



# ***Letter from Castle Dracula***

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**SPECIAL CHRISTMAS ISSUE**

## FACT & FICTION IN STOKER'S "DRACULA" - TIME FOR A NEW PARADIGM

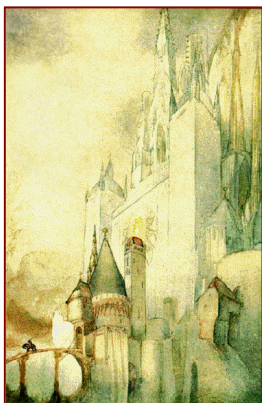
"The secret to creativity is knowing how to hide your sources."

Albert Einstein

Dear Members and Friends of the TSD,

I am honoured by the Editor's request to create this Christmas & New Year special edition - although the task involves a *contradictio in terminis*. In the gloomy halls of his Castle, vampire lore tells us, the Prince of Darkness never celebrates the Christian Feast of Light, and very rarely, he counts the years of his perpetual existence. But as I was invited to "throw some light" on issues that have remained obscure over so many decades and the answers to these questions may even signal a "new start" in appreciating Bram Stoker's "Dracula" novel, I hope that this essay will be received as an appropriate contribution to the festive days ahead.

If this "Letter from Castle Dracula" had been sent out during Stoker's days, the post stamp on the envelope might have provided a clue about the true location of the Vampire's residence. We know that the Count had to leave his home for dispatching his guest's letters, and in Chapter 1, Harker refers to "Bistritz, the post town named by Count Dracula". While creating some maps as an illustration for my book "The Ultimate Dracula" (April 2012), I have tried to reconstruct Harker's route from Bistritz to the Castle. After three months of studying Habsburg military maps from the Victorian age, I was able to narrow down the area of this mythical edifice until only two mountain tops in the Călimani Mountains remained. And was greatly surprised to find a cryptic remark in Stoker's own handwritten research notes, confirming that the novelist actually had selected one of these peaks, Izvorul Călimanului (2,033 m), as the site of his fictitious Castle!



Because Stoker obviously knew the exact coordinates of this mountain from a map, the question emerged why he decided to obscure its precise place in his book: Jonathan, Prof. van Helsing and Mina all fall asleep during the last stretch of their routes, snow storms block the sight and no recognisable landmarks are described on the way. Our heroes can reach the Castle only by guidance, and in this respect, Castle Dracula is the antipole of the Arthurian Grail Castle, which cannot be found on purpose. Evidently, Stoker did not like the idea that his readers and critics might follow the young lawyer's footsteps, arrive at Mount Izvorul and see .... that its

summit was empty! In his foreword, the writer had promised a tale which sounded unbelievable, but was based on eye-witness diaries, telegrams and newspaper clippings, "... so that a history almost at variance with the possibilities of latter-day belief may stand forth as simple fact." In decisive points, though, like the identities and addresses of his protagonists, the novelist had to remain vague, so that his fabrication could not be disproved. In his preface to the Icelandic edition (written 1898), he openly stated that he "changed the names of the people and places concerned." This way, any critique of his narrative being inaccurate was precluded.

After discovering that Stoker had employed this mechanism for *all* vital addresses in his vampire novel, I wondered if it also applied to some other issues intensively debated among "Dracula" scholars: the time frame of the story and the identities of Count Dracula and Professor Abraham van Helsing, the novel's main antagonists.



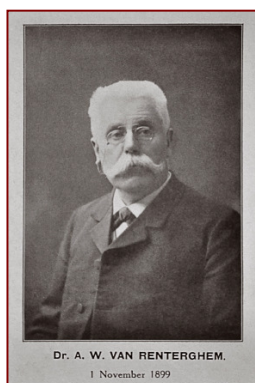
In "Dracula - Sense and Nonsense" (2006, p. 86ff), Elizabeth Miller claims that Stoker intended the novel's action to take place in 1893. She points to a calendar book used by the writer to plan the story's events, to the death of Charcot in August 1893, to the "Westminster Gazette", which first appeared in 1893, and to the use of the term "New Woman", coined in the very same year. But in his final note to "Dracula", Harker ruins her reasoning by remarking that "seven years ago, we all went through the flames". The typewritten manuscript, now owned by Paul Allen, even states "eleven years ago". Stoker excelled at mathematics; he surely was aware that the year of publication, 1897, minus seven or eleven, was *not* 1893. Instead of dismissing this inconsistency as the result of negligence, we must conclude that the author deliberately wanted to confuse us about the year in which the action took place.

In 1958, Basil Kirtley suggested that the lifetime identity of the Vampire Count coincided with that of Vlad III Dracula a.k.a. Vlad the Impaler. In the 1970's and 1980's, McNally and Florescu made this theory extremely popular. But they ignored some crucial facts. Not only did Stoker know very little about the historical Vlad III - an objection eloquently worded by Elizabeth Miller. In his dialogue with Harker in Chapter 3, the Count indeed refers to a member of the Dracula dynasty who after the "Battle of Cassova" (October 1448) "crossed the Danube to beat the Turk on his own ground", but was betrayed by "his own unworthy brother", who "sold his people to the Turk": Information copied from William Wilkinson (1820), who refers to Vlad III (without using this name) and his brother Radu the Handsome. But still in the same breath, the Vampire Count also speaks of "that other" of the Dracula race, "who in a later age again and again brought his forces over the great river into Turkeyland". In Chapter 25, Van Helsing and Mina positively identify the Count as this anonymous "other". Until now, this subtle stage magic trick has gone unnoticed: Silently, Stoker replaces the historical figure Vlad III by a nameless double. Only a close examination of Stoker's research notes reveals that the novelist may have thought of Michael the Brave (1558-1601), who pushed



the Turks back to Adrianople in 1595. Again, like with the location of Castle Dracula, Stoker chose *not* to disclose this name to his readers: He did not want his main villain to be clearly linked to a cherished national leader whose biography could be looked up in history books.

In his preface to the Icelandic edition and in his interview with Jane Stoddard, Stoker insisted that the character of Professor Van Helsing was based on a real person and that this “highly respected scientist, who appears here under a pseudonym, will also be too famous all over the educated world for his real name, which I have not desired to specify.” By now, many candidates have been put forward: Dr. Gerard van Swieten (1700-1772), personal physician of Empress Maria Theresa of Austria, the Flemish physician and alchemist Johan Baptista van Helmont (1580-1644), Prof. Arminius Vámbéry from Budapest, Prof. Max Müller from Oxford, Prof. Moriz Benedikt from Vienna, and John Freeman Knott, a physician married to the sister of Stoker’s wife. But except for Van Helmont and Van Swieten, whose accomplishments and fame belong to the past, not the future, none of these persons spoke Dutch!



In his autobiography (2009), the Dutch filmmaker Tonny van Renterghem claimed that his grandfather, Dr. Albert W. van Renterghem, would have been the true role model for Van Helsing. Together with his colleague Dr. Frederik van Eeden (also a well-known poet and social activist), Dr. van Renterghem established the first clinic for hypnotical treatment in Amsterdam in 1887. This unique institute soon became famous all over Europe and although I could not detect any direct letters or personal meetings between Bram Stoker and the two Dutch psychiatrists, I discovered numerous cross-connections, suggesting that the Irishman must have been familiar with their wide-published work.

While Van Helsing’s true identity is a tough nut to crack and Stoker possibly “merged” the Amsterdam hypnotists with other brain scientists - like his own brother Thornley -, the complex relationship between fact and fiction in “Dracula” plainly results from the ambitious programme set out in its preface. A inescapable paradox governs this *manuscript trouvé*: The more authentic detail Stoker adds to his chronicle, the easier it becomes to demonstrate that it never took place this way. About Count Dracula, Elizabeth Miller (2006, p. 172) wrote that “A fictional character can have any history his creator wishes to endow”. In my eyes, however, Stoker was not free to write just whatever he wanted. Van Helsing’s words about the Vampire also apply to his creator:

“He can do all these things, yet he is not free. Nay, he is even more prisoner than the slave of the galley, than the madman in his cell. He cannot go where he lists, he who is not of nature has yet to obey some of nature’s laws, why we know not.”

The other side of the medal: Some of the lacunae and inconsistencies in the novel may not have been caused by mere “sloppiness” from Stoker’s part. Instead, they must be explained from his efforts to uphold the pretense of a factual report while at the same time preventing verification. McNally and Florescu falsely assumed that Stoker was thoroughly informed about Vlad the Impaler. As a backlash, over the last two decades the image of an overworked part-time author, unable to tell Vlad III Dracula and the Hungarian leader János Hunyadi apart, has frequently been promoted.



My recent findings rather show him as a meticulous planner and researcher, striving for a dramatic literary effect which forced him to encode, blur and conceal his historical and geographical references and sometimes lead us into blind alleys.



This new paradigm, presented just before the centenary of Stoker's death (20 April 2012), already aided me to solve another old riddle: The location of the Scholomance, the Devil's School, which the novelist placed at "Lake Hermanstadt" [sic!]. Again with the help of antique Habsburg military maps, the true site, originally described by Emily Gerard, could be established: Iezerul Mare, next to the Platoul Diavolului, high up in the Cindrel Mountains south-west of Sibiu. My local guide confirmed that the folk beliefs quoted by Gerard and Stoker were still respected; full details can be found in the planned "*Dracula Bram Stoker Travel Guide*" which I am currently preparing together with Dacre Stoker, Bram Stoker's great-grandnephew. I hope that this approach may inspire us all to unveil any further enigmas which the author of "Dracula" left for us in his writings.

I wish you all the best for the Christmas Days and a great New Year!

Munich, 20 December 2013



Hans Corneel de Roos

The informal nature and limited scope of a Christmas message forbids presenting all details of my research here, scientific footnote apparatus included. For readers interested to learn more, I refer to my following publications. PDF versions of my articles can be emailed on request. Please feel free to contact me at [deroos@dractravel.com](mailto:deroos@dractravel.com).

- "Castle Dracula - Its Exact Location reconstructed from Stoker's Novel, his Research Notes and Contemporary Maps". Published 7 Febr. 2012 by Linköping University Electronic Press, Sweden
- "Bram Stoker's Vampire Trap - Vlad the Impaler and his Nameless Double". Published 19 March 2012 by Linköping University Electronic Press, Sweden
- "The Ultimate Dracula", Munich: Moonlake Editions UG, April 2012, ISBN: 978-3943559002
- "Heeft de Vampierbestrijder uit Bram Stoker's *Dracula* echt bestaan? De Amsterdamse psychiater Albert van Renterghem en de hypnose", in the Dutch literary magazine "De Parelduiker", Oct. 2012
- "*Dracula Bram Stoker Travel Guide*" - planned travel book about locations related to the "Dracula" novel, together with Dacre Stoker. Project Website: [www.dractravel.com](http://www.dractravel.com)

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