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**TRANSNATIONAL REWORKINGS OF THE DRACULA  
MYTH: CASE STUDY ON ELIZABETH KOSTOVA'S  
THE HISTORIAN AND PER OLOF EKSTROM'S  
THE SON OF THE DRAGON**

**Keywords:** *Dracula; history; myth; best-seller; folklore; fiction.*

**Abstract:** *My paper deals with the implications of the transnational circulation of one of the most popular literary myths of the last century – the legend of the vampire, and investigates whether this myth has more to do with forays into Romanian national history or with a globalized legend, since the persona of Dracula, be it a vampire or a historical character, has never ceased to fascinate the lovers of literature, readers and writers alike from several countries. The two novels I will be looking at are remarkable examples of the deep earnestness with which the myth has been approached fictionally in contemporary times. Looking back to the original source of inspiration, Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, my paper proposes to discuss the efficacy of historical knowledge in exploiting this age-old myth. While Kostova's novel is a modern popular reworking of Stoker's endeavor, Ekstrom's contribution to the topic is less well-known but equally fascinating in reviving the magnetic personality of the 'dark prince' of Wallachia. In this context, Stoker's book may be called a transnational canonic work of literature, being the source of inspiration for the efforts of such contemporary writers as my paper discusses, whose works allow the reader generous insights into history as well as into the local habits and folklore from the South-East of Europe. The dilemma which confronts the readers of these novels could be the following: is the myth just a pretext for delving into the delicacies of history or does history ultimately become the victim of the blood-thirsty myth?*

As Maud Ellman notes in her introduction to Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, psychoanalytical oppositions pervade this novel, whose publication nearly coincided with the release of Freud's first studies (1895-1897). As expected, in the novel, Eastern perversion (or the Id) is violently repressed by Western retribution (as the superego), while the characters' egos oscillate between high-strung morality and malicious desires - a schizoid fictional experience allowing the reader to indulge both stances. On the other hand, if according to Frederick Jameson,<sup>1</sup> the novel is one of the Western "machineries of representation" which develop allegorical "third world texts", could Stoker's *Dracula* be just such a novel and what kind of allegory could we expect it to generate?

In Lacanian psychoanalysis, the other is the image outside oneself, perceived during the mirror stage, when we become aware of the discontinuity between ourselves and the outside world. A fictional application of this theory might be the Western

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<sup>1</sup> "Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism" (1986).

“othering” of Dracula, by turning him into an “other” of humanity – a possible “Grand Autre” if he is not stopped in time.<sup>2</sup> In his own times, the Germans and the Hungarians preferred to demonize Vlad Țepeș rather than to help him in his desperate struggle against the real “other” – the Turkish Empire. The legends in which he figures as a blood-thirsty maniac were in fact motivated by ethnic or political antagonisms.

Equally useful in this context is Gayatri Spivak’s concept of “othering”, i.e. the process by which imperial discourse creates its “others” by labeling them as intrinsically different (women, natives, non-human beings – ‘it’ for vampire) and by banishing difference out of the sphere of the normal, demonizing it (the praxis is carried out by comparing and then distancing oneself from “the other”). Therefore, the Western ambition to dominate, control, and colonize can be said to have been transferred upon the vampiric fantasy, configuring it as a return of the repressed - by their attack, these creatures are threatening to “colonize” the Western self, othering it in return. Said’s “orientalism” is also about excluding/silencing the other by representing it as an object of fantasy (in this case - the vampire) and it is a process similar to Maria Todorova’s “balkanism”: Western stereotyping that serves Western ambitions (for instance, Dracula and paprikash appear in Kostova’s fiction as typically Romanian and Hungarian trademarks – but, as one character points out, there is so much more to Hungarian food than paprikash, and so much more to Dracula than the vampire legend). Other critics have commented upon the othering process within the European Union: for instance, Frances Olsen considers that “to the extent that Westerners view Central and Eastern Europeans as Other . . . they will never understand the region or be able to help its people” (2222).<sup>3</sup>

In order to explain how the two novels addressed in my paper process history into fiction, one must be introduced to the background information connecting Vlad Țepeș/Dracula and his times to the vampire-lore and to Stoker’s fiction. In the end, we will see how the novels and the myth converge and whether the result is beneficial to promoting historical truth or to the “othering” enterprise.

‘Dracula’<sup>4</sup> literally means ‘son of Dracul’ or ‘son of the dragon/the devil’ (in which the particle ‘a’ stands for ‘son’), and it helped distinguish Vlad III from other

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<sup>2</sup> If vampires don’t see themselves in the mirror, it is because they are an invasive species, which does not respect the limits of the self. Following this judgment, *Dracula* easily fits into the category of ‘invasive fiction’, together with H.G. Wells’ *War of the Worlds* – both novels appeared in 1987, and they deal with an alien element threatening to take over London. Both invasions are finally fought back by humans and London remains the independent center of the British Empire.

<sup>3</sup> Here, a discussion of the failure of the commercial project of Dracula Land in Sighișoara (2009) would be worthwhile. The fact that Romanian public opinion blocked the accomplishment of the project seems to suggest that our people do not feel represented by the vampire legend, although as a trademark Dracula keeps selling many branded souvenirs . . . According to Kast and Rosapepe, Dracula appears rather as a George Washington figure for the Romanians (during the Ceaușescu regime and for politicians after the year 2000) – 149.

<sup>4</sup> On the origins of the name ‘Dracula’: The Order of the Dragon [Societas Dragonistarum] was founded in 1408 by Sigismund of Luxemburg, king of Hungary and future emperor, to uphold Christianity and to defend the empire against the Ottomans; Vlad the II was admitted into the order around 1431 and Vlad III was also a member – they used the dragon symbol in their heraldry and coins.

Romanian rulers of the same name. Even though this name appears on some of the historical portraits, it is rather improbable that Vlad II and his son used it for themselves<sup>5</sup> – rather it came by association with the Order of the Dragon, and it was used extensively by Dracula’s detractors to underline his devilish nature.

In her study on “Dracula: Devilish Tyrant or Just Hospodar?,” Margot Rauch explains the historical circumstances that engendered Vlad Țepeș’s particular regime. The Romanian countries lied just between the East and the West and their rulers alternatively swore allegiance to Hungary, Poland or the Ottomans. The geographical status of borderland brought about a socio-cultural state of duality and liminality of which their leaders partook: Vlad II had to send his sons (Vlad III-Dracula and his brother Radu the Handsome) to the Turkish court and to pay tribute in order to keep his throne. In his own time, Țepeș would equally pay tribute for a while but he would also cheat the Sultan many times by alternatively swearing him allegiance and turning the arms against him. The news of Dracula’s inhuman cruelty, however, was mostly spread by the Saxon merchants of Sibiu and Brașov – the cities that Țepeș invaded in his lifetime. Additionally, the King of Hungary, Mathias Crovinus, used three forged letters to arrest Țepeș by accusing him of treachery against the Pope’s crusades and also spread exaggerated gossip about his cruelty.<sup>6</sup> Yet, despite the fact that all chronicles documented Vlad’s cruelty (thirst for blood, pleasure to torment), they made no association with vampirism until Stoker did so. Moreover, it seems that Vlad Țepeș was, even before Machiavelli’s *The Prince* appeared, a model of political and military prowess for Eastern princes.<sup>7</sup>

In “Outlook on Vampirism until Bram Stoker”, Rauch explains that vampire lore was abundant at the border between the Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian Empires, where attrition warfare had engendered severe economic backwardness among the Slavic population, prone to vampire-phobia. Rauch explains that the various epidemics (plague, consumption) were associated by simple-minded people with the vampire curse. But the long-fanged vampire did not exist in the South-Eastern European tradition of the undead, although there were vampire-killers. In order to put a stop to such unorthodox practices and to vampire phobia, the Empress of Hungary Mary Therese outlawed them, in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>8</sup>

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The members of the order were called ‘draconists’. The dragon symbol is dual, it represents fortune and prosperity but equally the terrifying primordial force of chaos; it may be the symbol of the devil (Rom. ‘zmeu’), whom Romanians believed to resurrect the dead by turning them into vampires.

<sup>5</sup> There is historical proof that his father was nicknamed ‘Dragul’ – the loved or precious one in Romanian, and that later on ‘g’ was assimilated to ‘c’ (according to Rauch, Vlad III signed two documents in 1476 as “Wladislaus Dragwlya”/”Ladislaus Dragkulya” - 29).

<sup>6</sup> One such item of gossip refers to Vlad’s splitting up the belly of a concubine who had pretended to be pregnant with him.

<sup>7</sup> While for the Germans and Turks of the 15th century, Dracula appeared as a ‘gruesome psychopath’, the late 15th century Russian diplomat Feodor Kuritsyn reached the conclusion that Vlad Țepeș had been cruel but just. Kuritsyn had interviewed members of Țepeș’ family and even Stephen the Great himself (who was Țepeș’ cousin). His purpose was to produce a study guide for young Russian princes, according to Kast and Rosapepe.

<sup>8</sup> The *Treaty on Vampirism* was compiled by the personal doctor of Empress Maria Thereza – Gerard von Swieten (1768). It gave medical, scientific explanations for the allegations of

There is very little of folk belief about the myth of Dracula. It was in fact Stoker who turned the ruddy and vulgar peasant vampire into a pale aristocrat, marked by melancholy. As Rauch notes, even if he was aware of history, Stoker merely wanted to combine fiction, historical detail and folk lore into a unique product, to whose success the eroticizing of the vampire greatly contributed in the Victorian epoch. But the main point of interest for our discussion is that Dracula as a novel created an allegory of the East as subaltern:

Devoid of any intrinsic connection, the two myths – the one about the diabolical tyrant Vlad III Dracula of the 15th century, and the one about Eastern European vampires of the 18th century – nevertheless carry a common element, which was perhaps unconsciously pursued by Bram Stoker: they both promote the image of Eastern Europe as barbaric and backward, as it had constituted itself in the Western imaginary. (Rauch 149)

Through the vampire myth, Westerners exploited the image of a dark, barbarian East while Mathias Corvinus's campaign constructed Țepeș into the embodiment of Eastern evil, under the Ottoman influence. The myth is equally connected to the "orientalizing" attitude of Europe in the 19th century, when Western leaders were trying to keep the Russian empire at bay by spreading gossip about the Eastern people's superstitions. Alterity or the state of being (perceived as) different appears as the logical result of this process of othering, which happens independently of the victim's will. In Stoker's *Dracula* the negative hero protests against being "othered" by humans when he declares to Jonathan Harker that he wants to be "no stranger" in London (instead, he wishes to become familiarized by speaking the dialect):

A stranger in a strange land, he is no one; men know him not – and to know not is to care not for. I am content if I am like the rest, so that no man stops when he sees me, or pause in his speaking if he hear my words, to say : "Ha, ha! A stranger!" I have so long been master that I would be master still – or at least that none should be master of me. (Stoker 20)

The ordeal of public laughter that Dracula shuns is more than humiliating, it represents a sign of aggressive rejection (since a hearty laugh implies showing your teeth...) on behalf of the native and it implies a combination of disgust and fear. What Dracula claims here in fact is the right to normality status – becoming invisible, getting integrated in the crowd like any gentleman. But why does he want people to be unaware of his presence – after all, he calls himself "noble" and "a boyar of royal descent"? It is not because, as an ordinary immigrant, he wishes to feel more at home – instead, by means of this invisibility, he hopes to get revenge and dominion over the others, as if to avenge the centuries of marginalization that the East has endured. I will be looking next at the ways in which Stoker's novel informs Kostova's and Ekstrom's fictions, perpetrating the invincibility of Dracula's legend.

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vampirism and thus supported the Empress' edict of 1755, by which she forbade such superstitions in Hungary and other areas of her empire. The edict forbids "posthumous magic", i.e. the exorcism of the so-called vampiric bodies or any other related superstitions. Consequently, no further cases of vampirism were reported in Hungary!

Per Olof Ekstrom's book is written like a movie script, following the historical epochs of the life of Dracula/Vlad the Impaler or "Kaziklu Bei" (his Turkish name). It reconstructs vivid scenes from Vlad's childhood (1431-1442), the period when he was a Turkish hostage (1431-1447), the brief period in which he was a voievode at 17 years old (in November 1448), it treats extensively of his involvement in the battle of Constantinople (1453) presenting Vlad's brave and shrewd battle tactics that were instrumental for the allied campaign, it presents his second reign – a section entitled "Terror for the Turks" (1456-1462) - when his most fabled crimes occurred, while a fifth section includes the episode of his seclusion in Vishegrad, where he is 'interviewed' by a certain monk – a pretext for Țepeș to muse on his reign and give us the historical details that shaped his bloody legend. On the other hand, Elizabeth Kostova's mythological thriller reunites a host of scholars and academics that are trying to solve the mystery of the disappearance of a famous American historian – Professor Bartholomew Rossi, kidnapped by Dracula himself who needs a man of genius to organize his library. The novel follows Stoker's fictional framework quite closely and even contains metafictional references to the original thriller, as well as excerpts from it to preface its sections.

If both authors that my paper is concerned with take over a common essential ingredient from Stoker's villainous character that is the ambivalence of his personality. In Kostova's fiction there are many references to Dracula as dual historical-mythological figure:

Viewed from this centre of culture [Istanbul], he [Țepeș] looked like a backwoods thug, a provincial ogre, a medieval redneck. I remembered the picture I'd seen of him in an encyclopedia at home—that woodcut of an elegant, moustached face framed by courtly dress. It was a paradox. (Kostova 244)

Also, in the scene where the historian Rossi is kidnapped and transported to the vampire's underground library, Dracula appears as an original combination of scholar and demon. In this scene he explains to Rossi why knowledge is important to him:

"In life, I loved books," he said. He turned to me a little, so that I could see the glint of his eyes and the lustre of his shaggy hair. "Perhaps you do not know that I was something of a scholar. This seems not widely known." He spoke dispassionately. "You do know that the books of my day were very limited in scope. But I had other resources. Merchants brought me strange and wonderful books from many places—Egypt and the Holy Land, and the great monasteries of the West. From these I learned about the ancient occult. As I knew I could not attain a heavenly paradise"—again that dispassionate tone—"I became an historian in order to preserve my own history forever". (643)

In Ekstrom's novel, Țepeș's Hungarian wife wonders about the emerging Dracula myth, while he seems amused and explains things to her:

Who are you in fact? Could all the terrible things said about you be true?  
Vlad's answer came accompanied by roars of laughter:  
Sometimes, people play upon my name, suggesting I would be the son of the devil...  
sometimes, I myself raise the stakes, suggesting I am no more or less than the devil's father

incarnate... Well, you know, according to the legend [Bogumilism<sup>9</sup>], the father of devils is Our Lord, Master of Light... That's a good one, eh? (Ekstrom 180-1)

It is true that the amount of gossip spread around the historical character of Țepeș was impressive and released in a steady flux: partly motivated by political hatred and partly sustained by the real deeds of the voievode, there appeared many terribilistic accounts since the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century when Țepeș died. Such were the *Chronicles of Konstanz*, the *St. Gallen Manuscript* or the *Nurnberg Chronicles* (around 1490), in which he appears under the various names of Ioan Dragula, Dracol, Trakle Vaida and Dracula Vaida. A Strasbourg illustrated manuscript from the year 1500 presents an account of the savage and bloody tyrant Dracula where we have a classical example of the “othering” process: Țepeș is represented feasting as he looks on a tormented crowd, nearby a city that could be Brașov. We can see in the foreground heads boiling in a barrel and bodies being hacked nearby his table. Apparently, this was a punishment for the upstart and stalwart Saxon merchants that oppressed the Romanian traders and infringed upon their rights. In an ironical, self-reflexive manner, Kostova chooses to have Dracula collect such denigrating pamphlets in his own library (together with accounts of folk superstitions concerning the vampires) and adds, not surprisingly, even Stoker's book to this amazing collection: as he took Rossi through the shelves, “he brought his great hand to rest on an early edition of Bram Stoker's novel and smiled, but said nothing” (643) – as if to say that all these are a bunch of inventions, that amuse him and flatter his vanity.

In his dialogue with Brother Aphonso, a fictitious Spanish monk visiting him in his constrained retreat of Vishegrad (where king Mathias Corvinus was keeping him), Vlad Țepeș of Ekstrom's script rejects most of the exaggerated accounts about his cruelty but admits to having impaled a large number of people for the sake of discipline and in order to keep the enemies at bay – overall, as he puts it quite clearly, his purpose was always a patriotic one, of helping his country progress:

I, Vlad Țepeș Basarab do admit that I have impaled thousands of individuals, from among those who attacked my country and its people by arms or trickery... But if anyone claims that I have drunk human blood, it is a shameful lie! A dirty piece of political calumny! I have only shed guilty and treacherous blood!!! The lazy ones dreaded me, but the hardworking people understood that all I did was solely for their benefit”. (Ekstrom 210)

After using the monk's presence as a pretext to recount his own history and that of his cousin – Stephen the Great of Moldavia (but also to discuss various religious and philosophical notions and his political relationship with king Mathias Corvinus), Țepeș kills Brother Alphonso just before dawn and the method he uses is a highly unorthodox one: he calls from the outside a huge swarm of blood-sucking bats which he had learned how to control through some obscure Oriental knowledge – as he explains to his wife:

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<sup>9</sup> Vampirism may also be linked to the heresy of Bogumilism, a spiritual movement which appeared in 1009 in South Eastern Europe as a reaction to the religious hierarchy. Bogumils believed that the Devil was creator of the universe, although God also existed. They believed in an evil demiurge and did not use the sign of the cross or worship in churches. People believed they were vampires.

I found a method to call them [the bats] to me and send them where I desire! Along the years, at the Egrigoz jail as well as at the Sultan's court in Adrianopole, I encountered many important men from the West and the East... Cultivated people from Italy and Spain who had fled due to the Inquisition... Enlightened minds from Persia and India, persecuted in their countries... I learned from them many things, and quickly too, as in a game... But, a serious one...". (Ekstrom 180)

Indeed, the connection between Dracula and bats is the only concession Ekstrom makes to the vampiric myth, choosing even to open his novel with a bat strike upon two heedless guards that are watching over Țepeș in his prison tower. The opening scene takes us back to the year 1474, when Vlad was still a prisoner of Mathias Corvinus (he had been detained for 12 long years). While he is crying out fiercely to be liberated in order to join his cousin Stephen (the Great) in his fight against the infidels, the two Hungarian guards mock him, calling him names – Belzebuth, Devil - and marvel at his royal imprisonment among books and embroideries since they also consider it more fit that Vlad should be fighting the Turks instead. Soon after calling him names they see a colony of bats flying over to the tower's window, and before they can realize what is happening they attacked and killed by hundreds of small, blood-sucking beasts that seems to follow Vlad's order. The last thing they hear is Țepeș' roar of laughter sounding melodramatic and devilish in the darkness. Besides this initial scene and the one in which Brother Alphonso is killed with the same method, the bats appear once more in a scene where Dracula feeds them in his own room:

The wind outside rustled deeply. Hundreds of wings could be heard, with a velvety fluttering. Dark shadows pervaded the room...Several small beasts, with rat's nozzles, double ears and long, shiny-white canines made a halt on the man's shoulders and arms". (Ekstrom 181)

Despite Vlad's affection for bats, Ekstrom makes no reference to his being a vampire but shows Țepeș musing on the various folk superstitions of his time: the ghost-horse, the revenants, the gnomes, the un-dead, the were-wolves...Moreover, the Swedish author shows him capable of very humane emotions: love (for a peasant woman called Mărioara) and tenderness (for his wives and children), friendship (with Stephen the Great) and affection for his troops and officers.... Vlad's last words in the book refer to his great love for the Romanian country and its people and express a determination that he shall carry out his plan: "I want nothing else but the good of my country and its suffering people...and no one will stand in my way!" (Ekstrom 265).

In Kostova's fiction, Dracula is much closer to Stoker's villain but not devoid of historical validity – indeed the American author shows him musing angrily over the discontents of history, while planning to take revenge on the whole world for being dispossessed of his earthly dominion:

History has taught us that the nature of man is evil, sublimely so. Good is not perfectible, but evil is. Why should you not use your great mind in service of what is perfectible? I ask you, my friend, to join me of your own accord in my research. . . . Together we will advance the historian's work beyond anything the world has ever seen. There is no purity like the purity of

the sufferings of history. You will have what every historian wants: history will be reality to you. We will wash our minds clean with blood. (Kostova 644)

It is interesting to note that Dracula's discussion with Rossi in Kostova closely resembles the conversation between Țepeș and brother Alphonso in Ekstrom. In fact, it serves a similar purpose – that of a monologue for Dracula, in which he exposes his own history and ambitions. The emphasis in Ekstrom however is on historical rehabilitation, while Kostova uses historical insight to build a consistent background for her evil character and to make him more compelling. One of the things that Dracula insists on in talking to Rossi is that he has prevailed in the end over all his enemies (among whom Sultan Mehmet ranks topmost) and that he intends to do so in the future as well. Here, he is shown reminiscing over his troubled youth as a Turkish hostage and how this shaped his character:

Yes, my own father left me to the father of Mehmet, as a pledge that we would not wage war against the Empire. Imagine, Dracula a pawn in the hands of the infidel. I wasted no time there – I learned everything I could about them, so that I might surpass them all. That was when I vowed to make history, not to be its victim.” His voice was so fierce that I glanced at him in spite of myself and saw the terrible blaze in his face, the hatred, the sharp curl of the mouth under its long moustache. Then he did laugh, and the sound was equally horrifying. “I have triumphed and they are gone”. (Kostova 642, my emphasis)

Interestingly, although in her novel Kostova has the team of scholars ultimately prevail upon Dracula (as in Stoker's fiction), the book's epilogue take us back into the past and 'resurrects' him like in the cyclical ouroboros for which the dragon symbol stands – The Historian respects therefore the deep-structure of the myth, which is something invulnerable to history – a legacy we carry in our unconscious:

The dome of the tower has long openings on every side. When the abbot reaches the top, Dracula is already standing at his favourite post, staring across the water, his hands clasped behind him in a characteristic gesture of thought, of planning. The abbot has seen him stand this way in front of his warriors, directing the strategy for the next day's raid. He looks not at all like a man in constant peril—a leader whose death could occur at any hour, who should be pondering every moment the question of his salvation. He looks instead, the abbot thinks, as if all the world is before him. (Kostova 704)

On the other hand, the part in which the main characters travel through the Romanian countryside on Dracula's tracks abounds in minute descriptions of local geography and history, almost in a documentaristic style – offering details of the landscape, people's habits and dress, mentality and customs (Chapter 46).<sup>10</sup>

In *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities* (1996), Brah Atvar wondered whether consolidation of a new European identity could strengthen the racisms

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<sup>10</sup> An episode that both Kostova and Ekstrom narrate in a similar fashion is a striking one about the building of Poenari Fortress in Muntenia (not Transylvania!) as a punishment for traitor boyars and their families who had to help erase the citadel bare-handed, carrying the rock and brick uphill.

through which [Western] Europe and its diasporas [the US?] have constructed its non-European “others”. Could then the present-day persistence of the fascination with Dracula’s myth consequently prove that a country like Romania is not welcome to partake of the new European and transatlantic treaties? In the recently released production, *Dracula Untold* (2014), Hollywood seems to get a keener grasp of Romanian history (though less so keen of geography), since Cozia Monastery – decorated in the Voroneț style [sic] – features as a stronghold of sorts for the Romanians led by Țepeș in his fight against Mehmet’s army. If the Hollywoodian stronghold has more to do with the Lord-of-the-Rings picturesque architecture, it is nonetheless true that Vlad had a fortress build on top of a great hill – Poenari Fortress (it features in both by Kostova’s and Ekstrom’s fictions) – which was meant as a Romanian watchpoint for and shelter from the Ottomans. But if Hollywood is yet undecided to let go of the money-making Dracula myth, James Rosapepe and Sheilah Kast (former ambassador to Romania and his wife who is a journalist) published a travel book on Romania in 2009, which they significantly entitled *Dracula is Dead* and which seems to refute Atvar’s suspicion. Indeed, if for far too long our country has been called ‘the Land of Dracula’, this book, which takes the reader through the real Romania, dwells little on the vampire tale and explains the historical circumstances that connected Țepeș with Stoker’s villain. As it is, Kast and Rosapepe’s travelogue initiates a “making amends enterprise” on behalf of the West which aims to prove that, at least for some knowledgeable Americans, ‘Dracula is dead’ for good and the flourishing of democratic Romania is regarded with hope and respect.

For Kast and Rosapepe, the situation in which the historical Dracula found himself suggests the idea of Eastern cooperation with Western Europe, in a partnership against the invaders: thus, joining the Order of the Dragon by Dracula’s father is seen as “a great networking opportunity” for striking fear in the enemy and building alliances with Central European princes (143), while the popular fascination with Dracula bespeaks “the American ignorance of the Transylvanian clash of cultures, customs, landscape” (144) – in other words, a strategy of othering that still works on the subaltern and which Kostova’s or Ekstrom’s fictions definitely challenge, by providing instead detailed lessons in cultural geography and local history while somehow sustaining and enriching the myth.

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