

Transylvania: Real vs. Imaginary Space in Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897)

**Transilvania: el espacio real versus el ilusorio en la novela
Dracula (1897) de Bram Stoker**



TRABAJO DE FIN DE GRADO

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ABSTRACT

At the end of the XIXth century legend and fiction brought to life the eponymous vampire known as Count Dracula, which eventually became a powerful cultural myth. Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897) symbolizes an idea of the sensationalism that attracts the reader by virtue of its distinctiveness, but it does not represent the essence of Transylvania, an unknown region on the very edge of Europe, nor its historical richness. The author's most enduring legacy has been the creation of a particular way of seeing Transylvania, meanwhile the fixation with the vampire myth allowed to proliferate a barbaric and misconceived image of "the land of Dracula". Nonetheless, as this paper proves, Transylvania's particular wilderness stands as a symbol of the beauty and uniqueness of this region. More than a supernatural place this region is depicted as a different and unexplored location, "a lovely country" that is "full of beauties of all imaginable kinds." (Stoker, 1993: 420).

Al final del siglo XIX en Inglaterra leyenda y ficción dieron vida al epónimo vampiro conocido como el Conde Drácula, que eventualmente se convirtió en un poderoso mito cultural. Drácula, de Bram Stoker, simboliza una idea de lo sensacional que atrae al lector por virtud de su carácter distintivo, pero que en realidad no representa ni la esencia de Transilvania, una región desconocida situada al margen de Europa, ni tampoco su riqueza histórica. El verdadero legado del autor ha sido crear una forma particular de ver Transilvania, mientras que la fijación con el mito del vampiro permitió proliferar una imagen atroz y equivocada de "la Tierra de Drácula". Sin embargo, este proyecto quiere reflejar el particular salvajismo de Transilvania que se erige como un símbolo de la belleza y singularidad de esta región. Más que un lugar sobrenatural esta región está representada como un lugar diferente e inexplorado, "a lovely country" que es "full of beauties of all imaginable kinds." (Stoker, 1993: 420)

Key words: Late-Victorian Gothic Literature, Location and Landscape, Bram Stoker, *Dracula*, Transylvania.

Introduction

Literature has proved to be throughout time a powerful tool for creating enduring myths, legendary characters and fictional stories, making thus the truth irrelevant as long as the narrative was gripping. Such aspects, together with the context and period into which a novel was written brought to life stories that have become immortal and are going to last for eternity.

This seems to be the case of the 19th century author Bram Stoker (1847-1912) who, upon fact, legend and fiction brought to life his eponymous vampire: Count Dracula, a sinister and monstrous predator who thrived on the blood of living souls. Regarded by many as the defining work of Gothic fiction, Stoker's fin-de-siècle novel achieved a pervasive hold on Western imagination, transforming it into one of the most lasting literary myths of all times.

Hence, it comes as no surprise that when we say "vampire" we immediately think of Dracula, and such has been the superstition created around this character that nowadays it is impossible to allude to Romania, and particularly to Transylvania, without thinking of it as the home of Dracula. As Duncan Light so perfectly phrased it in his book *The Dracula Dilemma*: "such is the mythology that has grown up around Transylvania that many in the West are surprised to learn that Transylvania is a real place" (2012: 28). The Occidental's misconceived view of this unknown region on the very edge of Europe, together with Stoker's sinister description of it, has created the most suitable home for a sinister predator, creating thus a powerful place myth around it.

Such has been the effect of *Dracula* that more than a century later, after its publication the popularity of the vampire Count shows no sign of fading. In addition to this the vast majority of interpreters and scholars believe that the author's most enduring legacy has been the creation of a particular way of seeing Transylvania as "the point of entry into an imagined world of vampires

and the supernatural” (Light, 2012: 33). Stoker made use of the Victorian obsession of boundaries between the West and the East, enhancing the gap between these places, and installing once again an important weight on the idea of space from a western view. By moving back and forth, Transylvania - London - Transylvania, he managed to contrast and compare two different locations, Great Britain and Romania, and establish them as the civilized and the primitive. Thus, on account of the novel’s great influence on the image of Romania, this essay will aim its attention on the idea of space and place in *Dracula* to prove the contrast between real images and fictionalized representations.

Objectives

In an era in which Victorian literature was a combination of anxieties due to “the collapse of the Empire, the degeneration of the race [...] and the rise of the New Woman” (Daly, 1997: 181), Stoker’s novel shows that the darkness of the landscape, as well as the oppressive images portrayed throughout the story encompass a larger significance of the places transversed. For this reason, my essay will focus on the importance of place in Bram Stoker’s Gothic novel *Dracula*, showing how the fixation with the vampire myth allows to proliferate a barbaric and misconceived image of “the land of Dracula”. My idea is to contemplate the space and landscape described throughout the novel so as to see how “there is something behind or within the narrative of *Dracula*” (Schleifer, 1980: 301) with regard to Transylvania, that it is neither sinister nor shadowy, just different.

Ultimately, the purpose of my dissertation is to look at *Dracula* from another perspective; one that does not associate Romania’s image with the experience of the supernatural or with the home of vampires. I will try to leave behind the well-established representation of “Transylvania as a nightmare land of mists and shadows, unrelievedly nocturnal and ill-lit” (Glover, 1993: 131), and try to see it with different lens. The question is simple: Should the country’s traditions, folklore and different cultural identity create a bad image of Romania just because its distinctiveness and peripheral location does not fit the Victorian Britain requirements? In the novel the narrator gives a clear answer to my question when he says: “We are in Transylvania; and Transylvania is not England. Our ways are not your ways, and there shall be to you many strange things” (1993: 23). Therefore, such comments shows how the West’s perception collides with the way that Romania sees itself, but that does not make the country a strange or supernatural place.

Methodology

For my analysis on the subject I will make use of a combination of secondary sources that are relevant to the cultural, historical and fictional context of both Britain and Romania, in order to better appreciate and judge the landscapes and places described in *Dracula*. An understandable starting point for examining the novel and envision a different illustration of Dracula's Transylvania will be to take a general look at the literature and context of the late-Victorian culture, period into which Bram Stoker wrote the novel.

To contextualize the development of *Dracula* it is paramount for us to speak about the decay of Britain as a world power, and how that collapse is transformed into narratives. As Stephen Arata notes, "*Dracula* enacts the period's most important and pervasive narrative of decline," showing how for many the fear was "that what had been represented as the civilized world was on the point of being colonized by primitive forces" (1990: 623). These anxieties are expressed in the book through the mentality of an eternal struggle between the good, civilized West represented by the city of London, and the evil - wild East that was the Transylvanian countryside, ideas which dominated the late-Victorian era.

My next step will be to make a contrast between the two essential places described in *Dracula*: From London to Transylvania, in order to see how the Balkanic position of the region is the key element that makes Romania different from the "civilized West". My idea is not so much to carry out a comparison between the two places, but to look at them as different landscapes, with separate traditions and customs. The fundamental idea is that Romanian's distinctiveness was the essential component for the development of the Gothic atmosphere in *Dracula*, and "the midst of the Carpathian Mountains [gave birth to] one of the wildest and least known portions of Europe" (Stoker, 1993: 2). Yet, in reality the country's culture and customs simply existed off the beaten path that the westerners established.

All of these elements will help me narrow my scope of what I actually want to examine: Transylvania: the land beyond Dracula's castle. For that, to conclude my analysis I will focus on the fictitious image which has become an enduring element of popular culture, transforming the region into a Gothic and strange land, full of superstition and uncertainty.

State of the Questions and Critical reception of *Dracula*

Gothic as a literary genre has generally been associated with descriptions of frightening events which produce an atmosphere of mystery and anxiety, concepts that in the end provide the suspension of disbelief so important to the Gothic fiction. Described by many as “a literature of crisis” the Gothic can be understood as a linguistic assertion where “the anxieties of a culture find their most explicit expression” (Daly, 1997: 184), reflecting thus the political, social and cultural context in which they were written.

Relevant to point out is that by the end of the Victorian period Gothic fiction had ceased to be the prevailing genre and was overlooked by most critics, however, in many ways, it was now arriving to its most creative stage with authors such as Mary Shelley, Edgar Allan Poe, Robert Louis Stevenson and many others. This was the context in which Bram Stoker wrote “one of the most horrifying books in English literature” (Henderson, 1976: 607) *Dracula*, a narrative that provides a case study about a powerful cultural myth which is interpreted, as Eleni Coundouriotis notes, “in terms of Eastern European Folklore” (1999: 143). As a result of this, the clash between Britain’s view of Romania, or better said, Stoker’s depiction of it, and the country’s own identity cannot concur in their representation.

Since its publication *Dracula* has had a significant impact on the image of the vampire in popular culture and folklore, and although Stoker did not invent the vampire figure, he surely defined its shape, converting his novel into the most widely known vampire story ever written. The most famous Gothic villain, Count Dracula has become, over the course of the twentieth century and beyond, an iconic figure after which numerous theatrical, film and television adaptations were produced, and although they defected from Stoker’s novel, these movies helped increase the book’s notoriety. F.M. Murnau’s 1922 *Nosferatu: A Symphony of Horror*, although an unauthorized

adaptation of Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, was the earliest film reworking of the book, followed by John Badham's 1979 horror film *Dracula: A Love Story*, and ending with the screening of the movie in 1992, by the famous director and producer Francis Ford Coppola, entitled *Dracula: Love Never Dies*, all of which help make *Dracula* the iconic figure that he is today.

All these aspects prepared the way for an abundance of interpretative works made by scholars when analyzing *Dracula*, and a glance at critical accounts reveals how concepts like Orientalism and Degeneration have dominated the interpretation of the novel. Authors like Robert D. Kaplan, Stephan Arata or Éleni Coundouriotis focused their attention on notions such as Empire and Colonization, and on how Stoker's fiction was elaborated around Western discourses, seeing thus Transylvania as a region that is in Europe but is not fully European. They have understood, like Cannon Schmitt, that the dominant discourse of the novel is a statement concerning "the West's construction of a reified and stereotyped East" (1994: 27). The consensus of this group of scholars was that *Dracula* illustrated a constant binary West/ East opposition, where the East was always inferior to the West. Eleni Coundouriotis, for example, made a thorough study regarding this facet of the narrative "treating the Eastern Question as central to Stoker's project, [analyzing thus] the way in which the actual historical context of the novel informs its discursive delegitimation of Eastern European history" (1999: 143). Stephen Arata had a similar perspective on *Dracula* and in his essay he examined how the historical context into which the novel was written was fundamental for understanding the text and its "anxiety of reverse colonization." He argued that culture itself transforms perceptions into narratives, and in *Dracula* these perceptions enact and even "assuage the anxiety attendant upon cultural decay" (1990: 623), reinforcing cultural stereotypes, as well as adding a sinister atmosphere to the place.

Other critics have decided to see *Dracula* from a gender pondered perspective, and although their interpretations have provoked many critical

discussions, such ideas cannot be overlooked. For example, Marjorie Howes perceived the novel to abet for “the mediation of the feminine, bisexuality and homoerotic desire”, and in her article she argued that “the novel’s anxieties about gender definition are related to an ambivalent pattern of expression and repression that structures the treatment of its fantasies” (1988: 104). Thus, Howes’ critical view argued that the text was fundamentally based upon a confluence of homosexual desire, and that the “feminine” role was used mostly to conceal such sexual fantasies. Matthew Brennan also points out the idea of femininity in *Dracula*, but rather than seeing female characters as alter egos of the men represented throughout the book, he speaks about “the Role of the New Woman”(1992: 1), and how Stoker’s characterization of Lucy and Mina is a positive response to the social phenomenon of self-development in women.

With so many contrasting points of view and interpretations the essential aspect upon which the vast majority of interpreters and scholars have agreed on is that *Dracula* is a roman à clef based on the life of Vlad III, better known as Vlad “the Impaler,” a fifteenth century Prince (Voievode) that ruled the Wallachian throne. But who was he, and how did he achieve such fame? In his essay “East European Vampires & *Dracula*” Felix Oinas examined both the resemblance and differences between the well-known Voievode and Count Dracula in order to see if there is a foundation to support such ideas. As he noted, the original Dracula, or Vlad Țepeș, “was devoid of any vampiristic features,” and became famous “because of the way he executed his victims by impaling them on stakes” (1982: 114), acquiring thus the reputation of one of Europe’s bloodiest tyrants. Paul Dukes analyzes thoroughly in his essay “*Dracula*: Fact, Legend and Fiction,” the story behind the figure of Count Dracula, showing how “there is a basis in fact and Eastern European legend for the ghoul” (1982: 44). As he explains, the vampire that haunts our dreams is inspired in Romanian history, concretely Stoker’s nineteenth century vampire is inspired in the fifteenth century ruler of the Danubian principality

of Wallachia, known as Vlad Țepeș, or Vlad Drăculea (alias Dracula). Yet, Dukes' analysis more than a comparison between the two figures focuses on demonstrating how Stoker's creation, although inspired by Vlad, is considerably moved from the historical figure and authentic life of the Voievode, and directed towards constructing a more Gothic and fictitious character. That is to say, he argued that Stoker played with the confusion generated by the cultural myth of the historical Voievode, and created both a sinister character and a powerful cultural myth.

By now, it can be fully understood how part of the appeal of a novel like *Dracula* is brought about by such powerful cultural stories related to immortality, cruelty and the un-dead, but the uncertainty unravels around questions such as: Should Transylvania, in the XXI century, still be regarded as the home of vampires just because an ancient ruler was cold-hearted? Wouldn't now be the time for readers to start fathoming such superstitions, as those derived from Stoker's *Dracula* or about Vlad "the Impaler" as being illusory? In his recent book *The Dracula Dilemma* Duncan Light tackles these issues and points out that "nothing in Romanian folklore narratives associates Vlad Țepeș with vampirism" (2012: 44). Light dedicates an entire chapter to the Historical Dracula, contrasting it with the Dracula of Literature, showing in this way how the first was the source of inspiration for the second. Schematically, the author examines how Stoker's main character Dracula is influenced up to a certain point in the medieval legend of Vlad Țepeș, but also how it deflects from it in order to bring to life a sinister villain.

The majority of studies show that it is usual for characters in Gothic fiction to find themselves in strange and mysterious places, and by now it is safe to say that Stoker's book established Eastern Europe, and Transylvania in particular, as the *locus classicus* of the Gothic. As Felix Oinas perfectly phrased it, "Stoker succeeded fairly well in creating a novel of medieval Transylvania" (1982: 115), transforming it into an absurd and strange place. With this in mind, my essay seeks to look at "the land a Dracula" from a different

perspective, to see how the “darkness” of the landscape stands out to represent the beauty of an unknown place on the edge of Europe. My idea is to try to see Dracula’s home, Transylvania, as a real place that is neither menacing nor barbaric, but a beautiful region that is situated within the arc of the Carpathian Mountains. By setting apart Dracula’s image from that of Romania we could come to understand the country’s real customs and folklore and contrast them with Brooker’s Gothic fictional counterparts.

Literature and Context of the late-Victorian culture

“The haunting face of the vampire is simply a darker version of our own”

(Carol A. Senf)

The nineteenth century, or the Age of Victoria, has been regarded throughout time as a period of astonishing progress and prosperity, that transformed Victorian Britain from “a largely rural society, based on a monopoly of state-controlled interests, to an urban and industrial society, based on an increasing culture of individualism and capitalism” (Purchase, 2006: 3). For the British society, its early to mid-Victorian years set up an expanding productive economy, with domestic and colonial achievements around the world, establishing it as a global supremacy.

Nevertheless, as the end of the century approached, its glory as well as affluence began to decline. The emergence of new Empire rivals, the Indian Rebellion, problems in the Crimea, the Boer Wars and the Jamaican uprising aroused a time of unprecedented anxiety and controversies. In the face of industrial modernity the faith of the Victorians was increasingly shaken, and that eventually lead to the dissolution of traditional values, as well as the family system. As Punter and Byron pointed out:

England was an imperial power in decline, [...] experiencing doubts about the morality of the imperial mission, and faced with growing unrest in the colonies. At home, the social and psychological effects of the Industrial Revolution were becoming all too clear as crime and disease were rife in the overcrowded city slums. (2004: 39)

Thus, the urban overcrowding and industrial pollution, along with challenges to moral codes, class and sexual roles, religious beliefs and extreme poverty eventually lead the British society to a pessimistic feeling of degeneration as the century wore on. Seemingly, the deterioration of society was an aftermath

of man's deterioration, and that brought about "Gothic endings" (Shattock, 2010: 262) for Britain during the decades of the new imperialism.

One outcome of such context was the development of the Gothic genre in literature and writing. Through the medium of fiction and horror, Gothic representations in texts helped contextualize the problems and anxieties that preoccupied the Victorians by the end of the century. Yet, it is important to note that Gothic fiction was not a revolutionary creation of the Victorian era, but rather it evolved from different tendencies that appeared in the eighteenth century, and that paved the way for the Gothic.

So, as a genre, English Gothic fiction has its historical origins in the late-eighteenth century, during the Romantic period, with novels like Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto: A Gothic Story* (1765) and Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794). These avant-garde writings combined elements of the medieval romance, the character of the sublime and the grotesque, the threatening and the bizarre, feelings that had not been experienced until then in literature. In fact, these features were carried forward into the nineteenth century, but "significantly transformed, intensified and disseminated by interactions with national literatures and political events outside England" (Riquelme, 2000: 586). Thus, the idea of Gothic literature and its development during the fin de siècle years of the Victorian period became associated with darkness, anxieties and a sense of terror, and the combination of science and the occult epitomized greatly this type of literature. As we come to understand, quite different from the eighteenth century Gothic writings, in Victorian literature the idea of Gothic represented both a reflection on, and a reaction to a decadent and corrupt English society.

The Gothic emphasis on mystery and awe turned out to be a fundamental part of the literary modernism that was emerging in the 1890s in Britain, meantime, these writings became associated with an illusory dimension that was overflowing with terror and macabre goings-on. Nevertheless, finding the beautiful and the sublime in obscure characters and dark places was an

essential element that defined all the major works of the late-nineteenth century. John Paul Riquelme noted that an important step for modern Gothic fiction was the way in which authors “Gothicized the aesthetic and aestheticizes the Gothic” (2000: 593). They were not merely exploiting the unknown and mysterious, but rather exploring the obscure, the strange, and the exotic.

At any rate, Gothic literature “remains a nebulous a genre as the shadowy veiled figures which haunt its pages” (Wright, 2007: 1), and as we have seen, these original, yet unusual publications, bring to life suspense and danger, dark secrets and murder, as well as gloomy creatures such as ghosts, monsters, and vampires, to name just a few.

This brings me to an essential aspect around which my study develops: the figure of the vampire and the proliferation of the vampire myth. The subject of vampirism has attracted worldwide attention on account of its superstitions concerning the Undead, the living-dead, or otherwise known as blood sucking creatures. Experts have observed how, although vampires were not very realistic figures, they were referred to by a great variety of cultures from Eastern Europe to Asia and Africa, and as Carol Senf pointed out, “the belief in vampires is indigenous to almost all cultures and all periods” (1988: 141), the superstitions existing almost everywhere in the world. The beginnings are, of course, in folklore and popular culture, from which the vampire inspired fear, horror and repulsion. Quite contrasting with the romantic figure of the nineteenth-century fictional vampire, with which we are accustomed, the vampire of folklore did not drink blood, nor transformed into a bat, but instead it exhibited much more cruelty and barbarism.

Still, as it seems, England was quite left out of this cultural belief, and it is not until the nineteenth-century that the subject was approached in fiction. In fact, not only did the vampire appear in many writings during this period, but it also becomes a pervasive cultural icon simply because the mysterious subject appealed. Unquestionably the vampire originated in folklore, yet

literature considerably reshaped and remolded its figure “into a recognizable literary type to suit its own needs and purposes” (Senf, 1988: 25). For instance, a pioneer work to feature an aristocratic vampire in English literature was John Polidori’s “The Vampyre” in 1819, which founded the modern tradition of vampire fiction. This narrative is the first of many to introduce innovations in terms of setting and characters, Polidori being the first author to bring the vampire to his own era, and closer to home. From the success of this novel, an abundance of other publications have flourished throughout the century, such as *Varney the Vampire* (1847), Le Fanu’s *Carmilla* (1872), and last but not the least Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* (1897).

Contemplated as the last and most important Gothic work in the nineteenth-century to portray a vampire, Stoker’s *Dracula* is a revealing novel because “it embodies almost every Gothic cliché imaginable, and even more so it spices them up with specifically Victorian neuroses” (Purchase, 2006: 80), converting the vampire into one of the stock figures of Gothic fiction.

Nowadays, it is impossible to say the word vampire without associating it with the infamous Count Dracula, and Stoker did such a good job at creating “a creature of supernatural evil and immense power” (Senf, 1988: 32), that even though *Dracula* is not the first vampire novel ever written, it is for sure the most famous one. At this point, one may wonder what makes *Dracula* better than its predecessors or even successors? Well, the answer resides in all the aspects that shape the novel. Stoker’s unconventional character is a transitional figure that connects the repulsive and terrifying creature from folklore with a more engaging modern form, who exhibits up-to-date anxieties, as well as a romantic Gothic character.

As it seems, an important element that contributed to *Dracula*’s authenticity, and was vital for the narrative’s outcome, attended to the locations illustrated by the author. It is plain to see how much of the novel’s action takes place in England, and as Carol Senf noted, Stoker’s use of “a prosaic, modern setting is responsible for the novel’s peculiar excellence”

(1988: 33). Yet, contrasting greatly with the contemporary nineteenth-century England, is the description of the exotic Transylvania, also known as “the land of Dracula”. As Stoker presents it, this bizarre place can only be a “ghoulish hell” (Shapiro, 2008: 30), from which supernatural creatures and criminals came to life.

As we come to understand, Stoker’s *Dracula* brought about an imaginative construct of the place, and the result was that the West firmly establish Transylvania as a strange location, where supernatural and mythical creatures find safe refuge. In the end, a particular resonance within the Western world came into being about Transylvania, a “remote, backward, and sinister place on the very edge of Europe, where vampires and the supernatural reign freely” (Light, 2008: 6).

***Dracula*: From London to Transylvania**

“The impression I had was that we were leaving the West and entering the East”

(Bram Stoker)

This is one of the opening statements with which Stoker’s main character, Jonathan Harker, starts his description of the landscape he encounters while traveling across the continent towards Transylvania. As we come to understand later on, this remark is the first of many to segregate the West from the East in *Dracula*, converting rural Transylvania into “a place where the supernatural reigns supreme.” (Light, 2009: 243). Moreover, Stoker’s novel placed in motion an entire vampire culture during the 20th and 21th century, which eventually established an enduring place myth around Transylvania, and implicitly Romania, as the home of vampires whether they like it or not.

Important to notice while reading *Dracula* is that two antithetical locations are selected for the novel’s development: London and Transylvania. These cardinal regions, which represent the West and the East, are fundamental for the plot’s evolution since they personify completely opposite values, cultures and ideas, as Count Dracula himself lets us know: “We are in Transylvania; and Transylvania is not England. Our ways are not your ways, and there shall be to you many strange things.” (Stoker, 23)

With this in mind one may wonder why such imaginative construct was built around this region; what made Transylvania so bizarre and frightful to the degree that “every known superstition in the world [was] gathered into the horseshoe of the Carpathians” (Stoker, 1993: 2)? A good answer is given by Carol A. Senf in his book *The Vampire in the 19th Century English Literature* where he notes that such beliefs go far beyond the place itself, and that “the vampire was simply one more example of a mysterious subject that appealed” (1988: 21) by virtue of its Orientalism. As he explains it *Dracula* symbolized

an idea of the sensational that attracted the reader, and not the essence of Transylvania or its historical richness.

Nevertheless, fundamental in *Dracula* are the constant journeys that the characters undertake: across Europe, in between cities, across provinces or from America. All these journeys have a fundamental aspect in common: they all start from or finish in the capital city of the largest empire of the world in the nineteenth century: London. This city represents one of the key locations that the author uses for the development of the plot because of the importance it had at that moment. In the book Count Dracula gives us a clear example of the mentality of people surrounding this place:

I have come to know your great England; and to know her is to love her. I long to go through the crowded streets of your mighty London, to be in the midst of the whirl and rush of humanity, to share its life, its change, its death, and all that makes it what it is. (1993: 22)

Thus, as we come to realize the context is crucial, and from the beginning of *Dracula* it is quite obvious that the story's localization strengthens contemporary fears related to the Victorian society as well as with the nature of Englishness. The contrast between the West's richness and splendor is constantly correlated with the East's perpetual worthlessness. As Gill Davies pointed out, "the detailed geography of London is deployed to highlight a number of imperial and national anxieties" (Davies, 2004) which already existed.

As a matter of a fact, by the time that *Dracula* was published stereotypes were well-established, and London was already considered both the heart and the image of the Empire, all the while the East represented all the things that the West was not. In his article "Performing Transylvania: Tourism, fantasy and play in a liminal place", Duncan Light perfectly pointed out how in the novel the author was more interested, due to his imaginative construct of the place, in portraying "Transylvania as the social and spatial Other of Victorian Britain" (2009: 243), than to describe the beauty and peculiarities of this region. Thus, London was the center of the British Empire and Bram

Stoker makes a point of describing all the ways in which this city was superior to the East.

Ironically, the importance of it is always contextualized in contrast to Transylvania, for which “the general effect was one of extraordinary pallor” (Stoker, 20). During the opening sections of the novel Jonathan Harker travels East across Europe, across “the most Western of splendid bridges over the Danube” only to arrive “among the traditions of Turkish rule” (Stoker, 1). His narrative points to the border, or bridge between the civilized Occident and the ignorant Orient in regard to the landscape, people and customs he encounters. Furthermore, we see how the image that the city and society epitomized positioned it as the center of the world, while the picturesque East became the 'unknown England' or the 'outcast London'. As we come to understand Transylvania’s landscape “defined more by wood and natural stone than by concrete and scrap iron” (Kaplan, 1993: 148) is perceived as a primitive country that exhibits fantastic elements and Gothic characters.

Be that as it may, important to emphasize is that the novel begins and ends in this remote place, situated in “the midst of the Carpathian mountains”, and presented as “one of the wildest and least known portions of Europe” (Stoker, 2). In contrast to London, Transylvania is an unexplored place, the reason for which Jonathan cannot get “the exact locality of the Castle Dracula as there are no maps of this country as yet to compare with [the] Ordnance Survey maps” (Stoker, 2). As we are told, the district as well as the castle is situated in “the extreme East of the country, just on the borders of three states, Transylvania, Moldavia and Bukovina” (Stoker, 1). So, the further Jonathan moved from the West, the less he could identify with the culture and people that inhabited those regions, as he clearly lets us know: “there were many things new to me” (Stoker, 8).

But what is important to stress out is that new does not mean strange nor dangerous, just different. Hence, if we try to see Transylvania from a realistic point of view, more than a supernatural place this region is depicted as a

different and unexplored location. From this perspective, the region becomes “a liminal place, a threshold between the known and the unknown, the ordinary and the extraordinary” (Light, 2009: 243). The beauty of the settings that Jonathan describes throughout his journey illustrate the fascinating differences that comprise this far away land. In his book *Balkan Ghosts: A Journey through History* Roberto D. Kaplan tried to explain the mysticism surrounding this Eastern place situated in Romania by demonstrating how such conceptions had to do more with cultural influence than with reality:

The mystical streak [that the country exhibited] was further intensified by the Carpathian landscape itself, darkened by fir forests and teeming with wolves and bears, out of which arose a pantheon of spirits and superstitions and the richest folk culture in Europe (2005: 94)

Thus, although the country gets wilder as Jonathan gets closer to his destination, this particular wilderness symbolizes in reality the beauty of the region. Even he admits to its allurement: “all day long I seemed to dawdle through a country which was full of beauty of every kind” (Stoker, 3).

As noted earlier, these two locations represent complete opposites. The attractiveness of Transylvania and the Carpathians cannot be compared or undermined by London’s supposed modernity because its natural scenery and cultural distinctiveness makes it idyllic and unique.

Transylvania: The Land beyond *Dracula's* Story

It is a proven fact that stories about mythical places have been a source of inspiration worldwide. Pronounce the name of Atlantis or El Dorado and surreal stories about lost civilizations and golden cities immediately will excite people's imagination. As we come to realize, literature has helped to firmly embed these imaginary locations into people's minds, eventually leading them to acquire extraordinary resonance.

This seems to be also the case of Transylvania, who, upon the publication of *Dracula* back in 1897, received the title of "the home of vampires", or better known as "the land of Dracula"- a place of confinement and hysteria. Still, what we have to take note of is that in contrast to "make-believe" places this location actually exists in Eastern Europe, and to be as precise as possible I have to say that Transylvania is one of the three regions that built up contemporary Romania, being located in the central part of the country.

Although there are countless locations around which a place myth has developed throughout time, in the 19th century Bram Stoker succeeded quite well in creating a story of medieval Transylvania that was "backward, undeveloped and fundamentally different from the West" (Light, 2012: 29), the impact of which has been so high that "it is difficult to think of another country that is so immediately identified with a literary character - and a villain at that" (2012: 1). Such is the mythology that has developed around Transylvania that even today there are still many enthusiasts that travel to Romania in search of Dracula.

Thus, while reading the novel, we see how the way in which the author depicts the locations, landscape and people generate the Gothic and frightful atmosphere that takes the story within the bounds of possibility, and as Robert D. Kaplan noted in his book *Balkan Ghosts: A Journey through History* "Romanian manners have always been an unfortunate and dangerous palimpsest, which is precisely what attracted authors and journalist to them in the first place." (2005: 94). Hence, this region's notoriety appeared once

the novel was brought to life, and in writing *Dracula*, Stoker enacted what was to become an enduring place myth of Transylvania.

Needless to say that in this context many have assumed this fictitious writing to be real, and have taken for granted that the evil and supernatural form part of this land. Even nowadays the very word Transylvania “conjures up images of howling wolves, midnight thunderstorms, evil looking peasants, and the thick courtly accent of count Dracula” (Kaplan, 2005: 149). Nonetheless, this cannot be the only truth behind the land of Dracula, “a lovely country” that is “full of beauties of all imaginable kinds” and where “the people are brave, and strong, and simple, and seem full of nice qualities” (Stoker, 1993: 420).

So far I have alluded mostly to what Romania represented in the West, nevertheless, as I stated in my thesis this location has nothing to do with Stoker’s depiction, and although the author makes us believe there is “something wild and uncanny about the place” (1993: 433), the beauty of the scenery, along with Romanian traditions is exactly what makes Transylvania unique and different. In fact, if we move away from the ‘Orientalist’ ideas that dominated the 19th century Victorian society, as well as Stoker’s novel, we can observe that Romania is a magical country with breathtaking scenery. The author himself acknowledges it through Jonathan’s statements regarding the beauty of the scenery: “all day long we seemed to dawdle through a country which was full of beauty of every kind” (Stoker, 1993: 3)

Thus, when reading *Dracula* we see how the country’s splendid landscape, as well as the beauty of the Carpathians is “stripped of cultural significance” (Coundouriotis, 1999: 146) in order to make the novel more thought-provoking for the reader. Nevertheless, all of these aspects cannot make us oblivious to true facts about Transylvania, a “very interesting old place” (Stoker, 2005: 3) whose attractiveness has a lot to offer. For example an important detail to consider is that Romanian people call it Ardeal, which translated from Latin stands for “the Land beyond the Forest”, on account of

its scenery within the Carpathian landscape. A perfect image of it is described by Jonathan Harker when he travels across the country towards the castle:

Beyond the green swelling hills of the 'Mittle Land' rose mighty slopes of forests up to the lofty steeps of the Carpathians themselves. [...] With the afternoon sun falling full upon them and bringing out all the glorious colours of this beautiful range, deep blue and purple in the shadows of the peaks, green and brown where glass and rock mingled" (1993: 8)

Although the scenery described is magnificent, and depicts a beauty that nothing has to do with London, Stoker uses the landscape's peculiarities to give a frightening image of the region all throughout the story.

A second fact which is quite ironical is that the author never visited Romania. As it has been established, before writing the novel Stoker spent several years studying stories about vampires and their connection with European folklore, but he never actually visited the country so as to see it "in all its grandeur" (Stoker, 1993: 433). The author's information about this subject, as well as his "fixation on the vampire myth" (Glover, 1993: 12) was developed after reading what others wrote about this far away land called Transylvania. One such author was Emily Gerard, who in "Transylvania Superstitions" noted her opinion about this region:

Transylvania might well be termed the land of superstition, for nowhere else does this curious crooked plant of delusion flourish as persistently and in such bewildering variety. It would almost seem as though the whole species of demons, pixies, witches, and hobgoblins, driven from the rest of Europe by the wand of science, had taken refuge within this mountain rampart. (1885: 128)

As we notice literature does more than just present or describe locations, it helps construct and tear places apart, meanwhile writers are the ones that have a "significant role in creating ways of seeing places and landscapes" (Light, 2012: 16), ways which eventually attain a pervasive hold on the

imagination. Looked upon from this perspective, “travelling to Romania was like inhabiting the pages of a Dostoevsky novel” (Kaplan, 2005: 113) in which the essence of things conjures up a land of mists and shadows, and not its pure beauty and true identity.

Another fundamental aspect that takes away the story’s credibility is that in search of the extraordinary the author losses sight of real details. Therefore, we notice how the accuracy of Harker’s localization of the castle and description of his journey across the country is far from reality, and for those that have some basic knowledge of Romanian geography Stoker’s limited awareness regarding the topic is more than obvious. The map below illustrates the localization of Stoker’s castle in *Dracula*, nevertheless the position offered by the author is clearly not the correct one. The accurate location of the castle, Vlad the Impaler’s castle, also known as Dracula in Romania, and Stoker’s inspiration for the novel is situated in “the horseshoe of the Carpathians” (Stoker, 1993: 2) which will be further south.



As a result, one of the peculiarities of *Dracula* is that “it has turned a real place into a fantasy” (Gelder, 1994: 1), and as we can see, in the novel the limits of knowledge are taken to the extreme. In writing *Dracula*, Bram Stoker

succeeded quite well in generating a particular way of seeing Transylvania, converting it into a “cursed spot, [a] cursed land, where the devil and his children walk with earthly feet” (Stoker, 2005: 61). As a consequence of this *Dracula* has become a powerful cultural myth, the reason for which many are still searching for an experience of the supernatural in Transylvania. Nevertheless, in the end Stoker’s story symbolizes an idea of Romania that is based on a misconceived image of a spectacular, but different location, a clever strategy to locate his successful Victorian Gothic story.

Conclusion

As disappointing as it may be the myth that has evolved around *Dracula* is evidently not going to disappear, and the association of Transylvania with vampires and the un-dead is clearly going to exist for years to come. Nevertheless, by now many have understood that *Dracula* needs to be seen in its full literary and historical context in order to comprehend how its location and characters influence the perception and the outcome of the novel. As Duncan Light noted “the story is as horrifying as it is because *Dracula* is this emblem of Eastern European danger threatening the West” (Light, 2012: 247), and as we come to understand, the problem with this region has nothing to do with its people and customs, but with its distinctiveness from the West.

Thus, the real state of the case is that Transylvania, “with its wolves and mysterious lights hovering on the verge of impenetrable darkness” (Wood, 1983: 179), becomes a “cursed spot, [a] cursed land” (Stoker, 1993: 61) just because it represents all the things that the West is not. Furthermore, its remoteness and inaccessibility are repeatedly stressed throughout the novel so as to make it represent a place eternally embedded in the past. The realm of the implausible is constantly personified throughout the novel, converting Transylvania, and implicitly Romania, into an undesirable place.

Regardless of this, Transylvania’s particular wilderness exemplifies the beauty of the region and its originality. As my dissertation has proven “the attribute given to *Dracula* and Transylvania is that they are dreamlike” (Wood, 1983: 179), and that “the beauty of the scenes” (Stoker, 1993: 7) described by Stoker depict “a country which was full of beauty of every kind” (Stoker, 1993: 3). A place far more beautiful than anything encountered by then an account of its distinctiveness.

In the end it is a matter of perspective and how people chose to see this far away, but nevertheless a real place situated in “the midst of the Carpathian mountains.” (Stoker, 1993: 2)

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