

DRACULA: FROM HISTORICAL VOIEVOD
TO FICTIONAL VAMPIRE
PRINCE

by

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ABSTRACT

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Vlad Dracula was a fifteenth century historical prince in Wallachia, a part of modern day Romania. Prince Dracula was an ardent defender of Christendom, and staunch opponent of the expanding Ottoman Empire. However, through the skillful use of the printing press and the masterful work of the author Bram Stoker this man has become associated with the fictional character Count Dracula.

This thesis discusses the life and deeds of the historical Prince Vlad Dracula, also known as Țepeș, or the Impaler, and his association with the fictional character Count Dracula. This thesis provides an examination of the epic struggle between Prince Dracula and the Ottoman sultan Mehmed 'The Conqueror'. Furthermore, consideration

will be given to the ever-changing view of Count Dracula in American pop culture as well as the differing roles of the folkloric and literary vampires throughout history.

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CHAPTER ONE

IN THE BEGINNING....

Ever since I was young I have had a fascination with the paranormal. Growing up I was exposed to waves of television specials on ghosts, spirits, UFO's, the Loch Ness monster, various conspiracy theories and a host of other subjects that would be considered outside the realm of the normal for a young lad at the ripe old age of eight. Without a doubt I owe this fascination to one person, my mother. There was always a big production at home when a television expose' concerning anything mystical was on, and in the days before satellite television this was a rare treat indeed. Rather than being a detriment to my growth, this exposure has had quite the opposite effect, awakening a boyish sense of curiosity and a thirst for learning. Could this stuff really be true? If so, why have we as a society been so slow to accept the supernatural, and if not, why is it an ever-present theme in societies worldwide?

I remember my first exposure to the vampire. It was a four-day television extravaganza in which several different 'made for TV' movies were broken into four 30-minute segments. One of these starred Christopher Lee as Dracula. It took much cajoling for my mother to agree to let me sit in on that one, and I was absolutely terrified and irrevocably fascinated. From these beginnings stemmed grade school English papers on Loch Ness, Stonehenge, and UFO's. At that time none of my teachers considered the study of folkloric vampires a worthy topic, that is, until I got to college.

In the following thesis I will be examining several aspects of both the historical

Vlad Țepeș and his vampiric counter-part Count Dracula. Considerable time will be spent on the historical figure, his life, times and deeds that have made him famous as well as infamous. The connection through literature and movies between Țepeș and Count Dracula will also be explored, and hopefully debunked. The vampires of folklore and fiction will be compared, contrasted, and the differing roles each play in the society of their creation explained. Finally, the appeal and influence of the vampire will also be given its due. All these differing aspects of the following thesis have been made possible through historical and literary methods of research. Historical research is always the first and foremost aspect of any paper. Exploration of both primary and secondary sources has been thorough. Since the thesis also contains large elements of both literature and cinematic works, many hours of research have been dedicated to the more influential movies and literary pieces pertaining to the vampire and Count Dracula in particular. Lastly, vampire and ghost tours have been taken in a few different parts of the country, interviews conducted with Romanian Nationals, and experts in the field of vampirology have been consulted.

It was good timing for my desire to engage in vampire research to re-emerge. In the 1970's it was discovered that the most famous of all vampires had a real historical counterpart, Vlad Țepeș, which means "The Impaler", or as he is more commonly known, Dracula. It is important to note that Prince Vlad never referred to himself as "The Impaler", rather by his surname, Dracula, which means 'Son of the Dragon.' The nickname 'Impaler' came from his enemies and reflects his penchant for impaling those that he felt had crossed him. For clarification purposes, however, I will refer to the historical figure by his moniker Vlad Țepeș or as Prince Vlad Dracula while consistently

using Count Dracula when alluding to Stoker's fictitious vampire creation. This discovery was well received, and, due to the legitimacy of the findings the proverbial floodgates began to open to new research and historiography concerning vampires, the literary/cinematic Dracula as well as his historical counterpart. The books that I am referencing are *Dracula: A Biography of Vlad the Impaler*, *In Search of Dracula*, and *Dracula: Prince of Many Faces*, all three by Dr. Radu Florescu and Dr. Raymond T. McNally. While the books by Florescu and McNally were not the first to link Țepeș to the arch-fiend Count Dracula, they were certainly the first to be well researched in the three major elements of vampirology: the folkloric, literary/cinematic and historical. Also, it is within the pages of the three aforementioned books that perhaps the two most fundamentally important questions about Dracula are answered. The two historians connect Țepeș and Count Dracula by examining passages in the novel *Dracula* as they relate to the historical or Voievod, or Prince, Vlad. Conjecture also plays a big part in the historian's estimation of Bram Stoker's knowledge. The two surmise that, based on the consistent allusions to Vlad Țepeș in *Dracula*, the author had more information than he revealed in his notations.

Since their publication, the books by Radu Florescu and Raymond T. McNally have created a firestorm of controversy surrounding the link between Țepeș and the Count. Perhaps the best-known opponent of the Țepeș-Count Dracula link is Elizabeth Miller. Miller bases her contumacious rejection of the link between the historical and fictional figures on a strict interpretation of the evidence available, of which there is no source that directly links the Voievod and the Count. Having examined both sides, and the evidence that survives, I have come to the conclusion that Stoker could not have

based Count Dracula upon the historical Prince Vlad Țepeș.

Other authors have followed Florescu, McNally and Miller, each supporting one theory or another regarding Țepeș and Mehmed the Conqueror as well as Count Dracula and Voievod Dracula. However, there has not been a book in the last twenty-five years written that does not owe some inspiration to part if not all of the authors mentioned above. Kurt Treptow has written one such book titled *Vlad III Dracula: The Life and Times of the Historical Dracula*. Treptow's book is well written and contains something that all budding students of 'the Impaler' have longed for: translated contemporaneous letters and documents, some of which are penned by Țepeș. Romanian historians Stephan Andresscu and Nicole Stoicescu have also turned in well written history texts concerning Țepeș. Both Andresscu's *Vlad the Impaler* and Stoicescu's *Vlad Dracula: Prince of Wallachia* are essential texts for the study of Țepeș despite their slant towards Romanian nationalism. The incorporation of primary source documents pertaining to the Prince Vlad Dracula from the National Library of Romania and Romanian oral histories gives the reader a perspective on Prince Vlad not found elsewhere.

The historical source material that is available in an English translation consists of Renaissance histories in which Țepeș is mentioned only in passing. These include historic classics such as Michael Doukas's *Decline and Fall of Byzantium to the Ottoman Turks*, *History of Mehmed the Conqueror* by Kritovoulos, and Tursun Beg's *The History of Mehmed the Conqueror*. Another source for the matters of this thesis is the classic novel *Dracula* by Bram Stoker. While not being the first vampire story, it is certainly the most recognizable, and has never been out of print since it was penned at the close of the nineteenth century.

The name Dracula has worked its way into the collective consciousness of the modern world. It seems that everyone has been exposed to Bram Stoker's vampire classic. If one looks around, it is impossible to escape the image of Dracula. Movies, literature, children's toys and even cereal boxes all owe their popularity to a horror novel which received only marginal reviews in its own time. So what is the story behind the name Dracula? The answer to that question is not a simple one, for there are several aspects to consider. Historically, the name Dracula was adopted by a fifteenth century Wallachian ruler better known now as Vlad Țepeș, whose horrific deeds and daring-do have become the stuff of legend. Chapter One will examine the life and times of Vlad Țepeș including the formation of Wallachia, aspects of Vlad's early life, various reigns, military career, and of course, impalement. To this end, I will attempt to shed light upon three important questions that have surrounded Dracula for five hundred years. First, did he defeat Mehmed the Conqueror, and if so, why did his people accept his brother as their new ruler? Finally, why was he arrested by one of the era's leading opponents of Ottoman expansion, King Matthias Corvinus, after his conflict with Mehmed the Conqueror?

The second chapter will deal with Prince Dracula's reputation and the changing perception of the Romanian warlord. I will support the theory that Vlad Dracula was not as deranged as has been portrayed, but rather that he was a victim of the skillful use of the printing press, a man whose reputation has been forever destroyed by a group of vengeful Saxon Catholics. Since no discussion concerning Vlad Dracula can be undertaken without recognition of Bram Stoker and his classic novel, the second chapter of this thesis will also deal with varying aspects of association between the historical and

fictional Draculas. For example, was the fictitious Count Dracula based on the defamed reputation of the historical Vlad Dracula? I will argue against the popular opinion that Stoker based his antagonistic Count Dracula on the historical Prince Vlad Dracula, and in favor of the thesis that Stoker used what evidence he had about the Wallachian warlord to flesh out an existing character. I will also analyze the changing cinematic view of the vampire (Count Dracula in particular) in American pop-culture, and how this has coincided with recent scholarly work that is changing the traditional view of Vlad Dracula as a bloodthirsty monster. The last chapter will deal with the enduring myth of the vampire as well as the contrasting realities of the fictitious literary and folkloric vampire and their differing roles in European society. Also, consideration will be given to the reason why the vampire has been and continues to be an intriguing figure.

Many people are to thank for this thesis, the research and the writing of which at times has seemed endless. I have had the opportunity and privilege to have been taught by some renowned professors at the University of Texas at Arlington. Along with each and every one of those I must also thank the internationally famous Dr. Mark Benecke for his information regarding impalement as well as the imminent vampirologist Dr. Elizabeth Miller for her efforts in editing and occasional guidance when I made an error or needed clarification. Thank you all.

CHAPTER TWO

ENTER THE DRAGON

In the west, the image of Dracula comes from a combination of name association with the classic novel and the overblown stories of his cruelty that people assume are true. No one would argue that Dracula was a saint; however, any responsible judgment of his actions must be tempered by an understanding of both history and geography. Collectively the Balkan states are geographically and historically at a crossroads of great empires. Caught like a piece of metal forged between the western hammer and the anvil of the Islamic East the Balkan peoples were forced to fight on two fronts after the rise of the Western States. Their regional leaders were forced to placate both Christian and Muslim leaders in an attempt to secure a sense of normalcy for their people.

The fifteenth century can be seen as a century of transition. The Renaissance in Europe paved the way for advances in the sciences, mathematics, the arts, and medicine just to name a few. In Western Europe, modern paradigms of humanism and nationalism began to take shape. During this time inventions such as the printing press and advances in learning all helped to shape the fifteenth century. However, it seems that the shroud of superstition and cruelty were hardly set aside with the intellectual rebirth of the continent. With the revival of classical learning came a revival of superstition. Institutions such as the Holy Inquisition burned thousands of “heretics” in what they deemed as “acts of faith”. The *Malleus Maleficarium* (“Witch-hammer”) enflamed the belief that devils and dark witchcraft were a very real threat to one’s salvation. A series of eccentric popes,

more interested in secular living than the spiritual guidance of their flock were elected in the Vatican. Internal strife and political mistrust of neighboring countries and principalities were the norm. The divine right of kings became a commonly held belief and nationalism began to take shape. Historically, the Balkans had been between surrounding Empires. The Byzantine Empire had held sway over the region for roughly a thousand years. However, by the fifteenth-century, the once mighty empire was reduced to little more than the city of Constantinople. The Turkish menace in the east and the rise of the Western powers had all but destroyed the Byzantine sphere of influence. The one indelible mark left by the Byzantines was the Orthodox religion, and one of the few remaining strongholds of the Orthodoxy was the Principality of Wallachia (part of modern day Romania). All of these things played an important part in the shaping of the fifteenth century mindset. It is into this tumultuous world that the historical Vlad Dracula was born.

The realm that Vlad Dracula was to come to rule, Wallachia, was forged together in the late fourteenth century by his grandfather, Mircea the Old (1387-1418). This coincided with the military and political threat of the Ottoman Turks. The rising Ottoman tide threatened the independence of the fledgling principality and, following the Battle of Kosovo in 1389, Mircea agreed to pay tribute to the sultan in return for a guarantee of continued peaceable relations and maintenance of sovereignty. A few years later, in 1394, Mircea defeated Sultan Bayezid I at Rovine and allied himself with the king of Hungary, Sigismund of Luxemburg.¹ This set the precedent for a deadly game of political vacillation that was to repeat itself for hundreds of years.

Mircea then tried to set up a hereditary monarchy. He installed his oldest son,

Mihail, as co-ruler while his younger son Vlad resided at the Hungarian court. The attempt failed. Shortly after Mircea's death in 1418 his brother Dan II assumed the throne. While Mircea's oldest son did not last long on the Wallachian throne, his youngest legitimate son, Vlad (future father of Vlad Dracula), was being educated at the Hungarian court. His youth and education at the Hungarian court suggests a strong possibility of Catholic influence. In 1425, at the age of 30, Vlad married Princess Cneaja, the eldest daughter of the Moldavian Prince Alexandru "the Good". Cneaja was also the sister of the future Moldavian Prince Bogdan II, and aunt of the famous King Stephan the Great.²

Perhaps the most influential event of Vlad (the father's) life took place in 1431 when he was summoned to the court of the Hungarian King Sigismund and sworn into the knightly Order of the Dragon. Sigismund created the Order of the Dragon in December of 1408. Modeled after the knightly Order of Saint George, the "Societatis Drachenordens" was designed with the dual purpose of protecting the king's family and standing as a bulwark against the enemies of the Church, particularly the schismatic Hussites and the Turks. During the life of Sigismund, the Order of the Dragon was one of the most important political entities in Hungary, second only to the king himself. The Dragon Order was broken into two classes: a superior class, whose symbol was a dragon being strangled by its own tail with an outstretched cross on its back, and a class made up of foreigners who were not required to swear fealty to the king of Hungary. Many prominent leaders of Europe, such as Henry V of England, belonged to the latter class of the Dragon Order. It is important to note that the Dragon in fifteenth century iconography does not have an evil connotation, but was seen as a symbol of chivalry and

knighthood. The dragon being strangled by its own tail is seen on the family crests of many Hungarian noblemen all the way through the seventeenth century, indicating the prominence of the Dragon Order. As mentioned, Vlad took the Oath of Fealty in 1431. From that point on he was known as Vlad Dracul, or Vlad “the Dragon”. Vlad Dracul indirectly transformed the symbol of the Order into his own family coat of arms. A dragon attacking and killing a lion represented this crest. Symbolically, it referred to Psalm 90 and was seen as the triumph of Christianity over its enemies. Had the Order of the Dragon never existed, or without Vlad Dracul’s admission into it, the name Dracula, or ‘son of the Dragon’, would not have been used by Bram Stoker. The figures associated with the name would never have enjoyed their historical notoriety and may have fallen through the cracks of scholarly study altogether.³

After his vestment into the Order of the Dragon, Dracul spent the next five years patrolling the Wallachian-Transylvanian border as the commander of the frontier guards, all the while with his eyes on the Wallachian throne. He would assume this coveted position in late 1436. Dracul’s idealism and loyalty to the Christian cause made him an ideal candidate to the Wallachian throne. However, his Christian convictions were soon be compromised when in 1437, his liege lord Sigismund died, and with his untimely passing, the prestige of the Order of the Dragon began to wane. Vlad was compelled to sign a treaty with Sultan Murad II after he invaded Wallachia in the same year.⁴

In 1437 the first documents referring to Dracul’s sons appear. He had three legitimate sons; Mircea (born 1428), Vlad (born 1431), and Radu (born 1435).⁵ All three of Vlad Dracul’s sons could have carried on the ‘Dracula’ surname, however circumstances such as Mircea’s untimely death and Radu’s defection to the Turks have

left only the middle son Vlad commonly associated with the family Dracul. At his father's court the education of the future Prince Dracula was what one might expect for a noble. He learned the art of fencing, swimming, jousting, archery, court etiquette, and horsemanship, the latter being a particular favorite of the Wallachian prince. Young Dracula was also taught the humanities, as well as to read and write Italian, German, Cyrillic, Old Slavic, Latin, and his native Wallachian.⁶

The winds of change once again began to favor the Western powers with the election of King Ladislas in 1440. This enigmatic king united the crowns of Hungary and Poland one year later. His election, coupled with the appointment of the military expert John Hunyadi as the new governor of Transylvania, re-ignited the idea of the Christian crusade against the Muslim Turks. Dracul began to stray from his alliance with the sultan in favor of his Catholic counter-parts. The Dragon Oath he had sworn some ten years before was still a matter of personal faith and honor. However, this oath was now tempered by the realization that the Ottomans (who controlled the entire line of the Danube River) were far superior in strength to his Hungarian courtiers. Torn between his sworn word and political reality, Vlad chose the middle course by aiding Hunyadi, while still trying to maintain good relations with the sultan.⁷ Unlike many others of the Orthodox religion, his time in the Hungarian Court made it easier for him to ally himself with the Catholics. When the Turks entered Wallachia in 1442, Vlad refused to take sides. He allowed the Turks to invade Transylvania where they suffered a crushing defeat near Sibiu. Vlad's decision to allow the Turks access through his lands may have been swayed by the assurances of support Hunyadi had given the son of the previous Wallachian prince, Dan II, who had taken up quarters in the Transylvanian city of

Brasov.⁸

Having been called upon by both the sultan and Hunyadi for military aid and delivering none could have only disastrous results. Sensing Vlad's subtle change, Murad II called Dracul to his court, presumably to inquire where the prince's loyalties lie. Vlad, trusting that the sultan meant him no harm, left for Gallipoli with his two sons: Vlad and Radu. The older son, Mircea, was left in charge of Wallachia until he could return. As the trio entered the city gates, they were seized, chained, and imprisoned. The father was transported to Adrianople as a 'guest' of the sultan while his young sons were spirited away to the distant fortress of Egrigoz, in Asia Minor.⁹

Dracul was released at the end of 1442; however, the young boys stayed as hostages in Turkish captivity for several years. Dracula was held for six years, until 1448, while Radu stayed considerably longer, until 1462. During this captivity, the two boys were educated by the best minds in the Ottoman Empire. They were brought up around others who were to become famous in their own right. The sultan's own son, the future Mehmed 'the Conqueror' was one such personage. Another was George Castriota (nicknamed Skanderbeg), a future hero of anti-Ottoman resistance in Albania. Vlad and Radu's stay with the Turks had a profound effect on their personalities. Vlad Dracula quickly developed a reputation as an ill-tempered student. He was often whipped in order to incite compliance. Radu was quite the opposite, being sensual and well liked by both the male and female members of the sultan's court. Their differing personalities and different treatment led to an intense dislike and rivalry between them.¹⁰ While the character of Vlad Țepeș was hardened by his captivity, Radu eventually succumbed to the sexual affections of Murad's son, Mehmed II. He was to become Mehmed's minion and

later his choice for the Wallachian throne.¹¹

Considering the strong Orthodox religion with which Vlad Dracula was raised, I believe it is very likely that his time in Turkish captivity had a profound effect upon him. Witnessing the homosexual nature of his brother's sexual submission would have assaulted the young Vlad on many levels. To an Orthodox Christian, the act itself was considered sinful. Seeing his own brother pander to the enemy in order to gain favor could have only filled 'the son the dragon' with a burning hatred for his captors. Add to this the possibility that he was an unwilling participant in such activities and one can see the beginning stages for what would become his favorite means of execution, impalement.

The fortunes of the Dracul family took an unfortunate turn when in 1447 the immensely powerful governor of Transylvania, John Hunyadi, removed Vlad Dracul and had him killed near the city of Balteni. Dracul's oldest son, Mircea, was buried alive by rebel Wallachian boyars seeking to please their new master. Hunyadi installed Vladislav II on the throne and returned to Transylvania.¹² The death of his father must have put tremendous strain upon young Vlad. Uncertainty concerning his personal safety and that of his younger brother added to an already difficult situation. Despite being stubborn and hot-tempered, Vlad proved himself an able student. He was made an officer in the Turkish army and given the impression that he would one day succeed his father.

Meanwhile, John Hunyadi was again trying to break the Turkish stranglehold on the Danube River. In October of 1448, Hunyadi's army reached the plateau overlooking the fields of Kosovo. This was the same spot where in 1389 the Turkish army had defeated the Serbs in the famous Battle of 'Black Birds'. The second battle was to prove

little different than the first. The Turks routed Hunyadi, who once again narrowly escaped Turkish captivity. However, the Turks, fearing that Christian reinforcements were close, failed to pursue their fleeing enemy and turn the battle into a slaughter. Vladislav II was allowed to escape due to this miscalculation.¹³ John Hunyadi was captured by the Serbian Prince George Brankovic. With Vladislav defeated (but not dead) and his main supporter Hunyadi imprisoned, the door was open for Vlad Țepeș to seize his father's former seat of power. With the support of the sultan, he invaded and took the Wallachian throne in late 1448. Hunyadi was not imprisoned for long. Brankovic released him after he promised to arrange a marriage between his son, Matthias Corvinus and Brankovic's daughter in law Elizabeth Cilli. Prince Dracula's first stint on the Wallachian throne was short lived as well. Backed by Moldavia's Prince Petru II, Vladislav II forced Vlad Dracula to flee after just one month. He fled to the Turkish Capitol for a short period of time, where his exact whereabouts and actions are unknown to us today. Țepeș reappears in the fall of 1449 at the Moldavian court, where his uncle, Bogdan II had succeeded his enemy, Petru II. Vlad stayed at the Moldavian court of Bogdan II for two years, where he met and befriended the future Stephen the Great of Moldavia. His tranquil stay was shattered when his uncle was murdered in 1451. Both Vlad and Stephen fled to Transylvania, where the Wallachian prince sought Hunyadi's support for the throne. His ill luck would continue. Prior to the death of Vlad's uncle Bogdan II, Hunyadi had signed a peace agreement with the sultan. This treaty guaranteed that the status quo would remain in place for the next three years.¹⁴

The warm relations between John Hunyadi and Vlad seem strange considering Hunyadi had killed Dracula's father. However both had two things in abundance,

political ambition and an utter disdain for the Ottoman Empire. Each man saw in the other a politically useful tool. Hunyadi hoped to gain a true ally to the Christian cause of holding the line against Ottoman aggression. Țepeș knew that without the support of the Transylvanian governor he could never firmly entrench himself on the throne of Wallachia. Furthermore, Hunyadi knew that Vlad had spent time in the Ottoman army. The two exchanged the latest Ottoman and Hungarian military tactics of the day, and it is certainly not out of the realm of possibility that a genuine friendship began to develop. During his time under Hunyadi, Dracula was exposed to the Hungarian court of King Ladislas and was even present at the king's coronation.¹⁵

This situation would remain in place for several years, until the chance at finally attaining power in his homeland presented itself to Dracula in the summer of 1456. Then the Ottomans launched an attack on Belgrade. The fall of Belgrade would have opened the Danube for the Turks to launch further sorties aimed at either Buda or Vienna, threatening the Holy Roman Empire and/or Hungary. With the fall of Constantinople still fresh in the minds of the west, the capitulation of Belgrade was not an option. Trusting none other than John Hunyadi to secure the city's defenses, Belgrade held in the face of a massive Turkish onslaught. Twenty-four thousand Turks lost their lives in the failed siege. The Christian forces endured tragic losses as well. On top of all the nameless soldiers who died making the defense of Belgrade legendary, John Hunyadi also lost his life due to an outbreak of the plague that hampered both Ottoman and Christian forces.

Before leaving in what would be his final defense, Hunyadi gave Dracula permission to invade Wallachia and secure the throne in order to place a stalwart anti-

Ottoman defender in control of a buffer state between the Turks and his beloved Hungary. Between July and August, Vlad invaded with the intent of establishing himself as Voievod, or prince, a second time. In dramatic fashion, Vlad Dracula bested the ruler of Wallachia, Vladislav II in personal combat and reassumed the throne.¹⁶ Now that he was once again in charge of the Wallachian government Vlad (who now began using the nickname Dracula) intended to stay in power. The first few years of his 'primary' reign were marked by an internal focus.

To secure his power, Voievod Dracula had to break the power of the boyars, a hereditary class of landed aristocracy, who had to vote upon a new prince when the time arose. In this way the newly elected prince was indebted to the boyars, who deliberately limited the power of the central government to protect their own property. Prince Vlad believed that he would be better able to defend his lands from external interference and retain Wallachian autonomy if he were the unquestioned authority. Shortly after seizing power, he learned the details of the murder of his older brother Mircea. He used this information for the dual purpose of exacting revenge and breaking to the boyar's political power. Around Easter of 1457, Dracula called the boyars of Tîrgoviste to his palace for a feast celebrating the religious holiday. At the feast, Dracula began to question the boyars' loyalty. The following quote is translated from the German minstrel Michel Beheim:

He (Dracula) asked the assembled noblemen
How many princes have you known?
The latter answered
Each as much as he knew best
One believed that there had been thirty
Another twenty
Even the youngest thought there had been seven
After having answered this question
As I have just sung it

Dracula said: tell me
How do you explain the fact
That you have had so many princes
In your land?
The guilt is entirely due to your shameful intrigues?¹⁷

Angered by the answers of the treacherous boyars, Vlad Dracula enacted his revenge. Romanian tradition has it that he then seized and impaled 500 boyars. While this number is exaggerated, as seen by the physical dimensions of his feast hall, the true story is little better. The old and infirm boyars were, indeed, impaled and left to rot outside in the courtyard. The young and able bodied were marched fifty miles up the Arges River where they were forced to re-build the now famous Castle Poenari, more commonly known today as Castle Dracula. The numbers of boyars who died of exhaustion or plummeted from the treacherous precipices leading up to the castle are unknown. What is known is that after these events, Vlad Dracula's reputation was cemented in Romanian lore. He would now be referred to by future generations as Vlad Țepeș, or 'the Impaler.'¹⁸

Impaling is one of the most physically painful and symbolically disturbing ways to be executed. A wooden stake was coated with grease and forcibly inserted into the anus. Sometimes an existing stake, such as a tree limb, could be used. The victims of impalement could stay alive for a few days at the most, although death could be hastened by allowing them to drink water. In such cases where it was a possibility, the arms of the impaled were cut off to prevent them from walking away. While techniques of impaling originated in Asia, Vlad could have learned the details of the process during his imprisonment by the Turks. It is also possible that his father learned the methods of impaling during his travels as a member of the Hungarian court, although, it is unlikely

his father ever impaled anyone. After the oiled spike had pierced the anus, the victim could be pulled upright, in which case their own body weight would cause them to slowly slide down, resulting in massive internal injury and death, or, as stated before, the victims arms could be removed and the stake left protruding from their rectum.¹⁹ The physical nature of impaling is well recorded; however, the potential psychological and symbolically emasculating affect of impaling should not be over looked. Seeing victims writhe in agony for hours or rot away as the scavengers picked at their corpses must have had a dreadful impact on the psyche of those left unmolested. As if the physical pain were not bad enough, the thought of dying in such a manner would have had a terrifying effect on even a hardened soldier.

To replace the boyars he had disposed of Vlad appointed new ones from the lower classes. This knowledge kept the newly appointed boyars loyal as they knew that if another man were to become prince, the privileges bestowed upon the new boyars by their Voievod would likely be stripped away. This spoils system enacted by Dracula would ensure their loyalty by giving them a personal stake in his continued reign. The newly created position of *Armas* also served to further cement his reign. These men had but one duty, to administer and enforce the harsh justice of the prince as it was handed out. In essence, they were a ragtag lot of thugs, malcontents, and miscreants, holding a government created position by virtue (or lack there of) of the fact that they would do Vlad's dirty work.²⁰ The *Armas* were his impalers and strong-arms akin to Mafioso thumb breakers.

As his consolidation of power neared completion, Țepeș could focus on external issues. In 1457 he lent military support to his cousin Stephen in an effort to oust Petru

Aron and gain the Moldavian throne. With Vlad's help, Stephen was successful and would go on to become Moldavia's greatest king.²¹ In the same year Vlad also allied himself with his personal friend and Transylvanian governor, Mihai Szilagyi, against King Ladislas V of Hungary. During this conflict, Vlad raided, burned, and pillaged the cities of Sibiu and Brasov, both of which were centers of opposition to Szilagyi and Dracula, the Son of the Dragon.²²

By 1461 Dracula felt secure enough to refuse to pay annual tribute to the Ottoman Empire. Enflamed by the rhetoric of Pope Pius II, who had begun to funnel money to Mattias Corvinus for a new crusade against the Turk, Vlad threw his support in with his Christian allies.²³ The previous decade had seen several stunning Ottoman conquests. These included Constantinople in 1453, Serbia after the death of George Brankovic (a.k.a. "Skanderbeg") in 1456, and Greece in 1458.²⁴ With each new Christian capitulation, resistance became more difficult. Those not conquered outright were forced to accept peace terms that put them within the Ottoman sphere of influence. Furthermore, with the death of several hard-line Christian rulers such as Hunyadi, Brankovic, and the aforementioned Szilagyi, a sense of dread and hopelessness laid over the lands whose gaze the Ottomans fell upon. A particularly gruesome fate awaited Szilagyi, who was captured while on a scouting mission, tortured and sawed in half by his captors.²⁵ The death of a man who was not only a political ally but also a personal friend of Țepeș only strengthened what was already a deep rooted hatred of the Turks.

Good relations with Hungary, including a proposal of marriage into the Corvinus family, also played a part in Dracula's bravado. The combination of this as well as his abhorrence for the Turks, brought on by his father's vestment into the Order

of the Dragon, Vlad's time in Ottoman captivity, and fierce desire for Wallachian independence made the legendary confrontation between Mehmed the Conqueror and Vlad the Impaler inevitable. We know from the chronicles of the Byzantine historian Chalkondyles that the sultan began to suspect Vlad was secretly allied with the Hungarians:

...and in the winter, when the sultan heard that he (Dracula) had evil thoughts on his mind, and that, appealing to the Hungarians, he entered into some kind of alliance with them.²⁶

The sultan wanted to depose Vlad, and hatched a plan to bring him to Constantinople. Mehmed sent Hamza Beg of Nicopolis and the Greek Catavolinos to ensure Vlad's compliance. The emissaries of the sultan were to make the Wallachian Voievod come by either trickery or bribes, and when safely outside Wallachia, they were to subdue and bring the prince into custody.²⁷ A meeting place was set outside the Turkish fortress of Giurgiu. Catavolinos was to meet Țepeș and accompany him from Tîrgoviste to Giurgiu, keeping Hamza Beg informed of their progress. Vlad was for-warned of their intentions, and set a trap of his own. He ordered troops and a large force of cavalry to follow him as bodyguards. As his forces approached the fortress, Țepeș tricked the guards into opening the outer doors by dressing as a Turkish officer and giving his orders in fluent Turkish. Once the doors were open, the Turkish guards were surprised and quickly overwhelmed by the Wallachian troops. This was to be the first in a series of attacks led by the Impaler on Turkish towns and fortifications along the Danube.

In a two-week span he marched his troops 800 kilometers, from the Danube heel to the Black Sea. Along the way he burned and pillaged Turkish villages and forts in the "adjacent section of the Sultan's domain" along the Danube.²⁸ In a letter sent to King

Mattias Corvinus dated February 11, 1462, Dracula beseeched Corvinus for aid and informed the Hungarian King of his deeds:

Your majesty should know that we have broken our peace with them, not for our own benefit...but for the benefit of Christianity and the Catholic faith...if it is Your Majesty's desire to fight against them, then gather all of your country and all of your fighting men...and bring them to our Wallachia...please, do not delay.²⁹

The Wallachian prince goes on further, giving a detailed account of the numbers his army have slain:

First, in the places called Oblucita and Novoselo there were killed 1,350; and 6,840 at Darstor, Cartal, and Dridopoyrom; likewise 343 at Orsova, and 840 were killed at Vectrem.....and at Ghighne 1,138.....Likewise, at the above places where there were crossing points, they were burned and destroyed, the people, men, women, children and babies were all killed....³⁰

The above information does not count for Hamza Beg or Catavolinos, who were marched to Tîrgoviste and vertically impaled. The higher stakes that were used on the two men acted as a twisted tribute to their stature in life.

In May, Mehmed sent his grand vizier Mehmed in an initial attempt to quell the uprising, while he oversaw the siege of the city of Corinth in Asia-Minor. The grand vizier captured the port-city of Bralia with 18,000 troops. Mehmed used the city as a launching point for terror attacks on Wallachia, in which his soldiers burned buildings, sacked towns, and raped women. Dracula swiftly counter-attacked. After a forced march, the Wallachian troops caught the vizier's rear guard as they were trying to cross back over the Danube. If the numbers of the Italian chronicler de Lezze are accurate, 10,000 Turks were killed. This embarrassment caused Mehmed to give up the siege of Corinth and redirect his attention towards the rebellious Wallachia.³¹

In June, led by the man who directed the fall of Constantinople, the Ottomans crossed the Danube into Wallachian territory with an army of 90,000 Turks, 25,000 of which were his elite Janissary corps. The Sultan wanted to make Wallachia into a buffer between his lands and the Catholic west. Since Țepeș as well as his predecessors proved untrustworthy, Mehmed took with him Vlad's brother Radu, who had been with Mehmed for many years and was fully indoctrinated into the Muslim religion, with the intent of placing him on the Wallachian throne. The sultan believed that the creation of a Wallachian *pashalik* would allow him to shorten his border with western Christendom, thus making it easier to defend and launch future invasions. Standing in the great sultan's way was Vlad Voievod and a mere 22,000 men.³²

Outnumbered almost four to one, he knew he could little afford to engage in a pitched battle with the superior Muslim forces. Vlad used guerilla hit-and-run tactics as well as a scorched-earth policy to demoralize the Turks and rob them of any relief from the intense heat of summer. Ottoman superiority was also partially negated by the Wallachian countryside. Forests, poor road conditions, and bog marshes all served to hamper Turkish progress. Dracula had the crops burned, wells poisoned, and his people and cattle relocated into the Carpathian Mountains. Seven days into Wallachian territory had yielded little resistance to the Turkish advance. Morale quickly withered in heat that was so intense that Turkish historian Tursen Beg stated:

...The front line of the army announced that there was not a drop of water to quench their thirst. All the carts and animals stopped. The heat of the sun was so great that one could cook kebabs on the mail shirts of the warriors. This was why the sultan accused the commanders of carelessness. At the same time the scouts were scolded and punished.³³

As the sultan crept toward Tîrgoviste, Dracula launched his renowned ‘night attack’ on June 17, 1462. The night attack caught the weary Turks by surprise.

Dracula had envisioned fighting his way through the dumbfounded Ottoman forces and personally killing Mehmed the conqueror. Initially, things went well for the Impaler; however, he either became lost or received bad information as to the location of the sultan’s tent. Instead, Dracula attacked the tent of the sultan’s viziers Mehmed and Isaac. This miscalculation gave time for the janissaries to re-group. The elite troops quickly surrounded and secured Mehmed’s tent. The journal of the janissary Konstantin Mihailovic, one of the few surviving contemporary sources of the famous night attack, describes the events:

Although the Romanian Prince had a small army, we always advanced with great caution and fear and spent nights sleeping in ditches. But even in this manner we were not safe, for during one night, the Romanians struck at us. They massacred horses, camels and several thousand Turks. When the Turks had retreated in the face of the enemy, we janissaries repelled the enemy and killed them. But the Sultan incurred great losses.³⁴

As the Turkish troops rallied, the Wallachians withdrew. Both sides suffered considerable losses, the exact number of which is uncertain. What is clear is that the Turks lost considerably more men, perhaps as many as three to every one Wallachian soldier.

After the failed night attack, the path to the Wallachian capitol of Tîrgoviste lay open. As the slow moving Turkish army advanced towards Tîrgoviste they met with the well-known spectacle of the ‘forest of the impaled’, perhaps the best-known scene surrounding Vlad Dracula. The Byzantine chronicler Chalkondyles describes this grisly and macabre image that awaited the sultan:

We marched for about five kilometers when he saw his men impaled; the sultan's army came across a field with stakes, about three kilometers long and one kilometer wide. And there were large stakes on which they could see the impaled bodies of men, women, and children, about twenty thousand of them, as they said; quite a spectacle for the Turks and the sultan himself! The sultan himself, in wonder, kept saying that he could not conquer the country of a man who could do such terrible and unnatural things, and put his power and his subjects to such use.. And the other Turks, seeing so many people impaled, were scared out of their wits.³⁵

The psychological warfare used by Vlad was as inventive as it was cruel. On June 22, the Turks began to withdraw eastward back toward the port city of Brălia, leaving Radu in Țirgoviste as the new Wallachian prince. Radu rallied dissident boyars against his brother and promised to restore peace with the Turks, restore all lost hereditary titles, and to refuse to allow Wallachian boys to be conscripted into the Janissary corp.

By this time, the people of Wallachia had had enough. The effects of warfare, destroyed crops, useless wells, and Vlad's terror tactics had worn down the desire to resist.³⁶ Having seen the repeated Ottoman invasions of Albania, Serbia, and Croatia, just to name a few, the Wallachian boyars capitalized on the populace's fear and accepted Radu as their new ruler. Radu was, after all, the brother of the Voievod Vlad and the son of Vlad Dracul, thus making the hereditary transition easier to accept. This rationale was supported by the words of Radu himself. Radu addressed the Wallachian people from his new headquarters in Baragan as reported by Chalkondyles:

I am aware of the mighty forces that the sultan controls, which sooner or later he will use to lay waste what remains of your country. If we continue to oppose him, we shall be despoiled of all that is left to us. Why do you not reach an agreement with Sultan Mehmed? Only then will you have peace in the land and in your homes. Are you aware that there is no cattle, no horses, no farm animals, no food left in this country? Surely you have borne such sufferings long enough because of my brother, because you were loyal to this man who was responsible for more suffering than any other prince.³⁷

In this speech, Radu seems uncertain of his newfound role. He almost pleads with the people to accept him, using the fear of yet another Ottoman invasion to emphasize the acceptance of his rule. He promised that under him (Radu) there would be peace and prosperity. One needs only to look back at the recent events, as Radu skillfully points out that food and livestock are scarce due to his brother's scorched earth policy the countryside has been devastated. 'Reach an agreement with the Sultan', i.e. accept my leadership and peace is restored....remain loyal to Vlad Dracula, and face certain destruction. Also, the planned marriage between Dracula and a member of the Corvinus family had to have been viewed with suspicion by the devoutly Orthodox Wallachians. There was not much of a choice for the Wallachian people, especially considering the events that were unfolding concerning King Corvinus that would eventually lead to the arrest of Dracula.

Despite the setbacks, Vlad continued to harass the Turks as they made their way toward his borders. Near Bralia, he was defeated and forced to flee into Transylvania, where he wanted to meet up with the forces of King Corvinus, whose army had finally begun a slow march toward Wallachia. Unfortunately for Vlad Dracula, the Hungarian king had no intention of pursuing the Turks. Matthias Corvinus was involved in a heated dispute over the Hungarian crown with the emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, Frederick III, and could ill afford to waste manpower and risk prestige on a crusade. A master at procrastination when it suited him, Corvinus had not even left Buda by the time Mehmed was returning home. Vlad's arrest was ordered, and he was taken into custody by General Jan Jiskra von Brandeis near the city of Rucar. Three letters were then forged, which came to be known as the Rothel letters, wherein the Wallachian voievod allegedly

promised to aid the sultan in his conquest of Hungary: “In atonement for my sin, I can hand over to you all Transylvania, the possession of which will enable you to bring all Hungary under your power.”³⁸

From the outset both the contemporary people of fifteenth century Europe as well as modern historians have looked at the Rothel letters with suspicion. Why would such an ardent supporter of the anti-Ottoman cause suddenly change sides when he thought he had the king of Hungary coming to his aid? One only needs to look at the difference in attitude between the above quote in the Rothel letter and correspondence such as the following deed issued on September 20, 1459:

By the grace of God, I Vlad, Voioved and prince, son of the great Vlad Voioved, ruler and lord of all Wallachia, and of Amlas and Fagaras, by my grace, willingly, with pure heart, have granted this most beautiful and honest gift, this deed by my authority, to Andrei and his sons to have as theirs Poiana of Stev, and of Iova, and of Drag....and if one of them die, the land will remain with the others....In addition, after my death, whoever the Lord god grants the throne of Wallachia, whether it be one of my sons or relatives, or for our sins, one of another family, if he will strengthen and protect this deed of mine, may God grant His support....³⁹

This certainly was not the tone of one who is easily cowed, especially when the forces of Christendom are on the way to aid his cause. Furthermore, considering that Dracula had agreed to marry a relative of the Corvinus family and the legitimacy of the Rothel all but falls apart and historians can conclude that they were forged by Corvinus in an attempt to avoid further conflict with the powerful Ottoman Empire..

Now let us turn our attention to the outcome of the conflict between the Ottoman Conqueror and the Impaler Prince. Historians are at odds over who exactly won the war between Mehmed and Țepeș for several reasons. Firstly, there are several differing

contemporary accounts concerning what exactly transpired. Byzantine historians such as Chalkondyles and Kritovoulas as well as the Ottoman Tursun Beg report on the hard-won victory of the sultan and the subsequent acceptance of Radu ‘the Handsome.’ In opposition to this is a preponderance of accounts proclaiming Prince Dracula’s victory. Venetians such as Balbi report Dracula was triumphant, even Mattias Corvinus sent an emissary claiming Mehmed was defeated by “the Hungarians and the Wallachians”⁴⁰. The Byzantine historian Michael Doukas claims, “The tyrant (Mehmed II), in disgrace, crossed the Danube and returned to Adrianople.”⁴¹

With the available information in opposition it is easy to see why there has been so much speculation regarding the 1462 campaign of Mehmed. So what exactly happened that summer when these two historically infamous leaders met on the battlefield? I believe that Dracula scored a couple of symbolic victories using guerilla tactics: one as the Turks initially crossed the Danube into Wallachia the other being his infamous ‘night attack’. I use the term symbolic victories because his Ottoman enemies endured far greater losses. However, they cannot be considered true military victories considering that Mehmed’s troops kept marching towards Tîrgoviste. As the Turks pushed deeper into Wallachia, many began to succumb to disease, famine and anxiety due to the constant fear of attack. This sense of dread only deepened with the grotesque discovery of the previously mentioned ‘forest of the impaled.’ As the casualties mounted and the mental fighting edge of the Turks began to wane, Mehmed left a contingent of troops behind with Radu to aid him in consolidating the Wallachian throne, and turned his army east, crossing the Danube and reappearing with the vast majority of his remaining men in Adrianople on July eleventh.⁴²

Symbolic victories aside, Dracula could ill afford the losses incurred with each battle with the Turks. Logistically, he had almost no way of feeding or equipping his soldiers as he had ordered the destruction of Wallachian supplies in early June. He had placed his trust in the coming Hungarian army, only to be backstabbed by Mattias Corvinus. Had Voievod Vlad had more men and supplies, I have no doubt that history would be certain regarding his victory over Mehmed the Conqueror. As it was, he did compel the Turks to make a hasty retreat home; however, due to the tactics required in doing so, he lost the support of his people and ultimately, his position as Voievod. It is from this confusion that the disagreements concerning Dracula's victory arise. Indeed, in a sense, Vlad had success against the most feared man in Christendom. However, the fact remains that he lost his crown. Thus, in the most pro-Țepeș terms, the campaign of 1462 can at best be considered a draw.

One last question remains regarding this campaign, chiefly, the behavior of Mattias Corvinus. Questions concerning why Corvinus chose to stand idly by while the neighboring state of Wallachia changed from a pro-Christian to a pro-Islamic state have been asked since 1462. As with so many other aspects of the events previously discussed, confusion seems to be the only constant. Corvinus had been crowned king shortly after the death of his father, John Hunyadi. However, just as in Hunyadi's time, the kingdom of Hungary was in disarray. The Hapsburg monarch, Fredrick III also laid claim to the Hungarian throne. An agreement was reached between the two rulers in April of 1462, but a real peace treaty between the two was not signed until July of the following year.⁴³ As mentioned before, Corvinus simply could not divert the man-power it would take to support Vlad Țepeș in a meaningful way. So, he took the 'wait and see'

approach, and as soon as it became evident that Dracula could not achieve an outright victory, the decision was made to arrest him and support Radu. This was met with some confusion by historians, as can be seen by the following passage from Corvinus's biographer, Antonio Bonfini:

The King said that he was going to Wallachia to free Dracula (Tepes), to whom he had given in a lawful marriage one of his blood relatives, from the hands of the Turks. On his way there, I do not know the reason why because this was never understood clearly by anyone, he captured Dracula in Transylvania, but the other Dracula (Radu), whom the Turks had appointed Prince of Wallachia, he approved of, against all expectations. The other (Tepes) he brought to Buda and punished him with ten years in prison.⁴⁴

Corvinus was not prepared for a confrontation with Mehmed the Conqueror. My position is that and so allowed, if not ordered the Rothel Letters to be written, providing a convenient excuse for his sudden change of heart. The Hungarian king would have had to pacify and explain his inaction against the Turks to Pope Pius II, who had been giving money to Corvinus for a crusade. Furthermore, the king needed a stable southern border, which would certainly have not been the case had he thrown support behind Wallachia's rightful ruler, Vlad Dracula. Sultan Mehmed II had shown in previous campaigns that he was willing to repeatedly attack a nation in order to achieve his aim. Had Corvinus restored Țepeș to power right away, he would have had to continuously funnel men, money and supplies into a doomed cause. So Corvinus came to a politically astute, albeit morally questionable resolution, and had Dracula arrested on evidence that he at least knew was false, and at worst had a direct hand in planting.

Prince Vlad was kept prisoner in Visegrad Castle, near the city of Buda until 1474. During this time his legend in the West began to flourish through the embellishments of German writers. The invention of the Gutenberg press in 1450 made

such material far more accessible than in any other time prior to its invention.⁴⁵ In 1474 Radu died after a long bout with syphilis, leaving the Wallachian throne open. Corvinus, at the request of Stephen the Great of Moldavia, offered to support Țepeș, on the condition that he converted to Catholicism. With his conversion, the long proposed marriage between the exiled Wallachian prince and a blood relative of the Corvinus family, most likely Ilona Szilagy, the daughter of his deceased friend Mihaly Szilagy, took place. After Țepeș's conversion and marriage, his former accuser, Mattias Corvinus did his best to restore Vlad's tarnished image, even going as far as to say the charges brought against him were false.⁴⁶

In 1474, the conflict between the Ottomans and Christians again flared up. Țepeș was made a captain in the Hungarian army and participated in the siege of the Serbian City of Sabac in February 1476.⁴⁷ In the first two months of 1476, Vlad fought the Turks in Serbia and Bosnia. He also helped drive out the Ottoman forces that had penetrated Moldavia. Finally, with the help of Stephan the Great, whom Vlad had aided in attaining his throne some years earlier, Țepeș took the Wallachian throne a third time in November of 1476. It was to be his shortest reign. Just one month later, the deposed Prince Laiota Basarab (who took over after Radu's death), engaged the Impaler with the help of the 4,000 Turks. A letter written by Stephan of Moldavia recounts the Impaler's last moments: "The disloyal Basarab returned, and finding Vlad Vioved alone, killed him along with all my men; only ten of them escaped with their lives."⁴⁸

Thus ended the life of Romania's most famous prince, cut down by the Turks he had so long opposed. Rather than dying a prisoner or a withered old man, Vlad Țepeș went out as a Prince, defending his beloved Wallachia from the external forces of oppression.

However, due to the penmanship of various authors, especially a little known Irish 'hack', his legend was just beginning.

CHAPTER THREE

FROM VOIEVOD TO VAMPIRE PRINCE

As is the case today, Dracula was a legend in his own lifetime. He owes this notoriety honor mainly to chronicles who skillfully used the printing press to exaggerate his cruel deeds. How does one become so reviled while simultaneously praised throughout Christendom? To answer this question we need to look at one group of people in particular, the German Catholics who resided in Wallachia at the time of Țepeș's rule. The German-Catholics had a particular enmity towards Dracula. This enmity led to the publication of many scandalous reports concerning the Wallachian prince. This hatred and subsequent slander stems from two distinct reasons. Firstly, the Latin Catholic and Greek Orthodox churches had developed a mutual distrust for one another over the course of centuries. These dubious feelings had begun to fester centuries before, when the debate raged over who was the head of the Church, the Bishop of Rome or the archbishop of Constantinople, as well as a few minor theological points. Finally, in 1053, with no workable solution in sight, the pope excommunicated the archbishop and, by extension, all of the Orthodox faith. The leery Byzantine Empire was slow to aid the Catholic Crusaders of the eleventh century, fearing they planned an assault on Constantinople rather than the recapture of Jerusalem. This fear proved later to be well founded when during the Fourth Crusade of 1204 the crusaders conquered the capitol city of the Byzantine Empire and went on an orgy of destruction the likes of which the city had never seen.

By this time, those practicing the Orthodox faith had declined dramatically. With the capitulation of the Byzantine Empire, most adherents of Greek Orthodox Church had vanished. Wallachia was one of the few countries where the majority of people were active members of the Greek Orthodox Church. Vlad Dracula was, like his people, an Orthodox Christian. In the eyes of Catholics, the Orthodox Greeks had been practicing Christianity as excommunicae for hundreds of years. This made it all the easier to condemn Vlad when the second reason for their ruinous publication occurred, the conflict between Wallachia and the German speaking merchants of cities of Braşov and Sibiu during the reign of Prince Dracula.

The beginning of the conflict between Voievod Vlad and the Saxon merchants started with the death of John Hunyadi following his valiantly led defense of Belgrade. His death left Hungary politically unstable. Questions of who should take the throne began to take a violent turn, and civil war broke out between factions supporting King Ladislas V and those supporting Hunyadi's son, Mattias Corvinus. Dracula was in league with his friend and ally Michael Szilagy, who was the uncle and tutor of Corvinus. However, the cities of Sibiu and Braşov were often times at odds with both Szilagy and Dracula, even going as far as harboring and supporting pretenders to the Wallachian throne. One such pretender was Dan III, who, with the support of the Hungarian King Ladislas was preparing to take the throne of Wallachia. In response to the offer of help to one of his enemies, Dracula raided and pillaged several cities in southern Transylvania. The conflict between the opposing factions of Szilagy and King Ladislas was resolved in late 1457. With this resolution, the status quo remained in Wallachia and Dan III was expelled from Brasov. In a strange twist of fate, King Ladislas died the same day the

treaty took effect, leaving the path open to Corvinus to assume the Hungarian throne. This ushered in a brief period of political stability between Wallachia and Hungary.⁴⁹

During this period, Dracula sought to end the Saxon trade superiority. The Saxons had been granted special trade privileges by Mircea the Old, founder of Wallachia and grandfather of Țepeș. The Saxons, mainly in Sibiu and Brașov had fallen increasingly on hard times as the approaching Turks cut off several important trade roads. To this end the Saxon merchants sought to make up for their losses at the expense of Wallachian traders. For economic reasons, Corvinus supported Sibiu and Brașov. The situation was made worse when King Corvinus had his uncle (Szilagy) arrested in October of 1458, thus further alienating Dracula. As relations between Corvinus and Dracula reached the boiling point the Hungarian king as well as the Saxon merchants began to support the previously expelled Dan III. In a letter penned in April of 1459, Dan wrote to the Brasov ruling council stating that: “You know that King Mattias has sent me and when I came to Țara Bârsei the officials and councilors of Brașov....cried to us with broken hearts about the things which Dracula, our enemy, did.”⁵⁰ A few weeks later Dan III invaded Wallachia, only to be defeated by Dracula. Dan III’s fate would be recorded by the 1488 edition of the *Nurnberg Chronicle*: “He (Dracula) captured the young Dan and had a grave dug for him and had a funeral service held according to Christian custom and beheaded him beside the grave.”⁵¹ After hearing of Dan’s demise, the city of Brașov sent a representative group of fifty-five men to Dracula in hopes of avoiding further hostilities. As soon as Vlad could, the delegation was arrested for their part in aiding a rival to the throne of Wallachia.

By May of 1459 Vlad ‘The Impaler’ was set to unleash a torrent of retaliatory

aggression against the Saxons. After sufficiently plundering Braşov, Dracula turned his attention to the duchies of Amlas and Fagaras, both of which had incurred his wrath. From these attacks stems much of Vlad Dracula's bad press. What followed the attacks on the aforementioned cities is one of the greatest and most enduring smear campaigns in human history. Excerpts from the *Nurnberg Chronicle of 1488* (written by the same German Catholics Țepeş had punished) gives us a glimpse, albeit grossly exaggerated, of the Dracula-Saxon conflict:

Immediately he had Prince Lasla (Vladislav II) killed. Soon after this he had villages in Transylvania, also a town by the name of Beckendorf in Wurtzland burned. Both women and men, young and old perished. Some he brought home with him to Wallachia and impaled them all there....He declared a peace, and during the same he had many merchants and waggoners from Wurtzland impaled. He also had a large family extinguished and impaled, from the smallest to the largest, young and old....Ambassadors numbering fifty five were sent from the Kingdom of Hungary and Saxony and Transylvania into Wallachia. Dracula kept them waiting for five weeks and had stakes made for their lodgings (impalement).... Meanwhile he went into Wurtzland and destroyed the grain and had all the crops burned and he had the populace led into captivity out from the city called Kronstatt. Then Dracula rested near St. Jacob's Chapel. He had the outskirts burned. Also, when the day came, early in the morning, he had women and men, young and old, impaled around the hill by the chapel and sat down among them and ate his breakfast with enjoyment.⁵²

Despite not expressly stating as much, the last comment has led the Saxons to speculate that Dracula drank the blood of his victims with his breakfast. Nowhere does any document reference Vlad Dracula as a blood-drinker. While the scene of a prince eating his morning meal amidst the screams of the freshly impaled is a morbid scene, it is not the Vlad -vampire connection that many Vampirologists have sought.

The pamphlet goes on to tell several sensational tales of Dracula's cruelty. Prince Dracula was accused of roasting children, impaling priests, had his mistress torn apart for giving the false news of her pregnancy, buried people up to the stomach and had them

used for target practice, impaling up to twenty-five thousand men, women and children outside of cities and so on and so fourth. With each tale the deeds get more gruesome, and thus more attractive to those listening to them. The *Nurnberg Chronicle* is akin to the fifteenth-century version of the modern day blood-and-guts slasher film. It is proof that, even centuries ago, horror sells, and the more sickening the story the better. The chronicle ends in a rather peculiar way, taking one of the most abrupt changes in tone imaginable. Its final entry reads as follows:

Soon after this the king of Hungary captured him and kept him for a long time in severe captivity. Afterwards he let himself be baptized publicly as a Roman Catholic and did great penance. After this the king made Prince Dracula a ruler again as before. And people say he did many good deeds afterwards.⁵³

Dracula's conversion allied him more closely with his Hungarian neighbors. This meant an increased measure of security for the Southern Transylvanian cities that had been previously ravaged by the Impalers army. Furthermore, the tone-change from negative to positive following Dracula's conversion points to the fact that a considerable amount of the sensational information written about him stems from his Orthodox affiliation.

So what exactly can be gleaned from the *Nurnberg Chronicles*? When blended with the Russian and Romanian tales they serve as a contemporary reference to the kind of ruler Vlad Dracula was. The Slavic tales concerning Vlad Țepeș come from *The Tale About Voioved Dracula* written between 1486 and 1490.⁵⁴ These tales promote the idea that despite his well-documented cruelty, Vlad was a brave leader who meted out a harsh form of justice regardless of social status. In one such anecdote, Dracula inspires his troops just prior to the 'night attack' with the words: "Whoever wants to think of death let him not come with me, but let him stay here!"⁵⁵ Some stories tell how moral sins such as

laziness, adultery, lying, and thievery were all severely punished. Still others read like a fairy tale, speaking of a golden cup at a drinking well in the middle of the forest that all could drink from but none dared steal for fear of Dracula's wrath.⁵⁶

The aspects of Dracula's character that are remembered in Romania today vary greatly from what the German speaking chroniclers would have us believe. Bravery, honesty, and his staunch defense of Wallachian independence sets Dracula, in the eyes of Romanian people, above other princes. A twenty-five year old Romanian computer programmer states that: "For Romanians, Dracula is a totally positive figure. When he ruled, it was one of the most prosperous periods for Wallachia, and he succeeded in completely getting rid of thieves."⁵⁷ Another Romanian native relates, "[Romanian] history tells us he did many good things. Many Romanian leaders have had two faces, one that is cruel and bloody, the other that is kind and forgiving. He [Dracula] protected the country and gave money to the churches. Oh yeah, and he killed all the bad guys....with a stick."⁵⁸ In Romania, Dracula is viewed as the father of their country. The historical truth of the matter may be quite different. After all, it was his grandfather who united Wallachia, but myth and popular desire often prevail over historical truth. Thus, as an icon in terms of the nation's founding father, Romanians have come to see him in the same light as Americans view George Washington. His vicious treatment of the Turks is seen as an inspiration for national movement of resistance to foreign suzerainty. In Romania, Dracula "has all but the halo of sainthood over his head."⁵⁹

Political stability is the reason for Dracula's inhumane actions towards foreigners and his own people. Dracula created a situation (through terror) in which the people of Wallachia could live without fear of their goods being stolen and without thought that

their leader would abandon them to the Turks. According to those who see him as a patriot, his actions were not those of a madman, but inspired to create law out of chaos and stabilize what had previously been a politically volatile situation. Such beliefs have a sense of truth to them, but are obviously driven by nationalistic pride. The Romanian people have long been a subjugated people. The fact that Vlad the Impaler has emerged as a folk hero and father of a nation is telling of the mentality of a country that has had endured backstabbing and foreign rule for too long. Since the 1848 uprising, led by Andrei Muresanu (who, incidentally, wrote the Romanian National anthem *Awaken thee Romanian*), have attempted to fight off the yoke of foreign dominion. However, as stated, a series of invasions during nineteenth and twentieth centuries by both Germans and the Russians has further hardened the Romanian independent streak.

When taking all the stories of Dracula into consideration, an image of his leadership qualities emerges. One can argue that he was a cruel tyrant, reminiscent of the historical age in which he lived. However, Dracula was also a fair and a ghoulishly just ruler. Extraordinarily protective of Wallachian trade, viciously cruel to those who broke his strict law and morality codes, an inspiring and decent military tactician, and finally, a true Wallachian, and thus Romanian patriot who was willing to do anything necessary to ensure its survival are all traits that describe the character of Vlad Dracula.

None of these traits is why Dracula is most remembered. Rather, it is the association with the vampire count. Many have wondered how much Bram Stoker's novel was influenced by Vlad the Impaler? The debate has raged for more than a decade over exactly how much Bram Stoker knew about the historical Vlad Dracula. There can be little doubt that the Irish author had some knowledge of the historical Dracula. After

all, he is referenced throughout the novel. However, the central discussion revolves around whether or not Stoker based the vampiric Count Dracula on the deeds of the Wallachian voivod whose nickname he borrowed. In the following pages the allusions in *Dracula* to the historical figure will be examined in order to disprove the popular conjecture that Count Dracula and Vlad Dracula are one and the same.

Since the knowledge that there really was an enigmatic figure in history named Dracula became mainstream (through the research of historians Florescu and McNally) the majority of people have begun to associate Vlad Dracula with Count Dracula. There is an ever-growing assumption that Vlad Țepeș inspired Stoker to write the most famous vampire story of all. The basis of any argument that the count and Vlad are one and the same lies in two areas. The first is how much (if any) information Bram Stoker learned from his relationship with the Hungarian historian Arminius Vambery. The second is whether the history Stoker provides for the Count suggests a detailed knowledge of Vlad.

A few historians have assumed without hard evidence that Vambery filled Stoker's head with images of the deeds of the Impaler Prince. From their meetings it has been supposed that Stoker was given a plethora of information concerning the history of Wallachian Voievod that the Irish author then used to create the infamous character he called Count Dracula. Donald Glut's states in his book *True Vampires of History*:

It was upon this historical Dracula that Bram Stoker based his novel of the notorious vampire count. Stoker cited in his novel a certain "Arminius" who was actually Arminius Vambery of Budapest, who supplied him with such information concerning the Dracula who was referred to as "The Impaler." Stoker incorporated what he learned of the historical Dracula in telling the origins of his romanticized character.⁶⁰

The speculation was heightened and popularized by the eminent historians Radu Florescu

and Raymond T. McNally. While being perhaps the most influential Dracula historians to date, the two chose to venture into the realm of speculation on this particular issue. In *Dracula: A Biography of Vlad the Impaler* they state that “it is the emphasis on the evil Dracula that fired the poetic imagination of the English horror story writer Bram Stoker through his contact with the Hungarian scholar Professor Arminius Vambery.”⁶¹ The two go on to say that “It is interesting to note that in all the regions of Romania, most of the genuine authenticated vampire cases were reported from Transylvania, particularly northern Transylvania, the scene of Stoker’s Gothic plot, which stories Vambery....undoubtedly described in detail in the course of conversations with Bram Stoker.”⁶²

Even in the latest book on Vlad Dracula, *Vlad the Impaler: In Search of the Real Dracula* by M.J. Trow this assumption continues. In Trow’s opinion:

...it is likely that Vambery discussed his native Hungary with Stoker and probably suggested books he should consult in the reading room of the British museum when researching the background for his novel....He may have been intrigued by the name Dracula or Vambery’s stories of the barbarous cruelty that were associated with it, but the fact that his description of Vlad’s lineage is reasonably accurate indicates that he intended his undead Count to be associated with the Impaler himself.⁶³

Such assumptions seem reasonable until a couple of facts come to light. First, there are no letters, notes, or correspondence of any kind between Vambery and Stoker. Such letters do not exist. What does exist are Stoker’s personal notes concerning *Dracula*, which are on display at the Rosenbach Museum in Pennsylvania. These contain no mention of Arminius Vambery as a source of information. All that is known is that the two men, along with Henry Irving, dined together following a theatre production.⁶⁴ While

writing *Dracula*, Stoker took meticulous notes, even going so far as to copy train schedules for accuracy. Furthermore, all of his known sources are accounted for in his own working papers. So are we to believe that Stoker kept notes on everything except his conversations with the Hungarian historian, which he conveniently left out? Are we to believe that Stoker apparently felt strongly enough about the Hungarian historian to name a character in *Dracula* after him, but did not bother to give him credit for his intellectual contribution to the novel.

Furthermore, McNally and Florcescu propose that in researching Vlad the Impaler, Stoker came across a source that states: “Vlad was created for the part he played; he hated foreigners, he hated the boyars! He hated the people! He massacred, impaled, killed without distinction for his own pleasure and security.”⁶⁵ Perhaps worst of all, because it reaches such a large audience, are the educational television shows such as *A & E’s Ancient Almanac*. The following quotation appeared in a recent episode of *Ancient Almanac* entitled *The Real Dracula*:

Then he [Stoker] saw red [when he] came across the accounts of a real blood-drinker from Transylvania, a fifteenth century despot who was responsible for the murders of tens of thousands of innocent people, Vlad the Impaler. To Stoker, he would be an inhuman inspiration....this was the character that fascinated Stoker, a real blood-drinker.⁶⁶

This statement incorporates two faulty assertions. First, concerning Stoker’s familiarity with the source proclaiming Vlad’s hatred for the boyars, I must ask why then would Count Dracula claim to be a boyar when telling Jonathon Harker his history? During a dinner conversation between Harker and the Count, Harker notes that: “This he [Count Dracula] afterwards explained by saying that to a boyar the pride of his house and the

name is his own pride, that their glory is his glory.”⁶⁷ The Count would certainly not be prideful of being a boyar if Stoker had been familiar with the history of the treacherous Wallachian boyars. As previously noted in chapter one, Vlad Dracula had little care for the boyar class who had survived so many Wallachian princes. Surely the learned Vambery, who was working on two recently discovered books concerning King Matthias Corvinus, was aware of Dracula’s disdain of the boyars. Furthermore, if the two men had actually discussed the history of the Impaler in detail, the story of Vlad’s impalement of the old and infirm boyars and the subsequent forced labor of the young boyars in rebuilding Castle Poenari shortly after his second reign began, would have come up as it is one of the best known stories about Vlad Dracula. Also, it is absolutely false that Stoker found ‘a real blood-drinker’ in Vlad Dracula. No document exists stating that the Voived ever consumed blood. The closest is a woodcut illustration in one of the German pamphlets about Vlad. This scene, if true, shows Dracula’s seeming indifference to the pain of others as he eats his breakfast amidst a group of freshly impaled bodies outside the city of Brasov. The pamphlet says nothing about blood drinking; in fact, it is not even implied.

The second argument given to support the Dracula/Count connection is the Count’s history given to us mainly from the Count’s mouth early in the novel and scattered in a few other places through correspondence between one Van Helsing, one of the most recognizable heroes from the novel *Dracula*, and the aforementioned historian Arminius. The following passage from the pages of *Dracula* seems to illustrate Stoker’s familiarity with Prince Vlad. As Jonathon Harker and the Count sit for dinner, Harker notes that the Count speaks like a king when he boasts that:

Is it a wonder that we were a conquering race; that we were proud; that when the Magyar, the Lombard, the Avar, the Bulgar, or the Turk poured his thousands on our frontiers, we drove them back?...And when the Hungarian flood swept swept eastward, the Szekys were claimed as kindred by the victorious Magyars, and to us for centuries was trusted the guarding of the frontier of Turkey-land.... Who more gladly than we throughout the Four Nations received the bloody sword, or at its warlike call flocked quicker to the standard of the King? When was redeemed that great shame of my nation, the shame of Kosovo, when the flags of the Wallach and the Magyar [Hungary] went down beneath the Crescent [Ottoman Empire]? Who was it but one of my own race who 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 shame and slavery upon them!⁶⁸

In this one page Stoker alludes to the 1448 disastrous Battle of Kosovo, in which the Turks decimated the Christian forces. It was this battle that led to Dracula's first reign. Dracula's famous 1462 campaign against the Turks is alluded to in the line: "who crossed the Danube and beat the Turk on his own ground?" The subsequent backstabbing by his 'unworthy brother' Radu, who stole the Wallachian throne from Dracula shortly after the campaign's conclusion when Vlad was arrested by the Hungarian King Matthias Corvinus ends the statement, thus shaming Wallachia and placing her under the yoke of the Turks.

The connection between the Count and Voievod Dracula seems to continue in other places as well. Late in the novel, Professor Van Helsing regales his group of Harker, Quincy Morris, and Lord Gadalming with the following information:

He must, indeed, have been that Voievod Dracula who won his name against the Turk, over the river on the very frontier of Turkey-Land. If it be so, then he was no common man; for in that time, and for centuries after, he was spoken of as the most cunning, as well as the bravest sons of the 'land beyond the forest' (Transylvania). That mighty brain and that iron resolution went with him to his grave, and are now arrayed against us. The Dracula's were, Arminius says, 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 (Satan). They learned their secrets at the Scholomance, amongst the mountains over Lake Hermanstadt, where the Devil claims the tenth scholar as his due....and in one manuscript this Dracula is spoken of as Wampyr, which we all understand too well.⁶⁹

The first portion of the quote refers once again to the 1462 campaign of Voievod Dracula, and once again seems to point to knowledge imparted by Vambery. However, the information in both Count Dracula's boastful dinner conversation with Harker and Van Helsing's tale can be accounted for in the source material left by Stoker himself. The following is an excerpt from Stoker's notes on William Wilkinson's *Account of the Principalities of Wallachia and Moldavia*:

The Wallachians joined the Hungarians in 1448, and made war on Turkey, being defeated at the Battle of Cossova [Kosovo] in Bulgaria and finding it impossible to make a stand against the Turks submitted to annual tribute which they paid until 1460 when Sultan Mahomet II being occupied in completing a conquest of the Islands of the Archipelago gave opportunity of shaking off the yoke. Their Voioved [DRACULA] crossed the Danube and attacked the Turkish troops Only momentarily success. Mahomet drove him back to Wallachia were pursued and defeated him. The Voioved escaped into Hungary and the Sultan caused his brother Bladus [Radu] received in his place. He made a treaty with Bladus finding Wallachia to perpetual tribute and laid the foundations of that slavery not yet abolished. Dracula in the 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.⁷⁰

All of the historical information used by Stoker can be accounted for without the use of conversations between Vambery and Stoker that may or may not have taken place. The other information used by Stoker, in particular that concerning the Scholomance, was gathered from an influential article by Emily Gerard entitled "Transylvanian Superstitions". Stoker learned from Gerard, as well as a few other sources about Transylvanian superstitions, knowledge that led to a change in setting for *Dracula* from Styria (Austria) to Transylvania.

Transylvania might well be termed the land of superstition, for nowhere else does this curious crooked plant of delusion flourish as persistently and in such bewildering variety. It would almost seem as though a whole species of demons, pixies witches, and hobgoblins, driven from the rest of Europe by the wand of science, had taken refuge within this

mountain rampart....The spirit of Evil (the devil) plays a conspicuous part in the Romanian code of superstition, and such destination as the Gregynia Drakuluj (devil's garden), the Gania Drakulja (devil's mountain)....I may as well mention here the *Scholomance*, or school supposed to exist somewhere in the heart of the mountains....Only ten scholars are admitted at a time, and when the course of the learning has expired and nine of them are released to return to their homes, the tenth scholar is detained by the devil as payment, and mounted upon an *Ismaju* (dragon) he becomes the devil's aide-de-camp....More decidedly evil, however, is the vampire, or *Nosferatu*, in whom every Romanian peasant believes as firmly as he does in heaven and hell....⁷¹

The written word has cemented the vampire, and in particular Dracula, in American culture. This image has been carried on by the relatively new medium of cinema. Movies have further perpetuated the merging of Prince Dracula and Count Dracula. The opening scene of *Bram Stoker's Dracula* is a quick and bloody depiction of the Voievod in triumph over the Turks in 1462. Added, for the sake of the story, is an authentic Romanian folk tale concerning a vengeful Turkish archer who shot an arrow into Dracula's castle with the news that the Turks had the entire area surrounded. Having been read by his wife (or mistress) the letter caused her to become so overwhelmed with grief that she, fearing all was lost, flung herself off the ramparts of the castle.⁷² Pictures commonly seen of Vlad with elongated fangs or those of an eerie moonlight illuminating a flock of bat surrounding what is supposed to be Castle Dracula all aid in the unfair infusion of Count Dracula to Vlad the Impaler.

In closing this section I have one final point refuting the erroneous assumption that Voievod/Count Dracula are one and the same. Count Dracula is never referred to in the novel as Vlad. Nor, for that matter is the process of impalement brought up, save for its well-known use against the vampire, which, according to Stoker's notes, comes from folklore rather than history. If Stoker were so familiar with Vlad Dracula's life would he

not have worked this in somehow? Scanty references in cited works, imaginary conversations, and wishful thinking do not make a thing true. This is what those who would lump the Vampire Count and the Wallachian Prince together have done. To me, this logic seems exceedingly silly, and until a single shred of evidence to the contrary comes to light, I, and many others will continue to believe that Voievod Dracula and Stoker's fictional character Count Dracula have little to do with one another other than share a name.

Rather than being inspired by Dracula to create the Count, Stoker was attempting to flesh out an existing villain. Take, for example, the emphasis on the devil in his original notes. The word is in all capital letters. Since the Biblical story of Revelations the dragon has been associated with the devil.

Then another sign appeared in the sky; it was a huge red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and on its head were ten diadems....Michael and his angels battled against the dragon....The huge dragon, the ancient serpent, who is called the Devil and Satan....⁷³

In Eastern Europe, especially Romania, the symbol of the dragon has an entirely different connotation. Since the time of the Dacians, the dragon signified unyielding strength in battle and was in no way associated with Satan.⁷⁴

The vampire can be easily associated with the perversion of Christian traditions. Vampires have attained eternal life outside the sacraments of the church while retaining their physical being. Normally eternal life is associated with the spiritual, not the corporeal. Furthermore, the association of blood and eternal life is a theme in both the story of the last supper and in *Dracula*. In the Book of Luke, Jesus states, "The cup is the new covenant in my blood...."⁷⁵ Each Sunday, millions relive this symbolic act by

taking communion and consuming 'the blood of Christ', fulfilling their pact with God in hope of eternal salvation. By way of contrast, Renfield repeatedly screams "The blood is the life" at various intervals in *Dracula*.⁷⁶ Renfield acts as a disciple to Dracula. Unlike the twelve apostles of the Bible, he is not concerned about salvation, and says as much: "I want no souls. Life is all I want."⁷⁷ Yet another association is the way Count Dracula turns Lucy into a vampire by draining her blood and forcing her to consume a portion of his. Through the consumption of blood eternal life is granted in two very different forms. Lastly, the resurrection of both the fictional Dracula and Jesus bears mentioning. While, according to Christian tradition, Jesus ascends to heaven as a spiritual body, Dracula, in a final aberration, remains earthbound in a state somewhere between life and death, forced to consume (blood), that which Jesus offered and gave freely for the salvation of others, to continue his own hellish existence. Thus, I believe Stoker found the name Dracula and associated it with the legend of the Scholomance, a mythical school of sorcery taught by the devil himself, subsequently blending his little historical knowledge of Vlad Dracula to bolster the novel's realism. Added to this was vampire folklore and earlier vampire fiction (mainly La Fanu's tale *Carmilla*) to create a monster that is a perverse parody of Christ.

Stoker's *magnus opus* received mixed review upon publication in 1897. He died before *Dracula* became truly popular. Since Stoker's death in 1912, *Dracula*, has never been out of print, and has inspired over two hundred movie adaptations.⁷⁸

CHAPTER FOUR

THINGS THAT GO BUMP IN THE NIGHT

For the majority of people, vampires are the creatures of nightmares and legends that exist beyond the boundaries of normal life, yet linger a hair's breadth from death. In fact, one might not recognize a folkloric vampire when contrasted with the vampire of popular literature. Both in fiction as in folklore they are 'un-dead', extending their lives by unnatural and unholy means such as drinking the blood of the living, becoming spiritually unclean monsters whose very existence is a perversion of the natural cycle of life. However, the similarities largely end there. Vampires have haunted humanity across the globe and throughout time. Few, if any, cultures worldwide do not have a vampiresque creature within its collective mythology. Vampires are supposed to have had many names, but regardless of what they are called, all share the need for blood. The earliest known depiction of a vampire was found on an ancient bowl, an engraving showing a man and vampire having intercourse. In ancient Assyria, a prayer against evil spirits reads:

Spirits that minish heaven and earth,
That minish the land,
Spirits that minish the land, Of giant strength,
Of giant strength and giant tread,
Demons like raging bulls, great ghosts
Ghosts that break through all houses,
Demons that have no shame,
Seven are they!
Knowing no care,
They grind the land like corn,
Knowing no mercy.
They rage against mankind:
They spill the blood like rain,

Devouring their flesh and sucking their veins.
Where the images of the gods are, there they quake
In the Temple of Nabu, who fertilizes the shoots of wheat.
They are demons full of violence
Ceaselessly devouring blood
Invoke that ban against them,
That they no more return to this neighborhood
By heaven be ye exorcized! By Earth ye be exorcized!⁷⁹

According to the traditions of Babylon, the restless spirit of the dead could return from the grave seeking to drain the living of their life force.⁸⁰ Another ancient vampire is Adam's first wife Lilith. The story that comes down from a Hebrew text is that Lilith chose a life of exile rather than submit to Adam. Later she returned as a vampire like witch who sucks the blood from children.⁸¹ From the Hebrew stories of Lilith stem the Greek and Roman tales of the *lamiae*. Ancient writers thought the *lamiae* were horrid women masquerading as beautiful maidens. These *femme fatales* would then use their wily charms to lure a righteous man into a compromising position and subsequently devour him whole.⁸² Vampire tales continued in the Arabic classic *Thousand and One Nights* with the story of Abdul-Hassan. Hassan learns that his new wife is a vampire after he follows her one night to a graveyard and witnesses her feasting on the blood of corpses. Divorce without the possibility of reconciliation is later ensured when he digs up her tomb and, finding her body seemingly full of life, burns it on a pyre of scented wood and scatters the ashes in the Tigris River.⁸³

Medieval Europe is ripe with the vampire story as well. One such story occurred in 1196 in Buchinghamshire, a town in present day England, when a man who had died of natural causes returns from the grave to attack his wife. The husband and the family are saved when the bishop of Lincoln writes an absolution relieving the dead man's soul of any onus that caused him to wander the earth. When the absolution was placed upon

the chest of the vampire, the problem was solved, and he never again returned to do harm to anyone else.⁸⁴ This tale, like many of the European accounts of the vampire, reinforces the church's role as the sole means of salvation, not only for the vampire, but for his victims as well. In South America, the home of the infamous vampire bat, ancient cultures believed the vampire like god *Kali* devoured the souls of those unworthy of ascension to heaven.⁸⁵

Reports of vampirism during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were common, particularly in Eastern Europe. According to one account in the year 1727 a Hungarian soldier named Arnold Paole returned from his service in the army and settled in the village of Meduegna. Paole was seen by his fellow villagers as a bit strange, but otherwise an honest and decent man. He was to eventually settle with his betrothed (a local girl named Nina), to whom he admitted that a vampire had plagued him while he was stationed in Greece. In the winter of 1732 he met with an untimely end when he was unlucky enough to have fallen out of a fully loaded cart of hay. His sudden death set off a chain of events that would become one of the most 'authentic' vampire tales in history. Roughly a month after his accident, the people of the small Hungarian village began to tell frightened tales of late night encounters with Paole. Soon, four villagers mysteriously died and panic set in. They decided to dig up Paole's body in order to determine whether or not he was at the root of Meduegna's troubles. The exhumation party consisted of two military officials from Belgrade, two army surgeons, a drummer boy, town officials and an elderly church official. When the coffin lay open, all were astonished to find fresh blood around the mouth and the corpse preserved in a fresh condition. Then it was determined on the basis of the aforementioned villagers' tales combined with the body's

preservation that Paole was indeed a vampire. The men set about the grizzly work of destroying the undead. Garlic was sprinkled over the body and a wooded stake driven through Paole's heart, at which time a horrifying shriek emitted from the corpse. As a further measure against the spread of vampirism, the bodies of the four recently deceased were also dug up and promptly staked. Afterwards all five bodies were burned and reburied on holy ground.⁸⁶

The tale of Arnold Paole is not an uncommon one. Several such stories are documented throughout the centuries. Another European account comes first hand from the Hungarian village of Kisilova in 1738, where a Jewish citizen reported a father returning from the dead to ask his son for 'something to eat'. When the son was found dead and several citizens suddenly fell ill, the town, in typical fashion, exhumed the body. Finding the man lacking corporeal corruption and, amazingly enough with 'natural respiration' despite having been deceased six weeks, they decided that he was indeed a vampire and thereafter staked him through the heart and burned him to ashes.⁸⁷ Even with the Enlightenment and the colonization of the New World, vampire superstitions survived. Nineteenth-century Rhode Island is the site of one such report. In isolated parts of Rhode Island, the belief was widely held that those dying of consumption would return from the grave to suck the blood of their family, thus ensuring that their family suffered the same fate.⁸⁸

The modern world is no exception to the belief in vampires, particularly in parts of Romania. Just last year, in February 2005, a Romanian man named Gheorghe Marinescu and his five family members were sentenced to six months in jail for unlawfully exhuming the body of a former teacher who they believed was haunting them

from the grave and drinking their blood at night. At midnight the family removed the body from its resting place, tore out the heart, burned it, and drank an elixir they made out of the ashes. In a comment released after his arrest, Marinescu stated that:

If we hadn't done anything, my wife, my son and my daughter-in-law would have died. That is when I decided to 'unbury' him. I've seen these kinds of things before. When we took him out of the grave, he had blood around his mouth. We took his heart and he sighed when we stabbed him. We burned it, dissolved the ash into water and the people who had fallen sick drank it. They got better immediately. It was like someone took away all their pain and sickness. We performed a ritual that is hundreds of years old. We had no idea we were committing a crime. On the contrary, we believed that we were doing a good thing because the spirit of Petre was haunting us all and was very close to killing some of us. He came back from the dead and was after us.⁸⁹

The prevalence of vampire belief shows that, like the 'Great Flood' myths, vampires have transcended time, geography, and cultural variation. The question is why?

The answer to this is certainly neither easy nor straightforward. From a cultural standpoint, vampire tales have been used by less scientific societies to explain natural phenomena that are not understood. Disease, mental illness, unexplained sudden death and even birdcalls have been attributed to vampires or demons. As is evidenced by the Assyrian prayer shown earlier in the chapter, religion has always been seen as the way to combat supernatural evil such as the vampire. As time passed and Christianity emerged, the vampire kept its familiar role as a maleficent creation, with the caveat that salvation of both victim and vampire was ensured only through the direct intervention of the Church. It was during the eighteenth century that the Holy Cross became an integral part of the vampire hunter's kit as a powerful symbol to ward off attacks.

Due to the ignorance and superstitious nature of the populace during the Medieval and Renaissance periods, fear of the vampire among other creatures of evil legitimized the Church's role and helped solidify its position as one of the pillars upon which society

was built. Vampire outbreaks became so common during this period that a series of ‘tests’ based on testimonials and a physical observation of the corpse were used to determine if the deceased needed help with its transition into the realm of the dead. Often times the suspected vampire emits a foul odor, as one would expect from a corpse, but the arms and legs remained free of rigor mortis and the body remains uncorrupted. Dom Augustine Calmet, an eighteenth-century scholar and churchman, describes the bodies of supposed vampires as being “....red [faced], with their limbs supple and pliable, without worms or decay; but not without great stench.”⁹⁰ Add to this the following account from a German physician: “We opened the coffin, and, to be sure....one saw that a foaming, evil smelling brown-black ichor welled out of their mouth and noses....”⁹¹ According to a variety of Eastern European superstitions, blood flowing from the mouth of the deceased is a sure sign of vampirism. The assumption being that the fluid around the mouth of the suspected vampire had been sucked from his latest victim. Added to the description of the vampire is a bloating or swelling of the body and a slight darkening of the complexion. The same physician went on to say: “It was gorged and swollen with frightful corpulence, and its face was florid and chubby, with huge red puffed cheeks, and the shroud in which he had been wrapped was all soiled and torn.”⁹²

Also intertwined with religious beliefs are burial rites designed to show proper respect and to mourn for the dead, both of which reinforce societal mores. A common belief was that if a suspected corpse was not sent into the afterlife in the proper manner, there was an increased risk of an angry soul’s return from the grave. Break the rules of a decent burial and risk the wrath of the dead. There can be no more important task in life than to make sure a soul passes into the afterlife successfully. The societies of Eastern

Europe believed that the soul and the body were attached, even after death. Funerary rites allowed safe passage from the realm of the living to the after-life. Until recently, those residing in Balkan countries exhumed a corpse to make sure proper decomposition is taking place. For forty days in some countries such as Crete or up to seven years in others like Romania, relatives and community members brought food and worldly goods to the gravesite of the recently deceased. At the end of the preset time, the body was exhumed. A second burial was then preformed if the corpse showed proper decay. If the body had not properly decayed, it was then a vampire and had to be staked, beheaded, and/or burned.⁹³

A few other characteristics of the appearance and character of the folkloric undead should be noted. Noted folklorist Phillip Barber points out that in folklore “the teeth [of a vampire] are not especially prominent.”⁹⁴ Furthermore, having read several vampire accounts, I found no mention of an aversion to religion symbols could be found, although church officials tend to be present and the newly violated bodies are reburied on holy ground. Lastly, it should be noted that the vampires of folklore tend to inflict their wrath on family members or those that were close to them in life.

Literature, as it relates to the vampire, tells a vastly different tale than its folkloric counterpart. Firstly, the vampires of literature are aimed at a target audience, mainly, the collective masses. Due to this almost all literary vampires are from an aristocratic family. The trend started with John Polidori’s *The Vampyre*, written in 1819, and continued through *Dracula*. Neither Polidori’s ‘Lord’ Ruthven nor Stoker’s ‘Count’ Dracula need further explanation of their nobility since it is implied in their title. We find out early on that Augustus Darvell from Lord Byron’s *Fragment of a Story* is “a man of

considerable fortune and ancient family....”⁹⁵ This trend continues in La Fanu’s vampire tale *Carmilla* when she reveals that she is descended from a Hungarian noble family, the Karnsteins, whose “ruins of the castle are only three miles away.”⁹⁶

Secondly, beauty and physical attraction are hallmarks of the fictional vampire. Women are the favored targets as evidenced by the way in which they are seduced. Once again, Polidori sets the stage for future writers with “...many of the female hunters after notoriety attempt to win his (Lord Ruthven’s) attention, and gain, at least, some marks of what they might term affection.”⁹⁷ Even female vampires like *Carmilla* attack women in a thinly veiled homoerotic encounter. Furthermore, the vampiric act of biting has sexual connotations such as penetration and the exchange of bodily fluids. Another aspect of note when considering the fictional undead is that they tend to travel extensively or hale from a foreign land. The exception to this is *Carmilla*, in which the main characters are of English origin, but have settled in Styria. This adds to an air of mystery that surrounds the vampire and is in direct contradiction to the mindless bloodsuckers of folkloric legend. Ties to a homeland are kept informal and distant, while the vampires of folklore are bound to a certain place.⁹⁸

Almost without fail, the vampire of literature is a solitary creature. One famous exception to this is the novella by Richard Matheson, *I Am Legend*. This story has been made into a couple of rather poor movies. However, the story adds a very different twist to the vampire genre. In *I Am Legend* the world it completely changed when a virus turns the populace into vampires, that is, except one man. In a dramatic role reversal, the last of humanity becomes the hunter, preying upon a society of vampires.

How does one become a vampire? Tradition lists a plethora of ways that a

normal corpse assumes the role of a vampire. Most, if not all, are tied to one of three things: the behavior of the person while they were still alive, improper funerary rites, and lastly, supernatural intervention. People who in life were unpopular, troublesome, alcoholics, great sinners, committed suicide, sorcerers, a seventh son, a child born with teeth or with a caul (amniotic membrane that covers the newborn's head), and those bitten by a vampire are all strong candidates to become vampires after death.⁹⁹ The belief that those excommunicated by the church did not rot in their graves led to the assumption that they too were to become the undead.¹⁰⁰ Another vampire creation method has to do with the clash of cultures. As one society begins to become assimilated by another, more powerful one, the weaker culture's religion is often changed or even forbidden. This was seen by the Roman conquest of North Africa where the religious ceremonies remained intact, but with the deities taking on new Roman names. Later, and to a much greater level, Christianity vilified the deities of a subjugated culture, making demons and vampires from those that were previously worshipped as gods. Finally, the unholy act of having sex with a demon or devil would produce a vampire.¹⁰¹ In the *Malleus Maleficarum* it is written that the baby produced from such an act is "more powerful than an ordinary man."¹⁰²

The origins of the literary vampires are a bit unclear. We learn that Count Dracula was changed into a vampire after attending the Scholomance.¹⁰³ No word is spoken concerning the character and actions of the vampire while they lived, as it would pertain to their eventual un-death. Other than the supernatural (Scholomance) the bite of a vampire, or the consumption of vampire blood, the exact method of transformation of the living into a vampire in works of fiction remains mysterious. It should be pointed out

that many early literary vampires led wholesome lives, but once contaminated by the vampire became diabolical creatures of evil.

So what does the above information tell us about the purpose of its origin? Firstly, that the folkloric and fictional vampires serve very different roles in the society of their creation. Vampires of folklore were, in part, created by the minds of peasants to explain a rash of deaths, usually from a lingering disease, but unknown in origin. In many cases the Church perpetuated this belief. In a strange way, vampires proved to the medieval masses that there is life after death and added legitimacy to the cornerstone of Christianity, the divine resurrection of Christ. After all, if a mortal man could come back from the grave then surely Jesus could as well. Furthermore, if indeed vampires exist it would stand to reason they must be the creation of some supernaturally powerful force of evil, namely, Satan. If one accepts the existence of the Devil, then by deduction one must accept the existence of God. Thus, from the belief in vampires comes the proof that God is real. This made religious faith far more tangible and answered a timeless question about the reality of God that has plagued mankind throughout history.

The culture of religion combined with the norms and mores of various societies to enhance the vampire legend throughout the world. Nonetheless this does not completely explain how the belief in vampire-like creatures developed in completely different cultures and in various parts of the world with little or no contact between them. This would ignore the human condition that gives rise to the notions of good, evil and reward or punishment in the afterlife. In other words, the vampire is an extension of the intrinsic human need to explain the world around them, the same need that has given rise to religion after religion over the span of time. The vampire and religion often go hand in

hand, for in many ways they are the mirror image of one another, each perpetuating the other's survival. A secondary role of the folkloric vampire is the explanation and justification of burial rights and practices, thus reinforcing one's place in society.

The fictional vampire is used for a very different purpose. Just by appearance alone the authors' of vampire fiction made the monsters appealing. Vampires are not mindless apparitions returned from the grave to suck the blood of the living; instead, they were imbued with a sense of panache. Beautiful and appealing to the opposite sex, vampires allowed those of the Victorian Age (and the modern one as well) to dream of a forbidden sexual encounter. Numerous literary sources refer to the bite of a vampire as erotic and pleasurable. For example, early in the novel *Dracula*, Jonathon Harker succumbs to the advances of three female vampires in Castle Dracula. He describes the experience as "Sweet it was in one sense, Honey-sweet, and sent the same tingling through the nerves as her voice..."¹⁰⁴ Never has a 'real' tale of a vampire attack been described as anything but terrifying, but through the written word and an author's fancy, the embrace of a vampire is sensual, taboo, and carnal.

The authors of early vampire stories had other motives. While the vampires of old wives tales were fellow peasants, the vampires of fiction are almost universally rich and noble. It can scarcely be denied that the broad appeal of the vampire among the general public is that the bloodsuckers are aristocratic. Almost immediately after the publication, Polidori's *Vampyre* was adapted to the stage in England and France. Its success was followed by a series of plays featuring a gothic-romance theme.¹⁰⁵ Aristocratic vampires allowed the poor to see the nobles in the flesh the way they were perceived by the bulk of society: as bloodsuckers. The vampire represents a powerful

symbol, draining the blood of the average peasant through an orgy of wealth and excess. Vampires, and by association, the rich, figuratively illustrate the parasitic role of the wealthy. Like a tick on a dog, they should be plucked away and utterly destroyed. Furthermore, as Western European society became increasingly bourgeois, the old, aristocratic family power structure was seen as an out-of-date portion of society. This old aristocracy of Europe was the remnants of an aging power structure allegorically sick and bloated on the essence of the people, yet, like the vampire, refusing to die.

Through Anne Rice's series, *The Vampire Chronicles*, the first of which was published in 1976, the vampire as we know it has completely changed its character while still remaining easily recognizable. Gone is the effect of the crucifix, even for the faithful, but sunlight, the stake, and fire remain, as has the necessity for blood. Blood is 'still the life'. It was not a wholesale makeover, but a revival of a stale and dying monster that made Rice's contributions significant. Vampires were not out to take over the world; they now exhibit unique personalities and desires. No longer are they soulless blood drainers, now vampires wrestle with their conscience trying to understand their place in the universe. The male homosexual tones, as opposed to the lesbian encounters of past stories such as *Carmilla*, that are contained within the pages of *The Vampire Chronicles* would have certainly not been possible in an earlier generation. Her remaking of the vampire model has spawned the role-playing game *Vampire: The Masquerade*. No one would have ever wanted to become a vampire like Lucy from *Dracula*, but Louis from *The Vampire Chronicles* is a different breed. Until Rice took over the vampire genre in the 1980's and 1990's, there was only one other reference to a human desiring to become a vampire. This was in a short story written by Richard Matheson in 1952

entitled *Blood Son*. Even this tale was dramatically different from Rice's vampires. The young boy who truly wanted to become a vampire was strange, perhaps even morbid in his obsession with Count Dracula. He is portrayed as an outsider who is completely different from 'normal' boys and girls his age. Rice makes the ambition to become a vampire seem normal, even desirable compared to the mundane existence of humanity.

The modern film industry has taken the literary presentation of the vampire and thrust it into the stream of pop culture conscience. Shortly after the publication of *Dracula*, movies began the process of replacing the written word as the major means of entertainment. Motion pictures have done at least as much as literature to reshape the view of the vampire in the minds of fans worldwide. These films, some of which are pieces of art in and of themselves, took their queue from literature. The cinematic vampires are almost all aristocratic, beautiful, sensual and attractive to the opposing sex. The cinema has a couple of great advantages over written fiction. First, it takes no work to sit, stare at a screen, and be told what to think. Secondly, a mass audience can be reached in a relatively short period of time. Millions attended the 1992 film *Bram Stoker's Dracula*, directed by Francis Ford Coppola, although it ran for only a matter of months. By its very nature, film quickly reaches more people than books ever will. Thus, an examination of the changing face of the vampire (particularly Count Dracula) as it pertains to film is certainly necessary to understanding this phenomenon.

Any study of this sort must start at the beginning, in this case, the 1921 German silent film classic *Nosferatu*. The vampire in *Nosferatu*, which is a type of horribly ugly vampire, is Count Orloc, played by the actor Max Shreck. Orloc is a loathsome creature in both appearance and deed. At no point can the audience sympathize with or feel

anything but revulsion towards the Count. This early cinematic view of the vampire seems more in tune with the way the peasants, who endured what they thought was an outbreak of vampirism, must have felt. The storyline basically follows Stoker's *Dracula*, albeit in a German setting, with one major change. At the climax of the film, Count Orlok is destroyed by the glow of the rising sun. This one seemingly insignificant addition was to forever shape the way in which vampires were combated. It was now possible to destroy a vampire relatively cleanly, without the bloody mess of driving a wooden stake through its heart. This is without a doubt one of the most significant deviations from both folklore and written fantasy. While the vampires in both genres tend to be nocturnal, with most attacks occurring when the victim is sound asleep, they are by no means destroyed by sunlight, that is, until *Nosferatu*.

Jump ahead ten years to the 1931 release of *Dracula*, starring Bela Lugosi. Lugosi began an overhaul of Dracula's identity. According to the Stoker's *Dracula*, the Count is described by Jonathon Harker as follows.

His face was a strong—a very strong—aquiline, with a high bridge and thin nose and peculiarly arched nostrils....and hair growing scantily round the temples but profusely elsewhere. His eyebrows were very massive, almost meeting at the nose, and with bushy hair that seemed to curl in its own profusion. The mouth, as far as I could see it under the heavy moustache, was fixed and rather cruel-looking, with peculiarly sharp teeth; these protruded over the lips....his ears were pale, and at the tops extremely pointed....¹⁰⁶

Bela Lugosi's portrayal was quite different from the description given to us by Stoker. His thick accent, alluring stage presence and power over women have forever altered the role. Although *Nosferatu* and *Dracula* told essentially the same story, the two vampires could not have been more different. Since Lugosi's *Dracula*, vampires have been seen as attractive (to the opposite sex) and hypnotic, thus placing the cinematic vampire more in

tune with its literary counterpart. The Dracula portrayed by Lugosi is the quintessential Count by which all others are judged. Eight decades later, it is Lugosi's Dracula that is still most recognizable in masks, costume wear, and overall is the most easily recognized. His immortal line "I don't drink....wine" is one that has been imitated frequently, but never with quite the same aura.

Through the 1950's and 1960's, Christopher Lee took over the character. Cast in the same mold as Lugosi, handsome with an accent, the English born Lee is tall with an incredible charisma on screen. We see the sign of the times reflected in Hammer films in *Horror of Dracula* and *Dracula: Prince of Darkness*. This era saw the gradual desensitization of the audience and the increase in the acceptable level of violence and bloodshed. Also, the sexual pleasure of the vampire's bite is no longer implied but explicitly expressed between Dracula and his female victims. The Count's prey becomes so enamored that they lie and deceive on his behalf, even placing loved ones in peril rather than betray their vampiric lover.

Dracula continued to morph when in 1979 Frank Langella emerged as the newest Count. By appearance alone the change in Dracula is obvious. While both Lugosi and Lee were attractive men, Langella was a sex symbol of the late 1970's. A few important developments come out of the 1979 interpretation. First, the newest *Dracula* movie begins a demographic change in the target audience by incorporating a younger, more sexual Count Dracula. This production, starring not only Langella, but also Hollywood icon Laurence Olivier, further broke down the viewer's imagination concerning the sexual appeal and relations between victim and vampire. In a lengthy sex scene with Lucy (played by actress Kate Nelligan), Langella leaves no doubt as to the erotic powers

of the vampire. Another important aspect of this movie was the addition of faith as a necessary component when using religious symbols to drive away the vampire. The power of the cross comes not from the image itself, but rather from the faith of those who wield it. This speaks volumes about the changing religious nature of American and European societies. Never before was this an issue, as it was assumed that those presenting the cross had faith. In the past, everyone was a believer, but not anymore as of the 1970's. Reflected by a decrease in church attendance, faith in religion was on the decline. No longer could anyone grab a nearby crucifix and drive away Dracula. Now the king of vampires can sense the absence of faith, allowing him to go about his business as usual.

In 1985 the popular movie *Fright Night* was released. *Fright Night* continues the good-looking, younger vampire theme as well as the necessity of faith started by Frank Langella's portrayal of the Count. However, the movie is set in modern middle town American suburbia. A young high school boy must convince a television knockoff of Van Helsing that his neighbor is a vampire. *Fright Night*, as well as the sequel, is an early form of the 'fun-horror' genre. One can see vampires on roller-skates in *Fright Night II* as well as a bizarre Renfield-like character who utters the Latin name of an insect seconds before consuming it. Movies in the 'fun-horror' theme genre are meant not only to startle but also to offset the moments of intensity with periodic injections of levity. This type of movie also takes the traditional monster, complete with all of the passé characteristics of the previous generation's films, and makes them fun again.

The vampire's appeal to the youth of America continued with the release of the 1987 box office hit *The Lost Boys*. In *The Lost Boys* the vampire are young, hip and

sexy. Teen idol Kiefer Sutherland plays the leader of a group of four vampires who are all good looking, ride motorcycles and sport the latest heavy metal fashion while other late 1980's stars like a youthful Corey Feldman and Corey Haim take on the role of the vampire hunters. With the slogan "sleep all day, party all night...It's fun to be a vampire" *The Lost Boys* was not only a wildly popular movie but it also went a long way towards glorifying the vampiric lifestyle.

In 1992 *Bram Stoker's Dracula* was released. Holding somewhat closer to the written text than other endeavors, this version made a couple of significant artistic changes. First, this film was the first mass-produced movie that emphasized the connection between the historical Vlad Țepeș and the fictional Count Dracula. Secondly, it was portrayed as a love story, in which Dracula, played by Gary Oldman, is reunited with his lost love, Isabella, centuries after her suicide when she is reborn as Mina, Jonathon Harker's fiancé. A truly emotional vampire was something new to the cinema. Count Dracula proved to be capable of 'true love', even weeping at the rejection of Mina. The vampire became a multi-dimensional monster; still capable of the familiar bloody deeds but now driven by emotions that are all too human.

Dracula 2000 offers the next twist in the constantly morphing persona of Count Dracula. His charismatic power over attractive females continues with an erotic love scene. The movie offers a little humor as well, when Count Dracula utters the line "I don't drink....coffee." While this movie offers what has become the standard Vlad Dracula/Count Dracula connection, *Dracula 2000* takes the vampire prince into the realm of the biblical, a place where many have speculated vampires belong. The first major deviation from the standard Dracula story is that Van Helsing, having captured the

vampire prince, has been unable to kill him by traditional means. Swearing that he shall not rest until he finds a way to rid the world of Dracula, Van Helsing ingests small portions of Dracula's blood in order to stay alive until he discovers a way to destroy the Count. In a dramatic twist, we learn that Vlad Țepeș is but one name in a long line of names used by Count Dracula, his first being Judas Iscariot. As a result he cannot be slain as would any other vampire, but rather he must be hung in the same way Judas chose to end his days following his betrayal of Christ.

The 2002 movie *Dracula: The Dark Prince* takes the association between Prince Dracula and the fictional Count Dracula to a new level. *The Dark Prince* starts out as a movie loosely based on the historical Vlad Dracula and ending with a vampiric twist. Vlad becomes a vampire after his death not due to his barbaric deeds in life but because his conversion to Catholicism caused him to be excommunicated from the Orthodox Church. This excommunication doomed him to wander the world in a state somewhere between life and death, being forever denied the restful sleep of death.

By the late 1980's the claim that Count Dracula was based on a real person had unfortunately been disseminated among the public by Florescu and McNally. *Dracula: Prince of Many Faces* was published in 1989 and shortly followed by a revised and updated edition of *In Search of Dracula: A History of Dracula and Vampires* just two years later. Considering the popularity of both books, it is certainly no coincidence that writers of screenplays, producers and directors of almost every movie based on the novel *Dracula* has managed to include references to Vlad Țepeș in some way.

CHAPTER FIVE

APPEAL OF THE EVERLASTING

The connection between Țepeș and Count Dracula has provoked mixed emotions. Recent interest in Dracula has prompted the Romanian government to use his image to attract western capital. A theme park bearing the name Dracula Land was set to open in 2005, but lost steam when Western investors pulled out due to the on-going disputes over the location of the park. The World Dracula Conference, hosted by the Transylvanian Society of Dracula (whose membership spans several countries) has taken place in Transylvania annually since May 1994. It is a place where historians, folklorists, vampire enthusiasts and academics of various sorts gather to learn, share stories, and pay homage to the Romanian hero. However, many prominent names in the field of history are leery about what the conferences mean to the Romanian image of Dracula. One such man is the historian Stefan Andreescu, perhaps the most preeminent scholar on Vlad Țepeș, who states that the conferences are: “Seventy-five percent business, fifteen percent scholarship and the rest is I don’t know what. The participants are not coming to learn about the true history. They are coming to confirm an image, to verify the idea of the vampire.”¹⁰⁷ Another staunch opponent of Dracula Land is the Orthodox Church. Out of fear for the potential disparaging effects on Romanian culture, Costel Stoica, a spokesman for Bucharest’s Orthodox patriarchate, released the following statement:

“We would support a functioning park which assisted economic development in a particular area. But we cannot agree to its being named after a fantasy character that has nothing to do with Romanian history, spirituality or culture. There are beautiful places in

Romania, which would be well worth popularizing and bringing tourists to—but not a negative fabrication which corrupts moral values and damages young people.”

Stoica goes on to say that Vlad Țepeș had nothing to do with Stoker’s fictional count.¹⁰⁸

The reality is that Romania is a largely poor country that is finding the lure of the vampire irresistible. Romanian restaurants, nightclubs, bars, campgrounds, souvenir vendors, the theme park (which may or may not ever be built) and even beer all bear the name Dracula. Petre Muranu, a Romanian actor at the Dracula Club Restaurant in Bucharest, points out that: “We’re beginning to find Dracula interesting as well as lucrative. Why fight it?”¹⁰⁹ Romanian native Marius Blaj expressed disgust at the recent hardships encountered by Dracula Land: “It’s all about the money.” In his opinion the association between the vampire and the Romanian hero is not a bad thing. It is merely an “external legend created from an internal myth of Romanian folklore.”¹¹⁰ Other Romanian nationals see it in a different light. They see the Count/ Țepeș connection as a negative. “Vlad was a friend of the poor. When nobles treated the poor badly, he punished them by [Impalement] in a way that made others hesitant to misbehave.”¹¹¹

Romania’s favorite son seems to be forever linked to the vampire count. Even the Romanian people themselves cannot decide whether it is a good or bad connection. The reality probably lies in the middle. It will come down to whether or not Romania can finally become an economically stable nation based on its own legends and folklore without losing or damaging the true history within. Any mythical creature whose appeal has survived thousands of years and has appeared and re- appeared in cultures throughout the world has a power of endurance that screams for long-term investments.

Through the combination of the novels, literature, film and history the vampire has spawned an entire sub-culture that infests most western nations, the Goth scene. In today's society, folklore, fiction, and cinema have all manifested themselves in a Vamp sub-culture within the 'Goth' sub-culture of America. In a twist that few saw coming, the once shunned lords of the night have become the life style of many Americans. Disgruntled men and women clad in a wardrobe of black meeting at gothic-themed nightclubs have become the reality in every major U.S. city as well as several of those abroad. Many of these people not only dress the part, but also actually consume blood. Personally I met such a couple on a ghost tour in Salem, Massachusetts, in July of 2004. What struck me as odd about these two was their appearance. Young, attractive and well dressed, they were perhaps the most normal looking people in the bunch.

The late Stephen Kaplan, founder of the Vampire Research center, devised a test after many years of vampire studies to separate 'vampire like people' from those who need to drink blood, or true vampires. The test is devised around a series of questions concerning the behavior of the interviewee such as: *Do you sleep in a coffin? Are most of your clothes black? Do you have fangs? Do you enjoy biting people on the neck? Do you occasionally drink human blood? Does the sight or taste of human blood arouse you sexually?* Answering affirmative to these questions does not make one a vampire as they have nothing to do with true vampirism.¹¹² Those engaging in the above activities are 'vampire-like people', a sub-culture within the gothic American sub-culture. This group is most assuredly a well-read bunch, at least when it comes to vampire tales. Their lives seem to be based on the novels of Anne Rice who is perhaps the most prolific and important author in terms of reshaping the modern paradigm of the vampire.

The Goth sub-culture is just one in a line of examples of the enduring popularity of the vampire. It begs the question of why the vampire is so much more likeable than its contemporary monster counterparts such as the werewolf and the Frankenstein monster?

In terms of appeal, vampires have additional advantages over other mythological monsters. Vampires represent something that, subconsciously, people want. In this way they have separated themselves from other monsters of the horror genre. With makeup and special effects, other monsters depict mankind outside of his practiced behavior and often times at his symbolic worst. The vampire is not an outwardly primeval beast like the werewolf. When the vampire bites his victim, the experience is pleasurable, penetration combined with a sadistic version of oral sex. Compare this with being savagely torn apart by a werewolf, beaten to death by a Golem (Frankenstein), or repeatedly stabbed with a knife as in modern slasher films, and it is not difficult to see the lure. All of those would be a terrifying way to die.

Take the werewolf for example. Werewolves represent man's potential for violence, the eruption of the inner beast in a fury of primal rage. Laws of society teach that mankind should suppress violent anger, and he more-or-less willingly acquiesces to this demand. Under the soft, socialized exterior, mankind is still feral at heart. Yet still we strive to contain our bestial nature. The lesson of Frankenstein is in a nutshell that mankind should not venture into the realm of God. Frankenstein's aberrational resurrection by man led to his murderous rampage. It should also be noted that the literary and cinematic output has greatly favored the vampire over the werewolf and Frankenstein. Anne Rice's *The Mummy* enjoyed nowhere near the fame and acclaim of her *Vampire Chronicles* nor was Stephen King's *Cycle of the Werewolf* as well regarded

as his vampire tale *Salem's Lot*. Moreover, the literary and cinematic vampire has extraordinary powers. It can change shape at will into a bat, wolf, rat or even fog and has super human strength and speed.

Lastly, and perhaps more intriguing, is the vampire's immortality. The fate of every living thing is to be born and to eventually die. Every creature, whether they are man or beast, has an instinctive desire to prolong its life. Death is the great unknown. Only a brief glance at the advances of medical science points to the fact that mankind avoids death at all cost. Medicine, vaccinations, diet and exercise all testify to that desire. Society has even adapted euphemisms to mask our fear. In the past fifty years it became common to say 'sixty years young' rather than sixty years old, all to try and ease the acceptance of our own mortality. That statement holds both a biological and moral truism of the human condition. We want to believe that we live on, in a spiritual sense, even after death. Immortality is the vampire's greatest trait, and its greatest tragedy. Dr. Mark Benecke astutely notes that: "Writers make a certainty what is biophysically very probable: if death does not curb life, life loses value."¹³ With few exceptions the literary vampire is a lonely, desolate creature, having watched loved ones wither and die as the world the creature once knew changes. The life they so desperately held on to becoming a cycle of repetition and loneliness.

With the recent advances in cloning it is debatable whether or not man has ventured too close to the Creator role and opened Pandora's box. Already Hollywood has responded and begun to release horror films with cloning as the central theme. As of now governments have stopped short of human cloning. However, man has never failed to seek to extend his life. Immortality has been long sought after and coveted to the point

of wasting years of one's life in the vain search for a magical device to extend one's stay here on Earth. From a historical perspective, the temptation has proven too great to resist.

From the historical Vlad Țepeș to the immortal Count Dracula, the vampire and its historical counterpart have become fused in the conscious mind of pop-culture. Whether this is fair or not is a matter of opinion. What is important is the understanding of the man who stands in the shadow of the myth. As a leader, it is inarguable that Țepeș was a cruel and perhaps even a bit morbid. However, considering the times and circumstances in which he lived, he was only slightly different than many other examples who bear the surname 'The Great.' Political realities and geographic disposition dictated that Țepeș be a brutal leader in his rather Machiavellian attempt to maintain Wallachian sovereignty. Extreme times call for extreme measures. After all, it is necessary to consider that the norms and mores of Vlad Țepeș were formed in an age predating the Renaissance. In the fifteenth century rulers could, and were often compelled to maintain rule through the use of the sword, or in this case, the stake. Throughout Eastern Europe this rather hard way of politicking was brought on by the proximity of the Ottoman Empire, often times the enemies of Christendom throughout Europe. Those who were law abiding and displayed loyalty to Wallachia and the line of Dracul Voievods had little to fear under Vlad's leadership. Although the tales of his cruelty and evil come from sources whose credibility is questionable based, Țepeș's alleged unorthodox and bloodthirsty methods were both his greatest strength and his ultimate downfall. He was an enigma. A man who, in his own mind, knew exactly what he wanted but was unable to attain it due to the military might and the political shiftiness of the Hungarians to the

west and the Turks to the east. Without the acumen for political discourse, Vlad Țepeș was left with the tools fate had given him, a sound military mind, and the force of will to commit any atrocity to attain the elusive independence he fought so hard for but never truly realized. Due to this struggle he is immortalized in modern-day Romania as a national hero akin to the way Americans view George Washington. From the Ottoman and Hungarian Empires of the fifteenth century to the Soviet Union in the twentieth century, there has always been one or more powerful nations standing in the way of Romanian independence. Romania, being at the crossroads of empires and having been torn apart by war for countless generations has looked to its history for a champion. Few, if any, have fought for freedom with such ferocity as Vlad Țepeș. Nineteenth-century poet Mihai Eminescu laments his country's poor leadership and corruption at the hands of foreign powers in his poem *Satire III*, harkening to the days when such exploitation did not exist:

Now you look amazed and frightened to our cold and sceptic eyes,
And you wonder why no longer we can listen to your lies?
When we see that all these loafers, who with great words make such
din,
Are but chasing after money, cheaply, without work to win.
If these polished empty phrases, all this idle talk, by brothers
Cannot cheat us any longer, is it now the fault of others?
Too much did you use this poor country with our foes to pieces tear,
Too much did you shame our nation, too much, too much did you dare
Our most holy things, our customs, language, ancestors defile!
But we have now all your measure, O, you scoundrels mean and vile!
Yes, to gain without an effort is your end, and rich to be,
Virtue is the merest folly, genius is but misery!
Let the ancestors sleep soundly in their annals' dusty book,
From their glorious past they surely down on you with scorn would
look.
Where art thou, old prince, Vlad Țepeș, on them all to lay thy hands
Treating them as rogues and madmen, to divide them into bands,
Throw them into two big houses, as with others thou didst whilom,
Setting fire unto the prison, and the lunatic asylum.¹¹⁴

The poem reflects the anguish of a people who have been downtrodden for centuries.

There may yet be hope for Romanian independence. With its recent acceptance into the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, Romania's freedom from communism is virtually assured.

Many historians have expressed concern over the evolving view of Țepeș as a vampire and the damage this does to Romanian culture. The proposed Dracula Land theme park has been a dead project time and time again. However, just like the Dracula of Hammer Films fame the project once again is beginning to show signs of life. With the proposal to move Dracula Land from the beautiful medieval village of Sighisoara to a location near Snagov Lake, it now appears that this project has risen from the grave. However, to the chagrin of many, particularly historians, the park is to have more of a vampire theme. For years now, the Romanian Government has issued post cards and stamps that combine the two images into one man in an attempt to reap the rewards of a booming tourist industry. It remains to be seen whether or not the current image of the historical Vlad Țepeș as connected with Stoker's Count Dracula will survive, or, like a lycanthrope, change into something more sinister in the coming century.

As previously discussed, writers and filmmakers have slowly 'revamped' the vampire. These creatures of the night have been made and remade to fit the expectation of the society that recreated them. As life expectancy is extended by medical science, so too increases life's preciousness to the average person, thus increasing the appeal of the vampire. Add to this that over the last hundred years, humans have developed more effective ways of killing one another while extending the average lifespan by ten or more years. While mankind's methods of killing one another have become quicker, less personal, and reached an unprecedented scale, our literary vampires have become more

desirable. It seems that as society becomes increasingly secularized, the immorality of seeking immortality has decreased. Terry Eagleton asks: “Who is concerned with the uniqueness of the individual, the imperishable truths of the human condition or the sensuous textures of lived experience in the Foreign Office or the boardroom of Standard Oil?”¹¹⁵ Perhaps a rethinking of what it means to be a vampire is underway. As time marches on new vampire novels and movies will continue to fascinate fans. However, due to over saturation the vampire has in part lost its appeal. It is difficult to be scared by a vampire with images of cartoons such as *Count Duckula*, a cereal named *Count Chocula* cereal, or *The Count* from *Sesame Street* dancing in your head. Furthermore, goofy songs such as Bobby ‘Boris’ Picket and the Crypt Kickers *Monster Mash* make direct reference to the vampire count, further diminishing our fear of once the terrifying beast:

Now everything's cool, Drac's a part of the band
And my monster mash is the hit of the land
For you, the living, this mash was meant too
When you get to my door, tell them Boris sent you¹¹⁶

Another example of this type of lyric is John “Cool Ghoul” Zacherly’s *Dinner with Drac*:

A dinner was served for three
At Dracula’s house by the sea
The hors d’oeuvre were fine
But I choked on my wine
When I learned that the main course was me!¹¹⁷

These cartoons and songs have had a two-fold effect. First, they keep vampires and Dracula in particular in the conscious mind of most Americans. This has helped keep the vampire’s popularity and recognition alive through the decades since the publication

of Bram Stoker's *Dracula*. However, it has also had a damaging effect on the historical Țepeș. Unfortunately, the average person assumes the Count and the historical character are one and the same. This connection keeps the proverbial marriage solvent, despite the efforts of many to separate Voievod Dracula from the fictional count within the historical community. The secondary effect of the saturation of all things vampire has been a decrease in the chilling nature of the vampire. This saturation keeps the beast ever present, eternal in the minds of the average American while sapping the very power imbued into creature through centuries of folklore, literature and cinematic efforts.

Over time the vampire has gone through several changes starting with its beginnings in ancient folklore as an unholy creature of the damned to haunting the local villages of Medieval Europe. From its roots in folklore to a literary antagonist, it was captured and transformed into a sexy cinematic villain. Slowly, subtly, like a mist seeping under the window sill, the vampire has gone from a purely evil creature of Satan to a heroic character imitated by a growing sub-culture throughout the western world. In the coming age it is impossible to predict what form the vampire will take. The vampire could take on new meaning. Instead of describing a villain, a societal leech or an ex-wife as a vampire, the term may soon, due to the growing Goth scene and artistic works both written and cinematic, come to define those few individuals who exert control over those around them without restraint and are free from sexual inhibitions and the rules of a middle class society. Hopefully, the historical Vlad Țepeș will be seen by future generations as a Christian crusader, holding the line against the Muslim invaders rather than taking his historical significance in the eyes of the average westerner from the vampire with whom he has come to be associated.

APPENDIX A

DRACULA PRODUCT LIST AND THE DRACULA INSPIRED

Dracula and Dracula-Inspired Product List

1. *Angel*: A series spin off of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, it ran from 1999-2004.
2. Blade, “The Day Walker.” Blade is a Marvel Comic book and movie hero who is half human half vampire. This character has been featured in three Hollywood movies.
3. *Blacula*. A blaxploitation Vampire film starring William Marshall produced in 1972.
4. *BloodRayne* is a vampire video game in which the heroine is the beautiful vampire Rayne.
5. Bram Stoker Society, Dublin Ireland.
6. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*: An award winning television series that ran from 1997-2003.
7. *Bunnacula*, by Debroah and James Howe. This is a children’s tale in which the main character is sure that his pet bunny is a vampire.
8. Count Dracula Fan Club, New York, NY
9. The Count Dracula Society.
10. Count Duckula Cartoon. A whimsical cartoon that ran from 1988-1993.
11. “The Count”. A Sesame Street character used to help young children learn to count to ten.
12. *Dark Shadows*. A popular TV series running from 1966-1971.
13. The Dracula Society, London England.
14. *Elvira* the “Mistress of the Dark” was the buxom hostess of several late night horror movies as well as becoming the spokesperson for Coors beer.
15. Fangs. This mega popular Halloween prop is seen annually in abundance on the thirty-first of October. Fangs have been associated with vampires since Hollywood’s early movie adaptations. Fangs range from the cheap, plastic fangs commonly seen in vampire costumes to permanent and expensive dental

- enhancements.
16. *Forever Knight*. A TV series ran from 1989-1992 with the heroic vampire Nick Knight as the main character.
 17. *Hammer Films* is a British film company that has produced several horror films including a series of Dracula films starring Christopher Lee.
 18. *The Journal of Dracula Studies* is an academic journal dedicated to the study of the literary Dracula as well as the historic Vlad Țepeș.
 19. McFarlane Toys has produced several products relating the Dracula including the *Icons of Horror*, *Bloody Dracula*, *Movie Madness: Dracula* and *Faces of Madness: Vlad the Impaler*.
 20. *Midnight Sons* was a comic book published by Marvel. This series featured Blade as well as another vampire hero named Morbius.
 21. *Midnight Syndicate* is a classical music group who has made several theme albums of eerie vampiric music.
 22. *The Munsters* was a popular sitcom TV series that ran from 1964-1966 and was followed by several made for TV movies.
 23. *New Amsterdam* is a new TV series featuring the immortal detective John Amsterdam.
 24. *The Transylvanian Society of Dracula* is a Dracula inspired academic group dedicated to the study of both Count Dracula as well as Vlad Țepeș.
 25. *True Blood* is an upcoming HBO series set in a world where vampires have proven to be a reality.
 26. *Vampirella* is a vampire comic book that ran periodically from 1969 to the mid 1990's.
 27. Vampire Tie made in Holland
 28. Vampire Wine is a product of Romania and an example of that country's capitalization on the marketing potential of their favorite son, Dracula.

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Michael Vorsino earned his B.A. in history in 1998. While earning his Masters he has worked on projects that have included the Spanish Inquisition, John Hunyadi, the defense of both Belgrade and Vienna against the Ottoman Turks, Gustavus Adolphus, and of course, Dracula. Currently he is a middle school history teacher and football coach. In the future Michael has expressed an interest in both Law school as well as Archeology.