

REVIEW

Marius-Mircea Crișan (editor), *Dracula. An International Perspective*, Palgrave Macmillan, Palgrave Gothic, Basingstoke, Hampshire, 2017, XI+280 pages.

Dracula. An International Perspective, edited by Marius-Mircea Crișan (West University, Timișoara) for the Palgrave Gothic Series, mostly deals with the so-called 'literary Dracula'. This collective volume is focused on the sources, social and literary context, as well as the astonishing impact of Bram Stoker's 1897 novel. Comparisons with other literary works, the stage and film versions, as well as new and daring theories are to be found within the fifteen chapters. At least for this case, Vlad Țepeș, the 15th Century Wallachian prince referred to as 'the historical Dracula', plays a well-deserved secondary role. Nevertheless, I consider this volume as relevant for the historians. Beyond doubt, any decent monograph of Vlad Țepeș must deal with the Dracula myth. An attempt to study the history of the reading habits of the late 19th Century, or the film history of the 20th Century, cannot avoid the Gothic and the horror genres. Closer to the contemporary history of Romania, forbidding any discussion on Bram Stoker's *Dracula* whilst using it in the West in order to attract tourists reveals the deceit practiced by the communist regime. Last but not least, historians need to pay attention to theories and facts investigated by humanities and sciences, in order to practice their own study of the past.

Marius-Mircea Crișan is one of the Romanian academics for whom Dracula is a familiar topic. In *Dracula*, he points out, one deals "with a story about reading and writing" (2), imagined by the London based Irish writer Bram Stoker (1847-1912) after years of demanding research. The "international perspective" is a consequence of the impressive impact of the novel in the Western culture, as Canadian professor Elizabeth Miller, the leading world Dracula scholar, once wrote (3, 5). This is confirmed by an impressive list of no less than fourteen different fields of studies providing theoretical resources for "academic critique from various angles" (6), assembled by the editor in his introductory part.

William Hughes (Bath Spa University) discusses the multiple, sometimes tricky features, of what looks like an established 'national literary style', in this case the Irish Gothic. William Hughes argues that the push of London publishers to satisfy a public interested to buy supernatural fiction played an important role in the development of the genre (22-24). The biographies of writers producing 'Irish Gothic' reveal more than their national or social background (mostly Irish, Protestant, and living in England). Modern science, to which some of these writers were not strangers, was an explanatory force in novels where supernatural forces, e.g. vampires, appear (27).

Imagology studies are an established topic within the humanities. A major contribution of the present volume is the de-singularizing of Transylvania as a mythical territory. This annoying issue for the Romanian public finds a correspondence in the case of Italy, as proven by Donatella Abate Badin (Torino). “Contemporary Irish issues” were cross-referenced in novels and stories “set abroad”, thus creating the literary image of a “demonised Italy” (42-43, 49). The image of Central and Eastern Europe depicted in the works of Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849) proves that a good part of Europe, not particularly Transylvania, was still poorly known to the wider public. By looking at this possible literary source of inspiration for Bram Stoker – a known admirer of Edgar Allan Poe – Lucian-Vasile Szabo and Marius-Mircea Crişan (both West University, Timișoara) also contribute to the discussions on why Central and Eastern Europe had such a power of attraction for writers interested in having a “fictive geography inspired by elements of the real one” (55) as background to their stories. A mediaeval myth rooted in fears and stereotypes, the pied piper inspired writers and film makers through the 19th and 20th Centuries. There were numerous 19th and 20th Centuries re-workings of this story of stolen children, investigated by Sam George (Hertfordshire). Shifting the location of the myth from Hameln to other locations, or the ending to a happy one, obviously in an American animation movie, proves one more the known fluidity of the myths. Among the modern re-interpretations two are strikingly opposed: in 1939, the evacuation of the children from air attacks threatened London was code-named Operation Pied Piper; in 1940, the propaganda film “Der ewige Jude” showed that a myth without a religious reference can be given an antisemitic meaning (81).

Dracula ranks high among the literary works so popular that lead to creation of special tourist attractions. During the 1980s, the communist government of Romania capitalised on the enthusiasm of Western tourists (mostly American and British) and built a castle-shaped hotel in the Borgo (Tihuța) Pass, where the fictitious one is set. In his contribution, Hans Corneel de Roos suggests that Bram Stoker’s notes reveal a different location for the castle. Though this seductive theory is well demonstrated, one must take into account the fact that, despite its thorough documentation, Bram Stoker’s work is ascribed to the fictional genre.

Clive Bloom (Professor Emeritus, Middlesex) explores “*Dracula* and the Psychic World of the East End of London”. Written in the aftermath of Jack the Ripper’s murders, Bram Stoker’s novel was set in another unfamiliar, foreign, uncontrollable, hence dangerous East, e.g. Eastern Europe (132, 35). “Reality subordinated to fantasy” (134) sums up both *Dracula* and its unpredicted impact.

Following previous research on *Dracula* tourism in pre- and post-1989 Romania, Duncan Light (Bournemouth) investigated for his contribution how travel appeared in Bram Stoker’s novel itself. The journeys for pleasure, health,

or business, were not only essential for the literary plot, but also an echo of the increasingly mobile society of the late 19th Century (149). The issue of Dracula's (fictional) castle is scrutinised by Marius-Mircea Crişan in his chapter on the newly discovered connections between the Corvin castle in Hunedoara and the historical and literary Draculas. This is more than a good opportunity to revisit the travelogues of Andrew F. Crosse and Charles Bonner, known to have been consulted by Bram Stoker (167-171). The rise in interest and visitors for the Hunedoara Castle confirms the positive and negative power of storytelling in the modern world. The same may be said about other cities and towns associated with supernatural, i.e. vampire, stories, as Kristin L. Bone (Hertfordshire) demonstrates for New Orleans, Whitby, or Forks.

John Edgar Browning (Georgia Institute of Technology) discusses how the story of *Dracula* evolved from basically an English novel to an American film icon. Bram Stoker wrote his novel “around and not about” Dracula. Therefore, the character is associated rather with the influential performance of actors such as Bela Lugosi or Christopher Lee (196, 204-206). John Edgar Browning makes an important point: the novel cannot be separated anymore by its stage and film versions, in themselves answers to “shifting moral, cultural, and technological stimuli” (196). Not the first, and certainly not the last in the line of vampire novels and films, Dracula is often compared to Anne Rice's Lestat. We owe to Nancy Schumann a comparison between the two fictional characters. Magdalena Grabias (Lublin) looks at the contemporary Gothic and horror cinema and television. Her work is a good reminder that the two genres evolved rapidly, swiftly moving away from Dracula towards more contemporary backgrounds. As Dorota Babilas argues, even if the public is not anymore restricted to a conservative middle-class with strong moral principles (249), the Gothic and horror were genres build upon “human anxieties” (254). “Vampires for Family Values”, a trend of transforming monsters into family figures and inducing the idea of general kindness, does go against tradition, but one must agree with the author about the dangers of such an approach. Last but not least, Carole Senf (Georgia Institute of Technology), a well-known Dracula scholar, confirms such an approach by investigating how Gothic stories evolved from being set in dark forests and derelict castles to major cities and, in our very days, in recognisable neighbourhoods (260, 273).

To conclude: with Bram Stoker's notes for *Dracula* finally published in 2008 by Robert Eighteen-Bisang and Elizabeth Miller, hence with open access to the most of his bibliography, new theories on the novel's content, impact, and meaning were prone to appear. This volume demonstrates that such an assumption is correct.

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