



KULTURA i HISTORIA

48/2026(1)





Vol. 48/2026(1)

e-ISSN: 1642-9826

**REIMAGINING THE GOTHIC
– DRACULA, VAMPIRES, ADAPTATIONS, AND 19TH-CENTURY
LEGACIES”**

Edited by

MAGDALENA GRABIAS

YURI GARCIA

FLORIN NECHITA

Maria Curie-Skłodowska University Press

© Wydawnictwo UMCS, Lublin 2026

ZESPÓŁ REDAKCYJNY/EDITORIAL TEAM

Redaktor Naczelny/Editor-in-Chief

Magdalena Grabias

Zastępca Redaktora Naczelnego/Deputy Editor

Michał Bobrowski

Sekretarz Redakcji/Secretary

Radosław Bomba

Redaktorzy Tematyczni/Thematic Editors

Magdalena Grabias, Yuri Garcia, Florin Nechita

Komitet Naukowy/Scientific Committee

Marius Mircea Crişan, West University of Timişoara, Romania

Erick Felinto, Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

Yuri Garcia, Federal University of Alagoas and State University of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

William Hughes, University of East Anglia, Norwich, United Kingdom

Christopher Garbowski, Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin, Poland

Duncan Light, Bournemouth University, United Kingdom

Laura Loguerio Cánepa, Universidade Paulista, São Paulo, Brazil

John Gordon Melton, Baylor University, Waco, Texas, USA

Florin Nechita, Transilvania University of Braşov, Romania

Ewa Anna Niestorowicz, Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin, Poland

Diego Paleologo, University of the State of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

Nina Anna Trzaska, Uniwersytet im. Adama Mickiewicza w Poznaniu, Poland

Redakcja/Editing

Marta Kasprzak

Skład/Typesetting

Agnieszka Muchowska

Projekt okładki i stron tytułowych/Cover and title pages design

Scientia Paweł Chilczuk

Grafika na okładce/Cover artwork

Ewa Niestorowicz

© Wydawnictwo Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej, Lublin 2026

Wydawnictwo UMCS ul. Idziego Radziszewskiego 11, 20-031 Lublin

Table of Contents

MAGDALENA GRABIAS, YURI GARCIA, FLORIN NECHITA

- Editors' Note: Reimagining the Gothic – Dracula, Vampires, Adaptations,
and 19th-Century Legacies 7
*Od Redakcji: gotyk na nowo – Dracula, wampiry, adaptacje i dziedzictwo
XIX wieku*

HANS CORNEEL DE ROOS

- Bram Stoker's *Dracula*: The True Location of "Lake Hermanstadt" and
How to Get There. With Notes on Contemporary Publications.
Part 1: "Lake Hermanstadt," Its Location in Emily Gerard's Writings and
in the Cindrel Mountains. With a Travel Report. 10
*Dracula Brama Stokera: prawdziwa lokalizacja „Jeziora Hermanstadt”
i jak tam dotrzeć. Z uwagami na temat współczesnych publikacji.
Część 1: „Jezioro Hermanstadt”, jego lokalizacja w pismach Emily Gerard
oraz w Górach Cindrel. Z relacją z podróży*

ENRIQUE A. PALAFOX

- Dracula* Transmedia: From Page to Experience. Expanding the 1897 Epistolary
Novel through Faithful Transmedia Strategies. 41
*Dracula transmedialny: od książki do doświadczenia. Rozszerzanie powieści
epistolarnej z 1897 roku poprzez wierne strategie transmedialne*

DIGANTA ROY

- Uncanny Resemblances: Studying Dracula's Likeness across Literary and
Film Adaptations 56
*Niezwykłe podobieństwa: analiza wizerunku Draculi w powieści i jej
adaptacjach filmowych*

PHILIPPE MET

- Vampirism in/as Family: Filmic Avatars of the *Vourdalak*. 69
Wampiryzm w rodzinie i jako rodzina: filmowe wcielenia vourdalaka

NANCY SCHUMANN

- True Love Never Dies, But It Might Just Kill You: Why Audiences Love
the Toxicity of *Twilight* Romances. 84
*Prawdziwa miłość nigdy nie umiera, ale może cię zabić: dlaczego odbiorcy
kochają toksyczność romansów ze Zmierzchu*

JOHN SCHAFF

- Providence: Interpreting Charlotte Brontë's Depiction of God in *Jane Eyre*. 98
*Opatrzność: interpretacja obrazu Boga w Dziwnych losach Jane Eyre
Charlotte Brontë*

JACEK CHROBACZYŃSKI

- Mirosław Maciorowski, *Powstańcy i realiści. Historia opowiedziana na nowo*,
Wydawnictwo Agora, Warszawa 2025 (1251 s.). Spojrzenie osobiste.
Kilka najważniejszych uwag 111
*Mirosław Maciorowski, Insurgents and Realists: History Retold, Agora
Publishing House, Warsaw 2025 (1251 pp.). A Personal Perspective:
Several Key Observations*

Editors' Note: Reimagining the Gothic – Dracula, Vampires, Adaptations, and 19th-Century Legacies

*Od Redakcji: gotyk na nowo – Dracula, wampiry,
adaptacje i dziedzictwo XIX wieku*

MAGDALENA GRABIAS

magdalena.grabias@umcs.pl
<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6987-1793>

YURI GARCIA

yurigpk@hotmail.com
<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1077-5929>

FLORIN NECHITA

florin.nechita@unitbv.ro
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5398-722X>

This issue of “Culture and History” brings together six original essays that explore the enduring vitality of Gothic literature and culture from fresh interdisciplinary perspectives. While four of the contributions focus directly on Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* and its many cultural afterlives, the volume also broadens its scope to consider other influential vampire narratives and the wider 19th-century literary tradition. Collectively, these essays demonstrate that Gothic texts continue to generate new questions about history, geography, adaptation, visual culture, religion, and popular reception.

A recurring concern throughout the issue is the remarkable capacity of Gothic narratives to transcend their original historical and textual contexts. Whether through archival investigation, media adaptation, film, marketing, or theological interpretation, the contributors reveal how canonical works continue to be rediscovered, reinterpreted,

and reimagined for new audiences. The articles illustrate the richness of contemporary Gothic scholarship, combining close textual analysis with historical research, adaptation studies, film criticism, media theory, and cultural history.

The issue opens with Hans de Roos's "Bram Stoker's *Dracula*: The True Location of 'Lake Hermanstadt' and How to Get There. With Notes on Contemporary Publications. Part 1: 'Lake Hermanstadt,' Its Location in Emily Gerard's Writings and in the Cindrel Mountains. With a Travel Report." Drawing on Emily Gerard's travel writings, 19th-century Habsburg military maps, and the author's own field research in Romania, de Roos reconstructs the likely location of the mysterious "Lake Hermanstadt" associated with the legendary Scholomance. By combining archival scholarship with first-hand exploration, the article offers new insights into one of the most enigmatic geographical references underpinning Stoker's novel.

Enrique A. Palafox's "Dracula Transmedia: From Page to Experience. Expanding the 1897 Epistolary Novel through Faithful Transmedia Strategies" shifts attention from geography to media. Challenging conventional notions of adaptation, Palafox argues that *Dracula* functions as a distributed documentary system whose narrative architecture anticipates principles now associated with transmedia storytelling. Through the case study of Dracula Legacy, the author proposes a notion of faithful transmedia expansion that preserves what he identifies as a structural and epistemological integrity of Stoker's novel while opening new possibilities for contemporary engagement.

Questions of representation and visual identity continue in Diganta Roy's "Uncanny Resemblances: Studying Dracula's Likeness across Literary and Film Adaptations." Examining both Stoker's novel and Francis Ford Coppola's *Bram Stoker's Dracula* (1992), Roy investigates how physical resemblance and facial identity contribute to the construction of Dracula's monstrosity. The article demonstrates how cinematic techniques – including prosthetics, make-up, lighting, and performance – create and manipulate uncanny resemblances that shape the Count's multiple incarnations on screen.

Moving beyond Stoker, Philippe Met's "Vampirism in/as Family: Filmic Avatars of the *Vourdalak*" explores the cinematic afterlives of Aleksey Konstantinovich Tolstoy's influential novella introducing the Slavic *vourdalak*. Surveying Italian, French, and late Soviet adaptations, Met examines how the figure of the vampire who preys upon members of its own family becomes a powerful vehicle for exploring familial disintegration, social anxiety, and changing historical contexts through diverse cinematic traditions.

Nancy Schumann's "True Love Never Dies, But It Might Just Kill You: Why Audiences Love the Toxicity of *Twilight*" turns to one of the 21st century's most commercially successful vampire narratives. Revisiting *Twilight* two decades after its publication, Schumann analyses the series' targeted marketing as

a romance while revealing the Gothic traditions and darker narrative structures that underpin its enormous popular appeal. The article argues that *Twilight* consciously mobilises familiar Gothic archetypes alongside capitalist marketing strategies to attract readers whose expectations of romance gradually become entwined with horror.

Finally, John Schaff's "Providence: Interpreting Charlotte Brontë's Depiction of God in *Jane Eyre*" broadens the issue's engagement with 19th-century literature beyond the Gothic vampire tradition. Reassessing longstanding debates surrounding the novel's religious outlook, Schaff argues that *Jane Eyre* presents a profoundly Christian vision centred on divine love and providence rather than punitive judgment. By situating Brontë's theological convictions within her personal and literary context, the article offers a compelling reinterpretation of one of the Victorian period's most enduring novels.

Taken together, these contributions demonstrate the notable breadth of contemporary research into Gothic and 19th-century literature. By bringing together a wide range of interpretative perspectives, the issue highlights the continuing relevance of Gothic narratives and their incessant capacity for reinvention across cultures, media, and generations. We hope that readers will find in these essays both new insights into familiar texts and fresh avenues for future scholarship.

Bram Stoker's *Dracula*: The True Location of "Lake Hermanstadt" and How to Get There. With Notes on Contemporary Publications.

Part 1: "Lake Hermanstadt," Its Location in Emily Gerard's Writings and in the Cindrel Mountains. With a Travel Report

*Dracula Brama Stokera: prawdziwa lokalizacja „Jeziora Hermanstadt” i jak tam dotrzeć. Z uwagami na temat współczesnych publikacji.
Część 1: „Jezioro Hermanstadt”, jego lokalizacja w pismach Emily Gerard oraz w Górach Cindrel. Z relacją z podróży*

HANS CORNEEL DE ROOS

hanscorneelderoos@gmail.com
<https://orcid.org/0009-0000-4156-1996>

ABSTRACT

Part I of this paper discusses the location of Dracula's "Lake Hermanstadt" near the Scholomance, the mythical School of the Devil mentioned by both Bram Stoker (1897) and Emily de Laszowska Gerard (1885 and 1888). It addresses the question whether either of the authors actually was familiar with the lake's exact site, which I was able to reconstruct from Gerard's 1888 travel account, military maps from the Habsburg era and by personally traveling there in August 2013 and July 2015; this article also shows maps and photos from my exploration trips. Part II discusses other reports from the second half of the 19th century, describing foot walks to this lake. These travel logs confirm many curious details presented by Gerard, including the lake's alleged ability to influence the weather and its supposed connection to the open sea, but no clear association with the Scholomance, the "Devil's Cauldron" and the dragon sleeping under the surface. For this, Gerard must have consulted other sources, or conflated separate notions. It is Stoker, finally, who tightly fixed the site of the mysterious Scholomance's to that of Gerard's lake in the Cindrel Mountains.

Keywords: Stoker; Gerard; *Dracula*; Scholomance; Hermanstadt; Hermannstadt; Cindrel; lake; Iezerul Mare; vampire; magic; devil; folklore; Transylvania

ABSTRAKT

W części pierwszej artykułu omówiono lokalizację „Jeziora Hermanstadt” z powieści *Dracula* Brama Stokera, usytuowanego w pobliżu Scholomance – mitycznej szkoły diabła, wspomnianej zarówno przez Brama Stokera (1897), jak i Emily de Laszowską Gerard (1885 i 1888). Artykuł jest próbą odpowiedzi na pytanie, czy którekolwiek z tych autorów rzeczywiście знаło dokładne położenie jeziora, które udało się zrekonstruować autorowi, na podstawie relacji z podróży Gerard z 1888 roku, map wojskowych z czasów monarchii habsburskiej oraz dzięki osobistym wyprawom w to miejsce, odbytym w sierpniu 2013 i lipcu 2015 roku. W artykule zamieszczono również mapy i fotografie z tych ekspedycji. Część druga jest poświęcona relacjom z pieszych wędrówek nad to jezioro odbywającym się w drugiej połowie XIX wieku. Dzienniki podróży potwierdzają wiele intrygujących szczegółów przedstawionych przez Gerard, w tym domniemaną zdolność jeziora do wpływania na pogodę oraz jego rzekomy związek z otwartym morzem. Nie znajdują jednak jednoznacznych powiązań z Scholomance, „kotłem diabła” ani ze smokiem śpiącym pod powierzchnią wody. W tym zakresie Gerard musiała korzystać z innych źródeł lub połączyć odrębne wątki tradycji ludowej. Dopiero Stoker jednoznacznie utożsamił lokalizację tajemniczej Scholomance z jeziorem opisanym przez Gerard w Górach Cindrel.

Słowa kluczowe: Stoker; Gerard; *Dracula*; Scholomance; Hermanstadt; Hermannstadt; Cindrel; jezioro; Iezerul Mare; wampir; magia; diabeł; folklor; Transylwania

Introduction

I reconstructed the site of Stoker's "Lake Hermanstadt" as early as June 2013, and mentioned this in the Christmas issue of *Letter of Castle Dracula*:

This new paradigm, presented just before the centenary of Stoker's death (20 April 2012), already aided me to solve another old riddle: The location of the Scholomance, the Devil's School, which the novelist placed at "Lake Hermanstadt" [sic – HdR]. Again with the help of antique Habsburg military maps, the true site, originally described by Emily Gerard, could be established: Iezerul Mare, next to the Platoul Diavolului, high up in the Cindrel Mountains south-west of Sibiu. My local guide confirmed that the folk beliefs quoted by Gerard and Stoker were still respected; full details can be found in the planned "Dracula Bram Stoker Travel Guide" which I am currently preparing together with Dacre Stoker, Bram Stoker's great-grandnephew.¹

As the publication of this guide book was postponed again and again, I decided to present my findings at the "Children of the Night" International Dracula Congress

¹ Hans C. de Roos, "Fact & Fiction in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*: Time for a New Paradigm," special Christmas issue of *Letter of Castle Dracula*, December 22, 2013: 5.

in November 2022. The following paper is based on the insights and materials discussed at this virtual meeting. The first part deals with reconstructing the actual location of “Lake Hermanstadt,” using Gerard’s travel descriptions.² The second part, to be published in the next issue of *Kultura i Historia*, will analyze texts by other contemporaries who discussed either this mysterious lake or the myths of the Devil’s Cauldron and the Scholomance, and will examine the link between the three.

Just as for the location Stoker most probably had in mind for his Castle Dracula, my research regarding “Lake Hermanstadt” emphatically includes “learning by walking.” From the available texts alone, it was impossible to decide which of the two glacier lakes in the area Gerard visited was supposed to be the “Devil’s Cauldron”: I had to visit the place itself to elicit the spontaneous comments that finally settled the issue. As a photographer and artist, I have been advocating a more visual approach to Dracula Studies since 2012. The maps and photos contained in Part I are no mere holiday souvenirs, but serve to link Stoker’s mythical “Lake Hermanstadt” – with its mark of remaining hidden to the non-initiated – to real places, and to show other scholars the route, so that they can learn about these local myths first-hand, before the regional folklore fades away forever.

The ultimate goal of my research, however, was not merely to map the geographical background of Bram Stoker’s story, but to collect materials leading to a better understanding of the complex relationship between fact and fiction in his *Dracula* novel, as discussed in some of my other papers.³ The way Stoker inserted the myth of the Scholomance into his story is typical of how he handled both in his narrative: Building on his preparatory library research, using respected sources and detailed notes, he produced literary characters and locations that appeared authentic to his readers, but in the end could not unambiguously be traced back to historical-biographical or topographical reality. Count Dracula is initially linked to the historical Vlad III the Impaler, but in Chapter 25, Van Helsing and Mina Harker discard this association and instead identify their foe as “[t]hat other of his race who, in a later age, again and again, brought his forces over The Great River into Turkey Land”⁴ – possibly a hint to Michael the Brave (1558–1601).⁵

² Although it is usual to italicize foreign-language words in academic texts, this article is so full of them that I have dispensed with it, in favor of a more orderly layout, and only used quotation marks where it seemed appropriate.

³ E.g. De Roos, “Fact & Fiction”; “Bram Stoker’s Vampire Trap: Vlad the Impaler and His Nameless Double,” *Linköping Electronic Articles in Computer and Information Science* 14, no. 2 (March 19, 2012); “*Dracula*’s Truth Claim and its Consequences,” *Journal of Dracula Studies* 16 (October 2014): 53–80.

⁴ Bram Stoker, *Dracula* (Constable, 1897), Chapter 25, Dr. Seward’s Diary of 28 October.

⁵ See again my paper “Bram Stoker’s Vampire Trap” and my book chapter “Count Dracula’s Address and Life-Time Identity,” in *Dracula: An International Perspective*, ed. Marius Crişan (Palgrave, 2017), 95–115.

The route descriptions to Castle Dracula get vaguer as the protagonists approach it: Jonathan Harker, Professor Van Helsing and Mina all fall asleep while snow storms obscure any recognizable landmarks.⁶ Van Helsing is said to be based on a real person, but finding out whom the novelist had in mind is a tantalizing task.⁷ Therefore, it should not surprise us that "Lake Hermanstadt," which Van Helsing mentions as the location of the Scholomance, is not listed in any atlas. Finding it all the same on the military maps of the Habsburg era is one thing; suspecting that Stoker willfully created a fictitious name for this lake in order to render any verification or falsification impossible is another thing. The following paper should be read as a contribution to a new paradigm transcending the principles worded by Elizabeth Miller and her colleague Clive Leatherdale.⁸ At the same time, I am trying to untangle a number of misunderstandings introduced by the writings of Raymond McNally, Radu Florescu and Leslie Klinger.

Dracula and the Scholomance as Cultural Phenomena

Bram Stoker's *Dracula* is not only a novel; it is a cultural phenomenon. Since its first edition, it has never been out of print, and the text has been human-translated to and published in book form in more than 50 languages.⁹ The Count Dracula character, its variations, imitations and re-inventions have appeared in more than 700 film, television, and video adaptations globally.¹⁰ In this respect, the *Guinness Book of Records* puts him far ahead of Sherlock Holmes.¹¹ Although not everyone

⁶ For the reconstruction of the location of the castle, see my paper "Castle Dracula: Its Exact Location Reconstructed from Stoker's Novel, His Research Notes and Contemporary Maps," *Linköping Electronic Articles in Computer and Information Science* 14, no. 1 (February 7, 2012), and my book chapter "Count Dracula's Address."

⁷ See my article "Heeft de vampierbestrijder uit Bram Stoker's *Dracula* echt bestaan? De Amsterdamse psychiater Albert van Renterghem en de hypnose," *De Parelduiker* 17, no. 6 (October 2012): 41–58. In an 1897 interview, Stoker insisted that Van Helsing was based on a real person. See Jane Thompson Stoddart, "Mr. Bram Stoker: A Chat with the Author of *Dracula*," *British Weekly*, July 1, 1897.

⁸ See my article "Fact & Fiction," 2–5.

⁹ Video call conversation with Professor Gordon Melton, Baylor University's Institute for Studies of Religion, June 3, 2026. In his email to the author of June 15, 2026, Melton pointed out that *Dracula* is still missing from Wikipedia's "List of literary works by number of translations" but deserves to be included in the top 60.

¹⁰ John Edgar Browning and Caroline Joan Picart, *Dracula in Visual Media: Film, Television, Comic Book and Electronic Game Appearances, 1921–2010* (McFarland, 2011), 3f.

¹¹ "As of August 2015, Bram Stoker's Count Dracula has been portrayed in a total of 538 films (both cinema releases and TV films – more than any other literary character. This puts him a long way ahead of his closest literary character rival, Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes, with 299 appear-

appreciates Stoker's style¹² – e.g. his long-windedness, chivalric sentimentality and “cardboard characters”¹³ – “Dracula's indelible influence on pop culture”¹⁴ cannot be denied. For this reason alone, the novel and its elements deserve the attention of academic scholars.

The popularity of Stoker's story not only extends to its characters, but also to the fictitious sites featured in the text. Castle Dracula became the inspiration for the Castlevania franchise, while around a million tourists are visiting Castle Bran near Braşov, Hotel Castel Dracula in the Borgo Pass, and the Poenari Castle in the Argeş Valley every year, hoping to experience some of the dark atmosphere of the vampire's fortress. In all three cases, the connection with Stoker's Count is thin or non-existent, as the novelist, according to my research, imagined Count Dracula's stronghold to be located on an empty mountain top, Izvorul Călimanului, in the volcanic Kelemen Alps, ca. 24 km south-east of the mentioned Hotel Castel Dracula.¹⁵

After Castle Dracula, the Scholomance is the second site mentioned in Bram Stoker's Dracula novel connected with evil supernatural powers. While the castle is the residence of the King Vampire and his three wanton brides, the Scholomance is said to be the earthly seat of the Devil himself, where he teaches the Dark Arts to a few selected students. That the Count attended this school himself links him directly to Satan. This is how Professor Van Helsing describes the Scholomance in Chapter 18 of Dracula:

The Draculas were, says Arminius, a great and noble race, though now and again were scions who were held by their coevals to have had dealings with the Evil One. They learned his secrets in the Scholomance, amongst the mountains over Lake Hermanstadt [sic – HdR], where the devil claims the tenth scholar as his due.¹⁶

Popularized by Dracula, the Scholomance today is an important site or “zone” in various fantasy games and books, such as the online game *World of Warcraft*

ances as of the same date.” Quoted from <https://guinnessworldrecords.com/world-records/97587-most-portrayed-literary-character-in-film>

¹² Recently, film director Robert Eggers called Stoker “a bit of a hack writer.” Quoted from Robert Eggers, “‘I had to make the vampire as scary as possible’: Nosferatu's Robert Eggers on how folklore fuelled his film,” *The Guardian* of December 27, 2024. <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2024/dec/27/robert-eggers-nosferatu-vampire-director>.

¹³ “The novel is usually considered flawed, or even ‘a spoiled masterpiece.’ [...] Obviously it's a story we want to hear badly enough to put up with the stretches of dullness and the undelineated cardboard characters whose voices mostly sound identical.” Quoted from Dr. Michael Delahoyde, Washington State University, “Bram Stoker: *Dracula*,” n.d.

¹⁴ Dacre Stoker, “Foreword,” in Browning and Picart, *Dracula in Visual Media*, 2.

¹⁵ See again my paper “Castle Dracula: Its Exact Location,” and my book chapter “Count Dracula's Address.”

¹⁶ Stoker, *Dracula*, Mina Harker's Journal of 30 September.

(including the *Mists of Pandaria* remake), the Hearthstone card game Scholomance Academy, and the Young Adult novel *A Deadly Education* by Naomi Novik, that have appropriated the Transylvanian myth for their own artistic and commercial purposes.



Fig. 1. Scholomance illustration in the Demonic Paradise Wiki



Fig. 2–3. *World of Warcraft*. Top: the island of Caer Darrow, Classic version. Source: Warcraft Wiki. From the Warcraft Wikipeage: “Caer Darrow [...] is an island and a ruined keep located on Darrowmere Lake in the Western Plaguelands. Prior to the Third War, Kel’Thuzad made a deal with the House Barov and established the headquarters of the Cult of the Damned under this ancient human fortress, in the catacombs that became Scholomance, a school of necromancy. Once a bright institution it is now dedicated to the darkest, most vile arts, where human monsters seek to push the bounds of power and life itself.” Bottom: *Mists of Pandaria* expansion. Final boss room of the Scholomance dungeon in *World of Warcraft*, where the players encounter Darkmaster Gandling. © All images: Blizzard Entertainment Inc. (Microsoft)

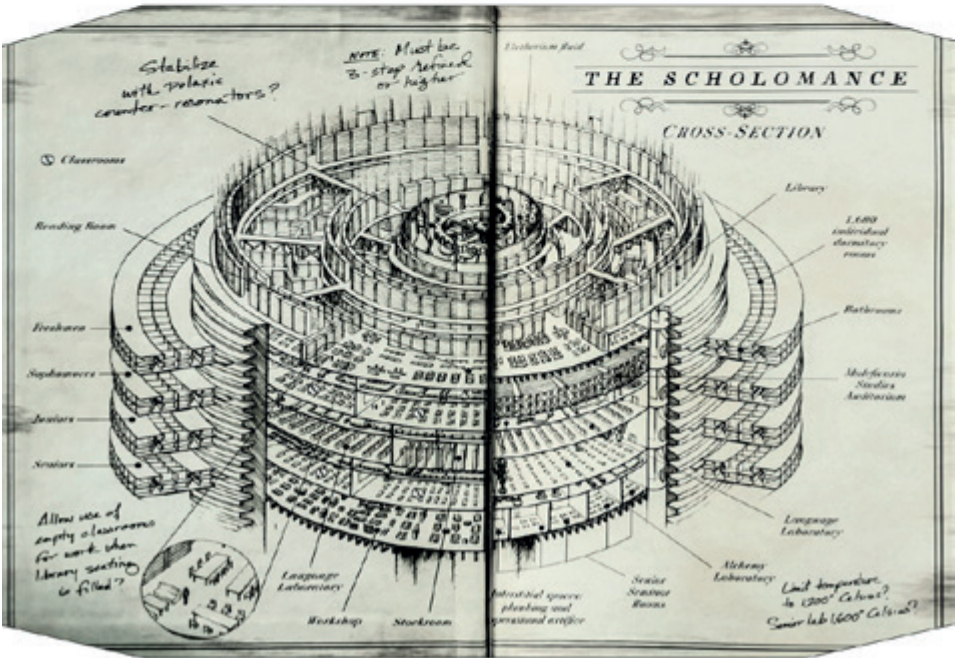


Fig. 4–5. Top: *Scholomance Academy Expansion* (Hearthstone game). Bottom: *A Deadly Education* (Naomi Novik, 2020)

The relevant paragraph from this article reads:

As I am on the subject of thunderstorms, I may as well here mention the Scholomance, or school supposed to exist somewhere in the heart of the mountains, and where all the secrets of nature, the language of animals, and all imaginable magic spells and charms are taught by the devil in person. Only ten scholars are admitted at a time, and when the course of learning has expired and nine of them are released to return to their homes, the tenth scholar is detained by the devil as payment, and mounted upon an Ismeju (dragon) he becomes henceforward the devil's aide-de-camp, and assists him in "making the weather," that is to say, preparing the thunderbolts.

A small lake, immeasurably deep, lying high up among the mountains to the south of Hermanstadt, is supposed to be the cauldron where is brewed the thunder, and in fair weather the dragon sleeps beneath the waters. Roumanian peasants anxiously warn the traveller to beware of throwing a stone into this lake lest it should wake the dragon and provoke a thunderstorm.¹⁹

Three years later, in 1888, Gerard published her travel memoirs in the form of a book, *The Land Beyond the Forest*.²⁰ In Volume 2, on pages 5–6, we find exactly the same text.

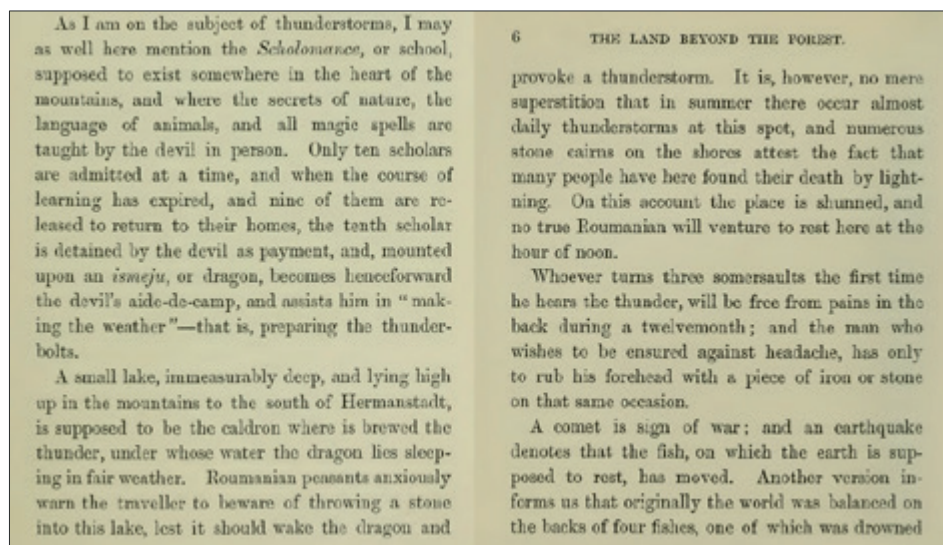


Fig. 7. Facsimile of Emily Gerard's 1888 book *The Land Beyond the Forest* (collage), Chapter 27, pages 5–6

¹⁹ Emily Gerard, "Transylvanian Superstitions," *The Nineteenth Century* 18 (July 1885): 136.

²⁰ Gerard, *The Land Beyond the Forest*.

In the 2008 facsimile edition of the Notes, however, Robert Eighteen-Bisang and Elizabeth Miller comment that there is no evidence that Stoker actually read the book.²¹

Only in late October 2018, Philip Spedding, Development Director at the London Library, unearthed a series of books that Stoker may have consulted in the London Library, instead of in the Whitby Library or the library of the British Museum.²² The London Library listed 26 book titles Stoker would have referenced in his preparatory notes.²³ The last title on this list is Emily Gerard's 1888 book. In fact, Stoker's Notes do *not* mention this book, only Gerard's article in *The Nineteenth Century*. During the "Children of the Night" Dracula Conference 2021, however, independent researcher Lokke Heiss presented his arguments that Stoker actually *did* peruse Gerard's volumes.²⁴

Whatever the case, in the text of *Dracula*, Stoker copied Gerard's spelling error "Hermanstadt" (instead of Hermannstadt) – an oversight suggesting that neither Stoker nor Gerard cared much about the actual site of the Scholomance, and perhaps even did not know its precise location. I will discuss later whether this is true.

What I was interested in, back in 2013, was to identify the *actual location of the lake* that was hinted at by Gerard and later became the model for Stoker's "Lake Hermanstadt." The obvious problem is that Gerard's article, even if we correct the spelling error, does not provide exact geographical clues. There are many mountains "to the south of Hermannstadt" (now called Sibiu), and there are many small lakes to be found there. The name "Lake Hermanstadt" used by Stoker cannot be found in any of Gerard's texts, nor can it be spotted on any old or modern map of Transylvania; we may suspect that the name was invented by Stoker himself. This means that another set of clues is needed to locate it – provided that Gerard's lake was not purely fictitious.

As for the name "Scholomance," most scholars assume that it refers to the "Solomonari," who – according to certain Romanian superstitions – were wizards "learned in the wisdom of Solomon," able to create storms and ride dragons. In the Talmud and in the "Testament of Solomon" (1st–3rd century AD), King Solomon is said to have tricked the demon Asmodeus (in other sources: Beelzebub or Beelzebub) into helping to construct the temple in Jerusalem. Hence, this king had a reputation

²¹ Eighteen-Bisang and Miller, *Notes*, 123, footnote 252.

²² Or in addition to the works consulted there; Stoker may have consulted some titles multiple times.

²³ Mike Wilton, "The London Library Has Found Books Bram Stoker Used as Research For Dracula," Allhallowsgoek.com, November 10, 2018; email exchange of the author with Spedding. November 5, 2018.

²⁴ His presentation was titled "In Emily We May Acquit and Blame the Word on Schmidt."

of being able to summon supernatural creatures. According to various apocryphal writings, he could also speak with animals, and was a master of alchemy.²⁵

Solomon's Rocks: On the Wrong Track with the Wrong King?

In his book *The New Annotated Dracula* (2008), Leslie Klinger quotes the opinion of *Dracula* scholar Nicolae Paduraru, the founder of the Transylvanian Society of Dracula. According to Klinger, Paduraru identified the Scholomance as

[...] 'the rocks of Solomon,' where the scholars took their oaths to uphold their way of life, located at Bâlea Lac (Lake Balea), high in the Carpathians between Sibiu (Hermannstadt) and Braşov.²⁶

Following Klinger's hint, in October 2012, I visited Bâlea Lac in the Făgăraş Mountains east of Sibiu, but no one I asked there knew about such "Solomon's Rocks" at or near the lake.²⁷

Such a rock *is* mentioned, however, by former Boston professors Raymond McNally and Radu Florescu in their book *The Essential Dracula* (1979). The authors refer to it as "Pietrelelui Solomon," which in their opinion was located near a town called "Păltiniş Pietrele":

Near Hermannstadt (known as Sibiu in modern Romanian) close to the town of Paltinis Pietrele, is a spot called "pietrelelui Solomon," the rocks of Solomon. We know that students often took vows to uphold their way of life.²⁸

But like "Lake Hermanstadt," the name "Păltiniş Pietrele" is not marked on the maps of Transylvania I was able to consult. In the Romanian language, the word

²⁵ In his book *Siebenbürgische Sagen* (J. Gött, 1857), 177f, Friedrich von Müller wrote that "Kaiser Salomo" had the gift to control the weather, and that those who inherited his skills were called "Scholomonar." In his essay "What Was the Scholomance – Horror, Ancient Myth and the Origins of the Devil's School," 2011, Jason Colavita argues that the Transylvanian legend of wandering wizards controlling the weather and riding dragons must have its roots in pre-Christian Dacian and Thracian myths around the pagan god Zalmoxis or Salmoxis (also: Zalmus), whose power his priests were allegedly able to wield.

²⁶ Leslie Klinger, *The New Annotated Dracula* (Norton, 2008), 342f, note 45.

²⁷ Gerard, *The Land Beyond the Forest*, Chapter 51, reports on her visit to Bâlea Lac, but does not mention any supernatural properties.

²⁸ Raymond McNally and Radu Florescu, eds., *The Essential Dracula* (Mayflower, 1979), 195, note 278.



Fig. 8. Bălea Lac. A promontory rock is visible somewhat right of the center, but to the local population, it is *not* known as “Solomon’s Rock.” Photo: Hans C. de Roos, 2012

“Păltiniș” refers to a sycamore-maple grove; it is a generic name.²⁹ In Romania, there are several towns and villages bearing this same name (e.g. near Caransebeș in Caraș-Severin County, or in Botoșani County).

The denomination “Pietrelelui Solomon,” however, seems to be unique. In “Solomon’s Rock: Myths, Legends and a Site of Natural Beauty,” Rachel Mundy explains that according to a local legend, King Solomon, while fleeing on horseback, fell into an abyss while his steed was jumping from one rock to another over 50 m distance. On this rock plateau, constituting a natural fortress, remains of the first Dacian settlement of the region have been discovered. The spoiler: This rock is located close to Brașov, which is around 140 km east of Hermannstadt. Traditionally, inhabitants of the Schei District of Brașov organize a procession to these Solomon’s Rocks during the spring holidays, commemorating the one day in the year that Romanian people were allowed to sell goods in the Saxon city without paying a toll. Today, it is a touristic point of interest, with a parking place and a hotel nearby.³⁰

We can conclude that the “Pietrelelui Solomon” is a well-defined site, but it can neither be described as “near Hermannstadt,” as McNally and Florescu did, nor as “to the south of Hermannstadt,” as indicated by Gerard. If Gerard actually wanted to point to Solomon’s Rock, the phrase “to the south of Kronstadt” would have been far more accurate. An even bigger problem is that the King Solomon linked to these

²⁹ “Păltiniș” derives from the Latin *platanus*; in Europe, the sycamore tree is a species of maple (*acer pseudoplatanus*).

³⁰ Rachel Mundy, “Solomon’s Rock: Myths, Legends and a Site of Natural Beauty,” *Brașov Visitor*, No. 1 (October 2004), at brasov-visitor.ro. The website is no longer active.



Fig. 9. Map from 1862, showing Hermannstadt (Sibiu) and Kronstadt (Braşov)

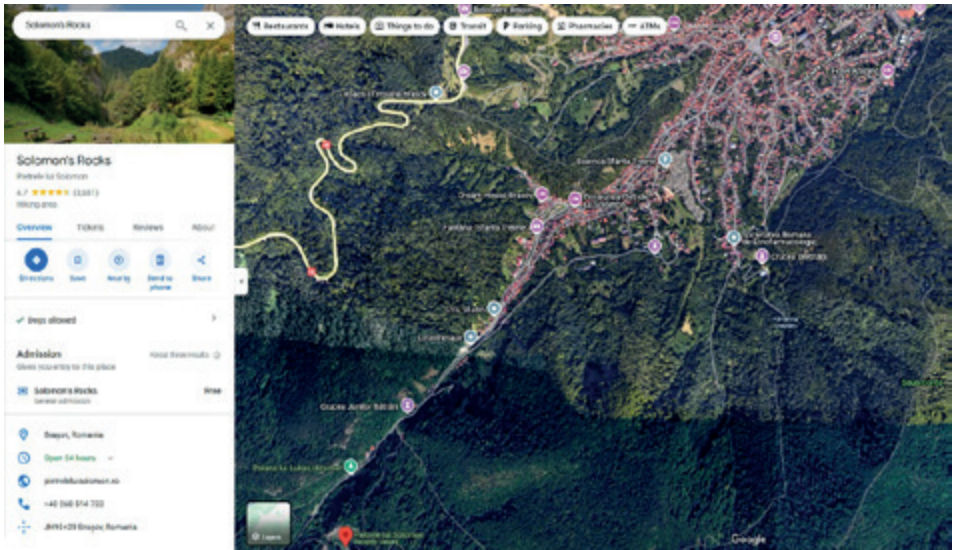


Fig. 10. Google Maps showing Pietrellelui Solomon near Braşov



Fig. 11–12. Pietrelelui Solomon. Photos by Nicu Farcaș. Wikimedia Commons. License: CC BY-SA 3.0.

rocks is believed to be a *Hungarian* king, a medieval ruler cursed by his mother for killing his own brother³¹ – there is no apparent connection to the biblical King Solomon, who died of natural causes, around 930 BC, after a reign of 40 years.

Further Clues Found in *The Land Beyond the Forest*

My research only progressed when I continued studying Gerard's book *The Land Beyond the Forest*. In Volume 2, Chapters 54 and 55, she reports on an excursion that should lead to a lake:

As on the second morning the rain had stopped, we thought we might venture to proceed on our way, the next station we had in view being the Jäeser See, a mysterious lake lying high up in the hills, of which many strange tales are told. This Meeresauge (eye of the sea, as all such high mountain-lakes are called by the people) is the source of the river Cibin, and believed by the country folk to be directly connected with the ocean by subterraneous openings. The bones of drowned seamen and spars from wrecked ships are said to have been there washed ashore; and popular superstition warns the stranger not to presume to throw a stone into its gloomy depths, as a terrible thunderstorm would be the inevitable result of such sacrilege. According to some people, the Jäeser See would be no other than the devil's own caldron, in which he brews the weather, and where a dragon sleeps coiled up beneath the surface.³²

From these details, we may conclude that this "Jäeser See" is the same lake as the one mentioned at the beginning of Volume 2 of Gerard's book, and in her article "Transylvanian Superstitions." To find the location of Stoker's "Lake Hermanstadt," all we would have to do is to find this "Jäeser See." Unfortunately, like "Lake Hermanstadt," it was not listed in any atlas of Romania. But while searching for this name, I noticed that "iezer" is the Romanian word for "mountain lake": Perhaps, Gerard mistook the term "iezer" for the name of the lake?

³¹ See, e.g. "People of Romania: Brasov (part III)" at abctravelromania.com; "Solomon's Rocks (Pietrele lui Solomon)" at brasovtour.com; Wikipedia, lemma "Pietrele lui Solomon." According to the curse, the king would die as soon as he would be seen by a commoner, so he tried to escape from his country unseen. During this dramatic adventure, he lost his crown (or he hid it, according to other versions). Legend has it that this was the crown that gave Kronstadt its name. The historical King Solomon of Hungary lived from 1053 till 1087 and reigned from 1063 till 1074. He was cursed by his mother after he raised his hand to strike her during an argument, when he had lost a battle against his cousins.

³² Gerard, *The Land Beyond the Forest*, Vol. II, 353f.

In order to find out which mountain lake she was referring to, I had to study the rest of Chapters 54 and 55. In this text, Gerard describes how her little travel group first visits the Hungarian customs station of La Dus, then continues to the Bistra Forest the next morning; Gerard mentions visiting a “Klause” or “monster dam” facilitating the transport of timber. After the group leaves the pine forest and moves to higher ground along a mountain shoulder, a snow storm forces the excursionists to return; Gerard does not actually reach the mysterious lake. But as La Dus and the Bistra Forest are marked on the 1876 Austro-Hungarian military maps, I could trace some of the group’s route and make an educated guess about the planned destination.

The mentioned “monster dam” must refer to the “Friedrichsklause” as marked on the 1876 Habsburg map, just south of Colonie Bistra and the “J.H.” (“Jagdhaus” or Gamekeeper’s Lodge).³³

The Habsburg map shows *two* nearby lakes as Gerard’s possible destination: Iezerul Mare (Big Lake) and Iezerul Mic (Small Lake). Both are cauldron-shaped glacial lakes just below the peak of Mount Cindrel,³⁴ 35 km southwest of Hermannstadt at ca. 2,000 m altitude.³⁵ Both names correspond to Gerard’s term “Jäser.” Next to the Cindrel, we find the “Teufelsplatte (“Platoul Diavolului”, “Devil’s Plateau”). The border between Transylvania (Austro-Hungarian territory) and the personal union of Wallachia and Moldavia, established in 1859, becoming the United Principalities of Romania in 1862, and the independent Kingdom of Romania in 1877, ran south of the Cindrel mountain range.

³³ David Turnock, “Settlement History and Sustainability in the Carpathians in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries,” *Review of Historical Geography and Toponomastics* 1, no. 1 (2006): 48 informs us that “Colonia Bistra” was founded in 1870 by German settlers from Baden to provide the Petrești paper factory with wood; they constructed a “stavilar” (dam) to regulate the water flow and ease the transport of logs downhill. A further barrage was constructed at Oașa Mare. In the *Jahrbuch 1893* of the Siebenbürgische Karpathenverein, 85, Frieda von Kimakowicz also describes the Friedrichsklause as a “colossal” dam; her report will be discussed in Part 2.

³⁴ Also spelled Cândrel, Cschindrel, or Csindrel.

³⁵ In fact, there are two more glacial cirques in the region, the Gropata and the Iujbea Rășinariului cirques (also north of the Cindrel Peak), but they contain no lakes. In “Patrimoniu de mediu, arhitectural și cultural,” the Grupul de Acțiune Locală (GAL) Mărginimea Sibiului informs us: “In the central part of the main summits of the three massifs Lotru, Cindrel and Șureanu, at heights of over 1,900 m, 15 glacial cirques were carved by glaciers. The relief and altitude conditions were less favorable for the development of glacial phenomena. As a result, four glacial cirques were formed on the northern and eastern slopes of the Șerbota-Frumoasa – Cindrel peak: Gropata, Iezerul Mic, Iezerul Mare and Iujblea, two of which harbor glacial lakes, from which their names derive” [“Iezerul” means “mountain lake” – see above]. Of the two mentioned glacial lakes, Iezerul Mare is the largest (ca. 300 × 160 m) and the deepest (13.3 m). Nicknamed “The Emerald Sea” (Comoara de Smarald), Ioana, “Iezerul Mare al Cindrelului,” *De pe drum. Jurnale de călătorie*, 2014, calls it “without a doubt, the jewel of the Cindrel Mountains” (“fără îndoială, bijuteria Cindrelului”). Confusingly, in the Iezer Mountains (Romanian: Munții Iezer/Munții Iezer-Păpușa), east of Sibiu, in Argeș County, there are also two sites named Iezerul Mare (2,462 m) and Iezerul Mic (2,409 m).



Fig. 13. Map of Siebenbürgen, Hermannstadt Verlag, 1862; border with the new United Principalities of Romania (1862)



Fig. 14. Habsburg military map, 1876, showing the Bistra Colony, La Dus, and the two discussed lakes (Second Military Survey, ZONE_23_COL_XXIX_RIU_SEBES_1876). I marked the probable route from La Dus to the glacier lakes in June 2013; it turns out to be the same route as taken by Frieda von Kimakowicz in 1891; her writings will be discussed in Part 2 of this article



Fig. 15. 1876 Habsburg military map showing Mount Cindrel, the lakes and the Devil's Plateau (Teufelsplatte, Platoul Diavolului)

Learning by Walking: A Personal Exploration of the Terrain and Local Myths

Based on Gerard's description and the maps alone, there was no way to determine which of the two lakes was meant. Hoping to learn more at the actual site, I made a hiking trip in August 2013. My base was the Pensiunea Grandor, which can be reached from Sibiu along the DJ106A. Here, the name "Păltiniș" came back into play, as a little ski resort town by this name was located between my hotel and Mount Cindrel. It is possible that McNally and Florescu had been on the right track, but that trying to combine the account of the lake with that of Solomon's Rock had resulted in a story that made no sense.

Walking up to Mount Cindrel from the Păltiniș ski lift station ("Statie Tele-scaun") and back means a twelve-hour trip, which should be started directly after sunrise in order to return before dark. My host Florin warned me that one wrong turn could cause several hours of delay. This means that for first-time visitors to this area, hiking with an experienced guide is highly recommended. I managed to find one, in the person of Stefan Giuran, a member of the Păltiniș Mountain Police.

We were accompanied by Florin's teenage son, Alex, who acted as a translator. Our goal was to reach the two mountain lakes, Iezerul Mare and Iezerul Mic.



Fig. 16. Google Maps with mark-ups for Sibiu, the DJ106A, the PensiuneaGrandor, Păltiniş, and the route to Iezerul Mare

- Around 8:30 a.m. Stefan drove us to the Statie Telescaun and then to a bend in the DJ106N.
- Along the DJ106N, we reached the Cantonul Silvic Muncel, a forest house 2 km south of the Păltiniş ski lift station (along the road: approximately 3½ km).
- One kilometer further to the southwest, a smaller trail, marked by red vertical bars, took us to the main ridge (“crestei principale”) of the Cindrel Mountains.
- Still by four-wheel-drive, we proceeded to Şaua Şerbănei at an altitude of 1,885 m. Here the protected nature reservation began, and we had to leave our car at this point.
- By 10 a.m. we started walking in the direction of the Iezerul Mare, along Vârful Niculeşti, Vârful Cânaia (1,962 m), Şaua Cânaia and Şaua Cindrel. To return, we took an alternative route along the Cabana Cânaia.

The moment of truth only arrived when we reached Iezerul Mare. Spontaneously, our guide warned me not to throw any stones into the water, as this could provoke a storm. As he spoke only little English, I had neither discussed Emily Gerard's description nor Stoker's novel with him. Thus, he could not know that this was one of the characteristics of the lake we were looking for.



Fig. 17. Arrival at Iezerul Mare, August 2013. Photo: Hans C. de Roos

Moreover, he explained to me that the lake was fed by an underground well, so that the water was continuously flowing over the edge. On the north side, as I could see myself, it formed a creek, which he said was the origin of the Cibin, the river that flows to and through Sibiu (Hermannstadt). This was another defining characteristic mentioned by Emily Gerard.³⁶

We also climbed the top of Mount Cindrel (2,244 m) and hiked to the other lake, Iezerul Mic, but the smaller water was less impressive and there was no similar story implying that this tarn would be the source of storms, too. We thus may conclude that Iezerul Mare was the mysterious lake Emily Gerard was heading for: the lake that – according to some people she had spoken to – was the cauldron where the Devil brewed the weather.

In accordance with Gerard's text, the whole area still today is believed to be dangerous, as the weather can suddenly change, with thunder and lightning, heavy rain, and even hail. Our guide told us about a 42-year old German tourist who had

³⁶ Iezerul Mic is connected to Râul Mic, which joins Râul Mare, originating from Iezerul Mare, to form the Cibin River. In this sense, Iezerul Mic also contributes to the Cibin River. The much larger Iezerul Mare is considered to be the main source, however: "Cibinul izvoraste la confluenta a doua rauri, Raul Mare si Raul Mic, la 30 de kilometri de comuna Gura Raului. Insa firicelul de apa original pleaca din lacul Iezerul Mare" ("The Cibin springs at the confluence of two rivers, Raul Mare and Raul Mic, 30 kilometers from the Gura Raului commune. But the original stream of water leaves from Lake Iezerul Mare") Quoted from "Ati vazut vreodata Cibinul curat?" Sibiul.ro, no date.



Fig. 18. Leaving Stefan's car at Șaua Șerbănei, July 2015. Photo: Hans C. de Roos

been killed by a thunderbolt on top of Vârful Rozdești (1,952 m), a mountain peak we had crossed earlier. This had happened on June 10, 2013, just two months before our hiking trip. He had been accompanied by his family, three children under six years old included. For this reason, our guide did not allow us to take a break at the Cindrel peak, as he believed that it was too dangerous there. And although the weather remained stable that day, I could hear the distant sound of rolling thunder as soon as we reached Iezerul Mare.

There are other, more romantic stories connected to Iezerul Mare – although they are violent as well. According to a local tale, the lake was formed by the tears of the shepherd's daughter Frumoasa ("The Beautiful"), who had fallen in love with a shepherd boy, Cindrel. But because Cindrel was from a poor family, the girl's parents conspired with another clan to marry her off to their rich but ugly son, and to kill Cindrel. Today, the two lovers stand next to each other forever as Mount Cindrel and Mount Frumoasa (2,168 m), joined (or separated) by the Devil's Plateau. In another variant, the daughter of a giant wished to marry Cindrel, but when she saw that he only had eyes for Frumoasa, in her jealousy she asked her father to kill the shepherd boy.³⁷ In a third variant, Cindrel was in love with Măriuca, with Frumoasa playing the part of the jealous third. A group of "sânziene" (fairies, elves) who sympathized with the heart-broken Frumoasa lifted Cindrel and Măriuca high up in the air, but after a moment of ecstasy, the pixies cruelly let the lovers fall to

³⁷ See, e.g. "Poveste de dragoste la Iezerele Cibinului," *Tribuna.ro*, April 11, 2014.



<https://www.antena3.ro/actualitate/un-turist-german-a-murit-in-muntii-cindrel-dupa-ce-a-fost-lovit-de-un-trasnet-217496.html>



Fig. 19–20. Top: *Antena 3* news report of June 11, 2013. Bottom: Victim at the accident scene, June 10, 2013

earth. At the places where their bodies hit the ground, Iezerul Mare and Iezerul Mic were formed.³⁸



Fig. 21. Romantic impression of Iezerul Mare, seen from Mount Cindrel. Photo: Courtesy of Artografica Photo School, Sibiu

What Did Gerard and Stoker Know?

After finding the site, one question remains: Did either Emily Gerard or Bram Stoker, or both, know where the mythical lake was actually located? As for Gerard, I tend to answer this in the affirmative, as this lake was the stated goal of her expedition. Even if her travel group had to turn around, I assume that at least the hired guides knew exactly where they were heading for, and that Gerard, too, must have had an idea how to find their destination on a map, even if she did not see the lake with her own eyes. As far as Stoker is concerned, I have more doubts. Even if he actually read *The Land Beyond the Forest*, we have no evidence that he recognized the lake Gerard described in Chapter 55 as the same place mentioned in “Transy-

³⁸ E.g. Thomas Hupfer, “Vârful frumoasa – eine rumänische Legende,” *Impuscator.ro*, April 15, 2022; Ramona Găină, “Legenda vârfului Frumoasa, stânca născută dintr-o femeie superbă și dragoste ei neîmplinită,” *Adevarul.ro*, June 3, 2013.

Ivanian Superstitions" and at the start of the book. The notion that the lake would be connected to the ocean does not appear in *Dracula*. Nor did Stoker mention the name "Jäeser See." All in all, Stoker mentions nothing that could *not* be found in Gerard's article "Transylvanian Superstitions." For this reason, I doubt that he did any further research on the location of the lake; possibly, he merely used the information from this article and created the name "Lake Hermanstadt" by combining the word "lake" with the name of the city mentioned by her.

A Visual Documentation of the Route from Păltiniș to Iezerul Mare

In order to document my route for scholars and other interested travelers, I decided to produce a visual documentation of the route from Păltiniș. In June 2015, I traveled to the same guesthouse again and made the same hiking trip together with the same guide, Stefan. This time, I had a small geo-tagging device mounted on my camera. Back at home in Munich, I processed these geo-tagged photos with Robo-Geo, a software capable of creating KMZ files. Such files can be opened in Google Earth Pro, which will show a zoomable map with mark-ups of the saved route, illustrated by clickable photos that are time-stamped and exactly pinned in place according to their recorded GPS data. By now, the trail from Păltiniș to Iezerul Mare can also be found on specialized hiking websites such as WikiLoc,³⁹ *muntii-nostri.ro*⁴⁰ or OutdoorActive.com⁴¹ – without the background information about Stoker's novel, of course.

³⁹ de.wikiloc.com/routen-wandern/paltinis-muncel-batrana-rozdesti-cindrel-frumoasa-serbota-mare-cabana-oasa-26043956

⁴⁰ <https://muntii-nostri.ro/trail/saua-steflesti-varful-cindrel/>

⁴¹ <https://outdooractive.com/en/route/mountain-biking/transylvania/paltinis-cindrel-oasa-jina-sibiu/152847817/>

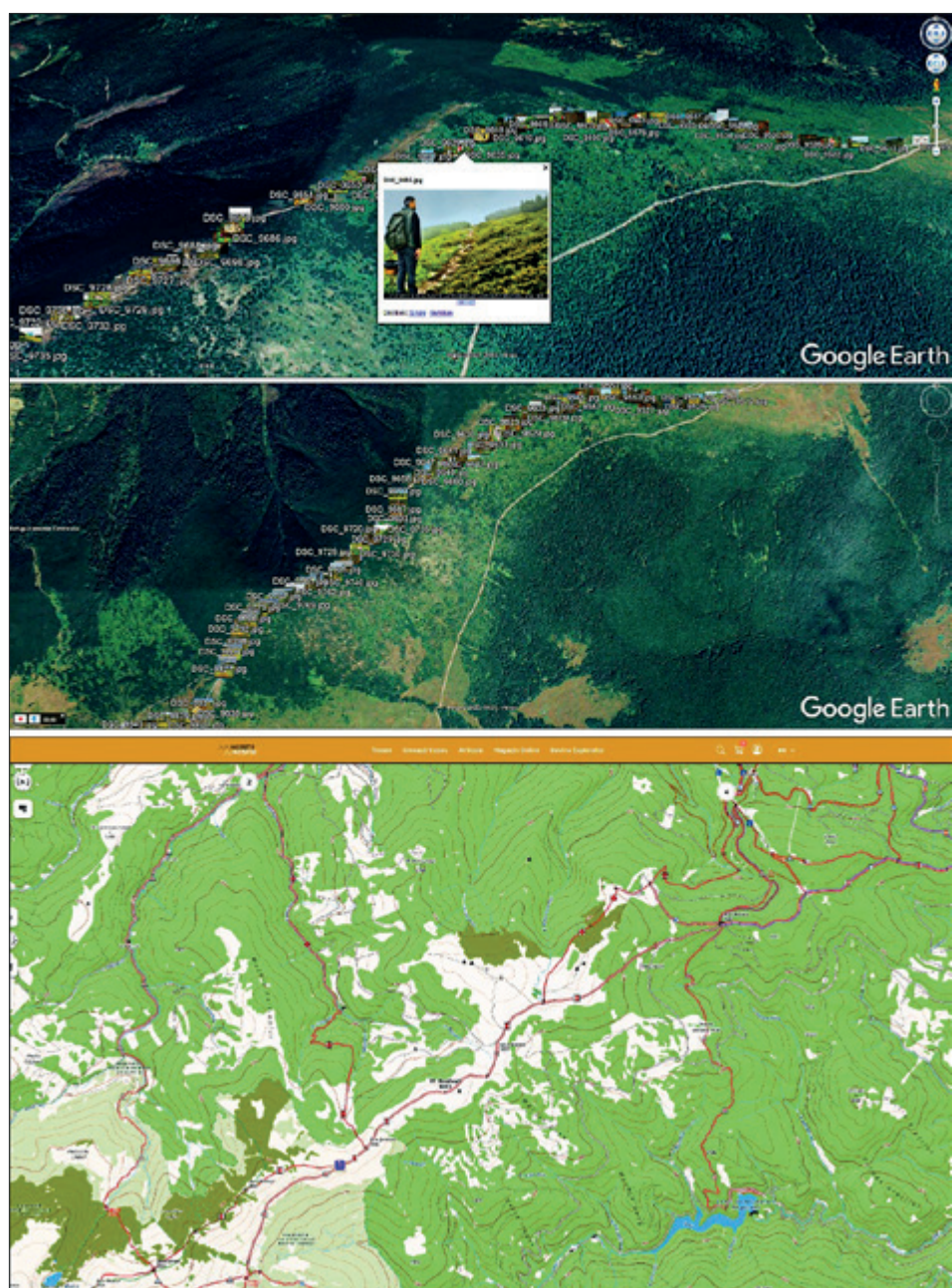


Fig. 22–24. Route from Pălteniș to Iezerul Mare, Robo-Geo reconstruction displayed on Google Earth (top and centre) vs. Munții noștri map (2026) for the hiking route from Șaua Ștefleşti to Vârful Cindrel (23MN04) (bottom)

Time-Stamped, Geo-Tagged Photos from the Second Trip, July 1, 2015

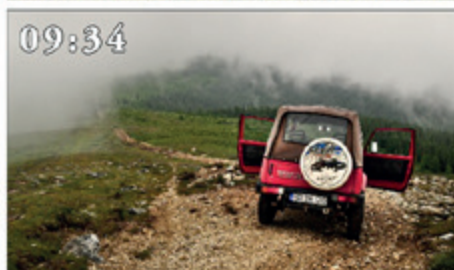


Fig. 25–32.

8:43. A large boulder, near Vârful Rozdești

9:18. A large boulder, near Vârful Rozdești

9:21. A shepherd, near Vârful Rozdești

9:24. Donkeys, near Vârful Rozdești

9:28. Following the road signs with the red bar

9:34. Stepping out from the car, en route to Șaua Șerbănei

10:10. Alpenrose (*Rhododendron myrtifolium*)

10:42. Șaua Niculești

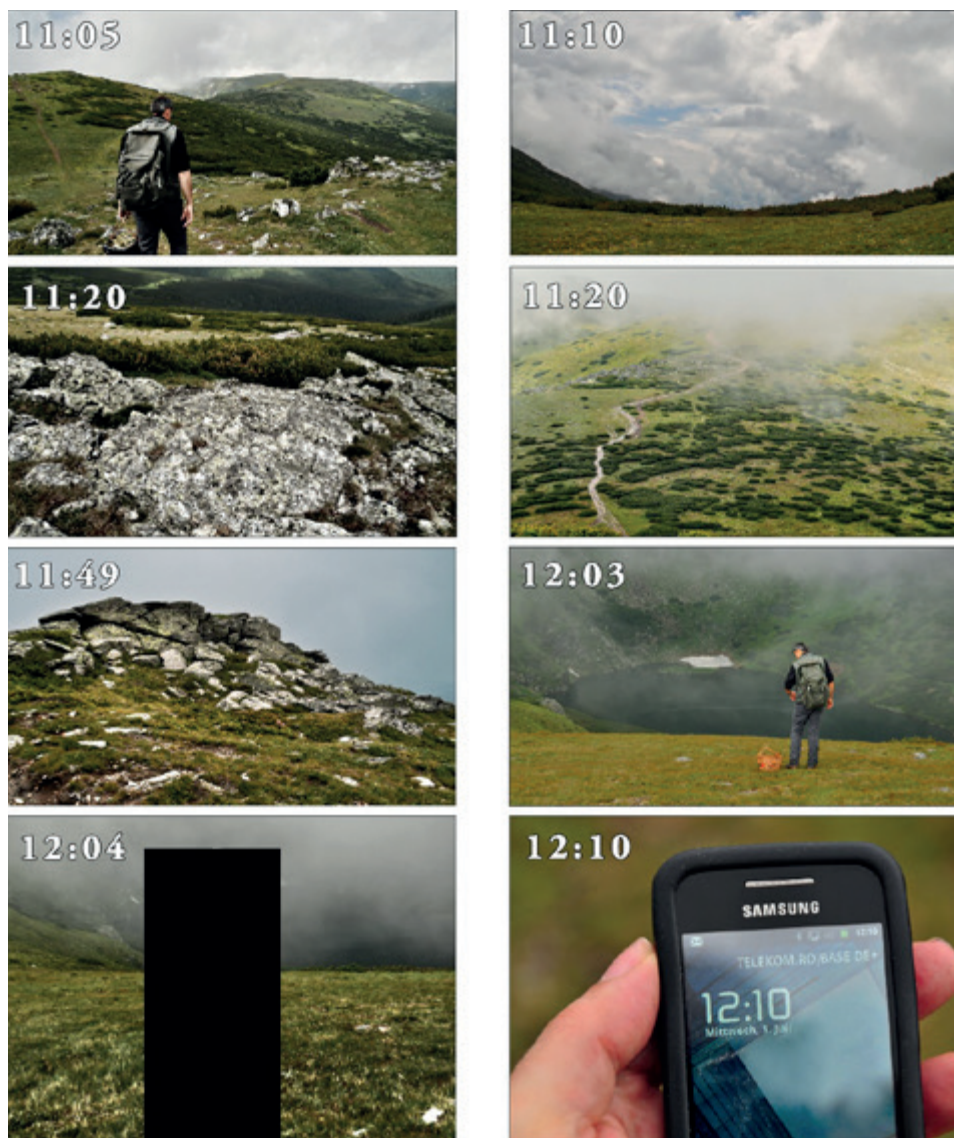


Fig. 33–40.

11:05. Between Șaua Niculești and Șaua Cânaia

11:10. En route to Șaua Cânaia

11:20. Near Șaua Cânaia

11:20. Near Șaua Cânaia

11:49. Șaua Cindrel

12:03. Arrival at Iezerul Mare

12:04. Arrival at Iezerul Mare

12:10. Time to turn back

References

- ABC Travel Romania. "People of Romania: Brasov" (Part III). N.d. Retrieved October 24, 2024.
- Colavita, Jason. "What Was the Scholomance? Horror, Ancient Myth and the Origins of the Devil's School." Jason Colavita blog, 2011. Retrieved August 30, 2022.
- Brasovtour. "Solomon's Rocks (Pietrelelui Solomon)." N.d. Retrieved September 2, 2022.
- Browning, John Edgar, and Caroline Joan Picart (eds.). *Dracula in Visual Media: Film, Television, Comic Book and Electronic Game Appearances, 1921–2010*. McFarland, 2011.
- Delahoyde, Michael. "Bram Stoker: *Dracula*." Washington State University. N.d. Retrieved June 16, 2026.
- De Roos, Hans C. "Castle Dracula: Its Exact Location Reconstructed from Stoker's Novel, His Research Notes and Contemporary Maps." *Linköping Electronic Articles in Computer and Information Science* 14, no. 1 (2012).
- De Roos, Hans C. "Bram Stoker's Vampire Trap: Vlad the Impaler and his Nameless Double." *Linköping Electronic Articles in Computer and Information Science* 14, no. 2 (March 19, 2012).
- De Roos, Hans C. "Heeft de vampierbestrijder uit Bram Stoker's *Dracula* echt bestaan? De Amsterdamse psychiater Albert van Renterghem en de hypnose." *De Parelduiker* 17, no. 6 (October 2012): 41–58.
- De Roos, Hans C. "Fact & Fiction in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*: Time for a New Paradigm." Special Christmas issue of *Letter from Castle Dracula*, December 22, 2013: 2–5.
- De Roos, Hans C. "Count Dracula's Address and Life-Time Identity." In *Dracula: An International Perspective*, edited by Marius Crişan, 95–115. Palgrave, 2017.
- De Roos, Hans C. "*Dracula's* Truth Claim and its Consequences." *Journal of Dracula Studies* 16 (October 2014): 53–80.
- Eggers, Robert. "'I had to make the vampire as scary as possible': Nosferatu's Robert Eggers on how folklore fuelled his film." *The Guardian* of December 27, 2024.
- Eighteen-Bisang, Robert, and Elizabeth Miller, eds. *Bram Stoker's Notes for Dracula: A Facsimile Edition*. McFarland, 2008.
- Găină, Ramona. "Legenda vârfului Frumoasa, stânca născută dintr-o femeie superbă şi dragostea ei neîmplinită." Adevarul.ro, June 3, 2013. Retrieved August 29, 2022.
- Gerard, Emily. "Transylvanian Superstitions." *The Nineteenth Century* 18 (July 1885): 130–150.
- Gerard, Emily. *The Land Beyond the Forest: Facts, Figures, and Fancies from Transylvania*. Blackwood & Sons, 1888.
- Gmerek, Katarzyna. "Emily i Dorothea Gerard: nieznane pisarki szkockie w Polsce." *Biblioteka* 9, no. 18 (2005): 11–26. Retrieved June 14, 2026.
- Grupul de Acţiune Locală (GAL) Mărginimea Sibiului. "Patrimoniu de mediu, arhitectural şi cultural." N.d. Retrieved September 2, 2022.
- Guinness Book of Records*. "Most Portrayed Literary Character in Film," status August 2015.
- Heiss, Lokke. "In Emily We May Acquit and Blame the Word on Schmidt." Presentation at the "Children of the Night" International Dracula Conference 2021.

- Hupfer, Thomas. "Varful frumoasa – eine rumänische Legende." *Impuscatora.ro*, April 15, 2022. Retrieved September 2, 2022.
- Ioana. "Iezerul Mare al Cindrelului." *De pe drum*. *Jurnale de călătorie*. Travel blog, post of December 18, 2014, describing a hiking trip to Iezerul Mare. Retrieved September 2, 2022.
- Kimakowicz, Frieda von. "Pass Dusch und Umgebung im Zibinsgebirge." In *Jahrbuch* Vol. 13 (1893). Hermannstadt: Siebenbürgischer Karpathenverein, 1893, 66–86. Alternative edition.
- Klinger, Leslie. *The New Annotated Dracula*. Norton, 2008.
- McNally, Raymond, and Radu Florescu, eds. *The Essential Dracula*. Mayflower 1979.
- Müller, Friedrich von. *Siebenbürgische Sagen*. J. Gött, 1857.
- Mundy, Rachel. "Solomon's Rocks: Myths, Legends and a Site of Natural Beauty." *Brasov Visitor* 1 (October 2004), at brasov-visitor.ro. Retrieved June 10, 2013.
- Schmidt, Wilhelm. "Das Jahr und seine Tage in Meinung und Brauch der Rumänen Siebenbürgens." *Österreichische Revue* 3 (1865): 219–226.
- Sibiul.ro. "Ați văzut vreodată Cîbinul curat?" N.d. Article describing the origins of the Cibin River. Retrieved August 30, 2022.
- Stoddart, Jane Thompson. "Mr. Bram Stoker: A Chat with the Author of *Dracula*." *British Weekly*, July 1, 1897.
- Stoker, Bram. *Dracula*. Constable & Co, 1897.
- Tribuna.ro. "Poveste de dragoste la Iezerele Cîbinului." Article at Tribuna.ro, April 11, 2014, mentioning the myths linked to the Cindrel lakes. Retrieved August 29, 2022.
- Turnock, David. "Settlement History and Sustainability in the Carpathians in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries." *Review of Historical Geography and Toponomastics* 1, no. 1 (2006): 31–60.
- Warcraft Wiki page: Fandom page dedicated to the *World of Warcraft* game. N.d. Retrieved June 16, 2026.
- Wilton, Mike. "The London Library Has Found Books Bram Stoker Used as Research For *Dracula*." *Allhallowsgeek.com*, November 10, 2018. Retrieved July 18, 2023.

***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 niezwykłą 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.

References

- Bolter, Jay David, and Richard Grusin. *Remediation: Understanding New Media*. MIT Press, 1999.
- Candy, Linda. *Practice Based Research: A Guide. CCS Report 1.1*. University of Technology Sydney, 2006.
- Cross, Nigel. “Designerly Ways of Knowing.” *Design Studies* 3, no. 4 (1982): 221–227.
- Eighteen-Bisang, Robert, and J. Gordon Melton. *Dracula: A Century of Editions, Adaptations and Translations. Part One: English Language Editions*. Santa Barbara, CA: Transylvanian Society of Dracula, 1998. <https://www.cesnur.org/2003/dracula/>.

-
- Huhtamo, Erkki, and Jussi Parikka, eds. *Media Archaeology: Approaches, Applications, and Implications*. University of California Press, 2011.
- Hutcheon, Linda. *A Theory of Adaptation*. 2nd ed. Routledge, 2013.
- Jenkins, Henry. *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*. New York University Press, 2006.
- Leitch, Thomas. *Film Adaptation and Its Discontents: From Gone with the Wind to The Passion of the Christ*. Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009.
- Lessig, Lawrence. *Free Culture: How Big Media Uses Technology and the Law to Lock Down Culture and Control Creativity*. Penguin Press, 2004.
- Palafox, Enrique A. "The Death of Adaptation II: Character Design as Ontological Law: The Nosferatu, Coppola, Erivo Paradox." Independent research paper, 2026. Academia.edu.
- Ryan, Marie-Laure, ed. *Narrative across Media: The Languages of Storytelling*. University of Nebraska Press, 2004.
- Sanders, Julie. *Adaptation and Appropriation*. 2nd ed. Routledge, 2016.
- Scolari, Carlos A. *Narrativas transmedia: Cuando todos los medios cuentan*. Deusto, 2013.
- Stoker, Bram. *Dracula*. Archibald Constable and Company, 1897.

Uncanny Resemblances: Studying Dracula's Likeness across Literary and Film Adaptations

Niezwykłe podobieństwa: analiza wizerunku Draculi w powieści i jej adaptacjach filmowych

DIGANTA ROY

diganta1994diganta@gmail.com
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2937-5418>

ABSTRACT

Studies on Bram Stoker's *Dracula* have frequently referred to his animalistic qualities, focusing on his appearance in the novel with sharp teeth, hairy body and a predatory disposition. While such studies have critically examined the construction of the vampiric monster and its physical form, they have often overlooked the resemblance of the Count both in the novel and in film adaptations to actual living personages. Adnan Qiblawi, for example, observes how the portrait of a young Dracula on the wall, in the 1992 film version, is a replica of a German Renaissance art piece by Albrecht Dürer called *Self-Portrait at Twenty-Eight*. This paper will try to identify these resemblances of the Count to actual human figures in Bram Stoker's *Dracula* and in Francis Ford Coppola's film *Bram Stoker's Dracula* (1992). I will also look at the way in which the physical appearance of characters, and their resemblance to other faces are used within the text to create narrative tensions. By doing so, I will establish the centrality of these uncanny resemblances both to faces within the text, and to human figures in the real world, in an attempt to understand the monstrosity of the vampire in terms of the difference in appearance through the movie. In this paper, I will argue that the different appearances of Dracula in the film are based on creating, altering, or erasing the resemblance of the Count to other portrayals within the film or to the face of the actor. However, the realisation that the same face and the same Count underlie all of the different portrayals of Dracula within the film show how such uncanny resemblances, or lack thereof, are manufactured through prosthetics, lighting, makeup, and other technological tools.

Keywords: Dracula; Bram Stoker; resemblance; similitude; portraiture

ABSTRAKT

Badania poświęcone *Draculi* Brama Stokera często zwracają uwagę na jego zwierzęce cechy, koncentrując się na opisie jego wyglądu w powieści – ostrych zębach, owłosionym ciele oraz drapieżnym usposobieniu. Choć opracowania te wnikliwie analizują konstrukcję wampirycznego potwora i jego fizyczną postać, zazwyczaj pomijają podobieństwo hrabiego – zarówno w powieści, jak i w adaptacjach filmowych – do rzeczywistych postaci historycznych lub żyjących osób. Adnan Qiblawi zauważa na przykład, że portret młodego Draculi widoczny na ścianie w filmowej adaptacji z 1992 roku stanowi kopię renesansowego dzieła niemieckiego malarza Albrechta Dürera zatytułowanego *Autoportret w wieku dwudziestu ośmiu lat* (*Self-Portrait at Twenty-Eight*). W artykule podjęto próbę zidentyfikowania podobieństw hrabiego do rzeczywistych postaci ludzkich zarówno w powieści *Dracula* Brama Stokera, jak i w filmie Francisa Forda Coppoli *Dracula* (1992). Zanalizowano również sposób, w jaki fizyczny wygląd bohaterów oraz ich podobieństwo do innych twarzy zostają wykorzystane w tekście do budowania napięcia narracyjnych. W ten sposób ukazano, że te niezwykle podobieństwa – zarówno między twarzami pojawiającymi się w obrębie utworu, jak i między postaciami fikcyjnymi a rzeczywistymi ludźmi – odgrywają kluczową rolę w rozumieniu potworności wampira jako zjawiska związanego z różnicą i zmiennością wyglądu w filmie. Autor argumentuje, że różnorodne wcielenia Draculi w filmie opierają się na tworzeniu, modyfikowaniu lub zacieraniu podobieństwa hrabiego do innych przedstawień tej postaci obecnych w filmie bądź do twarzy odtwarzającego go aktora. Jednocześnie uświadomienie sobie, że za wszystkimi tymi odmiennymi wizerunkami Draculi kryje się ta sama twarz i ten sam bohater, pokazuje, iż niezwykle podobieństwa – lub ich celowy brak – są wytwarzane za pomocą charakterystyki protetycznej, oświetlenia, makijażu oraz innych środków technologicznych.

Słowa kluczowe: Dracula; Bram Stoker; podobieństwo; podobizna; portretowanie

Horror fiction relies heavily on the unseen, the hidden, and the object in the shadow. The dominant visual mode used in horror fiction to capture the object of fear is one of imperceptibility or the lack of a clear visual focus. Despite this predominance of blurred visions in such narratives, the most compelling moment of horror fiction involves the monster's face coming into focus out of the shadows and into the visual range of the human characters. The appearance of the monster's face is defined by the visual intensity of the moment (be it on the page or on the screen). However, such an appearance is already preceded by other descriptive, textual, audio and visual cues that establish the image of monstrosity in the mind of the readers/audience. These constant suggestions sent by the text signalling the upcoming appearance of the monster implies that the reader/audience will already have developed an image of monstrosity before it becomes visible. Therefore, the *human* resemblance of the monster to actual living characters (if any) or the

resemblance to other prototypes of human social figures are often ignored. This paper will try to identify these resemblances of the Count to actual human figures in Bram Stoker's *Dracula* and in Francis Ford Coppola's 1992 film *Bram Stoker's Dracula*. I will also look at the way in which the physical appearance of characters, and their resemblance to other faces within the textual world of *Dracula* are used to create narrative tensions. By doing so, I will establish the centrality of these uncanny resemblances both to faces within the novel, and to human figures in the real world, in the narrative of Stoker's *Dracula* and its adaptations.

One of the significant motifs tied to the role of resemblance in generating fear is the motif of the doppelgänger which is frequently used in horror fiction. The Gothic Double who shares an exact face with the character they are mirroring, brings out the inner psychological turmoil comprising violence, trauma, jealousy, anger and other repressed emotional states of the protagonist. Analysing *Dracula* as a doppelgänger narrative, Whitney S. May observes that Harker and the Count enter into a "doubled conflict," with the vampire assuming Jonathan's identity and growing stronger while Jonathan continues to become weaker day by day.¹ May, however, frames the relationship of Dracula and Harker as the relationship of the subject with its doppelgänger within a temporal structure where the pre-modern past interacts with the modernist future. This temporal fracture between the subject and its doppelgänger is recreated through the narrative, leading to a fragmentation of identity that is caused as a result of a vampiric attack. This is particularly evident in case of Lucy, who returns as the vampiric "Bloofer lady" after being bitten by Dracula and dying. The resemblance of the vampiric Lucy to her former self fools Arthur Holmwood who is initially reluctant to dig up her coffin and destroy the body. He asks Van Helsing, "Is this really Lucy's body, or only a demon in her shape?"² This frightful similarity, or rather sameness, of the vampiric Lucy's face to her human self indicates the fractured nature of this resemblance where two different personalities carry the same appearance. While the Lucy that Holmwood knew belongs to the modernist future, the undead Lucy belongs to the pre-modern past and is created only after Dracula attacks her. Despite the similitude of appearance, the two cannot exist simultaneously. The vampiric doppelgänger is only created once the human Lucy dies; similarly, the vampiric Lucy must be killed for the human subject to return to its original form. The similarity of appearance between the two, therefore, does not imply that they are one and the same. Recognition, in this case, does not lead to a sense of familiarity and security but to a sudden shock. When the members of the Crew of Light see her vampiric form, they "recognized the

¹ Whitney S. May, "'Powers of Their Own Which Mere 'Modernity' Cannot Kill': The Doppelgänger and Temporal Modernist Terror in *Dracula*," *Gothic Studies* 23, no. 1 (2021): 63, <https://doi.org/10.3366/gothic.2021.0078>.

² Bram Stoker, *Dracula* (W.W. Norton & Company, 1897, reprint 1997), 190.

features of Lucy Westenra. Lucy Westenra, but yet how changed.”³ The similarity of vampire Lucy's face to her human self only accentuates the monstrosity of her undead form. Moreover, the undead Lucy seems to have a more perfect resemblance to Lucy's usual face than the real person herself. The marks of suffering and illness which could be seen on her face in her final days is totally absent once she enters the undead state. The resemblance of the vampiric Lucy thus becomes “truer” to Lucy than her original self. The undead resemblance, therefore, is based on an imagined constant, an image that does not change over time. Unlike the real face of Lucy that is subject to the biological rhythms of her body, and changes constantly (growing pale or gaunt due to the loss of blood), the face of the undead Lucy is mapped onto this idealised image. This hollow mirroring of the image without any basis in physical reality creates a perfect simulacrum that is ironically lacking in the other qualities associated with that face. Once Lucy enters her deathless state,

Lucy is no longer Lucy, nor was she ever Lucy, for in her new potentially permanent form she transcends history. All the effects and memories of her ego, of the formation of her subjectivity, have been entirely stripped away, as has the gesture that stripped them away: Dracula's bite.⁴

In her “perfect” bodily state without the marks of her illness, or the marks of Dracula's bite, Lucy has stopped being herself, despite the exact resemblance to her former self. The manufacturing of the resemblance of the undead Lucy to her original self requires that her biological vulnerabilities be erased. This “new” image of her that does not contain the marks of her illness subverts the reality of her suffering, and her physical and psychological trauma, substituting accuracy of facial features for authenticity of her biological experience. Therefore, despite the vampire Lucy's similarity of appearance to her human self, Dr. Seward observes that he feels a strong sense of hate and loathing towards her, and could kill her with “savage delight.”⁵ Similarity or even the sameness of faces does not generate the same affective states in the characters or in the readers of *Dracula*.

As opposed to Lucy, Dracula's face in Stoker's novel and in different adaptations often feature multiple changes. These changes are either associated with a renewed vitality and youthfulness that often accompanies his acts of blood-drinking, or they are associated with his transformations into the bestial form depicting his animality. The first set of changes which leads to a reduction of Dracula's age enables him to blend in with the human society without being noticed and to locate his victims

³ Stoker, *Dracula*, 187.

⁴ Macy Todd, “What Bram Stoker's *Dracula* Reveals about Violence,” *English Literature in Transition, 1880–1920* 58, no. 3 (2015): 376.

⁵ Stoker, *Dracula*, 188.

easily. On the other hand, his transformation into a creature with a bestial appearance serves the contradictory role of helping him stand out as a violent predator and establishing his domination over others. In both these cases, therefore, Dracula tries to hide his resemblance with his original appearance in his castle in front of Harker. Unlike doppelgangers in horror fiction who use similarity of appearance to deceive and dupe the protagonists, the Count strives to transform his looks in ways that would not make him easily detectable. One of the important narrative points of any Dracula text, therefore, is to track the resemblance of characters one encounters with that of the Count. For example, when Harker reaches the castle and is greeted by the Count, he observes, “[t]he strength of the handshake was so much akin to that which I had noticed in the driver, whose face I had not seen, that for a moment I doubted if it were not the same person to whom I was speaking.”⁶ This first encounter itself shows how Dracula had purposefully hidden his face when he drove him to the castle to avoid being recognised as the Count. Had Harker been able to see his face and detect the resemblance, the horrific plans of the Count would probably have been cut short. However, after experiencing the horrors in the castle when Harker returns back to London, barely making it out alive, he is quick to recognise the resemblance of a man he sees in Hyde Park to Count Dracula, even though he has turned young after feeding on the blood of his victims. The entire narrative of *Dracula*, therefore, is based on this detective work of identifying facial similitudes between the characters, trying to guess if it is the Count or not.

Dracula’s dislike of mirrors can be attributed to this constant shifting of his physical form to avoid being identified. The fact that vampires do not cast a reflection in the mirror is part of the East European vampire folklore. However, as Carol A. Senf argues, Stoker uses this superstition that creatures without souls do not have a reflection, into a metaphor for the lack of a moral vision of other characters.⁷ Harker’s failure to see Dracula’s reflection indicates his moral blindness towards him. The way he develops a contemptuous attitude towards Dracula, and the culture he belongs to, even before knowing that he is a vampire, and the violence with which he attacks the Count when he is sleeping, all contribute to the metaphor of Harker’s inability to see Dracula’s reflection. While Senf’s analysis of the absence of Dracula’s reflection in the mirror treats the superstition as a metaphor for moral blindness, it is also important to understand the formation of the physical image of the Count in terms of the appearance of the monstrous body. The image on the mirror is based on the way the light from the object reflects and bounces off the surface of the mirror. The resemblance of the image to the person standing in front

⁶ Stoker, *Dracula*, 22.

⁷ Carol A. Senf, “Dracula: The Unseen Face in the Mirror,” *The Journal of Narrative Technique* 9, no. 3 (Fall, 1979): 164.

of the mirror thus depends on the existence of the object in the first place. However, since Dracula lacks a stable physical form, any attempt to create a reflection of an image that can resemble him fails. He casts no reflection in the mirror and is thus dismissive of it since he is constantly trying to move as far away from any resemblance to his former self as possible. Keri O'Shea refers to the horror genre itself as "that great distorting mirror" and observes how the genre frequently uses the mirror to create an "uneasy, same-different space."⁸ The mirror, O'Shea observes, creates a world that has the "illusion of depth and distance" but is beyond our reach. Dracula, similarly, changes his physical form constantly so much so that even when he appears to exist in the same space as the other characters is located on a different plane altogether. There is no mirror image of Dracula because his physical form itself is elusive, and forever recedes into the past whenever someone tries to catch him.

The drastic change of the physical form of the Count to remove any traces of likeness thus forms the technical core of creating the monster in film versions as well. To demonstrate this deliberate transformation of Dracula to remove any likeness to his former self/selves, I have chosen the different appearances of the character in Francis Ford Coppola's 1992 film *Bram Stoker's Dracula*.⁹ In this film, there are five significant portrayals of the Count at three different narrative stages. The first time we see Dracula, he appears as a young warrior, who has not yet been turned into a vampire. He is clad in his battle armour and is about to go to war. In the next appearance of the Count, however, there has been an important change in his appearance and demeanour. At this stage, he has already turned into a blood-thirsty vampire who has lost all the likeness to his former warrior self, indicating a corruption both of the body as well as the soul. In this second portrayal of Dracula, he appears as an old man in front of Harker with an elaborate hairdo, visibly pale or white face, and long nails. At this stage, his appearance, despite being human, is over-bearing, strange and alienating. The predator-like qualities of his form intermingle subtly with his graciousness as a host.

In this first appearance of Dracula as a vampire, the manufacturing of resemblance in Coppola's film can also be understood in terms of the visual props used in the film to construct the narrative trajectory of the Count. As Harker sits down for dinner in the castle of Dracula, he notes a portrait of the latter which has a striking family resemblance to the Count. Despite this resemblance, Harker fails to realise that the portrait is that of a young Dracula before he was turned into a vampire.

⁸ Keri O'Shea, "Reflecting Terror: The Mirror, Culture and the Horror Genre," *Warped Perspective*, August 20, 2014, <https://warped-perspective.com/2014/08/reflecting-terror-mirror-culture-and-the-horror-genre/?srsltid=AfmBOoqka4pahv8dfejEV7sHAWnqg3v6RrPy1IudCBWn0rkUu7P-HA-1>.

⁹ Francis Ford Coppola, dir. *Bram Stoker's Dracula* (Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, 1992), DVD.

The aging factor influences the detection of similarity or sameness between the current appearance of Dracula and his younger self. Understanding the resemblance between the two proves to be a crucial factor in uncovering vital narrative information in the film. More importantly, the portrait of a younger version of the Count is in reality a replica of a portrait titled *Self-Portrait at Twenty-Eight* painted by the German Renaissance artist Albrecht Dürer in 1500. The portrait used in Coppola's film is not an exact replica of Dürer's portrait. Instead, the face of the actor playing Dracula has been imposed upon Dürer's face to an extent that the painting remains recognisable as that created by Dürer, with the exception of the facial features which resemble that of the actor. The creation of selective resemblance thus aims to import the essence of Dürer's portrayal of himself, while maintaining narrative and visual consistency to the portrayal of Dracula in the film. The use of a resemblance to Dürer's portrait for the painting of Dracula reveals important details about the framing of the history of the character in the film. This is because the way Dürer chose to depict himself in the painting has deeper spiritual connotations, which at a first glance, may appear to be ill-placed with respect to an evil, blood-thirsty monster. Adnan Qiblawi observes how a frontal pose for a portrait was considered "aberrant for a secular portrait" during the 15th and 16th centuries.¹⁰ With his hands depicted in the middle of his chest as if giving a blessing, Dürer was trying to portray himself as Christ. The portrait used in Coppola's *Dracula* recreates the picture of the Count in the same posture. By placing his own image in the posture of Christ, Dracula deliberately parodies the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. Alison Milbank observes how Lucy's return as a vampire in Stoker is a kind of "anti-resurrection" with Van Helsing quoting the words of Christ to Thomas in John 20:29, when Thomas is doubting Christ after His resurrection.¹¹ Coppola visually translates this motif of "anti-resurrection" through the portrait of a young Dracula with a Christ-like pose. Moreover, the reason of using this resemblance also has to do with Dracula's role as a warrior in the beginning of the film, where he launches a religious crusade against the Ottomans from which he returns victorious. This is because at the beginning of the film, Dracula is presented as a warrior defending the Christendom against the Ottomans. Louise Child argues that Coppola continuously juxtaposes Christianity with Dracula's monstrous rage, blurring the line between the sacred and the sacrilegious.¹² The use of Dürer's portrait thus becomes a striking

¹⁰ Adnan Qiblawi, "As Seen on 'Bram Stoker's Dracula': A Vampire's Self-Portrait in the Style of Dürer," *Artnet*, May 3, 2024, <https://news.artnet.com/art-world/as-seen-on-dracula-francis-ford-coppola-2448135>.

¹¹ Alison Milbank, *God & the Gothic: Religion, Romance, & Reality in the English Literary Tradition* (Oxford University Press, 2018), 240–241.

¹² Louise Child, *Dreams, Vampires and Ghosts: Anthropological Perspectives on the Sacred and Psychology in Film and Television* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2023), 164.

visual reminder of the fall of the Count from a Christian warrior to a blood-thirsty evil vampire who has renounced his religion and everything that is holy.

The next portrayal of Dracula completely changes his appearance, with the Count appearing as a completely human figure and as a young man before Mina Murray. Thus, there is no resemblance between the old, predator-like Dracula in the castle and the suave, young gentleman who appears before Mina in London. This lack of resemblance to his old self in the castle is highlighted in the movie when the newspaper boy announcing the news about the wolf who escaped from the zoo hands the paper to Dracula himself, unaware that this disturbance was caused by the presence of the animalistic Count in London. Thus, the change of his appearance breaks any visual connection between his animality and the agitation of the animals in London. The fourth significant portrayal of Dracula is the depiction of the Count as an ultimate monster, with no recognisable human features whatsoever. This form of the Count can be seen in his fight with the Crew of Light when he assumes the form of a bat-like, winged monster. Bruce Scivally observes how the transformation of Dracula into this bat-like figure formed one of the concerns of Coppola:

In the previous films, Dracula had changed into mist, into a wolf, and into a literal, tiny bat. Coppola asked scriptwriter James V. Hart if they could have him turn into a bat. Hart felt modern audiences would laugh at such a clichéd transformation. So, Coppola asked: What if he's a big bat? The result was Dracula as a human-sized creature, half bat and half man, trapped somewhere in-between.¹³

Coppola's *Dracula* thus makes a significant shift in the tone of the character through the change of appearance. When Dracula had appeared as a tiny bat in other iterations of the character, the transformation from human to a non-human mammal was complete. By capturing Dracula mid-way between the human and the non-human, Coppola makes the vampire figure monstrous and grotesque. The corresponding increase in the size of the bat-like figure further adds to the monstrosity of the vampire by making it seem disproportionate both to the size of a human and to the size of a bat. Moreover, by retaining the semblance of a face, however remote that may be to a human one, Coppola invites the comparison of the Dracula as this non-human monster with his more human appearances in the film.

The final and the fifth portrayal of Dracula depicts him in the form in which he appeared in the castle but visibly weaker and with sunken cheeks as he lays dying after being injured by the Crew of Light. All these portrayals, therefore, alter his

¹³ Bruce Scivally, *Dracula FAQ: All That's Left to Know About the Count from Transylvania* (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2015), https://www.google.co.in/books/edition/Dracula_FAQ/TZDqCgAAQBAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1&dq=coppola+dracula+greg+cannom&pg=PT200&printsec=frontcover.

appearance in significant ways making him unrecognisable and removing any trace of resemblance to a “true” or “original” form. More importantly, each of these portrayals, including his most human appearance, seem decidedly different from the appearance of the actor Gary Oldman who played this role. The use of prosthetics and makeup to remove the resemblance of the different faces of Dracula to the actor’s face and to each other determines the narrative progression of Coppola’s film. Coppola’s Dracula can thus be referred to as what Larrie Dudenhoefferin in her analysis of the Dracula in the *Blade: Trinity* calls “ecto-prosthetic villain.”¹⁴ While Coppola’s Dracula may not shape-shift as much as Blade’s Dracula, the use of prosthetics to change his appearance and to remove traces of his resemblance to his human self, highlights the malleability of his external features as a vital component of his character. The lack of resemblance between these individual portrayals of Dracula indicates that technically the film tries to create and shift between his different forms to generate separate aesthetic and narrative effects. The absence of resemblance is thus manufactured using different technical means to shift from the vast array of qualities from the human to the animal, and everything in between.

In order to prove this change of appearance, I have used three online face recognition tools, mentioned in the footnote below.¹⁵ For the first set of data, I have used an image of the actor Gary Oldman from the time the movie was shot and released. I have compared this image of the actor with the five portrayals of Dracula mentioned above. Each of the portrayals have yielded different results, showing differing degrees of similarities to the actor’s face, as is evident from the table below.

Interestingly, as the data will show, even in the portrayals in which he is completely human or appears to be in a completely human form, there is no 100% match with the actor’s face. Almost all of the resemblances are below 80% which indicates that noticeable changes have been made to the actor’s appearance to reduce any likeness to the actor and to create a specific image of Dracula. After making these comparisons between the different portrayals of Dracula in Coppola’s film and the actor Gary Oldman, I tried to formulate a theory based on the data obtained. As per the narrative I designed, the data was supposed to show that the further we shifted away from the likeness of the human, the percentage of match with the actor’s face would decrease. Moreover, the comparison was supposed to yield stable results where all appearances of Dracula as a human character was supposed to show a greater percentage of match

¹⁴ Larrie Dudenhoefferin, *Anatomy of the Superhero Film* (Springer International Publishing, 2017), 33.

¹⁵ https://facecomparison.toolpie.com/#google_vignette, <https://profacefinder.com/face-comparison/>, <https://face-comparison-app.com/>. These online face recognition algorithms are not 100% accurate. The data gained from them provides an approximate understanding of the changes made to the actor’s face to create different physical versions of the Count, which share minimal or zero likeness to each other.

Table 1. Comparison of different appearances of Dracula in Coppola’s film to Gary Oldman’s face

Dracula’s appearance in Coppola’s film	ProFaceFinder	ToolPie	Face Comparison App
First appearance of Dracula as a human being	92.5% / 100% / 12.2%	59%	54.6%
First appearance of Dracula as a vampire in the castle	40.4%	66%	64%
Appearance of Dracula in London	48.2%	74%	77.1%
Appearance of Dracula as a monstrous bat figure	face / embedding missing	9%	0%
Appearance of Dracula as a dying vampire with sunken cheeks	29%	16%	51.6%

Source: Author’s own study.

when compared with the bestial forms of Dracula. This would imply that there was a narrative progression from Dracula as a warrior to that of a blood-thirsty creature, to a vampire pretending to be a human, to a beast and then to his final form during his death. These narrative progressions would have been defined by the degree of their resemblance to (or lack thereof) the actor’s original face and to each other. However, when I studied the results produced by these face comparison sites, the output was significantly different from what I had imagined. While some results justified my theory by showing a greater percentage of resemblance of the humanised Dracula to the actor’s face and a lower percentage of resemblance to the animalistic Dracula, these results were not always consistent. One of the primary anomalies I noted was that in one case the percentage of resemblance of Dracula’s face – as it appears in the castle the first time he meets Harker – to Gary Oldman’s face is greater than the resemblance of the warrior Dracula’s face to the actor. This seems baffling given that Dracula’s face as a warrior is extremely human and thus should show a higher percentage of resemblance than the pale-white, old face of Dracula with a lot of makeup and prosthetics. The second such anomaly was noted in the case of the warrior Dracula’s face being compared to that of the actor through the site ProFaceFinder. Surprisingly, the site turns up different results at different times for this comparison.

These varying results turned up by the sites disproved the narrative I had designed for the appearance of Count Dracula in his various forms. Therefore, instead of trying to fit the results within a pre-designed narrative, I proceeded to study these errors in the data and what caused them. Firstly, these readings that the sites produced were not random numbers spewed out by the machine. Rather, they form a coherent pattern that can be observed, analysed and used to understand the mechanism of resemblance used in the horror narrative. Even in the case of the site ProFaceFinder which produced different results at different times, there were three

constant results out of which one would turn up. For the comparison between the actor's face and warrior Dracula's face the site displayed a similarity percentage of 12.2, 92.5, and 100. What caused such a vast difference between the data sets obtained from the same photo in the same site? The answer lies in the way the particular algorithm extracts, processes and draws conclusions from the images provided by the user. For example, the site ProFaceFinder fails to recognise the face in the bat-like monstrous form of Dracula displaying an error message "face/embedding missing." This image is successfully processed by the other two sites, one of which – the Face Comparison App – records the similarity percentage as 0%. While both results indicate that the bat-like image is so far removed from human appearance that the algorithm cannot locate any similarity between the two, there is a subtle difference between returning an actual number 0 and not being able to process the data at all. Moreover, the site Face Comparison App shows 9% of similarity between the actor's face and the monster's face indicating that there are still some aspects of sameness with respect to the two images.

This difference of results with respect to a face created through prosthetics and visual effects highlights the fact that the way these images are processed by each of the algorithms are different. The face comparison models created by developers understand resemblance in terms of a variety of factors. It does not compare an overall image with another but rather breaks down the individual aspects of that image which affects the comparison. Face comparison apps, therefore, extract features from each image including the shape of the face, the size of the eyes, the position of the nose and other such physical features, and calculate the similarity based on these factors.¹⁶ If we look at the different portrayals of the Count in Coppola's movie it is evident that the lack of resemblance between the different forms is created by changing these physical features. While most changes like the monstrous features of the bat-like figure produce drastic changes, even in his human form, there are changes made to the face of the actor to reduce likeness to his appearance, as evidenced from the comparison results. For example, the forehead of the Count as a human figure seems to have been made significantly wider, thus affecting the similarity score when compared with the actor's face. However, resemblance, or its absence thereof, is manufactured in Coppola's *Dracula* through the use of other techniques as well. While discussing about the factors affecting the face comparison algorithm, Nupura Ughade observes that aging, facial expressions, nature of illumination, angle from which the face has been captured, obstructions like facial hair, masks and sunglasses also influence the accuracy levels of the comparison.¹⁷

¹⁶ Fabio Chiusano, "A Practical Intro to Face Comparison," *Medium*, July 26, 2022, <https://medium.com/brainbotapi/a-practical-intro-to-face-comparison-cf43f38f2812>.

¹⁷ Nupura Ughade, "How Accurate is AI Face Recognition Technology?" *Hyperverge*, February 9, 2026, <https://hyperverge.co/blog/ai-face-recognition/>.

If we look at the different portrayals of Dracula in Coppola, we find that in some he has an elaborate hairdo, while in some he is wearing sunglasses and a hat, while at other times, the lighting or the angle from which his face can be seen by the viewers is completely different. The inconsistency in the data sets obtained through the face comparison apps may be attributed to these factors. The higher percentage of resemblance between Dracula's first appearance as a vampire in the castle and the actor's face, as compared to the resemblance between Dracula's appearance as a human warrior and the actor's face, can be attributed to a closer similarity of facial expressions between the first set. The smile of Dracula in the first appearance as a vampire bears a lot of similarity to the smile on the actor's face in reality, thus, resulting in a greater percentage of similarity. However, we should not believe that the influence these factors have on the appearance of Dracula form uncontrolled variables. Rather, we should see them as deliberate tools used by the filmmaker to trick the audience into seeing a lack of resemblance for the sake of the narrative. As Jeffrey A. Weinstock argues, the cinematic vampire is in itself a "celluloid entity" that is produced through editing, special effects and other technologies and techniques used to create cinema.¹⁸ Factors like the lighting of the face or the angle from which the shots are captured or the obstructions that guard Dracula's face in the film, affect the human eye as much as it affects the face comparison apps, and influence the way we perceive the vampire. The vampire's body, as we have already observed, is an elusive one that constantly changes itself. With the advent of the cinematic medium, the vampiric body is further diffused, scattering across the film reel and breaking down into its component parts the moment we try to capture and analyse it.

The vampire's body, therefore, must be seen only as an amalgamation of cinematic techniques that constantly work to sustain its appearance. The algorithm of resemblance (or lack thereof) is deliberately manufactured through a combination of factors. The audience is invited to play this tricky, deceptive game of searching for similarities and dissimilarities between the different forms of the Count. We are supposed to be intrigued by the idea of the changes in the character's intentions, motivations and passions through the narrative, while being conscious that it is the trajectory of one single character, played by the same actor, that we are following through the film.

¹⁸ Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock, *The Vampire Film: Undead Cinema* (Wallflower, 2012), 57.

References

- Child, Louise. *Dreams, Vampires and Ghosts: Anthropological Perspectives on the Sacred and Psychology in Film and Television*. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2023.
- Chiusano, Fabio. "A Practical Intro to Face Comparison." *Medium*. July 26, 2022, <https://medium.com/brainbotapi/a-practical-intro-to-face-comparison-cf43f38f2812>.
- Coppola, Francis Ford, directed. *Bram Stoker's Dracula*. Columbia Pictures, 1992. DVD, 127 min.
- Dudenhoefferin, Larrie. *Anatomy of the Superhero Film*. Springer International Publishing, 2017.
- May, Whitney S. "'Powers of Their Own Which Mere 'Modernity' Cannot Kill': The Doppelgänger and Temporal Modernist Terror in *Dracula*." *Gothic Studies* 23, no. 1 (2021): 60–76, <https://doi.org/10.3366/gothic.2021.0078>.
- Milbank, Alison. *God & the Gothic: Religion, Romance, & Reality in the English Literary Tradition*. Oxford University Press, 2018.
- O'Shea, Keri. "Reflecting Terror: The Mirror, Culture and the Horror Genre." *Warped Perspective*. August 20, 2014. <https://warped-perspective.com/2014/08/reflecting-terror-mirror-culture-and-the-horror-genre/?srsltid=AfmBOoqka4pahv8dfejEV7sHAWnqg3v6RrPyI1udCBWn0rkUu7P-HA-1>.
- Qiblawi, Adnan, "As Seen on 'Bram Stoker's Dracula': A Vampire's Self-Portrait in the Style of Dürer." *Artnet*. May 3, 2024. <https://news.artnet.com/art-world/as-seen-on-dracula-francis-ford-coppola-2448135>.
- Scivally, Bruce. *Dracula FAQ: All That's Left to Know About the Count from Transylvania*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2015. https://www.google.co.in/books/edition/Dracula_FAQ/TZDqCgAAQBAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1&dq=coppola+dracula+greg+cannom&pg=PT200&printsec=frontcover.
- Senf, Carol A. "Dracula: The Unseen Face in the Mirror." *The Journal of Narrative Technique* 9, no. 3 (Fall, 1979): 160–170.
- Stoker, Bram. "Dracula." In *Dracula: A Norton Critical Edition*, edited by Nina Auerbach and David J. Skal. Archibald Constable and Company, 1897. Reprint, W.W. Norton & Company, 1997.
- Todd, Macy. "What Bram Stoker's *Dracula* Reveals about Violence." *English Literature in Transition, 1880–1920* 58, no. 3 (2015): 361–384.
- Ughade, Nupura. "How Accurate is AI Face Recognition Technology?" *Hyperverge*. February 9, 2026. <https://hyperverge.co/blog/ai-face-recognition/>.
- Weinstock, Jeffrey Andrew. *The Vampire Film: Undead Cinema*. Wallflower, 2012.

Vampirism in/as Family: Filmic Avatars of the *Vourdalak*

Wampiryzm w rodzinie i jako rodzina: filmowe wcielenia vourdalaka

PHILIPPE MET

pmet@sas.upenn.edu

ABSTRACT

Through the diachronic survey of Italian, French and late-Soviet era screen adaptations of Count A.K. Tolstoy's 19th-century French-language novella introducing the Slavic vampiric figure of the *vourdalak*, whose trademark is to feed on its loved ones, this study shows how the disintegration and/or reconfiguration of the family structure is diversely treated in terms in diegetic, thematic, stylistic and socio-historical terms.

Keywords: vampirism; *vourdalak*; family; European film

ABSTRAKT

Poprzez diachroniczną analizę włoskich, francuskich i późno-radzieckich adaptacji filmowych XIX-wiecznej noweli hrabiego A.K. Tołstoja, napisanej w języku francuskim i wprowadzającej do literatury słowiańską postać wampira – *vourdalaka*, którego charakterystyczną cechą jest żywienie się własnymi bliskimi – niniejsze studium ukazuje, w jaki sposób rozpad i/lub przekształcenie struktury rodziny są przedstawiane w zróżnicowany sposób na poziomie diegetycznym, tematycznym, stylistycznym oraz społecznohistorycznym.

Słowa kluczowe: wampiryzm; *vourdalak*; rodzina; film europejski

A lesser-known elder cousin of towering giant of Russian letters Leo Tolstoy, Count Aleksey Konstantinovich Tolstoy (1817–75) was nonetheless an accomplished poet-cum-novelist-cum-dramatist-cum-diplomat in his own right, not to mention a polished polyglot. At the precocious age of 22 – and at a moment in time when vampire fiction in Western Europe was still mostly limited to the British progenitor of the genre, John W. Polidori's *The Vampire* (1819), and various con-

stituents scattered in French texts¹ – he penned a French-language Gothic novella revolving around a peculiar case of vampirism: *La Famille du Vourdalak. Fragment inédit des mémoires d'un inconnu* (1839).² Almost immediately thereafter, Tolstoy committed to paper a prequel of sorts, also in French: *Le Rendez-vous dans trois cents ans* (*The Reunion After 300 Years*). A couple of additional stories in the vampiric vein followed: *Oupyr* (1841) and *Amena* (1846), the former written in Russian, the latter in French (and the only one of its supernatural tales to appear in his lifetime). Nonetheless, the *vourdalak*-centered piece unquestionably remains today the most striking and successful of the four, so much so that it was once regularly anthologized.

Owing to the deferred, posthumous publication of Tolstoy's story,³ the introduction and popularization of the word *vourdalak* into Russian language is generally attributed to Alexander Pushkin on the basis of an eponymous poem, published in 1835 as part of his *Songs of the Western Slavs* cycle, which happened to be a translated ballad from Prosper Mérimée's *La Guzla* where the reference to [a] "brucolaque" is precisely rendered by *vurdalak* in Russian. To complicate matters, *La Guzla*⁴ eventually turned out to be one of the most notorious literary hoaxes in 19th-century Europe. What had been presented, complete with critical or erudite apparatus, as mere translation work of "Illyrian" folk ballads interspersed with tales of vampires or the evil eye, was soon revealed to be Mérimée's own invention and creation. With *La Famille du Vourdalak*, Tolstoy then effected what might be termed a vampiric looping of the linguistic and literary loop, since under the influence of Pushkin he turned to the French language the better to reappropriate a Russian adaptation of an exoticizing Gallic mystification under the guise of a translation of Slavic folk tales – no less!

The *vourdalak* as an entity is, therefore, essentially a folkloric Slavic or Balkan variant of the vampire figure, initially presenting the physical appearance of an uncouth, archaic patriarch that is a farcry from the image of the suave or dashing seducer made popular by Bram Stoker's *Dracula* toward the end of the Victorian era, to say nothing of the countless cinematic incarnations that have since ensued. While retaining the primary mechanism of vampiric contamination, the *vourdalak* mythos adds a specific twist residing in the nature of the target or victim: Serbian vampires only feed on their loved ones. In the words of the Marquis d'Urfé, Tolstoy's inset narrator, "although their habits are similar to vampires of other countries, *vourdalaks* prefer to suck the blood of close relatives and friends, who

¹ See, in particular, the vampires featured in Charles Nodier's *Smarra, ou les démons de la nuit* (1821) and *Infernaliana* (1822), or in Prosper Mérimée's *La Guzla* (1821).

² Translated into English as *The Family of a Vourdalak*. See A.K. Tolstoy, *Vampire Stories of the Supernatural*, trans. Fedor Nikanov (Hawthorn Books, 1969), 92–125.

³ In 1884, in Russian translation; in 1950, in the original French.

⁴ Now available in English as *Songs for the Gusle*, trans. Laura Nagle (Frayed Edge Press, 2023).

die and become vampires also. In Estonia and Herzegovina entire villages may be composed of *vourdalaks*.⁵ In *The Family of the Vourdalak*, as in many of its filmic renditions, the grandson is thus old Gorcha's prey of choice when he returns home, turned *vourdalak*, at the stroke of midnight. Unsurprisingly, the child, once corrupted, will chew on his mother. Thus is initiated a virtually endless and uncontrollable cycle transmuting affection into predation, equating fusion with contagion. As the very title of Tolstoy's story already suggests, the family unit – or, rather, its reassessment through entropic disintegration and possible reconfiguration – is the intrinsic cornerstone of *vourdalak* narratives.

*

How did cinema, whose relation to literature has commonly been said to be, to a greater or lesser degree, vampiric in nature, position itself vis-à-vis the convoluted, indeed vampire-like genesis of the literary *vourdalak* as previously described? To what extent and in what ways has the adaptation process perpetuated, recycled or added to that practice of predation and contamination? Focusing on some of the cinematic renditions of Tolstoy's *The Family of the Vourdalak* within a general frame of remediation, reappropriation or recontextualization, the purpose of this essay is to examine varied facets and treatments of an anthropological motif identified above as at the core of *vourdalak* lore, namely the familial bond and structure forming the primordial basis for social order, but here under damaging threat and/or in structural transition. The range will be shown to be significant, from melancholy tone to grotesque, from period piece to modernization, from "straightforward" adaptation to experimental fragmentation, from social critique to political subtext. For, surprisingly enough perhaps, if Tolstoy's novella is nowadays too often neglected, including in vampire literature/film scholarship, it has been multiply and diversely transposed to the small and big screen over the years.

The adaptational process was set afoot by two Italian opuses: the "I Wurdalak" segment of Mario Bava's horror anthology film *Black Sabbath (I tre volti della paura)*, 1963) and, a decade later, Giorgio Ferroni's *The Night of the Devils (La notte dei diavoli)*, 1972). The screen versions would henceforth cut across national boundaries. Centered around the romance between the young nobleman protagonist and alluring Sdenka (the peasant family's daughter), a Spanish variant was helmed in 1975 by José Antonio Páramo and titled "La familia *vourdalak*," an episode of *The Fifth Horseman (El quinto jinete)*, a Spanish series transposing classics of fantasy and horror for television. After a hiatus of over a decade, a couple of expe-

⁵ *Vampire Stories of the Supernatural*, 96.

rimental Soviet films came out only one year apart from each other. Directed by Gennadiy Klimov (also producer) and Igor Shavlak (also lead actor), *The Family of the Vourdalaks* (*Semya vourdalakov*) was released in 1990. Shot by Yevgeny Yufit (the late founder of “necrorealism” and a key figure of “Soviet parallel cinema”), *Daddy, Father Frost Is Dead* (*Papa, umer Ded Moroz*) was screened in 1991. After yet another protracted interval, a handful of new adaptations have recently made their appearance. If Russia’s *Vamps* (*Vurdalaki*, 2017; dir. Sergey Ginzburg) and Argentina’s *A Taste of Blood* (*Sangre Vurdalak*, 2020; dir. Santiago Fernández Calvete) are clearly concerned more with spectacular pyrotechnics than with the actual source material, a more interesting if partly flawed proposition has come from France, in a new form of circling back (with regard to the language of the original text), with Adrien Beau’s debut feature: *Le Vourdalak* (2023).

*

Courtesy of Mario Bava’s visual genius, the inaugural screen version is already a vivid illustration – possibly to this day the most impressive of all adaptations – of a familial reconfiguration whereby an entire household is being vampirized from within. The emphasis is therefore on the family members acquiring a new global identity in a predatory domino effect. Hence the plural definite article in the original Italian title (“I Wurdalak”) where Tolstoy’s title was meant to designate Gorka’s singular status as ogre-like patriarch and initiator of the family’s mutation – as both arch- and *Ur*-vourdalak, as it were. One of the film’s earliest memorable moments is when Gorka, impersonated by an aging Boris Karloff, flees the family cottage in the dead of night – and into a dense forest – with his beloved grandson, Ivan, on horseback. Esthetically as well as thematically the scene plays out like a loose reenactment, or at least a variation, of the Scandinavian *Erlking* legend which concerns a supernatural being, the eponymous king of the fairies, assailing an infant child riding with his father and eventually causing his death. Before being exemplified by a multitude of 19th-century paintings, that figure was made famous by a poem by Goethe (“Erlkönig,” 1782), more somber, even thanatotic, in tone and substituting a boy as prey for the young man pursued by a maiden elf in the Danish folk ballad serving as source of inspiration. A suspicion of pedophilia, if not rape, is thus perceptible in the last but one quatrain of the piece: “‘I love thee, I’m charm’d by thy beauty, dear boy / And if thou’rt unwilling, then force I’ll employ.’ / My father, my father, he seizes me fast, / For sorely, the Erl-King, has hurt me at last.”⁶

⁶ *The Poems of Goethe*, 115.

The even more disturbing conflation of the (grand-)paternal figure and the menacing, destructive entity at play in *I Wurdalak* appears to be paradoxically uncoupled with such psychoanalytical modalities as the Oedipal conflict or with the mythical exemplar of Saturn (or Cronos) devouring his children as so strikingly depicted by Francisco Goya in one of his “Black Paintings” (1820–23). Indeed, the frail Ivan returns “in one piece” from the beyond, kneels outside the home in the icy-cold night, almost reminiscent of a diminutive, albeit treacherous Christ-like figure. He sonorously begs his mother to open the door and let him in, which she is only too eager to do, even if it means killing her husband who tries to reason with her and stop her. When she finally flings the front door open she is met not by her imploring son but by the merciless, feral face of Gorka who proceeds to vampirize her, perhaps in avoidance of what would have been an explicitly – and morbidly – taboo embrace between a mother and her living-dead infant. Regardless, what the film ultimately proposes is but a new *modus vivendi* for the family through vampiric inbreeding, or endogenous, indeed incestuous, contamination. Before bringing her back into the “redefined” fold, Gorka in the presence of his next of kin had made it clear to his daughter Sdenka (subsequent to her “elopement” with French diplomat Vladimir d’Urfe, whose misfortune it was to have come upon this secluded Serbian village) that “[n]o one can love you more than we do...” Echoing previous face-to-a-window shots, the concluding triptych pictorially uses light, color and windowpane to unite the family members ontologically as well as visually within a single (over)frame in their respective squares. All their eyes are fixed on the newly reaffiliated Sdenka kissing Vladimir until her head slowly moves toward his jugular. No matter how abnormally or monstrously in viewers’ eyes, Bava’s film implements not only analogous restructuring of the initial family unit along strictly *vourdalak-esque* line, but integrative incorporation of an externality (D’Urfe as an allogenic or exogamous element in both socio-economic and cultural terms) into the familial matrix.

*

In an unassimilable rather than inclusive perspective this time, Giorgio Ferroni’s *The Night of the Devil* also foregrounds, in a modern-day setting (the early 1970s), the *forestiero* status of Nicola, the lumber importer who after a car accident on a deserted road has found refuge at a farmhouse located near the Slovenian border, a liminal space *par excellence*. A *forestiero*, i.e., a stranger, an outsider, or even an intruder, in the eyes of the Ciuvclaks, a family name that uncoincidentally “rhymes” with *vourdalak*. The woodland villagers are in return perceived as not just “strange, totally ignorant and hardheaded,” but also “frightened witless by all the local crazy

legends and fairy tales,” to quote from the saw-mill owner who Nicola does business with. Even more intriguing is the introduction of a new character, a former *brigadiere* by the name of Kovavich, who highlights the “us vs. them” dichotomy while providing a rare, if somewhat muddled, definition of the *vourdalak*, a term that is barely even mentioned in some of the films in our corpus – or in the Tolstoy narrative, for that matter. In his parsing of the word, Kovavich interestingly resorts to oxymoron, a canonical rhetorical figure in the fantastic genre as it transgresses boundaries or fuses opposites, in designating *vourdalaks* as “incorporeal material creatures.” He is also not adverse to analogical thinking: “Something like the notes of this music,” he muses in a monotonous, almost gloomy delivery, while playing the organ in a Catholic church as he is wont to do in his free time. The continuation of his exposition blends the concrete and the abstract, the ontological and the metaphysical: “It’s the terror of silence on which they feed, the terror of solitude. They kill for love, for companionship – in order to have near them the people they loved the most. And their victims search for their own company. A never-ending chain of death until it’s broken.”⁷ Eros, Thanatos and Melancholia all rolled into one, so to speak – a rather heady brew, curiously at odds with the overall tenor and mood of the film, including its gore factor or the generally stilted performances and mediocre dialogues.

Referring to witch-hunt as a historical phenomenon, the *brigadier* more mundanely explains how he was fired from the police force “for being too superstitious, for practicing exorcism”: “They got rid of me the same way they did with witches in the old days.” The unnamed sorceress is in fact another idiosyncratic addition in the film whose physical or sartorial attributes tend to suggest a diabolical or undead essence (wan complexion, red circles under the eyes, maniacal laughter, dark clothes). By virtue of her being portrayed as the sole or primal source of evil, the patriarchal bent inherent to the *vourdalak* narrative appears to be displaced. As a result, Gorca’s only fault (albeit a cardinal failure as *pater familias*) lies, of his own admission, in his inability to protect his family from the curse somehow visited upon them by the bloodthirsty hag. In her ferocious showdown with Gorca (which is largely left off screen so as to sustain doubt about the outcome), the witch wields a bull’s horn against her opponent’s impaling stake, making explicit her “phallic woman” stature and the formidable castrating power attached to it. Whether this is a reproduction of a misogynistic trope or a reflection of masculinist anxiety vis-à-vis the rise of feminism in the 1970s (the witch as a conduit for a liberating force wreaking havoc with patriarchy), or both, remains a matter of interpretation.

In fact, Ferroni’s film generally tends to turn the tables on the original novella in terms of the gender dynamic. The boy in the peasant family is, for instance,

⁷ My own translation from the Italian audio track.

substituted by two young girls, Irina and Mira, first seen huddled together with their doll at a window, at once outwardly frightened and subtly spooky. This shot is very likely an intertextual reprise of an already noted Bavaesque motif as well as a narrative harbinger since the underlying sinister streak will soon prevail. Once vampirized, little Irina thus turns savagely on her own progenitor, most tellingly (as a sign of radical emancipation) after dropping her doll to the ground – a doll which she had previously cradled and comforted, pretending it was sick, in true *maternal* fashion. Not content with biting her mother's neck Irina proceeds to rip her blouse so as to expose her breasts which she then gnashes with her fingernails with cruel relish – a deliberately violent transgression of societal norms in the way of eroticism and motherliness. Siblings Irina and Mira will later be seen laughing mockingly and hysterically during Nicola's ordeal at the hands of the rest of the now *vourdalakized* family as he desperately tries to fend off their assaults. The tragically ironic twist of the epilogue returns viewers to a framing narrative completely different from the one devised by Tolstoy (a learned, aristocratic assembly listening to the marquis d'Urfé recounting at length a lived anecdote), since it features an agitated, possibly deranged Nicola confined to a mental asylum ward. Similarly, unlike what occurs in the source material and in most of its filmic avatars, Sdenka is wrongly perceived as a threat or an agent of *vourdalak-esque* infection. Instead of melting or caving in, her face remains beautifully intact as she lies lifeless on the floor after a frantic Nicola has pierced her heart with a rod. It goes without saying that Ferroni and his scriptwriters have been somewhat heavy-handedly striving all along to hoodwink their audience as well. Most notably, a number of physical or behavioral signs evinced by Sdenka, such as her fixed stare, altered voice and suspiciously overeager vows of eternal love (just as, earlier, the reported coldness of her body or the blood on her neck), clearly seem to have been planted so as to invalidate the hypothesis of her being the sole (uncontaminated) survivor in the family. The same would apply for the less than convincing explanation put forward by Sdenka herself: "maybe they loved me less than the others"...

*

In its own way, the most recent avatar on celluloid, Adrien Beau's *The Vourdalak*, offers a vivid encapsulation of the dichotomous thrust running through the Ferroni film in a scene where Sdenka and her brother, Piotr divulge fairly detailed background information geared to enlighten an unbelieving Marquis d'Urfé (not forgetting skeptical viewers in the process). "Even love is a curse around here," Piotr asserts almost factually, albeit resignedly. His sister supplies further details about the *vourdalaks* that are a complete novelty compared to the *Ur-text* and

potentially take the onto-metaphysical dimension of *The Night of the Devils* into a more psychoanalytical direction. One specific element will be later corroborated and eventually serve a decisive narrative function (more of which anon): “Some say that, to soak up their drool, they chew the shroud in which they were buried.” Such a deceptively infantile or regressive demeanor will be periodically exemplified over the course of the film, calling attention to this attachment to a transitional object that arguably metaphorizes the maternal breast. One may be reminded here, in an even more primal, foundational sense, of the mother of all mothers: the Biblical Eve, obliquely referenced when deep in a presumably primeval forest the marquis bites off a fallen apple to find in it a writhing worm that Sdenka is prompt to pick up and swallow...

Shot on grainy Super 16, Adrien Beau’s film is overall characterized by an assumed artificiality that translates into a fairly high degree of theatricality and wordiness in terms of acting and dialogue. It also walks a fine line between the grotesque and the poetic or the romantic, as is instantiated by the bold choice of live-action puppetry to impersonate Gorcha, the arch-*vourdalak*. The Nosferatu-inspired,⁸ skeleton-like marionette with clawed fingers was created and operated by the director himself who also lent his own voice to the character. Particularly revealing is a slight alteration of a passage from Tolstoy’s short story where D’Urfé imagines in his sleep Gorcha stealthily entering his bedroom at night and “ben[ding] over [him], his livid face so close to [his] that [he] could feel his corpse-like breath,”⁹ before waking up to realize that the old man is in fact peeking in through the window. In Beau’s version, the Marquis wakes up – or dreams of waking up – to find in horror that Gorcha is lying in bed alongside him. Shortly after this sequence, Vlad’s mother will confide to D’Urfé a horrifying nightmare of her own: looking for her son at night she only found an empty blood-soaked bed in his room filled with a pungent stench and a repulsive munching sound...

Since such a disturbing intrication of Eros and Thanatos will prove to be a plain foreshadowing of the poor child’s fate at the hands of his grandfather, it is not inconceivable that D’Urfé’s nocturnal vision was equally, if elliptically, proleptic, especially in view of the protagonist’s final return at nightfall to the family household where a surprisingly impassioned Sdenka awaits him. The pair ends up in bed, but in mid-coitus the unfortunate Frenchman discovers in a mirror on the wall that he is in actuality making love to a corpse that is none other than the skeletal Gorcha, relishing the copious amount of blood dripping from his mouth with a characteristic taunt: “My Lord, exquisite taste!” The scene

⁸ Another influence is likely the Crypt-Keeper, the wisecracking puppet host and narrator of the *Tales from the Crypt* HBO series.

⁹ *Vampire Stories of the Supernatural*, 104.

fits, in a way, within a larger frame of gender obfuscation or fluidity throughout the film. As a wig-wearing royal courtier from France, his face plastered with chalky white powder and his cheeks with rouge, a *mouche* or taffeta patch tastefully placed under his left eye, D'Urfé himself cannot but come across as effete to both Serbian peasants of the time and today's audiences. Most conspicuously, Piotr is early on and then repeatedly perceived as a cross-dresser or a gender-nonconforming person. D'Urfé first mistakes him for a woman and Gorcha, his own father, later calls him "girlie" or "sissy" (*fillette* in French). Be that as it may, viewers may still be incredulous that the Marquis has indeed copulated with Sdenka-impersonating Gorcha, even if, once impaled on his couch, the presumed shape-shifter continues to play the role until D'Urfé sets the bed ablaze and Gorcha's/Sdenka's professed love turns into a ferocious curse. And yet, the unforeseen reappearance of the "real" Sdenka near the edge of a cliff in the film's coda not only tends to substantiate such a conjecture, but also enables a final clever spin on an already-encountered structuring bipolarity that frequently breeds prejudice, discrimination, stigmatization, and victimization. On the one hand, an urban(e), lone stranger from Western Europe stereotypically represents the epitome of rationality and civilization – here, in the Age of the Enlightenment; on the other, a remote rural community is shown to adhere to an "archaic" belief-system or world-view. Having fallen victim to intrafamilial vampiric contamination, *The Vourdalak*'s elder son Jegor had accordingly turned D'Urfé into a scapegoat responsible for having brought misery upon his household – in other words, of being an external, causative agent of infection. Due punishment had soon followed, the "culprit" being beaten, then tied up to a pillar in the house cellar. Ironically, the film ends on an inversely symmetrical trajectory. Upon the vampire-bitten, soon-to-commit-suicide Marquis's encouragement and equipped with his letters of introduction, Sdenka's flees to France, where an unsuspecting Duchess provides shelter to this oddity of a foreigner ushered in by her chambermaid at dawn, "lost and pale as a ghost," as the noblewoman writes in her diary, which fills up the entire closing black screen in white letters. The revenge of Eastern Europe peasantry upon French aristocracy (which the film half-strives to metaphorize as some form of reverse colonization) is potentially in place since a fleeting telltale sign reveals that Sdenka, far from having miraculously escaped the vampiric curse, has instead turned into a ghoul herself. For, as she rides away on horseback, Sdenka is seen munching on a piece of cloth, in true *vourdalak* fashion (as redefined by the film)...



Turning to two Soviet films of the early 1990s, Evgeniy Yufit's *Daddy, Father Frost Is Dead* and Gennadiy Klimov and Igor Shavlak's *The Family of the Vourdalaks*, allows somehow for a circling back, but not without a few twists and turns along the way, to the original Russianness of the storyline. While being far looser than the screen adaptations considered thus far, both films are also much more historically specific – in a contextual rather than diegetic sense, that is, since, in contrast to Beau's opus, neither is a costume drama attempting to recreate an early 19th-century setting. Instead, they opt for a temporal shift (to contemporaneity) which obliquely yet eloquently resonates with the troubled late Soviet zeitgeist.

A Russian filmmaker, photographer and painter with a streak of the prankster and the exhibitionist in him, at least in the first part of his career, Evgeniy Yufit directed several shorts before shooting *Daddy, Father Frost Is Dead*, a black-and-white, slow-burning experimental film whose minimal dialogue, non-existent soundtrack, long static shots, and, most importantly, oneiric-hallucinatory and cryptic treatment of the *vourdalak* mythos all sidestep or subvert the main tenets of narrative logic. Apart from both being debut features, Yufit's *Daddy, Father Frost Is Dead* and Beau's *The Vourdalak* unpredictably share a motif extraneous to the source material. One will recall that the *vourdalaks* infantilely chomp on their burial shroud in the French version. In the Soviet film, the victims, infected or not, are unaccountably wrapped, not unlike mummies, in shroud bindings, some of which, once loosened, end up being blown away and spectrally caught in tree branches. This is but one example of numerous mesmerizing visuals and arresting, oftentimes poetical moments, which readily revolve around the figure of the child as the focus of all of his grandfather's mortiferous attentions. A scene showing the latter returning home with an unusual present for his grandson (a bottle covered in rough clay and planted with matches) is later followed by the dying young boy found under wetland grasses, whispering "Grandpa... kiss me again." His coffin is then enigmatically buried inside a gigantic pile of logs on top of which lies, as if catatonic, the cadaverous *vourdalak*-patriarch whose hand eventually slowly grasps the rifle by his side. Equally incongruous, absurd or surreal episodes abound, such as when the biologist-protagonist, plagued by a toothache, consults a dentist who, after uttering mystical ramblings about the Unknown, proceeds to stuff his "patient's" mouth full with cotton before hurriedly walking away. The hapless scientist is then left at the mercy of a posse of ostensibly living-dead creatures in ties and suits, "supposedly inspired by the official 'zombies' of the Brezhnev era."¹⁰

¹⁰ Josephine Woll, "Exorcising the Devil," in *Horror International*, ed. Steven Jay Schneider and Tony Williams (Wayne State UP, 2005), 352.

If space permitted, the film would have to be carefully reinscribed within Necro-realism, an artistic movement that flourished from the early 1980s to the mid-1990s. Primarily concerned with death and decay from the perspective of black humor or absurdism, it was also an integral part of the development of “Soviet Parallel Cinema,” an underground circuit for films made and distributed outside of the official Goskino State Cinema system, even with *perestroika* and *glasnost* policies gradually loosening censorship. A critic aptly summarized the Necrorealist ethos as the “exploration of the liminal state between life and death, in which crazed ‘zombies’ or necro-denizens wander apocalyptic landscapes and commit acts of wanton cruelty, homosexual violence, and murder,”¹¹ all of which characteristics are, to a greater or lesser extent, present in *Daddy, Father Frost Is Dead*. While Necrorealism was far from a strict or systematic parody of Socialist realism, a more or less explicit political or ideological subtext is easily detectable in a film whose only extensive verbal sequence features a disembodied voice, presumably coming from a transistor radio, but eerily redolent of some subliminal form of propaganda. The monologue heard explains how “moles do much damage to the country” so that “the struggle with moles is one of our main tasks,” where the emphatic repetition of *moles* (Kpot in Russian) cannot but alert to the polysemy of the word (animal/spy), even if the most obvious allegorical reading has to be a *mise en abyme* of the narrative proper. A transitive equality might be posited as follows: mole = *vourdalak* = dissident (or opponent, or adversary, of the State). From the viewpoint of authority all “terms” must be eradicated, following the example, mentioned in voiceover, of the mysterious chemical agent F-17 (“agent” offering a new instance of double-entendre: substance/spy), developed to exterminate moles as “enemies of agriculture” with sure results: “Application of it guarantees the death of a rodent in 10 minutes.” Much later in the film, a section seemingly disconnected from the storyline shows one of the zombies/*vourdalaks* communicating in Morse code before he is joined by one of his equally sinister-looking cohorts. For no apparent reason both decide to empty a wooden cabinet of its contents, including archival documents, dismantle the shelves and knock it over. Their next move is to pour a pot full of boiling water – or is it agent F-17...? – over the face of a man lying on the floor and now writhing in pain. Outwardly aberrant in terms of internal logic as well as plot relevance, the above scenes do not fortuitously segue from the capture of the protagonist by a contingent of the same menacing undead who are inexplicably content with swathing his head with gauze and pulling his pants down. Coded communication, ransacking, humiliation, torture, execution – all actions and

¹¹ José Alaniz and Seth Graham, “Early Necro Cinema in Context,” in *Necrorealism. Context, History, Interpretations*, ed. Seth Graham (Russian Film Symposium, 2001), 9.

methods that are not unequivocal of operations conducted and crimes perpetrated by the KGB or related secret police agencies under Soviet rule...

These are but localized examples in a film that has immersed its viewers in a dystopian, almost post-apocalyptic environment as early as its opening frames, where a man is seen wading through the murky water of what looks like a sewer or a flooded underground tunnel, until he trips and his head gets caught in a hanging wire noose, killing him almost instantly. Even if this is revealed to have been a disturbing dream experienced by the protagonist, a researcher about to leave for the countryside for the dual purpose of a study on a particular type of shrew-mouse and a visit to his cousin's family, the oneiric dismal mood and existential dread will soon spill out into "reality" to the point of blurring all distinctions between the two realms. No comforting sense of closure will be provided in the final scenes. Far from returning us to the prologue and ideally putting a definite end to the "nightmare," they plunge the viewer even deeper into it through confusion, fragmentation and ellipsis, especially where elements foreign to Tolstoy's novella are concerned, such as the young boy lying down across deserted rail tracks and promptly crushed by an oncoming locomotive, or the unused aspen stake and a photographic close-up of a shrew mouse's muzzle floating down the river. In the coda, a silent-film-style title card announcing the onset of cold weather is followed by a long static overhead shot of the zombie-like gait of the now familiar suited men advancing slowly amid scattered, frail and bare trees. In a sense, the conflation of the two figures, vampires and zombies, throughout the film, is not only a characteristic reflection – along with cyborgs, mutants and aliens – of Necrorealist concerns with "in-between subjects," but also an allegorization of the socio-political situation immediately leading to the collapse of the Soviet Union.

*

A color film less experimental or radical in format than Yufit's feature, Klimov and Shavlak's *The Family of the Vourdalaks* is just as visually stunning (in its use of overexposure, in particular) and poetically allusive in its editing, more oneiric, even melancholic perhaps, than grotesque or absurdist in its treatment. Oftentimes detached from the letter of its source it is nonetheless deeply true to its spirit, generally harkening back to Bavaesque Gothicism in modern-day guises. In lieu of a full-fledged analysis exceeding the limits of the present essay, a few cursory comments are offered here, tied to an underlying socio-political agenda. The latter can transpire in the course of the dialogue, as in a late statement by Maria (Sdenka's counterpart in the film) that could conceivably be subjected to a less individual than collective, less supernatural than ideological reading: "I'm not a master of my

destiny... I'm under the influence of some other powers." On a more visual level, the actual start of the film, past the dream-prologue but in symbolic, almost symbiotic connection with it, is another case in point. In their juxtaposition of innumerable coffins with army helicopters or a state funeral, the war photographs taken by journalist Igor (a modern-day, "commoner" version of the Marquis D'Urfé's) are not a mere daylight, "prosaic" echo of the nocturnal burial desecration perpetrated in the opening scene. They also seem to call for a specific contextualization, which might have been more immediately perceptible to Slavic audiences at the time of the film's release. The emphasis on art, and in particular religious iconography, all along the film might, in particular, be laced with a political subtext. Indeed, Shavvak's film appears to be subtended by the clandestine, subterranean endurance of faith in the face of "evil" forces which, whether supernatural or all-too real, have resulted, for instance, in a nearby church being in a state of utter dereliction... As for resilient faith as a form of resistance, it is *a contrario* emblemized by two personal items that Maria clings to devotedly. One is a small silver-framed icon inherited from her grandmother – and the only relic from the plundered house of God – which she secretly prays to; the other is a medallion she wears around her neck, depicting, in the semblance of the icon, a Madonna and Child. As a gesture of continued transmission, this piece of jewelry is gifted by Maria to Igor as he is forced to leave the family. It will eventually fill the closing frame as, subsequent to a suspensefully protracted showdown with the ghoul family and an equally extended slow-motion fall, Igor finds himself somehow catapulted from the snow-covered, *vourdalak*-infested forest onto the crowded city pavement of Moscow holding the medallion in his hand as he comes to. It is ultimately a moot point whether the object is a relic from the past (an heirloom, as was the case with the grand-maternal icon) or from some other space-time continuum (as if it belonged to a dream or fantasy world)... As a throwback to the beginning when the vampiric corpse's waking up in its violated tomb immediately prompted Igor to suddenly emerge from his presumed dream, the second hypothesis would tend to suggest that the film is structured around a bookending device.

Last but not least, the *vourdalakization* of the entire household is presented as unfolding along two major deviations, not only from the original novella but from all of the other screen adaptations. First, it occurs sometime not before but *after* the protagonist's eviction or departure from the area. In that respect, Yufit's opus comes out as even more of an outlier as it is devoid of a to-and-fro movement (between the protagonist's "home turf" and the remote community). Second, the editing style corresponding to the predatory chain reaction among the family is recurrently enigmatic or equivocal. For instance, a form of punctuation such as a cut to black following Igor's intense gaze at a painted portrait necessarily problematizes its own significance (is it a causal linkage or a disconnect?) as well as the significance

of what comes next, namely young Nikita pleading with his mother outside the family house at night and the inevitable consequences of her letting him back in. Is this a pictorially induced reminiscence, open-eye dream, “vision” or premonition? A related idiosyncrasy is the presentation of plot points as condensed or elliptical concatenation, as is exemplified by the last-mentioned sequence considered in its entirety: the mother giving in to her “returning” son’s supplications and unlocking the door for him; husband and wife lying side by side on the white sheets of their “death-like” bed until the wife rolls over to feed on her spouse; the latter biting in turn his brother’s neck amid the marshland reeds.

*

One of the most salient points that has transpired through the exploration of this small corpus of *vourdalak*-inspired films is perhaps not so much their *chronotope* in a Bakhtinian sense as the temporal and, most importantly, societal context within which the fate – or the doom – of the family unit caught in the process of *vourdalakization* is narrativized and thematized. Adopting the quasi-ahistorical frame of folk and fairy tales, Mario Bava’s “I Wurdalak” focuses exclusively on an isolated household that subsists, (d)evolves and “reinvents” itself as a self-enclosed, autarchic microcosm. The family structure proves to be akin to a living organism willing and able, if necessary, to integrate or assimilate a foreign body (in the person of D’Urfe). Although a first attempt at modernizing the original novella and blurring the gender dynamic that underpins the family structure, Giorgio Ferroni’s *The Night of the Devils* retains, for its part, a measure of socio-historical indecidability as figured geographically by the more or less indeterminate or undefined no man’s land (the border area between Italy and Slovenia) where the events are supposed to occur.

The process of a synchronic displacement or (re)contextualization, outside of historical reenactment (of the source), is what truly distinguishes the two late-Soviet era adaptations functioning as barely veiled allegories. In Yufit’s film, control, propaganda and repression are framed within a bleak, dystopic environment that reduces citizens to robotic, zombified and/or maniacal beings, and as such extends far beyond familial confines. For Klimov and Shavlak, religion (personal faith and a sense of the sacred secretly passed on across generations) seems to be the only shelter from and, potentially, resistance against oppressive forces. An associated adverse effect is, however, that the only remaining sane form of family might be restricted to a symbolic and iconic entity, distilled to its purest duality: the originary, irreproducible unit of Madonna and Child. Perhaps not unlike the unpredicted widening-of-the-scope denouement of Adrien Beau’s *The Vourdalak* implicitly

pointing in the direction of the ineluctable dissolution of the French monarchy, the societal disintegration at play in the two Soviet films can be regarded as a herald, whether conscious or unconscious, of the breakdown of the USSR... which indeed was to come barely a year later.

References

- Alaniz, José and Graham Seth. "Early Necro Cinema in Context." In *Necrorealism. Context, History, Interpretations*, edited by Seth Graham. Russian Film Symposium, 2001.
- Goethe, Johann Wolfgang von. *The Poems of Goethe*. Translated by Edgar Alfred Bowring. Hurst, 1853.
- Mérimee, Prosper. *Songs for the Gusle*. Translated by Laura Nagle. Frayed Edge Press, 2023.
- Tolstoy, Aleskey Konstantinovich. *Vampire Stories of the Supernatural*. Translated by Fedor Nikanov. Hawthorn Books, 1969.
- Woll, Josephine. "Exorcising the Devil: Russian Cinema and Horror." In *Horror International*, edited by Steven Jay Schneider and Tony Williams. Wayne State UP, 2005.

Filmography

- Bava, Mario. "I Wurdalak," in *Black Sabbath (I tre volti della paura)*, 1963.
- Beau, Adrien. *The Vourdalak (Le Vourdalak)*, 2023.
- Calvete, Santiago Fernández. *A Taste of Blood (Sangre Vurdalak)*, 2020.
- Ferroni, Giorgio. *The Night of the Devils (La notte dei diavoli)*, 1972.
- Ginzburg, Sergey. *Vamps (Vurdalaki)*, 2017.
- Klimov, Gennadiy and Igor Shavlak. *The Family of the Vourdalaks (Semya vourdalakov)*, 1990.
- Páramo, José Antonio. "La familia vourdalak." In *The Fifth Horseman (El quinto jinete)*, 1975.
- Yufit, Yevgeny. *Daddy, Father Frost Is Dead (Papa, umer Ded Moroz)*, 1991.
- Tales from the Crypt* (HBO series created by William Gaines & Steven Dodd), 1989–1996.

True Love Never Dies, But It Might Just Kill You: Why Audiences Love the Toxicity of *Twilight* Romances

*Prawdziwa miłość nigdy nie umiera, ale może cię zabić: dlaczego odbiorcy
kochają toksyczność romansów ze Zmierzchu*

NANCY SCHUMANN

nancy.sch@gmx.net

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6948-6454>

ABSTRACT

Twenty years after its publication it is time to revisit *Twilight*, taking a closer look at how this was marketed towards a specific audience. *Twilight* targets a teenage audience enthralled by a love story, yet, despite copious use of the word “love,” danger and lust lurk close to the surface. How did an audience of romance readers fall into the horror trap for *Twilight*? This paper highlights the targeted marketing of *Twilight* as a romance. The paper looks at the use of narrative archetypes to appeal to a specific readership and shows how *Twilight* utilises the history of Gothic novels and its heroines to revive a type of storytelling older than its vampires. The paper showcases a number of capitalist aspects contained in the narrative, arguing that these are deliberately placed.

Keywords: *Twilight*; vampires; romance; marketing archetypes; capitalism

ABSTRAKT

Dwadzieścia lat po publikacji *Zmierzchu* nadszedł czas, aby ponownie przyjrzeć się tej powieści, dokładniej analizując sposób, w jaki była ona promowana i kierowana do określonej grupy odbiorców. *Zmierzch* adresowany jest do nastoletnich czytelników zafascynowanych historią miłosną. Jednak mimo częstego używania słowa „miłość”, tuż pod powierzchnią narracji kryją się niebezpieczeństwo i pożądanie. Jak doszło do tego, że miłośnicy romansów dali się wciągnąć w pułapkę horroru, jaką okazał się *Zmierzch*? W artykule ukazano, w jaki sposób *Zmierzch* był celowo promowany jako romans. Zanalizowano wykorzystanie archetypów narracyjnych, mających przemawiać do konkretnej grupy czytelników, oraz pokazano,

jak powieść czerpie z tradycji gotyckiej i modelu gotyckich bohaterów, aby odnowić model opowiadania historii, który jest starszy od samych wampirów. Ponadto autor wskazuje na obecne w narracji elementy kapitalistyczne, argumentując, że zostały one umieszczone w tekście świadomie i z określonym zamysłem.

Słowa kluczowe: *Zmierzch*; wampiry; romans; archetypy marketingowe; kapitalizm

2025 marked the twentieth anniversary of the publication of *Twilight*. Extensive research has analysed various narrative aspects, such as religious meaning, politics, vegetarianism, humanised vampires, as well as gender roles. Much of the scholarship focussed on the depiction of coercion and abusive relationships in *Twilight*. Scholars and non-academic readers alike took issue with *Twilight*'s content that is supposedly romantic but depicts coercive control and violence in its relationships. As Alison Happel and Jennifer Esposito put it, "*Twilight*'s main theme, Bella's love for a boy who wants to kill her, sexualizes violence."¹ The narrating heroine is frequently seen, by both scholars and critics, as the antithesis of feminism: "Bella has no interest, or life beyond Edward."²

Additionally, fangless vampires who consider themselves vegetarian and sparkle in the sunlight have caused controversy. Where "the historical vampire monster relates to fears of colonisation – a topic that fits into the discourse of power relations between the dominant and the suppressed – as well as to fears of female empowerment,"³ *Twilight*, to many, embodies "the monsters' disempowerment."⁴ Scholars, such as Ildikó Limpár, see "the feminisation of vampire literature"⁵ as the root cause of developments that gave audiences "subjective" and "articulated undead"⁶ as well as "the defanged, living dead idol of the Female Gothic romance."⁷

Readers see *Twilight*'s vampires through the eyes of a human woman. Rather than seeing the "vampire's search for fulfilment,"⁸ readers follow the heroine's

¹ Alison Happel and Jennifer Esposito, "Vampires, Vixens, and Feminists: An Analysis of *Twilight*," *Educational Studies* 46 no. 5 (2010): 529, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131946.2010.510411>.

² Michele Tager and Lauren Nell, "A Vampire and a Damsel in Distress: A Postfeminist Analysis of Selected Female South African Viewers' Perceptions of the Romance Between Bella and Edward in the Film *Twilight* (2008)," *Communicare* 35 no. 1 (2016): 87, <https://doi.org/10.36615/jcsa.v35i1.1603>.

³ Ildikó Limpár, "Masculinity, Visibility, and the Vampire Literary Tradition in *What We Do in the Shadows*," *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts* 29, no. 2 (2018): 268, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26627624>.

⁴ Limpár, "Masculinity, Visibility," 267.

⁵ Limpár, "Masculinity, Visibility," 271.

⁶ Sorcha Ní Fhlainn, *Postmodern Vampires* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 17.

⁷ Limpár, "Masculinity, Visibility," 271.

⁸ Ken Gelder, *Reading the Vampire* (Routledge, 1994), 109.

search for perfection. As Leisha Jones puts it, “the hopes and dreams of a girl drive the plot.”⁹

However, “Meyer’s novels are more nuanced [...] than some reviews suggest.”¹⁰ Thus, scholars, such as Natalie Wilson in *Seduced by Twilight*, find plenty to theorise that explains *Twilight*’s allure. *Twilight and Philosophy*, edited by Rebecca Housel and J. Jeremy Wisniewski, is another example of scholarship focussed on *Twilight*’s attraction, including the wisdom that “Death captivates.”¹¹ Jessica Taylor asserts that “the audience must be engaging with aspects of the texts and films that they find pleasurable, rather than threatening.”¹²

Audience perception is the key focus of this paper, which argues that the main issue in *Twilight* is not the content *per se*. Writing style, structure, characterisations and sparkling vampires all come down to personal taste. Even Anne Rice’s protagonist Lestat says his “highly reflective skin” would give him away as unnatural if not “powdered down.”¹³ The core of the perceived issue is that *Twilight* is “marketed, viewed and perceived as nothing other than a teenage romance.”¹⁴

A horror story centred around an abusive relationship may not be light reading but the content is not problematic because it shows the problem. Readers are meant to feel uncomfortable. In contrast, there seems to be an expectation for “love stories” to be realistic,¹⁵ showing romance with the right kind of partner as attainable, but in *Twilight* “Bella is obsessed with a boy who wants to literally kill her, and the audience is encouraged to romanticise this.”¹⁶

Twilight is far from the first problematic romance: Audiences familiar with film adaptations, who then read Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* or Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights*, are frequently surprised and even appalled to discover the nature of the narratives’ (anti)-heroes because the authors “position their Byronic heroes as threatening rather than appealing.”¹⁷ As Joseph Crawford puts it: “The

⁹ Leisha Jones, “Contemporary Bildungsromans and the Prosumer Girl.” *Criticism* 53, no. 3 (2011): 441.

¹⁰ Anna Silver, “*Twilight* Is Not Good for Maidens: Gender, Sexuality, and the Family in Stephanie Meyer’s *Twilight* Series.” *Studies in the Novel* 42, no. 1/2 (2010): 126.

¹¹ Rebecca Housel and J. Jeremy Wisniewski, eds., *Twilight and Philosophy: Vampires, Vegetarians, and the Pursuit of Immortality* (Wiley, 2009), 1.

¹² Jessica Taylor, “Romance and the Female Gaze Obscuring Gendered Violence in the *Twilight* Saga,” *Feminist Media Studies* 14, no. 3 (2014): 394.

¹³ Anne Rice, *The Vampire Lestat* (Ballantine Books, 1993), 3.

¹⁴ Marko Lukić and Ljubica Matek, “Bella and the Beast: When Vampires Fall in Love, or the Twilight of a Genre.” *Supernatural Studies* 1, no. 1 (2013): 83.

¹⁵ Joseph Crawford, *The Twilight of the Gothic? Vampire Fiction and the Rise of the Paranormal Romance* (University of Wales Press, 2014), 13.

¹⁶ Happel and Esposito, *Vampires, Vixens, and Feminists*, 530.

¹⁷ Sara K. Day, “Rock Star Rochester and Heart-Throb Heathcliff: The Problematic Redemption of the Byronic Hero in Recent Young Adult Retellings of Brontë Novels, in *Young Adult Gothic*

notion that wicked individuals might still be attractive – that they might, indeed, be attractive because of their wickedness – is hardly a new one.”¹⁸

In both *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights* the “constructions of leading women force readers to attend to the dangerous nature of romance.”¹⁹ *Twilight* is one of many contemporary re-tellings that “minimised or erased the social criticism advanced by the original texts.”²⁰

Twilight also maintains its reputation as a romance. This paper’s focus will be the specific marketing approach to *Twilight* as a romance and the reasons for its success. This follows a similar approach as William Hughes, described in his 2014 *Open Graves, Open Minds* talk, where he argues that using “categories [...] created by marketing departments” “might [...] be valid” “since genre works by fulfilling and revising expectations.”²¹

While *Twilight* is “a story of lovers,”²² which is one possible definition of a “romance,”²³ it does not present as a Gothic Romance. Despite borrowing from earlier vampire narratives, *Twilight* carefully avoids associations with the cosy chill of a Gothic Novel. As Agnieszka Stasiewicz-Bieńkowska puts it: “In the new millennium, vampires appear more flexible than ever before.”²⁴ The vampires dwell in a house of glass, albeit in the middle of the forest, that is the very opposite of a dark Gothic mansion. Indeed, Marko Lukić and Ljubica Matek see the lack of a Gothic mansion as “suggesting in a way that her [Stephenie Meyer] vampire fiction is not a part of the Gothic tradition at all.”²⁵ The only anxiety the heroine feels is whether her vampire boyfriend’s family will like her and the only feature Bella shares with classic Gothic heroines are her “fainting spells”²⁶ that get worse by exposure to Edward: “‘You . . . made . . . me . . . faint,’ I accused him dizzily.”²⁷

All its brightness sets *Twilight* apart from Gothic narratives. It is its own representation of “the ordinary-made-extraordinary.”²⁸ Still, there are parallels

Fiction: Monstrous Selves/Monstrous Others, ed. Michelle J. Smith and Kristine Moruzi (University of Wales Press, 2021), 112.

¹⁸ Crawford, *The Twilight of the Gothic*, 23.

¹⁹ Day, “Rock Star Rochester,” 113.

²⁰ Day, “Rock Star Rochester,” 113.

²¹ William Hughes, “Demon Lovers: Embracing the Monster in Paranormal Romance,” OGOM 2014 talk. <https://www.opengravesopenminds.com/critical-thoughts/bill-hughes-demon-lovers-embracing-the-monster-in-paranormal-romance/> (accessed February 27, 2025).

²² Judith Wilt, *Women Writers and the Hero of Romance* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 5.

²³ Wilt, *Women Writers*, 5.

²⁴ Agnieszka Stasiewicz-Bieńkowska, “Love, Violence, and Consent in Young Adult Vampire Fiction,” in *The Palgrave Handbook of the Vampire*, ed. Simon Bacon (Palgrave Macmillan, 2024), 1283.

²⁵ Lukić and Matek, *Bella and the Beast*, 83.

²⁶ Stephenie Meyer, *Twilight* (Atom Books, 2005), 101.

²⁷ Meyer, *Twilight*, 317.

²⁸ Wilt, *Women Writers*, 131.

to Gothic narratives: “*Wuthering Heights* tells the story of the highly destructive love life of its protagonist”²⁹ and in *Jane Eyre* “Rochester is, throughout, a mix of good and bad qualities.”³⁰ Echoes of this are clearly visible throughout *Twilight*. The clearest parallel to its predecessors is the level of controversy caused by the narrative, focussed on the brooding man in the middle. Joseph Crawford accurately summarises: “In their own day, the Brontës were cultural outliers [] But for twentieth- and twenty-first-century romance fiction, they were foundational.”³¹

Twilight follows a classic horror structure whereby the monster is revealed half-way through the story and all the action is concentrated towards the end of the book. In contrast, a classic romance structure only applies when viewing the *Twilight* series as a whole where “love ultimately redeems and triumphs”³² in the form of a wedding, that is not the end of the narrative, and a vampiric happily-ever-after following much conflict and love-triangling. The “happy ending comes not when the hero rids himself of his vampirism, but when the heroine ascends into vampiric immortality”³³ but for large parts of the narrative, the romance plot is secondary to the mystery of monsters. Still, from the very start, this book does not try to appeal to a horror audience. Why?

Narrative Archetypes

Naturally, the book’s content cannot be ignored, neither in upfront marketing nor when it comes to audience reactions. Many readers do see Edward as a controlling boyfriend and Bella as a woman who is coerced. None of the relationships in *Twilight* can be described as healthy. Jessica Taylor observes: “violence within this series is not isolated to the main protagonists; rather, it is a normalized behavior.”³⁴

Both relationships and individual characters are intentionally similar. They are archetypes presenting the story readers expect. The archetypes referred to relate to basic story-telling structures commonly used as marketing tools. This paper will concentrate on archetypes recognisably used in *Twilight* for the characters of Edward and Bella. These are different concepts from the Gothic genre figures, such as the Byronic Hero, but certain facets overlap.

²⁹ Crawford, *The Twilight of the Gothic*, 34.

³⁰ Crawford, *The Twilight of the Gothic*, 33.

³¹ Crawford, *The Twilight of the Gothic*, 37.

³² Crawford, *The Twilight of the Gothic*, 36.

³³ Crawford, *The Twilight of the Gothic*, 75.

³⁴ Taylor, “Romance and the Female Gaze,” 389.

For Edward, this paper will discuss *The Ruler* (exerting control) and *The Hero* (a loner who keeps going through obstacles).³⁵

For Bella, the archetypes discussed are *The Regular Guy/Gal* (trying to belong with a fear of standing out) and *The Innocent* (somebody who retains or renews faith). *The Explorer* (focussed on maintaining independence) will also be mentioned.³⁶

Archetypically Edward/Bella

Twilight presents readers with “[t]he roles of hero and worshipper [...] gendered male and female respectively,”³⁷ as readers would expect from a romance. Bella is ever adoring. Edward presents as Byronic Hero, the “‘ceaselessly brooding’ mysterious men, with a ‘tragedy in the past [...] embittering them forever.’”³⁸ Edward’s tragedy is his attraction to the one human girl he can barely resist killing. Like the Byronic Heroes before him, “he is prone to gloomy moods, bizarre and extravagant gestures, and sudden fits of rage.”³⁹

The Hero archetype in marketing is usually a courageous character, often used for its potential for positive change.⁴⁰ The Byronic Hero in literature embodies all the negative potential of this archetype. He is what happens when the hero “filters out useful criticism” and “just keeps going,”⁴¹ which is precisely what Edward does.

At the start of the story, he tries to ignore Bella, having decided his attraction to her will be fatal to one of them. Yet, he does not take any helpful action for change. He does not talk to his family. He does not permanently leave Forks. He does not hold his breath for any length of time. Crucially, readers only learn of his attempts for any of these examples in book five, *Midnight Sun*, published 15 years after *Twilight*, which reads like a reaction to readers’ feedback, such as pointing out the fact that Edward’s struggle to resist Bella’s scent could easily be resolved because vampires in *Twilight* do not need to breathe. If Edward wanted to avoid Bella’s apparently irresistible scent he could do so by holding his breath in her presence, but as Edward puts it, using patriarchal norms in his defence: “I may not be human, but I am a man.”⁴²

³⁵ Margaret Mark and Carol S. Pearson, *The Hero and the Outlaw* (McGraw-Hill, 2001), 13.

³⁶ Mark and Pearson, *The Hero and the Outlaw*, 13.

³⁷ Wilt, *Women Writers*, 6.

³⁸ Crawford, *The Twilight of the Gothic*, 24.

³⁹ Crawford, *The Twilight of the Gothic*, 33.

⁴⁰ Mark and Pearson, *The Hero and the Outlaw*, 110.

⁴¹ Mark and Pearson, *The Hero and the Outlaw*, 110/1.

⁴² Meyer, *Twilight*, 311.

Edward then ignores Rosalie's warnings about the danger his decisions could mean for the family. Finally, he keeps ignoring Bella's wishes, whether it is something she wants, like become a vampire, or something she does not want, like going to prom.

The same behaviour that marks Edward as a coercive controller also makes him a successful capitalist. Signs of the Cullens' material success are everywhere, which leads back to the marketing discussion, as organisations manifesting this problematic aspect of the hero archetype in marketing or work structure burn out their staff who are expected to keep going.⁴³ Edward works the same way, burning out Bella to the point where the human girl dies for the vampire she becomes. Edward as a character fits *The Hero*⁴⁴ archetype by embodying its negative aspects. While Edward is not a typical hero, a hero is what readers expect in a romance and *Twilight* delivers in a specific way.

Most characters fit more than one archetype and one that obviously fits Edward is *The Ruler*.⁴⁵ This archetype is about taking responsibility and putting procedures, policies and customs into place.⁴⁶ The more positive aspects of *The Ruler* archetype are embodied by Carlisle, the other *Ruler* in the Cullen clan. Edward's character once again embodies the negative aspects of the archetype. He always is or at least tries to be in control. His behaviour towards Bella is often controlling and Bella modifies her own behaviour to better suit Edward's needs. Yet, Edward does follow the societal model behaviour set by Carlisle, by living as "vegetarian vampire."

Again, there's a capitalist angle: "The Ruler as an archetype [...] helps individuals become wealthy, powerful, and established in [...] their communities,"⁴⁷ which readers see both in Carlisle and Edward. Carlisle is the head of the family, the only one who has created vampires before Bella, and a successful physician. Aside from his job, there are only hints that Alice's ability to see the future makes every investment a risk-free participation in capitalism, giving credit to Marx's assessment that capital ought to be regarded as a vampire.⁴⁸

This dichotomy demonstrates "how monstrosity is performative"⁴⁹ on multiple levels: Carlisle rules the Cullen clan but his behaviour consistently performs the "good vampire." In *Twilight*, as in other YA stories, "vampiric monstrosity is narrated as disconnected from vampirism itself."⁵⁰ Edward shows varying

⁴³ Mark and Pearson, *The Hero and the Outlaw*, 112.

⁴⁴ Mark and Pearson, *The Hero and the Outlaw*, 13.

⁴⁵ Mark and Pearson, *The Hero and the Outlaw*, 13.

⁴⁶ Mark and Pearson, *The Hero and the Outlaw*, 206.

⁴⁷ Mark and Pearson, *The Hero and the Outlaw*, 247.

⁴⁸ Karl Marx, *Das Kapital* (Kritik der politischen Ökonomie. Bd. 1, 1867).

⁴⁹ Eric Parisot, *Jane Austen and Vampires* (Palgrave Gothic, 2024), 17.

⁵⁰ Stasiewicz-Bieñkowska, "Love, Violence, and Consent," 1283.

performances by, on the one hand, following Carlisle's rules as a member of the family but, on the other hand, then setting his own rules for his relationship with Bella. This "blurring accentuates the flaws in vampiric existence."⁵¹

Edward's approach to performing monstrosity highlights another capitalist aspect of marketing theory visible in *Twilight*. A contemporary real-life *Ruler* brand is *Volvo*, which presents the car as both the responsible choice for passenger safety and a power-tool overcoming any obstacle.⁵² The brand is specifically mentioned as Edward's car of choice multiple times in the narrative. This is unlikely to be a coincidence. It functions as a material mirror of Edward's behaviour claiming to be chiefly concerned for Bella's safety, while controlling every aspect of her life.

The entire story shows capitalism's eternal growths principle: cars, fashion, even houses, are single-use items to the Cullens. Vampirism is the end-result of capitalism. Kelly Budruweit asserts: "the whole series could be read as a means of inducting women into consumer culture."⁵³

All actions by all characters are driven by loss aversion.⁵⁴ Bella's fear of losing Edward keeps her anxious at all times but with each developmental step she gets a reward that is accumulative in nature: relationship, marriage, motherhood, and, finally, her wish of becoming a vampire and, thus, literal eternity. Bella gains nothing short of perfection by following her own personal American dream.

Bella's daughter becomes the embodiment of the narrative's romance, as "we see less of the sublimity of horror and more of the gentleness of beauty in Renesmee."⁵⁵ Both, Bella and *Twilight* readers, can say in the end: "by closing our collective eyes against the blood and gore affiliated with the traditional vampire child and conveniently forgetting the pain of Bella's childbirth experience, [we] embrace a perfect, nearly-eternal child."⁵⁶

Despite its vampirism and the violence involved in creating it, the nuclear family model presented by Bella, Edward and Renesmee is the romance fiction anomaly that shows the "happily-ever-after part" before the narrative ends. The nuclear family is also the marker of proof that the story must be a romance, as

⁵¹ Sarah Olive, "'Vanguard Taste and Fashion Spirit': Feminist Responses to Twenty-First Century, Western Zeitgeist in Vampire Romeo and Juliet Texts," in *Young Adult Gothic Fiction: Monstrous Selves/Monstrous Others*, ed. Michelle J. Smith and Kristine Moruzi (University of Wales Press, 2021), 79.

⁵² Mark and Pearson, *The Hero and the Outlaw*, 248.

⁵³ Kelly Budruweit, "Twilight's Heteronormative Reversal of the Monstrous: Utopia and the Gothic Design," *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts* 27, no. 2 (2016): 284.

⁵⁴ Melina Palmer, *What Your Customer Wants and Can't Tell You: Unlocking Consumer Decisions With The Science Of Behavioral Economics* (Mango Publishing Group, 2021), Chapter 9.

⁵⁵ Lisa Nevárez, "What to Expect When You Are Expecting (a Vampire): Reading the Vampire Child," *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts* 26 no. 1 (2015): 108.

⁵⁶ Nevárez, "What to Expect," 108.

the common romance goal of the “happy nuclear family” is achieved within the narrative.⁵⁷ As wife and mother, Bella meets “the traditional markers for female maturity,”⁵⁸ albeit as a vampire.

In terms of marketing archetype, Bella is both *The Innocent* and *The Regular Gal*.⁵⁹ This might sound very obvious and, as such, it is easy to lose sight of the fact that this is indeed the crux to the story’s appeal to a wide range of audiences. Bella as *The Innocent* lives entirely in the present and has absolute “faith in authority,”⁶⁰ often that authority is Edward but whenever Bella believes herself to be right nobody can tell her otherwise; not her friends, her parent and not even Edward.

Edward claims to want Bella to be *The Explorer*⁶¹ (“I want you to be human.”⁶²). He is nearly the only one pushing Bella towards a human life experience, encouraging her to go to college. Rosalie later supports Bella’s experiencing pregnancy and motherhood. These things combine to make the character an appealing idea to a surprising audience. Bella’s embodiment of *The Innocent* goes hand in hand with *The Regular Gal* she sees herself as.

Her worst fear is standing out, though that is precisely what she does compared to average teenagers, when she runs the single-parent household for either parent, has an after-school job, keeps up with her school-work and maintains a fairly standard teenage social circle. *Twilight* again shows readers the problematic side of the archetype in Bella. *The Regular Gal/Guy* can become “the victim who is willing to be abused rather than be alone.”⁶³ The archetype seems to attract stalker behaviour, as the desire to blend in becomes the very detail that enables *The Ruler* archetype to remain in control. That is what readers see in *Twilight* and it is underpinned by Edward’s violent fantasies about Bella described in *Midnight Sun*. The characters of Edward and Bella fit the potential perpetrator and victim behaviour in the marketing archetypes described, “advancing a regressive attitude towards gender norms and romantic relationships.”⁶⁴

⁵⁷ Candace R. Benefiel, “Blood Relations: The Gothic Perversion of the Nuclear Family in Anne Rice’s *Interview with the Vampire*,” *The Journal of Popular Culture* 38, no. 2 (2004): 263–64, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0022-3840.2004.00111.x>.

⁵⁸ Jones, “Contemporary Bildungsromans,” 440.

⁵⁹ Mark and Pearson, *The Hero and the Outlaw*, 13.

⁶⁰ Mark and Pearson, *The Hero and the Outlaw*, 66.

⁶¹ Mark and Pearson, *The Hero and the Outlaw*, 13.

⁶² Meyer, *Twilight*, 495.

⁶³ Mark and Pearson, *The Hero and the Outlaw*, 169.

⁶⁴ Day, “Rock Star Rochester,” 112.

Why These Archetypes Work

Basic story-telling is key to understanding why these problematic characters appeal and why the book is labelled a romance: Stories showing “unfulfilled yearnings might lead people to respond on a deeper level to what’s missing”⁶⁵ in the readers’ own lives, be it romance, adventure or danger. *Twilight* appeals to a predominately female YA audience who see themselves as *The Regular Guy/Gal*. They may object to being considered *The Innocent* that is clearly part of the *Twilight* narrative but they often long to be *The Explorer*.

The adult readership is likely women looking for me-time escapism. This is a reader who already knows who she is. She is not looking for a reflection of herself. The story has to “speak to the person she wants to become.”⁶⁶ Women are likely to feel trivialized “when they encounter yet another portrayal of the overworked, frantic, wife-mother-career woman.”⁶⁷ In the words of William Hughes “there may be an element of wanting to preserve the gains of feminism – autonomy, confidence about sexuality, and so on – while, in fantasy, to relinquish some of the anxieties that autonomy can bring.”⁶⁸ This is embodied by Bella as a teenager who competently runs the household and keeps up with her school work, while emphasising her love-story above all.

When Bella falls pregnant, she becomes an uber-mother: from the first sign of her pregnancy to the final show-down with the Volturi she is the “good mother in Meyer’s novels [is] willing to sacrifice herself for her family.”⁶⁹ Bella is never a role model and rather than identifying with her, audiences tend to view Bella as a stand-in. Studies focussed on audience reception highlight that “Bella serves only as an avatar through which the audience can vicariously experience being the object of such intense desire.”⁷⁰ It seems audiences do not aspire to be Bella, they just want to escape into the fantasy of her world.

The romance label is applied to evoke associations of contemporary romance, namely “the story of the development of a love relationship between hero and heroine.”⁷¹ Readers choose books with expectations, based on their reading habits, which is what marketing utilises.⁷² The story then takes readers into a Gothic Novel type of romance. The marketing of the book simplifies choices into a targeted

⁶⁵ Mark and Pearson, *The Hero and the Outlaw*, 278.

⁶⁶ Mark and Pearson, *The Hero and the Outlaw*, 281.

⁶⁷ Mark and Pearson, *The Hero and the Outlaw*, 39.

⁶⁸ Hughes, “Demon Lovers.”

⁶⁹ Silver, “*Twilight* Is Not Good For Maidens,” 131.

⁷⁰ Tager and Nell, “A Vampire and a Damsel in Distress,” 87.

⁷¹ Crawford, *The Twilight of the Gothic*, 40.

⁷² Palmer, *What Your Customer Wants*, 180.

category.⁷³ Readers are not expected to be familiar with 600 years of literary history of Gothic Novels and romance stories.

The explanation of the toxic relationship is deemed too complex for readers to engage pre-purchase. If the potential readers' brains get overwhelmed⁷⁴ they will not pick up the book. Yet, the shorthand of "horror" would attract a different readership that is not the target audience. Marketing knows that people do not want to be judged and recognises safety in numbers as "Herding."⁷⁵ Teenagers are likely to read romance at some point. If one's peers read romance, not horror, one avoids standing out by not admitting to reading horror. A horror book branded as romance circumvents this, and the sub-genre of "paranormal romance" has lived in a liminal space since the 1980s.⁷⁶

Horror audiences, who might avoid romance, will happily read a controversial text, romance or not. The romance label in combination with the content means that *Twilight* does not have anything to lose in terms of attracting its primary as well as its secondary readership. Crawford states: "*Twilight* was controversial because of its success"⁷⁷ but it was also successful because it was and is controversial.

The narrative supports this as all romance markers are matched to a corresponding horror trope. For example, the nuclear family of Edward, Bella and Renesmee sits beside the Cullen clan overall, a vampire family that "isolated from human society by its extreme longevity and its essential otherness, becomes an intensely inwardly directed unit."⁷⁸ Bella's schoolmates point out that the Cullen kids do not mix with the rest of the school kids and that they are "together together," rather than siblings.

Horror readers who are not the target audience will come to the text because of the controversy. By choosing to market the book as romance, *Twilight* caters to "contemporary demands for conventional romantic narratives"⁷⁹ and, yet, its readers have been exposed to the potential of horror because *Twilight* does present a contemporary example of Gothic stories depicting problematic relationships with supernatural creatures.

Of course, readers as real people are more complex than simplified marketing categories. There is no "imaginary, wholly passive reader of *Twilight*."⁸⁰ Indeed, "fans are not the dribbling, insipid, Edward addicts they are often made out to be."⁸¹

⁷³ Palmer, *What Your Customer Wants*, 142.

⁷⁴ Palmer, *What Your Customer Wants*, 142.

⁷⁵ Palmer, *What Your Customer Wants*, 112.

⁷⁶ Crawford, *The Twilight of the Gothic*, 61.

⁷⁷ Crawford, *The Twilight of the Gothic*, 181.

⁷⁸ Benefiel, "Blood Relations," 263.

⁷⁹ Day, "Rock Star Rochester," 120.

⁸⁰ Silver, "*Twilight* Is Not Good For Maidens," 137.

⁸¹ Natalie Wilson, *Seduced by Twilight: The Allure and Contradictory Messages of the Popular Saga* (MacFarland, 2011), 2.

Thus, *Twilight* may, possibly by accident, have highlighted the toxicity of its narrative content and led readers away from romance towards horror and Gothic Novels where love “is just as likely to fail.”⁸² It is now both “a story of lovers”⁸³ and a “widely read Gothic fiction.”⁸⁴ For all that the narrative lacks “the transgressive [...] nature of the Gothic,” a romantic story that “upholds patriarchy”⁸⁵ is hardly unique across Gothic fiction.

The literary marriage of genres is more than “a twist which gives romance novels [...] a market advantage.”⁸⁶ It is only the beginning of the *Twilight* story in much the same way as the story of Edward and Bella’s relationship does not end with their wedding.⁸⁷ In the 21st century, “[t]he vampire, which used to indicate an alignment with the sub-cultural, after all, has conquered the mainstream.”⁸⁸ Stephenie Meyer does something not dissimilar to what Bram Stoker did with *Dracula*: the *Twilight* narrative utilises a multitude of details that evoke disgust “and keeps the reader engaged, attracted and repelled at the same time.”⁸⁹ As Mathias Clasen has observed with regard to *Dracula*: “As soon as disgust-elicitors are safely distanced, for example by being fictitious, they awaken curiosity as well as revolt.”⁹⁰

Thus, regardless of how many scholars or lay readers may complain about *Twilight*, it is and remains one of those stories that audiences love to hate.

References

- Bacon, Simon, ed. *The Palgrave Handbook of the Vampire*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2024.
- Benefiel, R. Candace. “Blood Relations: The Gothic Perversion of the Nuclear Family in Anne Rice’s *Interview with the Vampire*.” *The Journal of Popular Culture* 38, no. 2 (2004): 261–73. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0022-3840.2004.00111.x>.
- Budruweit, Kelly. (2016). “Twilight’s Heteronormative Reversal of the Monstrous: Utopia and the Gothic Design.” *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts* 27, no. 2 (2016): 270–89. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26321204>.
- Clasen, Mathias. “Attention, Predation, Counterintuition: Why Dracula Won’t Die.” *Style* 46, no. 3–4 (2012): 378–98. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5325/style.46.3-4.378>.

⁸² Crawford, *The Twilight of the Gothic*, 36.

⁸³ Wilt, *Women Writers*, 5.

⁸⁴ Wilt, *Women Writers*, 22.

⁸⁵ Lukić and Matek, *Bella and the Beast*, 85.

⁸⁶ Lukić and Matek, *Bella and the Beast*, 89.

⁸⁷ Silver, “*Twilight* Is Not Good For Maidens,” 123.

⁸⁸ Limpár, *Masculinity, Visibility*, 282.

⁸⁹ Mathias Clasen, “Attention, Predation, Counterintuition: Why Dracula Won’t Die.” *Style* 46, no. 3–4 (2012): 389.

⁹⁰ Clasen, “Attention, Predation, Counterintuition,” 389.

- Crawford, Joseph. *The Twilight of the Gothic? Vampire Fiction and the Rise of the Paranormal Romance*. University of Wales Press, 2014.
- Day, K. Sara. "Rock Star Rochester and Heart-Throb Heathcliff: The Problematic Redemption of the Byronic Hero in Recent Young Adult Retellings of Brontë Novels." In *Young Adult Gothic Fiction: Monstrous Selves/Monstrous Others*, edited by Michelle J. Smith and Kristine Moruzi. University of Wales Press, 2021.
- Gelder, Ken. *Reading the Vampire*. Routledge, 1994.
- Happel, Alison and Esposito, Jennifer. "Vampires, Vixens, and Feminists: An Analysis of *Twilight*", *Educational Studies* 46, no. 5 (2010): 524–531. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131946.2010.510411>.
- Hughes, William. "Demon Lovers: Embracing the Monster in Paranormal Romance." OGOM conference 2014 talk. <https://www.opengravesopenminds.com/critical-thoughts/bill-hughes-demon-lovers-embracing-the-monster-in-paranormal-romance/> (posted January 25, 2015; accessed February 27, 2025).
- Jones, Leisha. "Contemporary Bildungsromans and the Prosumer Girl." *Criticism* 53, no. 3 (2011): 439–69.
- Limpár, Ildikó. "Masculinity, Visibility, and the Vampire Literary Tradition in *What We Do in the Shadows*." *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts* 29, no. 2 (2018): 266–88. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26627624>.
- Lukić, Marko and Matek Ljubica. "Bella and the Beast: When Vampires Fall in Love, or the Twilight of a Genre." *Supernatural Studies* 1, no. 1 (2013): 80–92.
- Mark, Margaret and Carol S. Pearson. *The Hero and the Outlaw*. McGraw-Hill, 2001.
- Marx, Karl. *Das Kapital*. Kritik der politischen Ökonomie. Bd. 1, 1867.
- Meyer, Stephenie. *Twilight*. Atom Books, 2005.
- Meyer, Stephenie. *New Moon*. Hachette Digital, 2006.
- Meyer, Stephenie. *Eclipse*. Atom Books, 2007.
- Meyer, Stephenie. *Breaking Dawn*. Atom Books, 2008.
- Meyer, Stephenie. *Midnight Sun*. Atom Books, 2020.
- Nevárez, Lisa. "What to Expect When You Are Expecting (a Vampire): Reading the Vampire Child." *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts* 26 no. 1 (2015): 92–112. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26321082>.
- Ní Fhlainn, Sörcha. *Postmodern Vampires*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019.
- Olive, S. "'Vanguard Taste and Fashion Spirit': Feminist Responses to Twenty-First Century, Western Zeitgeist in Vampire Romeo and Juliet Texts." In *Young Adult Gothic Fiction: Monstrous Selves/Monstrous Others*, edited by Michelle J. Smith and Kristine Moruzi. University of Wales Press, 2021.
- Palmer, Melina. *What Your Customer Wants and Can't Tell You: Unlocking Consumer Decisions with the Science of Behavioral Economics*. Mango Publishing Group, 2021.
- Parisot, Eric. *Jane Austen and Vampires*. Palgrave Gothic, 2024.
- Rice, Anne. *The Vampire Lestat*. Ballantine Books, 1993.
- Silver, Anna. "*Twilight* Is Not Good for Maidens: Gender, Sexuality, and the Family in Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* Series." *Studies in the Novel* 42, no. 1/2 (2010): 121–38.

-
- Smith, Michelle J., and Kristine Moruzi, eds. *Young Adult Gothic Fiction: Monstrous Selves/ Monstrous Others*. University of Wales Press, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.2307/jj.14491645>.
- Tager, Michele and Lauren Nell. "A Vampire and a Damsel in Distress: A Postfeminist Analysis of Selected Female South African Viewers' Perceptions of the Romance Between Bella and Edward in the Film *Twilight* (2008)." *Communicare* 35, no. 1 (2016): 77–93. <https://doi.org/10.36615/jcsa.v35i1.1603>.
- Taylor, Jessica. "Romance and the Female Gaze Obscuring Gendered Violence in the *Twilight* Saga." *Feminist Media Studies* 14, no. 3 (2014): 388–402. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2012.740493>.
- Wilson, Natalie. *Seduced by Twilight: The Allure and Contradictory Messages of the Popular Saga*. MacFarland, 2011.
- Wilt, Judith. *Women Writers and the Hero of Romance*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2014.
- Wisnewski, J. Jeremy and Rebecca Housel, eds. *Twilight and Philosophy: Vampires, Vegetarians, and the Pursuit of Immortality*. Wiley, 2009.

Providence: Interpreting Charlotte Brontë's Depiction of God in *Jane Eyre*

Opatrzność: interpretacja obrazu Boga w Dziwnych losach Jane Eyre Charlotte Brontë

JOHN SCHAFF

john.m.schaff39@gmail.com
<https://orcid.org/0009-0004-5342-1260>

ABSTRACT

When *Jane Eyre* was first published in 1847, it was interpreted by many readers as an anti-Christian text. While this interpretation is less popular in today's scholarship it has not been entirely abandoned. Far from being actively opposed to Christianity, however, *Jane Eyre* is a fundamentally Christian work that explores the nature of God's love for human beings. Charlotte Brontë was a woman plagued all her life by fears of sinfulness and damnation, but she ultimately believed not in an exacting God of cruelty but in a loving God who wills the happiness of all people. Brontë wrote *Jane Eyre* in order to persuade her readers, and to some degree herself, to adopt this view of God.

Keywords: Charlotte Brontë; *Jane Eyre*; religion; God; gothic novel

ABSTRAKT

Kiedy powieść *Dziwne losy Jane Eyre* została opublikowana po raz pierwszy w 1847 roku, wielu czytelników odczytywało ją jako utwór antychrześcijański. Choć we współczesnych badaniach literackich interpretacja ta jest znacznie mniej rozpowszechniona, nie została całkowicie zarzucona. W rzeczywistości jednak *Jane Eyre* nie jest dziełem wymierzonym przeciw chrześcijaństwu, lecz utworem głęboko zakorzenionym w chrześcijańskiej wizji świata, podejmującym refleksję nad naturą Bożej miłości do człowieka. Charlotte Brontë przez całe życie zmagала się z lękiem przed grzesznością i potępieniem, ostatecznie jednak wierzyła nie w surowego i okrutnego Boga, lecz w Boga kochającego, który pragnie szczęścia wszystkich ludzi. Pisząc *Jane Eyre*, Brontë starała się przekonać swoich czytelników – a do pewnego stopnia także samą siebie – do przyjęcia takiego właśnie obrazu Boga.

Słowa kluczowe: Charlotte Brontë; *Jane Eyre*; religia; Bóg; powieść gotycka

Since its original publication in 1847, Charlotte Brontë's master work, *Jane Eyre*, has been the subject of much scholarship. One popular reading of the novel, which under close scrutiny proves to be immensely problematic, is that *Jane Eyre* is an anti-Christian manifesto. While Brontë certainly criticized certain types of Christians throughout her novel, *Jane Eyre*, far from being a wholesale rejection of Christianity, is actually a fundamentally Christian text. In writing *Jane Eyre*, Charlotte Brontë depicted a very specific view of God as a loving deity who actively desires the happiness of humans. This interpretation of the text is complicated, though not invalidated, by primary sources that indicate Brontë was obsessed with sin and viewed God as cold and merciless. The solution to the seeming contradiction is to recognize that Brontë feared that God was vengeful but did not actually believe Him to be so. If this is true, it implies that *Jane Eyre* was an immensely personal work for Brontë. Additionally, while the biographical details do support the reading of *Jane Eyre* as a Christian depiction of a loving God, it is even more important to consider the textual evidence, which overwhelmingly supports this thesis.

In order to explore the role that God plays in *Jane Eyre*, it is important to first address the theory that the novel was intended by Brontë to be a rejection of Christianity. Andrew Weiler puts it succinctly when he says that "[i]t has been argued that *Jane Eyre* is naught but rebellion and rage."¹ The strongest textual evidence for an anti-Christian reading of *Jane Eyre* can be found in the character of Mr. Brocklehurst and in Lowood, the all-girls school that he runs. When Jane first meets Mr. Brocklehurst, she describes him as "a black pillar... the straight, narrow, sable-clad shape standing erect on the rug; the grim face at the top was like a carved mask."² Brontë clearly depicts Brocklehurst as a grim figure, a specter of judgement and unhappiness. He does nothing to endear himself to the reader when he tells Jane that there is "no sight so sad as that of a naughty child... especially a naughty little girl" and explains that he "buried a little child of five years old only a day or two since – a good little child, whose soul is now in heaven. It is to be feared the same could not be said of you, were you to be called hence."³ Brocklehurst is clearly not interested at all in helping Jane find happiness or fulfillment in this life or in the next. He is more interested in using the fear of damnation as a means of control. This is a scathing depiction of religious hypocrisy amongst the clergy, and as Marianne Thormahlen notes, "[a]ny criticism against the conduct of clergymen... expressed in the Brontë novels has always been interpreted as a more or less covert

¹ Andrew J. Weiler, "An Orphan's Dissent: Charlotte Brontë's Spiritual Vision in *Jane Eyre*," *Brontë Studies* 47, no. 4 (2022): 224, EBSCOhost.

² Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre* (1847. Penguin Classics, 2006), 38.

³ Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 39–40.

repudiation of the Christian faith.”⁴ Thormahlen’s claim that this is “always” the case is inaccurate, but it is certainly sometimes the case. For instance, Elizabeth Rigby, a contemporary of Brontë, complained in a review that “*Jane Eyre* is pre-eminently an anti-Christian composition.”⁵ The idea is that if Brontë believes the leaders of the church are corrupt, she must also believe that the church they lead is corrupt.

Young Jane’s reaction to Mr. Brocklehurst provides some justification for this theory. A fierce and independent youngster, she rebels against Brocklehurst’s attempts to subjugate her, and his warnings about sin and hell prove to be counterproductive. Jane lashes out in anger against Mrs. Reed, her abusive aunt who has charge of her, declaring that she loves neither her nor her children. This is a very anti-Christian sentiment, of course, and when Jane explains that “[i]t was the hardest battle I had fought, and the first victory I had gained... I smiled to myself and felt elate,”⁶ her rejection of Christian teaching is framed as a triumph rather than a moral failure. In fact, Jane consciously rejects Christianity as a whole shortly after arriving at Lowood. A girl around her age named Helen Burns encourages her to accept the teachings of Jesus and to love her enemies, and Jane responds by saying, “[t]hen I should love Mrs. Reed, which I cannot do: I should bless her son John, which is impossible.”⁷ Jane is not interested in a religion which would fetter her and force her to forgive her aunt, and when the reader considers the many abuses she suffered at the hands of the Reeds, including but not limited to being physically battered and called “less than a servant,”⁸ her decision seems justified. In young Jane’s mind, Christianity is nothing more than a tool for control and a justification for abuse, and Charlotte Brontë certainly saw this side of Christianity in her own life. John Maynard argues that Brontë was disturbed by her father’s “use of hell as a threat to sinners” and the fact that he sent his four eldest daughters “to the school for clergymen’s daughters at Cowan Bridge” where “the two eldest died from fever and, Charlotte clearly felt, mismanagement and Christian sadism.”⁹ It is possible that Brontë chose to depict in Jane the same frustrations that she herself had with Christianity, and perhaps critics like Rigby were right to regard *Jane Eyre* as an anti-Christian text.

⁴ Marianne Thormählen, “Clergymen in the Brontë Novels,” in *The Brontës and Religion* (Cambridge University Press, 2009), 7.

⁵ Quoted in John Peters, “‘We Stood at God’s Feet, Equal’: Equality, Subversion, and Religion in *Jane Eyre*,” *Brontë Studies* 29, no. 1 (2013): 53, EBSCOhost.

⁶ Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 45.

⁷ Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 69.

⁸ Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 13, 15.

⁹ John Maynard, “The Brontës and Religion,” in *The Cambridge Companion to The Brontës*, ed. Heather Glen (Cambridge University Press, 2006), 196.

Jane's initial rejection of Christianity cannot be interpreted in a vacuum, however, and careful readers will recognize that her rebellion against religion is short-lived. Mr. Brocklehurst is removed from his station at Lowood, and Jane benefits from Miss Temple's tutelage, which allows her to grow into a Christian adult. This change of heart is exemplified by her attempt to reconcile with Mrs. Reeds. As a child, it was her hatred of the Reeds that led her to reject Christianity, but when Mrs. Reeds is on her death bed, Jane goes to be with her. Mrs. Reeds hates Jane as much as ever, but Jane finds that she no longer hates the old woman. Instead of repaying her aunt's hatred with more hatred as she would have when she was a child, Jane says to her, "Love me, then, or hate me, as you will... you have my full forgiveness: ask now for God's, and be at peace."¹⁰ Jane embraces Christianity, but of course the protagonist of a story does not always adhere perfectly to the views promoted by the author. Perhaps by forgiving a woman undeserving of forgiveness, Jane was simply bowing under the pressure of an oppressive religion exemplified by the character of Mr. Brocklehurst. Such a view can be disproven by looking at Brontë's direct address in the preface to the second edition of *Jane Eyre* to those who feel that Mr. Brocklehurst is meant to be interpreted as a proof that Christianity is evil:

I would suggest to such doubters certain obvious distinctions; I would remind them of certain simple truths. Conventionality is not morality. Self-righteousness is not religion. To attack the first is not to assail the last. To pluck the mask from the face of the Pharisee, is not to lift an impious hand to the Crown of Thorns.¹¹

What Brontë means by this is that Mr. Brocklehurst represents a specific kind of hypocritical Christian, not Christianity in its entirety. She agrees that Christianity can be used to justify certain oppressive practices, but in her view, the individual should be condemned, not the religion. Jane's decision to forgive Mrs. Reed is an explicit acceptance of Christianity in its purest form rather than of Christianity as it is conceived of by Mr. Brocklehurst.

Jane's time at Lowood is a more direct rebuttal of Mr. Brocklehurst's style of Christianity. Mr. Brocklehurst's vision of the school is very austere and devoid of opportunity for sin. He describes his plan in detail while reprimanding Miss Temple, the woman in charge of the school, for serving the girls bread and cheese for lunch in place of horribly burned porridge:

¹⁰ Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 276.

¹¹ Quoted in Emily Griesinger, "Charlotte Brontë's Religion: Faith, Feminism, and *Jane Eyre*," *Christianity & Literature* 58, no. 1 (2008): 33, EBSCOhost.

[My] plan in bringing up these girls is, not to accustom them to habits of luxury and indulgence, but to render them hardy, patient, self-denying. Should any little accidental disappointment of the appetite occur, such as the spoiling of a meal, the under or the over dressing of a dish, the incident ought not be neutralized by replacing with something more delicate the comfort lost, thus pampering the body and obviating the aim of this institution; it ought to be improved to the spiritual edification of the pupils, by encouraging them to evince fortitude under the temporary privation.¹²

This paragraph is particularly important to consider because there is biographical evidence suggesting that Brontë actually favors this strict asceticism. Mr. Brocklehurst is clearly depicted as cruel and hypocritical, and while that indicates that the reader is supposed to be suspicious of his personal views, it does not guarantee that Brontë intended for them to be rejected wholesale. Brontë was obsessed with sin, and she once wrote to a friend, stating that she hoped to “become better... than my evil wandering thoughts, my corrupt heart, cold to the spirit, and warm to the flesh will now permit me to be.”¹³ No existing evidence suggests that Brontë was a particularly sinful person, and this quote indicates a severe level of self-loathing. It is thus reasonable to assume that she saw God as a cold figure, quick to punish the smallest of sins and hesitant to offer any mercy. Emily Griesinger supports this theory, stating that “the evidence suggests that Brontë spent an unhealthy amount of time obsessing over her sins and hardly any time enjoying God’s forgiveness, love, and grace.”¹⁴ Based on these details, it seems Brontë would approve of the rejection of earthly pleasures as described by Brocklehurst. After all, the more austere a person’s lifestyle, the less opportunity a “corrupt heart, cold to the spirit, and warm to the flesh” has to commit sins.¹⁵ But Brontë does not approve of Mr. Brocklehurst’s form of asceticism. Instead, the meal of porridge is described as “abominable” and “disgusting,”¹⁶ language that makes clear the food is more harmful than beneficial. What is more, the meal of bread and cheese that replaces the porridge causes a “high delight and refreshment of the whole school.”¹⁷ The meal is not a fleeting and corrupt pleasure but rather a generous gift that restores the souls of the tired and hungry girls of Lowood. Not only does Brontë not condemn earthly pleasures, but she also shows that they can sometimes be good for the soul.

¹² Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 74–75.

¹³ Quoted in Griesinger, *Charlotte Brontë’s Religion*, 33.

¹⁴ Griesinger, *Charlotte Brontë’s Religion*, 42.

¹⁵ Griesinger, *Charlotte Brontë’s Religion*, 42.

¹⁶ Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 54–55.

¹⁷ Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 57.

A certain dichotomy is developing between the Charlotte Brontë who writes to her friend about her intense fears of the sins of the flesh and the Charlotte Brontë who celebrates simple pleasures as a spiritual good. There is no reason to believe that they were literally different people, that the authorship of either the letters or *Jane Eyre* was misattributed, so there must be some way to reconcile the two seemingly contradictory views of sin and pleasure held by Brontë. It seems possible that Brontë suffered from scrupulosity, which can be defined as follows:

Scrupulosity is a psychological disorder primarily characterized by pathological guilt or obsession associated with moral or religious issues that is often accompanied by compulsive moral or religious observance and is highly distressing and maladaptive.¹⁸

Scrupulosity, a mental illness, is not the same thing as a religious conviction. Brontë could have suffered from a pathological fear that God hated her for her sins while also believing rationally that God is merciful and loving. This theory gains even more credence when one considers how difficult it is for someone with a mental illness to distinguish between fears spawned by a psychological condition and beliefs based on a genuine understanding of reality. She could have oscillated between a crippling fear of damnation and faith in God's mercy without realizing why. While it can be difficult and at times misleading to try and diagnose historical figures with mental illnesses, and this theory of a literary critic should not be conflated with the professional opinion of a trained psychologist, it seems likely that Brontë's fears and beliefs were meaningfully distinct.

Brontë does not merely ignore her overactive fear of sin in writing *Jane Eyre*, but actively rejects it. This can be seen clearly in the way that she depicts the character of St. John Rivers. In her essay on *Jane Eyre*, Kristi Sexton describes the young man as "cold" and "aloof," and she explains that "Jane associates his religion with the same dogma as Mr. Brocklehurst."¹⁹ Like Brocklehurst, St. John has a harsh and constricting religion which he uses to try and control Jane. In an attempt to convince her to become his missionary wife, he all but tells her that she will go to hell if she refuses him:

'[D]o not forget that if you reject it, it is not me you deny, but God. Through my means, He opens to you a noble career; as my wife only can you enter upon it. Refuse to be my wife, and you limit yourself for ever to a track of selfish ease and barren obscurity. Tremble

¹⁸ Chris H. Miller and Dawson W. Hedges, "Scrupulosity Disorder: An Overview and Introductory Analysis," *Journal of Anxiety Disorders* 22, no. 6 (2008): 1042, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.janx-dis.2007.11.004>.

¹⁹ Kristi Sexton, "Jane Eyre: Jane's Spiritual Coming of Age," *Brontë Studies* 39, no. 3 (2014): 184, EBSCOhost.

lest in that case you should be numbered with those who have denied the faith, and are worse than infidels!’²⁰

St. John truly believes that this is the best if not the only way for Jane to get to heaven, and that if she rejects his offer to be his wife, she will be gravely sinning. In the face of this threat of hell, the scrupulous person would crumble under the weight of fear, and while Jane is indeed tempted to accept him, she ultimately refuses to become his wife. Through the character of Jane, Charlotte Brontë consciously rejects the rigid and morally exacting view of religion held by St. John Rivers. Whether or not she understood why she was plagued by religious fears, Charlotte Brontë seems to recognize that they are disordered. *Jane Eyre* may have been more than simply another book for Brontë and could have been in part a therapeutic project for her.

Charlotte Brontë rejects the idea that God is a vicious taskmaster, but she does not go so far as to say that He has no plan for His children. In fact, she reveals that she believes firmly in Providence, “the idea that God has a purpose and plan, that God rewards obedience, if not in this life then in the next.”²¹ Throughout the text, both Jane and Rochester explicitly express their belief in Providence. When Jane discovers Bertha, Rochester’s mad wife, her belief is shaken, though not necessarily shattered. She explains:

Yesterday I trusted well in Providence, and believed that events were working together for your good and mine: it was a fine day, if you recollect – the calmness of the air and sky forbade apprehensions respecting your safety or comfort on your journey.²²

Later in the novel, however, even after all the tragedies both characters experience, Rochester speaks of a plan that God seems to have had for their lives:

Of late, Jane – only of late – I began to see and acknowledge the hand of God in my doom. I began to experience remorse, repentance, the wish for reconciliation to my Maker. I began sometimes to pray: very brief prayers they were, but very sincere.²³

While both the characters struggle to believe that God has a plan, they ultimately come to match Brontë’s faith in divine Providence. Regardless of what the characters do or do not believe, clearly supernatural events throughout the course of the novel indicate God’s active participation in the happenings of the world. The clearest

²⁰ Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 471.

²¹ Griesinger, *Charlotte Brontë’s Religion*, 46.

²² Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 323.

²³ Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 514–515.

example of this is the moment Rochester and Jane hear each other's voices, despite being nowhere near each other. Just as Jane is about to accept St. John's proposal against her better judgment, she hears "a known, loved, well-remembered voice... that of Edward Fairfax Rochester" cry out, "Jane! Jane! Jane!"²⁴ She goes out immediately and finds Rochester, and he tells her that the night she heard his voice, he had "supplicated God, that, if it seemed good to Him, I might soon be taken from this life, and admitted to that world to come, where there was still hope of rejoining Jane."²⁵ It is clear that it did not seem good to God to do this, because His plan was for Jane and Rochester to be rejoined in this world.

Brontë does not depict God's plan as an easy road towards happiness, and she shows that it can be difficult and even painful to follow. When Jane discovers that the man she loves is secretly married to a woman he has been hiding in his attic, she has no easy choices. Emily Griesinger explains that "it would have been impossible at the time of the novel for Rochester to divorce his mad wife under any circumstances... So for Jane (and Victorian readers) the only alternative is bigamy and / or adultery."²⁶ For Jane, who recognizes that the pleasure of sin "stings" and "tastes bitter,"²⁷ neither of these options is acceptable, but the alternative, leaving Rochester, is also undesirable. According to Sexton, "Jane knows her decision to leave is the morally right one; however, she has no desire to leave, and she is consumed with grief over hurting Rochester."²⁸ Caught between a rock and a hard place, Jane has to make a decision, and her choice is to leave Rochester. The decision is difficult, but she finds the strength to follow through with it only because she believes it is God's will. Jane recollects her immediate reaction after discovering the existence of Bertha, saying, "[o]ne idea only still throbbed life-like within me – a remembrance of God: it begot an unuttered prayer: these words went wandering up and down in my rayless mind... 'Be not far from me, for trouble is near: there is none to help.'"²⁹ While her faith in God and His will does not make her decision any less painful, it does give her the strength to do what she knows to be right.

Jane's flight from Thornfield seems to be the end of her life and the worst thing to have ever happened to her, and if the story ended here, it would not invalidate the claim that the God of *Jane Eyre* has a plan for humans, but it would certainly invalidate the claim that it is His plan for them to be happy. Gradually, though, it becomes clear that this tribulation was necessary for Jane as well as for Rochester to be truly happy together. For one thing, it removes both Jane and Rochester from

²⁴ Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 483.

²⁵ Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 515.

²⁶ Griesinger, *Charlotte Brontë's Religion*, 48.

²⁷ Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 160.

²⁸ Sexton, *Jane's Spiritual Coming of Age*, 183.

²⁹ Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 342.

great temptations to sin long enough for them to grow in virtue. For Jane, her temptation is to worship Rochester as a strange idol in place of God. During her engagement to Rochester, Jane notes:

My future husband was becoming to me my whole world; and more than the world: he stood between me and every thought of religion, as an eclipse intervenes between man and the broad sun. I could not, in those days, see God for His creature: of whom I had made an idol.³⁰

The language implies that in some manner she has forgotten about God, which is why it is so significant that when her marriage to Rochester becomes impossible, she states that she has the “remembrance” of God.³¹ Rochester’s temptation is to rely on Jane’s faith and purity rather than on God’s love and mercy, as evidenced by his claim that, as a result of his engagement to her, he is “healed and cleansed, with a very angel as my comforter.”³² Once Jane leaves him, Rochester is forced to eventually turn to God and develop a personal relationship with Him. After Jane returns to Rochester, he prays directly to God, saying, “I humbly entreat my Redeemer to give me strength to lead henceforth a purer life than I have done hitherto!”³³ This conversion would have been impossible had Jane remained in his life. Brontë uses symbolism to further make clear this point. During Jane’s absence from Thornfield, a terrible fire destroys one of Rochester’s hands and one of his eyes. Andrew Weiler connects this directly to a passage from the Sermon on the Mount:³⁴

If your hand or your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life maimed or crippled than to have two hands or two feet and be thrown into eternal fire. And if your eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into the fire of hell.³⁵

Brontë shows how Rochester losing Jane is the spiritual equivalent of him losing his hand and eye, which while temporarily painful lead ultimately to his

³⁰ Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 316.

³¹ Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 342.

³² Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 300.

³³ Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 516.

³⁴ Weiler, *An Orphan’s Dissent*, 225.

³⁵ Matthew 18:8–9 (NIV), in *The Bible*. New International Version (Zondervan Bible Publishers, 1978).

betterment. If Jane is not in his life, he cannot substitute her holiness for an actual relationship with God.

While a reader might be tempted to think that Rochester and Jane could have overcome their personal temptations without needing to first part from each other or even that it is selfish of God to make them suffer simply so that they will love Him more, there are a great many other things that happen as a result of their separation that make the two much happier individuals and eventually a happier couple. Jane learns a great deal about herself as well as about God that brings her much joy. After leaving Rochester, she is left destitute and without family, so her only option is to throw herself upon the mercy of others. This eventually brings her to the doorstep of St. John Rivers. She is initially turned away by the housekeeper, but when St. John finds her, he welcomes her into the house that soon becomes her home. St. John has two sisters, Diana and Mary, whom Jane immediately recognizes as kindred spirits:

The more I knew of the inmates of Moor House, the better I liked them. In a few days I had so far recovered my health that I could sit up all day, and walk out sometimes. I could join with Diana and Mary in all their occupations; converse with them as much as they wished, and aid them when and where they would allow me. There was a reviving pleasure in this intercourse, of a kind now tasted by me for the first time – the pleasure arising from perfect congeniality of tastes, sentiments, and principles.³⁶

The three women develop a deep friendship like nothing Jane has ever experienced, and it brings her great happiness. She never would have met these women had God allowed her marriage to Rochester to proceed unhindered. This could be interpreted as a mere happy coincidence rather than the result of divine Providence, but there is evidence to the contrary. During her time at Moor House, Jane learns that she is both a rich heiress and that she is related closely to the Rivers. She is pleased to learn of the fortune, but even more pleased to learn that her closest friends are in fact her family. Jane tells St. John that “[i]t may be of no moment to you; you have sisters and don’t care for a cousin; but I had nobody; and now three relations... are born into my world full-grown. I say again, I am glad!”³⁷ The likelihood that Jane would accidentally stumble upon her family while wondering aimlessly, and, furthermore, that they would welcome her despite her status as a stranger and not turn her away like the housekeeper tried to do are far too low to be the result of mere chance. Brontë is not so heavy-handed as to say directly that this is the result of Providence, but it seems clear that God allowed

³⁶ Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 402.

³⁷ Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 445.

Jane to be separated from Rochester and then led her to the doorstep of St. John so that she might know the joy of having blood relations.

Jane and Rochester's relationship is improved by the spiritual growth they both undergo while apart from each other. During their first engagement, both characters have unhealthy expectations that put a strain on their relationship. Rochester's image of what married life will be like is overly erotic, which does not sit well with Jane. In one passage, Rochester explains that he would "not exchange this one little English girl for the Grand Turk's whole seraglio – gazelle-eyes, houri forms, and all!"³⁸ Jane's response to this is not favorable:

The Eastern allusion bit me again. 'I'll not stand you an inch in the stead of a seraglio,' I said; 'so don't consider me an equivalent for one. If you have a fancy for anything in that line, away with you, sir, to the bazaars of Stamboul without delay, and lay out in extensive slave-purchases some of that spare cash you seem at a loss to spend satisfactorily here.'³⁹

Rochester alienates Jane by viewing his relationship with her in terms of sinful lust rather than in mutual, self-giving love. For her part, Jane struggles to commit herself completely to her relationship with Rochester, always holding her heart just out of his reach for fear that their love will hurt her in some way. When he says to her that she is "[s]oon to be Jane Rochester," she startles, telling him that "It can never be, sir... Human beings never enjoy complete happiness in this world."⁴⁰ Her fears that she and Rochester will be unhappy together, which seem to stem at least in some degree from a distrust in God's Providence, are self-fulfilling. In order to be content with each other, both characters need to experience growth. The suffering that Rochester endures while apart from Jane sobers and humbles him, and when he speaks to her, his tenderness for her is no longer tainted by selfish desires. He says to her, "I did not like to put my hand into a hireling's fingers, but it is pleasant to feel it circled by Jane's little fingers... Jane's soft ministry will be a perpetual joy."⁴¹ This is much more pleasing to Jane than his comparison of her to a harem, and she gladly tells him that he suits her "[t]o the finest fibre of my nature."⁴² For Jane, she has come to realize that God wants her to be happy in this life, which allows her to write the beautiful words, "Reader, I married him."⁴³ There is no more indication of fear and of doubt. She has fully accepted Rochester because she has fully accepted God's Providence. Symbolically, Brontë shows that their relationship

³⁸ Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 310.

³⁹ Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 310.

⁴⁰ Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 298.

⁴¹ Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 513.

⁴² Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 513.

⁴³ Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 517.

is experiencing rebirth by having Rochester declare that “[t]he third day from this must be our wedding-day.”⁴⁴ This is clearly a biblical allusion to the resurrection of Christ. On account of the separation that the two characters endured, they have both become healthier and therefore happier together, proving that God’s plan all along was for them to be as happy as they would allow themselves to be.

While there is some textual evidence that *Jane Eyre* is anti-Christian, such as Brontë’s clear disdain for Mr. Brocklehurst, careful reading reveals that she was rejecting religious hypocrisy rather than Christianity as a whole. This reading is supported by Jane’s eventual acceptance of Christianity, and it is held by a variety of contemporary scholars, including Emily Greisinger and Andrew Weiler.⁴⁵ A more serious source of tension in attempting to understand *Jane Eyre* lies in the dichotomy between Brontë’s obsession with sin and the depiction in her novel of a loving and merciful God. It is difficult to understand why Brontë would have written an entire novel promoting the idea that God actively works to bring humans towards happiness if she was also deathly afraid that any little mistake would cause God to send her to eternal damnation. While it is impossible to know for certain what was in her heart and mind, one possible solution to this problem is that she suffered from scrupulosity, a mental illness that burdens a person with irrational fears of sin that may not align with that person’s actual beliefs about God. In *Jane Eyre*, Brontë rebels against these scrupulous tendencies. By showing the way that God uses suffering to bring Jane and Rochester greater happiness, Brontë proves that she believes more deeply in a God of love than of vengeance. Brontë has a nuanced view of Christianity and recognizes the existence of hypocrisy and abuse, but anyone who regards *Jane Eyre* as a rejection of Christianity is missing the point. The novel is a deeply personal struggle between two different views of Christianity and of God. In *Jane Eyre*, Brontë decides that God is not “a black pillar”⁴⁶ like Mr. Brocklehurst but more like the kindhearted Miss Temple who gave Jane bread and cheese in place of burned porridge.

References

- Brontë, Charlotte. *Jane Eyre*. 1847. Penguin Classics, 2006.
- Griesinger, Emily. “Charlotte Brontë’s Religion: Faith, Feminism, and *Jane Eyre*.” *Christianity & Literature* 58, no. 1 (2008): 29–59. EBSCOhost.
- Maynard, John. “The Brontës and Religion.” In *The Cambridge Companion to The Brontës*, edited by Heather Glen. Cambridge University Press, 2006.

⁴⁴ Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 514.

⁴⁵ See Greisinger, *Charlotte Brontë’s Religion*, 33–34 and Weiler, *An Orphan’s Dissent*, 232.

⁴⁶ Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 38.

- Miller, Chris H., and Dawson W. Hedges. "Scrupulosity Disorder: An Overview and Introductory Analysis." *Journal of Anxiety Disorders* 22, no. 6 (2008): 1042–58. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.janxdis.2007.11.004>.
- Peters, John. "'We Stood at God's Feet, Equal': Equality, Subversion, and Religion in *Jane Eyre*." *Brontë Studies* 29, no. 1 (2013): 53–64. EBSCOhost.
- Sexton, Kristi. "Jane Eyre: Jane's Spiritual Coming of Age." *Brontë Studies* 39, no. 3 (2014): 178–86. EBSCOhost.
- The Bible*. New International Version, Zondervan Bible Publishers, 1978.
- Thormählen, Marianne. "Clergymen in the Brontë Novels." In *The Brontës and Religion*. Cambridge University Press, 2009.
- Weiler, Andrew J. "An Orphan's Dissent: Charlotte Brontë's Spiritual Vision in *Jane Eyre*." *Brontë Studies* 47, no. 4 (2022): 223–36. EBSCOhost.

JACEK CHROBACZYŃSKI

ORCID: 0000-0001-7896-2494
chrobaczynski@poczta.onet.pl

Mirosław Maciorowski, *Powstańcy i realiści. Historia opowiedziana na nowo*, Wydawnictwo Agora, Warszawa 2025 (1251 s.). Spojrzenie osobiste. Kilka najważniejszych uwag

Mirosław Maciorowski, Insurgents and Realists: History Retold, Agora Publishing House, Warsaw 2025 (1251 pp.). A Personal Perspective: Several Key Observations

Czytałem solidnie tę pracę przez dwa miesiące. Czasem ważny był powrót do niektórych fraz, spostrzeżeń. Czasem pytania. Sporo pytań. Nie sporządzałem notatek, bo lektura miała być nadobowiązkowa, bardziej dla higieny umysłu, a nie do publikacji. Uznałem jednak, że ta świetna pozycja ma prawo zaistnieć w szerszej czytelniczej, i nie tylko, perspektywie.

Ważna konstatacja: to lektura wymagająca, ale zarazem wciągająca, by nie powiedzieć emocjonująca czytelniczo. I to z kilku powodów: nie jest to monografia, także nie synteza, choć podtytuł jest dość prowokujący. Kluczem bowiem pozostają wywiady z historykami, przeprowadzone przez autora pomysłu i realizacji – czynny udział pytającego, z refleksją osobistą, a niekiedy wręcz prowokującą (świetny, czytany historyk), pozostaje stałą regułą. To atut całości. Niektórzy z autorów „przepytowani” byli dwukrotnie, bo tak układała się sekwencja problematyki i ich badawczych specjalizacji. Spoglądając nieco szerzej, interlokutorami pozostaje tu plejada świetnych badaczy. Kolejny atut.

Pierwsze zdanie wstępu zdecydowanie oddaje istotę, ale i przesłanie całości: „Spory o polskie powstania się nie skończą. I nie powinny, bo jest się o co spierać”¹.

¹ Mirosław Maciorowski, *Powstańcy. Marzyciele i realiści* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Agora, 2025), 15.

Czy to nie przypadkiem zasadnicza oś polsko-polskiego przypadku spoglądania na XIX-wieczny i XX-wieczny proces historyczny? Z ważnym pytaniem, które również się pojawia niemal w każdej rozmowie (zresztą tradycyjnie polskie): bić się czy nie bić?

Czy to polsko-polska „tożsamość”? Może „specyficzny patriotyzm”? – dopytuje jeszcze autor². Taki rodzaj wręcz wybuchowej mieszanki, przekładańca – klęska, bitewny pył i poetycka, romantyczna strofa. Postawa martyrologii, ofiary, a zazwyczaj „przegranego zwycięzcy”. Czy to oś spoglądania na polsko-polski, ale z uwzględnieniem dziejów powszechnych, proces/zjawisko historycznego myślenia? Pochodna historycznej narracji, edukacji, a może tylko tzw. polityki historycznej? Nie nauki historycznej i jej edukacyjnej funkcji, a polityki. Wszak tzw. polityka historyczna to nie nauka, a odmiana polityki. Polityki zawłaszczającej tryby procesu historycznego, historycznej narracji. Z konsekwencją historycznego politykierstwa, a nie nauki.

Wreszcie – czy to skala zbiorowości, czy raczej części konstytucyjnego „my naród”?³ Skaza badawcza, ofiarny czyn, śmierć, mogiła (mogiłki). Ileż tego w poezji, która też edukuje?

Wiersz o powstaniu, obraz powstańczy, to strofy dat znanych, znaczących, pamiętanych. Łącznie z narodowym hymnem. Raz „wstąpił na działo”⁴, a tuż obok sporo o powstańczych trupach (młodych) z 1944 roku⁵.

Autor wstępu akcentuje: „chcemy czy nie, duch powstań zawsze nas dopada”. Bywa nawet obecny przy codziennych i świątecznych stołach, rodzinnych rocznicach: powstańcza pieśń, rota przysięgi, tradycyjna przestroga: „Nie będzie...”.

To niemal jak prawniczy *casus* – stale przypominany, wypominany, przekazywany – pamięć, ale i już postpamięć.

Następstwo to społeczna część powstań, rewolucji, rewolty, zamachów – nazwiska, bohaterowie, ofiary. W tle zazwyczaj „niepodległość Polski”. Znowu *casus* – zabory, zaborcy, „Priwińslińskij Kraj”, ale już mniej o przyczynach upadku państwa, o *liberum veto*, wolnej elekcji, przypominającej pokerową rozgrywkę z workami pieniędzy „dla wyboru”? To też, jak chce socjolog/historyk, „fantomowe ciało króla” itd. Sporo więc tego „za i przeciw”. A to już problem/problemy, dyskurs, wspomniany spór – edukacja.

I dochodzimy do sedna projektu: „To książka o ludziach, którzy je [powstania] wywołali, marząc o niepodległej Polsce”. Byłoby z pewnością inaczej w procesie historycznym, gdyby w 1795 roku nie zapisano: *Finis Poloniae*. Z pewnością. Jednak „gdybanie” nie przystoi nauce historycznej, stąd powstania, rewolty, ludzie

² Maciorowski, *Powstańcy*, 15.

³ Por. Konstytucja Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej z 2 kwietnia 1997 r. Preambuła.

⁴ Zbiory własne: Adam Mickiewicz, *Reduta Ordona*.

⁵ Maciorowski, *Powstańcy*, 15.

„wywołujący”, ofiary (*Rozdziobią nas kruki, wrony*), klęski, czerń popowstaniowa. Także rocznice, groby, nabożeństwa. Intrygująca sekwencja emocji klęskowo-pokłękowych. W patriotycznym uniesieniu i poetyckiej zwrotce, powstańczej pieśni.

Lektura dowodzi też jeszcze jednego zjawiska, ważnego w procesie historycznym – pokoleniowości. Wszak w dyskursie bywa, że nie zawsze uznaje się pokoleniowość jako ważne ogniwo spoglądania na *social history*, ale uznaję, że pokoleniowość to ważny wskaźnik „czytający” tę społeczną historię. Także wyjaśniający. Szczególnie zaś nazwiskowa pokoleniowość, co wyraziście wybrzmiewa w tej pracy.

Autor wstępu też dodaje: „Powstańcy. Marzyciele i realiści są kontynuacją Władców Polski, książki, którą w 2018 r. napisałem [autor] wspólnie z Beatą Maciejewską”. *Powstańcy...*, w sekwencji ujęcia, konstruktu, przesłania, są rzeczywiście kontynuacją *Władców...* I to sprawdzającą się. Tym razem w głosie 27 historyków uczestniczących w 32 rozmowach. To spotkanie „eksperckiej wiedzy” z „dziennikarską ciekawością”.

Panoramą analizy, a w istocie wywiadów/rozmowy, były dzieje XIX i XX wieku: „od insurekcji kościuszkowskiej aż po przełom 1989”. To polska perspektywa, z uwzględnieniem polskich znamienych cezur procesu historycznego, która stanowi wyróżnik. Dzieje powszechne zaś, choć obecne, często nawet jednostkowo wyraziste, nie były jednak przedmiotem szerszej refleksji. Takie, zapewne, było koncepcyjne założenie całości *Powstańców...*, z wyborem raczej tylko dopełniającym powszechnodziejowość. A to akurat czas nie tylko braku państwowości polskiej, ale i czas bardzo europejski. Czas spojrzenia *via* rewolucja francuska (w tle, słowo o Stanach Zjednoczonych), Napoleon i szus aż pod Moskwę, z następstwami – nowe w Europie „po Napoleonie”. I czas formowania się państw narodowych, z nacjonalizmem, rasizmem, semityzmem/antysemityzmem w tle.

To przecież wielka dynamika zdarzeń – politycznych, społecznych, mentalnych i świadomościowych. Nowe grupy społeczne i nowe pola walki, rewolucje. Dalej, Wielka Wojna, czyli – niemal – „samobójstwo Europy”, by zacytować przyjaciela Andrzeja Chwałbę (na marginesie: co to za samobójstwo, gdy samobójca przeżył, i to całkiem dobrze)⁶. Jej następstwa.

Powszechnodziejowość to też ważne znamię czasu po 1918 roku. Istotne dla polskiego podmiotu państwowego i społecznego (po „Wielkiej Wojnie” i wspomnianym „samobójstwie”). Mimo „wojennych” brutalnych doświadczeń polski podmiot spisał się w międzywojniu, tj. przed II wojną światową, nie najgorzej. Obronił niepodległość i suwerenność, zbudował państwo. Choć kłopotów też poja-

⁶ Andrzej Chwałba, *Samobójstwo Europy. Wielka Wojna 1914–1918* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2023).

wiło się niemało (z jednej strony Gdynia, zwycięska wojna z bolszewikiem, ale i zamach majowy w 1926 roku, OZN, Bereza Kartuska, „nikt nam nie robi nic, bo z nami Śmigły, Śmigły Rydz”).

A w europejskim wymiarze: bolszewizm, faszyzm, nazizm i ich rewolucja, następstwa. Sporo nacjonalizmu, społecznych wykluczeń i wypędzeń. Pierwsze *Konzentrationslager* – przedpole Zagłady, ludobójstwa.

I wreszcie czas klęski 1939 roku, wrześniowo-powrzesniowego „syndromu klęski”, czas okupacji, krwi, cierpienia. Także czas „klęski drugiej” – nazizm w Europie Zachodniej. I następstwo: czas Zagłady oraz – po stalingradzkim przełomie – już coraz wyraźniejsze pola zwycięstwa. I też następstw: Teheranu – Jałty – Poczdamu, czas „przeigranych zwycięzców” i „nowych wygranych”⁷: Polski Ludowej/PRL, aż po rok/cezurę 1989. Czyli kolejny czas „nowej Europy”. Zmienność o dużej dynamice, przy tym wielowarstwowej. Dotykającej milionów.

Cezury pozostały zatem bez zmian: te XIX-wieczne, potem kolejne, lat 1914–1918, czas po 1918, od 1939–1945 do 1989. Tu sztywne, zrozumiałe ramy, choć już dostrzegane jest wewnętrzne zróżnicowanie. To prawidłowo akcentowany koncept spoglądania na zjawiska polsko-polskie, na nowo opowiadane. W tym upadki i powstania – Polska, ale i świat ponapoleoński (1918) – narodziny Sowietów i klęska Sowietów. PRL – RP. Wszystko się zgadza. Zapewne wyrazistszy akcent powszechnodziejowy poszerzyłby nie tylko pole obserwacji, ale dopełnił racjonalizm myślenia historycznego. Optykę bliższą francuskiej „*Annales*” – historii długiego trwania.

Kolejny wyróżnik *Powstańców...* – wspomniana historia „nazwiskowa”. Oczywiście nie ma historii bez nazwisk, to zrozumiałe. Jednakże w tym przypadku pojawia się „dwojakość” nazwisk:

- autorzy-historycy, którzy odwołują się do własnych badań, jednakże z istotnym dopełnieniem (formuła wywiadu) – dopuszczeniem publicystycznego spojrzenia, języka narracji; to nietrudno zauważyć, to ważne „dopuszczenie” – pozytyw;
- drugie nazwiska, to bohaterowie tych „opowieści”, już w kontekście dynamiki tegoż procesu historycznego.

Nazwiska, w jednym i drugim przypadku wielkie, co potwierdza statystyka:

- 27 autorów „przepytanych” w 32 rozmowach/wywiadach;
- struktura tekstu/narracji to cztery duże części: *Liczymy na siebie, Modlitwa o wojnę i rewolucję, Nadzieje i zgłiszczą oraz Robotnicy i jajogłowi*.

⁷ Szerzej zob. Jacek Chrobaczyński, *Konteksty przełomu 1944–1945. Społeczeństwo wobec wojennych rozstrzygnięć. Postawy – zachowania – nastroje* (Kraków: Universitas, 2015); Jacek Chrobaczyński, *Czas nieszczęść, cierpień, oporu i walki. Przegrani zwycięzcy? Społeczeństwo polskie między wrześniem 1939 a majem 1945* (Kraków: Universitas, 2017).

Gdy spojrzeć na tendencję, oczywiste jest, że jest to główny nurt polsko-polskiego dyskursu, jak na dłoni. A gdy dodać nazwiska bohaterów – krąg się dopełnia: Kościuszko, Wielka Emigracja, Wielopolski, Traugutt, Stańczycy, Piłsudski, Ślężacy i inni, *wrześniowy syndrom kłęski 1939* i następstwa. Także bohaterowie wojny, okupacji, konspiracji 1944/45 itd. Wreszcie, czasu po 1944/45. Dość „oczywista to oczywistość”.

Ale dostrzegam jeszcze jeden aspekt całości *Powstańców...*, który, dopiero w ostatnim wywiadzie, nagłaśnia i potwierdza Adam Michnik⁸: pozytywiści i romantycy oraz dość dramatyczne następstwo: „bić się czy nie bić”.

I przyznam, że to jest klucz dyskursu, swego rodzaju łącznik właściwie wszystkich wypowiedzi, choć z pewnym wyróżnikiem:

- gdy autor biografii np. Wielopolskiego w swej wypowiedzi nawet nie ukrywa, iż „kocha swego Wielopolskiego”;
- i gdy Michnik woli „bić się”, ale docenia pozytywistów i siłę budowania.

To w istocie to samo, tylko – trochę – inaczej. Chciałoby się powiedzieć, nic nowego w polsko-polskim dyskursie o dziejach XIX i XX wieku. Oczywiście, „nie wszystko już było” (historiografia), albowiem, jak mawiamy: „każde pokolenie stawia procesowi historycznemu swój kwestionariusz badań”, i – doceniajmy – wysiłek badawczy kolejnych pokoleń.

Wypowiedzi autorów to też coś pomiędzy, takie „tak, ale”.

Podobnie myślę jako historyk, choć mam swe preferencje. Inaczej niż A. Michnik, nie za bardzo lubię/preferuję romantyków. Wolę pozytywistów i ich sposób myślenia, budowania. Ten ton myślenia. Wyróżniam racjonalizm „trzeźwych entuzjastów”, by podeprzeć się tytułem znanej, choć nienowej rozprawy. Budowanie – owszem, a zaraz potem burzenie, „bo wojna”, bo „oni”, wrogowie, granice, „my” itd. Fakt. Ale jest w budowaniu coś znakomitego, dlatego np. nie akcentuję pojęć po 1918 roku: „odzyskanie” niepodległości czy „odbudowa” państwa polskiego, ale to *de facto* budowanie. Właśnie budowanie. Po 123 latach niewoli piąte pokolenie niczego o tamtej, upadłej nie wiedziało i jej nie pamiętało, zatem po swojemu, także w sporze, po prostu budowało nową RP.

W tej polsko-polskiej części XX wieku mieliśmy w istocie dwa wielkie „budowania”. To po 1918 roku i to po 1944/45. To nie akcentacja powtórki, bo historia się nie powtarza, ale raczej rodzaj cykliczności w procesie historycznym – także pokusy. Zatem dwa budowania, ale z ciągłością i zmianą w procesie historycznym. Nie wnikając w jakość i efekty tego budowania polsko-polskiego, trochę w tych rozmowach zabrakło mi tego szerszego nieco spojrzenia, ciągłości i zmiany. Obok czasu i miejsca istotnej kategorii procesu historycznego. W tle pytanie, zapewne

⁸ Wszystkie cytaty Adama Michnika zob. *Nie zgodę na niewolę mamy w DNA. A Michnik o powstaniach*, w: Maciorowski, *Powstańcy*, 1221 i nast.

na trzecią część tego cyklu: co z bilansami? To nie oddzielny problem, ale tożsamy zjawisku/zjawiskom, o których mowa w *Powstańcach*...

Podsumowując, myślę, że zarówno autor całości, jak i wypowiadający się historycy (ekstraklasa) dobrze odczytali projekt i dobrze się weń wpisali.

Mamy obszerne wypowiedzi, solidną argumentację. Ale i pytania. A bez nich nie ma badań, nie ma postępu, dyskursu. Zostaje tylko *ideolo* i tzw. polityka historyczna.

To, że brakuje szerszego spojrzenia na dzieje powszechne, zapewne ma znaczenie, ale koncept był z pewnością inny. I został solidnie zrealizowany w *Powstańcach*...

Dręczy mnie jeszcze jeden, na koniec, problem: podtytuł – *Historia na nowo opowiedziana*. W szczególności to „na nowo” i to „opowiedziana”. Czy można zawsze „na nowo”? Raczej bez przesady – mamy przecież proces historyczny pod historiograficzną, i nie tylko, kontrolą, zatem bardziej chodzi o „nowe”, ale w nieco pomniejszej części. To nie cała historia „opowiedziana [tu] na nowo”.

Ale „opowiedziana” solidnie, rzeczowo (wywiad i jego otwarte pola), często z dowcipem i klauzulą odwołań do odleglejszej przyszłości.

Zatem zgoda, „historia opowiedziana”, z imienia i nazwiska, z wykorzystaniem solidnych badań, autorskiego dorobku, literatury, a przede wszystkim źródeł.

Zgoda też, jednak tylko częściowa, „na nowo”, bo nie cała „na nowo”.

Wreszcie to, co dla mnie najjaśniejsze: nazwiska, historia „nazwiskowa”. Nie ma bowiem procesu historycznego bez nazwisk. Tak w *makro*, jak i w *mikro* perspektywie spojrzenia. Nazwisko to często magia w procesie historycznym, znacznik, wyróżnik, znamienity punkt odniesienia. Także zróżnicowanie: Paderewski – geniusz fortepianu, obywatel, ale i – krótko, ale jednak – polityk ważnego nurtu. Itd.

Natomiast A. Michnik w ostatniej rozmowie ma sporo racji, trochę syntetyzując całość i wpisując się w ogniwo nie tak małego okresu, gdy spojrzeć na biografię. Zapewne „antymichnikowcy” powarczą nad Adamem. Zresztą nie mając podstaw i słuszności, ale np. Michnik i Macierewicz razem? (KOR), a jednak. Z czasem tylko już osobno, by nie powiedzieć wrogo. Dlatego nazwiska „to je to” w procesie historycznym.

Jeszcze „moje osobiste michnikowanie”. Przede wszystkim jako historyka. Miałem, jako historyk, dwie duże przyjemności zajmowania się A. Michnikiem-historykiem. Pierwszy raz, gdy otrzymywał dyplom doktora h.c. mojej – wtedy – uczelni: Akademii Pedagogicznej/Uniwersytetu Pedagogicznego – byłem jednym z dwóch recenzentów „adamowego” dorobku – poznaliśmy się nieco bliżej. Moja recenzja, którą dziś jeszcze przeglądałem, oddawała nie tylko Michnika skomplikowanego, romantyka i pozytywisty zarazem, ale też utrwalała we mnie owo „michnikowanie”. Drugi raz, to było 2-godzinne spotkanie w Radiu Kraków nie

z Adamem, ale z autorem książki o Adamie – *Demiurg*⁹ – Romanem Graczykiem (Wydawnictwo Zona Zero).

Adam Michnik pozostaje dla mnie nie tylko niemal „rówieśnikiem” pokoleniowym, ale i postacią z „mojej bajki” – postawy, tożsamości, perspektywy spojrzenia. Także dylematów (cecha tego pokolenia?). Romantyko-pozytywista, który (romantyk) najchętniej zawsze by się „bił” i zawsze w słusznej sprawie. Bił o coś, przeciw itp. Jako pozytywista zaś, „trzeźwy umysł”, gdy trzeba, pozostawał i pozostaje właśnie pozytywistą, skłonny do kompromisu. „Wasz prezydent, nasz premier” – pamiętacie? Ja pamiętam. To dla mnie istota „michnikowania”. Klasyka. I, tym samym, mądre, racjonalne przemyślenie *Powstańców*...

Wywiady M. Maciorowskiego warte są lektury. Solidnej, z namysłem, ale i z dialogicznością. Są intrygującym „przystankiem” w dzisiejszej refleksji nad polsko-polskim, ale nie tylko, XIX i XX wiekiem obecności w dziejach. Zarówno własnych, jak i powszechnych, a nawet amerykańskich (Kościuszko/Pułaski).

Bibliografia

- Chrobaczyński, Jacek. *Czas nieszczęść, cierpień, oporu i walki. Przegrani zwycięzcy? Społeczeństwo polskie między wrześniem 1939 a majem 1945*. Kraków: Universitas, 2017.
- Chrobaczyński, Jacek. *Konteksty przełomu 1944–1945. Społeczeństwo wobec wojennych rozstrzygnięć. Postawy – zachowania – nastroje*. Kraków: Universitas, 2015.
- Chwalba, Andrzej. *Samobójstwo Europy. Wielka Wojna 1914–1918*. Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2023.
- Graczyk, Roman. *Demiurg. Biografia Adama Michnika*. Warszawa: Zona Zero, 2021.
- Maciorowski, Miroslaw. *Powstańcy. Marzyciele i realiści*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Agora, 2025.

⁹ Roman Graczyk, *Demiurg* (Warszawa: Zona Zero, 2021).

