

WORLD VAMPIRE DAY 2016

## DID MCNALLY AND FLORESCU COMMIT A ONE-LETTER CRIME?



HOW THE “DRACULA PROFESSORS” DIPPED THEIR BREAD IN BLOODY NONSENSE

BY HANS C. DE ROOS, MUNICH

## DID McNALLY AND FLORESCU COMMIT A ONE-LETTER CRIME? HOW THE “DRACULA PROFESSORS” DIPPED THEIR BREAD IN BLOODY NONSENSE

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**“Knowledge by way of Google is a dangerous thing.”**

Radu Florescu, 2013, *Dracula's Bloodline: A Florescu Family Saga*, p. 246

**15 May 2016** --- Readers of VAMPED.org are already familiar with the fiery dispute that raged over decades between the Boston Professors Raymond McNally (1931-2002) and Radu Florescu (1925-2014) versus Toronto Professor Emerita Elizabeth Miller, Baroness of the House of Dracula and a leading expert for Bram's Stoker famous *Dracula* novel. Last week, while preparing an article for a book on the conference organized by Marius Crişan in Timişoara, 2015, I was digging a bit deeper into the history of this dispute. The core issue, as we know, is the possible influence of Vlad III Dracula, a.k.a Vlad the Impaler, on Stoker's depiction of Count Dracula. What I discovered has raised a grisly suspicion with me. I have won the irritating impression that the Boston scholars not only took unproven assumptions for granted, but also may deliberately have distorted information in order to prop up their theories. We are talking – again – about a crucial line from a medieval poem that Stoker – allegedly – was familiar with and that – allegedly – depicted Vlad III as a tyrant dipping his bread in the blood of his enemies.



A colorized rendering of the woodcut by Ambrosius Huber of Nuremberg (1499)

Already in VAMPED of 27 January 2015, (at <http://vamped.org/2015/01/27/vlad-dracula-vampire/>), Anthony Hogg paid attention to the horrendous story spread by two books by McNally and Florescu. They pointed to a poem by the German *Meistersinger* Michael Beheim (1416 – c. 1472), *Von ainem wutrich der heis Trakle waida von der Walachei* (*Story of a Violent Madman Called Voivode Dracula of Wallachia*). It was first performed – that means, sung – at the court of the Holy Roman Emperor Friedrich III during the winter of 1463.



A page from one of Beheim's other compositions.  
Folio 287r of cpg 312 of University Library Heidelberg.

In their 1989 book *Dracula, Prince of Many Faces: His Life and His Times*, McNally and Florescu **claimed**:

[...] Beheim's poem [was] the source for Van Helsing's statement in the novel that he had found a document in which Dracula was described as a blood-drinker—a clear reference to one of Beheim's verses.

(McNally & Florescu, 1989, p. 233).

They repeated this claim in their 1994 book *In Search of Dracula—The History of Dracula and Vampires [Revised Edition]*:

In one verse Beheim described Dracula as dipping his bread in the blood of his victims, which technically makes him a living vampire—a reference that may have induced Stoker to make use of this term.”

(McNally & Florescu, 1994, p. 85).

As reported by Diana Weber in her 2005 paper on McNally's and Florescu's campaign to connect Stoker's Count with the historical Vlad III, this claim was again brought forward in the 1998 documentary *The Real Dracula*:

Visually shocked and emotionally charged, the spectator is now ready for the climax of the story: McNally's forceful assertion of Vlad's “real” blood-drinking, which the historian expresses in the following words: “While he was dining amid his impaled victims, first he would have the blood from his victims gathered in bowls and he would dip the bread in the blood and slurp it down, basically.”

(Weber, 2005, p. 6. Also in Ramsland, 1998, p. 132, quoted by Miller, 2003).

But “basically,” McNally’s and Florescu’s interpretation of Beheim’s poem was *wrong*. In their 2003 joint article in *Journal of Dracula Studies*, Elizabeth Miller and David B. Dickens criticized McNally’s and Florescu’s peculiar rendering—Anthony Hogg reported in VAMPED of January 2015. Miller spoke of a “far-fetched theory” and of a “remarkably liberal translation of the original German.” Readers who are used to her radical vocabulary in *Dracula—Sense and Nonsense* will note that this phrasing is surprisingly mild:

“Nonsense” “Ludicrous” “Absurd!” “Rubbish” “Wrong”  
 “Balderdash” “Give me a break” “Drivel!” “Fabrication!”  
 “Triple trash” “Is this a joke?” “Enough is enough!”

(Miller, 2006, pp. 18, 20, 28, 30, 40, 48, 58, 62, 67, 72, 77)

A quick look the actual text of discussed stanza of Beheim’s poem shows that the interpretation by the Boston authors had nothing to do with a serious transcription:

Er waz\* sein lust und gab im mut  
 wann er sach swenden menschen plut;  
 wenn er dy gwonhait hete,  
**Das\* er sein hend darjnnen zwug,**  
 wann man im zu den tische trug  
 wann er sein malzeit tete.

\* Note of 7 Febr. 2012: Cazacu and Condratu write “Er waz” and “Das.” After consulting Beheim’s handwritten text, I believe that the poet used the German “Eszett”: “Eß waß” and “Daß” respectively.

In the mentioned *Journal of Dracula Studies* article Miller cites the following—correct—translation by German scholars Clemens Ruthner and John Buffinga:

It was his pleasure and gave him courage  
 To see human blood flow  
 And it was his custom  
**To wash his hands in it**  
 As it was brought to the table  
 While he was taking his meal.

[Last line added by me; my emphasis]

So far, so good – or, with regard to McNally’s and Florescu’s claim, so *wrong*. Hands are not the same as bread.

“Erring is human, forgiving is divine,” the wise man says. But some suspicion stops me from being divine.

First of all: For American, Canadian and British readers, this Early New High German stanza may seem like gobbledygook, but for all who speak modern German, this medieval variant is not so difficult to decipher at all; even as a Dutchman, I understand what is being said here. In the decisive line nr. 174

Das er sein hend darjnnen zwug  
 (“To wash his hands in it” ---- that is, in the blood – HdR)

every German will easily understand the first three words “**Das er sein...**” (*lit.*: “*That he his...*”). Every German-speaking person will also recognize the word “**hend**” as an equivalent of the modern German “hand”, plural “Hände” (hand/hands). The Luther Bible, one of the fundamentals of modern German language, also uses the word:

Aber fur disem allen, werden sie die **hend** an euch legen, vnd verfolgen, vnd werden euch vbirantwortten ynn yhre schulen vnnd gefencknisse, vnnd fur konige vnnd fursten zihen, vmb meynes namens willen.

(Luther Bible, 1522, Gospel according to Luke 21:12)

But before all these, they shall lay their **hands** on you, and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues, and into prisons, being brought before kings and rulers for my name's sake.

(King James Bible, 1604-1611, Gospel according to Luke 21:12)

Moreover, the word “hand,” including the forms “hend” and “hende” are extensively discussed on 20 full pages in the *Deutsches Wörterbuch* (DWB) by Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm in 16 volumes, Leipzig 1854-1961. The Brothers Grimm quote, among others, a fragment from a rhyme featured in various old popular songs or poems (*Lieder*) that were published during their time; the first two lines employ both “hende” and “hand” (or “hant”), demonstrating that these forms were interchangeable:

er nam sie bei der **hende**,  
bei ir schneweisen **hand**,  
er furt sie an ein ende,  
do er ein gertlein fand.

Quoted in Brother's Grimm, DWB, Volume10, Column 324)

Then by the **hand** he took her,  
Her **hand** as white as snow  
And to a place he led her  
Where trees and flowers grow.\*

(My translation, May 2016, my emphasis)

\* Lit: where he found a small garden.

was zog er von seiner hande?  
von gold ein fingerlein. VILMAR volkst. 129, 14,  
namentlich in der adverbial gewordenen verbindung zu hande:  
zu hande gehorchen (*confestim obtemperare*). Frontin v. TACIUS  
bei FRONSP. 3, 229\*;  
darnach tot man zü hande  
den Hagenbacher schier. LILIENCRON volkst. 2, 28, 5;  
daneben häufiger die form hende, gekürzt hend, die noch durch  
das 16. jahrh. hindurch dauert: in der hende. BOCC. 1, 70\*;  
was trag ich auf der hende? UBLAND volkst. 587;  
er nam sie bei der hende,  
bei ir schneweisen hand,  
er furt sie an ein ende,  
do er ein gertlein fand. 672;  
und eh ein unglück hat ein endt,  
ist schon ein anders vor der hendt. H. SACHS 3, 1, 237\*;  
richt ahn, das dich potz marter schent!  
wil dir denn nichts gehn ausz der hendt? 237\*;  
was hat sie an ir hende?  
von gold ein ringelein. GÖDEKE u. TITTMANN liederb. 47, 19;  
die blatern, die sie (die sonne) euch nun hrennt,  
und die ir schafft inn der hend,  
werden euch dienen noch zum rhüm.  
FISCHART glückh. schiff (Gödeke d. dicht. 1, 194\*, 121).  
vergl. auch behende 1, 1336.  
Der gewöhnlichen form des nom. acc. ahd. hentî, mhd. hende,  
nhd. hände, bis ins 17. jahrh. auch hende geschrieben, gekürzt  
hend: das er ihnen unter die hend . . gerhiet. Garg. 131\*  
steht bei Ortiz hande vereinzelt gegenüber, das er aber nur in  
der übersetzung von Grotius' wahrheit der christl. religion wagt,  
und auch nur im reinen offenbar durch das holländische original

Brother Grimm DWB, Vol. 4, Section II, lemma HAND, Column 324. In Umland, 1844 and 1845, we find “hende” together with “hand” or “hant” in various songs (*Abendgang*; *Gretlein*.) Also in Kürschner, 1884, Vol. 13, *Deutsches Leben im Volkslied um 1530*, p. 128; Böhme, Franz Magnus. 1877. *Altdeutsches Liederbuch: Volkslieder der Deutschen nach Wort und Weise aus dem 12. bis zum 17. Jahrhundert*. Leipzig: Breitkopf und Härtel; Daur, Albert Julius Wilhelm. 1909. *Das Alte deutsche Volkslied nach seinen festen Ausdrucksformen betrachtet*. Leipzig: Quelle & Meyer.

No problem at all for any German philologist, I would say. But also those who have studied medieval English will easily recognize the word, as the German and English words have the same roots:

Oure Hoost tho spak, “A, sire, ye sholde be **hende\***  
And curteys, as a man of youre estaat;  
In compaignye we wol have no debaat.

(From Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Friar’s Prologue, Canterbury Tales*, Lines 1286-1288, OUP 1988, p. 122.)

Our host then spoke, Oh Sir, you should be courteous  
And polite, as befits a man of your position.  
We won’t have any arguments in our compamy.

Translation to modern English from *The Canterbury Tales in Plain and Simple English*. Bookcaps Study Guides, 2012.

“Hende” here meaning “courteous,” from “to be at hand,” with the original meaning “to be near the King, ready to serve him.”

The archaic English verb “to hend,” still used by Sir Richard Burton in his *Book of the Thousand Nights and One Night* (Vol. 1, *Tale of the Trader and the Jinni*, 1885, p. 27), means “to grasp,” “to hold” or “to take hold of”—the association with the word “hand” is clear.

The word “**darjnnen**” does not pose a single problem either, as it is simply a spelling variant of “darinnen” (meaning “in there” or “in it”) understood by any German speaker, as this word is still in use in modern German.

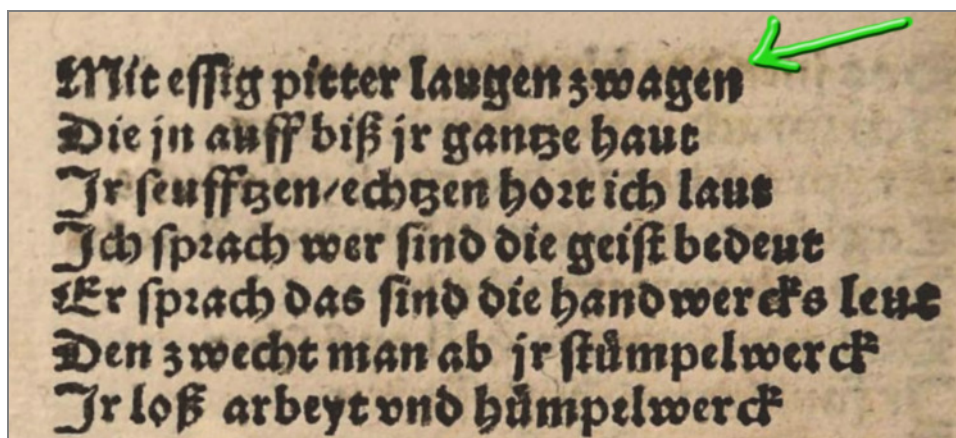
Somewhat trickier is the word “**zwug**”—but any Germany language student or professional translator can quickly find out what it means: it is the simple past tense of the now obsolete German verb “**zwagen**” (analogous to “tragen → trug” or “schlagen → schlug”). “Zwagen” means “to bath” or “to wash.”

“Zwagen” is explained in the well-known *Grammatisch-kritisches Wörterbuch der Hochdeutschen Mundart* by Johann Christoph Adelung, Leipzig, 1793-1801, reprinted in 1970 by Georg Olms Verlag, Hildesheim & New York. And of course, we also find the term in the mentioned *Deutsches Wörterbuch* by Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm. The Brothers Grimm cite, among others, the work of Hans Sachs (1494-1576), also a famous German *Meistersinger*, living almost a century later than Beheim; his work is still well-known today.

[...] und stürzt den pffaffen in den bach,  
das wasser ob im zsammen schlug,  
und darin weidlich badt und **zwug**.

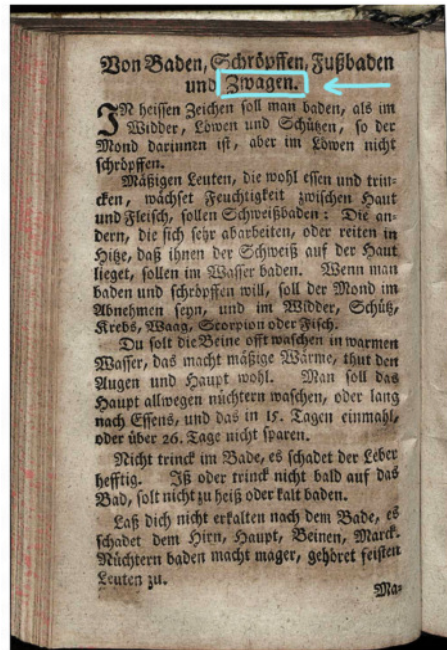
(Hans Sachs, published by Adelbert von Keller & Edmund Götze, 1870-1909, Vol. 17, p. 359)

Sachs also uses “zwagen” in his poem *Das Hellbad (The Therapeutic Bath)*:



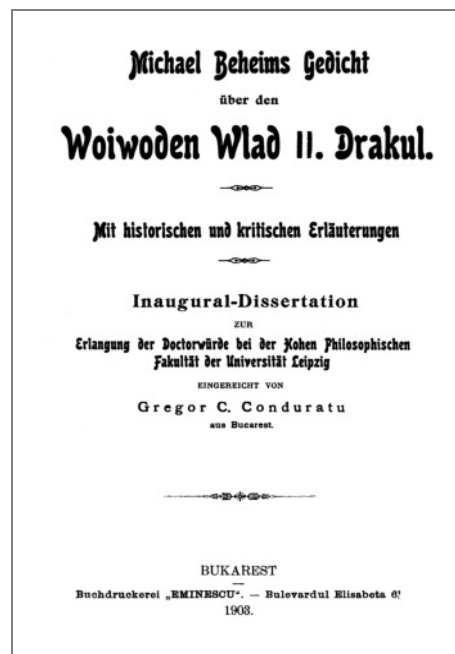
Fragment from Hans Sachs, *Das Hellbad*, created around 1565.

The term is used as late as 1736 by Peter Creußiger in his *Neu aufgelegtes Planetenbuch*, in his chapter *Von Baden, Schröpfen, Fußbaden und Zwagen*.



Fragment from Peter Creußiger, *Neu-aufgelegtes Planetenbuch*, 1736.

**In short, if McNally and Florescu would have engaged a halfway competent student of German language, or would have done some simple research themselves, they never would have arrived at an interpretation that had no basis in the text at all.** The transcript of Beheim’s original transcript, kept at the Heidelberg University Library, has been available in book form at the latest since 1903—printed in Bucharest.



Title page of Conduratu’s 1903 dissertation. Please note that in modern historiography, the counting of the name “Vlad” within the House of Basarab starts with Vladislav I of Wallachia, ruling 1364 - c. 1377. Beheim’s poems is about Vlad III Dracula “the Impaler”, son of Vlad II Dracul.



Zu Kronstat in der vorstat ob  
 der kapeln haisset Sant-Iacob,  
 liess Trakal waida marden  
 Und gancz aussprennen dy vorstat  
 155. und was er menschen funden hat,  
 dy im zu tail sein worden,  
 Man und weib mit den kinden,  
 paide iung und alt, gross und klain,  
 nam er zusammen all mit ain  
 160. wo er sy nur mocht vinden.

Vor tage, an ainem morgen fru  
 eilt er mit disen menschen zu  
 dem perg ober der kirche  
 Und liess sy spissen ümb und ümb  
 165. allenthalben dez perges krümb  
 nach der läng und ach zwirche.  
 Hört von dem schalk vil schnöden :  
 damiten under in er sass  
 ab seinem tisch das mal er ass  
 170. zu seinen grossen fröuden !

Bl. 96 a. Er waz sein lust und gab im mut  
 wann er sach swenden menschen plut ;  
 wenn er dy gwonhait hete,  
 Das er sein hend darjnnen zwug,  
 175. wann man im zu den tische trug  
 wann er sein malzeit tete.

Da er fralich und frische  
 kurzweil und guten mut wolt han,  
 so must man jms also pegan,  
 180. das man im pei dem tische

Mit armen leuten da hovirn  
 man martert sy, daz sy laut schrirn,  
 das was dann sein gelechte :  
 «Ai hort wol hupsche kurzewil  
 185. und wunnigliches frodenspil» —  
 also sprach der durchechter !  
 Dis armen warff man nider,  
 man slug etlichem auss dyzend,  
 etwa dy vinger von der hend  
 190. und ander ire glider ;



Then, there is the other possibility: that the Professors did not translate the discussed stanza (or have it translated) from the German original themselves, but used an existing translation. But... oooops... I could not find any such translation... at least not from German to English. Although the book by William McDonald, *‘Whose Bread I Eat’: The Song-Poetry of Michel Beheim* (1981) *does* mention the poem as such, it does not provide a translation.

But... English and German are not the only languages in this world. What about French?

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— 115 —

à une table, où il mangeait  
170 à grand pain.

175 **Ce qui lui plaisait et lui donnait du courage  
c'était de voir couler le sang humain,  
car il avait l'habitude  
d'y tremper sa main  
quand on le lui apportait à table  
pendant ses repas.**

Ainsi, quand il voulait avoir  
des divertissements nouveaux et de la bonne humeur  
il fallait commencer de la sorte.

Note of 6 Febr. 2020: Cazacu translated “zwug” with “tremper,” meaning “to dip” or “to soak.” Perhaps, this explains McNally’s and Florescu’s use of “dip” (but not of “bread”). The meaning of the German [“zwagen”](#) (past tense: “zwug”) is “to wash” or “to bathe.”

This is a translation from Beheim’s medieval German poem to modern French, published in 1988, **one year before** McNally and Florescu launched their stunning statement. And... by the stomach of the eternal cow! The French translation is **correct!** Almost word for word, it corresponds to the English translation produced by Ruthner and Buffinga. No wonder, of course, as all worked from the same German text.

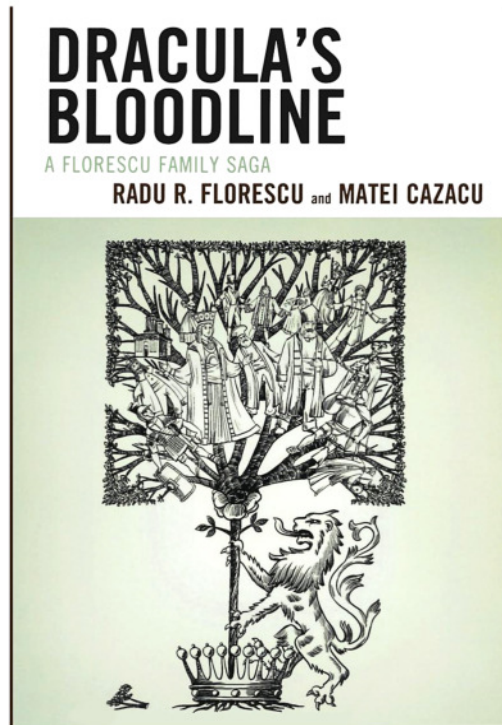
Now, you will ask me, where did I find it? I found it in a French book, titled *L’Histoire du prince Dracula en Europe centrale et orientale au XVe siècle*, published by Librairie Droz in Geneva, Switzerland. And who wrote it? Matei Cazacu, born 1946, a well-known Romanian scholar, specialist for medieval history and *Dracula* expert, living in Paris since 1975. And, most significantly, Radu Florescu’s co-author for their joint book *In Search of*

*Frankenstein*, Boston/New York Graphic Society, 1975—the same publisher where McNally and Florescu already in 1972 published their *In Search of Dracula: A True History of Dracula and Vampire Legends*.

Would it be far-fetched to assume that Florescu and Cazacu, both émigrés born in Bucharest, both specialists for Romanian history, both ploughing the same field of Dracula myth, and co-authors for the *Frankenstein* book, kept an eye on each other’s work in the 1980s? Would it be preposterous to suspect that Florescu learned about Cazacu’s translation of Beheim’s poem still in 1988, *before* he and McNally launched their shocking “insight” that a contemporary of Vlad the Impaler had described Vlad as dipping his bread in the blood of his victims? Would it be malicious to bring up the question, if McNally and Florescu maybe took some little liberty with Cazacu’s translation, and made it just a little bit less correct, in order to prop up their theory that Bram Stoker knew about Vlad’s “reputation as a blood-drinker”? After all, it just would be a single letter... from “main” to “pain.”

A one-letter change.. Would it be possible that a garbled telefax, a typo at the telex machine (email, WhatsApp and Messenger did not exist yet) was the cause of a misunderstanding? Not really... “main” is a female noun (“la main”) while “pain” is male (“le pain”). The expression “sa pain” instead of “sa main” does not make sense.

And... would it be plausible that Florescu until 1994, when McNally and Florescu launched their thesis again, did not chat a single time with Cazacu about this stanza in Beheim’s poem, that had caused a sensation in the circles of *Dracula* scholars? Not a single check with its only known translator before the TV documentary of 1998?



In 2013, Florescu and Cazacu would co-operate again, this time on the book *Dracula’s bloodline – A Florescu Family Saga*. Their book website <http://draculasbloodline.com/the-authors/> states:

With the publication of *DRACULA’S BLOODLINE, A Florescu Family Saga*, Professor Florescu (with added expertise provided by his friend and fellow historian medievalist Matei Cazacu)

illustrates how decades of painstakingly diligent research can combine to carry on a family legacy—especially when that legacy is of national and international interest.

“Friend and fellow historian”—but even in 2013, while working on a joint book covering, among others, the reputation of Vlad III Dracula, not a single conversation between the two co-authors Cazacu and Florescu occurred about the Dark Prince dipping his bread in blood—a conversation that might motivate Florescu (McNally died in 2002) to rethink his former claims—or Cazacu to revise his Beheim translation? I ask, and the reader may judge.

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Further research into the matter suggests a plausible reason for McNally and Florescu to omit the Heidelberg Beheim manuscript, Conduratu’s 1903 dissertation and the 1988 book by Cazacu in their detailed bibliography. The index of *Dracula—Prince of Many Faces* (1989) provides the decisive clue. On p. 196, McNally and Florescu write about the so-called St. Gallen manuscript of horror tales about Vlad the Impaler:

With the help of the research kindly placed at our disposal by **our colleague and friend Matei Cazacu** of the University of Paris, a fellow Dracula hunter of many years standing, and **using—with caution—the poem of Michael Beheim as a genuine historical source**, we now find it possible to reconstitute the route followed by one of these persecuted monks and describe the precise circumstances of his meeting Frederick III’s poet laureate, Michael Beheim, at the emperor’s palace in Wiener Neustadt. (My emphasis—HdR.)

So, evidently, while preparing their *Dracula—Prince of Many Faces* (1989), McNally and Florescu drew on Cazacu’s support. But how did they know that Cazacu’s use of Beheim’s poem was “cautious”? This implies that the three men not only discussed the St. Gallen manuscript, but also Beheim’s poem and how to understand it.



In 1989, *after* exchanging such information with Cazacu, McNally and Florescu stepped forward and announced to their astonished readers that the Beheim poem speaks of Vlad III as *dipping his bread* in the blood of his victims—which today turns out to be a ludicrous interpretation, yes, a falsification. Should we believe now that McNally and Florescu *personally* translated the German stanza, or received their translation from *another* source than from

Cazacu, the *only* known translator of the Beheim poem so far—and then did *not* discuss their sensational scoop with their friend and helper, who was known to be “cautious”? Ha! To speak with Elizabeth Miller: Hogwash! Far more probable, I think, is that the “Dracula professors” *knew* Cazacu’s translation and decided to “improve” it a little bit on their own account, leaving Cazacu unmentioned as the original translator in order not to incriminate him as a bad linguist. The authors connect their remark about Cazacu being familiar with the Beheim poem with their discussion of the St. Gallen manuscript, *not* of the poem itself—a clever shift. Neither in *Prince of Many Faces* (1989) nor in the revised edition of *In Search of Dracula* (1994) we find the original Beheim manuscript or Cazacu’s 1988 work listed as a source. In the end, *no one* seems to be responsible for this miserable “translation”—McNally and Florescu have covered up their tracks and the “remarkably liberal” translation seems to pop up from thin air.

In my humble opinion, I think that we caught Professors McNally and Florescu with their hand in the cookie jar... an act of academic fraud so nicely wrapped that the large crowd of *Dracula* adepts, hungry for authentic gory detail, swallowed it whole. A big hand for Miller, Dickens, Ruthner and Buffinga, who in 2003 pushed through to the original Beheim manuscript in Heidelberg and found out that the translation had been tampered with, without discovering how exactly, though—this may be the reason for the mild wording “remarkably liberal.” It took 13 more years to cover up the real progression of events<sup>1</sup>—of course, my reconstruction is open to debate and we may never know what was actually discussed between the three gentlemen. Too bad that the Boston writers cannot respond any more—but Matei Cazacu could. Maybe more next time...

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Today is *World Dracula Day 2016*—sixty years ago, Bacil F. Kirtly published the following words:

Unquestionably the historical past that Van Helsing in his speech [...] assigns the fictional vampire Dracula is that of Vlad Tsepesh, Voivod of Wallachia.

(Kirtley, 1956, p. 135)

Well... after discovering this nice little piece of swindle, what really is “unquestionable” in the world of *Dracula* research any more?

Munich, in May 2016

Hans Corneel de Roos

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<sup>1</sup> In fact, it only took three days now, thanks to the Internet and “knowledge by Google,” that allowed me to detect Cazacu’s translation of the Beheim poem by searching keywords from the medieval German text. This pointed me to Cazacu’s 1988 book. Cazacu’s French translation was already mentioned by Weber, 2005, p. 7, referring to Miller as “Margaret Miller.” Evidently, Weber was not aware that McNally and Florescu must have been familiar with Cazacu’s—accurate—rendering. Although Weber’s paper almost exclusively focuses on McNally’s and Florescu’s “over-interpretation of the Beheim passage” (p. 8) and Miller’s critique, surprisingly, Weber simply skips the point of the correct translation; after quoting Miller’s objections, her essay continues with “Whatever the translation may be—.” Evidently, Weber is unable or unwilling to translate the German text herself, although she reproduces the original German stanza. On pp. 6-7, she also fails to notice that McNally and Florescu launched their claim already in 1989 in *Dracula—Prince of Many Faces*, five years before their revised edition of *In Search of Dracula* (1994), although this fact is expressly mentioned by Miller, in Dickens & Miller, 2003. A missed chance, as it is only *Prince of Many Faces* that reveals McNally’s and Florescu’s close cooperation with Cazacu while preparing their 1989 account of the Beheim poem and the St. Gallen manuscript.

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Note: In February 2020, I replaced hyphens with em dash, eliminated some double spaces, corrected a single typo, added two notes.