

**Florin NECHITA**  
**(Editor)**

**DRACULA**  
**Between Pop Culture and Tourism**



**Transilvania  
University  
Press**

**2026**

## EDITURA UNIVERSITĂȚII TRANSILVANIA DIN BRAȘOV

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Editură recunoscută CNCSIS, cod 81.

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### **Descrierea CIP a Bibliotecii Naționale a României**

**Dracula Between Pop Culture and Tourism** / ed.: Florin Nechita. -

Brașov :

Editura Universității "Transilvania" din Brașov, 2026

Conține bibliografie

ISBN 978-606-19-1852-2 (print)

ISBN 978-606-19-1853-9 (e-book)

I. Nechita, Florin (ed.)

37

008

338.48

Design copertă: Ștefan HERGHELEGIU

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# Introducing the ‘Dracula Between Pop Culture and Tourism’ Project through a Personal Journey toward Becoming a Dracula Scholar

**Florin NECHITA**

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The *Dracula Between Pop Culture and Tourism* project became, from its first edition of this Erasmus+ Blended Intensive Programme (BIP), a space for new ideas, a passion for dialogue between different cultures, and, most of all, a meeting point for representatives of many universities (students and teachers alike) passionate about Dracula, who discovered the real Transylvania. The BIP *Dracula Between Pop Culture and Tourism* (abbreviated in this introductory chapter as BIP Dracula) is adding a new topic to similar interdisciplinary project-based learning initiatives developed by me at Transilvania University of Braşov, Faculty of Sociology and Communication, some of them being documented through the books of the project (Nechita et al., 2014; Migdalovici and Nechita, 2014; Nechita and Tanaka, 2017; Nechita, 2026). This volume has a primary aim, namely to document the BIP Dracula project and to set a benchmark for, hopefully, many future editions.

I started writing this introduction to the project book of BIP Dracula at State College, Pennsylvania, within the walls of the Pattee and Paterno Libraries at Penn State University, the place from which, at the beginning of November 2025, one of the sessions of another Dracula-related initiative, “Children of the Night - Dracula Congress”, took place. My research stay as a Fulbright Scholar in Rural Sociology was closely connected to my previous projects developed in Țara Lăpuşului, in Northern Transylvania.

This introductory chapter, written in the first person, begins as a combination of a personal storytelling approach, meant to explain how the idea for the first edition of BIP Dracula gradually took shape over the years, and a journey reflecting how I became engaged in Dracula studies, even though I do not consider myself a true

expert in the field. At each international academic conference, *Children of the Night - Dracula Congress*, while attending presentations by truly dedicated and far more experienced researchers, I become aware of how great the distance still is before I can consider myself fully developed in this area, as most of the presentations bring new perspectives on this topic that I had never considered before. As a supporter of lifelong learning, I am happy to remain an assiduous learner in order to become a fully accomplished and recognized contributor to this field.

The second part of the chapter includes a brief presentation of the contributions of the authors of this book, which I am proud to coordinate as editor.

My connection with the Dracula topic began rather late. I still remember a meeting at the end of 2012 with two of my colleagues, Victor Briciu and Adina Candrea, when we were planning to transform the visit of a group of approximately 20 Japanese students and teachers from Meisei University Tokyo to Transilvania University of Braşov, led by the distinguished Professor Hiromasa Tanaka, into an opportunity for a future research project. Even now, I recall that moment as if it happened yesterday. As early-career researchers from Eastern Europe, we realized that we would have greater chances of publishing in a high-ranked journal if we chose a topic that was either highly relevant or one in which we could claim a certain degree of expertise compared to others. Consequently, we quickly designed a questionnaire to survey each member of the Japanese group regarding their expectations prior to visiting Bran Castle, followed by a second questionnaire aimed at capturing their experiences after the visit. This unmaterialized intention (although I still have the paper with the responses of the 20 or so Japanese students and professors I accompanied to the castle known rather as Dracula's Castle) shifted my focus from the categories I had previously known as a professional and that I also addressed in my PhD thesis from the perspective of branding, to the field of tourism and, in particular, to destination branding. The reorientation of my interests from fast-moving consumer goods to places and destinations was also forced by my desire to increase my portfolio of examples to deepen and use in the teaching process. It seems that Dracula helped me to make a faster transition from beer marketing to place branding and place branding.

I began reading several articles on Dracula tourism in 2013–2014, and I have to admit that I only completed my first reading of *Dracula* by Bram Stoker quite late, in December 2015. Prior to that, I worked together with my co-authors on the article Candrea et al. (2016) on research in which the Dracula theme was present, although not as the central focus. The main emphasis was on the experience of participating in a film festival in Braşov, the Dracula Film Festival, which took place in October 2015.

“Marketing the Count's way: how Dracula's myth can revive Romanian tourism” is the title of the first article I co-authored with three colleagues from the Marketing and Tourism Department on the subject of Dracula (Candrea et al., 2016). Although primarily a tourism study, it can also be situated within the area of experiential destination branding. In the research component, we employed content analysis, specifically text analysis, examining the content published on websites offering Dracula-themed tours, whether inspired by the fictional character created by Bram Stoker or related to the historical figure Vlad the Impaler. The data were graphically represented on a map of Romania, illustrating the number of one-day tours, medium-duration tours (2–5 days), longer tours (6–10 days), and Halloween-themed tours available in different localities. The results indicated that Dracula tourism in Romania is influenced more by a work published during the communist period, which associated the fictional character with the historical figure Vlad the Impaler (McNally and Florescu, 1972), than by Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*, published in 1897. This association was later deconstructed by Elisabeth Miller (Eighteen-Bisang and Miller, 2008; Crişan, 2025).

In Candrea et al. (2016) we cited Hoppen, Brown and Fyall (2014), who argue that certain tourist destinations may lack a sufficient number of attractions but can nevertheless generate routes or thematic trails and develop tourism products and experiences based on literary characters. Dracula tourism can thus be understood as a form of media tourism, a concept proposed to encompass both literary and film-induced tourism, as these are often difficult to separate (Hovi, 2014). Both literary works and film-induced tourism rely on narratives that shape the image of a destination, and those responsible for managing this image must carefully evaluate its two key dimensions: the projected destination image and the perceived

destination image. In the case of the relationship between Dracula and the tourist experience in present-day Transylvania, Howell (2021) highlights the interplay between heritage and horror, history and media.

Based on the studies discussed in Candrea et al. (2016), as well as subsequent research and discussions at various conferences on tourism and heritage interpretation, I believe that one of the key conclusions of our article still holds. This concerns the need to intelligently manage the seemingly negative stereotype associated with the Dracula myth and the image of Romania. I also believe that the assumption and thoughtful integration of this myth into the communication of Romania as a destination brand should be approached with a sense of humor, much like Colombia did when it adopted the tourism slogan “Colombia, the only risk is wanting to stay” (Susac, 2013). I should add that I first became aware of this positioning strategy during a presentation by Vlado Susac at a summer school I organized in 2014, an event whose development is documented in Nechita et al. (2014).

All the early papers I read in the field of tourism, whether related to Dracula or not, led me to reflect on Dracula tourism as a possible form of creative tourism. The concept of creative tourism, most prominently associated with Greg Richards, allows us to consider Dracula tourism as a form of creative tourism, as it involves both tourists and residents in collaborative and creative processes of cultural production, consumption, and place branding (Richards, 2021; Richards, 2026). At the same time, at least in the case of the Bran area, Dracula tourism may also contribute to overtourism. However, it can also have a sustainable dimension. I first heard the term “sustainable Dracula tourism” from Corneliu Țepeluș when he presented his documentary *In Search of Dracula Castle* at the Dracula Film Festival in 2020 (DraculaFilm.ro, 2020). Later, at BIP Dracula, he presented the documentary again and kindly answered all the questions about it. Corneliu produced this film with Dacre Stoker, the great grandnephew of Bram Stoker. Chronologically, in 2016, another highly passionate researcher on Dracula, Hans de Roos, also collaborated with Dacre Stoker.

Meeting Hans de Roos, one of the most high-profile and passionate Dracula scholars, in 2016 opened new horizons for me in this research topic. If I remember correctly, while documenting material for an article about Dracula tourism in late 2015, I discovered the book *Dracula by Bram Stoker – The Dracula Travel Guide*, co-authored by Hans and Dacre Stoker. After connecting with Hans on Facebook and joining various Dracula-themed Facebook groups, I noticed his announcement of a short stop in Braşov in May 2016. I must admit that I do not remember whether we discussed a possible Dracula conference in Braşov before Hans' participation in the Transylvania Creative Camp (TCC) project in Țara Lăpuşului or slightly after. However, on October 20, 2016, Hans presented our joint paper at Trinity College Dublin, titled *Beyond Dracula Tourism in Transylvania: The Case of Rural Lăpuş Land*, based on the TCC 2016 project, which is more widely documented in Nechita and Tanaka (2017) and includes many photos taken by Hans, who also served as a lecturer on photography.

How Hans and Magda (Magdalena Grabias, Assistant Professor and Deputy Head of the Institute of Cultural Studies at Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin, Poland) paved the way for the first international academic conference *Children of the Night - Dracula Congress* is now history, a process briefly described by Hans himself in "The Roots of Today's Congress," his introductory chapter in the book Grabias, de Roos, & Nechita (2021). What is certain, however, is that one of the biggest steps that set me on the path of Dracula studies was that, in 2018, I served as a co-organizer of the first international academic conference *Children of the Night - Dracula Congress*, together with Hans and Magda. The conference, which took place from October 17 to 19, 2018, was held in parallel with the international *Dracula Film Festival*, organized by *Fanzin Association*, with Marian Gîlea and Mihaela Oană as the main coordinators. It attracted participants from around the world, including the United States, Brazil, Japan, the United Kingdom, Germany, Poland, the Philippines, Portugal, and Romania, and included student workshops on acting and mobile photography, as well as participation in the *Dracula Digital* short-film competition.

The second edition, initially planned for October 2020, was held online in April 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, bringing together 45 participants from 20 countries. Among the 28 international universities and three Romanian universities with which

the participants of Dracula Congress 2021 were affiliated, there were also prestigious institutions such as University of Leeds, Trinity College Dublin, Linköping University, Victoria University of Wellington, American University of Sharjah, University of Macau, University of Victoria (Canada), and Universidade Federal de São Paulo.

“*Dracula: the missing ingredient of the Romanian destination branding recipe?*” was the title of my presentation at Dracula Congress in 2021, although the idea of Dracula as an ingredient of the Romanian destination brand had been on my mind for some time before that. Within my broader research interest in place brand storytelling, I began to explore this particular direction, one that is closely connected to one of the most influential reference stories in popular culture. Although I cannot identify the exact moment when the idea of conducting research and publishing on Dracula as a central element of the Romanian destination brand first emerged, I must admit that I did not manage to develop this idea beyond that initial presentation delivered in April 2021. The earlier-mentioned discussion I had with my colleagues, Adina and Victor, at the end of 2012 revolved around “something with Dracula and the Bran Castle experience”, without the intention of framing it specifically within the topic of destination branding. The presentation I delivered at Dracula Congress 2021 carried the same title, and its abstract and selected slides are included in the Book of Abstracts of the conference (Grabias, de Roos & Nechita, 2021).

Another significant step on my path toward becoming a Dracula scholar was again linked to the second edition of the Dracula Congress. I had the opportunity to meet and interact, even online, with the leading specialist in Dracula tourism, Duncan Light. His numerous articles on the topic provided invaluable insights and inspiration for me. The “cherry on the cake” was that Duncan personally sent me his book, which, in my view, perfectly distills the entire subject of Dracula tourism: *The Dracula Dilemma: Tourism, Identity and the State in Romania* (Light, 2016). As mentioned about Duncan’s papers on Dracula before, it should be noted that his latest paper on this topic was co-authored with a lecturer at BIP Dracula, Dr. Anca Simina Martin. The paper examines the representation of places within Romania in Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* (1897) and *Vampirul* (1938), the first Romanian vampire novel.

I became convinced of the strong connection between Dracula and the destination image of Romania during teaching sessions within the Erasmus+ framework and through my participation in international academic conferences. In courses or seminars with students from abroad, I often use as a warm-up question, “What is the first thing that comes to your mind when I say that I come from Romania?” The answer is almost always Dracula. On rare occasions, I have heard other responses, but Dracula has never been absent. This may also be influenced by the fact that, on the first slide of my presentations, Transylvania appears as part of the name of the university to which I belong. My friend Marius Crişan from West University of Timișoara explains in a chapter co-authored with Duncan Light that the “Transylvanian Society of Dracula” acted as a cultural broker between external and Romanian perspectives. Similarly, Transylvania itself functions as a bridge: this top-of-mind association (Transylvania, Dracula, Romania) opens the way from popular imagination to more serious discussions about my country.

The documentation for the first published paper on Dracula tourism and my involvement in the first Dracula conference organized in Braşov also opened the path to the publication of a new Dracula-related paper, this time centered on the broader topic of film-induced tourism, co-authored with my colleague from the Marketing & Tourism Department, Adina Candrea, and my friend and collaborator from Universiti Brunei Darussalam, Yong Liu, and his colleague Wei Lee Chin (Liu et al., 2020). The paper was based on a presentation that Yong and I gave at the first edition of the Dracula Conference in 2018.

The third edition of *Children of the Night - Dracula Congress* was organized online from 18 to 20 November 2022, followed by the 2023 and 2024 hybrid editions and a new online edition (the sixth) in 2025. Some of the presentations were complemented by full papers published in special issues of the *Bulletin of the Transylvania University of Braşov, Series IV: Philology and Cultural Studies* (Grabias et al., 2021; Grabias et al., 2025). It should also be noted that, starting with the third edition of the Dracula Congress, Enrique Palafox and Yuri Garcia joined the Organizing Committee. From one edition to the next, the number of participants from Latin America has increased, and the number of Yuri Garcia’s PhD students has also grown, not only in quantity but especially in quality, with their presentations reaching a top level.

As with the first edition of the conference, for the 2023 and 2024 editions I coordinated with *Zile și Nopti* and *Fanzin Association*, founded and managed by Marian Gîlea, to align the organization of Dracula Congress with the timing of the *Dracula Film Festival*. Participation in the opening ceremony of the festival was greatly appreciated by all attendees of Dracula Congress, or Dracula BIP, as noted by some of the authors of the chapters in this book.

As previously mentioned in relation to the *Dracula Film Festival* and the *Dracula Digital* short film competition, another important direction of my involvement concerns the engagement of Digital Media students in these projects. Since 2018, I have encouraged first-year students from the Digital Media program at the Faculty of Sociology and Communication, which I coordinate, to participate in this competition. This initiative reflects the faculty's longstanding partnership with *Zile și Nopti* and *Fanzin Association*, the organizers of these high-profile events. At the same time, the *Dracula Digital* competition has attracted many international students, becoming an effective platform for the internationalization of the faculty. Notably, in two different years, students from Universiti Brunei Darussalam won the competition (Liu et al., 2023; Ling et al., 2024). Their submissions were also featured as dedicated moments within the *Children of the Night – Dracula Congress* when the event was held online. Collaboration between Romanian and Bruneian students was encouraged both in virtual settings and during their in-person participation in *Dracula Digital* in 2022. Through organizing hybrid formats for students, I have gained valuable experience, which proved beneficial in supporting cooperation even within the *Dracula Digital* framework (Nechita et al., 2023).

Cooperation with Dr. Yong Liu from Brunei Darussalam began in 2018, a few months before his participation in the first edition of the *Children of the Night – Dracula Congress*. This collaboration also led to another research initiative mediated by the *Dracula* theme. In this case, the focus shifted to linking positive psychology with intercultural competence. The movie *Hotel Transylvania 2* served as a key medium through which we explored well-being in relation to understanding difference and developing emotional resilience, flexibility, and openness to other cultures (Popa et al., 2021).

Coming closer to the present day, it is worth mentioning the many new insights I gained on the Dracula topic during my five-month stay at Penn State University. Considering them chronologically, it should be noted that in September 2025 I received the then newly published article by Dénes Harai, which examines the number of impalements reported in various historical sources and evaluates their plausibility, while also proposing a new data-driven estimation of Vlad's impaled victims (Harai, 2025). I am more than honoured to see my name included in an article published by Cambridge University Press, in the acknowledgements section of Dénes's paper, as his contribution on the history of Bran Castle at BIP Dracula made him aware of the need to reassess Vlad's collective impalements.

As the Pattee and Paterno Library at Penn State University has already been mentioned at the beginning of this introductory chapter, it should be added that the many references I accessed here in order to prepare my presentation for the Dracula Congress are not only relevant, but also considerable in number. A simple search on <https://catalog.libraries.psu.edu/> returns almost 400 entries, including books, magazines, films, documentaries, comic books, and even a ballet performance recording. Some of these sources were used in preparing my presentation entitled 'From Transylvania to Pennsylvania: Looking for Dracula at Penn State University'. For example, I was surprised to read in Daniel Farson's book, published in 1975, that he met the Romanian Minister of Propaganda in 1972, and that even the Communist authorities at the time were highly involved in creating and maintaining the association between Vlad the Impaler and the fictional character of Dracula. Although it was released a year earlier, I discovered the documentary *Dracula's Hidden Kingdom*, produced by PBS (Public Broadcasting Service, USA), while searching the Penn State Library catalogue. The documentary uses "Dracula" as a hook (and does include some images evoking the Dracula universe), but it is actually about the wildlife of Transylvania and its vast ancient forests that provide a sanctuary for wolves, bears, and lynx. Beyond the stunning visuals, I highly recommend watching it, especially as it is narrated by Jeremy Irons. It is freely available on YouTube (Nature on PBS, 2025).

As I highlighted during my presentation at the latest Dracula Congress, there are numerous connections, and at times striking coincidences, linking Transylvania and Pennsylvania, with Dracula representing one of the strongest of these links. For instance, *The Rosenbach Museum and Library* in Philadelphia is the world's primary repository of Bram Stoker's original research notes for *Dracula*, a collection comprising approximately 120 pages of handwritten and typewritten material compiled between 1890 and 1897. The museum also houses a well-known 15th-century woodcut gravure of Vlad the Impaler. As Edward G. Pettit from *The Rosenbach Museum and Library*, and the final keynote speaker at the Dracula Congress 2025, mentioned in response to one of my questions, it appears that Robert Eighteen-Bisang and Elisabeth Miller began their study of Stoker's notes by building on the earlier research of Florescu and McNally, conducted in the same museum.

Another link between Transylvania and Pennsylvania is mediated by *The Journal of Dracula Studies*, published by the Department of English at Kutztown University, located in this American state. Marius Crişan published in this journal in 2008 (Crişan, 2008).

As mentioned earlier in relation to Marius Crişan's (2008) article on the possible models for Castle Dracula in Bram Stoker's sources, another key milestone in my journey toward becoming a Dracula scholar was his book on the birth of the Dracula myth and Stoker's Transylvania, developed from his doctoral research (Crişan, 2013). I first received this volume from Marius when we met at the inaugural edition of the *Children of the Night – Dracula Congress* in October 2018. In this work, he argues that Bran Castle may have influenced Stoker, likely through an illustration published in Charles Boner's 1865 book. He also highlights the influence of Emily Gerard (1888), whose 1888 volume *The Land Beyond the Forests* shaped Stoker's depiction of Transylvania. I later read the Romanian translation (2024) with great fascination, completing it in just two days during the summer of 2025.

I could probably continue presenting my personal journey toward becoming a Dracula scholar in several more paragraphs, describing the conference presentations I have delivered over the years or mentioning the master's and bachelor's theses I have supervised, in which Dracula became a key element of the topic. Two of these theses, presented last year, deserve to be highlighted.

Alexandra Năstase, a participant at Dracula BIP, did an outstanding job by extensively researching the relationship between her hometown, Târgoviște, a place strongly associated with Vlad the Impaler (Năstase, 2025). More about her early research on Dracula is presented in her chapter of the present book. As I have already mentioned the bachelor's theses, I must also highlight Ștefan Meheș, a graduate of the Digital Media program, who applied his design skills to a thesis on Stoker Wines, initially discussed with Dacre Stoker and later carried out with strong support from Radu Oprea (Meheș, 2025).

After presenting the program of BIP Dracula Between Pop Culture and Tourism (BIP Dracula), the book includes contributions from some of the project's participants. There are five chapters authored by lecturers at BIP Dracula, two chapters by PhD students, and seven by students and master's students. In most of these contributions, a storytelling approach was employed, which helped me, as the editor, to achieve the aim of the book: to provide a journal of the project and a starting point for similar projects seeking to bridge the connection between pop culture and tourism.

The chapter by Marius-Mircea Crișan captures the essence of this book, offering a condensed reflection of the five amazing days of BIP (Bloody Intensive Programme, as I jokingly called it). He traces the origins of the idea to discussions in Pau, inspired by the “La Chanson du Roland Blending Intensive Program” and literary tours organized by Dr. Cécile Rochelois, Dr. Giovanna Hendel, and Dr. Laurence Roussillon-Constanty. Seeing the potential for a similar initiative in Romania based on the Dracula myth, Marius, the leading Dracula scholar in Romania, offered his expertise. The plan quickly took shape to organize the BIP in Brașov and its surroundings, allowing participants to explore key Dracula-related sites. The idea was enthusiastically embraced by Giovanna Hendel, Laurence Roussillon-Constanty, and endorsed by Professor Giaime Alonge from the University of Turin. The rest of the chapter briefly presents each lecturer's contribution to BIP Dracula, connecting the origin of the program to the content through a personal storytelling approach, including a description of how he entered into “BIP Dracula mode” while traveling from Timișoara to Brașov.

Magdalena Grabias, my friend and the driving force behind the Dracula Congress, presents in her chapter the topic covered on the first day: “Dracula Myth Valorisation in Whitby,” exploring the impact of Bram Stoker's novel on tourism and the town’s association with this fictional character. In *Dracula*, Whitby serves as a key setting where the vampire first arrives in England, highlighting the town’s pivotal role in the narrative. As several specific landmarks in Whitby are mentioned in the novel, Magda briefly presents all of them in her chapter, accompanied by photos recently taken in the town.

Dr. Dénes Harai, historian at Université de Pau et des Pays de l’Adour, Fellow of the Royal Historical Society (UK), and member of the Société de l’Histoire de France, presents in his chapter *From Vlad Țepeș to Dracula: Focus on Bran Castle* a detailed historical overview of Bran Castle. He begins with a brief history of Vlad the Impaler, illustrated with maps and photos taken during the BIP, before providing meticulously researched information about the castle itself. The first castle, Dietrichstein, was likely built by the Teutonic Knights in the 1210s, later replaced with a stone castle in 1377 by authorization of Louis I of Anjou, King of Hungary. Sigismund of Luxembourg attributed the castle to Mircea the Elder as a fief between 1407 and 1419. In 1441, John Hunyadi achieved a notable victory over the Ottomans nearby. Between 1459 and 1462, Bran played a key role in interactions between the Transylvanian Saxons and Vlad III. In 1498, Vladislav II Jagello leased Bran to Brașov, with the lease renewed in later centuries. Dr. Harai also analyzed various editions of Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*, noting that Bran Castle often competed with Neuschwanstein on book covers, though other buildings were sometimes used. For instance, a 2015 edition by Peacock Books features Mont-Saint-Michel under a giant moon and a sky full of bats.

In her chapter, Dr. Giovanna Hendel emphasizes that French depictions of Dracula relied on earlier sources, showing that the character’s inhuman and monstrous qualities were shaped early on by historical, political, and cultural contexts. The author pointed out that Dracula’s myth, rooted in the historical figure of Vlad III of Wallachia, was already well established in 16th- and 17th-century French literature. Early texts, such as François de Belleforest’s *Cosmographie* and Jean Bodin’s *Six*

*livres de la République*, shaped Dracula as a figure of extraordinary cruelty and “otherness,” often exaggerating his deeds for moral, political, or cultural purposes. Antonio Bonfini, Matthias Corvinus’ official historiographer, portrayed Vlad III as exceptionally cruel, a depiction later adopted by other authors like Münster and Belleforest. Vlad III was imprisoned by Matthias Corvinus for fourteen years, and these historical and political events influenced his monstrous image. The repeated reprinting of these texts consolidated Dracula as exotic, barbaric, and inhuman, establishing a lasting image that underpinned the 19th- and 20th-century literary and popular representations, including Bram Stoker’s novel.

In her chapter, Dr. Laurence Roussillon-Constanty connects her research interests in the Gothic imagination, the Pre-Raphaelite movement, and the representation of women. She frames this through a family connection linking John Polidori to his nephew and niece, Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Christina Rossetti. Using this lens, she offers a guided tour of the Victorian Gothic, showing how these two Pre-Raphaelite artists revisited aspects of vampirism. She suggests that from Polidori to Stoker, the subtle but influential Rossetti connection may serve as a missing link, highlighting the family’s contribution to Victorian popular culture, myth, and imagination. Reading her chapter also reminds me of her active involvement in a project, alongside Marius Crişan and me, exploring how European mountains inspired generations of writers and how their works can enhance the region’s touristic potential, using literary, geographical, and temporal data to uncover new paths for literary tourism (Begliuomini et al., 2025).

Lida Fernanda Estepa Rodriguez, PhD student at *University of Zaragoza*, presents her chapter as a journal-style narrative, beginning with her arrival in Bucharest and unfolding her discovery of Romania. She highlights tourists’ natural curiosity and their desire to understand the places they visit. Those drawn by the legend of Dracula soon realize that Romania extends far beyond the portrayals of Bram Stoker or Western cultural narratives. This creates valuable opportunities for local craftspeople, artists, and tourism professionals to enrich visitor experiences. Linking Dracula tourism with creative tourism, as defined by Greg Richards, thus emerges as a promising and underexploited direction.

Blanca Vidao Teruel from the University of Zaragoza used participant observation to identify good practices in Transylvania, based on her one-week experience. Her findings could serve as a starting point for policy proposals aimed at balancing tourism growth with community well-being, offering transferable insights for different mountain regions. She begins her chapter by examining the post-COVID-19 recovery of mountain tourism, highlighting Europe's leading role and the shift toward sustainability under EU policies such as the Green Pact. She emphasizes "responsible tourism," which requires all stakeholders (tourists, businesses, and governments) to ensure positive local impacts. Mountain destinations are well positioned to promote sustainable models such as ecotourism, slow travel, and cultural tourism, while avoiding overcrowding and the social pressures associated with mass tourism. Her experience and reflections are clearly aligned with projects organized under the UNITA framework.

Izarbe Aznárez Rodríguez, another student representing the University of Zaragoza, explores the transformation of the Dracula myth in Western thought and popular culture. She begins with a reflection on myths as imaginative constructs that externalize human experience rather than explain it. Building on this perspective, she focuses on Dracula as a symbol of the late 19th-century existential crisis, reflecting the decline of metaphysical certainties in Western thought and the awareness of human finitude. In this sense, Dracula does not truly live but merely subsists. She also examines how the figure is embedded in popular culture, illustrating her analysis with photographs taken during her participation in the BIP.

Juliette Bouvier, a student at the University of Savoie Mont Blanc, examines the economic impact of Dracula on Romania. She highlights how this fictional figure, created by Bram Stoker, has become a major driver of tourism, attracting international visitors to sites such as Bran Castle and Sighișoara. Juliette argues that Dracula supports local economies through job creation, tourism services, and themed businesses, while also acting as a catalyst for events and cultural productions. She further suggests that, beyond tourism, the myth enhances Romania's international image, contributing to national branding and the media industry. At the same time, it encourages the preservation of historical heritage

through tourism revenues. Overall, Juliette perceives Dracula as a powerful economic and cultural asset, linking imagination with tangible development opportunities.

Elena Drago (University of Torino) explores Dracula's transformation in Italian children's literature through *Dracula cerca casa!* by Ann Jungman. Using both literary and editorial approaches, she shows how the character is reshaped into a humorous, humanized figure, with simplified narratives and expressive illustrations, making the story accessible and engaging for young readers.

Mădălina Ecobici (Transylvania University of Braşov) reflects on her BIP Dracula experience through visits to key Transylvanian heritage sites, including Rupea, Viscri, Saschiz, and Sighişoara. She highlights the exploration of Saxon history, heritage preservation challenges, and the balance between authenticity and modern interventions. Her account emphasizes well-preserved traditions, local crafts, and community values. Through a photo-documented journey and personal reflection, she illustrates how participants encountered not only the mythical Dracula, but an authentic cultural landscape shaped by history, local life, and traditions.

Francesca Marconetto, a student at the University of Torino, explores the adaptation of Dracula in children's literature through the book *Maga Martina nel castello di Dracula*. She analyzes how the original work of Bram Stoker is reinterpreted in a playful and accessible way for young audiences. Her study highlights how dark themes are softened through humor, parody, and a child protagonist, transforming fear into curiosity and adventure. Francesca examines key contrasts such as ancient versus modern, science versus supernatural, and attraction versus repulsion, all adapted to suit children's sensibilities. By using many excerpts from the book, Francesca also emphasizes the role of editorial design, including illustrations and layout, in enhancing accessibility and engagement. She concluded that such adaptations preserve cultural narratives while reshaping them for new generations through imagination and visual storytelling.

Alexandra Năstase, a graduate of Digital Media and current master's student in Marketing Strategies at Transilvania University of Braşov, reflects on Dracula

tourism and destination branding following her bachelor thesis research on Târgoviște, Vlad the Impaler's historical seat. She explored how the city could leverage the Dracula myth to attract visitors while balancing history and legend. Through interviews with local authorities, historians, business owners, and residents, she identified opportunities and challenges in promoting the city as a Dracula-themed destination. Alexandra highlights the importance of cohesive storytelling, collaboration between public and private sectors, and the creation of recognizable symbols, such as mascots, to enhance tourism appeal. Her talent in design was revealed through sketches aimed at developing Dracula-related merchandise. Her findings suggest that Târgoviște has many assets, including historical significance and resident support, to develop a sustainable, myth-driven tourism strategy. Participation in BIP Dracula reinforced her ideas and inspired creative branding solutions, providing both academic validation and practical insights for future promotional campaigns.

As a resident of Bran village, home to the so-called Dracula's Castle, Victoria Negrea, a Digital Media student at Transilvania University of Brașov, shares a local perspective on Dracula tourism. While Stoker's novel turned Bran into a global attraction, Victoria highlights the challenges from her viewpoint: overcrowding, traffic, and strained infrastructure. She sees opportunities to expand tourism beyond the village center, using guided tours, craft workshops, and local traditions like "Focul lui Sumedru" to showcase culture, landscapes, and gastronomy. Her approach balances marketing with local quality of life, aiming to support businesses without overwhelming the community. Victoria still considers that there is room for culturally rich tourism that benefits both visitors and residents, showing how Bran can evolve as a destination while preserving its character.

At the end of this introductory chapter, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to all the partners of this wonderful project. Special thanks go to the participants and lecturers involved in this condensed and "bloody intensive program," which I hope managed to provide even a small glimpse into the complexity of Dracula as a topic, showing how many different perspectives can shine, even when the main light comes from pop culture and tourism.

As each contribution in this project book includes many photos that capture the vibe of the project, I will close this introductory chapter as editor with three images connected to the Dracula theme. The first, by Hans de Roos, shows me at the first edition of *Children of the Night – Dracula Congress* (2018), the second was taken at Pattee and Paterno Libraries at Penn State after my presentation at the latest edition of the Dracula Congress in November 2025, and the third at The Rosenbach Museum in Philadelphia in February 2026, just a few days before concluding my stage at Penn State University as a Fulbright scholar.



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## Schedule of BIP DRACULA

### DRACULA BETWEEN POP CULTURE AND TOURISM Blended Intensive Programme

Braşov, Poiana Braşov, Bran, Rupea, Vîscri, Saschiz and Sighişoara  
October 28th – November 1st 2024

**Monday, October 28th – Olimpia – The Museum of Sports and Mountain Tourism**

**9.00 - 9.30**

**Overview of the onsite Dracula BIP project and the outcomes of the two online phases**

*Dr. Florin NECHITA, Transilvania University of Braşov, Romania*

**9.30 – 10.00**

**Dracula – the Travel Agent During Communist Romania**

*Nicolae PEPENE, Manager of the Braşov County History Museum, Romania*

**10.00 – 10.30**

**Valorizing the Dracula Myth in Whitby**

*Dr. Magdalena GRABIAS, Maria Curie-Skłodowska University, Poland*

**10.45 – 11.30**

**From Vlad Ţepeş to Dracula : focus on Bran Castle**

*Dr. Dénes HARAI, Université de Pau et des Pays de l'Adour, France*

**11.30 – 12.15**

**“Estrange cruauté”: the emergence of Dracula’s myth through some Early Modern texts from the collections of the Bibliothèque nationale de France**

*Dr. Giovanna HENDEL, University of Torino, Italy*

**12.15 – 14.30**

**Valorizing the Dracula Myth through Private Business Initiatives – Urban Trekking and Teamwork**

**15.30 – 16.45**

**Embedding the Dracula Story in Guided Tours of Braşov**

*Dr. Adina Nicoleta CANDREA, Transilvania University of Braşov, Romania*

**16.45 – 17.30**

**Dracula in Advertising**

*Sorin PSATTA, University of Bucharest, Romania*

**17:30 – 18:30**

**In Search of Dracula’s Castle (Documentary)**

*Corneliu ŢEPELUŞ, Director and Producer*

**Tuesday, October 29th – Rupea Citadel, Viscri and Saschiz villages, Sighișoara**

**10.00 - 10.30**

**Visit to Rupea Citadel**

**10.30 - 11.00**

**The History of the Saxons in Transylvania**

*Dr. Dénes HARAI, Université de Pau et des Pays de l'Adour, France*

**11.30 - 13.00**

**Visit to Viscri Village**

**Anthropological Insights into the Rural Life**

*Dr. Silviu COPOSESCU, Transilvania University of Brașov, Romania*

**13.30 - 14.30**

**Reinventing Traditional Saxon Pottery**

*Marinel GYORFI, local artisan from Saschiz village*

**15.00 – 16.00**

**Sustainable Tourism and Development Initiatives in Southern Transylvania**

*Michaela TÜRK, Development Director, Mihai Eminescu Trust*

**17.00 – 18.30**

**Tracing Vlad the Impaler in Sighișoara – urban trekking activities**

**Wednesday, October 30th – Bran Castle, Bran and Șimon villages**

**9.45 - 10.45**

**Dracula in the Movies**

*Dr. Giaime ALONGE, University of Torino, Italy*

**10.45 - 11.45**

**Ghosts in Romanian Folklore**

*Dr. habil. Otilia HEDEȘAN, West University of Timișoara, Romania*

**12.00 - 13.00**

**Knocking at Death's door" - John Polidori's *The Vampyre* and the dualistic representation of women in the Pre-Raphaelite imagination**

*Dr. Laurence ROUSSILLON-CONSTANTY, Université de Pau et des Pays de l'Adour, France*

**13.00 - 13.30**

**Beyond Dracula's Myth: A Local Community Perspective on Tourism**

*Alina (SZASZ) DRĂGAN, PhD Candidate, Transilvania University of Brașov, and Public Manager at Brașov County*

**14.45 - 16.00**

**Visit to Bran Castle**

**16.00 - 18.00**

**Constructing and Deconstructing Dracula Castle: Teamwork and Field Research**

**19.00 - 21.00**

**Dracula Film Festival Opening Ceremony**

**Thursday, October 31st – Poiana Braşov (Hotel Acasă la Dracula)**

**9.30 - 10.30**

**Dracula and Its Translations: An Endless Series of Surprises**

*Dr. habil. Marius-Mircea Crişan, West University of Timișoara, Romania*

**10.30 - 11.00**

**Super-Woman and Super-Man Vampires in 21st Century Fiction**

*Patrycja PICHNICKA-TRIVEDI, PhD Candidate, University of Warsaw, Poland*

**11.00 - 11.30**

**Dark Allure: The Vampire in Polish Literary Modernism**

*Olimpia WASYK-JASTALSKA, PhD Candidate, University of Warsaw, Poland*

**11.45 – 12.45**

**Digging for Treasure and ‘Unearthing the Vampire’: Exposing Stoker’s Use of the Mandrake in the Construction of Parts of His Book and Monster**

*Fernando SOTO, Independent Researcher, Canada*

**12.45 – 13.15**

**Familiarity and Otherness in Dracula Films and TV Shows**

*Dr. Magdalena GRABIAS, Maria Curie-Skłodowska University, Poland*

**14.15 – 16.00**

**Imaginary on Dracula’s Castle – Creative Writing Workshop**

*Dr. Robert Gabriel ELEKES, Transilvania University of Braşov, Romania*

**16.00 – 16.30**

**Escaping Mythologies**

*Dr. Cristian PRALEA, Transilvania University of Braşov, Romania*

**16.30 – 17.00**

**Stake or Spotlight? How Târgovişte Counts on Vlad’s Legacy for Destination Branding**

*Alexandra NĂSTASE & Dr. Florin NECHITA, Transilvania University of Braşov, Romania*

**17.00 – 18.00**

**Teamwork for Preparing Presentations**

*Tutors: Florin NECHITA, Sorin PSATTA, Adina Nicoleta CANDREA, Giovanna HENDEL,  
Laurence ROUSSILON-CONSTANTY*

**Friday, November 1st – Poiana Braşov (Hotel Acasă la Dracula) and Braşov**

**9.30 – 10.30**

**Unearthing the Vrykolakas, or How to Study Folk Vampiric Beliefs**

*Dr. Nina TRZASKA, Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznan, Poland*

**10.30 – 11.00**

**Political Dracula: A Possible Bram Stoker's Veiled Stance concerning the Ottoman Empire**

*Dr. Sorin CIUTACU, West University of Timişoara, Romania*

**11.00 – 11.30**

**Ion Gorun's Interwar Romanian Dracula: A Story of Rediscovery with Ongoing Scholarly Implications**

*Dr. Anca Simina MARTIN, Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu, Romania*

**11.45 – 12.15**

**Tracing the Roots of the Vampire alongside the Mandrake to their Ultimate Ancient Sources, the Greek, Hebrew, and Egyptian Traditions**

*Fernando SOTO, Independent Researcher, Canada*

**12.15 – 14.15**

**Teamwork for Preparing Presentations**

*Tutors: Florin NECHITA, Sorin PSATTA, Adina Nicoleta CANDREA, Giovanna HENDEL,  
Laurence ROUSSILLON-CONSTANTY*

**15.15 – 17.00**

**Dracula as an Ingredient in Romanian Destination Branding – Team Presentations**

**17.00 – 17.30**

**Closing Remarks and Work Assignments for November 8th Online Session**

## **Again in Search of Dracula: Impressions on the UNITA BIP *Dracula Between Pop Culture and Tourism***

**Marius–Mircea CRIȘAN**

*West University of Timișoara, Romania*



During the period 28 October – 1 November 2024, I had the great pleasure of participating in the Blended Intensive Program (abbreviated BIP) *Dracula Between Pop Culture and Tourism*, developed in the frame of the Cultural Hub of the UNITA university alliance, and held at Brașov, under the auspices of the Transilvania University of Brașov. This initiative was born at the UNITA Cultural Hub meeting in Pau in April 2023 and was inspired by initiatives our colleagues at the University of Pau and the Adour Region had to explore the Pyrenees through didactic and research activities, such as BIPs and literary tours. My colleague Florin Nechita from Transilvania University of Brașov and I were inspired by the activities recounted by our colleagues, the “La Chanson du Roland Blending Intensive Program”, organised by Dr. Cécile Rochelois and Dr. Giovanna Hendel and the literary tours organised by Professor Laurence Roussillon-Constanty: we thought that such initiatives could stimulate a Blended Intensive Program in Romania based on the Dracula myth. I offered to provide my expertise in the field of Dracula studies, and so did Florin Nechita, who also suggested organising the BIP at Brașov and in its neighbourhood, where the participants could see many of the places connected with the Dracula myth in Romania. This idea was enthusiastically embraced by Giovanna Hendel and Laurence Roussillon-Constanty, and quickly endorsed by Professor Giaime Alonge from the University of Turin. An organising committee composed of the colleagues mentioned above was created, and we began a series of regular online meetings to organise the Dracula BIP.

Time flew, and at the end of October 2024, I was driving from Timișoara to Brașov, looking forward to participating in the BIP activities. On my way, I stopped at the Moșilor Pantheon (the heroes' graveyard in the village Țebea), in order to take a picture of Avram Iancu's sessile oak. I was going to talk to the international students of the UNITA BIP, as well as the participants of the Dracula Congress, about the translations of Bram Stoker's novel *Dracula*, and also to make a reference to the first translation into Romanian made, during the interwar period, by the writer Ion Gorun (*Gorun* means *sessile oak* in Romanian). Ion Gorun is the pseudonym of Alexandru Hodoș, the Romanian writer who published the translation of Bram Stoker's novel in serial form between 1928 and 1929. In personal discussions, I have noticed that some Romanian critics are surprised to learn that the first translation of *Dracula* into Romanian was by this traditionalist Romanian writer. I stopped at Țebea in order to show the international students and the conference participants what a *gorun* looks like, and I took a photo of probably the most famous sessile oak in Romania, associated with the memory of the Transylvanian leader in the 1848 revolution, Avram Iancu, one of the main personalities of Romanian history. In my opinion, it is possible that the writer Alexandru Hodoș took the pseudonym *Gorun* from Horea's sessile oak in the Moșilor Pantheon, an oak that must have looked, in the 1870s, like Avram Iancu's sessile oak today. Ion Gorun was influenced by Avram Iancu's personality, while his grandfather had taken part in the revolutionary forces led by Avram Iancu. The writer remembers with emotion that he participated, as a child, at Avram Iancu's funeral in 1872, under Horea's *gorun*.<sup>1</sup>

This reference to Avram Iancu's sessile oak may seem surprising in the context of the translations of *Dracula*, but the field of *Dracula* studies is open to an infinite series of surprises. Although only a pale trace of Horea's sessile oak remains today, Avram Iancu's *gorun* rises majestically under the sun's rays, carrying forward a narrative of history that climbs towards the sky. I took a photo, and then continued my trip to Brașov.

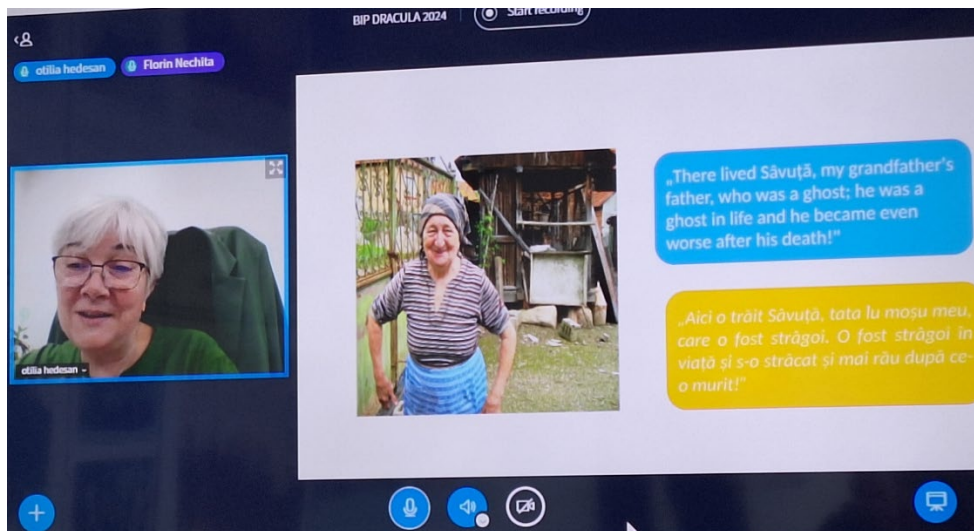
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<sup>1</sup> Ion Gorun. "O scrisoare despre Avram Iancu, — și altele (A Letter about Avram Iancu, — and Others)." *Transilvania*, vol. LIII (new series), no. 9, September 1922, pp. 591-594.

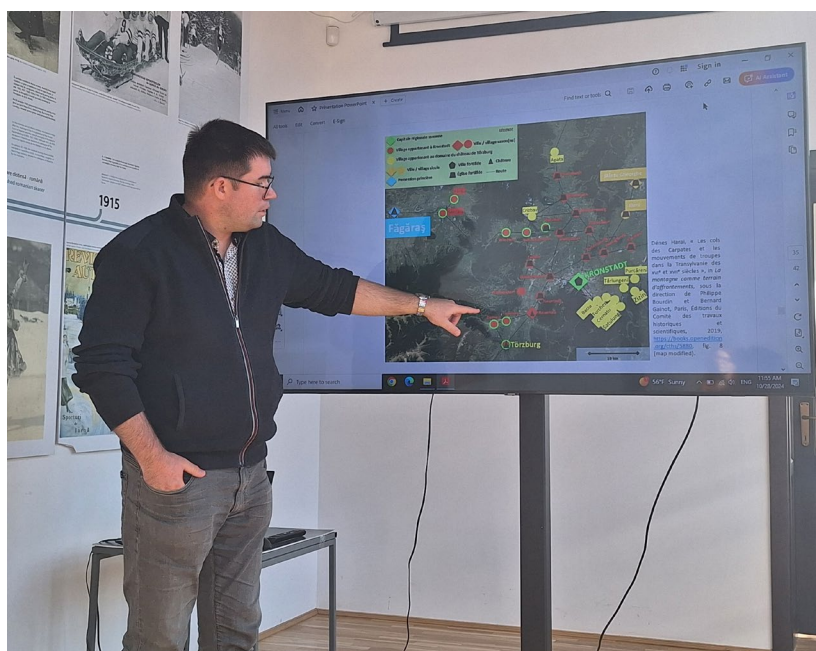


*Avram Iancu's grave and sessile oak*

The second day, in the morning, I headed enthusiastically to the *Olimpia Museum of Sports and Mountain Tourism*, where the opening session of the Dracula BIP was held, as well as the first day conference sessions. Florin Nechita warmly welcomed each of us, teachers and students, and everything was set for the event. It is important that the first paper presented was focused on Romanian anthropology. Professor Otilia Hedeşan, from the West University of Timișoara, spoke about the undead in Romanian folklore, presenting numerous elements from her anthropological and field research on the subject. One of the topics addressed was the distinction between several types of undead: *moroi*, *priculici* and *bosorcoi*.



In his paper, *From Vlad Țepeș to Dracula: Focus on Bran Castle*, Dr. Dénes Harai (Université de Pau et des Pays de l'Adour, France) discussed the role of Voivode Vlad Țepeș in the context of the anti-Ottoman fights in the 16th century, as well as the prince's connections with Transylvania and the Hungarian Kingdom, and focused on the perception of Bran Castle in some texts belonging to the 16th-century travel literature.



Dr. Giovanna Hendel, from the University of Torino, spoke about the emergence of Dracula's myth through some early modern texts in the collections of the *Bibliothèque nationale de France*. Dr. Hendel explained that, for political reasons, Voivode Dracula, who had been imprisoned by King Mathias Corvinus for 14 years,

was described as a monster. Consequently, the volumes consulted emphasised the prince's cruelty, which was described as "not making use of any reason". Vlad was described as a bloodthirsty Satanic character in works such as Jean Bodin's *Les Six Livres de la République* (Paris, Jacques du Puys, 1579) or *La Cosmographie universelle de tout le monde* (Paris, 1575), which emphasise the voivode's cruelty. The main argument of Dr. Hendel's paper was that the exacerbated inhumanity of the Wallachian voivode in 16th century sources was due to the geopolitical context of the time.

Afterwards, the documentary *The Search for Bram Stoker's Castle Dracula* was projected, a film based on the collaboration between Bram Stoker's great-grandnephew, Dacre Stoker (writer/narrator/producer), and Corneliu Țepeluș (director and producer). The film is built on the possibility of identifying the spot in the Călimani Mountains that Bram Stoker designated as the location of Castle Dracula. The source of the identification presented in the movie is an analysis by Hans de Roos of Bram Stoker's notes for *Dracula*<sup>2</sup>. After watching the documentary, it was useful for the students to engage in a dialogue with Corneliu Țepeluș, who attended that BIP session. The lectures were followed by a field activity entitled *Valorizing the Dracula Myth through Private Business Initiatives – Urban Trekking and Teamwork*, and then by a walking tour of Brașov, on the footsteps of Dracula.

The second day of the BIP, Tuesday, October 29<sup>th</sup>, was dedicated to a trip to Rupea, Viscri, Saschiz and Sighișoara. The visit to Rupea Citadel concluded with a lecture within the fortress's walls by Dr. Dénes Harai, who spoke about the history of the Saxons in Transylvania. During the visit to Viscri village, the students paid attention to some particularities of Transylvanian rural life and learned more about the history of the Transylvanian Germans while visiting the Viscri fortress. During the stop in Saschiz, the participants witnessed a performance by local artisan Marinel Gyorfi, who demonstrated how traditional Saxon pottery was reinvented by a new generation of craftsmen.

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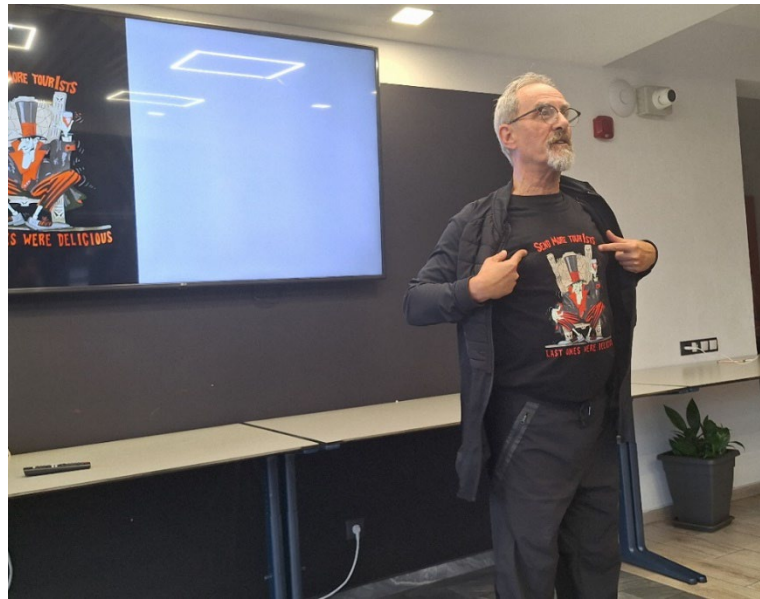
<sup>2</sup> Hans Corneel de Roos, "Count Dracula's Address and Lifetime Identity". In: Marius-Mircea Crișan (editor) *Dracula: An International Perspective*, Palgrave Gothic. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham. 2017. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-63366-4\\_6](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-63366-4_6)

The visit to the medieval town of Sighișoara began with a lecture by Michaela Türk, Development Director of Mihai Eminescu Trust, on *Sustainable Tourism and Development Initiatives in Southern Transylvania*. The day trip concluded with an urban trek, tracing places associated with the memory of Vlad the Impaler in Sighișoara, such as the house where the voivode was supposedly born in 1431.

The events of the third day of the BIP were held at Bran and Șimon villages, two places connected to the famous Bran Castle, which has been associated in popular fiction and media representations with Castle Dracula for about half a century. The day began with a visit to Bran Castle, which was followed by teamwork and field research based on a discussion of constructing and deconstructing (the mythical) Castle Dracula. Afterwards, the participants were warmly welcomed at the pension *Mama Cozonacilor* in the neighbouring village of Șimon, where the lectures were preceded by a rich lunch featuring typical cuisine. The talks were presented in the inspiring conference room of the pension, which offered stunning views of the autumn mountain scenery. I found it an ideal location for the excellent talks that afternoon.

The lecture session began with a talk by Professor Giaime Alonge from the University of Turin, focusing on Dracula in film. Professor Alonge analysed the evolution of the vampire count in some of the most successful *Dracula* cinematic adaptations, such as Friedrich Wilhelm Murnau's *Nosferatu* (1922), Tod Browning's *Dracula* (1931), Francis Ford Coppola's *Bram Stoker's Dracula* (1992), and, in an original manner, paid attention to some relevant details of film production.

Sorin Psatta, from the University of Bucharest, offered the BIP participants a lively lecture on the use of the Dracula image in Advertising, filled with complex observations and delivered in a comical tone. Dr. Psatta began with relevant examples of Dracula's role in American commercials, but the main part of his presentation focused on Dracula in Romanian advertising.



Professor Laurence Roussillon-Constanty, Université de Pau et des Pays de l'Adour, examined the dualistic representation of women in the Pre-Raphaelite imagination. Her presentation began with an overview of the Rosetti family tree and some references to the main characteristics of Christina Rossetti's poetry. Besides the comprehensive perspective on the literary texts approached and an in-depth analysis of the cultural context, Professor Roussillon-Constanty's presentation impressed the public by several original insights, such as the parallel between Christina Rossetti's poem "Goblin market" and John Polidori's short story "The Vampyre".



The afternoon session concluded with a talk by Alina (Szasz) Drăgan (PhD Candidate, Transilvania University of Braşov and Public Manager at Braşov County), who discussed how the local community's perspective on tourism is valorized in the area of Bran, beyond Dracula's myth. Upon their return to Braşov, the teachers and students participated in the events of the Dracula Film Festival.



The fourth and fifth-day sessions (October 31st and November 1st) were held again at a different location, this time at the Poiana Braşov mountain resort. The location was chosen for its association with the Dracula myth. In contemporary Romania, many tourist initiatives based on the Dracula myth were developed, and several hotels and pensions inspired by this myth were built<sup>3</sup>. With an architecture inspired by Bram Stoker's novel, the hotel *Acasă la Dracula* in Poiana Braşov seems the perfect place for an international conference on the Dracula myth.

I had the honour to open the sessions with a talk on the translations of *Dracula*. The morning session was continued by subjects presented by two PhD Candidates from the University of Warsaw, Poland, Patrycja Pichnicka-Trivedi ("Super-Woman and

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<sup>3</sup> See Duncan Light, *The Dracula Dilemma: Tourism, Identity and the State in Romania*. Surrey, Burlington: Ashgate, 2012; For Dracula academic tourism, see Marius-Mircea Crişan and Duncan Light, "Transylvanian Society of Dracula as a "Cultural Broker" in Romania". In Simon Bacon, (editor) *The Palgrave Handbook of the Vampire*. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham. 2024. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-36253-8\\_70](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-36253-8_70)

Super-Man Vampires in 21st Century Fiction”) and Olimpia Wasyk-Jastalska (“Dark Allure: The Vampire in Polish Literary Modernism”).

The Canadian independent researcher Fernando Soto participated in the conference with two different papers, one presented on Thursday (“Digging for Treasure and ‘Unearthing the Vampire’: Exposing Stoker’s Use of the Mandrake in the Construction of Parts of His Book and Monster”), and another one on Friday (“Tracing the Roots of the Vampire alongside the Mandrake to their Ultimate Ancient Sources, the Greek, Hebrew, and Egyptian Traditions”).

In her talk, “Dracula Myth Valorisation in Whitby”, Dr. Magdalena Grabias from Maria Curie-Skłodowska University discussed the impact of Bram Stoker's book on tourism and the "Draculisation" of the town. The topic approached by Dr. Cristian Pralea, from Transilvania University of Braşov, Romania, was “Escaping Mythologies - Stake or Spotlight?”. The next paper on the influence of Vlad Țepeş’s legacy on tourism in Târgovişte was presented by the student Alexandra Năstase under the supervision of Dr. Florin Nechita. Another activity realised on Thursday was a creative writing workshop on Dracula’s Castle, organised by Dr. Robert Gabriel Elekes, from Transilvania University of Braşov.

On Friday morning Dr. Nina Trzaska (Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznan, Poland) began the presentation sessions with a paper on “Unearthing the Vrykolakas, or How to Study Folk Vampiric Beliefs”, This was followed by Dr. Sorin Ciutacu from the West University of Timișoara, who suggested a political reading of Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*, focusing on the way in which the novel reflects the relationship between the Ottoman Empire and the Eastern Europe at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Dr. Anca Simina Martin, from Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu (author of the preface to the book-length re-release of the first translation of *Dracula* into Romanian, in 2023), spoke about the first translation of Bram Stoker into Romanian, published in a serial form by Ion Gorun (1928 - 1929). The presentation sessions concluded with Austrian entrepreneur Bernhard Moestl’s talk on the use of the Dracula myth in branding organic energy drinks in Braşov. Afterwards, the participants in the Dracula BIP worked in teams under the supervision of the tutors to prepare their presentations, which were discussed in the second part of the concluding day.

For me, participating in the design and the implementation of the Dracula BIP in Braşov is another dream fulfilled, along with other dreams which I have had on the connection between the image of Romania and the cultural dimension of the Dracula myth. Many thanks go to the organising committee of this BIP, Professor Laurence Roussillon-Constanty, Dr. Giovanna Hendel, Professor Giaime Alonge, as well as to Dr. Magdalena Grabias for her contribution to the organizing aspects of the event. But everything would have remained a utopic projection if it hadn't been for the amazing organizing skills, the endless energy and the unique generosity of the main organizer, Dr Florin Nechita. It was great to have all these colleagues and friends together, teachers, researchers and students, and I am indebted to them for making this dream come true.

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## Outside of Transylvania: Dracula Myth Valorisation in Whitby

### Magdalena GRABIAS

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Magdalena Grabias (PhD) is an Assistant Professor at the Institute of Cultural Studies of Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin, Poland. Her academic expertise lies in Film Studies, Gothic Studies, particularly Dracula Studies, as well as literary translation, and music journalism. Magdalena has co-organised notable events such as the “Fourth World Dracula Congress” in Dublin (2016) and numerous Gothic and vampire-themed conferences in Poland. She is also a co-founder of the international organisation “Children of the Night” and an organiser of the International Dracula Congress series held annually in Transylvania, which fosters global academic discourse on Gothic and Vampire Studies. Her academic publications in English, Polish, and Romanian include topics like pre-war cinema, visual culture, popular culture, and the Gothic horror genre. Over the past decade, her research has focused on Dracula and Vampire Studies, leading to a series of influential articles exploring the role of vampires in literature and cinema and their cultural significance. In recognition of her work, she received the prestigious International Helion Award in 2019 from the science fiction cultural association “Helion” in Timișoara, Romania. In 2022, the “Children of the Night” International Dracula Congress, co-organised by Magdalena, was nominated for the American Rondo Hatton Classic Horror Award in the category of “Best Event.” Since January 2026, she has been Editor-in-Chief of the academic journal “Culture and History”, published biannually at her alma mater Maria Curie-Skłodowska University.

While Bram Stoker’s famous 1897 novel *Dracula* is strongly associated with Transylvania, a vital part of the narrative’s plot unfolds in a small English town of Whitby. Numerous other locations are also mentioned throughout the novel.

However, it is Transylvania and Whitby that have gained the most significance and become mythologised thanks to the enduring influence of Stoker's work.



Whitby, a coastal town in North Yorkshire, holds a unique place in Dracula mythology. Over time, the Dracula myth has been valorised in Whitby, gaining cultural and economic significance that transcends its literary origins. This valorisation is not only a cultural phenomenon but also a socio-economic one, intertwined with tourism, identity formation, and the commodification of myth. Reflecting broader trends in place-making and heritage tourism, Whitby's association with Dracula has transformed fiction into a vital cultural and economic resource, illustrating the profound impact literary narratives can have on shaping a place's identity and value.

In *Dracula*, Whitby serves as a key setting where the vampire first arrives in England, marking the town's pivotal role in the narrative. Bram Stoker drew inspiration for this setting during his visit to Whitby in the summer of 1890. The town's dramatic geography, its historical ties to the Viking invasion, and the gothic ruins of Whitby Abbey all influenced the creation of the Dracula myth, intertwining the location with vampire lore. Stoker's novel bestowed Whitby with a mythic identity it had not previously possessed. Over time, particularly throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, this connection has deepened as the town increasingly embraced and capitalised on its Dracula heritage.

## Whitby Landmarks in the Novel

Several specific landmarks in the town are mentioned in *Dracula*. Stoker's use of these settings amplifies the novel's gothic tone and adds symbolic depth, with each location embodying a boundary between life and death, the known and the unknown, and civilisation and the supernatural. Whitby, with its blend of historical gravitas and natural beauty, becomes more than just a backdrop; it emerges as a vital, living element of the novel's gothic mythology.

**Whitby Abbey:** the iconic ruined Benedictine abbey overlooking the town, serves as a significant scenery in *Dracula*. Stoker vividly describes it as a dramatic and ancient site, imbued with an aura of mystery and decay. In the novel, Count Dracula, in the form of a large black dog, is seen running up the town's 199 steps to the abbey after arriving on the ship *Demeter*. The abbey's crumbling ruins symbolise decay, history, and the inexorable passage of time - themes that resonate deeply with the novel's exploration of Dracula as an ancient, undead creature.



**The church of Saint Mary:** located beside Whitby Abbey, St. Mary's Church also plays a prominent role in *Dracula*. Stoker depicts its graveyard as a quiet, contemplative space with dramatic views of the harbour, where Lucy Westenra and Mina Murray often sit. However, this tranquil setting takes on a darker tone as Lucy's sleepwalking episodes frequently lead her to the graveyard, culminating in Dracula's

attack. The church and its graveyard function as a haunting, liminal space between life and death, embodying the tension between the sacred and the profane while foreshadowing Lucy's tragic transformation into one of the undead.



**The 199 steps:** leading from the town to Whitby Abbey and St. Mary's Church, the famous 199 steps recur in *Dracula* on several occasions. These steps serve as both a physical and symbolic link between the everyday life of the town and the darker, more mysterious elements perched on the cliff. In the novel, Lucy Westenra ascends these steps during her sleepwalking episodes, and Dracula, in his dog form, is seen racing up them following the shipwreck.

**The East Cliff, Tate Hill Pier, and Whitby Harbour:** three pivotal locations in *Dracula*, marking the arrival of the ship *Demeter* and, with it, Count Dracula's entry into England. The *Demeter*, carrying Dracula and his crates of Transylvanian earth, gets shipwrecked during a storm, and an aforementioned large black dog (Dracula in disguise) leaps from the wreckage, racing toward the East Cliff and eventually to the

abbey. Whitby Harbour serves as the transitional space where Dracula, an outsider from the exotic and distant East, invades the familiar world of Victorian England. The eerie, crewless arrival of the *Demeter*, accompanied by a violent storm, underscores themes of invasion and the breakdown of geographical and moral boundaries, introducing terror and death into the heart of England.



**The Crescent:** a fashionable area of Whitby, serves as the setting for Mina and Lucy’s stay during their visit. Stoker portrays it as a place of calm and civility, offering a stark contrast to the darker, more mysterious areas such as the abbey and the graveyard on the other side of the cliff. However, this sense of safety is deceptive, as Lucy’s sleepwalking episodes begin at The Crescent, marking the beginning of her tragic fate. The Crescent stands for normalcy and Victorian respectability, which gradually crumbles under Dracula’s growing influence. It underlines the fragility of the boundaries between the secure, civilised world and the gothic, supernatural forces that threaten to disrupt it.

### **Dracula Myth Valorisation**

**Tourism and Heritage:** The concept of “valorisation” in cultural heritage refers to the process by which places or artifacts are invested with cultural, historical, and often economic value. Whitby has actively valorised its connection to *Dracula*

through various heritage initiatives. Whitby has embraced its gothic reputation, becoming a hub for heritage tourism and attracting fans of gothic literature and vampire mythology. Key sites like Whitby Abbey and St. Mary’s Church are marketed as part of this heritage, drawing visitors interested in the town’s connection to *Dracula*. Since 1994, the biannual Whitby Goth Weekend has further solidified the town’s status as a popular destination for gothic subculture members, attracting thousands of participants and spectators on a regular basis. Additionally, Dracula-themed tourism thrives in the form of walking tours, museums, and literary festivals, all of which capitalise on the myth, offering experiences that invite visitors to experience the novel's dark, gothic atmosphere.

**Commodification of the Myth:** The valorisation of *Dracula* has brought significant economic benefits to Whitby, as tourism driven by its connection to the novel generates income for local businesses, including hotels, restaurants, and shops selling Dracula-themed merchandise. This commodification of the myth has transformed it into a branded experience, with sites like Whitby Abbey serving not only as historical landmarks but also as cultural touchstones that attract visitors’ eager to engage with the gothic narrative. Thus, Whitby’s association with Dracula has shaped its cultural identity, blending its actual history with the fictional myth to create a hybrid cultural narrative that defines the town today.



## **Whitby in Film**

Several *Dracula* films and adaptations have drawn inspiration from Whitby, yet surprisingly few major productions have filmed on location in the town itself. Most films tend to recreate or represent Whitby through sets or alternative locations, though there are notable exceptions. In Hammer Film Productions' *Scars of Dracula* (1970), directed by Roy Ward Baker, some of the external shots were filmed in Whitby to capture its gothic atmosphere, though most scenes were shot elsewhere. The 1977 BBC miniseries *Count Dracula*, directed by Philip Saville, one of the most faithful adaptations of Stoker's novel, prominently features real Whitby locations, including the 199 Steps and Whitby Abbey. In contrast, the 2020 *Dracula* miniseries, directed by Mark Gatiss and Steven Moffat, while using Whitby as a significant setting in the storyline, filmed these scenes elsewhere, relying on sets and digital effects to represent the town. Similarly, *Dracula A.D. 1972* (1972), directed by Alan Gibson, symbolically quotes Whitby in connection with the original Stoker novel, but does not feature the town's actual locations. Despite the limited use of Whitby in actual filming, its presence in the *Dracula* mythos continues to inspire adaptations, underscoring the town's lasting significance in the lore.

## **Conclusion**

The valorisation of the *Dracula* myth in Whitby is a multifaceted phenomenon, rooted in cultural heritage, tourism, and identity formation. By embracing its connection to the novel, Whitby has developed a cultural and economic framework where fiction and reality intersect. Ultimately, the town's association with *Dracula* exemplifies how literary narratives can transform a place, turning fiction into a significant cultural and economic resource.



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## From Vlad Țepeș to Dracula: focus on Bran Castle

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I am a Franco-Hungarian historian specialised in Early Modern History of Navarre / Béarn and of Hungary / Transylvania. In 2009, I defended my PhD in History at Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne with a comparative study on the advisors of the king of Navarre and those of the prince of Transylvania in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century<sup>4</sup>. My research focuses on political, diplomatic and military history, but I am also

interested in textual and iconographic representations of political power in Europe. I belong to the ITEM (Identités, Territoires, Expressions, Mobilités) laboratory of the Université de Pau et des Pays de l'Adour (Pau) and I am Member of the Société de l'Histoire de France (France) as well as Fellow of the Royal Historical Society (United Kingdom).

“Castle Dracula is one of the most infamous pieces of real estate in horror literature”. This affirmation is made by Robert Eighteen-Bisang and Elizabeth Miller, editors of *Bram Stoker's Notes for Dracula*, who specify that “although Stoker reminds himself to ‘describe’ the castle, there is no such description in the Notes” and “although no specific castle is cited in the Notes, many Dracula enthusiasts claim to have visited the castle, be it Bran Castle or Poenari in Romania, or Slains Castle in Cruden Bay”.<sup>5</sup> As demonstrated by scholarship, especially by Marius-

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<sup>4</sup> This dissertation has been published: Dénés Harai, *Grands serviteurs de petits États. Les conseillers de Navarre et de Transylvanie (XVI<sup>e</sup>-XVII<sup>e</sup> siècles)*. Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2012.

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Mircea Crișan<sup>6</sup> and Hans Corneel de Roos<sup>7</sup>, and presented in the documentary *In Search For Bram Stoker's Castle Dracula* (2020), directed and produced by Corneliu Țepeluș, Dracula's castle is described as having the exterior of Bran Castle and the interior of Slains Castle on a location in the Călimani Mountains, near Borgo Pass. If this location fits well the story of the literary Dracula, that of Bran Castle matches the story of Vlad III the Impaler, the “historical Dracula”<sup>8</sup> who inspired the literary one to a certain extent.

### **Vlad III's links to Transylvania**

Vlad belonged to the House of Drăculești, a branch of the Basarab dynasty. His father, Vlad II, voivode of Wallachia two times (1436-1442 and 1443-1447), was nicknamed “Dracul” because of his membership in the Order of the Dragon, a monarchical chivalric order founded in 1408 by Sigismund of Luxembourg, King of Hungary and of Croatia. Vlad III is known as the “son of Dracul” (Drăculea) and is also referred to as Dracula by historians<sup>9</sup>. Vlad III was born probably in 1431, in Sighișoara, one of the seven major Saxon towns in Transylvania (Siebenbürgen in German), a voivodship belonging to the Kingdom of Hungary during the Middle Age, during the exile of his father (1431-1436)<sup>10</sup>. Vlad III ruled Walachia three times: October-November 1448, July 1456-August 1462, November-December 1476. Between his first and second reigns, he sojourned in Moldavia (1449-1452) and in Transylvania (1452-1456) where he probably stayed at Hunedoara Castle at the court of John Hunyadi<sup>11</sup>.

As ruler of Wallachia, Vlad had to navigate treacherous political waters between the king of Hungary and the sultan of the Ottoman Empire who controlled Bulgaria. As an example, Vlad III was able to become voivode thanks to Hungarian support in the

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<sup>6</sup> Crișan, Marius-Mircea, The Models for Castle Dracula in Stoker's Sources on Transylvania. *Journal of Dracula Studies*, Vol. 10 (2008): No. 1, Article 2. DOI: 10.70013/44d8e9fo.

<sup>7</sup> De Roos, Corneel Hans, Count Dracula's Address and Lifetime Identity. In *Dracula. An International Perspective*, ed. Marius-Mircea Crișan, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017; pp. 95–118.

<sup>8</sup> Treptow, Kurt W., *Vlad III Dracula. The Life and Times of the Historical Dracula*, Las Vegas: Histria Books; 2022.

<sup>9</sup> Cazacu, Matei, *Dracula*, edited, with an Introduction by Reinert, Stephen W., translations by Nicole Mordarski, Stephen W. Reinert, Alice Brinton, and Catherine Healey, Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2017.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>11</sup> Crișan, Marius-Mircea, Castle Hunedoara and the Dracula Myth: Connection or Speculation? In *Dracula. An International Perspective*, ed. Crișan, Marius-Mircea, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017; p. 164.

aftermath of the successful defence of Belgrade by John Hunyadi against the Ottomans. Nevertheless, the newly-reinstated voivode maintained his good relations with Istanbul by an annual tribute to sultan Mehmed II in 1456-1458.



*House on Piața Cetății in Sighișoara where Vlad Drăculea was born in 1431*  
(photo: Dénes Harai, 29 October 2024)

From his predecessors, Vlad III inherited the right to two fiefs in Transylvania granted by the kings of Hungary: the duchies of Amlăș and of Făgăraș. Thus, the voivode was the neighbour of Saxons both outside and inside Transylvania. After a few years of cooperation, Vlad became hostile to Saxons of Sibiu and of Brașov because of divergent commercial interests and Saxon hospitality to Dan III, Vlad's political opponent as pretender to the voivodship of Wallachia. The crisis metamorphosed into a bloody conflict in 1459 when the voivode of Wallachia arrested and impaled Saxon merchants and other Saxons citizens in Wallachia<sup>12</sup>.

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<sup>12</sup> Cazacu, M., *Dracula*, pp. 115–116. On impalements, cf. Harai, D., Counting the Stakes: A Reassessment of Vlad III Dracula's Practice of Collective Impalements in Fifteenth-Century South-eastern Europe. *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 2025, 1-16 <https://doi.org/10.1017/S008044012510042X>.



Wallachia, 13<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> century

[https://et.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vlad\\_Dracula#/media/File:Wallachia\\_13-16c.svg](https://et.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vlad_Dracula#/media/File:Wallachia_13-16c.svg)



The duchies of Amlaş and of Făgăraş

<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:AmlasFagaras.svg>

In April 1460, Dan III, with Saxon support, entered Wallachia to claim the voivodship, but was defeated and decapitated. In order to punish the Saxons, Vlad launched an attack on Braşov and its region (Burzenland). The Wallachian army entered Transylvania at Bran (Törzburg) Castle. The devastation was striking: “Braşov’s suburbs and the church of Saint Bartholomew were burned, and Codlea (Zeidling) and Bod (Beckendorf) likewise were attacked. Impalements were reported near the chapel of Saint James, on a hill facing Braşov”<sup>13</sup>. These impalements constituted the

<sup>13</sup> Cazacu, M. *Dracula*, 128.

scene of a memorable meal in the writings of 15<sup>th</sup> century chroniclers: “A contemporary notice in the chronicle of the monastery of Melch, in Austria, specifies that two hundred people were impaled near the chapel of St. James, and that the table on which Dracula took his breakfast was wrested from the chapel’s main altar”<sup>14</sup>. During summer of 1460, Vlad continued his campaign in Transylvania, targeting the duchy of Amlaş, to punish the former supporters of Dan. The war against the Saxons ended with a peace treaty on 6 September 1460: Braşov and Sibiu had to return Wallachian fugitives and agreed to assist Vlad III with troops in case of a war against the Ottomans, while “the Saxons required the return of captives Vlad had taken during his campaigns in Transylvania, and, most probably, a reopening of commercial routes subject to conditions the Wallachian prince might impose”<sup>15</sup>.

Soon after, Vlad started his war against the Ottomans (1461-1462). The voivode launched a series of attacks along the Danube and caused massive casualties: according to Vlad’s own report, approximately 23,000 individuals were killed “without counting those burned alive in their houses, or whose heads were not presented to our officers”<sup>16</sup>. This campaign and the scale of the destruction largely contributed to the infamy of Vlad not only in German texts, but also in Ottoman ones in the aftermath of the war<sup>17</sup>. The Ottoman counterattack took place during the summer of 1462. Even if Vlad carried out night attacks (16/17 June and 22/23 June 1462)<sup>18</sup>, he had to retreat in the Carpathians where he hoped to receive the military support of Matthias Hunyadi, king of Hungary, who sojourned in Braşov between 2 November and 2 December<sup>19</sup>. As we learn from Venetian diplomatic correspondence from March 1462, Vlad III had married a woman from the Hunyadi family (either the king’s sister or cousin), which

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<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*, footnote 112. For more on the depiction of Vlad’s actions, cf. Giovanna Hendel, “‘Estrange cruauté’: the emergence of Dracula’s myth through some Early Modern texts from the collections of the Bibliothèque nationale de France’.

<sup>15</sup> Cazacu, M., *Dracula*, p. 130.

<sup>16</sup> Cazacu, M., *Dracula*, pp. 141–142. The body count is slightly different in the two copies of Vlad’s report: “The Munich copy conveys a total of 23,884 killed, but adding the figures by locality yields a total of 20,099. The Wolfenbüttel copy records 23,889 killed, but addition by localities yields 22,879” (*ibid.*, p. 142).

<sup>17</sup> Gheorghe, Adrian, *The Ottoman Dracula: Kazıklı Voyvoda and the Construction of the Rebel and Evil in the Ottoman Empire*. *Journal of Balkan and Black Sea Studies*, Year 6, Issue 11, December 2023, p. 1–24.

<sup>18</sup> Gheorghe, Adrian. “Understanding the Ottoman Campaign in Wallachia in the Summer of 1462. Numbers, Limits, Manoeuvres and Meanings.” In *Vlad der Pfähler – Dracula Tyrann oder Volkstribun?*, eds. Bohn, Thomas, et alii, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2017; pp. 159–188.

<sup>19</sup> Bebes, Árpád. *Royals on the road. A Comparative study of the travel pattern of two Hungarian kings Sigismund of Luxembourg and Mattias Corvinus*, MA Thesis in Medieval Studies, Budapest: Central European University, 2015; p. 116.

must have given the voivode cause to hope for royal support<sup>20</sup>. Instead of such a help, Matthias took Vlad with him. The voivode was arrested in the Piatra Craiului mountains on the border between Wallachia and Transylvania. When he entered “preventive custody”<sup>21</sup> and later his long “house arrest” in Hungary (1462-1475), it is very likely that he went by Bran Castle, at the same place where he has entered Transylvania with his troops a few years earlier.

### Bran Castle in Renaissance Transylvania

In his chronicle about the history of Hungarians published in 1575<sup>22</sup>, Gáspár Heltai indicated Bran Castle (Törzburg in German and Töröcsvár in Hungarian) as the southern limit of Transylvania. On the map *Chorographia Transylvaniae* (Basel, 1532) created by Johannes Honterus, major figure of Braşov in the 1530s and 1540s, Bran Castle is located in the Carpathians.

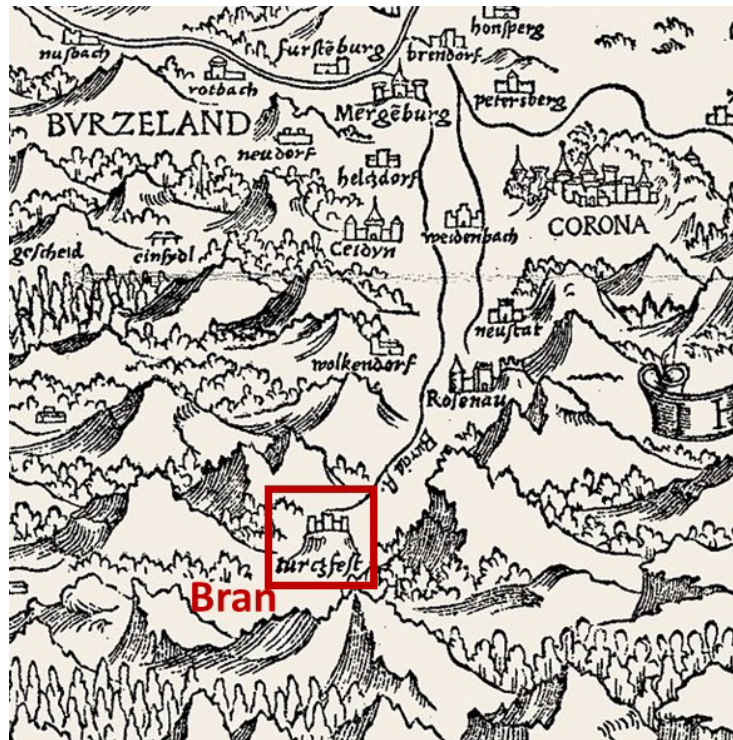


*Chorographia Transylvaniae*, Basel, 1532 (red circle added to indicate Bran)  
[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Chorographia\\_Transylvaniae\\_Sybemb%C3%BCrgen\\_1532.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Chorographia_Transylvaniae_Sybemb%C3%BCrgen_1532.jpg)

<sup>20</sup> Simon, Alexandru, *In the World of Vlad. The Lives and Times of a Warlord*, Berlin, Frank&Timme, 2021, p. 116.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 119.

<sup>22</sup> Heltai, Gáspár, *Chronica az Magyaroknac dolgairol*, 1575.



Burzenland in *Chorographia Transylvaniae*, Basel, 1532

(detail, red square added to indicate Bran)

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Chorographia\\_Transylvaniae\\_Syembemb%C3%BCrgen\\_1532.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Chorographia_Transylvaniae_Syembemb%C3%BCrgen_1532.jpg)

The first castle, named Dietrichstein, was probably built by the Teutonic Knights in the 1210s. It was in 1377 that Louis I of Anjou, King of Hungary, authorized the town of Braşov to replace it with a stone castle. Sigismund of Luxembourg attributed it to Mircea the Elder, voivode of Wallachia, as a fief between 1407 and 1419. In 1441, John Hunyadi earned one of his victories over the Ottomans in the vicinity of Bran. Between 1459 and 1462, as explained above, Bran played an important role in the contacts and tensions between the Saxons of Transylvania and Vlad III. In 1498, Vladislav II Jagello leased Bran to Braşov for 10 years (lease renewed in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries).

On 24 June 1574, Pierre Lescapier, a French traveller belonging to a diplomatic delegation sent to Transylvania from Istanbul, arrived at Bran Castle from Wallachia and he described it as the first garrison of Transylvania on the top of a mountain difficult to climb and surrounded by a dense forest. According to him, the castle did

not have a gate, but only a ladder that the soldiers used to get inside<sup>23</sup>. In June 1585, Jacques de Bongars, another French traveller, who crossed the Bran Pass from Transylvania to Wallachia specified that a first group of soldiers left the castle in the morning to patrol in the area while a second group accomplished the same mission in the afternoon. The soldiers remaining in the castle while others were on patrol checked the traffic, controlled travellers and ensured the security of the tax collectors at Bran<sup>24</sup>.



*View of Bran Castle from Wallachia in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century  
(engraving by Ludwig Rohbock)*

<https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/b/b6/T%C3%B6rcsv%C3%A1r.jpg>

Account books from the first half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century enable us to have some key information about Bran Castle's garrison. From 1504 to 1555, the number of soldiers varied on average between 10 and 15. A first increase from 10 to 12 or 13 soldiers can be observed in the 1530s. A second increase happened in the 1540s when 14 or 15

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<sup>23</sup> Lescapier, Pierre. *Journal*, ed. by Cernovodeanu, Paul I., *Călătoria lui Pierre Lescapier în țara Românească și Transilvania la 1574*. In *Studii și materiale de Istorie medie*. Bucharest: Editura Academiei Republicii Populare Romîne, t. 4, 1960; p. 445.

<sup>24</sup> Bongars, Jacques. "J. Bongars' Tagebuch seiner Reise von Wien nach Constantinopel im Jahr 1585." In Hermann Hagen, *Zur Geschichte der Philologie und zur römischen Litteratur*, Berlin: S. Calvary, 1879; p. 157.

soldiers were paid. The Ottoman occupation of a large part of Hungary in 1541 and the settling of the Szapolyai Hungarian royal dynasty in Transylvania might partly justify this increase. A third increase happened in the 1550s when 16, 18 and, often, 20 or even 23 soldiers were counted<sup>25</sup>. The annual incomes of the lordship of Bran (approximately 400 florins) nearly covered the garrison's cost, at least between 1504 and 1526<sup>26</sup>. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the lordship belonged to Braşov and, besides Bran, included 9 villages in Burzenland (Apaţa, Baci, Cernatu, Crizbav, Purcăreni, Satulung, Tărlungeni, Turcheş, Zizin)<sup>27</sup>. The cost of the castle's maintenance was allocated by the town of Braşov. During peacetime, the role of Bran Castle was to control traffic. During wartime, it had to slow down invaders coming from the south.



*Northern façade of Bran Castle*  
(photo: Dénes Harai, 30 October 2024)

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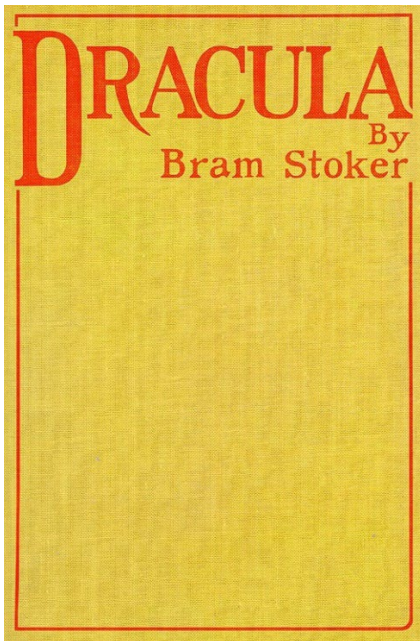
<sup>25</sup> Harai, Dénes, Les cols des Carpates et les mouvements de troupes dans la Transylvanie des xvi<sup>e</sup> et xvii<sup>e</sup> siècles. In *La montagne comme terrain d'affrontements*, Bourdin, Philippe, and Gainot, Bernard (eds). Paris: Éditions du Comité des travaux historiques et scientifiques, 2019, <https://books.openedition.org/cths/5880>, fig. 7.)

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, fig. 6.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, fig. 8.

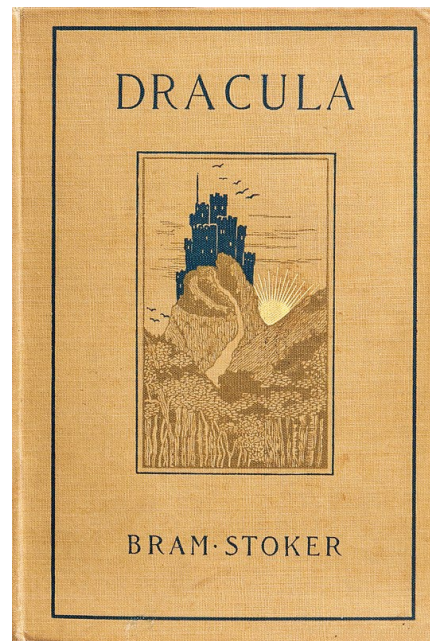
## Bran as Dracula's Castle

As explained by Marius-Mircea Crişan, engravings of Bran Castle in 19<sup>th</sup>-century publications about Transylvania influenced the silhouette of Dracula's castle in Bram Stoker's imagination<sup>28</sup>. This influence can also be detected on the 1899 book cover of *Dracula* printed by the Doubleday and McClure publishing house in New York City, whereas the book cover of the first edition two years earlier did not contain any illustration.



London, Archibald Constable and Co.,  
1897

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/  
file:Dracula\\_1st\\_ed\\_cover\\_  
reproduction.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Dracula_1st_ed_cover_reproduction.jpg)



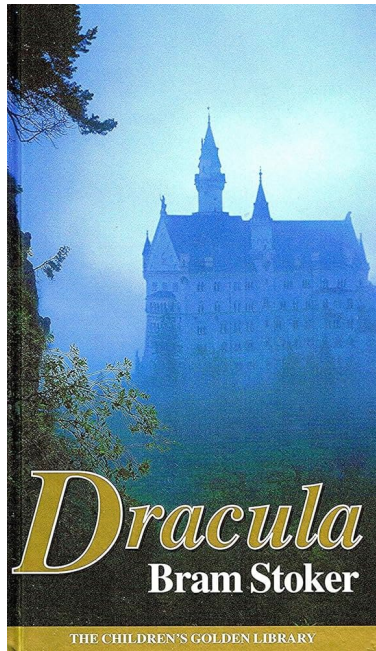
New York, Doubleday and McClure, 1899

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/  
wiki/File:Dracamer99.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Dracamer99.jpg)

Despite the above-mentioned influence, many covers of Bram Stoker's *Dracula* do not feature any castle or if they do other castles are chosen. This phenomenon is particularly vivid between 2000 and 2015, in English, American, Canadian and Mexican editions which use images of the castle of Neuschwanstein (Hohenschwangau, Bavaria, Germany). On these book covers, the castle is presented in a foggy or cloudy background, the foreground being filled by vegetation (trees and bushes).

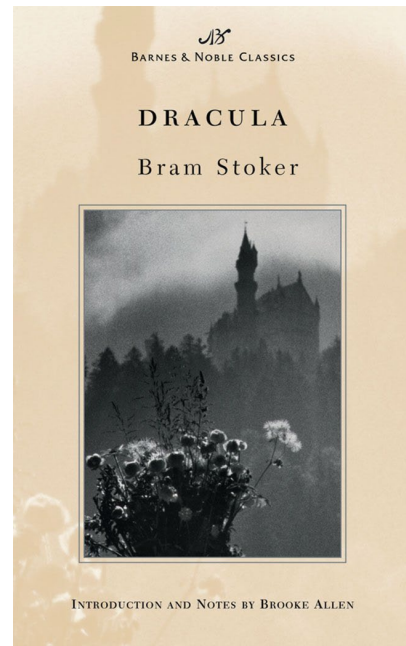
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<sup>28</sup> Crişan, Marius-Mircea. "The Models for Castle Dracula in Stoker's Sources on Transylvania." *Journal of Dracula Studies*, Vol. 10 (2008): No. 1, Article 2. DOI: 10.70013/44d8egfo.



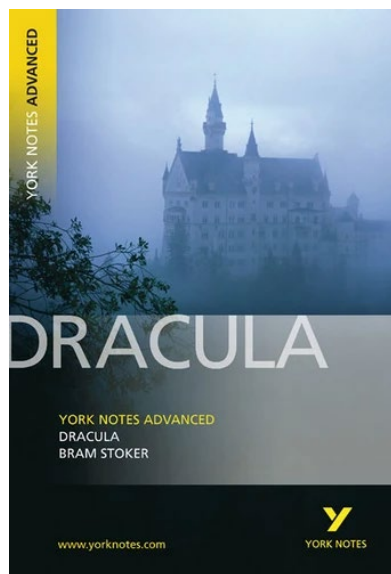
Borders, 2003

<https://www.amazon.co.uk/Dracula-Childrens-Library-Bram-Stoker/dp/Boo1DBZXBG>



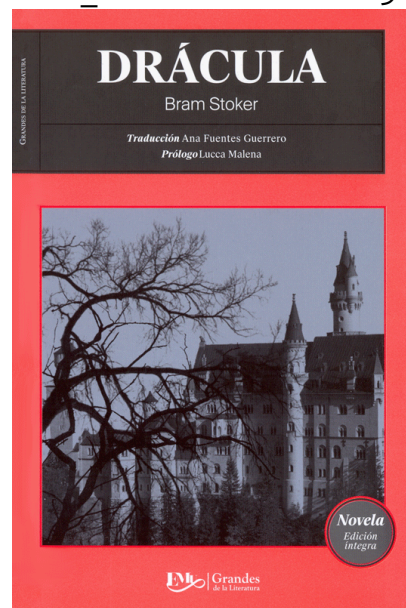
Barnes & Noble, 2003

[https://www.barnesandnoble.com/w/dracula-bram-stoker/1116610564?ean=9781593080044&st=EML&sid=OOC&2sid=201014\\_FF\\_OOC\\_B\\_F\\_DROP\\_IN&sourceId=L000032267](https://www.barnesandnoble.com/w/dracula-bram-stoker/1116610564?ean=9781593080044&st=EML&sid=OOC&2sid=201014_FF_OOC_B_F_DROP_IN&sourceId=L000032267)



Pearson Education Canada, 2006

<https://www.yorknotes.com/alevel/english-literature/dracula/overview>



Editores Mexicanos Unidos, 2014

<https://editoresmexicanosunidos.mx/catalogo/grandes-de-la-literatura-dracula/>

Thus, the castle of Neuschwanstein was the biggest competitor of Bran Castle on *Dracula* book covers, even if other buildings were sometimes used. For example, a

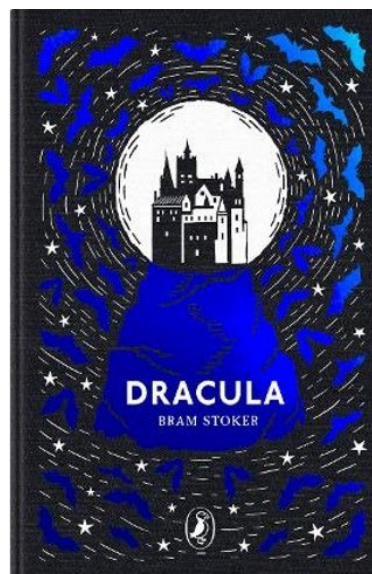
2015 edition of *Dracula* by Peacock Books features the Mont-Saint-Michel on its cover: this World Heritage Site appears in the background under a giant moon and a sky full of bats. In this case, the silhouette of the location was enough to allude to a castle, but this picture is even more distant from Transylvania than that of the castle of Neuschwanstein.

Since 2015, Bran Castle seems to have conquered a major place on the book covers of different editions of *Dracula*, usually accompanied by the moon and numerous bats.



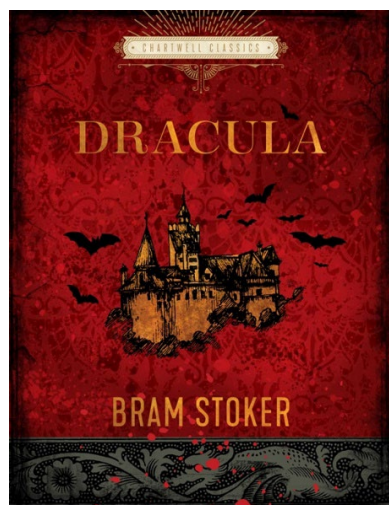
*Award Publication, 2017*

<https://www.amazon.com/DRACULA-Award-Essential-Classic-Stoker/dp/1782701834>



*Puffin Clothbound Classic, 2019*

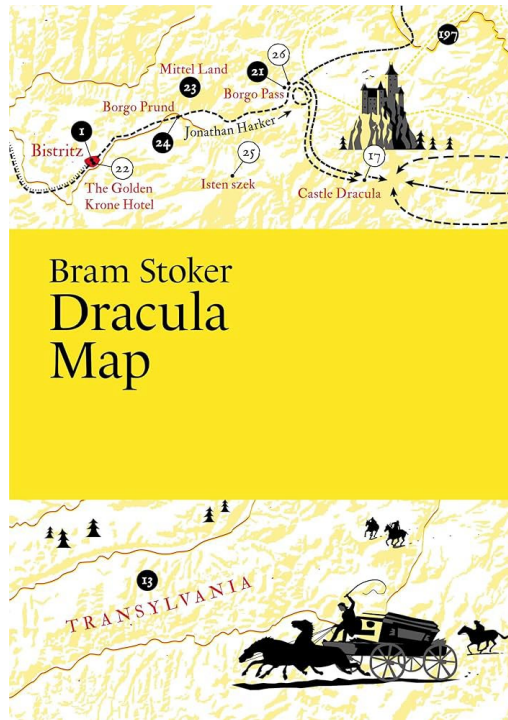
<https://www.penguin.co.uk/books/59864/dracula-by-stoker-bram/9780241411155>



*New York, Chartwell Books, 2022*

<https://www.quarto.com/books/9780785841784/dracula>

The consecration of Bran Castle as Dracula's home comes from the Bram Stoker Dracula Map published in 2024 by Paris Grafik, based in Stockholm. Located near Borgo Pass, a schematic image of Bran Castle – somewhat similar to what we can see on Ludwig Rohbock's 19<sup>th</sup>-century engraving – dominates the upper part of the map's cover.



Paris Grafik, 2024

<https://literarymaps.com/products/dracula-map>

## Conclusion

Given its location, history and literary metamorphosis, Bran Castle can be called a stronghold between worlds. Built on the border between Transylvania and Wallachia, the castle was an obligatory stop on the route of merchants, diplomats, soldiers and of many other people in the Middle Ages and early modern times. It is today a highlight at the crossroads of different tourist itineraries crossing Romania. In Vlad III's story, Bran was the scene of major changes: the voivode crossed the Carpathians under the castle's walls as a mighty prince in 1459 and started his captivity there in 1462. Between historical reality and literary fiction, Bran Castle's

silhouette – either in the vicinity of Braşov or in that of Borgo Pass – is a key feature of Transylvania’s image and can be found both on covers of Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* and on some guidebook covers of Romania edited in Western Europe. From a historical perspective, Bran Castle is a wonderful site to observe and analyse *Dracula* between pop culture and tourism.

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# “Estrange cruauté”: the emergence of Dracula’s myth through some Early Modern texts from the collections of the Bibliothèque nationale de France

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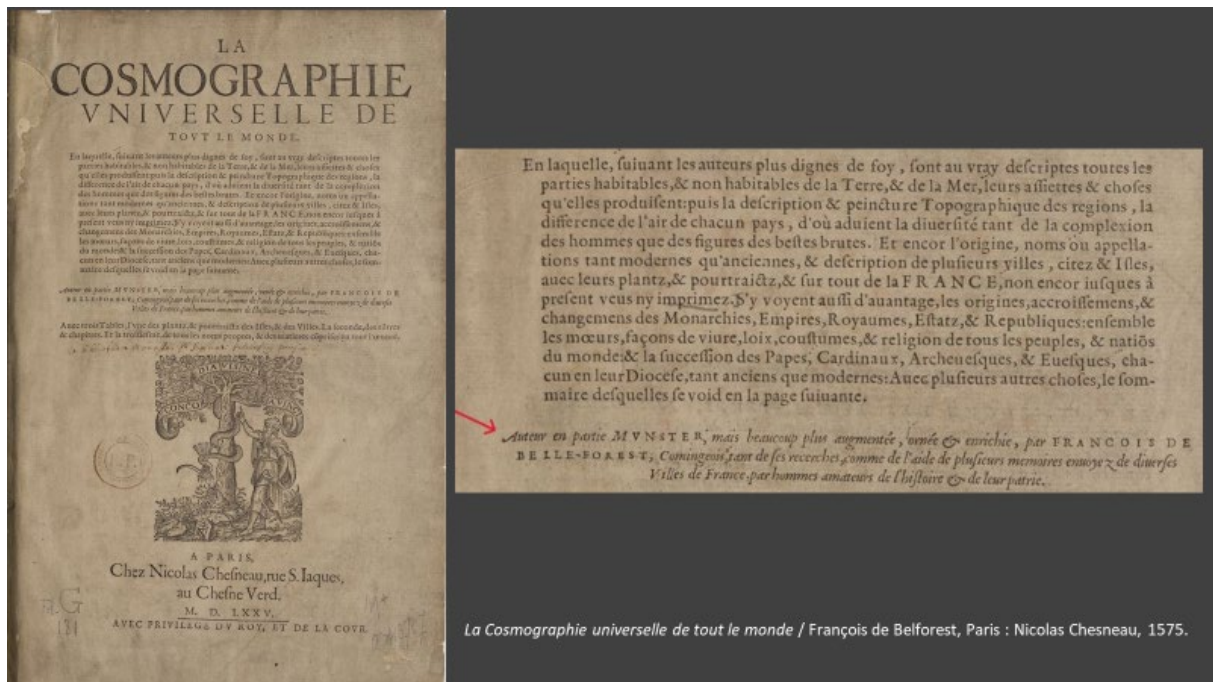


Collection, London. Her specialisms, as a scholar, are 16<sup>th</sup> century book and art collections and digital heritage collections (e.g. *Les livres d’heures imprimés de la collection du Musée national de la Renaissance*, Réunion des musées nationaux, 2017). However, she has also published within multidisciplinary teams of researchers on projects conceived on her different posts (e.g. *They Did Not Stop at Eboli: UNESCO and the Campaign against Illiteracy in a Reportage by David “Chim” Seymour and Texts by Carlo Levi (1950)*, G. Hendel, C. Naggar, K. Priem (eds.), UNESCO-De Gruyter, 2019).

In this essay, I consider the emergence of Dracula’s myth focusing on some Early Modern French texts, which are all held in the collections of the Bibliothèque nationale de France (BnF). I shall give some examples drawing on 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century editions, arguing that, by the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, a well-established Dracula’s myth was already in place, repeated throughout the 17<sup>th</sup> century, and

forming the basis for later developments leading to the well-known versions of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

As it is well known, Dracula’s myth was developed taking as starting point the historical character of Vlad III of Wallachia (1429-1476). In the collections of the BnF, we first encounter him mentioned in works of a literary genre that we could call ‘encyclopaedic’. A good example of this is the ‘Cosmographia’.



**Fig. 1.** *La Cosmographie universelle de tout le monde* / François de Belleforest.

Paris: Nicolas Chesneau, 1575.

As it can be seen from the title page in figure 1, in ‘cosmographies’ authors were undertaking no less than giving a description of the whole world from, basically, the perspective of most disciplines: geography, history, sociology, botany, etc.

This, in particular, is the 1575 edition of the *Cosmographie* by François de Belleforest (1530-1583). François de Belleforest is best known as the author of *La Pyrénée*, which is frequently regarded as the first French ‘pastoral novel’. As a matter of fact, it was actually a free interpretation/translation of the pastoral novel by Portuguese author Jorge de Montemayor, published some 10 years earlier. But this, indeed, was not

unusual for Belleforest, who, for at least a good deal of his life, gained his living by publishing *de facto* translations as if they were his own works. And this is the case, indeed, also for the *Cosmographie*. As it can be seen from the title-page, Belleforest actually acknowledges that Munster (i.e. Sebastian Münster (1489-1552)) is the “auteur en partie” / “partly the author” of this work. However, he goes on to say that “this [is] much more augmented, decorated & enriched by François de Belleforest, Comingeois, both by his research as well as with the help of several memoirs sent from various towns of France, by men fond of history & their homeland.”

The reason why I am going so much into detail about all this is because I think that this helps bring out three important points. The first one is that, ever since the beginning, Dracula makes his appearance in French literature bringing with him some kind of international luggage. The *Cosmographie* by Belleforest is, as we have seen, an adaptation of the *Cosmographia Universalis* by Sebastian Münster (1489-1552), first published in 1544. However, what Münster writes on Dracula is, in turn, taken from what Antonio Bonfini (1427-1502) wrote about Dracula in his *Historia Pannonica*, first published in 1495.

Antonio Bonfini was Matthias Corvinus’ official historiographer. It is no wonder that the picture of Vlad III we get from him (and from authors later drawing from him, such as Münster and Belleforest) is one where Vlad III’s inhuman cruelty etc. is particularly emphasized. In fact, Vlad III was made prisoner by Matthias Corvinus for fourteen years. The reasons for Vlad’s imprisonment hinged, of course, on the political and military power struggles of the period in that geographic area. However, in the *Historia Pannonica* we get, instead, almost an association cause-effect between a depiction of Vlad as some kind of sadist monster and his imprisonment.

So, to get back to Belleforest’s *Cosmographie* and to how Vlad, alias Dracula, is depicted in it, not only was this inherited from previous non-French sources, but, indeed, and this is my second point, we can see that ever since the 16<sup>th</sup> century the depiction we get of Dracula in French works comes from, in particular, previous sources where the character of Dracula as an inhuman monster began to be shaped because of historical and political reasons.

Having said that, and this is my third point, as we can see from the title-page of Belleforest's *Cosmographie*, although French sources frequently draw on non-French sources, this is somehow underplayed and what is emphasized, instead, is, so to speak, a French standpoint: “par l'aide de plusieurs memoires envoyez de diverses villes de France, par hommes amateurs de l'histoire & de leur patrie” (“with the help of several memoirs sent from various towns of France, by men fond of history & their homeland”).

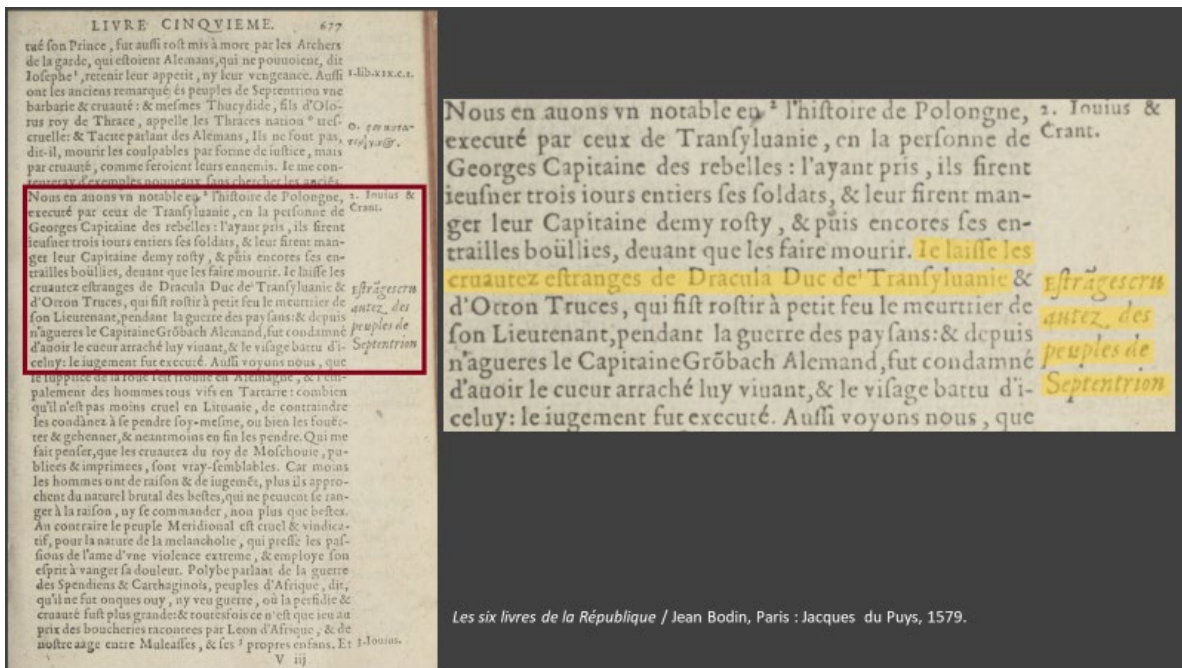


Fig. 2. *Les six livres de la République* / Jean Bodin, Paris: Jacques du Puys, 1579.

We are thus getting to another feature of the character of Dracula, as it began to emerge very early on. This is the connotation of Dracula as ‘exotic’, etymologically ‘coming from outside’, as ‘the other’, to be contrasted with the standpoint of the writer and of the writer’s culture and society. As an example of this, I would like to take the mention of Dracula in Jean Bodin’s *Six livres de la République*, of which an extract from the 1579 edition is reproduced in figure 2.

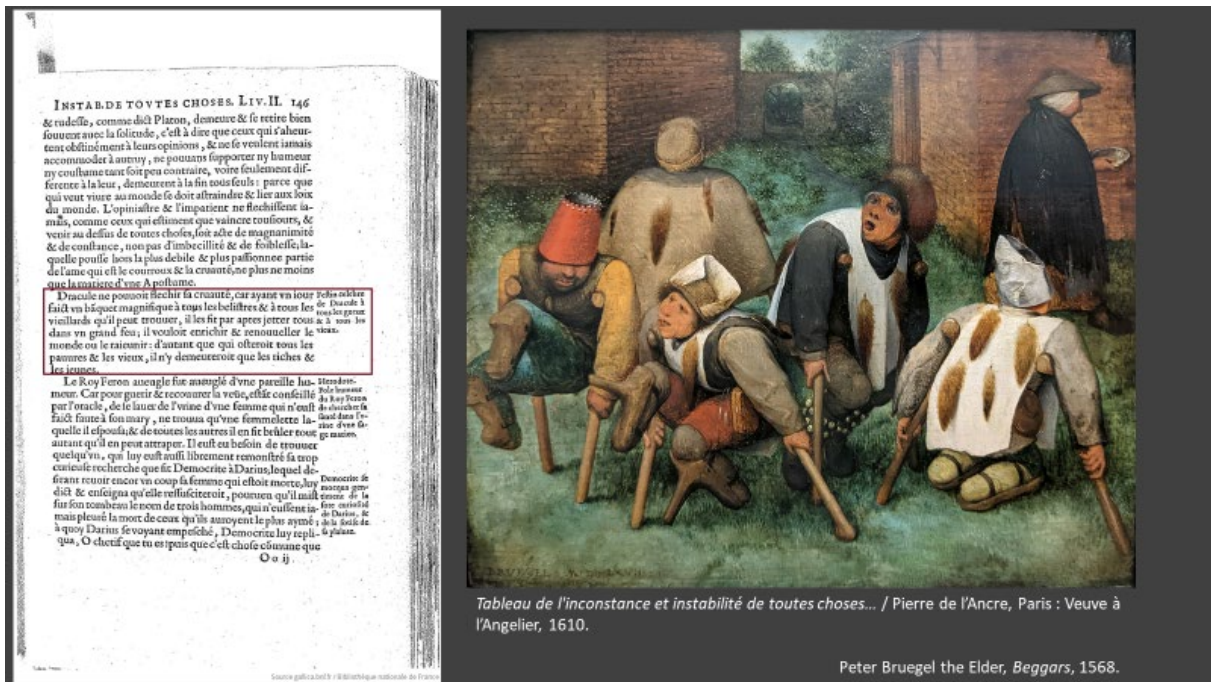
Bodin’s *Six livres de la République* is a conceptual and historical excursus on the different forms of government and on their origins. In particular, in Book V, from which the present extract is taken, Bodin sets out to show how different forms of

government take their origin from and are dependent on differences in topography, climate and populations. Here he deals with the “étrange cruauté des peuples du Septentrion”, i.e. the extraordinary cruelty of peoples from, I would translate, ‘cold’ countries rather than, literally, ‘from the North’, since Bodin will cover regions that are not, strictly speaking, further North than France itself. Moreover, I am translating the adjective “étrange” by ‘extraordinary’, given the particular context. However, note that the French term comes from the Latin term ‘extraneus’, which also means ‘foreign’. After duly citing a few classical authors, Bodin goes on to say that he will rather give some more modern examples and he picks the history of Poland, citing, in particular, the “strange deeds” carried out by the people of Transylvania, including starving for three days the troops of a rebel captain and then feeding them on him “demy rosty” (“half roasted”) and with his bowels taken out while he was still alive. Immediately after this gruesome example, he writes: “Je laisse les cruantez estranges de Dracula Duc de Transylvanie et d’Oton de Truces” (“I won’t dwell on the extraordinary cruelties of Dracula, Count of Transylvania and of Otto of Thracia”). So, once again, the term “étrange”, associated with the cruelties in question. And, although Bodin writes that he won’t dwell on them, suggesting by this, that, by the time Bodin publishes his book, i.e. 1576, Dracula’s cruelties are already very well known, as a matter of fact he cannot resist the temptation of giving some more examples, including ‘slow roasting’ (“rôtir au petit feu”) his enemy and taking his heart off while he is still alive. Here, I would like to flag out, by the way, the somehow ‘culinary’ context associated with the figure of Dracula already in these relatively early sources, which won’t fail from reminding the reader of the blood drinking of later associations. Indeed, one of the most popular early representations of Vlad/Dracula is the famous woodcut in Markus Ayrer’s 1499 pamphlet, reproduced in figure 3, showing Dracula happily dining among the impaled bodies of his victims.



**Fig. 3.** *Hie facht sich an ein graussemliche erschrockenliche hystorien von dem wilden wütrich Dracole wayde [...]. Nuremberg : Markus Ayrer, 1499.*

Besides, impaling is indeed mentioned among the “étranges cruautés” listed by Bodin. After his list, Bodin reaches the following conclusion: the “étranges cruautés” are obviously due to the fact that the perpetrators in question, so including Dracula, are not making use of reason, of their rational powers, thus ranging themselves on the side of beasts in the human/animal divide, in contraposition, clearly, to the standpoint of the writers and of his readers. So, once again, Dracula is presented as ‘the other’, as what arises amazement, horror, fear, as something “étrange”, “extraneous”, “foreign” and, in the end, evil – animality to be contraposed to the goodness of Reason.



**Fig. 4.** *Tableau de l'inconstance et instabilité de toutes choses...* / Pierre de l'Ancre, Paris : Veuve à l'Angelier, 1610.

Peter Bruegel the Elder, *Beggars*, 1568.

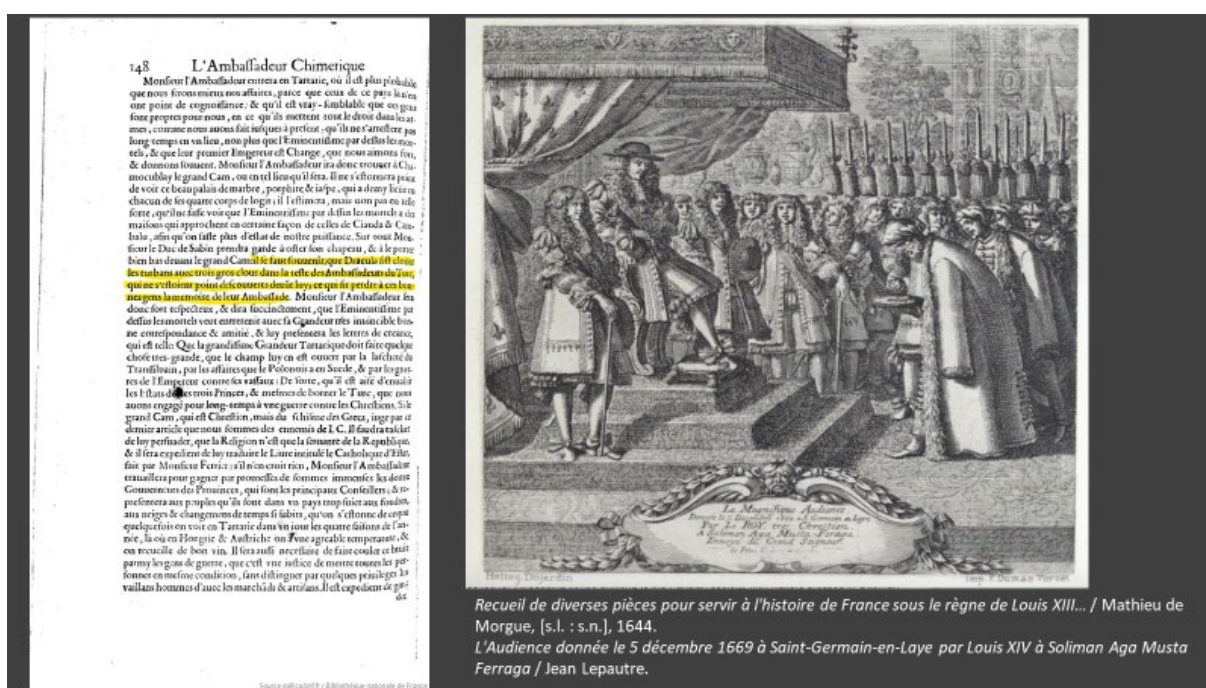
The association of Dracula's cruelty with some eating and drinking acts emerges, again, from another anecdote, in Pierre de l'Ancre's *Tableau de l'inconstance et instabilité de toutes choses...* revu et corrigé et augmenté d'un livre nouveau de *l'inconstance de toutes les nations principales d'Europe*, published in 1610 (figure 4) :

*Dracule ne pouvait fléchir sa cruauté, car ayant un jour fait un banquet magnifique à tous les belistres et à tous les vieillards qu'il put trouver, il les fit par après tous jeter dans un grand feu; il voulait enrichir et renouveler le monde ou le rajeunir: d'autant que qui osterait tous les pauvres et les vieux, il n'y demeureroit que les riches et les jeunes.*

*Dracula could not bend his cruelty, for having one day offered a magnificent banquet to all the beggars and old men he could find, he had them all thrown into a great fire; he wanted to enrich and renew the world or rejuvenate it: insofar as, by removing all the poor and the old, only the rich and the young would remain.*

Here we can also find the concept of rejuvenation, eternal youth, immortality, which, *mutatis mutandis*, will reappear later on in the myth (whether or not with also some social connotations, it remains an open question).

I would also like to point out how anecdotes are departing more and more from Vlad III's actual deeds, although exaggerated, to become mythical, entering the genre of the fable, heir, in turn, of the Classical literature *exemplum*.



**Fig. 5.** Recueil de diverses pièces pour servir à l'histoire de France sous le règne de Louis XIII... / Mathieu de Morgue, [s.l. : s.n.], 1644.

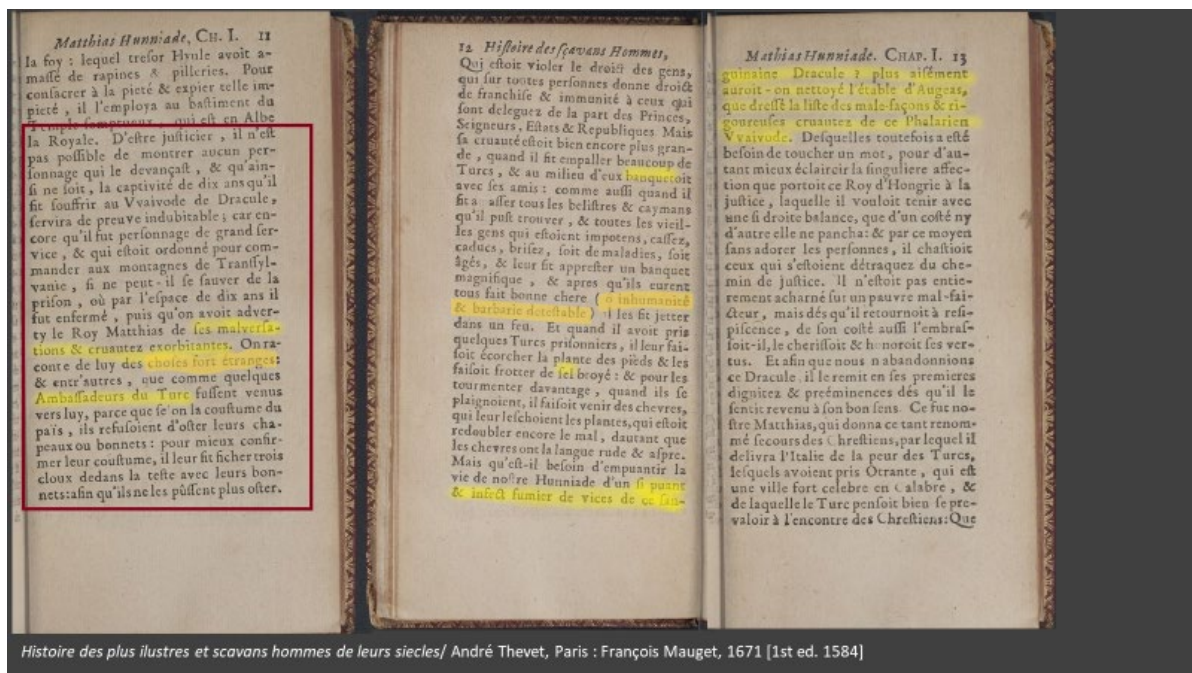
In the following example (figure 5), we can see that, by the mid-seventeenth century, almost two centuries after Vlad III's death, he has become such a famous character that writers can assume that anecdotes about him can be cited as examples with which their readership already have a certain degree of familiarity.

In fact, Mathieu de Morgue introduces the anecdote by saying « we must remember that » (“il se faut souvenir de que »)

Dracula fit clouer les turbans avec trois gros clous dans la teste des Ambassadeurs du Turc, qui ne s'étaient point découverts devant lui, ce qui fit perdre à ces bonnes gens la mémoire de leur Ambassade.

Dracula had the turbans nailed with three large nails to the heads of the Sultan's ambassadors, who had not uncovered themselves before him, causing these good people to lose the memory of their embassy.

Besides, the anecdote of the nailed turbans appears to have enjoyed quite a degree of success. We find it again, for instance, in Saunier's *Encyclopédie des beaux esprits* (1657), cited, once again, as an exemplum of cruelty, under the "cruauté" section. And, again, in Pierre de Saint-Romuald's *Éphémérides, ou Journal chronologique et historique, contenant succinctement les choses plus remarquables... avènements de jour en jour... depuis le commencement des siècles jusqu'à l'année 1664*, this time, then, featuring simply as one of the most notable events in a chronological catalogue of remarkable events "since the beginning of times" ("depuis le commencement des siècles") until the year 1644.



**Fig. 6.** *Histoire des plus illustres et scavans hommes de leurs siecles/ André Thevet, Paris : François Mauget, 1671 [1st ed. 1584]*

In André Thevet's *Histoire des plus illustres et scavans hommes de leurs siecles* (figure 6), we find the turban anecdote, together with that of the banquet amongst the impaled, and that of the banquet of the beggars. To these anecdotes, it is then added that of the skinning of the soles of the feet of his enemies, seasoning them with salt and then making them leak by goats which, as everybody knows, he points out, have their tongues rough and harsh ("rude et aspre"), so inflicting all the more pain to the tortured enemies.

Although the BnF edition dates to 1671, the original edition was actually published almost one century earlier, i.e. in 1584. Indeed, Thevet's text and 'treatment' of Dracula is very much related to the two 16<sup>th</sup> century texts we considered at the beginning, namely Belforest's *Cosmographie universelle* and Bodin's extract from his *Six livres de la République*.

Dracula, alias Vlad Țepeș, is indissociably linked to almost his *alter ego*, within some historiographic traditions, i.e. Matthias Corvinus. In fact, as we have seen, Belforest's account of Dracula was very much dependent on the account by Antonio Bonfini, Matthias Corvinus's official historiographer. And Thevet writes on Vlad Țepeș in his chapter devoted to Matthias Corvinus, once again to justify Matthias Corvinus's imprisonment of Vlad Țepeș on the 'fair' grounds of the latter's "malversations et cruautés exorbitantes" ["exorbitantly evil and cruel cruel deeds"]. Note, indeed, the same vocabulary and 'cultural viewpoint' characterising Thevet, Belforest and Bodin: les "choses estranges" (cf. Bodin's "estrange cruauté"); the totally 'uncivilized' behaviour of breaching the codes of respecting ambassadors' diplomatic immunity (the Turkish ambassadors who had their turbans nailed to their skulls); indeed, the same contraposition we saw in Bodin between the civilized world of the author and his readership, on the one hand, and the barbarity and inhumanity ("O inhumanité et barbarie detestable !") of bloodthirsty ("sanguinaire") Dracula, "this stinking, foul manure of vices" ("si puant et infecte fumier de vices").



**Fig. 7.** Hie facht sich an ein graussemliche erschrockenliche hystorien von dem wilden wütrich Dracole wayde [...]. Nuremberg : Markus Ayrer, 1499.

Équarrissage de la victime, Scène d'anthropophagie rituelle des Tupinamba, *Les singularitez de la France antarctique* / André Thevet, Paris, chez les heritiers de Maurice de La Porte, 1557.

Our journey through some Early Modern editions started in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and brought us back to it via a 17<sup>th</sup> century reedition of a 16<sup>th</sup> century work. This is no chance: it is, indeed, the character of Vlad/Dracula shaped in 16<sup>th</sup> century works, including his associated recurrent anecdotes, that got consolidated in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, and was repeated again and again in 17<sup>th</sup> century works, of which we gave some examples. And it is no chance either that we find re-editions of works such as Thevet's *Histoire*: the re-editing of them is witness to their success.



**Fig. 8.** Hie facht sich an ein graussemliche erschrockenliche hystorien von dem wilden wütrich Dracole wayde [...]. Nuremberg : Markus Ayrer, 1499.

*Dracula Untold* / Gary Shore, 2014.

Historian Pierre Monnet sees in this character the result of a propaganda by Western European kingdoms portraying him as the figure of the Eastern prince, barbarian and heretic, to which "... other layers of propaganda were added, making Vlad the embodiment of those very Eastern princes and lords of Christendom who were gradually covered over by the Ottoman presence, who were basically made into territories that had not defended their Christian faith enough, and who basically deserved their sport. Vlad ends up ticking all the boxes: satanic, bloodthirsty, nocturnal, particularly cruel, who doesn't respect his alliances. He's the token scarecrow."<sup>29</sup> As such, he will become embedded in different layers of popular culture which will then inspire Bram Stoker's novel, in turn source of inspiration for further developments in popular culture.

<sup>29</sup> 'Vlad l'Empaleur, figure du prince barbare et hérétique', radio programme broadcast on France Culture on 9th January 2023, at 10 :45 am. Available on podcast : <https://www.radiofrance.fr/franceculture/vlad-l-empaleur-figure-du-prince-barbare-et-heretique-2909778>.

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# Knocking at Death's door - John Polidori's *The Vampyre* and the dualistic representation of women in the Pre-Raphaelite imagination

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I would like to begin by thanking Florin Nechita and Marius Crisan for organizing this wonderful Blended Intensive Programme on *Dracula*. This event provides a unique opportunity to connect several scholarly interests of mine: the Gothic imagination, the Pre-Raphaelite movement, and the representation of women. In considering how to bridge these interests, it occurred to me that the most natural starting point is a family connection: the lineage connecting John Polidori to his nephew and niece, Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Christina Rossetti. Through this lens, I intend to offer a sort of guided tour of the Victorian Gothic, focusing on how these two Pre-Raphaelite artists revisited aspects of vampirism. Unlike previous discussions of “actual” vampirism, I will tackle a derivative form we might call “figurative vampirism”, exploring how the Rossettis co-branded the legacy of the vampire within the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood (PRB).

## **The Rossetti siblings**

Christina Rossetti was born in 1830 and spent her childhood reading romances by Anne Radcliffe, “Monk” Lewis and Charles Maturin. Her grandfather, Gaetano Polidori, who worked in London as an Italian teacher and translator had translated *the Castle of Otranto* into Italian and other works by John Milton. Christina’s

grandfather, Gaetano Polidori, had married Anna Maria Pierce of Middlesex, a governess, with whom he had several children (seven in all, but only four survived): their oldest son, John William Polidori, Christina and Dante Gabriel's uncle, was a doctor, and became famous as Lord Byron's physician. He is now considered as the creator of the vampire genre and fantasy fiction on the strength of one publication, *The Vampyre*, which was published in *The Monthly Magazine* 1819.<sup>30</sup> In fact, it is quite uncertain to this day why the short-story became so successful: some say it is because it was first believed that Lord Byron wrote the story but it seems the romantic poet started it and John Polidori continued it.<sup>31</sup>

The circumstances of the writing of the novella are in themselves interesting: Byron arrived at Lake Geneva in May 1819 where he met and became friends with the poet Percy Bysshe Shelley who was travelling with his future wife Mary Godwin. Byron settled at the Villa Diodati ("Villa Belle Rive", owned by a friend of Milton) with his personal physician, John William Polidori, and Shelley rented a smaller house called "Maison Chapuis" on the waterfront nearby. The group was also joined by Mary's stepsister, Claire Clairmont, with whom Byron had had an affair in London.

The weather was so cold and stormy that the members of the group decided to stay indoors and read fantastical stories, including *Fantasmagoriana*, a collection of short-stories and then started devising their own tales. Mary Goodwin (Shelley) wrote the first draft of what would later become *Frankenstein, or The Modern Prometheus*. Polidori was inspired by a fragmentary story of Byron's, *Fragment of a Novel*, and produced *The Vampyre*.

For the Rossettis, John Polidori was a memorable figure, not only because of his career as a writer but also because of his tragic death. Indeed, in 1821, he took his own life with prussic acid over gambling debts, and this was a terrible blow to the Polidori family. John Polidori's sister, Frances Rossetti (Christina and Dante Gabriel

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<sup>30</sup> See Monica Coghen, "Lord Byron and the Metamorphoses of Polidori's *Vampyre*", *Studia Litteraria Universitatis Jagellonicae Cracoviensis*, 2011, Volume 6, Issue 1, pp. 29-40.

<sup>31</sup> Skarda, Patricia L. "Vampirism and Plagiarism: Byron's Influence and Polidori's Practice." *Studies in Romanticism*, vol. 28, no. 2, 1989, pp. 249-69. JSTOR, <https://doi.org/10.2307/25600775>. Accessed 25 Feb. 2026.

Rossetti's mother), treasured the portrait of her handsome brother (now at the National Portrait Gallery<sup>32</sup>) and always displayed it in the family home. So even though John Polidori actually died years before Dante Gabriel Rossetti and his sister Christina, both of them were well aware of Polidori's life and literary works.

Dante Gabriel Rossetti, although very different from his sister, was also immersed in romanticism: as a young man, he translated Bürger's ballad, *Lenore*, from the German, a Gothic story that greatly influenced vampire literature as it involves a graveyard, a woman and a returning dead knight. Although many critics have noted that both Rossettis were influenced by the Gothic, very few of them have actually demonstrated that they developed aspects of vampirism that were already present in John Polidori's work: worse, trying to find scholarly articles dealing with Polidori's novella and the Rossettis, I only found critics claiming that Christina Rossetti had been influenced by Polidori's story of the *Vampyre* but not one stating that her brother was also influenced by it. While she certainly was just as able as Dante Gabriel to create something new (like Mary Shelley who wrote *Frankenstein* on her own), one may wonder why critics have thought her more likely to be influenced by Polidori's tale than her brother: is it because it is harder to think of a female writer tackling some of the issues running through vampire stories: blood, death, eroticism, consumption and desire? Is it because vampires have also been linked to sexual perversions and deviance, such as homosexuality and cannibalism, so that we cannot think that women would be tackling the issue?

In any case, in this article, I should like to show how both Christina and Dante Gabriel Rossetti were driven to revisit the vampiric motif and give it a singular twist – offering a dual and often contrasting view of women in their respective works.

### **John Polidori's *The Vampyre* and Christina Rossetti's *Goblin Market***

To begin with, it may be worth retracing the main storyline of the *Vampyre*: the story deals with Lord Ruthven, a dark, mysterious and yet popular nobleman who frequents the fashionable salons of London. He makes friends with Aubrey, a naïve

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<sup>32</sup> <https://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/portrait/mw05070/John-William-Polidori>

protagonist who soon finds out that Ruthven is a rake, inspiring pleasure and fear. All the people he approaches are cursed or doomed and, in a way, he is a symbol of all that is decadent in the world:

There was one circumstance about the charity of his Lordship, which was however still more deeply impressed upon his mind: all those upon whom it was bestowed, inevitably found that there was a curse upon it, for they were all either led to the scaffold, or sunk to the lowest and the most abject misery.<sup>33</sup>

As the plot unfolds, we follow Aubrey and Ruthven in their Eastern travels: they end up in Greece when Aubrey falls in love with a young and innocent Greek girl, named Ianthe. She warns Aubrey about vampires but he laughs it off and undertakes an all-day excursion in a wood supposed to be the resort of the vampires.

In pure gothic tradition, Aubrey is late in returning, a storm whips up and he must find refuge in a hovel in the woods. There, he finds that Ruthven has attacked Ianthe (what on earth was she doing there?). He hears a scream and eventually finds the dead body of Ianthe. She has blood on her breast and neck and bite marks on her throat.

Aubrey falls ill and is nursed by Ruthven. He agrees to travel again with him but Ruthven is later mortally attacked by robbers – he has Aubrey swear that he will not mention his death for a year and a day but Ruthven does not die: he is miraculously healed and reappears in London where he starts seducing Aubrey's sister. Miss Aubrey marries Ruthven but is then found dead on her wedding night, the presumed victim of a vampire.

Throughout the story, several key motifs appear, such as temptation and desire but also curiosity and redemption – all themes that are related to vampirism and will resurface in both Christina and Dante Gabriel Rossetti's poetic productions, most prominently starting with Christina Rossetti's poem *Goblin Market*, which was published in her first collection of poetry (1859).

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<sup>33</sup> The quote is taken from the online version of the story so it unpagged: <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/6087/6087-h/6087-h.htm>

As Rebecca Little has convincingly argued<sup>34</sup>, Christina Rossetti's long poem *Goblin Market* certainly uses figurative vampirism both to denounce heterosexual desire and suggest a form of intimate connection between sisters that many critics have interpreted as alluding to same sex relation. She herself dismissed it as "just a fairy story devoid of "any profound or ulterior meaning"<sup>35</sup> but criticism has persisted with it as it is still recognized today as one of the most enigmatic poems of the Victorian age. It has been variously read as a straightforward fairy story, a parable of temptation, a sexual fantasy... but never quite as a vampire story.

Dedicated to Dante and Christina's sister, Maria, "Goblin Market" deals with two sisters, Laura and Lizzie, who are being tempted by goblins as they are on their way to fetch water. Lizzie warns Laura not to listen to them and turns away, reminding her sister that their sister Jeanie, who had succumbed to the Goblins' appeal and eaten of the goblin fruit, had wasted away and died. Laura, however, ends up buying their fruit, giving away a lock of hair in exchange for the precious food. Soon after, her health starts deteriorating and Laura witnesses her obsession with the goblins' figs and plums. In a desperate attempt to save her sister, Laura returns to the goblin men that only she can hear and offers to buy their fruit while resisting joining their party. She then resists the evil creatures' assaults and makes her way home, her mouth and face smeared with fruit juices. In a very memorable scene, she encourages her sister to feed off her face, hoping that it will revert the ill fate and operate as an antidote:

'Hug me, kiss me, suck my juices.

Squeezed from goblin fruits for you,

Goblin pulp and goblin dew (l.468-469)

Eat me, drink me, love me; Laura, make much of me". (ll. 430-432)

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<sup>34</sup> Little, Rebecca '20 (2020). "Homoerotic Vampirism in "Goblin Market" and Carmilla," *Furman Humanities Review*: Vol. 31, Article 16.

<sup>35</sup> Quoted in PLOURDE, AUBREY. "The Innocent Old Way: Reserved Interpretation and Christina Rossetti's 'Goblin Market.'" *PMLA*, vol. 134, no. 5, 2019, pp. 1076-93, p. 1076, *JSTOR*, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27037517>. Accessed 25 Feb. 2026.

Laura does as she is asked and Lizzie spends the night looking after her. When dawn comes, Laura has been restored to her former self, with her hair once again gleaming and golden, showing a process of regeneration akin to the one seen in *Dracula*. Later, when the grown girls have become mothers, they tell the story to their own children and the final line of the poem goes: “For there is no friend like a sister, In calm or stormy weather” (l.562) – a line often seen on current day postcards.

Quite clearly then, the main themes of the poem revolve around temptation and seduction themes as well as individual sacrifice and saving grace.<sup>36</sup> Besides, several aspects of the story may remind us of Polidori’s *The Vampyre*.

First, in the very action of the goblins who are vampiric: they give strange, exotic fruits to young women who become drained, languid and bloodless. Second, the victim is a young naïve but curious young woman who is saved by her sister’s exposure and resistance to the goblins. Finally, Lizzie and Laura can also be seen as doubles of the same woman or two sides of the same coin.

Indeed, in Victorian criticism, the sisters have often been read as participants in the Manichean struggle between the saintly Victorian woman (Coventry Patmore’s *The Angel in the House*) and her sensuous “Other”: the Fatal woman, the *New Woman*, the Free woman who rejects status quo in favour of a monstrous Gothic world of desire and morbid sexuality. In a sense, we, as readers, can either view the goblin as vampiristic figures to be resisted or envisage that Lizzie has become a vampire herself.

To conclude, we can say that Christina Rossetti’s *Goblin Market* reuses an aspect of the vampire and articulates it with notions of the Victorian ideal of womanhood: what happens when Laura consumes the fruit is a form of reverse transformation – a doppelgänger process in which the woman confronts her desirous other self which allows her to overcome temptation.

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<sup>36</sup> A lot of valuable criticism has been published on the poem and some of them are summed up in Georges Letissier’s article: George Letissier, « *Goblin Market* de Christina G. Rossetti : « sororité » et tentations d’innocence », *Cahiers victoriens et édouardiens* [En ligne], 59 Printemps | 2004, mis en ligne le 01 avril 2025, consulté le 24 février 2026.

However, when we look at the illustration of *Goblin Market* by Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1862), we can see that his interpretation brings out the most subversive aspect of the poem. Indeed, Rossetti's two vignettes represent two key moments: in the first one, the girls are sleeping and we see Laura is dreaming of the Goblin men. In the other, we witness Laura making her initial exchange for goblin fruit by cutting a lock of her hair. In Dante Gabriel Rossetti's visual interpretation, both women look alike, implying that they could just be two sides of the same person. In that case, the danger embodied by the Goblins is just an external manifestation of an inner struggle that every young woman is faced with. Seen in that light, Christina's poem appears as a strikingly visual example of the antagonistic representation of women that was common in the Victorian period and that we find in Dante Gabriel Rossetti's own poetic and artistic production.

### **Dante Gabriel Rossetti's representation of women – from muse to vampire?**

The most obvious example of this dualistic representation of women either as idealized or demonized is to be found in a very long unfinished poem by Dante Gabriel Rossetti entitled "Jenny" (1870) that tells the story of a young girl who has fallen into prostitution. The poem has often been compared with "*Goblin Market*" because of the way it also articulates the dual nature of women by merging the two female figures into one. In the course of the poem, the narrator is looking at the young woman who has fallen asleep and remarks:

Just as another woman sleeps!  
Enough to throw one's thoughts in heaps  
Of doubt and horror, – what to say  
Or think, – this awful secret sway,  
The potter's power over the clay!  
Of the same lump (it has been said)  
For honour and dishonour made,  
Two sister vessels. Here is one.

Jenny, he says, reminds him of his cousin Nell, who is pure and draws the comparison between the two by saying:

Of the same lump (as it is said)  
For honour and dishonour made,  
Two sister vessels. Here is one.

It makes a goblin of the sun.  
So pure, – so fall'n! How dare to think  
Of the first common kindred link?  
Yet, Jenny, till the world shall burn  
It seems that all things take their turn;

The very expression of the “goblin” ties in D.G. Rossetti’s and Christina Rossetti’s poems together, and critics have often read *Jenny* in parallel to *Goblin Market* because of the way women and sex economy are represented in both works. Taken together, the two poems emphasize the danger women run when exposed to the “other” – whether it be a supernatural being or even a real person. Looking at Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s own stance towards the women he used as muse and sitter, his sister Christina was also quick to note that the commodification of women through art could also lead the male painter to develop vampirical features by “feeding” off them. This is what she writes:

One face looks out from all his canvases,  
One selfsame figure sits or walks or leans  
We found her hidden just behind those screens,  
That mirror gave back all her loveliness.  
A queen in opal or in ruby dress,  
A nameless girl in freshest summer-greens,  
A saint, an angel; --every canvas means  
The same one meaning, neither more nor less.

*He feeds upon her face by day and night,*  
And she with true kind eyes looks back on him  
Fair as the moon and joyful as the light:  
Not wan with waiting, not with sorrow dim;  
Not as she is, but was when hope shone bright;  
Not as she is, but as she fills his dream.<sup>37</sup>

The woman she is referring to in this poem is Dante Gabriel Rossetti's young muse – Lizzie Siddal – the most famous pre-Raphaelite model – the epitome of self-sacrifice. Indeed, as is well-known, the poet-painter's ambivalent relationship to the young girl he met and eventually married after a long engagement period, all the while often betraying her with other female models (among whom Jane Burden, William Morris's wife) provides another prism through which to view Rossetti's figurative vampirism. The young woman's tragic death after an overdose of laudanum in February 1862 and her dramatic disinterment in 1869 (initiated by Rossetti himself as he meant to retrieve a book of poems he had buried in her coffin in a romantic gesture of love and guilt) reinforced the perception that Rossetti might have been instrumental in her increasingly depressed and morbid condition. Although reclaimed today as an artist in her own right, Siddal still remains in the collective imagination as the artist depicted her in her art works – either as a pale-looking and subdued woman – an idealized vision of womanhood – or else as a spirit or a ghost, a martyred female body was supposedly untouched by death (as Rossetti's friends who had exhumed the poet's manuscript claimed).

Indeed, as early as 1862, Dante Gabriel Rossetti features Elizabeth Siddal in a spooky drawing: "How they met themselves" showing a couple in the forest: as she sees herself, the woman flinches and looks terrified. Seeing oneself here is a bad omen – foreshadowing one's death. Again and again, Rossetti depicts Siddal in portraits where she appears gradually paler and more death-like – or, in Christina Rossetti's words "wan with waiting". In this case, the vampirical figure is not so much the woman as the painter himself who sucks the life out of his models.

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<sup>37</sup> Italics mine

One poem in particular, entitled *The Portrait* (1869) illustrates the kind of transaction at stake in the very act of painting, a sonnet where the poet insists on the quasi-mystical aspect of painting a portrait:

O Lord of all compassionate control,  
O Love! let this my lady's picture glow  
Under my hand to praise her name, and show  
Even of her inner self the perfect whole:  
That he who seeks her beauty's furthest goal,  
Beyond the light that the sweet glances throw  
And refluent wave of the sweet smile, may know  
The very sky and sea-line of her soul.

Lo! it is done. Above the enthroning throat  
The mouth's mould testifies of voice and kiss,  
The shadowed eyes remember and foresee.  
Her face is made her shrine. Let all men note  
That in all years (O Love, thy gift is this!)  
They that would look on her must come to me.

While the octave of the sonnet evokes the deference the artist feels towards the model while contemplating her model, the sestet turns to the effect of the very act of painting. The expressions “Lo it is done” and “the face is made her shrine” sound as if the very act of painting were a criminal gesture, intent on reducing the muse to silence. At the same time, the final sentence reads like a riddle as the pronoun “me” may refer to the painting or to the painter.

Another example in Dante Gabriel Rossetti's artistic production showing the vampirical and erotic transaction between painter, model and viewer is to be found in a very famous portrait of another of Rossetti's muses, Fanny Cornforth, called “Bocca Bacciata” (1859), in which we see him transition from his earlier style to a later, more colorful painting style. The theme of the painting refers to Boccaccio's *Decameron* story of the young Alatiel who has passed from hand to hand before returning to her husband. In the story, her eroticized mouth is said to have become

renewed through kisses: “A kissed mouth doesn’t lose its freshness for like the moon it always renews itself”. Here, legend has it that the painting’s owner used to kiss it<sup>38</sup> as if the boundaries between reality and art had been blurred, enhancing the sensuous experience of painting a woman so as to literally consume her through touch and sight.

However, the conjunction of the representation of a beautiful woman, the ambivalent gesture of the artist and the woman’s dual nature as a muse and a seductive femme fatale reaches a climax in Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s most complex set of works about Lilith – the ancient snake woman in the Bible. From the drawing “Eden Bower” showing the figure of Lilith entwined by a snake to the various versions of the painting of *Lady Lilith* (the 1867 version, a watercolour and gouache painting, actually features Fanny Cornforth too), the ambivalent nature of woman as victim and evil creature returns. As in Christina Rossetti’s *Goblin Market*, ambiguity is key as the poet-painter acknowledges woman’s power to love, kill and redeem.

### **Conclusion and a speculation**

Toward 1880, Bram Stoker moved next door to Dante Gabriel Rossetti in London. By that time, the Polidori story of *The Vampyre* had been translated and widely circulated and the “Lizzie” legend was rampant: Sensational stories relating to Lizzie’s immortal state and rumours that her ghost was haunting Highgate cemetery may have inspired Stoker’s Lucy, even more stunning in death than when alive. From Polidori to Stoker, the missing link may be that every so subtle but powerful Rossetti connection – a testimony to the family’s important contribution to Victorian popular culture, myth and imagination.

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<sup>38</sup> Cf *The Correspondence of Arthur Hughes and Dante Gabriel Rossetti*, 2:288n2.

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# Unexpected Romania: Reflections after BIP Dracula Between Pop Culture and Tourism

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Hi! I'm Lida, I'm a Colombian student from University of Zaragoza. I am attending a PhD degree in Laws oriented in public laws. My passions are reading a lot of books, trekking and cats. My experience with BIP was breathtaking. I found myself captivated by the local people, and the picturesque vistas of Transylvania.

«My friend: (...)

*I trust that your journey from London has been a happy one, and that you will enjoy your stay in my beautiful land.*

*-Your friend,*

*Dracula.»<sup>39</sup>*

Romania is not a country the kind of country I had in mind. Certainly, is a place so far away of my home and that in my mind lived like an abstract idea, surreal, closer to a literary place than a real country.

In a certain moment, you have created an elevated level of expectation about it. The preexisting relationship between Dracula's myth with this distant land is a great

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<sup>39</sup> Stoker, p. (1897, p. 14)

incentive for to go, but it becomes evident that Romania is not a prominent destination that one would anticipate when formulating a European tour. However, thanks to the experience offered by the Transylvania University of Braşov in the frame of our BIP, today I can say that it is a tourist destination that has everything to offer and a lot to exploit.

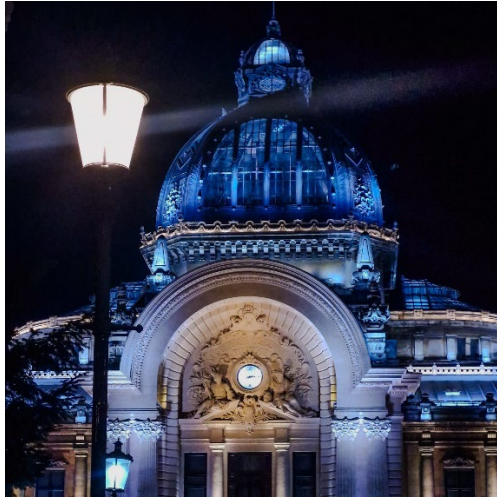
Undoubtedly, I was expecting than the aesthetic of the country would be dark and gothic, in alignment with the traditional Halloween theme and the mass marketing strategies of the western. When I arrived at Bucharest the surprises had just started: I observed a fashionable city. The first point to consider is the similarities between Bucharest and Paris. A preliminary urban analysis reveals to us the presence of an «Arc de Triomphe», a imponent building for the Parliamentary institution and some similarity of some of its avenues to the Champs Elysées in Paris.

Another particularity was the shared space: the flat facades of the flat facades of the buildings that were part of the communist period coexisting with others inspired by art nuouveau and baroque, being accomplices of the Parisian-style café terraces where Romanian is spoken with insistence: The city is the mother of the one magnificent architectonical fusion that offer us one inspiring testimony of one resilient country thought historical transformations.

The Romanian capital city is a point of cultural meeting, where the mix is the queen. It was showed a non-static community: At one point, I found myself surrounded by a man who was playing in a violin “One Summer’s Day”<sup>40</sup>, of a grandmother dressed in a traditional Romanian costume holding her grandson by the hand, the ambience of a Parisian terrace and an Orthodox temple, interwoven with the essence of Romania, serve as a testament to the cultural fusion that characterizes the nation.

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<sup>40</sup> This song is part of the movie Spirited Away of the Studio Ghibli.



It is not about only its architecture or the magical corners of its streets: the gastronomic experience does not lag behind! Romania is delicious, and this is the main reason you should be willing to put on weight: Dishes like mamaliga with mushrooms or Sarmale are the must when you visit Romania, although the desserts and candies are amazing!

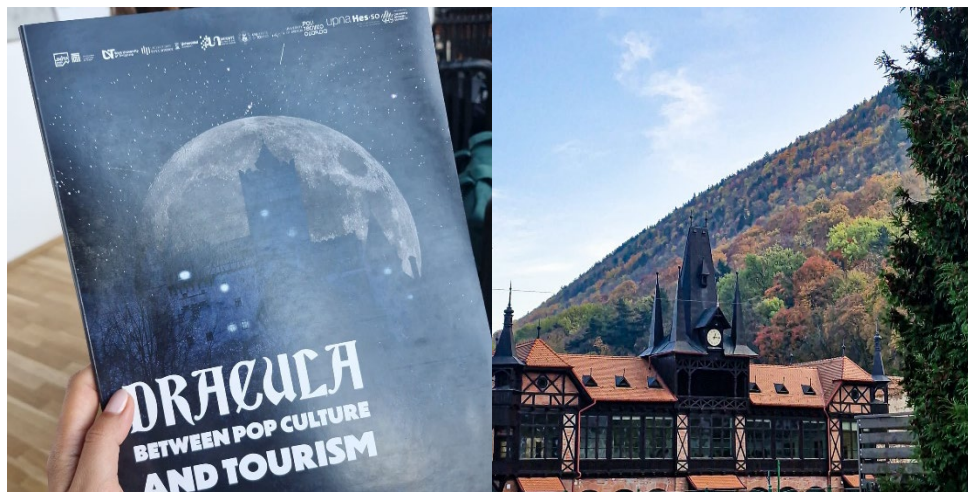


However, the main course was waiting for us: Transylvania.

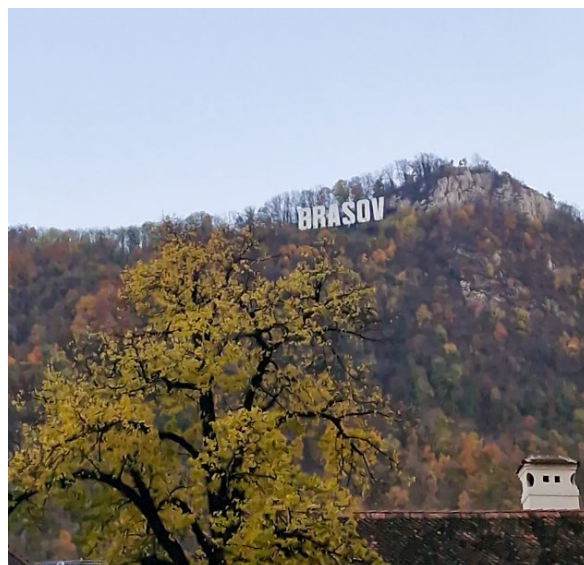
Before the this BIP, my knowledge of Transylvania was extremely limited, and I associated it with a timeless place where people were frightened by the vampire and looked for ways to isolate or condemn him, as depicted in popular culture (I carried my crucifix, just in case). I was aware of the existence of the house of Dracula, a mythological and deeply romantic being, a misunderstood one. The desire to locate the footsteps of Dracula was the impetus for me.

With this in mind, we took the train from Bucharest to Braşov. We counted on a good omen: The views of the autumnal forest with their ochre and orange trees were inspiring, and Romania's landscapes have a mystical veil that grips you! Between the views of the trees and mountains, your thoughts slip away, you can sleep lulled by the sounds of the train, admire the students coming and going from the university to their homes and soothe yourself with the calm that seems to take over everything.

It was 28th October. Already in Transylvania the adventure began: Our BIP Dracula Between Pop Culture and Tourism was about to start!



A perfect time for the Children of the Night Congress! Braşov's atmosphere was embellished by the clear skies that matched its Hollywood-style sign!



After a tour of Bram Stoker's book, the influence of French and German traditions and Dracula's relationship with Vlad Țepeș through very profound lectures, we went on an urban trek through Brașov in search of Dracula's footsteps. All the participants, without knowing each other in person before this BIP, started to become friends: the magnetism of Dracula and the warmth of the Romanians unite people around the world!



Some about our urban trekking: All the participants, students of different grades, disciplines, ages, professors, all different backgrounds, of diverse nationalities and mother tongue, have the same intentions for learning about this land profoundly linked with vampire stories<sup>41</sup>. That was the basis of a bond that has transcended: we were all forced to confront our own limitations and open ourselves to receiving the possibilities that Brasco generously gave us, a richness that can only be appreciated when we genuinely connect with others.



We went on a tour for the nooks and crannies that only the locals know in depth in their city, and that's why we were there! Around the streets that shelter the people of Brașov there is a medieval aesthetic surrounded by an environment full of nature that captures you. Moreover, in the Piața Sfatului you can see a symbol that represents the spirit of the city: its coat of arms, which, through the roots of a tree with a royal crown, highlights that it is

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<sup>41</sup> « With the recent rebirth of Gothic narratives, Transylvania has become again one of the favourite locations of vampire stories.» (Crisan, 2016, p. 45)

made up of diverse nationalities and cultures, but that it has always honoured its roots. So, I am fully surprised when I saw that in downtown is located the Black Church! Its name was given by a fire in 1689. It is obligatory to turn around and look at it in all its dimensions. If you want to admire it in peace and quiet, I recommend spending some time on the terraces of the nearby coffee shops.



The streets of Braşov kept opening up before our eyes, filling us with new experiences through a city where centuries of history converge, flooded with multicultural diversity. The cobbled streets showed us the traces left by Hungarians, Germans and Ottomans, who in different ways shaped the city's identity.

At every turn you could discover facades with architectural details that spoke of a vibrant past, while the shop windows invited you to lose yourself. All kinds of shops were scattered along the route: cosy restaurants, bookshops full of stories waiting to be discovered, and antique shops where time seemed to stand still, offering objects that silently told the story of Romanian history.

Walking through the local shops, however, it becomes clear that there are underestimated business opportunities that can attract tourist spending: the supply of authentic souvenirs, locally made or designed, especially those related to the Dracula myth or capturing the essence of Romanian traditions, is limited. Despite Braşov's rich culture and history, most of the available souvenirs seem to be mass-produced “made in China” rather than locally handcrafted.

There is considerable difficulty in accessing memorabilia that reflects Romanian art or customs, or even the local perception of Count Dracula and his relationship with Vlad Țepeș. The shelves are full of repetitive items that, lacking an authentic connection to the country's cultural heritage, perpetuate the stereotype of the vampire inherited from popular culture and cause discomfort in certain sectors of the population.

Tourists are naturally curious and always want to know more about the places they visit. This can be exploited by the niche of tourists interested in the mystery and legend of Dracula who travel to Romania. However, in the absence of an alternative offer, the tourist lacks the means to understand that Romania goes beyond what Bran Stoker depicted in his work or what has been told through Western cinematic or cultural references. This is an opportunity for local craftspeople, artists and marketing and tourism professionals to enrich the experience of the visitor, who is usually looking for a meaningful souvenir to take home, such as Saxon pottery.

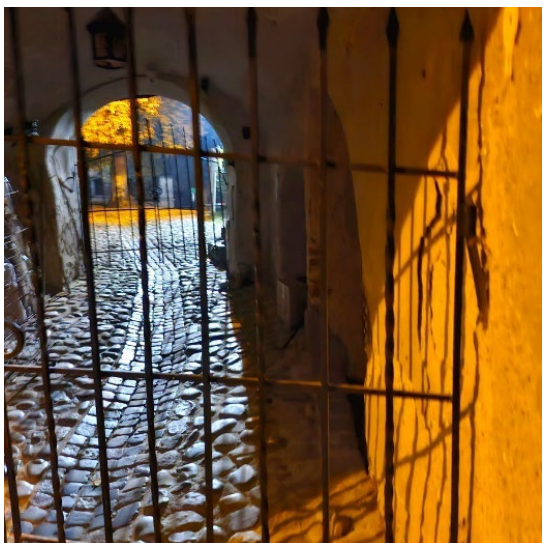


During our journey, it was possible to observe the presence of a character characterized by his discretion: the cat. In the city of Brașov, cats move freely, looking at distracted passers-by, keeping a mysterious distance and taking an evasive stance towards any uncalculated approach. This behaviour suggests that we humans are part of a vast arena in which cats allow us to roam their territory, acting as the city's true hosts.

In the course of our search for Dracula, we made our way to Sighișoara, whereby the time we arrived, twilight was beginning to cast its shadow over the city, making the journey through its streets an experience of the imagination.

Walking through the city, we came across the house where Vlad Țepeș was born, which has been transformed into a themed café, testifying to the fusion of fiction and reality. The atmosphere of the place is perceived as a quest to satisfy the expectations of visitors who long to find spaces that reflect the image of the fictional character disseminated by the mass media.

This initiative, which is met with divergent opinions, is an attraction that positions Sighișoara in the attention of tourists, but it is possible to enrich this experience. It is plausible to reconcile the « Instagrammability of the horror experience » with other mechanisms that educate the viewer in the distinction between Vlad and the Count, allowing the focus of attention (the myth) to be the gateway for the dissemination of local heritage. It is feasible to reconcile the character of Bran with Romanian history.



In our search for Dracula, we made one of the most iconic stops: Bran Castle. It was built in 1377. First of all, it is an imposing castle with pointed ends, situated on the top of a mountain, which gives it a unique magnetism. This medieval fortress allows you to imagine the life of the Count in this place, but, in fact, Dracula's Castle is not a Bran Castle. It is theorised that this is a fictitious construction that in certain characteristics is so similar with the real Castle.



Dracula is the starter, the culture and the people are the main course. And this is demonstrated by his castle. It is an example of how myth gives way to real history. Although Bran Stoker did not visit Romania, he drew inspiration from it, which led to Bran Castle becoming associated with the residence of Count Dracula<sup>42</sup>. However, the curator of the castle takes advantage of the opportunity to tell the story of the Teutonic Knights, through the restoration work conducted by Queen Maria of Romania, who rebuilt one of the residences of the royal family, to the present day.

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<sup>42</sup> «Dracula's Castle as imagined by Bram Stoker is undoubtedly a fictional building. Much has been written about his sources of inspiration, but the only conclusion that can be drawn is that this imaginary castle is a mixture of what Bram Stoker saw, what he read and what he imagined » Crisan, p. (2016, p. 47).

However, the design of the visit to the castle is aimed at the adult public, leaving out one of the most important segments, children and teenagers, who set guidelines for family consumption. This is an excellent opportunity to enrich a personalised tourist offer that can create loyalty among consumers of Romanian experiences. They can return later, as adults, having created important memories. In general, adults do not return to a museum once they have exhausted it, and if they do, it is in a minimal proportion, either because of a specific interest or because they are waiting for temporary exhibitions that represent a significant novelty.

The museum experience focused on foreign adults is a breakthrough, but it can evolve to attract other types of tourism, creating a co-creative narrative focus for the youngest visitors based on digital and interactive strategies with the use of gamification or the establishment of creative workshops, for example<sup>43</sup>. Such strategies can make the visit more fun and memorable and capture the attention of children and their families. A person who experienced a significant impact as a child is likely to repeat the experience as an adult with their children.

While these kinds of complex challenges require resources, especially human talent, there are diverse ways to approach them. One way to overcome this barrier is through the linking of international academia, which, together with other actors such as the government<sup>44</sup> and communities, can participate in the collective construction of projects that strengthen identity through interdisciplinarity and interculturality, always with respect for Romanian traditions. Areas such as economics, business administration, tourism, marketing and law can contribute visions and tools to adapt the cultural richness forged around the figures of Vlad Țepeș and Count Dracula to innovative narratives, in line with a realistic image of the country and aligned with European values.

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<sup>43</sup> Should more information be required about gamification in tourism, the reader is directed to Luque & Correa (2017) and Xu et al. (2013).

<sup>44</sup> « Each state will encourage and support forms of tourism that accord with, and affirm, its sense of its own cultural and political identity. Therefore, the representation of local cultures is a political act. » Light, p. (2007, p. 747)

While not a peaceful issue, the acceptance of Dracula's link to Romanian territories, customs and population can be the gateway to show tourists the true face of an amazing nation, creating a robust economic sector that impacts on the local quality of life. I speak in this way because Romania has completely changed my mind: it is a destination that takes your breath away, but not because of the terror. As you travel through it, you realise that imagination falls short of the vast wealth it has to share with the world: it is a beautiful land to enjoy. In short, Romania is not what I expected, it is even better!

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# Insights from the Exchange with the Transilvania University of Braşov for the Formulation of Public Policies on Responsible Tourism in European Mountain Destinations

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Hello! I am a recent PhD graduate of the Doctorate program in Sociology and Public Policy at the University of Zaragoza. My areas of work are sociology and social and cultural anthropology. I was fascinated by Romania's natural and cultural wealth, the authenticity of the places we visited, and the warm welcome of its people.



*Welcome to my house. Come freely.*

*Go safely; and leave something of the happiness you bring.*

— Bram Stoker, Dracula

## **Introduction and theoretical framework: Recovery of mountain tourist destinations in a new post-COVID-19 context**

After the exit of the health crisis by COVID-19, we find a situation of recovery of the tourism sector at different levels according to the countries. Europe is at the head of the global recovery (the last is Asia and Pacific), with a recuperation of 78.5% in 2023 as the main destination receiving international visitors (UNWTO, n.d.). In their analysis of the tourism situation in 2022, many experts surveyed by UNWTO (65%) also believe that international tourism will not return to 2019 levels until 2024 or later. However, countries such as Spain have broken their own tourism records

through 2023 (Tourspain, 2024; Ministry of Industry and Tourism, Government of Spain, 2024).

In its postulates, the European Union is working towards a Sustainable Europe by the 2030 horizon for the period 2021-2027. This European ecological and digital transition encompasses all sectors of the economy, including tourism. The EU has a Green Pact adopted in 2020 to achieve a sustainable economy by 2050. This Pact affects all countries as it strives to adapt EU policies on climate, energy, transport and taxation to the objective of reducing net greenhouse gas emissions by at least 55 % in the short term by 2030 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, European Union and Cooperation, 2023). The EU Member States are among the best performers within the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

To achieve this change towards sustainability, a more responsible tourism is proposed. But what is responsible tourism? Although this term has been around since the dawn of tourism, it was coined especially during the pandemic years. It is associated with sustainable tourism in the Global Code of Ethics for Tourism adopted in 1999 by the General Assembly of UN Tourism. But responsible tourism goes a step further, it is defined as a commitment to the environment that “starts from assuming and demanding responsibilities from all the actors associated with tourism so that the impact on travel is only positive and beneficial to local populations” (Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Tourism of Colombia, 2024). It is understood to affect all tourism stakeholders: tourists, businesses and residents. The contribution of governments to responsible tourism and management of tourism destinations are two important aspects with gaps in the academic literature, more focused on the role of the responsible tourist (Schoenherr, 2024).

Mountain destinations can contribute to the development of a more responsible and sustainable tourism through the protection of nature, the development of culture, local identity and the preservation of historical and artistic heritage. Some examples of these more responsible modalities that we highlight are ecotourism (especially linked to the rural environment), slow travel, cultural and gastronomic tourism, wine tourism... In addition, during the COVID-19 we emphasized a tourism of proximity and avoid overcrowded destinations for fear of contagion and prioritize health safety.

In places like Spain, where tourism has been growing steadily in recent years, measures are needed to tackle problems such as overcrowding and coexistence between locals and tourists. This not only affects traditional sun and beach destinations, but also extends to countryside's and mountain destinations such as the Pyrenees. The problem of mass tourism leads to other social problems such as rising prices in the rental or sale of housing, reducing the possibilities of residents to access the real estate market. It is for this reason that public and social policy proposals in tourism are necessary for the recovery of the sector and the improvement of society. Thus, this work is justified, with the aim of achieving a balance and responsible development of local and international tourism.

### **Objectives**

The main objective is to gather ideas from the exchange in Romania in order to generate public policies that contribute locally to the responsible development of cross-border and European mountain tourism. To achieve this, several secondary objectives have been set:

- To observe on the ground how tourism works locally (take notes, photographs, talk to people).
- To identify good tourism practices during the exchange in Romania.
- To integrate different approaches and strategies of several European mountain tourism destinations (Pyrenees and Transylvania).

### **Methodology**

The context of the research is the BIP exchange 'Dracula Between Pop Culture and tourism' organised by the University of Transylvania (Romania) during several online sessions and the presential activity in the period from 28 October to 1 November 2024. The Combined Intensive Programmes promoted by UNITA seek to strengthen teaching through an international experience and to weave academic networks between the different European mountain universities that adhere to the alliance. The purpose of this exchange with Romania is the continuous training of students in the field of sociology and tourism, paying special attention to the figure of Dracula as the country's main tourist attraction. The work culminates in the publication of

this scientific article, which is based on the approach of the sociology of tourism and social and cultural anthropology, using qualitative methods for the elaboration of the results.

The topic studied is closely related to the own doctoral thesis on society, culture and heritage in inland destinations (whether rural or urban) as the central Pyrenees. This is why it has been decided to include the lessons learned from this stay in the broader study of the doctoral thesis given its international character, and the possibility of learning first-hand about tourism management in other similar European destinations. The methodology used by the doctoral student throughout the stay consists mainly of fieldwork. Throughout the physical stay, notes and photographs were taken, and exchanges were held with the locals. We are therefore talking about participant observation in the field. Observation is a basic method in qualitative research (Álvarez-Gayou-Jurgenson et al., 2016) that allows us to ‘carefully observe the phenomenon, fact or case, collect information and record it for subsequent analysis’ (Díaz, 2010, p.18). We rely on observation to obtain and contrast more precise information. According to Olaz (2024), observing is more than just looking and ‘is related to trying to understand the motivations, behaviour and reactions of a group, to interpret the space in which it takes place and the time in which it develops’.

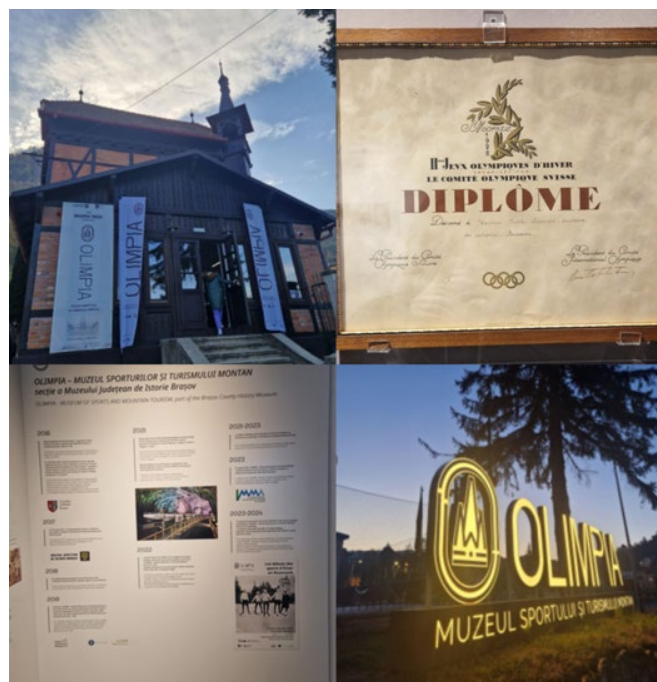
Based on observation and the collection of notes in a field diary, a synthesis of the information was carried out, in which we tried to integrate all the elements in a coherent way to combine and create proposals that will later be adapted to the Pyrenean context by means of a policy matrix. To systematise the data, the most appropriate and inspiring scenarios of the stay in Braşov have been selected. This includes lectures by experts, sightseeing tours of the city and nearby villages (Braşov, Rupea Citadel, Viscri and Saschiz villages, Sighişoara, Bran Castle, Bran and Simon villages), exchange with local craftsmen and entrepreneurs, international student teamwork, viewing of audiovisuals (Corneliu Tepelus' documentary “In search of Dracula's Castle”), or attending events (Braşov Dracula Film Festival and the Children of the Night International Dracula Congress).

## Results

The activities selected for their interest are set out below. These ideas will be organised into different proposals covering several categories: socio-cultural, economic, political and environmental. The ideas are accompanied by reflections and a description of the activity. The ideas have been structured according to the following themes: (1) Tourist infrastructure of interest, (2) Visits to traditional villages and places of tourist interest, (3) Sustainable tourism projects, (4) Events and audiovisuals for tourism development, (5) International exchange and teamwork and (6) Travel miscellany to promote an alternative local identity.

### Tourist infrastructure of interest

The Museum of Sport and Mountain Tourism in Braşov presents an interesting journey through the history of mountain sports. It talks about the origins of skiing and ends with relevant sportsmen and women from the region. The tour starts with a timeline of the most important milestones in the history of local mountain tourism, including old skis and other vintage sports equipment.



**Fig. 1.** Braşov Museum of Mountain Sports and Touris

Sources: Personal archive

## Visits to traditional villages and tourist attractions

We highlight the visit to Rupea Citadel where students were invited to reflect on the charm of authenticity and the reconstruction of historical monuments. On the other hand, the visit to the Viscri Village Anthropological Insights into the Rural Life provided a necessary anthropological approach to better understand the rural environment. The fortified monument integrates an ethnographic museum where one can see period costumes, objects of traditional life, thus recreating ways of life of the past.



**Fig. 2.** Ethnographic Museum of Viscri Village

Sources: Personal archive

There is also a room dedicated to local ceramics, very characteristic and with elegant decorative floral motifs.



**Fig. 3.** Hall dedicated to local ceramics in Viscri Village

Sources: Personal archive

To complete the visit, and emphasising the importance of pottery in today's life, a visit 'Reinventing Traditional Saxon Pottery' was made to a workshop of a local potter and craftsman, Marinel Gyorfi, from Saschiz village. The place is called Atelier de Olărit Saschiz, it literally means 'The pottery studio of Saschiz'.

Finally, we visited Bran Castle, usually associated with the figure of Dracula following myth and legend rather than reality. The castle is the most touristic monument of the whole visit, and the surrounding area was also full of souvenir stalls. From a personal view, despite being the most visited monument, or one of the most emblematic, this is not a synonym of the best visitor experience due to the large number of tourists, but it is part of the experience of the trip.



**Fig. 4.** Visit to Bran Castle

Sources: Personal archive

### **Sustainable tourism projects**

In Sighișoara we attended a talk about sustainable projects and joint promotion between villages. The local administration was represented by Michaela Türk, who talked about sustainable initiatives carried out in South Transylvania. Among them are the proposals for accommodation for locals. In their strategy they seek to promote the local heritage, the natural landscapes, through responsible tourism, in which the families who adhere to the programme offer hospitality to visitors.

Tourism is approached as a complement to other activities and not the only one. The challenge is to attract a type of tourism interested in the local, to develop an emotional connection and to be able to value the community without falling into the masses. To achieve social sustainability, it is necessary to include the resident and the younger generations.

### **Events and audiovisuals for tourism development**

On the one hand, I would like to highlight the screening of the documentary “In Search of Dracula's Castle” with the presence of its director Corneliu Țepeluș. I consider it interesting to make this kind of audiovisual material to make known a historical character and important figure for the country, such as Vlad Țepeș, prince of Wallachia, also known as the Impaler. Based it on a scientific basis and prestigious figures, adds value to the destination.

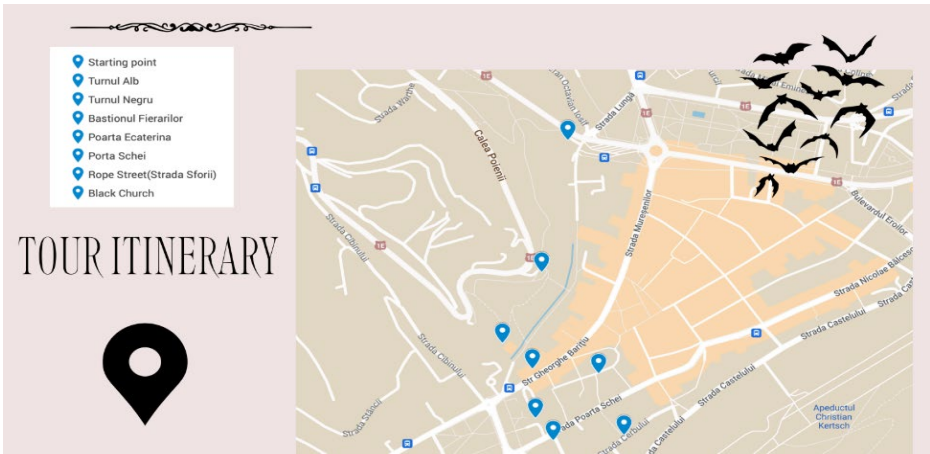
On the other hand, the Dracula Film Festival Opening Ceremony: the seventh art, is a festival specialising in the figure of Dracula but covering more genres (for example current adaptations of silent films, etc.). This festival showcases films, documentaries and other media that disseminate a local culture created around the famous vampire.

Finally, attendance at the Dracula Congress conferences on gothic literature held at the Hotel Acasă la Dracula called ‘Children of the Night International Dracula Congress’. It is an opportunity to delve into the literature and culture surrounding the character, torn between myth and reality.

### **International exchange and teamwork**

The first activity of our group (formed by four interdisciplinary and international students) consisted of a guided tour ‘Urban Trekking and Teamwork in Brașov’ by local student Alexandra Năstase. It included a visit to the most emblematic places of Brașov, and it was planned in an original game style where the international group had to take pictures of themselves in the different places. In addition, it allowed the group members to get to know each other and to share moments of exchange.

On the last day there was a groups presentation. In it, a proposal was created by our teamwork (Aleksandra, Elena, Blanca & Giulia) with a view to real applicability, namely dramatized night-time sightseeing tours called ‘Conquerors of the Night’ aimed at both visitors and locals at this time of the year. The purpose is to vindicate the local culture, and it is an opportunity to make it known in a different way to the stereotypes generated. The route was operationalised on a tourist map.



**Fig. 5.** Poster and map of ‘Conquerors of the Night’ dramatized night-time tours  
Sources: Creation of the working group and Google Images

## Miscellaneous travel to promote an alternative local identity

In this section we will look at the most striking cultural and social aspects of the journey from a personal point of view. It is approached from the curiosity of the travel experience itself mixed to an open and inclusive approach. Although gastronomic tourism forms a typology, local gastronomy has been the big surprise and sometimes one of the most unknown aspects. From palinka to other specialities such as polenta or mămăligă and sarmale, gastronomy reflects the multiculturalism that makes up the Romanian identity and history.

I found interesting the existence of Transylvanian cats, in the process of being protected, so it is something special. Cats could be an attraction for visitors, given the large number of felines that can be seen on social networks and their ‘Instagram-ability’, which is undoubtedly an attraction and promotion of the destinations. As for the local fauna, I also found noticeable the coexistence with the bears. The inhabitants are accustomed to the presence of this animal and people are polite and formed to avoid undesirable encounters.



**Fig. 6.** Common cats on the streets of Braşov

Sources: Personal archive

As we have pointed out, Romania is a country rich in culture. Through the buildings you can appreciate the Soviet and communist history as in the city of Bucharest. Also, you can recognize the differences between the countryside and the city and

the mix of traditional or modern. For people visiting the country for the first time (as in my case), the architectural and cultural eclecticism (buildings with French reminiscences, such as the *brasseries*), or the German influence (in the language, specialized schools, community life or even in *Alpine* style architecture) has undoubtedly been one of the most surprising aspects. To this is added a vernacular and colourful local heritage.

The visit to Transylvania coincides with a special time of the year: Halloween or All Saints' Day for the popular tradition. Several attractions stand out currently: tasting the seasonal gastronomy, enjoying the special decorations, and bright colours of the forest for those who love photography.

## **Conclusions**

In conclusion, all the ideas collected are suitable for integration in other contexts, especially in the field of mountain tourism. Through these initiatives, appropriate public policy proposals can be formulated to help the sector recover and support the sustainable tourism transition towards fairer tourism.

What have I learned by doing this work and what are my impressions? In my opinion, the BIP experience has been very positive at all levels. I would highlight a few points regarding the development of the exchange. It allows to get to know better the Romanian culture (sometimes an unknown culture or impregnated with stereotypes related to Dracula). I appreciate the scientific approach and the reflections from the sociology of tourism or social anthropology. Establishing relationships with students from other European universities (working in interdisciplinary and international teams) and the proximity of the professors. I value the experience as a professional and personal enrichment. Moreover, the academic impacts were the inspiration for public policy proposals in mountain destinations (related to my thesis project), the adaptation of these learnings and ideas through the publication of a scientific article published by the University of Transylvania and finally the development of international academic networks. This opens the way to joint lines of research that will allow us to build bridges between

common problems in rural destinations with a high cultural and natural value as well as an important historical past.

For reasons of limitation, only the most significant experiences and conclusions have been recounted, although some proposals will be adapted within the framework of the doctorate for the mountain destination of the central Pyrenees, which also develops cultural, nature, sustainable and responsible tourism.

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# The Transformation of the Dracula myth in Western Thought and Popular Culture

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Hi! I'm Izarbe Aznarez Rodriguez. I'm currently studying the third year of the Bachelor in Philosophy at the University of Zaragoza (UNIZAR), Spain. The Blended intensive program "Dracula Between Pop Culture and Tourism" has been the first mobility program in which I have participated, and it has been such an enriching experience.

*Myths are constructed as exorcisms*  
(MAILLARD, 2021, p. 73).

Myths are distorting mirrors, mediators between images. Their logic is ruled by imagination, by the capacity of constructing images. Myths do not aim to explain or persuade; instead, they externalize and materialize the various situations in which individuals find themselves. They are the means through which consciousness explains itself. Throughout history, different societies have used myths to interpret their existential conditions. Myths address relationships intrinsic to the human condition. They tell us who we are, our fears, and our desires.

One of the most popular myths, particularly in the last century, is the myth of Dracula. This myth reflects the longing for immortality that the human being has always craved: From Goethe's *Faust* (1808), Shelley's *Frankenstein*; or, *The Modern Prometheus* (1818) even in the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, humanity's perennial longing for transcending themselves has been present in literature. Drawing on Chantal Maillard's thesis regarding Romantic and postmodern subjectivity, this analysis will

briefly examine the figure of the vampire and its historical evolution—from Romanticism (Stoker's *Dracula*) to contemporary Romania and popular culture.

What do myths reveal about us? The prevailing values of any historical period are reflected in its cultural productions. Victorian morality, bourgeois society, Romantic subjectivity, and the anxieties of a world transitioning toward industrialization are all encapsulated in the 19th-century vampire, as well as in Gothic literature in general. This genre embodies one of the most significant aesthetic and philosophical categories of the 19th century: the sublime.

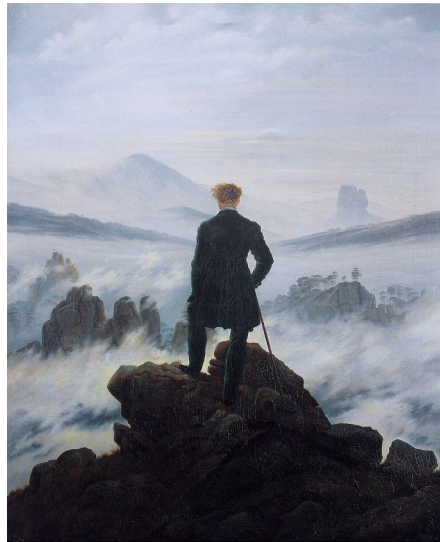
Rather than depicting reality—particularly the rationalized world of the Enlightenment—Gothic novels offered fantastical means of confronting the challenges of the new century, and addressing the anxieties and fears provoked by the changes that brought the “new world”. It was a historical period that demanded much thought and debate, and Gothic imagination provided new possibilities for questioning and understanding the world, often exploring topics that philosophical discourse proposed.

The infinite is one of the main concerns within the framework of philosophical inquiry. Idealism revisited the notion of the infinite in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, which until then had been relegated to an interpretation marked by theological interpretations. The infinite is the unrepresentable, impossible to imagine; yet, following Kant in his *Critique of Judgment*, reason can conceive it.

This arises a tension between understanding and reason. Beyond its theoretical implications, we are interested in exploring how Romanticism—and by extension, Gothic literature—will be especially captivated by the terror evoked when it comes the time of recognizing humanity's limits. The unrepresentable nature of the infinite evokes a sense of vertigo, resembling nothingness by its condition of being the unrepresentable, which Romanticism expressed through its fascination with the sublime.

Romanticism's tragic consciousness emerges from the recognition of human finitude. The Romantic subject grapples with the certainty of mortality and the impossibility of imagining infinity. This existential vertigo shifts the focus to immanence, with meaning derived from within human existence rather than from external, eternal guarantees. The human being cannot escape from one certainty:

that of their own finitude. The tragic consciousness emerges from the certainty of the inherent negativity of human existence. The inherent existential vertigo in recognizing one's own limits is what will produce a shift in the considerations about the meaning or sense of human existence. For the Romantic subject, as depicted in works like Friedrich's *Wanderer above the Sea of Fog* (1818), life must confront the void. The 19th-century destruction of theological constructs like God (that standard-bearer of the kingdom of heaven, the guarantor of eternal life), underscores the individual's responsibility to find meaning within the boundaries of their existence. God had to be *killed* (referring to Nietzsche's work) in the 19th century in order to safeguard the Romantic hero, his individuality, and his responsibility.



**Fig. 1.** *Der Wanderer über dem Nebelmeer*

Note. Caspar David Friedrich, 1818, painting, oil on canvas, Hamburger Kunsthalle, Hamburg, Germany

The Romantic subject must face the certainty that there is nothing beyond his life, and that the meaning of existence is immanent to itself.

If human beings, as Heidegger posited, are fundamentally *Being-towards-death* (*Sein-zum-Tode*), how does Dracula's immortality fit into this framework? The belief in immortality destroys the idea of the sublime. Rather than offering transcendence (the afterlife portrayed by christianity), Dracula's immortality represents condemnation—a grotesque parody of life. His immortality a punishment: an ironic consciousness of a subject who is condemned to the absurdity of an empty existence.

Dracula exists in a liminal state, neither fully alive nor dead. He cannot detach himself from life. He suffers from eternal hunger. *Dracula* (1897) tells the story of someone who survives death but loses humanity because for surviving death he must become a beast that survives by killing, clinging to a life that is merely a simulation of death.

Dracula mirrors the existential crisis of the late 19th century, reflecting Western thought's abandonment of metaphysical certainties following the *death of God*. The feeling of abandonment, the only certainty of their own finitude. Dracula subsists, he does not live. His existential situation nearly resembles that of the absurd man: he must feed on the lives of others to continue his existence (that simulation of death) but, for what purpose? To prolong his eternal condemnation.

This is, therefore, the beginning of an orphan consciousness. Dracula carries his coffin on his back, condemned to carry it with him forever, like we can see in some representations of the Vampire like *Nosferatu* (1922). Therefore, he knows he will have to live forever with that thirst, with that continuous hunger, and the weariness will grow alongside the sadness.

Dracula embodies romantic (absurd) consciousness, a consciousness that must always carry a coffin, as Sisyphus carries a rock. Dracula portrays the ironic consciousness, the tired consciousness,

trapped in an hyperactive loop (sucking blood, feeding on his peers) from which he seemingly cannot —and does not want to— escape, because stopping means contemplating the lack of meaning. Behind Dracula's thirst for blood lies only a deep and never-ending void.



**Fig.5. Sísifo**

Note. Tiziano, 1548, painting, oil on canvas, Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid, España



Fig.3. *Nosferatu*

Note. Frame of the movie *Nosferatu* directed by Friedrich Wilhelm Murnau, 1922.

At first, the reader is supposed to fear Dracula. Stoker's Dracula is a monstrous being, and the protagonist is actually the pretty, upper-class girl, as the emphasis is on the bourgeois morality of that time. In Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), the vampire represents a monstrous "other," juxtaposed with Victorian ideals of morality. Mina Harker—the actual protagonist: a pretty, virtuous, upper-class girl— exemplifies these values, providing strength and moral guidance to the male characters: "She was so good and brave that we all felt that our hearts were strengthened to work and endure for her, and we began to discuss what we were to do." (STOKER, 2003, p. 397). Meanwhile, the female vampires in the novel challenge societal norms by openly expressing their sexuality, Dracula would be portrayed as a monstrous being until the 20th century, when the vampire myth underwent a transformation. No longer a terrifying monster, Dracula became a figure of pity and desire, reflecting a shift from Romantic tragedy to postmodern absurdity. The character of Dracula as a terrible being will soon be replaced by a "seducer" who evokes pity. Myths are now generated by multinational corporations. And fear is counterproductive to the market economy: it paralyzes the individual, so it would be better to eradicate it. This is achieved in two ways: by eliminating what is feared or by neutralizing it. The tragic vampire must be eradicated. The postmodern vampire, the outcast, will be neutralized, transformed and absorbed by mass culture, becoming an object of desire and thus, a marketing strategy.

Dracula has begun to acquire moral consciousness, has been civilized, assimilated; we are assimilating the vampire. In recent years, the myth of Dracula, especially in popular culture and cinema, opens up the fantasy of a total socialization of human nature; a complete assimilation of the animalistic within us. Chantal Maillard claims that:

*We approach the beast, yes... but first we must domesticate it, humanize it; we are not capable of accepting the non-human animal as it is. (...) The more we find traits in them similar to those of our species, the more we respect them, but all we truly respect in them is, in reality, ourselves. The only thing that moves us are our own responses, the only thing we understand is our own language. Without those perverse translations, even though we may admire them, that other terrifies us. It would be so simple, however, to see them for what they are; it would be so beautiful to love the beast in its wildness, the animal in its animality, the monster in its peculiarity, the other in its difference.*

(PARDO, J. L. and MAILLARD, C., 2017)

Vampires are not only terribly tired, as the Jarmusch nihilistic vampires in *Only Lovers Left Alive* (2013). The figure of Dracula has also been assimilated, and has lost its otherness. Its monstrosity and animality seems to blur within popular culture. From *Marceline*, the jesting vampire from *Adventure time* (2010-2018), who is actually willing to protect her friends and, instead of blood, sucks the color red, to the *Twilight saga*, where we see vampires that have families, and that they no longer want to kill (they are, in fact, “vegetarians”). We are witnessing a radical shift in what Dracula represents. Now, we find a victim who yearns for reintegration from his abject condition. Morality now resides in Dracula, the vampire. The other has been assimilated, as post-Fordist societies seem to be experts in assimilating all its others, who are neutralized, integrated... We make them ours; we imbue them with our values, we domesticate them.



**Fig. 4.** *The Twilight Saga: Breaking Dawn Part 2*

Note. Frame of the movie *The Twilight Saga: Breaking Dawn Part 2* directed by Bill Condon, 2012



**Fig. 5.** *Only lovers left alive*

Note. Frame of the movie *Only lovers left alive* directed by Jim Jarmusch, 2013

Dracula is now the victim, as we see, for example, in Coppola's film, which retrieves the story of Count Dracula. There is a particular scene where Dracula confronts God, stabbing the cross, drawing blood:

- *Dracula: Is this my reward for defending God's church?*
- *Transylvanian Priest: Sacrilege!*
- *Dracula: I renounce God! I renounce him! I shall rise from my own death, to avenge hers with all the powers of darkness.*

(COPPOLA, 1992)

Dracula is constantly redefining itself. Dracula's evolution invites us to ask: What remains of the myth in its modern incarnations? How does the historical Vlad Țepeș persist in the magnets and mugs sold in souvenir shops? Today, Dracula is as much a tourist attraction as a mythological figure. When visiting Bran castle, we all could see the places where, supposedly, Vlad Țepeș, the historical figure that inspired Dracula, lived for a while. But we could see nothing of the terrifying vampire that threatens bourgeois ideals in the Dracula-themed tourist attractions of Transylvania.

Following Benjamin, in an era in which technical reproducibility of images, symbols, and icons is possible, it is inevitable that the figure of Dracula ceases being that reflection of bourgeois morality and the complicated relationship between humans

and eternity. Dracula now is also an ice cream, a Halloween costume, a magnet for your fridge, a collectible figurine: a brand. The Dracula of today is a fragmented figure, reshaped by the market economy but still haunted by its Romantic roots.



**Fig. 6.** Dracula themed restaurant and Dracula themed hotel in Braşov

Note. The picture is own elaborated



**Fig. 7.** Dracula mugs and magnets sold in Bran Castle

Note. The picture is own elaborated

The program’s goal—destination marketing—was new to my students, whose academic focus was international studies. They also faced the challenge of using English as a working language, introducing linguistic and cultural complexities to their teamwork.

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## How does Dracula contribute to the Romanian economy?

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Salut! I am Juliette. I am a student at Savoie Mont Blanc University in France. I'm currently doing a degree in Franco-German economics and management.

I love sport, food and travelling, which is why I decided to go to Romania. My experience during the BIP «Pop culture and tourism» programme gave me the opportunity to discover Romania's historical and cultural heritage.

What a wonderful experience of sharing, discovering and meeting new people.

I can't wait to go back !



The character of Dracula, created by Bram Stoker in his 1897 novel of the same name, is widely associated with Romania, not least because of his roots in the country's folklore and history. Although Dracula is a fictional figure, his impact on the Romanian economy, particularly in terms of tourism, culture and national branding, is very real. This vampire, well known to the general public, contributes to the Romanian economy in a number of tangible ways.

First of all, Dracula is a major economic driver, thanks in particular to the boom in tourism in Romania. Indeed, tourism is one of Dracula's most significant contributions to the Romanian economy. Since the publication of Stoker's work, Dracula has become an iconic figure on a global scale, attracting millions of curious visitors to the lands linked to his legend.

Bran Castle is a perfect example. Often referred to as 'Dracula's castle', it is one of



Romania's main tourist attractions. Although the castle is not directly linked to Vlad the Impaler, the historical figure who inspired Dracula, it has become an essential symbol of the character. In 2019, the castle attracted nearly 1.5 million visitors, generating millions of dollars in revenue for the local economy from admission tickets, souvenirs, tour guide services and hotels. What's more, Dracula tourism is not limited to Bran. The town of Sighișoara, where Vlad the Impaler was born, is a *UNESCO World Heritage Site*.

Other historical sites linked to the legend, such as Poienari Castle, also attract visitors from all over the world, creating a steady stream of income for local businesses, travel agencies and the state.

In addition, the most famous vampire has an impact on the economy, creating jobs and supporting local industry. The worldwide interest in Dracula has led to the creation of numerous businesses and jobs in the tourist industry, as well as in other related sectors such as hotels, restaurants, transport and the marketing of derivative products. In the Transylvania region,



for example, a number of small businesses have sprung up specialising in marketing Dracula-related products such as books, films, souvenirs and costumes.

Events such as the International Dracula Festival in Brașov are presented as a way of generating soft power and attract participants, film-makers and film-lovers from all over the world.

In addition to the direct jobs created in the tourism industry, this passion also encourages the development of retail shops, restaurants and hotels, as well as transport companies offering themed tours.



Dracula also has an influence on Romania's international culture and image. The character of Dracula contributes to Romania's international visibility, with beneficial effects for the cultural industry and the national brand. Thanks to the legend of Dracula, Romania is perceived as a mysterious place, rich in history and folklore. The Romanian government and tourism agencies have capitalised on the image of Dracula to promote the country as a unique tourist destination.

In 2004, the Romanian Ministry of Tourism launched an international advertising campaign entitled 'Discover Romania beyond Dracula', aimed at attracting foreign tourists by highlighting the country's connection with the myth.

This initiative has helped to increase the number of international visitors, particularly from Asia and North America, who are often attracted by the mystical side of the legend. In accommodation establishments, including flats and rooms to let, tourist arrivals in May 2023 were up 12.8% on the previous year. The total number of arrivals reached an impressive peak of 1.041 million visitors, with an increase in overnight stays of 10.1%. The percentage of foreign tourists was 18.8%, meaning that international interest in Romania is on the rise.

Dracula also affects the economy, contributing to the film and media industry. Dracula's impact extends beyond tourism to the film and media industries. The figure of Dracula, portrayed in numerous films, series and television productions, generates significant revenue. Iconic films such as Francis Ford Coppola's *Dracula* (1992), or more recent series such as *Dracula* produced by Netflix in 2020, are examples of how the legend fuels the entertainment industry. These productions draw attention to Romania, encouraging



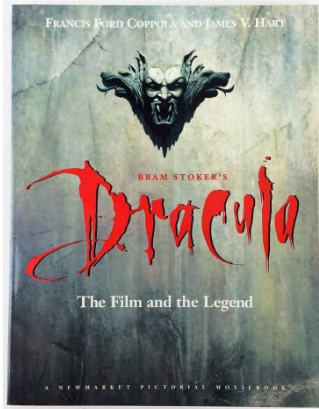
foreign productions to choose the country as a shooting location. This can generate considerable revenue for the country through subsidies, site rentals and local consumption of goods and services during filming. Over and above the financial gain, adapting Dracula into a film or series helps to maintain the myth surrounding this mystical creature that is a dream for children and adults alike.

Finally, as the films show, Romania is a country of mystical beauty. Bram Stoker's work therefore helps to enhance Romania's historical and architectural heritage.

Indeed, Dracula contributes to the enhancement of Romania's historical and architectural heritage. The attraction of the sites linked to the legend encourages the conservation of historic buildings and ancient sites, which are essential to the national cultural identity. For example, Bran Castle, despite its marginal links with Vlad the Impaler, has been restored and maintained thanks to the income generated by tourism.



Similarly, other historic sites such as the Poenari fortress (Vlad the Impaler's place of refuge) are benefiting from investment in their conservation and promotion as national heritage. These preservation efforts have an economic impact by attracting visitors, but also by creating jobs in heritage restoration and the maintenance of historic sites. Romania is therefore developing a circular economy that enables it to preserve the beauty of its landscapes, history and monuments.



Although Dracula is an imaginary character, his myth and impact on the Romanian economy are very real. Dracula makes a significant contribution to the country's economic expansion, notably through tourism, job creation, heritage enhancement and his influence on the media sector. The legend of this mythical character, oscillating between fear and wonder, remains a vector of influence for Romania on an international scale, contributing to its enrichment while reinforcing its cultural identity.

# Dracula Reimagined for Children

**Elena DRAGO**

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Hello! I am Elena Drago and I am a master student at the Faculty of Letters at the University of Torino. I would like to become a high school teacher, in fact now I'm taking part in different projects to take first steps into teaching. One of the projects aims at helping students with learning difficulty. I am passionate about literature, especially about theatre. My master's thesis will focus on the translation and the analysis of a French play "Tous des oiseaux" of Waji Mouawad. I enjoy studying the history of theatre, going to see a play but also play

theatre. I am a member of a theatre company which makes improv shows. It's really entertaining and exciting !

## **Introduction**

Dracula has become the protagonist of numerous film adaptations and the source of inspiration for several literary works. Stoker's most famous creation fascinates a wide audience of readers, embracing entire age groups. The famous novel by Bram Stoker becomes also available to children.

This study aims to analyze the figure of Dracula in the literature for children in Italy; in this chapter will be analyzed the work *Dracula cerca casa!* by Ann Jungmann. It is an English work translated into Italian which has been very successful in Italy. The book will be studied from two approaches: literary approach and editorial approach. In the literary approach, the analysis will focus on children's adaptation, the main themes and characters (the transformation of count Dracula, Dracula castle, new characters); in the editorial approach, the analysis will focus on the book cover and illustrations and the publishing house and the book format.

## Literary approach

### 1. The adaptation for children

*Dracula cerca casa!* is a children's fiction book by Ann Jungman with illustrations by Doffy Weir, published by Piemme Junior in October 2003. Ann Jungman was born and lives in London. As a teacher she became passionate about children's books. She has published hundred titles, including a children's book series dedicated to Count Dracula. *Dracula cerca casa!* is her most successful work in Italy.

The book tells the story of the famous Count. He needs money to restore his castle which is falling apart. He decides to go to London and try a film career, proposing himself as an actor in a movie about vampires.

### 2. The main topics and characters

#### 2.1 The transformation of count Dracula

Dracula undergoes a complete mutation of his being, he impersonates a spoiled child who cries for whatever has denied him: "Poi si accucciò a terra, si mise un dito in bocca e cominciò a piagnucolare" p. 9 ("Then he crouched on the ground, put his finger in his mouth and began to whine"). He starts to cry when the director of the film in which he would like to play the lead role reveals that he will never have a career as an actor. Dracula then realizes that he doesn't have enough money to fix his own castle: " "Oh no! Buuu! - piagnucolò Dracula. - Che ne sarà del mio castello", p. 12 ("Oh no! Buuu! - Dracula whimpered. - What will happen to my castle").

In this text we find a Dracula who is not a degenerate man or a criminal, who can bring ruin. Dracula is presented as a human vampire, whose nature is so twisted that it doesn't even scare anymore. Like the stereotypical vampire figure, he is depicted with sharp teeth and an aquiline nose. However, the vampire of is recontextualized through a burlesque disguise. His image changes, becoming more "normal" when he describes his everyday life. Dracula is caught bathing in the bathtub, resting on

the couch with a hot water bag, pulling his hair because he needs a television with a big screen. The count is not even recognized because he no longer looks like himself: “Beh, tu non sembri proprio un vampiro. Che ruolo ti piacerebbe fare? Un servo, un vagabondo, un'anonima comparsa? -Io non sembro un vampiro? - replicò Dracula indignato. -Niente affatto!”, p. 28

(“Well, you don't look like a vampire. What role would you like to play? A servant, a vagabond, an anonymous extra? -I don't look like a vampire? - replied Dracula in indignation. -Not at all!”).

In the case of Dracula rewriting, the parody of the character is necessary because the texts in question are intended for children, who conceive of the vampire as a funny and less terrifying character. Count Dracula is completely overturned, and this creates a parody of the character. He is no longer the undead who sucks human blood, but an old, depressed count who in the end instead of vampirizing a young woman, saves her from danger: “Niente paura, mia dolce signora! - disse Dracula. Arrivano i soccorsi! Il conte si alzò in volo e, leggero come una piuma, raggiunse la bella Miriam. La afferrò giusto in tempo e volò via stringendola tra le braccia”, p. 50 („Don't worry, my sweet lady! - said Dracula. The rescue is coming! The count got up and, light as a feather, reached the beautiful Miriam. He grabbed her just in time and flew away, holding her in his arms”).

## **2.2 Dracula's castle**

In this work, the clash between what is ancient and what represents modernity is reposed. The archaic nature of the Count is linked to the place where he lives, a decrepit house with the broken, a television still in black and white and a crypt that floods because of water infiltration. On a dark and stormy night, the terrible Count Dracula was watching television reclining in his armchair, with a shawl on his shoulders and a hot water bag on his belly: “Ho freddo, ho i calzini bucati e come se non bastasse ho una decrepita televisione in bianco e nero! Probabilmente sono l'unico in tutta la Romania... Ma che dico? Probabilmente sono l'unico al mondo.

Voglio una televisione a colori!"; p. 6 ("I'm cold, my socks are punctured and as if that were not enough, I have a decrepit black and white television! Probably the only one in all of Romania... But what do I say? I'm probably the only one in the world. I want a color television!").

Dracula's archaic nature is limited to not being able to keep up with a constantly evolving technology. The Count needs a renewal: "Portami subito una penna e un foglio di carta, Boris. Voglio scrivere un elenco. Un elenco di tutto quello che bisogna fare. COME RIPORTARE IL CASTELLO ALLA SUA ANTICA GLORIA. Riparare il tetto, riparare il camino, impermeabilizzare la cripta, mettere vasi di fiori su tutti i davanzali, allargare le finestre per far entrare più luce, mettere il riscaldamento centralizzato, comprare tende e tappeti nuovi, incorniciare le foto di famiglia, comprare una tivù A COLORI con MAXISCHERMO!!!"); p. 14-15 „Bring me a pen and a sheet of paper, Boris. I want to write a list. A list of everything to do. HOW TO RESTORE THE CASTLE TO ITS FORMER GLORY. Repair the roof, repair the fireplace, waterproof the crypt, put flowerpots on all the windowsills, widen the windows to let in more light, put on central heating, buy new curtains and carpets, frame family photos, buy a COLOR TV with MAXISCHERMO!!!").

Dracula goes to London, which is an advanced and civilized country, where he is sure to earn some money for the renovation of his castle: "Potrei andare in Inghilterra e diventare una stella del cinema! - disse Dracula. ... Inghilterra stiamo arrivando!"; p. 18 ("I could go to England and become a movie star! - said Dracula. ... England we're coming!").

The spaces in the story must be adapted for a particular type of audience composed by children. It would be appropriate to talk about a simplification of the places where Dracula moves. The work maintains an opposition between the scenery of Transylvania, wild land and place of origin of the vampire and London, a country far from popular beliefs and superstition, modern and technological.

## **2.3 New characters**

In the adaptation several characters and events present in the original work were not transposed. These cuts simplify the narration, because a high number of characters and situations would make the story more complicated.

However, in *Dracula cerca casa!* there is a character who does not exist in the work of Stoker. It is a servant called Boris Plasma. The presence of the butler is important because he performs the function of assistant, a typical role in children's literature. He is the confidant of the poor vampire, and he is very important for the story. Dracula could not reach England without his help. Despite the additions and deletions to Stoker's work, the aim of this adaptation is to be comprehensible to a children's audience and to entertain.

## **The editorial approach**

### **1.The book cover and illustrations**

The black and white illustrations are related to the comic strip because the drawings are made with a linear, angular stroke of the pen. The illustrator decided to represent the characters in a caricature, he focused on the expressions of the faces (they are depicted while amazed, angry, satisfied) and on the movements of the bodies (they are depicted while jumping, dancing).

In addition, some drawings contain bubbles with the characters' lines. On the last page of the book there is an image of Dracula, his wife, the butler hugging and singing a song, whose words written above the drawing create a wave movement and are accompanied by the image of musical notes (p.64) In the book you can also find a picture of the list of works that Count Dracula must do to make his castle modern and livable (p.14).

The black and white drawings are unusual for a children's fiction book, as they would expect colorful illustrations. However, the absence of colors refers to the horror world of Dracula. Drawings occupy the whole page in some cases and half a page in others.

The black and white drawings inside the book contrast with the colored cover. The colors that dominate the design are orange and purple that immediately recall the atmosphere of Halloween. On the cover is depicted Dracula with a sad facial expression, with dark circles, messy hair, and slippers on his feet, holding his face with his hand. He sails a river over an uncovered coffin, and he has a broken umbrella in his hand. In the background there is a bridge with a wire attached to it, where underwear and socks are hanging, and some bats fly in the sky.

The Dracula on the cover tells the readers the unconventional story they will face. Dracula appears thin, dressed in black, with an aquiline nose and sharp teeth, all characteristics belonging to the traditional Dracula. However, he does not appear as a majestic, unsettling and manly vampire, as he has often been depicted in films, picture books, and advertisements. In this book Dracula deals with the problems of everyday life, in this sense he appears more as a man than as a superhuman being. At the beginning of the story he is depicted, as in the cover image, with his unkempt hair, socks and a blanket over his shoulders, worried about the fate of his castle. As the reading continues, a worried Dracula is also in the image where he lies on the bed-coffin with his pajamas and hot water bag. Dracula depicted bathing in the bathtub, with a cap on his head. These representations are very comical in that they are in opposition to the conventional image of Dracula. In one scene the illustrator shows Dracula wet from the rain, in another scene he is on the set of the film disguised as a vagrant. The image of Dracula doesn't meet expectations, but it makes the readers laugh.

## **2. The publishing house and the book format**

Il Battello a Vapore is a series of books born in 1992 published by Edizioni Piemme for children from three to thirteen years old, with fantasy, horror and adventure themes. The series offers 800 titles, and it is divided into several series according to the expected age of the readers and the genres or topics: Classic, Rainbow, White, Blue, Orange and Red series. *Dracula cerca casa!* is part of the blue series, which is addressed to an audience from seven to nine years old. In the series "I Classici"

where we find the rewrites of the most famous works, there is no rewriting of Dracula by Bram Stoker.

As for the format of the book, on the title page there is the author's name at the top, and below the title of the work, there is the name of illustrator Doffy Weir and translator Clare Stringer. At the end of the page there is an illustration of the half-bust of Dracula and his butler, who are watching each other with a complicit and suspicious look. In the following page we can find the author's dedication to Boris, Julie and Emile.

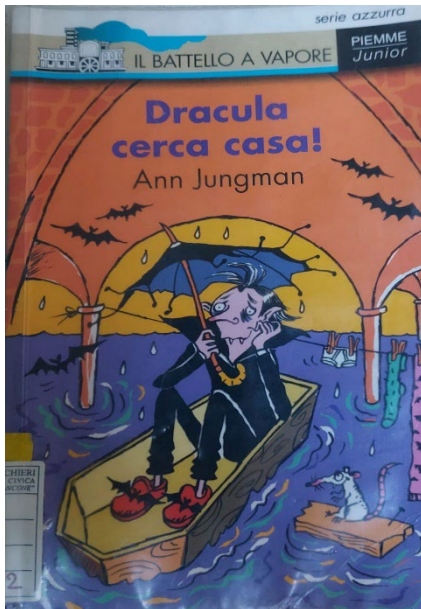
The font chosen by the publisher is large and readable, suitable for a children's audience. The author often uses exclamation marks and suspenders. The lines are written between the two hyphens, and the interjections, words or expressions in capital letters give the idea of being spoken aloud: "UFFI!"; "una televisione a colori con MAXISCHERMO"; "IO SONO DRACULA"; "E VIVAAA", p.7,14,43,18 ("UFFI!"; "a colour television with MAXISCHERMO"; "I AM DRACULA"; "YAYYY!"). The expressions on which the author wanted to focus are written in italics: "Passami la lanterna e andiamo a vedere un po' questo *terribile danno* di cui parli..."; "Hai sentito Boris? - disse Dracula irritato. - *Una porticina secondaria!*"; "Quello li?"; p.11,17,24 ("Pass me the lantern and let's go see a little bit this *terrible damage* you talk about..."; "Did you hear Boris? - said Dracula irritated. - *A secondary door!*"; "That one?").

## Conclusion

Dracula has captured the imagination of the new generations, the count has become the subject of adaptations and transpositions that have helped to make known the work of Stoker even to a kind of public for which it was not initially intended, children and adolescents. The figure of the vampire, so dark and obscure, represents the character in a different light, he is deprived of his connotations. The seductive and bloodthirsty monster performs a transformation, in which evil and horror decrease. This study analyzes the way in which the myth created by Stoker is revisited to be presented to a new audience. The victim of this change is not only the character, but the narrative itself that contains deviations, additions, deletions

and new creations compared to the original work. Count Dracula in the adaptation of *Dracula cerca casa!* makes smile and teaches to see things in a different light.

## Images



Book cover



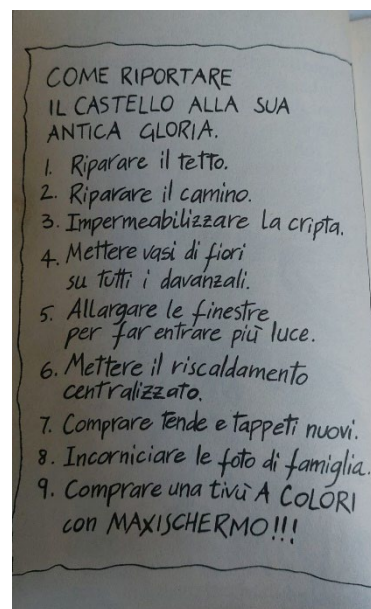
Title page



p. 5



p. 54



p. 14



p. 7

# Travel Journal: In search of Dracula on the Saxon Land of Romania

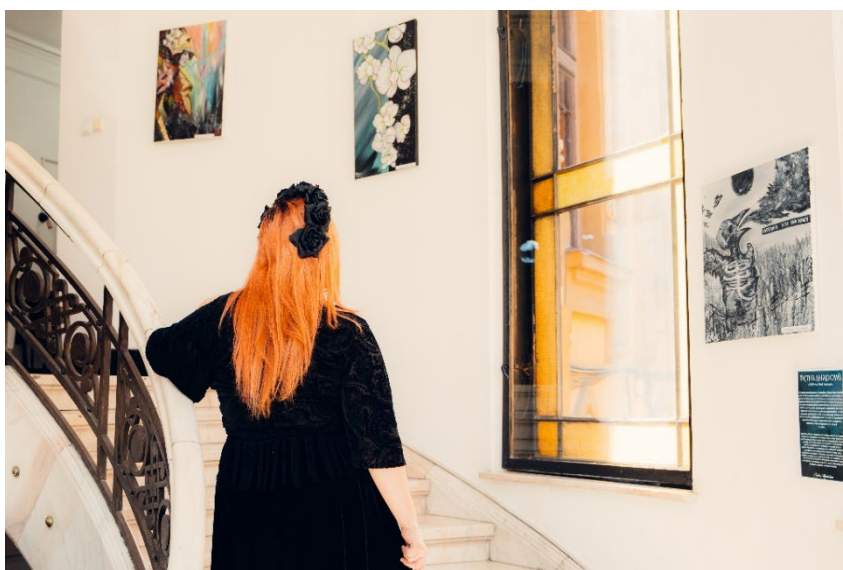
**Mădălina ECOBICI**

*Transilvania University of Braşov, Romania*

Hi! Let me introduce myself to you! My name is Madalina, but for a long time, I have

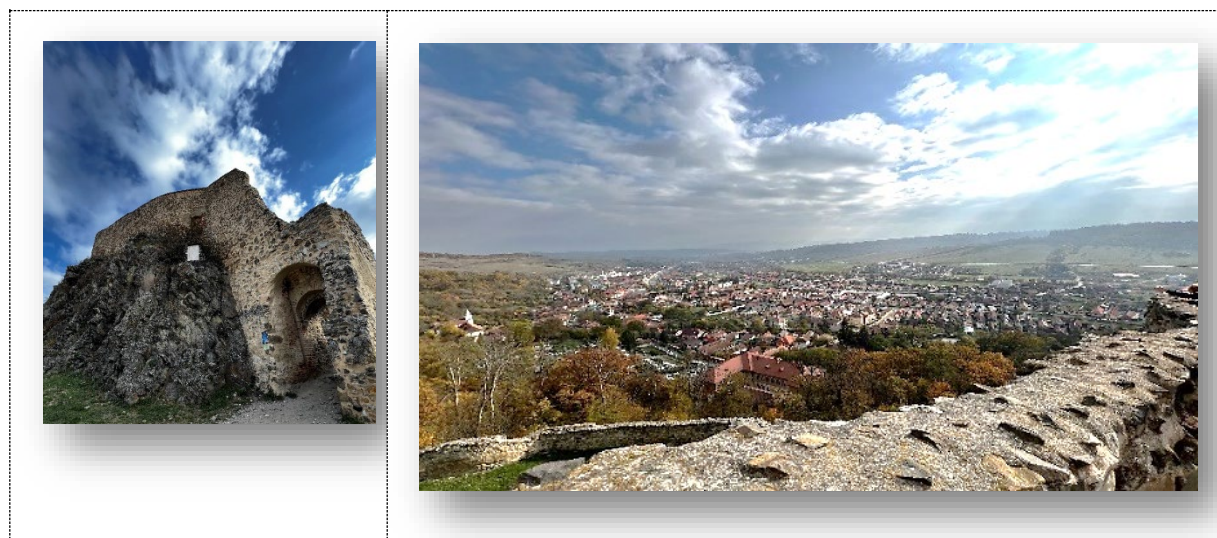


been known as Katia. In my free time, when I'm not at the university or working, I do tattoos, and occasionally, you can find me painting various canvases with images that inspire me. My passion for Dracula began in childhood, while many little girls dreamed of being princesses, I hoped to become a vampire. I listen to metal music and usually attend concerts and festivals whenever I can. Gothic style has been a part of my life for the past decade. I have participated in many paintings' competitions and held exhibitions. Some people live off art, I'm proud to say that I live through it!



## Rupea Citadel

Our first stop was Rupea Citadel, where we had the pleasure of joining Dr. Denes Harai from Université de Pau et des Pays de l'Adour, France, for a discourse on the history of the Saxons in Transylvania. We explored the evolution of Transylvania's fortifications considering contemporary restoration methods, emphasizing the challenges of maintaining the authenticity of heritage sites. As we stood within the smooth-walled chamber, we contemplated the value of investing additional time and resources in restorations that are closer to the original architecture rather than having modern textures.



### Fact:

In **Rupea Citadel**, there was a special structure, **“Turnul Slăninii”** or "Bacon Tower". This is not a unique structure in this citadel, and you will find this tower in most of the fortifications in Transylvania. Back in the past, this tower was used by the Saxons as a communal smokehouse and storage space for preserved meats. Each family had a spot within the tower where they could keep



their bacon/smoked meat safe and cool throughout the year. The head of the family, usually the man, could receive weekly a portion of meat, enough to feed the family for several days. This practice was common in Transylvania between 15<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. This tower is a symbol for the communal traditions and the Saxons' practical approach to survival in medieval times.

**Viscri Village**

We explored Viscri Village, a breath-taking location with its roots in the 12th century. With pastel-painted houses and cobbled streets, the village will make you feel like you have stepped back in time. Viscri's fortified church is a UNESCO World Heritage Site and is the real proof of the village's preservation efforts. The locals maintain the traditional crafts and lifestyle without modern developments, contributing to the cultural heritage of the village and the community. This cultural heritage will give visitors the chance to experience the village's true essence.

**Facts:**

In **Viscri Village**, **King Charles III** owns few properties, but the one that we visited is



a blue house that has been beautifully restored in the traditional Saxon style. This residence provides king's holiday retreat. It's so charming and relaxing because it's surrounded by countryside landscapes. King Charles is recognized not only as the King Of England but for his dedication of preserving local heritage, using his influence to support sustainable initiatives in the area.

The **Divorce Chamber**. Remember that on the previous page I had mentioned the “Bacon Tower” a common space in the fortified churches that stands as a symbol of community. As a similar story, fortified churches like **Viscri** have a fascinating legend about Saxon customs. Couples who are in the situation of divorcing would enter the chamber sharing only a spoon, a bowl, a bed, a chair, symbolizing their shared life. Inside, they will have some time where they will discuss their issues, trying to live again as a strong couple. The legend said that in 300 years, there was only one couple that had divorced. This practice reflected how Saxons approached marital issues, focusing on communication and respect.



**Short conclusion:** I didn't find Dracula, just cats and geese. Maybe the black cat will tell us something? I think I will find out on my next trip to Viscri!

### **Saschiz Village**

In Saschiz, the art of pottery was welcoming us with warm and fascinating stories, told by the local artisan Marinel Gyorfi. He demonstrated how to make a ceramic vase from a simple piece of clay. He explained to us the technique for crafting ceramic pieces, distinct from other Transylvanian pottery. Saschiz pottery is dyed blue, with models created by scratching into the dye, revealing in this way the color of the natural clay beneath. This art is unique and cannot be compared to anything in the surroundings.



### Sighișoara Medieval Citadel

Our trip ended in Sighișoara at a conference held by Michaela Turk, Development Director of the Mihai Eminescu Trust. The M.E. Trust have the mission of preserving Transylvania's heritage. I think that restoring and helping are the key words that describe perfectly M.E. Trust. This association helps maintain the cultural legacy of Saxon villages for future generations. Some villages that are included in this program are: include Viscri, Malâncrav, Biertan, Criș, Saschiz, Agnita,

Alma Vii, Richiș, Hoghilag, Archita, Saschiz, Daia, and many more, from county of Brașov, Sibiu and Mureș.



**Fact:**

**Vlad Țepeș**, or Vlad the Impaler was born in Sighișoara in 1431. Vlad was born in the Citadel, in a house that still stands today. The house is very close positioned by the Clock Tower and now is wearing the name of “Casa Vlad Dracul”.

**Funny thoughts:** Here I found Dracula right in his own birthplace, which is now a souvenir shop. I found him everywhere – on magnets, mugs, and T-shirts. In fact, I even found him upstairs, in a coffin. I think he's now living in the body of a mortal man.

**Romanian traditional food:** Romanian cuisine is born from rich traditions and unforgettable memories. This food represents comfort and heritage and shows a deep appreciation for simple ingredients that nourish the body and spirit of every resident and every tourist.

When you are tasting the food, the flavors of Romania will tell you a story where diverse cultures have coexisted along the centuries, each leaving an important mark on the culinary field. Here, cooking is not only a task but a way to preserve traditions. Tasting Romanian dishes is like receiving a warm embrace from a culture that finds joy in all the little things. The phrase “*Pofta bună!*” will invite you to join this culinary journey.



# Dracula in the literature for childhood: editorial and literary study on *Maga Martina nel castello di Dracula*

Francesca MARCONETTO

University of Torino, Italy



Hi! I am Francesca, I'm an Italian student from University of Turin. I am actually attending a Master degree in *Culture moderne comparate*, faculty of Letters. My dream is to become a teacher in High school, as I love literature and history. My passions are traveling, reading and practising dance. My experience in Romania, attending *Dracula Between Pop Culture and Tourism BIP* was amazing, I truly fell in love with people, culture and landscape in Transylvania!

## Introduction

In recent years, adaptations of classic literature for younger audiences have become an important area of study within children's literature. One such work that exemplifies this trend is *Maga Martina nel castello di Dracula* by Knister and translated into Italian by Lessmann. This is a children's book that reinterprets Bram Stoker's iconic novel *Dracula* through a more playful and accessible lens. While Stoker's *Dracula* is a gothic horror novel meant for an adult audience, *Maga Martina nel castello di Dracula* simplifies and alters key elements to cater to the sensibilities and developmental stages of young readers. This chapter explores how *Maga Martina nel castello di Dracula* adapts the original gothic tale for children, focusing on the modifications made to the narrative, themes, and characters. In particular, it investigates how the book maintains the essence of the original story while

adjusting its darker and more complex elements to fit the expectations of a child-friendly text. Additionally, the study will analyse how the editorial design of the book, such as illustrations, layout, and format, further contributes to its accessibility and appeal to young readers. The research aims to understand the intersection between literary adaptation, visual communication, and the editorial choices that shape how children engage with a narrative traditionally associated with horror and adult themes. Through this analysis, we seek to uncover how these adaptations influence both the reading experience and the transmission of cultural narratives across generations.

## Literary study

### The book

Here some general information about the book *Maga Martina nel castello di Dracula*:

<b>Author:</b>	Knister
<b>Translator:</b>	Luisa Lessmann
<b>Illustrator:</b>	Birgit Rieger
<b>Publisher:</b>	Sonda
<b>Series:</b>	<i>Maga Martina</i>
<b>Genre:</b>	Children's Fiction
<b>Language:</b>	Italian

The Italian version, first published in 2007, belongs to the series “Maga Martina” and the opening introduction of this series is:

*Let me introduce myself, I'm Maga Martina. I carry with me a mysterious magic book. I started doing magic the day I found a book of spells and tricks next to my bed. I couldn't resist the temptation, and my life changed.*

In the book *Maga Martina nel castello di Dracula* the little girl discovers an adult book in the library and becomes fascinated by the adventures of Dracula, the Prince of Darkness. Unable to put it down, she decides to learn more and travels to Transylvania to practice magic at Dracula's castle. Armed with garlic and a flashlight, Martina embarks on a thrilling vampire hunt and will overcome different adventures and difficulties.

In this first part of the text analysis, we will explore how the character of Dracula is adapted and the contrasts that emerge, particularly the contrast between attraction and repulsion towards the vampire, the contrast between the ancient and the modern, and finally, the contrast between science and the supernatural. In particular, we will see how it is evident that in this children's adaptation, the themes are parodied to make them more fun and accessible to a young audience.

### **Characters: Dracula and Maga Martina**

The character of Dracula retains the traits from Stoker's original work, the executioner who sacrifices his victims by draining their blood. However, the atmosphere of terror is softened by the fact that Dracula belongs to his own era, and there is no confrontation between the present and the past. To encounter the vampire, one must actually travel back in time. Thus, a particularly clever Count is revealed, for with his army of "predator" vampires, he manages to penetrate the city walls, which are covered in garlic, with a simple trick: a clothespin on his nose to block out the smell:

*The figure of Count Dracula is unsettling yet majestic at the same time. However, something doesn't seem quite right. So, Martina takes a pair of binoculars... What she sees is too funny, and the tension eases. Now it's clear how the vampire managed to get past the garlic barrier: with a clothespin... A simple clothespin with which the vampire plugged his nose to block the smell of garlic.*

The comedy of the scene greatly diminishes the terror typically associated with Dracula's arrival.

The protagonist, Maga Martina, is a brave little girl with whom the reader can easily identify. This is a book aimed at children, and the protagonist is one of them. The vampire, a malevolent figure from an ancient past, can be confronted even by a child, which makes it seem less believable and terrifying:

*Here's Martina, the protagonist of our story. She's about your age and looks like any other little girl. In fact, she is... but not entirely!*

*Martina has made up her mind: she wants to see real vampires! Where they truly belong: in Transylvania.*

### **Contrast between the ancient and the modern**

One of the key themes explored by the author of *Maga Martian nel Castello di Dracula* is the contrast between the ancient and the modern. This reimagining for a young audience plays on a parody of the theme. It is no longer Dracula who enters the civilized world; rather, it is the modern world that goes to meet him. The protagonist, Maga Martina, travels back in time, embarking on a journey to the past. Holding a white glove to her heart, an object that points her in the right direction, she recites a magic formula that transports her back in time. The past she finds herself in appears to be the Middle Ages, complete with castles, fortresses, and the village inhabited by the famous Count, the “Lord of the Shadows”. Even the description of the castle evokes a distant era; it is depicted as a fortress, with arched windows and pointed towers, much like the famous Dracula Castle in Transylvania, at Bran.

### **Contrast between science and supernatural**

The protagonist uses traditional items for protection against the vampire, but they are reinterpreted in a modern, humorous way. For example, she uses a mirror, garlic, a powerful flashlight, and even earplugs to block out Dracula's deathly scream. Other items include sunglasses to avoid being hypnotized and a life jacket in case she needs to jump into water to escape. This playful recontextualization of old tools highlights the contrast between the ancient myth and modernity.

Moreover, the story transforms classic themes from Stoker's *Dracula*, especially the battle between science and superstition. While Dracula and his supernatural world

are associated with danger and death, doctors and representatives of modern society are portrayed as the heroes who restore balance. In these kind of recontextualisations of the myth, Dracula is simply the villain to be defeated, emphasizing the triumph of reason over myth.

### **Contrast between attraction and repulsion**

The vampire simultaneously evokes both attraction and repulsion, creating a destabilizing effect on its victim. Dracula, in particular, is a highly erotic character, and the attraction he elicits is a form of sexual desire mixed with both pleasure and pain. However, in adaptations aimed at a young audience, all these nuances are removed. The feeling of attraction and repulsion is reduced to simple curiosity about meeting the vampire, discovering its identity, and perhaps even hunting it down to destroy it.

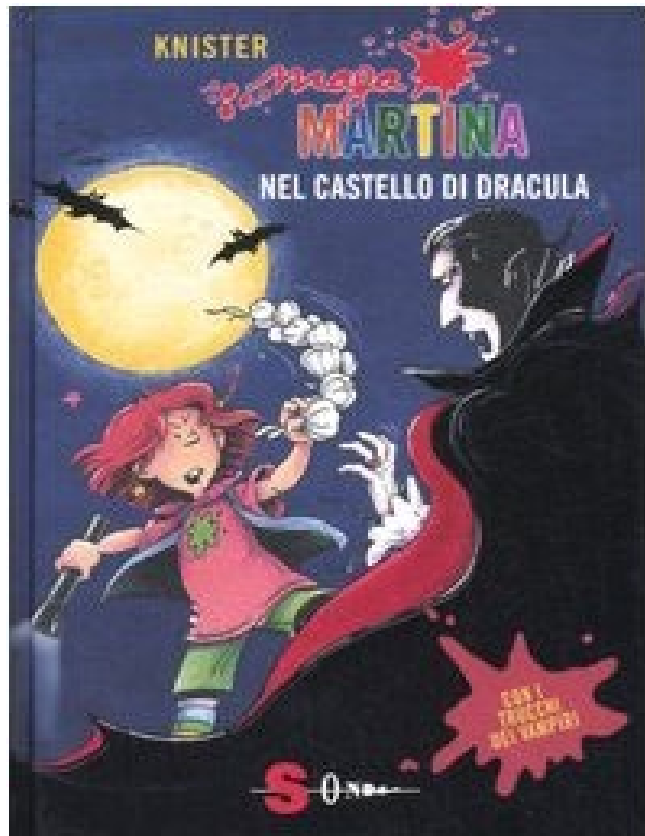
This contrast of emotions is present in *Maga Martina nel castello di Dracula*, where the young adventurer, despite the fear she feels in front of the castle, is determined to meet the famous and terrifying Count Dracula, about whom she has heard so much. She is afraid of him, but at the same time, she is drawn to him. In fact the description of her emotions are that her heart races, just like when you're nervous or excited, she feels paralyzed and unable to leave her room. The vampire, and everything he represents, already has power over her; she is completely captivated by him.

### **Editorial study**

#### **Cover**

The cover of *Maga Martina nel castello di Dracula* is designed to attract young readers through several key elements. First of all, the protagonist – Maga Martina – is a young witch with a friendly, adventurous appearance. Her strong and confident demeanor appeals to children, as they often connect with characters who are brave and capable.

The cover combines the magical elements of Martina as a witch with the dark, mysterious atmosphere of Dracula. However, the presence of Martina makes the story feel less scary, offering a sense of adventure without overwhelming fear. The dark tones (black, purple, red) are contrasted in a visually engaging way, creating an exciting, mysterious look that attracts children without being too intimidating. The bats and fog around the castle add to the sense of fantasy and the image of Dracula sparks curiosity about what might



happen. The title is elaborated and catchy, with “Maga Martina” suggesting a friendly character but also insisting of the element of blood.

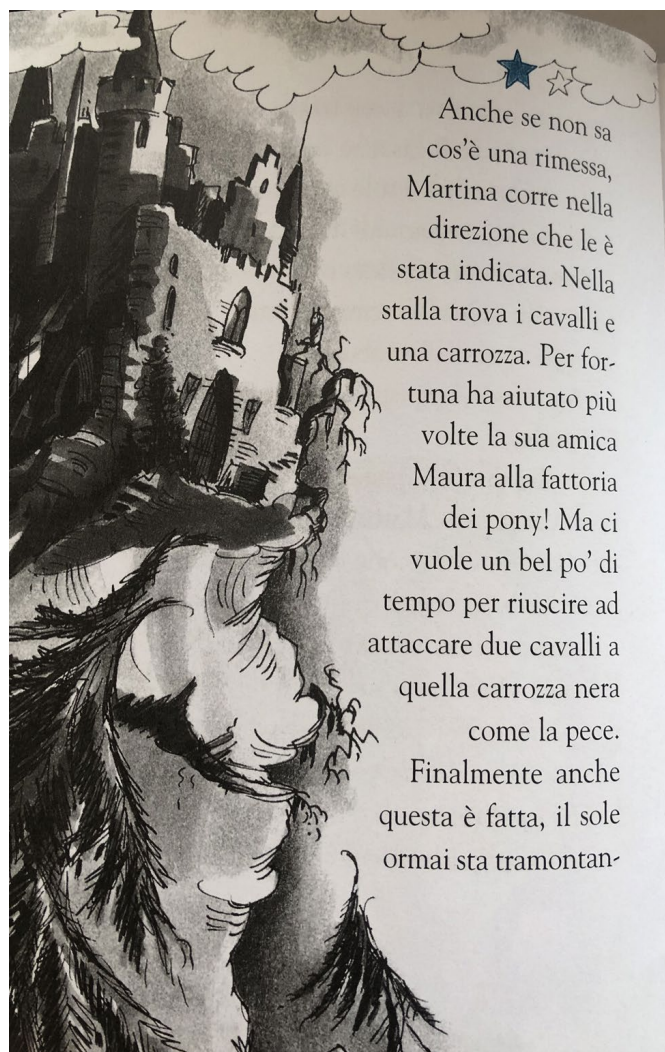
Overall, the cover is designed to engage children with a balance of magic, adventure, and just the right amount of suspense, making it appealing and accessible for young readers.

### **Illustrations and format**

This children's book has a sturdy, hard cover that is easy for young hands to hold. The paper is thick and durable, so the book can withstand lots of handling, making it perfect for children to enjoy repeatedly.

The text is printed in a clear, large font, which is easy for children to read.

The layout is simple and well-spaced, making it comfortable for young readers to follow the words without feeling overwhelmed.

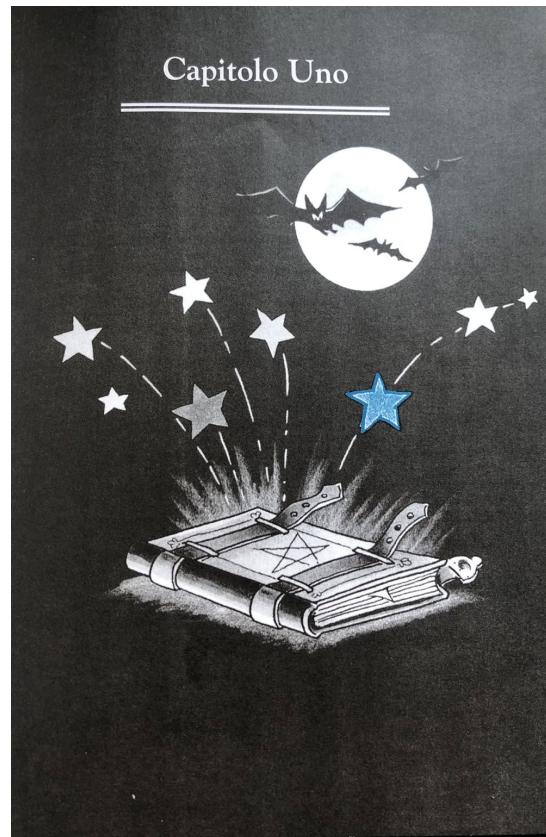


Anche se non sa  
cos'è una rimessa,  
Martina corre nella  
direzione che le è  
stata indicata. Nella  
stalla trova i cavalli e  
una carrozza. Per for-  
tuna ha aiutato più  
volte la sua amica  
Maura alla fattoria  
dei pony! Ma ci  
vuole un bel po' di  
tempo per riuscire ad  
attaccare due cavalli a  
quella carrozza nera  
come la pece.  
Finalmente anche  
questa è fatta, il sole  
ormai sta tramontan-

The illustrations in the book are like pencil sketches, drawn in black and white. They are simple, charming, and not too detailed, which helps keep the focus on the story. The black-and-white drawings create a calm, peaceful feeling, while the only colour used is a soft blue. This blue appears in small details, such as little stars around the page numbers, adding a touch of magic to the book. Since the main character is a magician, these stars likely represent the magical elements in the story.

The cover of the book is very colourful, in contrast to the more simple, monochrome interior. The bright cover grabs attention and makes the book look exciting, while the inside is more quiet and focused on the story and illustrations.

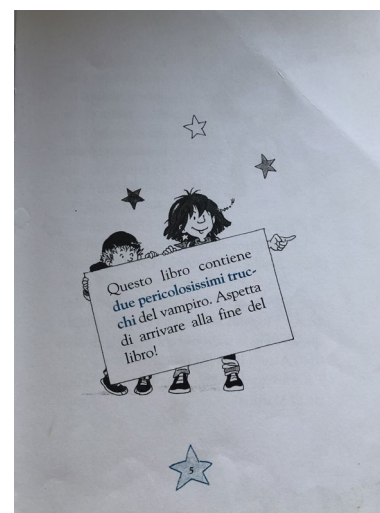
Overall, the design of the book is perfect for young readers. The strong cover, clear text, and simple yet magical illustrations create a great reading experience for children, making it both fun and easy for them to dive into the world of the story.



At the start of each chapter, the book features the same illustration, giving the reader a familiar image that marks the beginning of a new section. Inside the chapters, the illustrations change to match the story, and they are all designed to be fun and appealing to children.

For example, when the story introduces “the villain”, Dracula is shown in a very exaggerated, cartoonish way. This makes him look less scary and more funny and clumsy, which fits his role in the story as more of a humorous character than a real threat.

The first illustration is a clever “mise en abyme” (a story within a story) because it shows the main character reading Dracula’s book. This not only sparks curiosity but also helps the young readers feel connected to the protagonist. By seeing her reading the book, children can imagine themselves in her shoes, making them more engaged with the adventure.



At the end of the book, there's a fun surprise: two tricks for children to try. These tricks are framed like special secrets, adding an interactive element to the book. This makes the book feel more like an adventure or a game, inviting the reader to take part in the magic and fun of the story, rather than just reading it.

Overall, the combination of playful illustrations, engaging story elements, and interactive activities makes this book a highly engaging experience for young readers. They not only get to enjoy the story, but also feel like they are part of the adventure themselves.

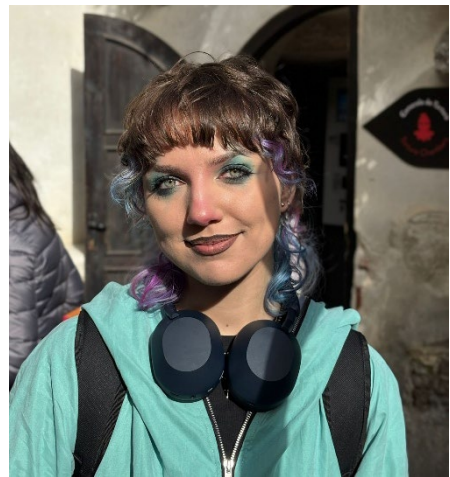


## Branding with a bite: How a destination could sink its teeth into Dracula Tourism

**Alexandra NĂSTASE**

*Transilvania University of Braşov, Romania*

As your average horror enjoyer, my favorite quote from classic cinema – classic in my book, at least – is “Most people fear the strange and unusual. I am strange and unusual”, from the cult favorite *Beetlejuice*. Something I’ve always found funny about this film is the Romanian translation of the title, literally rendered as “Life of a Ghost”, which somehow reflects my own existence. I am mostly active at night and I like to make my presence



known through bold, sometimes loud manifestations. What can I say – I have a flair for the dramatic. As of today, I hold a bachelor's degree in Digital Media and I am enrolled in a master's programme in Marketing at Transilvania University of Braşov.

“Oh, Dracula, Dracula, where are you?” was the motto of the most thrilling week during my final year as a bachelor's student. And thrilling it truly was to search for Dracula's origins in the heart of Transylvania, all while attending presentations about monstrous creatures lurking in the night and bloodthirsty, heavily romanticized royal figures of the past—figures so wrapped in mystery through literature and pop culture that it has become nearly impossible to separate them from the myth of the vampire.

There's something irresistibly alluring about the seductive nature of the vampire, who, through its supernatural powers, can slip into the minds of the vulnerable and completely subdue them. With that in mind, there is no wonder so many people imagine there might be – even in the faintest way – some trace of this fantasy in the

real world. And so, they venture into the ruins of medieval buildings and into hidden corners of the world, wandering along the frontier where reality meets the realm of the stories they once read.

This is how I imagine people end up visiting the medieval cities scattered across Braşov county, especially the ever-popular town Bran, known for hosting Bran Castle – the medieval relic said to have inspired Bram Stoker when imagining Count Dracula’s castle in his novel. But that surely couldn’t be the only reason for taking a trip to Romania, right? And if it were, then linking an entire region to such famous character as Dracula would become an incredibly fruitful opportunity for promoting tourism. After all, we’ve witnessed a resurgence of the vampire figure in hugely popular media throughout the 2000s and 2010s, with TV series and movies that turned into global phenomena – not that the vampire genre was ever short of popularity – video games, books and many more.

I can’t say for sure that people who visit Romania because they are vampire enthusiasts actually expect Count Dracula to come pick them up from the airport or welcome them at the entrance of Bran Castle. Even so, more than one tourist has confessed to me that they expected to find more proof of the count’s existence before their trip. Of course, they anticipated discovering some of Romania’s heritage and culture, but were taken completely by surprise when, while touring Bran Castle, they encountered paintings of the royal family instead of ghastly apparitions; and later, in the nearby souvenir shops, they found the image of Vlad the Impaler plastered on fridge magnets, right above the boldly written name “Dracula”.

As the story goes, Bram Stoker wasn’t only inspired by the Bran Castle when setting his novel in Romania, but also by the horrific tales surrounding the medieval ruler of Wallachia, Vlad III, better known as *The Impaler* – a name earned from his preferred method of execution. This association was strengthened in the last century by the now-famous book *In search of Dracula*, published by Radu Florescu and Raymond T. McNally (Light, 2007b). The volume is widely credited with bridging the gap between Stoker’s fictional Count Dracula and Vlad III, a real-life 15<sup>th</sup> - century prince, son of Vlad II, also known as Vlad Dracul.

To reiterate a brief etymology lesson given in an earlier chapter of this book – one that every school-age child from Târgoviște could recite by heart: “dracul” is a name often used in Romania to refer to the Devil; in historical context, however, its meaning shifts, and it denotes a dragon. Vlad III’s father belonged to The Order of the Dragon, a monarchical and chivalric society founded in central Europe to protect Christianity against the Ottoman Turks. Thus, the name Vlad Dracul refers to a ruler sworn to protect the Christian faith – a far cry from the sinister image we tend to associate with the term today. As for how people arrived at “Dracula” when referring to his son, the explanation is remarkably simple: it functions the same way I would claim this chapter is mine by saying “Alexandra’s chapter”. The “-a” at the end of “Dracula” links the two as father and the father’s son, in their shared mission of protecting Christianity in Europe.

Since Florescu and McNally’s book appeared, Dracula tourism has grown increasingly active in Romania, more precisely in Bran, even though more recent studies, as well as the novel itself – which places its action in Borgo Pass, a little over 300 kilometers north from Bran – have disproven many of their claims (Light, 2007a). Still, the cultural impact of their work remains profoundly relevant when trying to understand why, to this day, Bran Castel is commonly referred to as Dracula’s Castle and why Vlad the Impaler is often described as bloodthirsty and exceptionally cruel (Light, 2007b) – though I like to say he was simply a product of his time.

There’s a reason it seems as though I was defending Vlad in that last sentence, one I have yet to mention. Had I lived six centuries ago, we would have basically been neighbors. Vlad III ruled over Wallachia from the medieval town of Târgoviște; I grew up in Târgoviște, just walking distance from the very spot his princely court once stood. Naturally, my childhood and early education were sprinkled with conflicting information about what’s true and what’s fiction about Vlad III. And even though I knew for certain he was not a vampire, I still remember being 5 or 6 years old, visiting the ruins of his court, imagining that maybe – just maybe – he was hiding somewhere, transformed into a bat – as vampires do – waiting for nightfall.

As I grew up, I became even more passionate about history and the myth of the vampire. When I moved to Braşov after graduating from high school, my first job was in a cake shop, where many foreign visitors would stop for coffee and a sweet treat, and return for a complimentary history lesson from the friendly young lady serving them: me. Whenever Dracula's name came up as a reason for visiting Romania, I saw an opportunity to promote my hometown Târgovişte, as the home of the real Dracula. And so I began to wonder: why isn't the city promoted as such by the local authorities? It could surely be beneficial to attract more visitors and encourage them to stay at least a couple of days.

Now, Târgovişte may seem small compared to other cities, but its rich history and quaint charm have a character I have yet to encounter anywhere else. I might be biased, but there's nothing wrong with wanting to promote something as precious to me as the place where I grew up. So I took it upon myself to figure the formula that might convince the local authorities to consider this opportunity, one that could also satisfy the locals; after all, as I have already established, we tend to see Vlad as the human being he was, a protector of Christianity just like his father, not the vicious impaler, and certainly not the vampire – except maybe small children. And this was the idea that sparked the inspiration for my bachelor's thesis.

I had settled on the subject months before the official deadline for submitting the topic of my thesis, so I had plenty of time to begin preparing my research. Naturally, I had to consider the resources available to me. Ideally, I wanted to speak directly to the people responsible for shaping the city's public image, but that seemed a bit out of reach at first. Still, knowing myself and believing firmly in the seven people rule, I thought to myself: "How hard could it really be to reach, say, the city mayor?". After discussing my plan with my coordinator, my strategy became clear: I first needed to find out who those key people were and then start hunting for answers.

First, I thought it would be useful to ask whether there was any department of tourism at the city hall. Unfortunately for me, its activity had ceased a few years earlier, due to lack of funding. With that option gone, I began dusting off my old connections, to figure out who the main people responsible for promoting the city actually were.

The first suspect I landed on was a local historian and Dracula enthusiast, who had authored several books on Vlad the Impale's legacy. He then pointed me towards the director of the local theatre, who alone brings hundreds of foreign tourists to the city each year, with his annual festival of modern arts. I thought I could also have some luck with the county council, since they administer the Princely Court of Târgoviște, which functions now as a museum, but they had a strict no-interview policy. So, I went straight to the big names and requested an interview with the prefect – and to my surprise, they were genuinely enthusiastic. Somehow, though, the idea of approaching the mayor felt far more intimidating. That was until I noticed he went to the same gym as I did, and I instantly decided that made us gym buddies by definition, which surely meant he would agree. And indeed – with a little lobby from my father, who may or may not have landed me some connections of his own – he agreed.

I had already gathered an impressive roster of interviewees, but there was one piece missing. All of them were key figures in the public sector, yet I had no representative from the economic and private sector, someone who truly understood how tourism is created through cohesive presentation and well-designed services. I needed someone who had genuinely tried to develop tourism in the city “the Dracula way”. That person was none other than the owner of the most luxurious hotels in the region, and he just so happened to have known me since the days when I still believed Dracula was hiding somewhere in the Princely Court. He became the first person I interviewed.

His response was overwhelmingly positive, and as I interviewed him, I sensed that we shared similar views on what could be done to increase visits in Târgoviște and to develop a feasible strategy that would benefit the local economy. Two decades earlier, he had even attempted to bring a Dracula-themed amusement park to the city, but that project has been held since. The main takeaway from this interview was that an integrated approach is needed, one that all those involved in the private service sector could adopt, in order to offer a complete and cohesive experience, capable of attracting potential tourists, while highlighting the city's main attractions. Most accommodations and restaurants already possess the know-how to handle large

groups of visitors; they simply need to agree on a shared strategy, and even collaborate to secure special deals from suppliers and propose complete service packages (Năstase, 2025).

So much more could be done to link Târgoviște to other key locations through themed tours. One such tour could center on Dracula, tracing the legend from Târgoviște, to the fortress of Poenari Citadel and finally to Bran, offering a full picture of how history turned into myth (Năstase, 2025). However, without initiative from the public sector, such tour packages would have little chance of succeeding, since the locations themselves must also reflect at least a hint of the overarching theme.

This sentiment was also shared by both the historian I spoke to and the director of the theatre, each of whom emphasized the importance of storytelling in promoting tourism in the city, especially when the municipality aims to build a consistent path for economic sustainability. As both of them pointed out, there is unfortunately a lack of recognition even among locals when it comes to the cultural heritage of the city, and many of them, if not most, tend to dismiss Târgoviște's major attractions (Năstase, 2025). There is a noticeable absence of communal values, which ultimately proves detrimental in creating the kind of welcoming environment that significantly shapes visitor satisfaction - one factor which has been proven to influence satisfaction in tourism dramatically (Soltani et al., 2018). Even so, the two continue to work tirelessly to implement new ideas that highlight at least Vlad III's enduring popularity, even if they are denied promoting events centered explicitly on Dracula.

The prefect and the mayor however – though unsurprisingly – were not particularly fond of Dracula tourism in the city, and were far more interested in promoting their own achievements as touristic attractions. Admittedly, the recent investments in local infrastructure, entertainment and leisure facilities are remarkable, and without question, they are valuable assets for the city. Yet they are not tied to any overarching narrative that could elevate the city's image in a truly distinctive way.

Yes, people from neighboring towns may visit the sports center out of necessity, and teachers may bring pupils on school trips to the Princely Court because of its proximity, but this is far from the large-scale popularity the city could achieve

through cohesive presentation and destination branding. When I raised the idea of developing a city brand that capitalizes on Dracula's worldwide appeal, the opportunity was dismissed, as directing public funding towards a myth was considered inappropriate. Even Vlad III was deemed unsuitable as a representative figure, despite his exceptional historical notoriety, because emphasising his legacy might imply that the other Wallachian princes who ruled from Târgoviște were less important, potentially suggesting that the municipality does not value all aspects of the city's history equally (Năstase, 2025).

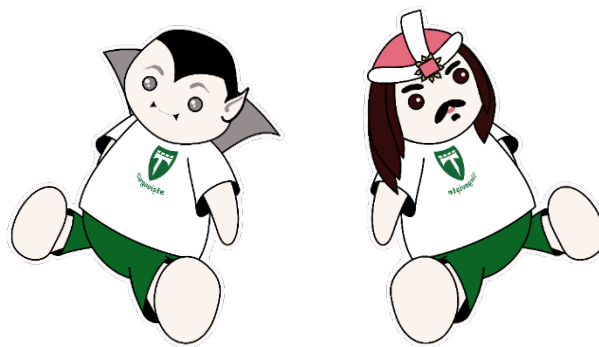
With all these insights in mind, I had to rethink my previous assumptions. Was it truly such an outlandish idea to harness the notoriety of the Dracula brand and the enduring appeal of Dracula tourism in the case of Târgoviște? I understood the points raised by the local authorities, and I appreciate the rich history of the city just as much as they do. I grew up surrounded by beautiful churches and interwar architecture; I know every museum by heart, and I can even admit that the sports center is one of the best I've visited among the many I've frequented across the country. But relying solely on people's good faith and their spontaneous appreciation for what might be interesting to see in Târgoviște feels somewhat idealistic. Just as developing excellent car tyres still required the Michelin Man to make them recognizable, a beautiful place also needs a recognizable face to make it truly attractive.

Just when my hopes began to deflate, I was informed about the week long Blended Intensive Programme (BIP) *Dracula Between Pop Culture and Tourism*. Taking part in the BIP gave me an amazing opportunity to discuss the topic with like-minded people and reassured me there still is genuine interest in marketing places through the image of the Count. Our scheduled activities showcased the existing



Sketch done while attending presentations, on the first day of the BIP

potential for marketing destinations to foreigners under the pretext of redesccovering the vampire myth in contexts that are not strictly tied to the horror genre. Even more, I was able to present the initial findings of my research and receive valuable external validation for them. I even felt artistically inspired to produce the first sketches of potential mascots that could be used for branding Târgoviște as a destination – since mascots gain sympathy and recognition from the public and tend to benefit a brand (Pairoa & Arunrangsiwed 2016) – along with other related products – plushies are my weakness.



*Final rendering of the mascots*

After completing the BIP, I gained renewed strength and doubled determination to finalize my bachelor's project. For the second part of my research, I questioned the residents of Târgoviște, since their image of the city reflects how the city is perceived (Stylidis et al. 2014). The majority of them acknowledged the benefits that tourism development would bring to the local social and economic environment. According to the respondents, Târgoviște is a city with great potential for future

development, combining modernity with historical tradition. As it was revealed through their answers, this should become the foundation for building the image of Târgoviște city as a destination brand. In regards to the most representative figure for the city, the vast majority of the respondents acknowledged the association between Târgoviște and Vlad Țepeș, above other rulers. Many answers also indicate that the residents associate the city with Dracula (Năstase, 2025).

There is no definitive ending to my story. My thesis was completed, Târgoviște has yet to be transformed through a tourism project, and the city's administration has dealt with more pressing matters that I do not intend to elaborate on. However, the results of my research indicate a clear direction for a potential promotional campaign: Târgoviște, a city at the intersection of myth and history, a place where the patina of time has quietly formed, leaving us with the radiant glory of a past that, for many, still remains undiscovered.

As for myself, I still bring up my hometown in casual conversations. I still believe there is a chance for Târgoviște to become an iconic destination for Dracula enthusiasts. And I will always be on the hunt for the strange and unusual, as I am myself a little strange and unusual – and maybe I will return to Bran Castle to hunt for one of those heart shaped Dracula keychains bearing the portrait of Vlad the Impaler.



*Heart shaped Dracula keychain, bearing the portrait of Vlad the Impaler*

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## Dracula - Marketing vs. Reality: A local's perspective

**Victoria NEGREA**

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### **Analytical by nature. Creative by choice.**

I believe these attributes are the bedrock of effective marketing. As a prospective 2026 graduate of the Digital Media programme at the Faculty of Sociology and Communication (UNITBV), I define myself through a commitment to lifelong learning. In my daily life, I find immense value in studying diverse information and learning from the people around me; I strive to accumulate knowledge from various domains to become a better version of myself each day and to be a more insightful, well-rounded conversationalist. My worldview is driven by a desire to understand humanity and the world more deeply, ensuring that I leave a positive impact on society and every individual I interact with. My professional identity is shaped by a unique blend of technical expertise – rooted in a background of Mathematics and Computer Science - and strategic Social Media Marketing. This duality empowers me to act as a natural problem-solver, facilitating the resolution of complex social and business issues with both logic and empathy. Ultimately, I consider myself a "person of the future" living firmly in the present - always adapting to emerging trends while ensuring my work remains grounded in purpose and meaning.



*“There is a reason why all things are as they are.”*

— **Bram Stoker, Dracula**

Before Dracula, Bran Castle was considered to be the summer residence of the Queen Marie of Romania. After the release of the well known novel of Bram Stoker, it gained a different kind of notoriety. Thanks to the plenty of tourists who came to

visit “Dracula’s Castle”, being fascinated by the movies that they have watched, Bran’s economy increased and the locals discovered a way to increase their incomes as well: tourism.

The main jobs of the locals were based on sheep/cows/pigs breeding and trade activities. That was before the communist times, when a significant part of the population had to work in factories, such as “Uzina <<6 martie>> Zărnești” (“Factory <<6 Martie>> Zărnești”), “Fabrica de Celuloză și Hârtie Zărnești” (“Zărnești Cellulose and Paper Factory”), “FSR - Fabrica de scule Râșnov” (“FSR - Râșnov Tool Factory”), “Întreprinderea chimică Râșnov” (“Râșnov Chemical Enterprise”). Most of them still continued to practice their past activities, but this time only to provide food for their families, because during communism, there was not such a variety of food, they had to cultivate the land, raise animals in households, and ensure their daily sustenance, as food products were not abundant in the area.

After Romanians abolished the dictatorship and after the state slowly started to build its democratic system, Bran’s locals and also the investors have taken in consideration to rent their homes and start some businesses (to develop agro-tourism in the village). They noticed a huge potential regarding the myth of Dracula, so they were opportunistic and learned to profit from Dracula’s fans (the visitors). We can clearly see how this trend has spread between the locals (the influence of “bandwagon effect”) from the fact that, in the area of Bran-Moieciu, many locals rent their homes and/or built guesthouses and this is what they do for a living. Moreover, the investors built hotels.

As everything has advantages and drawbacks, Bran, for sure, suffers from the effect of overtourism, due to the huge number of visitors. This opinion is definitely subjective, but the tourists can confirm this issue as well. The lack of parking lots, the lack of free seats at the restaurants, the queues in which you have to wait to buy tickets for visiting the castle, or donuts/langos. There is a Romanian idiom: “a vinde gogoși” (to sell donuts) and the meaning of it is to fool somebody. Not to mention

the experience of traveling by bus (it is too crowded and the air conditioned does not exist).

As a local who does not benefit from the economical effect of tourism or merchandising (since I do not own a business in this village), I consider that Bran should not be advertised. It definitely is a radical opinion, but the tourists do not know what the locals have to face due to the traffic conditions. It is also about the old and well known issue of the infrastructure, since there is only one road to Bran, so it is obviously crowded.

Furthermore, Bran should not be advertised because it already has enough visitors, and advertising Bran won't make any huge difference. Bran acquired that level in which it is promoted by its visitors from all the corners of the world, and not only by them, also by the film industry and by the connection with the American tradition of celebrating Halloween.

It is interesting that, in our region, and in many other parts of Romania, we have a tradition named: "Focu' lu' Sumedru" ("Sumedru's fire"). It works this way: on the 25th of October, in the evening (until night), there is an intentionally organized huge fire, in which we burn wood, tire etc. The purpose of this activity is to "burn the evil spirits". If the village is wealthy enough, at this event, there might be invited some traditional music singers to entertain the villagers, who play traditional dances, such as "hora", "sârba", "brâul" and "braşoveanca", which are some of the most spread ones in our region. At such events, there are also folk groups made up of young people (in general), that perform Romanian traditional dances.

Not to forget mentioning about the sweets and food booths, from which you can buy glazed apples, cotton candy, lollipops, gingerbread, popcorn, boiled corn on the cob and, of course, the indispensable "mici" - Romanian grilled minced meat rolls or "Ćevapi", as our balkan neighbours call them. Through this reference, I will try to clarify that Romania is not really a balkan country. Romania, geographically speaking, is positioned on map, in the South-Eastern part of Central Europe, and

very little of the territory is part of the balkan region. In fact, culturally and traditionally speaking, we are pretty similar, but we cannot understand each other if everyone speaks in their own language, because of the vocabulary. Basically, our balkan neighbours speak slavic languages and ours is Latin, with some slavic, Turkish, German, French, Italian, and newer, English influences. So, because of that, it is easier for us to understand Italian, French or Spanish. It's no wonder we have a community of over 1 million Romanians settled in Italy. One more mention before going back to the previous subject, a 2018 UN report highlighted that Romania ranked second in the world (after Syria) in terms of emigration rate relative to its total population. This was notable because Syria was in an active conflict, while Romania was the only "peaceful" country in the top.

As another Romanian idiom says: “să ne întoarcem la oile noastre” (“let’s go back to our sheeps”), which means “let’s get back to the point”, I was explaining about the Romanian tradition, “Focul lui Sumedru”. So when I was little, I used to join this outdoor event every year, even performing traditional dances or just to enjoy this celebration. I remember that villagers used to give sweets to the children (I did this as well). Hmm... sounds familiar? I would characterize it as the Romanian version of Halloween.

From my perspective as a local, Bran should not be advertised, because it is already advertised, without sponsorship, by the tourists. But, from my point of view, as a marketer, Bran should be advertised more, so people who own businesses in the village will be able to gain more money, and the economy of the village will increase. The problem is that Bran became too crowded, considering the number of visitors (especially in the central area of Bran).

So this is the starting point of my idea. Because of the fact that, realistically speaking, it is not possible to change the infrastructure in few years, so there will be more routes to Bran and less traffic, and to create more parking lots in the centre of the village, than those that already exist, my idea is to attract tourists to visit more parts

of the village and neighbouring villages. To promote the beauty of the entire area, so that would make the investors/locals open some more businesses even in less accessible places, with wonderful views. Or in any part that is not central, but the businesses have unique perspectives. How would a guided tour in Bran, going from one attraction to another, would sound like? The first stop would be at the cows farm, where tourists would learn how to milk a cow. The next stop would be at the cheese workshop, where tourists can learn how to prepare their own cheese at home. Other stop to be at the knitting workshop, where they would be taught how to knit their own winter socks. Another interesting idea for a workshop would be a sewing workshop, where they can learn how to sew a traditional pattern on a folk costume - only the top of it (named “ie”), because the other parts of the costume are harder to make.

