



DOI: 10.1515/rjes-2018-0019

**DRACULA REVISITED**  
**BOOK REVIEW: MARIUS-MIRCEA CRIȘAN (ED.), *DRACULA. AN INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE*, LONDON, PALGRAVE MACMILLAN, 2017, 280 P.**

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Editing a collection of studies about the international dimension of the Dracula myth is not Marius-Mircea Crișan's first approach to the multi-faceted Transylvanian figure. A scholar and associate professor at the West University of Timișoara, Marius-Mircea Crișan has already offered academics and the general public two books in which he has single-handedly extracted the cultural personality of Dracula from the monster. *The Birth of the Dracula Myth: Bram Stoker's Transylvania* (2013) is a plea for the need to reinterpret the well-known myth so as to capitalize on the richness and beauty of natural Romania, something perhaps in the spirit of the new documentary film *Untamed Romania* (2018). In this first book, the scholar tries to make a clear distinction between a "false" Transylvania, the result of stereotypes and imagological (mis)representations, and a "mythical" one, seen in a positive light, a space governed by a quasi-panteist spirit, which facilitates the spiritual initiation of its visitors. *The Impact of a Myth: Dracula and the Fictional Representation of the Romanian Space* (2013), published in Romanian, is an interdisciplinary study which presents the reflection of Romania in 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century British literary representations, including ethnic, religious and especially political clichés. It follows the cultural history of the tyrant's figure, from the medieval prince, cruel, but not abnormally so for his time, through the aristocratic and sophisticated vampire, to the modern dictator. In this literary Transylvania, the Other is both an embodiment of social and national difference and a deviant, dark side of the individual, instinctive and elusive, which cannot be kept totally under the control of reason.

Marius-Mircea Crișan's project of bringing together scholars from the UK, the USA, Germany, Italy, Poland, Holland and, of course, Romania, in order to discuss, from a variety of angles, the past and future of the Dracula myth is admirable. The internationalization of Dracula in particular and of vampire or gothic fiction in general is even more significant since it entails taking the Victorian count out of the exclusivistic circle of Anglo-American expertise and giving him – and discourses about him – a plural, European dimension. It reminds readers and fans of this genre that the ingredients necessary to the configuration of the gothic atmosphere were, according to tradition, Mediterranean, Central and Eastern European. Italy was a favourite setting for early gothic fiction writers, while the Victorian gothic was already familiar and intrigued about the Balkans and the Danubian provinces. Just as significantly, the volume reminds us of the Irishness of Dracula's author, which, in a discussion about the narrative colonization of the territories beyond the borders of the Empire – to borrow Vesna Goldsworthy's term – shifts the focus from the core, or centre, to the periphery, the distant corners beyond the limits of civilization, via the semi-periphery – as Ireland was regarded during the imperial age.

The international dimension of the Transylvanian vampire is further nuanced, the editor remarks, by numerous details of Bram Stoker's novel's secondary plot. Dracula's homeland is presented by the Victorian writer as a multicultural space, where various languages and dialects are spoken and various religious confessions and ethnic traditions are tolerated. What's more, the count himself is a multinational, pluri-lingual figure: he rules over a multi-ethnic region, speaks several foreign languages, has a library full of English books, has travelled across the continent. The Crew of Light, the group of experts who hunt vampires is equally multinational, made up of British, American and Dutch scientists. Dracula, this volume tells us, is far from being only a figure of popular culture and has a well-stated *livresque* identity, which is acknowledged by Bram Stoker himself in his portrayal of the vampire. Before surprising (and terrifying) Harker as a dangerous gaoler, the count strikes him as an avid consumer of quality fiction, which fills the walls of his impressively large library. This elitism reflects, inevitably, more than a hundred years later, on the novel's and the character's critical reception and afterlife.

The contributors to this volume approach Dracula both in a predictable and in a surprising, unusual manner. On the predictable side, the history and geography of the Transylvanian myth is presented – including Dracula's "address" and a tourist guide of the region's castles and best sightseeing locations. The comparative discussion associates Bram Stoker with his 19<sup>th</sup> century contemporaries – Le Fanu, Edgar Allan Poe, Anne Radcliffe, Mary Shelley or the Grimm Brothers – but also with 20<sup>th</sup> century writers who have diversified the gothic into thrillers, mysteries and horror fiction, such as Anne Rice, Stephen King or Robert Kirkman. On the less predictable side, the diverse afterlife of the vampire includes Neogothic revisitations, prequels and sequels, parodies and pastiches, expressionistic cinema, cartoons and romances, where the beast is gradually transformed into a beauty, or a positive character, or a homely figure, or a victim, or a hero. In today's culture of hybridization, such metamorphoses are not entirely implausible and keep this character constantly attractive and interesting to the ever younger – but also more demanding – public. Those who sign the articles collected in this volume are celebrated scholars of gothic studies, such as Clive Bloom or William Hughes, Dracula specialists (Hans Corneel de Roos, John Edgar Browning), scholars in literary or film studies (Donatella Abbate Badin, Dorota Babilas, Sam George, Magdalena Grabias), experts in tourism (Duncan Light), media and communication academics (Carol Senf, Lucian-Vasile Szabo), best-selling authors of fantasy fiction and poetry (Kristin L. Bone, Nancy Schumann). This diversity of interests gives the book a polyphony which ideally suits the encompassing, inclusive dimension promised by the title's "international" epithet.

Among the conclusions we can draw reading the volume edited by Marius-Mircea Crișan, an important one is the fact that Dracula can be, in the end, what the readers expect him to be, shaped according to their expectations, tastes, the fashion of the new worlds in which they live. Like the character, the book has many faces and allows many approaches, encouraging us to envisage Bram Stoker's story in its dynamic, fluid version – a myth in progress, which contributes more to the international appeal of Romania in general than many other (failed) projects with a tourist or educational-cultural component. Last but not least, it is a book to be enjoyed not only by the specialists, but also by the less initiated public, from Romania and from abroad.

#### **Note on the authors**

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