

***Dracula* Transmedia: From Page to Experience. Expanding the 1897 Epistolary Novel through Faithful Transmedia Strategies**

Dracula transmedialny: od książki do doświadczenia. Rozszerzanie powieści epistolarnej z 1897 roku poprzez wierne strategie transmedialne

ENRIQUE A. PALAFOX

enrique.a.palafox@gmail.com
<https://orcid.org/0009-0002-6551-3731>

ABSTRACT

This article focuses on the idea of advancing faithful transmedia expansion as a design-led methodology for restoring the structural and epistemic coherence of *Dracula* (1897). Over more than a century of adaptation, reproduction, and visual standardisation, Count Dracula has achieved extraordinary cultural visibility while progressively losing the documentary architecture that organizes Bram Stoker's novel. Rather than treating this loss as a secondary consequence of popularization, the article argues that the recurrent fragmentation of *Dracula* across film, theatre, advertising, editorial design, and merchandising results from the displacement of the novel's underlying informational system: its coordinated assemblage of diaries, letters, telegrams, phonographic recordings, memoranda, and newspaper clippings. The study proposes that *Dracula* should not be read as a source text for adaptation but as a distributed media system whose coherence depends on the interaction of differentiated documentary forms – anticipating key principles later associated with transmedia organisation and media convergence. Drawing on transmedia theory, remediation, media archaeology, and designerly ways of knowing, the article develops a framework in which design operates as a form of curatorial mediation between source text, material culture, and contemporary platforms. Within this framework, fidelity is understood not as literal replication of surface features but as the preservation of structural relations, epistemic functions, and ontological continuity – allowing the article to distinguish reconstruction from reinterpretation and restoration from substitution. Through the case study of Dracula Legacy, it demonstrates how editorial systems, narrative artefacts, and temporal serialisation can function as instruments of

literary archaeology, proposing faithful transmedia expansion as a transferable methodology for re-engaging works whose structural integrity has been obscured by a long history of adaptation and iconographic drift.

Keywords: *Dracula*; Bram Stoker; transmedia storytelling; faithful transmedia expansion; remediation; media archaeology; literary archaeology; design methodology; epistemic coherence; public domain

ABSTRAKT

W artykule zaproponowano koncepcję wiernego rozszerzania transmedialnego (*faithful transmedia expansion*) jako metodologię opartą na projektowaniu, służącą przywróceniu strukturalnej i epistemicznej spójności powieści *Dracula* (1897). W ciągu ponad stu lat adaptacji, reprodukcji i wizualnej standaryzacji postać hrabiego Draculi zyskała niezwykle rozpoznawalność kulturową, jednocześnie stopniowo tracąc dokumentalną architekturę organizującą powieść Brama Stokera. W artykule dowiedziono, że tej utraty nie należy postrzegać jedynie jako ubocznego skutku popularyzacji. Powtarzająca się fragmentaryzacja *Draculi* w filmie, teatrze, reklamie, projektowaniu edytorskim i merchandisingu jest bowiem konsekwencją wyparcia podstawowego systemu informacyjnego powieści – skoordynowanego zespołu dzienników, listów, telegramów, nagrań fonograficznych, memorandum i wycinków prasowych. Zaproponowano, aby *Draculi* nie traktować jako tekstu źródłowego przeznaczonego do adaptacji, lecz jako rozproszony system medialny, którego spójność zależy od współdziałania zróżnicowanych form dokumentalnych. Takie ujęcie wyprzedza wiele zasad, które później zaczęto wiązać z organizacją transmedialną i konwergencją mediów. Poprzez odwołanie do teorii transmediów, remediacji, archeologii mediów oraz projektowych sposobów poznania (*designerly ways of knowing*) rozwinięto model, w którym projektowanie pełni funkcję kuratorskiego pośrednika między tekstem źródłowym, kulturą materialną a współczesnymi platformami komunikacyjnymi. W tym ujęciu wierność rozumiana jest nie jako dosłowne odtwarzanie cech powierzchniowych, lecz jako zachowanie relacji strukturalnych, funkcji epistemicznych i ciągłości ontologicznej. Pozwala to odróżnić rekonstrukcję od reinterpretacji oraz restaurowanie od zastępowania. Na przykładzie projektu *Dracula Legacy* autor pokazuje, w jaki sposób systemy edytorskie, artefakty narracyjne i serializacja czasowa mogą pełnić funkcję narzędzi archeologii literackiej. W rezultacie proponuje wiernie rozszerzanie transmedialne jako uniwersalną metodologię ponownego odczytywania dzieł, których integralność strukturalna została przesłonięta przez długą historię adaptacji i dryfu ikonograficznego.

Słowa kluczowe: *Dracula*; Bram Stoker; opowiadanie transmedialne; wiernie rozszerzanie transmedialne; remediacja; archeologia mediów; archeologia literacka; metodologia projektowa; spójność epistemiczna; domena publiczna

Introduction

The widespread assumption that *Dracula* (1897) is inherently difficult to adapt has shaped both scholarly discourse and media production for more than a century. This difficulty is commonly attributed to the novel's epistolary form, which is often described as fragmented, discontinuous, or resistant to the narrative unification expected by theatre, film, and other media. Such accounts, however, treat the novel's documentary multiplicity as an obstacle rather than as a structuring principle, reducing the formal specificity of *Dracula* to a technical problem of adaptation instead of recognizing it as a coordinated system of narrative organisation.

This article proposes that *Dracula* is not structurally resistant to adaptation in itself; rather, it has been repeatedly misread at the level of its informational design. Bram Stoker's novel does not simply recount events through multiple documents¹ – it organises knowledge through them. Diaries, letters, telegrams, phonographic recordings, memoranda, and newspaper clippings each carry specific temporal, epistemic, and rhetorical affordances, and their interaction produces a distributed narrative architecture governed by internal relations of sequence, mediation, verification, and disclosure. What later traditions perceive as fragmentation is, in fact, a highly organized documentary logic.

A crucial distinction must therefore be established at the outset. The present study differentiates between at least three overlapping but analytically distinct layers: the historical Dracula linked to Vlad III of Wallachia; the literary Dracula created by Bram Stoker in 1897; and the media Dracula generated through 20th- and 21st-century adaptation, reproduction, and visual standardisation. These layers are frequently collapsed in popular discourse, and that collapse has consequences for adaptation theory. Once the literary blueprint is obscured by the cumulative weight of later media images, fidelity becomes difficult to discuss with methodological precision because the reference point itself has been destabilized.

To address this problem, the article advances faithful transmedia expansion as a design-led methodological framework for reconstructing the governing principles of *Dracula* across media without altering its textual foundation. Fidelity is not defined as literal reproduction of surface features, but as the preservation of structural relations, documentary functions, and epistemic continuity. The article makes three related contributions: it reframes *Dracula* as a documentary narrative system; it argues that design provides a methodological bridge between literary analysis and transmedia reconstruction; and through the case study of Dracula Legacy, it proposes a model of ethical restoration for public-domain cultural production grounded in literary archaeology, structural fidelity, and curatorial mediation.

¹ Bram Stoker, *Dracula* (Archibald Constable and Company, 1897).

Why Design Matters

Within *Dracula* (1897), design does not function as ornamental arrangement or as a visual concern added to narrative form from the outside. It operates structurally. The novel's organisation of documentary materials determines how information appears, how it is distributed across witnesses, how it acquires credibility, and how it becomes legible to both characters and readers. Design therefore functions as a principle of narrative governance: it regulates access to knowledge, controls temporal disclosure, and establishes the conditions under which disparate fragments can be assembled into a coherent account.

Dracula is often treated as though its multiple documents merely diversify the presentation of a preexisting story. The opposite is closer to the case. The story becomes intelligible precisely through the differentiated functions of its media forms. Diaries establish subjectivity and intimate temporal proximity. Letters mediate interpersonal transmission within networks of relation, delay, and address. Telegrams introduce urgency and abbreviated communication. Phonographic recordings register technological mediation and place voice within systems of storage and replay. Newspaper clippings externalize events into public discourse. These forms are not interchangeable containers; each contributes a specific epistemic mode, and meaning emerges from their coordination rather than from any one document in isolation.

Design here consists in the orchestration of media units whose distinct affordances generate a cumulative logic of witness, corroboration, and discovery. Knowledge in the novel is never simply given; it is produced through mediated accumulation. Information must be recorded, transmitted, compared, reordered, and interpreted. This process gives the text a procedural quality that conventional linear narration tends to obscure. What appears as fragmentation is in fact a highly controlled architecture of distributed cognition, in which design governs not only how information is stored but also how uncertainty is maintained and gradually transformed into provisional coherence.

This understanding clarifies why *Dracula* can be productively read in relation to transmedia storytelling. Stoker's text already coordinates multiple media forms within a single narrative system, assigning each a differentiated role in the production of meaning. The documents do not merely illustrate a world; they constitute its operative channels of mediation. The novel stages relations among media rather than presenting one stable narrative form: writing, sound recording, telegraphic communication, print circulation, and documentary compilation coexist and interact, generating a system in which one medium constantly reframes, supplements, or validates another. Stoker's achievement lies not only in using heterogeneous media, but in integrating them into a relational design whose coherence is governed,

not accidental. This configuration – in which one medium reframes, supplements, or validates another – is precisely the logic that the theory of remediation identifies as constitutive of modern media systems.²

Once this design logic is removed, later adaptations default to simplified narrative formats. A linear plotline, a dominant narrator, or iconic visual cues may preserve broad recognizability, but they do so by collapsing the differentiated relations that originally generated coherence. The consequence is not merely aesthetic reduction but structural loss: the documentary architecture that once organized knowledge, delayed revelation, and coordinated evidence is replaced by more immediate and portable forms of storytelling. Fidelity, therefore, cannot be judged solely at the level of plot summary, atmosphere, or image. It must also be judged at the level of system design – how forms relate, how information moves, and how meaning is generated through coordination. Without that recognition, adaptation discourse risks mistaking the survival of signs for the preservation of structure.

Design as Methodology

Within this article, design is repositioned not as a secondary layer of visualisation or aesthetic embellishment, but as a methodological instrument for analysis, translation, and reconstruction. To speak of design as method is to argue that certain cultural objects – especially those structured through multiple media forms – can be understood more rigorously when their organizing principles are treated as design problems rather than as purely interpretive abstractions. Design does not begin after analysis has concluded; it constitutes a mode of inquiry through which the internal logic of a work may be identified, tested, and rearticulated across material and medial contexts. Applied to *Dracula*, this means treating the preservation of epistemic coherence – the structured conditions under which narrative knowledge is produced and transmitted – as the primary criterion of fidelity.

Applied to *Dracula* (1897), this perspective shifts attention from representational surface to operational structure. The novel is not approached merely as a narrative to be retold, but as a system whose coherence depends on the relation among differentiated documentary forms. Its logic emerges through the coordination of letters, diaries, telegrams, phonographic recordings, memoranda, and newspaper clippings; through the temporal sequencing that regulates when information becomes available; through cross-validation of testimony that stabilizes credibility; and through the integration of contemporary technologies of inscription, storage,

² Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (MIT Press, 1999).

and transmission. Design methodology begins by identifying these relations as governing principles rather than as stylistic accidents.

The task of design is analytical before it is generative. It asks what functions the original system performs, how those functions are distributed, and under what conditions they remain coherent when translated beyond their initial material form. The question is not how to embellish *Dracula* for new audiences, but how to extract the principles that make its documentary architecture intelligible and reactivate those principles in new media environments. Those principles include at least four interrelated dimensions: coordination of documentary units, temporal sequencing, evidentiary cross-validation, and media differentiation – together establishing a model of narrative organisation in which access to knowledge is staggered, mediated, and continually recontextualized.

This approach aligns closely with the tradition described as designerly ways of knowing,³ in which knowledge is produced through constructive procedures rather than through commentary alone. Design is not limited to problem-solving in a pragmatic sense; it is a mode of disciplined inquiry capable of generating understanding through modelling, prototyping, system construction, and iterative testing. What is learned through design is not only how something looks, but how it works – a distinction especially relevant for a work such as *Dracula*, whose logic is inseparable from the orchestration of multiple media forms.

Design as method therefore differs from adaptation understood as free transformation and from design understood as decorative mediation. It establishes a process through which the source text is first diagnosed as a system and only then translated into new outputs according to explicit criteria. This diagnostic dimension becomes especially important in the context of public-domain works, where the legal freedom to reuse often masks methodological imprecision. Design, used critically, makes such imprecision visible by forcing the researcher to specify what exactly is being preserved, what is being transformed, and what counts as continuity – thereby providing the practical foundation of faithful transmedia expansion.

From Design Coherence to Media Fragmentation and Epistemic Dilution

Throughout the 20th and 21st centuries, *Dracula* has undergone successive processes of adaptation, reproduction, commercialisation, and iconographic stabilisation. These processes have secured the Count an exceptional degree of cultural visibility, yet they have also progressively displaced the structural logic

³ Nigel Cross, “Designerly Ways of Knowing,” *Design Studies* 3, no. 4 (1982): 221–227.

that organizes Bram Stoker's 1897 novel. What circulates globally under the name "Dracula" is therefore not always the continuity of a stable narrative system, but often the persistence of a recognizable label detached from the documentary architecture that originally governed it. The problem is not that *Dracula* has proliferated, but that proliferation has frequently occurred through forms of simplification that privilege circulation over structural fidelity.

This simplification has operated above all through visual and medial standardisation. Theatre, cinema, illustration, advertising, and merchandising have condensed *Dracula* into a portable set of signs: cape, fangs, aristocratic posture, nocturnal atmosphere, erotic menace, blood, and a narrowed repertoire of reproducible silhouettes. Such signs reduce complexity into immediate recognizability, allowing the character to travel rapidly across formats and markets. However, recognizability is not equivalent to coherence. These visual codes can preserve brand-like continuity while simultaneously erasing the epistemic relations that make *Dracula* legible within Stoker's novel – producing a process aptly described as epistemic dilution, in which the archive expands quantitatively while its internal coherence weakens qualitatively.

A terminological clarification is therefore necessary. Not every transformation of a source text should be understood in the same way. Adaptation translates a prior narrative system into another medium while maintaining a recognizable relation to its governing structure. Reinterpretation permits stronger inflection or ideological recoding, foregrounding contemporary concerns over structural continuity. Reconstruction seeks to reactivate the original work's internal logic through analytical and curatorial means. Substitution occurs when the governing ontology of the source is displaced beyond a threshold, so that the inherited name remains in circulation while the identity system it originally marked has been replaced. Without these distinctions, critical discourse loses the capacity to evaluate how far a given work remains structurally continuous with its source.

It is in this sense that the Law of Substitution – formulated in related work on character design as ontological governance⁴ – becomes relevant here as a supporting proposition. When a character or narrative system is altered beyond the limits of its governing design logic, the persistence of the original name no longer guarantees continuity of identity. Instead, the name functions as a cultural and commercial marker that organizes recognition while masking structural discontinuity. This problem is especially acute in the case of *Dracula* because Stoker's Count is not a generic gothic figure but a precisely engineered character. What emerges from the

⁴ Enrique A. Palafox, "The Death of Adaptation II: Character Design as Ontological Law: The Nosferatu, Coppola, Erivo Paradox," independent research paper, 2026, Academia.edu. The Law of Substitution is formulated in section 10 of that study.

novel's documentary architecture – diaries, telegrams, medical notes, newspaper clippings – is a coherent identity constructed through redundant witness testimony: an aquiline nose, heavy brows, prominent teeth, pointed ears, skeletal hands, a pallor that signals altered vitality rather than theatrical death. Age governs the design: the initial Count is old, and rejuvenation is a physiological consequence of feeding, not an essential condition. Behaviour is specified with the same precision – the descent down the castle wall “like a lizard,” the movement described as “so panther-like – something so unhuman,” are kinetic instructions, not decorative atmosphere. This is not rumor; it is a blueprint. There is material evidence that the blueprint was understood and reproducible in early print culture: the 1901 Westminster paperback depicted Dracula crawling down a castle wall consistent with Stoker's text, and Edgar Alfred Holloway's illustration for the 1916 Rider & Son edition presents an elderly Count with white mustache and severe features closely aligned with the novel's opening chapters.⁵ Fidelity existed; it was simply not the version industrial media chose to reproduce.

A design-based analysis therefore clarifies that the fragmentation of *Dracula* is not merely the by-product of popularity, but the consequence of repeated migrations from system to surface – from a precisely engineered character and its governing documentary architecture to a portable set of reproducible signs. Without explicit distinction between adaptation, reinterpretation, reconstruction, and substitution, the field risks mistaking circulation for continuity and visibility for fidelity. Reestablishing those distinctions is a necessary step toward any serious attempt to restore *Dracula*'s structural coherence across media – a task that motivates the methodological framework proposed in this article.

Literary Archaeology and Ethical Restoration

Within the framework proposed in this article, literary archaeology refers to the critical recovery of structural relationships embedded within a text and obscured by later processes of adaptation, circulation, and simplification. It designates an analytical operation through which a work is approached as a layered system whose coherence depends on the relation among textual, medial, temporal, and material components. In the case of *Dracula* (1897), this means treating the novel not only as a literary narrative but as an archive composed of differentiated yet

⁵ Robert Eighteen-Bisang and J. Gordon Melton, *Dracula: A Century of Editions, Adaptations and Translations. Part One: English Language Editions* (Transylvanian Society of Dracula, 1998). The 1901 Westminster paperback and the 1916 Rider & Son edition are documented in section A of the British (Constable-Rider) tradition. A digital index of the volume is available at <https://www.cesnur.org/2003/dracula/>.

interdependent forms of inscription: diaries, letters, telegrams, phonographic recordings, memoranda, and newspaper clippings – the means through which narrative knowledge is organized, authenticated, delayed, and transmitted.

To read *Dracula* archaeologically is to excavate the principles that govern how its documentary architecture works. Such excavation proceeds across multiple layers: at the textual level, it identifies relations among document types, witness positions, and sequences of disclosure; at the historical media level, it situates the novel within the late 19th-century ecology of recording and evidentiary culture – an approach informed by the methods of media archaeology, which attends to the material conditions and dispositifs through which knowledge was produced and stored;⁶ at the design level, it examines how formal differentiation produces epistemic function; at the reception level, it registers the extent to which subsequent adaptations have preserved, simplified, or displaced the original system. Literary archaeology is less concerned with recovering an immutable essence than with reconstructing a network of relations that later cultural memory has often flattened into isolated motifs or generalized atmosphere.

Ethical restoration requires three interrelated commitments: transparency (the new work must declare whether it is adapting, reinterpreting, reconstructing, or substituting); source accountability (the source text must remain the governing reference against which transformation is measured); and preservation of structural integrity (changes in medium or format should not dissolve the operational relations that define the work's coherence). Fidelity, accordingly, is understood as adherence to systemic principles rather than replication of surface features – relocating fidelity from static sameness to relational continuity. Within the public domain, legal openness does not eliminate methodological responsibility: unrestricted access and interpretive freedom are not the same as structural accountability, and a work can be legally available while still demanding rigorous handling if its coherence is to be preserved rather than merely exploited.

It is precisely under this framework that *Dracula* Legacy becomes legible not as a commercial extension detached from scholarship, but as a practice-led research system. Its outputs are justified not by novelty alone, but by the extent to which they reactivate documentary relations, temporal logic, material mediation, and epistemic structure already present in Stoker's novel. Literary archaeology supplies the diagnostic lens; ethical restoration supplies the governing discipline. Together, they make possible a form of public-domain engagement that is neither merely preservational nor merely exploitative, but reconstructive in the strongest methodological sense.

⁶ Erkki Huhtamo and Jussi Parikka, eds., *Media Archaeology: Approaches, Applications, and Implications* (University of California Press, 2011).

Case Study: Dracula Legacy

Dracula Legacy implements the principles outlined in this article as a practice-led transmedia research system.⁷ Rather than treating Bram Stoker's *Dracula* as a source to be freely reimagined, the project approaches the novel as a structured documentary architecture whose governing relations can be reactivated through design, editorial reconstruction, material mediation, and synchronized digital distribution. Its relevance as a case study lies in its capacity to demonstrate that transmedia development need not require the abandonment of structural fidelity – on the contrary, it can function as a means of restoring coherence when the source text is treated as a system rather than as a reservoir of isolated motifs.

At the editorial level, the project develops reconfigured editions that reactivate the novel's documentary logic through framing, organisation, and paratextual emphasis. These editions foreground the novel's status as an assemblage of mediated records rather than flattening it into homogeneous narration. They operate as design interventions that restore relations among document types, reinforce the logic of evidence and witness, and re-situate the reader within the novel's epistemic structure – demonstrating that editorial design can serve as a reconstructive medium without altering textual content. A second layer consists of documentary artefacts, including transcriptions and facsimiles that extend the work's documentary ontology into tangible objects. By translating documentary components into designed artefacts, the project materializes the novel's evidentiary logic rather than merely illustrating its atmosphere, re-embedding narrative information within forms that recall its original mediated condition.

A third and especially significant component is temporal serialisation aligned with the novel's internal chronology. *Dracula*'s documents do not simply accumulate; they appear in time, according to dates, delays, intervals, and acts of retrospective ordering. Dracula Legacy reconstructs this principle by distributing narrative fragments according to their original dates, restoring not just sequence but temporal experience. This is methodologically important because chronology in *Dracula* is not decorative realism; it is one of the mechanisms through which suspense, evidence, and narrative cognition are produced. This logic is fully realized in the project's real-time digital application, which distributes entries on the dates assigned within the fictional world – functioning not merely as a platform for access,

⁷ The distinction between practice-based and practice-led research adopted here follows Linda Candy, who defines practice-led research as concerned with the nature of practice and leading to new knowledge that has operational significance for that practice. See Linda Candy, *Practice Based Research: A Guide*, CCS Report 1.1 (University of Technology Sydney, 2006).

but as a synchronization device that restores the progressive arrival of information built into the text.⁸

Taken together – editorial editions, documentary artefacts, temporal serialisation, and digital synchronization – these outputs function collectively as instruments of literary archaeology. Each can be evaluated according to the same questions: What original function does it reactivate? How does it preserve coherence? What does it reconstruct rather than invent? *Dracula Legacy* demonstrates that transmedia expansion need not entail ontological substitution or structural dilution, and provides a working model of how a public-domain work whose coherence has been obscured by long histories of adaptation may be re-engaged through design-led restoration – not a replacement of *Dracula*, but a reactivation of its internal system under contemporary conditions of mediated participation.

Ethics of Design in the Public Domain

The public domain enables unrestricted reuse, reinterpretation, circulation, and material transformation – one of its greatest cultural strengths.⁹ Yet the absence of legal restriction does not eliminate the need for critical discipline. On the contrary, the greater the formal freedom afforded by the public domain, the greater the importance of methodological accountability. If authorial exclusivity no longer governs access, responsibility must be located in the clarity with which a new work defines its relationship to the source. The ethical question is therefore not whether reuse is allowed, but how reuse is carried out, declared, and justified.

Design occupies a particularly sensitive position in this context. It does not merely package or decorate public-domain material; it mediates how that material is identified, interpreted, organised, and reintroduced into culture. It can either clarify structural relations or obscure them, either reactivate a source's internal logic or compress it into a more marketable but less coherent form. The ethics of design in the public domain therefore requires at minimum four commitments: clear identification of sources; explicit distinction between adaptation, reinterpretation, reconstruction,

⁸ The cultural and legal dimensions of public-domain openness are examined in Lawrence Lessig, *Free Culture: How Big Media Uses Technology and the Law to Lock Down Culture and Control Creativity* (Penguin Press, 2004). While Lessig is primarily concerned with defending access, this article addresses the methodological responsibilities that such access entails once legal restrictions are removed.

⁹ The dominant frameworks in adaptation studies have tended to centre on narrative transformation, thematic recoding, and questions of fidelity understood at the level of plot and characterization. For representative accounts of these debates, see Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation*, 2nd ed. (Routledge, 2013); Thomas Leitch, *Film Adaptation and Its Discontents* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009); and Julie Sanders, *Adaptation and Appropriation*, 2nd ed. (Routledge, 2016).

and substitution; preservation of structural integrity; and transparency in design decisions. These commitments do not prohibit invention – rather, they discipline invention by locating it within a declared relationship to the source.

Fidelity, within this framework, cannot be reduced to literal reproduction or visual resemblance. It is understood as adherence to systemic principles rather than replication of surface features. A restoration may alter scale, format, or material embodiment while remaining faithful if it preserves the relations that structure the original work's intelligibility. Conversely, a work may reproduce isolated motifs with apparent accuracy while remaining structurally unfaithful if it displaces the underlying logic that once connected them. Ethical restoration thus relocates fidelity from the level of static sameness to the level of relational continuity.

Implications: Adaptation, Transmedia, and the Public Domain

This study has argued that *Dracula* (1897) is more productively understood as a documentary narrative system than as a singular story distributed across multiple voices – a reframing with direct consequences for adaptation theory, transmedia studies, and design research. The problem is not that *Dracula* resists transformation by nature; rather, it has too often been approached through models that privilege narrative compression, atmospheric shorthand, or iconic recognizability over the preservation of systemic relations.

Faithful transmedia expansion offers an alternative to both reductive adaptation and unrestricted reinterpretation, providing a vocabulary and process for distinguishing between adaptation, reinterpretation, reconstruction, and substitution – restoring analytical precision to a field in which the language of fidelity is often invoked without specifying what, exactly, is being preserved. This has direct implications for adaptation studies, where discussion has understandably focused on plot transformation, thematic inflection, and characterisation.¹⁰ Such categories remain important but are insufficient when the source text is organized as a system of mediated documents; fidelity must also account for how information is organized, how truth claims are distributed, and how temporality structures readerly knowledge. For transmedia studies, the argument shifts emphasis from franchise expansion toward reconstructive potential: transmedia can function archaeologically, reactivating structural principles already latent in the originating

¹⁰ The conception of transmedia as additive expansion across platforms and markets is central to the industrial model developed in Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York University Press, 2006). For complementary accounts, see Marie-Laure Ryan, ed., *Narrative across Media: The Languages of Storytelling* (University of Nebraska Press, 2004); and Carlos A. Scolari, *Narrativas transmedia: Cuando todos los medios cuentan* (Deusto, 2013).

work, so that expansion is not opposed to fidelity but becomes one of the means by which fidelity may be operationalized.¹¹

The article also has consequences for the study of the public domain. Legal openness should not be confused with methodological neutrality. The public domain does not abolish the need for rigor; it intensifies it. When no legal framework compels continuity, continuity must be established through declared method, transparency of operation, and structural accountability to the source. The case study of *Dracula* Legacy demonstrates that this framework is not merely theoretical: editorial systems, documentary artefacts, temporal serialisation, and digital synchronization can collectively function as a reconstructive apparatus. Transmedia development need not begin from simplification or symbolic shorthand; it can begin from structural diagnosis and proceed toward outputs that preserve the coherence of the source while opening new modes of engagement.

The framework proposed here is a situated model developed through the specific formal properties and cultural afterlife of *Dracula*. Its transferability to other works will depend on the extent to which those works combine documentary or medial complexity with a history of iconographic simplification. Works such as Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), whose creature has undergone a visual standardisation broadly analogous to that traced here, or Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890), whose formal tensions between surface and depth have been consistently flattened in adaptation, suggest that the model may find productive application beyond *Dracula* studies. The study therefore does not claim universal applicability in identical form, but offers a methodological proposition that invites further comparative testing – a way of thinking about cultural continuity under conditions of media migration in which coherence need not be sacrificed when works move across formats.

Conclusion

This article has argued that *Dracula* (1897) is most coherently understood as a documentary narrative system structured through the integration of multiple media forms. Diaries, letters, telegrams, phonographic recordings, memoranda, and

¹¹ The project's chronological reconstruction was recognised in its early development under the title "Dracula's Place," which distributed diary entries and documentary materials in real time via social media beginning in 2017. In May of that year, Dacre Stoker – great-grandnephew of Bram Stoker and co-author of *Dracula: The Un-Dead* (Dutton, 2009) – commented directly on the serialisation, describing it as "a pictorial journey thru Bram's *Dracula*." That unsolicited response from the author's closest living literary custodian constitutes external evidence that the chronological reconstruction was legible and consistent with the source text as understood by those with privileged access to the Stoker archive.

newspaper clippings constitute the relational architecture through which narrative knowledge is organized, validated, and temporally disclosed. The difficulty historically attributed to adapting *Dracula* does not arise from an inherent resistance within the novel itself; it arises from the repeated displacement of its design logic – the substitution of documentary coordination by linear compression, and of systemic coherence by iconographic recognizability.

The article has proposed faithful transmedia expansion as a design-led methodological framework for reconstructing the governing principles of a literary system across media without dissolving the coherence of its source. What this framework ultimately establishes is a different account of what fidelity requires: not the replication of surfaces, but the maintenance of operative relations – the connections among documents, the sequencing of evidence, the distribution of epistemic authority across witnesses and media. Design, understood in this sense, does not decorate a text or illustrate its atmosphere. It reconstructs the conditions under which a work becomes coherent, demonstrating that fidelity is not a constraint on transmedia expansion but its most rigorous form.

The case study of *Dracula* Legacy demonstrates the practical application of this approach. By deploying editorial reconfiguration, documentary artefacts, temporal serialisation, and synchronized digital delivery, the project shows that transmedia development can occur without epistemic dilution or ontological collapse, provided that the source text is first diagnosed as a system and only then translated through explicit reconstructive criteria. Its value is therefore not only illustrative but methodological: evidence that public-domain engagement can operate through structurally accountable forms of reactivation rather than through simplification or symbolic extraction alone.

More broadly, faithful transmedia expansion is offered not as a universal formula but as a transferable methodological proposition: a way of thinking about how coherence may be preserved when narrative systems migrate across media. Restoring the system, rather than merely repeating the sign, is the critical task.

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