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How a Book Changed a Nation

by

Teodora Buzea

A Thesis

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Student Signature: **Teodora Buzea**

Thesis Title: **How a Book Changed a Nation**

Thesis Advisor's Signature: **Dr. John C. Leffel**

MA Coordinator's Signature: _____

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "J. C. Leffel", is written over a horizontal line. The signature is cursive and somewhat stylized.

How a Book Changed a Nation

“We don’t believe in vampires.”

I didn’t bother to turn away from the TV to look at my parents. On screen, a crew of young men were interviewing an old woman. She spoke only Romanian, and a too-perfect female voice spoke for her in English. I could see the confident fear in her expression as she exclaimed that vampires were indeed real and that she was always scared of them. She wasn’t alone. All of Transylvania were aware of the existence of vampires. Truly, these young men—ghost hunters and cryptologists—were right to come here to this haunted nation.

The crew moved to Bran Castle, home of the infamous Count Dracula. It was time to look for vampiric activity. If they were lucky, perhaps they would even find the ghost of cruel Dracula himself. They stumbled down the halls at night with candles to guide them.

“Vlad Țepeș (a.k.a. Dracul) was a king of a different Romanian kingdom. He stayed no more than three days in Bran Castle, if any,” my mother said.

At that, my attention was split. What did my parents mean by saying that Dracula—*the Dracula*—didn’t actually live at Bran Castle (or, as I and so many lovingly called it, “Dracula’s Castle”)?

“Vampires are not even Romanian.”

My worldview on what I thought vampires were ended at that moment. As a first generation American to two Romanian-born immigrants (Transylvanian ones to boot), I thought I knew enough about “real” vampires even without being a vampire aficionado. I knew that Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* is what made Transylvania so memorable. Was it all a lie?

Pardon me if that sounds all too dramatic, though perhaps it is fitting. After all, Emily Gerard, in her study entitled *Transylvanian Superstitions* published in 1885, starts out by declaring “Transylvania might well be termed the land of superstitions” (7). Bold words from a book that preceded Bram Stoker’s infamous *Dracula* in 1889 and is thought to have inspired the author. All cultures create stories and thus superstitions to explain the unexplainable. Based on the environment and history, these stories become unique mythos and introduce a whole slew of characters specific to them. For some, this means vampires. A sudden bout of sickness overnight that leaves the victim feeling weak in the morning can be associated with hungry demons. People disappearing after going into the woods after dark can be blamed on the undead. What humanity

fears is not knowing what they should fear. Stories are told to engage audiences and encourage fellow humans to behave or else something bad might happen. If you tell a child that going out to play at night might lead to a vampire catching them and drinking their blood, the child will be guided by fear and not go outside at night. No one wants to come face-to-face with a terrifying creature like that, right?

Yet, vampires are more complex than your average bogeyman. First of all, there are a series of rules that they must follow: They cannot enter a home, unless invited, can burn in the sunlight, cannot cross running water, and stabbing their heart with a stake will lead to their demise (though, arguably, this would lead to anyone's demise). They get stranger and fascinatingly specific: If you put a broom in front of your door, they have to count every individual bristle? They are allergic to garlic?! They sparkle?! No other monster has such a unique and ever-growing list of traits. Everyone wants to add their two cents on what makes a vampire and what their traits are. Hypnotism. Shapeshifting. Flight. By all accounts, the vampire sounds like it should be multiple different creatures instead of one. Perhaps, then, we can say that the vampire is not a singular type of creature, but a name used to describe multiple types of creatures. Based on their common traits and portrayals, I would like to suggest that the vampire is more similar and could be categorized as the live succubi rather than the undead zombie.

Based on initial appearances, labeling vampires as zombies because of their undead nature, immortality, and cannibalistic tendencies would be appropriate. However, I'd rather suggest vampires should be compared more to the succubus and incubus (the male counterpart), especially when we consider how vampires become more associated with promiscuous sexuality the closer we get to modern times. The succubus is considered a creature that is born to steal the life energies of human mortals through sexually charged or penetrative acts. Through the stealing of these life energies, the succubus maintains its strength, youth, and immortality. Such features are exemplified in the character of Count Dracula, who becomes younger and more virile after consuming blood, and who keeps three sexualized female vampires around him to tempt any fool that dares to waltz to his castle. What makes vampires similar to zombies is crucial, however: They are undead. While some media portrays vampires as being born monsters (such as the infamous Count Dracula), many vampires are the product of being "turned" by other vampires

(sort of like selling your soul—or life—to the devil in exchange for strength) through the exchange of blood or by consuming just enough blood that the victim doesn't die. In an article written in 2017 by scholar Sarah A. Lauer entitled "The Social Impact of the Misconceptions Surrounding Tuberculosis", vampires were extremely similar to zombies. This led to what was aptly known as the New England Vampire Panic during the 19th century. Those who died of tuberculosis (also fittingly known as "consumption") were thought to have risen from their graves at the dead of the night and infect their families with the disease that had caused their death. This led to mass hysteria after people found the graves of these "vampires" showing some manner of disturbance (from natural decomposition processes and not anything truly supernatural... as far as we know). Lauer states that, because of a lack of science proving the existence of tuberculosis in a way that could have alleviated the fears of the people, "The people of New England decided that it was better to exhume, burn, and sometimes even eat the bodies of vampires rather than watch their loved ones die" (65).

This is just one example of vampires being used as a tool for explaining that which cannot be explained. They are a fiction meant to become a truth; however, like all fiction, this has dangerous consequences when taken too seriously. Here, we enter the region of Transylvania in the country of Romania that is so deeply associated with these fictitious beings because of a single book. Bran Castle is flocked to by tourists more than any other castle in Romania for its presumed associations with Dracula (or better known as Vlad Țepeș in history). Celebrities and athletes coming from Romania don their best vampire capes to represent their heritage. Yet, how can we call this a heritage if the vampire as we know it, along with its most acclaimed form of media, is not even a product of the Romanian nation? Has it become a new form of social identity? What true Romania's folktales have been lost because of outside interference and are waiting for their time to shine under the sun (or the moon)? How do Romanians depict the tales of vampires? How has the modern world depicted Transylvania? Going back even further, why did the author Bram Stoker decide to set his chilling tale in the forests of Transylvania? Is the vampire and *Dracula*, as some scholars have contended, a form of cultural appropriation?¹ Or, can it be one of appreciation?

But perhaps we should start at the beginning. What came before *Dracula*?

1. The First Bite

The world is filled with mysteries and the unexplained. There are so many years for people to have created life-sucking monsters leading up to the publication of *Dracula* in 1897, so let's go back in time. I think that the dawn of mankind as we know it is a good place to begin.

The first “vampires” were crude, most frighteningly, one that can be proven to be very real: Blood is life! Warm and full of vitality, it is a sign of power. That bright red makes one think of power. If blood is so powerful, then one can naturally become even more powerful through the consumption of it. Romanian historian and Vlad Țepeș expert, Radu Florescu, as well as the Eastern European academic, Raymond T. McNelly, start their conversation about the origin of the vampire in their book *In Search of Dracula* (1994) by noting how “The notion of vampirism traces far back in time – to man, the hunter, who discovered that when blood flowed out a wounded beast or a fellow human, life, too, drained away. Blood was the source of vitality. Thus men smeared themselves with blood and sometimes drank it.” (Florescu et al. 117). Vampirism, in this case, goes hand in hand with cannibalism, often in a ritualistic way. Witnessing one bleed out their life is a visceral image that would have been common for many prehistoric hunters. The answer to the question of what makes one alive and strong was answered in those moments: Blood! Having it would make one stay alive, possibly for all time. For warriors, this was an elixir of power found in fleshy vials.

But humans are not monsters (at least, not in the way that we are thinking of). The cannibalistic hunter is not the supernatural creature we are thinking of. Our first vampire sightings in Asia: “In China, it was reported that vampires existed there in 600 B.C.,” continues Florescu and McNelly (117).ⁱⁱ What makes them more of a vampire in comparison to the human hunter is that they were considered a creature that was not human. Babylonian and Assyrian pottery, also dating B.C., depict vampires. Other ancient people believed in them as well. For example, the Ancient Peruvians worshiped an evil god who sucked blood from sleeping children. Additionally, large amounts of related blood-based deities and creatures found in much of the Americas responded to the offering of life through blood. Turning to Europe, the ancient Greeks mention the empusa or lamia—“horrible winged demon-women who lured handsome youths to

their death in order to drink their blood and eat their flesh” (Florescu et al. 118). The lamia showcases some sensuality often observed in our modern definition of what a vampire is. The Greek siren can also be considered somewhat vampiristic in its ability to control and seduce men to their deaths.

Like dragons, the concept of vampires exists around the world, but they possess notably different appearances, making it difficult to pinpoint exactly what the first vampire actually was. The more modern perception of vampires is noted in English folklore since 1196 (in Scotland) and, in Eastern Europe, they appeared in Moldavia in 1644 and in Wallachia in 1652 (Florescu et al.).ⁱⁱⁱ The first recorded “vampire,” named Peter Poglojowitz, appeared in 1725 in a small village in Hungary, one of Romania’s neighboring countries. His body was found with blood around the mouth and without any signs of decay. In 1732, there was a new case, Arnold Paole, found in Serbia, suggesting yet more vampiric activity. It is believed that the vampire superstition in Transylvania was imported from Asia, more precisely from Mongolians who had a bat god and believed in vampires. During the early 1200s, Mongolian population settled in current-day Hungary, and some remained in Transylvania. In a sense, yes, vampires are not a Romanian concept. The vampire is a global monster coming in many shapes and forms. Romania too has its own unique form of vampire.

Two very important creatures to know are the *strigoi* and the *moroi*. Definitions for the two are varied and cannot be perfectly pinpointed, but both find their presence in Romanian lore as a devilish and vampiric monster. Strigoi contains the Romanian key word *striga* meaning “witch,” suggesting an affinity for magic.^{iv} According to Dr. J. Gordon Melton in *The Vampire Book* first published in 1998 and edited in 2010, there are two branches of strigoi: *strigoi vii* and *strigoi mort*. Strigoi vii stands for the living vampire while strigoi mort is the dead vampire. Strigoi vii can turn into their undead counterpart “as well as other people who died irregularly by suicide or an accident” (584). What this suggests about the Romanian vampire is that they can be a restless soul whose life was disturbed from its usual path. The living strigoi are more sophisticated and fit the modern vampire aesthetic, but the dead strigoi are more like the blood suckers we all know. Romanian folklore gives a reason for their insatiable cravings: a fruitless desire to regain the life that was stolen from them through blood. The moroi is similar to the strigoi, but is more commonly associated with ghosts, suggesting a disturbed death as well. They

may steal the life energies of the living after leaving their graves. They are less common in folktales. A way to differentiate the two is by region. Melton explains that moroi “seem to be the common term in Wallachia, as strigoi is in Transylvania” (584). If the strigoi is the more popular of the two, this may be a possible explanation as to why Transylvania may have been chosen as vampire central by Western Europe rather than Vlad Dracula’s actual kingdom of Wallachia.

Preceding Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* by five years, another famous author based a work of fiction in Romania, specifically employing the strigoi terminology. It is possible that Bram Stoker even took inspiration from the illustrious French author, Jules Verne, who published *The Castle of the Carpathians* in 1892. While not one of his more famous works, it still illustrates his visionary imagination. Like *Dracula*, this book is a Gothic novel as well as a love story. It is set in Transylvania and concerns two noblemen who are obsessed with the same woman. La Stilla, an Italian singer, is loved by Baron de Gortz (the owner of the eponymous Carpathian Castle) and by Count Franz de Telek. While Baron de Gortz adores her music, he does so from afar. He is a stalker who had been attending her shows for six years, never approaching her—a fact that justifiably scares her. His appearance does not help either, as he is described as tall, “wrapped in a long dark overcoat, and wearing a large hat which hid his face” (17). The singer feels weak under his ardent gaze. Count Franz de Telek is a “younger, handsomer version of Baron Gortz” who wants her for himself (18). In the end, La Stilla chooses to be with him because she wants to escape Baron Gortz, and also because of his more agreeable looks.

Concerning the titled castle, the Carpathian Mountains is a well-known mountain range in Romania and home to many natural treasures, like the velvety edelweiss flower. In Verne’s tale, “The little village of Werst, which is just within eyeshot of the Castle of the Carpathians, is filled with peasants who believe in every monster about whom anyone ever told a tale” (21). This supports Gerard’s infamous introductory line from *Transylvanian Superstitions*, published years earlier, concerning the mentality of the Romanian peasant, as well with Jonathan Harker’s description of his first encounter with native Romanians in Stoker’s *Dracula*. The people living in the Carpathians within the village of Werst see the castle—dated to the 12th century—as terrifying, evil, and filled with demons. They remark how the Gortz’s “had been lords of the country from time immemorial” (52). If we know anything about Gothic novels and vampires, this should be a sign of generational trouble and the supernatural. Its old age that surpasses that

of any villager, as well as its mysterious inhabitants, are reasons enough for anyone to be wary of the castle—not to mention that the castle is, for the most part, deserted, mysterious, and falling into ruin. Because of its state, the horrifying noises that come from the castle, and the owner's unattractive physical appearance, the peasants in the novel believe that this is a haunted place to stay away from. The similarities in the descriptions of Romanian locals in Verne's and Stoker's novels are uncanny and solidify the idea that they probably were inspired by Gerard's seemingly exaggerated retellings of Romanian superstitions.

Jules Verne did his research for the novel, though. The names used in the story correspond to real places in Romania. For example, the mountains are named Retyezal, and a mountain named Retezat exists in Transylvania. The descriptions of the natural landscape are also accurate and specific: "its table-land under cultivation, its luxuriant pastures, its capriciously carved valleys, its furrowing summits, Transylvania, streaked by the plutonic ramifications of the Carpathians, is furrowed by numerous watercourses flowing to swell the Theiss and the superb Danube, the Iron Gates of which, a few miles to the south close the defile of the Balkan chain on the frontier of Hungary and the Ottoman Empire" (35). While this book humors the supernatural, obvious attention was put into properly describing the locations. Verne had one privilege that Stoker didn't: the right to say that he had visited Romania. Fascinated by it, he also wrote two other books set in Romania: *The Danube Pilot* and *The Stubborn Keraban*.

Vampires, unfortunately, make little to no introduction in the narrative. Verne introduces the Werst villager, Frik, a shepherd who is "regarded as a sorcerer, a caller-up of apparitions. According to him the vampires and stryges obeyed him [...] he believed in the legends of his country" (38). Despite its different spelling, stryges and strigoi mean the same thing, but it is interesting to note that the strigoi is separated from the vampire, thus making the claim of it potentially being a different species. Frik is representative of the superstitious old generation. Too involved with myth, fiction becomes truth. Werst had always believed in the supernatural, and the two most important figures of the village, the priest and the teacher, teach the children that the vampires are named strigoi because they scream and feed on human blood, and thus they must stay alert. Melton explains in *The Vampire Book* how the word for strigoi is also "derived from the Latin *strix*, the word for a screech owl" giving some basis to the priest and teacher's claims, and also giving the strigoi more weight than just being another name for the vampire

(Melton 584). Verne makes the legends of strigoi and vampires believable through his attention to cultural superstition and Romanian etymology.

Despite all of this fascinating foreshadowing, the novel is not so much about vampires as it may lead us to believe. The word “vampire” appears only three times in the text—same with the word “strigoi”—and “ghost” appears five times. The novel is more about the hypothetical vampire, and warns readers about the true monster: fellow humans who wish you ill. Baron Gortz is shown to be an energy vampire that takes all of La Stilla’s energy away, and Count Franz de Telek sucks up all of her freedom, leading to her death via suicide. The most supernatural being ends up being La Stilla, who exists after her death through phonograph recordings and projection, and haunts the two men to madness like the voice of a siren. The peculiar noises that the people of Werst hear are these siren calls that the mad Baron Gortz doomed himself with in order to keep La Stilla by his side forever. In typical Jules Verne fashion, the true star of the novel is the author’s visionary mind that introduces new inventions and ideas that may not even exist; in this case, the phonograph and projector. Perhaps his novel can be seen as a warning for those who can be easily controlled by superstition to beware, because the answer may be less supernatural than one would expect. It’s a critique of how creating stories to explain the unknown becomes a cultural phenomenon.

So where can we find a text that may have inspired Bram Stoker that actually has vampires? We turn to 1819 and follow John William Polidori’s creation of a tale fittingly entitled *The Vampyre*. The story is founded on the superstitions about undead who are “rising from their graves, and feeding upon the blood of the young and beautiful,” matching the 18th century sentiments of what people thought were vampires at the time (Polidori XIX). The action starts in London, and we are immediately introduced to the Byronic Lord Ruthven, who has a “dead grey eye” and a “deadly hue of his face” (27-8). Despite his lifeless appearance, he is considered to be a beautiful man by both men and women. He is also described as having a flirty personality and approaches only the “virtuous wife and innocent daughter” (29). At the same time, we are introduced to Aubrey, a young gentleman, who is also an orphan and has a younger sister. Aubrey sees Lord Ruthven as a role model and takes on a fancy of him, leading the two to become closer and to go on a tour around Western and Central Europe (against his guardians’ reticence). He starts studying the eccentric Lord Ruthven as he compulsively gambles and loses

all of his money as quickly as he wins it, and, of course, how he flirts with women. In Rome, Lord Ruthven's flirtations with a young woman makes Aubrey feel very uncomfortable, causing him to decide to leave his side and pursue the rest of the tour by himself. He arrives in Greece where he meets another young woman who tells him stories about the living vampire who is feeding "upon the life of a lovely female to prolong his existence for the ensuing months," and when she describes this creature, this description is a "pretty accurate description of Lord Ruthven" (42). Other inhabitants of that village "affirmed their existence, pale with horror at the very name" (44). Whatever dots you are beginning to connect are probably true.

One day, Aubrey wants to explore the area, but he is reminded that he should not be in the woods at night. He promises not to do so, however the night comes sooner than he expected. While passing through the woods toward his residence for the night, he hears unnatural screams and decides to follow them. Before long, he stumbles across a hut. Here, he is attacked by a creature with superhuman strength and is almost bitten in their tussle. Fortunately, a mob of people carrying torches arrived. When they enter the hut, he sees his young woman friend dead. Polidori describes her corpse by saying "upon her neck and breast was blood, and upon her throat were the marks of teeth having opened the vein" (48). This image will certainly be nothing unusual in future vampire texts.

In the meantime, Aubrey falls ill and has episodes of delirium. He calls for Lord Ruthven, who just so happens to arrive in Athens. While taking care of Aubrey, he cannot help but notice Lord Ruthven's malicious smile, but doesn't delve too much into the matter. After a while, Aubrey begins to feel better and the two embark on their trip through Greece. Shortly after, they are ambushed, and Lord Ruthven becomes mortally wounded. Lord Ruthven asks for Aubrey's help in making him swear that "for a year and a day you will not impart your knowledge of my crimes or death to any living being in any way, whatever may happen, or whatever you may see." (55). After his death, no one is able to find his corpse or clothes. Aubrey gathers Lord Ruthven's belongings, and in doing so, comes across his weapons that have traces of blood.

When Aubrey returns to Rome, he learns that the young woman who Lord Ruthven had flirted with disappeared once he had left the city. As he continues to travel to London, his mind "became almost broken under so many horrors" (58). Once in London and while preparing for

his younger sister's debut into society, he begins to imagine that he sees Lord Ruthven and is reminded of his oath. His mental health gets worse and worse, and he is confined to his bedchamber. Throughout all this, his sister continues to visit him. As the year passes, he starts getting better. One day, his sister tells him she found a suitor, the Earl of Marsden. When he sees the Earl's picture, however, a dreadful case of recognition hits him. He recognizes the Earl of Marsden to be the very Lord Ruthven who is dead! He begs his sister not to marry him, but she is not easily convinced. The next day, when the Earl comes to visit, he learns about Aubrey's illness and goes to torment him "Remember your oath, and know, if not my bride to day, your sister is dishonored. Women are frail" (71)! Aubrey has a stroke, and the wedding takes place. The tale concludes with Aubrey's guardians running to his younger sister's aid after hearing his harrowing tale, but all too late. Polidori ends with "Lord Ruthven had disappeared, and Aubrey's sister had glutted the thirst of a VAMPYRE" (72)! The curtains close on this terrifying proclamation and the word "vampyre" which is purposely capitalized. Would she have lived had Aubrey not kept his oath? Or was marrying off his sister to a monster a fate worse than death?

The Vampyre provides us readers with some common tropes that are familiar to this day. For one, Lord Ruthven is viewed as being handsome despite his lifeless appearance. Especially in modern media, depicting vampires as stunning beyond comparison is just one of the ways to justify why we would ever dare to let them get close to us, like Aubrey gets close with Lord Ruthven. This allows Lord Ruthven to take over Aubrey's mind; yet another trope of vampires. Count Dracula is not as handsome as Lord Ruthven, but he does become younger through the consumption of blood, which goes along Lord Ruthven's need for blood in order to become more powerful. The topic of gender is also addressed. Perhaps just a sign of the times, but the women are innocents and victims to the call of the vampire. But there also is some mild homoerotic tension that exists when Lord Ruthven is described to capture the attention of men alongside women. As for the locations that Aubrey and Lord Ruthven travel through, Greece in particular (close to Eastern Europe, and with a rich superstition folklore) is special for their belief in vampires. Much of the action happens in London and all across Europe, the same as in *Dracula*.

The Castle in the Carpathians and *The Vampyre* are not by far the only books on vampires published before 1897, when Bram Stoker published *Dracula*. There were multiple novels on the topic by a plethora of famous authors from around the world. To name just a few

predecessors of Stoker: *The Vampire* by Heinrich August Ossenfelder (1748), *The Bride of Corith* by J.W. von Goethe (1797), *The Family of the Vourdalak* by Aleksei Tolstoi (1843), *The Pale Lady* by Alexandre Dumas (1849), *The Vampire* by Alexandre Dumas (1851), *The Legend of the Ages* by Victor Hugo (1858-9), *The Vampire Countess* by Paul Feval (1865), *Carmilla* by Sheridan Le Fanu (1872). Special attention should be brought to Emily Gerard's 1885 book, *Transylvanian Superstitions*, in which she indicates that "the very name of Transylvania tells us that it was formerly regarded as something apart, something out of reach, whose existence even for a time was enveloped in mystery." (Gerard 4). It is here that our infamous tale begins.

2. An Infamous Name

Dracula!

What does this name spark in people? Fear? Comedy? Sadness? Happiness? None of those are wrong answers, considering all of the iterations of the Count that appeared after Bram Stoker's version. We've got counting puppets, slapstick-animated hotel owners, and so many fathers bearing the iconic name. All of these iterations of Dracula all claim to be from Transylvania. Except, that's not really right, now is it? As previously mentioned, Vlad Țepeș was not the king of Transylvania, but rather Wallachia. Thanks to Bram Stoker, we now have different associations. Surprisingly enough, according to the Bran Castle Tourist Guide, Stoker initially wanted to name the vampire "Count Wampyr," but after reading William Wilkinson's travel notes named "An Account of the Principalities of Wallachia and Moldavia," published in 1820, and learning about Vlad Țepeș (also known by his alias of Dracul or Dracula), he decided to name him Count Dracula—a choice that would permanently affect the way many look at the historical counterpart. The decisions that Bram Stoker took in order to create his infamous novel are well-researched and create for a captivating horror tale. By reading the tale and Stoker's descriptions of Romania, one can begin to piece together how the nation was looked at prior to its publication. Examining these origins is important if we are to piece together how exactly *Dracula* created an impressive Romanian history that many could agree with.

Prior to the publication of *Dracula*, a guidebook of sorts had entered Western Europe and served to intrigue the audience with its unbelievable stories about habits and superstitions. This book is said to be one of the books that inspired Stoker's *Dracula*. *Transylvanian Superstitions* was written by the English author Emily Gerard and published shortly before Stoker wrote his book in 1885. In the text, she recounts the tales she had heard while traveling to Romania. The fact that she had traveled to Romania in creating this text may have given her credibility to a Western European audience, and thus it could have served as a guide on what "authentic" Transylvania looked like. Though, as the title of the book mentions, this book focuses entirely on superstitions and thus couldn't be the perfect text to explain a whole nation; especially since superstition to begin with is such a difficult subject to tackle. Deeply ingrained in cultural practices, tradition, history, and the environment, possibly the only way to understand superstition is to be emotionally involved within it, for how can we best write what a superstition

feels like if we do not believe in it? Gerard associates the superstitions in Transylvania with four sources: the landscape (mountains, caverns, lakes, etc.), the imported superstitions of Saxon colonists, the wandering superstitions of the Romani tribes, and the “Greek Church, to which the Roumenians exclusively belong, has an abnormal number of feast days, to almost each of which peculiar customs and superstitions are attached” (Gerard 12). Every day brings with it another superstition, with some feeling absolutely ridiculous to the modern reader. Yet some are relevant to the topic of vampires. One of these superstitions is about the dead. They can wander about for days after the funeral, and, to protect themselves from these wandering souls, the living should offer a pomană (a funeral feast) for the departing soul. If not, this lost soul would become a strigoi—an omen “of sickness or misfortune [...] More decidedly evil, however, is the vampire, or nosferatu, in whom every Roumenian peasant believes as firmly as he does in heaven or hell.” (29). With its relative popularity and the Gothic novel craze in England, it would be no surprise if Gerard’s book landed in Stoker’s hands given all its vivid descriptions of an unknown, mysterious, perhaps even exotic, place. Romania and much of Eastern Europe was still separated from Western Europe for many reasons including religion and geography. Much of the land was still unexplored by Western Europeans and the two fronts were developing their nations at different rates, in different ways, and with different mentalities.

Before a book comes an author, and Stoker’s life provides clues as to what his purpose for writing *Dracula* could have been. Abraham “Bram” Stoker was born in Ireland in 1847. From a young age, Stoker’s mother exposed the infamous author to horror and fantasy stories, and Bram suggested that “the vampire pestilence in his novel owed much to the frightful stories told by his mother” (Florescu et al. 137). It seems that he was driven by the protective power of superstition. The book was initially titled *The Un-Dead*, and “it was only when the book was in galleys that he changed the title to *Dracula*” (Florescu 151). Stoker wrote for an income, so this change is understandable. Connected to a notorious ruler and definitely more original than “The Undead”, the novel was well-received and became a beloved Gothic novel of the time.

The story of *Dracula* is written as a series of letters between many characters. The first character that is introduced is Jonathan and his journey starts right off in Transylvania. He goes into detail describing the ways that the local folk discourage him from visiting Count Dracula’s castle and their superstitions but ignores them because of their unbelievability. When he arrives

at the Count's castle, he begins to realize that the wariness of the local folk was justified for Count Dracula continually shows himself to be a creature that is not human, and his life becomes threatened. After Jonathan escapes, Dracula's plan is revealed—to conquer England. To do this, he boards a ship headed to England and fills it with coffins filled with Transylvanian soil. Once in England, he begins to prey on one of Jonathan's friends, Lucy, who falls ill. Enter Professor Abraham Van Helsing... who is not the rad vampire hunter like he is so often depicted as. We learn that modernization is a weakness for Londoners when faced with a supernatural being. Dr. Van Helsing is the only person who understands both modern medicine and Eastern superstitions working in tandem, like how providing a blood transfusion would help her and hanging garlic flowers will ward away future vampire attacks. Lucy does end up dying and becoming a sensual vampire who is destroyed by impaling her undead body with a stake, beheading her, and stuffing her mouth with garlic flowers. Seeing revenge on the foreigner who had forced their friend to meet such a cruel fate, Jonathan, Lucy's friends and suitors, and Van Helsing begin to chase down Count Dracula, taking them all the way back to Romania. After he is stabbed in the heart, he dies and all who were under his curse are freed. The book concludes with Jonathan taking out a stack of papers from the safe that him and the rest of his companions wrote on when brainstorming ways to eradicate Dracula. He concludes that "we were struck with the fact that, in all the mass of material of which the record is composed, there is hardly one authentic document" (Stoker 399)! Is this an indication that Stoker in the end of his book is acknowledging that his work is a work of fiction, that he never visited the places he wrote about?

So, what can *Dracula* tell us about sentiments at the time, and possibly about the perception of Romania? We see three themes in this novel: the consequences of modernity (understanding and keeping history, folk, and superstitions alive), the threat of female sexual expression (the Victorian women were seen as pure and Dracula was taking this away from them, which is probably a consequence of the fear of the unknown Eastern Europe with its peculiar superstitions), and the promise of Christian salvation (describing Dracula as a satanic figure with pointed ears, fangs, flaming eyes, consuming blood—all signs of evil in the Bible; as well as the weapons of Christian faith involved in defeating him—crucifix, communion wafers). On the first theme, we see the need to retain our knowledge about superstitions, where its importance is shown in the character of Professor Van Helsing. It is through his studies and knowledge of Transylvanian superstitions that the characters are able to conquer evil. It becomes

no wonder that Stoker places such a heavy amount of emphasis and research on information gained through materials and books like *Transylvanian Superstitions* to create an accurate image of life. On the second theme, Western Europe held more modest views about how women should act compared to Eastern Europe. If cultural fusion were to occur, could it corrupt the modern modesty the people of England were trying to retain? The most influential women in Eastern Europe are the three alluring vampire mistresses, while in Western Europe, Lucy and Mina, Lucy's friend and Jonathan's fiancé, take a starring role. Lucy is a little more open with her sexuality than Mina (even asking at one point why she cannot just marry all three suitors) and becomes even more so after becoming a vampire via the Count. Mina too does show to be a tad more sexual after being turned. Is this a bad thing? From the outside, it can certainly be seen that way. Becoming this monster originating from Eastern Europe is closely associated with things that are all too unholy. In trying to balance historical superstition and sexuality, we are brought to the third theme of the novel: religion. Religion is ever so crucial in the defeating of Dracula, not only because the vampire is one closely associated with demons, but also because it is a sign of a traditional history that Stoker wishes to maintain. This directly ties in with the first theme as superstition is just the product of what cannot be explained with the science that is currently available. An emphasis is thus placed on belief and instinct. Modernity and a reliance on science takes away a bit of what makes us human

As previously stated, the novel is written in a journal – epistolary style, that makes the novel feel as if it were a true story and a story that specifically would have been lost to history had these notes never been found and compiled. This not only reflects on the popular narrative style at the time, but may show that Stoker would have put much research into the creation of his novel to make it as accurate as possible. It is important to note the attention to detail Stoker pays when he describes the places, superstitions, vampires, and how to get rid of them. Stoker's little history lesson on Romanian history and nationalities is correct. The action takes place somewhere in the 1800s, and the Romanian principalities did not unite until 1918. In Romania, there are five nationalities: Romanians, Saxsons, Magyars, Szekleys, and Romani—the last four being minorities. Stoker mentions only the first four as, at that time, Romani (or Roma or, as they would have been referred to at the time, Gypsy) were most probably not officially recognized as a minority in Romania. They have a crucial role in the narrative, though. Romani are seen in the book as a power of the East, as they are the ones who serve Dracula more than a

few times in the novel, including being the ones who provide his guard and transportation back to the castle. Unfortunately, the perception of the Romani was still negative, and English writers would have played with their “mystic vagabond” stereotype for these kinds of supernatural stories. Stoker introduces the superstitions early on in chapter one when the inn’s owner wife is telling him about the eve of Saint George’s day and “when the clock strikes midnight, all the evil things in the world will have full sway” further imploring him not to go to the castle and finally giving him a rosary (Stoker 5). Such superstition is present even today with the idea that midnight is the “witching hour”. Jonathan is sent away by the villagers, who all made the “sign of the cross and pointed two fingers toward me” (6). The majority of Romanians and minorities living on the Romanian territory are Christians, and it is a traditional sign of good luck to make the sign of the cross when a person heads out from their house to start their day, a trip, or a business venture. The number of times one can make this sign knows no bounds. What matters is that the ones making the signs feel safe enough after doing so.

The landscape in its descriptions and locations listed during Jonathan’s journey through Romania are also all real places. Bukovina (called Bucovina in Romanian) has its plains and hills and borders the Carpathians to the north of the country. Also, as explained in the novel, it is territory largely occupied by shepherds. It’s a little strange that the Count decided to travel to England by boat from the Black Sea, considering that traveling all the way to Western Europe by cart would have been faster, but let’s just say that there wasn’t enough room for Dracula to place his boxes of dirt. Bistrița is near the place where the Count’s castle is located in the book, and this is indeed located in northern Transylvania. To get up into the northern Carpathian Mountains where Dracula’s castle is, you need to take the Borgo pass (which is located in Bistrița), much like Jonathan and his crew did when chasing after Dracula. When Stoker mentions the Szekely population and the Count’s name association, this is also true with reality. If we take the Hungarian translation of “szekely,” it means dracul or the devil—both associated with the infamous Wallachian ruler. ...But there is some oddness on hand. Oddness which dramatically affects how we look at a certain area of Romania in relation to the novel. We may forgive Stoker for making Dracula, the namesake of a Wallachian king located in Southern Romania, suddenly a resident of northern Romania. We’ve already confirmed that, at the time, Transylvania, in comparison to Wallachia, was much more well known as being a land of superstition and strigoi and recognized more in Europe as part of their shared history with Austria and Hungary. No,

what is odd is that Bran Castle—the castle we so heavily associated with *Dracula*, is not even near Bistrița at all! Bran Castle is located in the region of Bran and is south of Bistrița; much closer to Wallachia, but still a part of Transylvania. Well, then, why Bran Castle?! It all comes down to aesthetics and visual representation. Bran Castle is one of the few castles in Romania that is still standing and looks impressive, and this castle would have probably been the subject of photos that were seen by many over in Western Europe when Stoker was writing. It also shows similarities with Slains Castle at Cruden Bay over in Scotland, which Stoker visited while writing *Dracula* and, according to Florescu and McNally, probably took inspiration from.

Here, we return back to the origin of the writer and realize that, at the end of the day, Transylvania and *Dracula* really are only set pieces to get Bram Stoker's message across. Perhaps *Dracula* too is just an aesthetic and Stoker is rather inspired by something more personal. Yes, Vlad Dracula was recognized as a bloody king who impaled his victims, but mayhap Stoker wanted to find something that he could relate to. Dr. Bob Curren, writer of *Vampires: A Field Guide of Creatures That Stalk the Night*, says in a BBC article that “Stoker had an interest in Irish folklore and the character of *Dracula* was based on a Celtic chieftain called Abhartach” (Sheeran). Having been born in Ireland, he would have felt a deeper connection to the lore and stories of his motherland, rather than Romania—a country he had never set foot in. But who is this Abhartach? The article goes on to say that he was a tyrant who demanded offerings in the form of blood-filled bowls who met his end after being impaled with a sword made of yew wood. Would *Dracula* have been too personal to his English audience if Stoker placed its antagonist in Ireland? England viewed Ireland with a lens of “otherness” and acknowledged its mystical history, similar to how it viewed Eastern Europe. It is possible that *Dracula* would have been the subject of more criticism and political debate if it were not in the mysterious and little-known Eastern Europe. Little did he know, Stoker was encroaching on a whole new world of histories and legends that would intrigue the fans of his novel in the future.

3. A King and a Castle

Sometimes, reality is stranger than fiction. Even if Bram Stoker was more inspired by the legend of an Irish tyrant, that does not stop us from associating the character of Dracula with the historical Romanian king, Vlad Dracula (more accurately known as Vlad Dracul or, better yet, Vlad Țepeș). He was born possibly around 1431 and died around 1476. The exact years are unknown. The consequence of naming such a villainous, influential fictional character after a real-life figure is that those fictional traits will be passed on inadequately and affect our perceptions. Several Romanians consider Vlad Țepeș to be someone to be admired for how he defended the nation and stopped heinous acts of crime, even if this was through unusual and frightening ways. As a result, he is found in many history books and television shows as something of a hero. If the world prescribes the real King Vlad Țepeș with the same negative traits as his vampiric counterpart, this may affect the way future generations see history. People outside of Romania could possibly consider natives as being wrong in their appreciation for the ruler because of the immense presence a fictional character bearing his namesake has over him. The consequences are already felt and now it is very hard to hear Vlad Țepeș referred to with words other than “cruel” or “sadistic”. Vlad Țepeș’s history and, in turn, an important piece of Romanian history has been drastically changed because of a novel. The only way to rectify this is by explaining the truth and separating the person of Vlad Țepeș from the character of Count Dracula. At the end of the day, they are not the same person, and this chapter aims to bring light to a person and a history that has been rewritten.

One of the earliest stories that I heard from my Romanian parents explaining the nature of Vlad Țepeș’s rules goes as follows: A miller had placed a golden chalice on a water wheel. Tempting to the passerby and thief, one would have expected it to have been swiped away in no time, and yet it remained untouched. One day, however, the chalice was no longer there, having been stolen unceremoniously by a common thief. That was the day when the miller knew that Vlad Țepeș had died. And why, you may ask, did he know? Well, that is because Vlad Țepeș had no room for thieves in his kingdom and would chop off their hands at an offense.

Another famous tale that I was told exemplifies Vlad Țepeș’s clever mind. During his battle with the Ottomans, he realized how outnumbered he was, and thus concocted a plan. In the dead of night, he dressed himself up as an Ottoman soldier and infiltrated their camp. Once

inside (and in a perfectly good Turkish accent, having studied within the Empire at a young age), he yelled out, “The Romanians are coming!” Panicked and having been just woken from their slumber, the Ottoman soldiers left their tent in a frenzy and started attacking their comrades who they mistook for the enemy Romanians. As the sun rose, they were horrified to see that all around them were the bodies of slain soldiers from their side who died because of a clever bout of trickery.^v

By modern moral standards, yes, Vlad Țepeș was by no means a hero. Based on these stories of his rule alone that are still passed down from generation to generation, he can be defined as someone who made the world righteous with the use of fear. He made himself the villain not because he could, but because he had to. Wallachia was so incredibly small in comparison to the Ottoman Empire, so he had to make a show of power. Having miles of impaled Ottoman soldiers, decaying and reeking in the sun (some still even alive in this gruesome state) for arriving soldiers to see was meant to disgust and terrify the enemy enough that they wouldn’t want to deal with an unpredictable ruler. There is no question on the justification of the moniker Vlad the Impaler or even Vlad Dracul, which means “the devil” in Romanian. He is a crucial figure of Romanian history and remembered well for his ingenuity in holding back the Ottoman invasion. Some Romanians still would consider him to be a good king, despite his shows of cruelty toward criminals. The Transylvanian-born lecturer and author of the book *Transylvanian Vampires*, Adriana Groza, points out that, “Within the Romanian tradition, Dracula does not carry the indelible image of a terrifying monster. Historical accounts praise his skill in war, serving the Christian cause” (7). Thus, not only is he looked at with some admiration, but he is also considered to be holy, which conflicts heavily with the typical emphasis on the unholy nature of the vampire.

So, how does Vlad’s vampiric counterpart compare? In the novel, Count Dracula is not Vlad Țepeș, but rather described as a descendent sharing similarities with him. His facial description in the book fits the portrait of the Wallachian ruler (except, of course, for his fangs... as far as we know). The Count has a lot of vampire characteristics – he can assume the form of an animal (black dog, bat), control the weather, is stronger than twenty men, moves very fast, can manipulate people (i.e. Renfield), cannot enter the victim’s room unless invited, is afraid of crosses or religious items, is afraid of garlic, cannot cross water unless carried (travels by ship),

is rendered powerless by daylight, needs dirt from his home country while in England, etc. For all his cleverness, Count Dracula is a man with many peculiar weaknesses to balance out his strengths. These peculiar weaknesses are not impossible to activate; even an ignorant human can wrap themselves in garlic and render themselves “vampire-proof”. While these weaknesses are the product of Transylvanian superstition, they translate an interesting story of what kind of person Vlad Țepeș was. He was a man who used many unsettling tactics in order to achieve results and gained a devil-ish reputation for his impaling tendencies, but if Count Dracula could be defeated by anyone despite having so much power, what is to stop people from believing that Vlad Țepeș was a prince that needed to be stopped by anyone and everyone willing to step up? As it will be explained later though, Vlad Țepeș was not killed by the average human or forces of nature, but in battle and very unlike Count Dracula. Unlike the Count, Vlad Țepeș didn’t try to run away and continued fighting with honor and was not downgraded into a Count.

Much information on Vlad Țepeș can be found in the Bran Castle’s Tourist Guide.^{vi} As previously stated, this castle really has no connection to either the Count or Vlad Țepeș. What makes it stand out is its longevity and impressive aesthetic power. Some claim, however, that Vlad Țepeș did stay overnight for a few days or maybe even months to escape the Ottoman soldiers, but there is little evidence to prove this. Bran Castle was officially “born on 19 November 1377” and was owned by the people of Brasov (Bran Castle Tourist Guide 15). In the 14th century, during the reign of Vlad Țepeș, his relationship with Brasov was tense, and the people of this city plotted against him, resulting in multiple confrontations. This could give further proof as to why he may not have been a frequent visitor of the castle. Nonetheless, as previously stated, Romanian history considers Vlad Țepeș to be a great king and leader. Țepeș is described by the Tourist Guide as having taken “his role as a ruler seriously and tried to defend his subjects and frontiers from enemies, both from the inside, i.e. the Romanian political elite, and from the outside” (46). His methods were the thing that gave him notoriety and a bit of a fear factor. According to this guide, the first “documents in which he received the name of Dracula come from the southern part of Transylvania, dating to 1459-1460” and were written by a pretender to the throne, showcasing just how many enemies he might have had for his unorthodox methods (50). The name Dracula is a pun on the word for “devil,” reflecting on his actions. This sobriquet, Dracula, was so immensely popular that he is now remembered primarily by it. In that case, we cannot really blame Bram Stoker for attaching Vlad Țepeș’s name to

Dracula, as history and the Romanian people have already done that themselves. However, historically, the name Dracula (Drăculea in Romanian) stands for Dragon and is a high sign of honor received by his ancestors and passed down to him.

What did Vlad Țepeș actually accomplish, other than being a fascinating king who shocked the continent with his torture methods? It is time for a long-awaited and brief history lesson. Vlad Țepeș (born as Vlad III) was born as the illegitimate son of Vlad II, the ruler of Wallachia. Tensions with the Ottomans were already high and, after his father refused to support their invasion into Transylvania, Vlad II, Vlad III, and his younger brother, Radu, were taken and imprisoned by them. Vlad Țepeș was only 11 and Vlad II was released soon after. This imprisonment benefitted both him and Radu, though, as they were trained in the art of Ottoman warfare and became well accustomed to the language and culture of the enemy. The plan was to subdue the two boys so that they would never think about attacking the Ottoman Empire once they were released. This plan may have worked with Radu, but Vlad III was not as easily persuaded. After the death of his father and older brother, Mircea, in 1447, the two boys were released. Sensing foul play in the manner of Mircea's death (having been buried alive), Vlad III; now Vlad Țepeș, began his journey for revenge against those who had wronged him, and especially the Ottoman Empire, who was using the Wallachian kingdom to do their bidding. A skilled fighter, he struck fear in the battlefield and demanded respect. The real battle with the Ottomans started when he refused to pay tribute to them, having been under their thumb for so long. Even if he was outnumbered and with much less resources than his opponent, he found ways to gain the upper hand (this is where "Vlad the Impaler" comes in). Wallachia won battle after battle, however other alliances made by the Ottoman Empire proved too much, and he was killed in battle and his decapitated head sent to the Sultan.

I remember the first time I went to Bran Castle: On both sides of the bridge leading up to the impressive fortress were tent stands of vendors selling their wares. Bran Castle is the most visited castle in Romania by tourists—due not just to its associations with Dracula, but also because it is one of the last few castles standing! Vlad Țepeș would have resided at the Poenari Castle in Arefu-Arges, but a comparison of the two castles shows a very stark difference. Poenari Castle is, unfortunately, composed of ruins. It is still impressive, but would have a hard time competing with Bran Castle, which is maintained to this day. (In fact, you can even stay the night

there!). There is even the option to spend a night in a coffin at the historic Bran Castle! Why not visit the basement and see all of the nifty torture devices, complete with ghost projections floating along the walls, while you are at it? Halloween is a busy time to visit Bran Castle, but it is surely a time that will be remembered. Bran Castle stands at an interesting intersection: being both a historical museum and a literary curiosity, and a must-see for horror aficionados everywhere. Considered to be a haunted place by many travel magazines, it is a common place for ghost hunters to visit (despite the lack of Vlad Țepeș's spirit wandering around). Based on the information found in the Bran Castle Tourist Guide, accommodations are set in place to please every interest: the history of the castle (which was owned for a great period of time by Hungarians), the tales of Count Dracula, the aesthetic and architecture of the castle, the grounds, torture instruments, shops, foods, and so much more. Bran Castle is a symbol of pride for Romania and new discoveries are being made to this day. Its associations with myths and fiction do not seem to degrade it, but rather strengthen it. Bran Castle has welcomed the cultural phenomena of vampires with open arms for they add just another layer to its complex history.

Brasov is the city where my mother was born and raised. Expecting some fascinating stories of her visiting Bran Castle during the holidays as a child, I asked her about what her experiences were like. Unfortunately, she had few. During her childhood in the 1970s and 80s, Romania was under the rule of the communist dictator Ceaușescu and he discouraged folk culture and history, thus barring the castle from maintenance and tourism. My mother was able to go for day trips via her school to see the castle, but Halloween parties and Christmas lights would have never happened back then. When the communist regime ended in 1989, Bran Castle could now be open to the public. Repairs were immense, but the hard work of those who love history and culture made Bran Castle into what it is today. We can excuse Bran Castle for some of the gimmicks it presents which would make the uptight scholar roll their eyes. Bran Castle was given back to the people to enjoy, and so why not make it an entertaining paradise for everyone to enjoy?

Vlad Țepeș and Bran Castle have been shown to be separate from vampires, but what of Romania's past with vampires? Count Dracula's weaknesses and strengths are accordingly based off of Transylvanian superstition, so we could assume that Romania has histories on vampires that are reflective of them. *Transylvanian Superstitions*, the book said to have inspired Bram

Stoker's creation of Dracula the vampire, also is accountable for the way we look at Romania. Perhaps it is not "guilty" for the way we look at Vlad Țepeș, but its claims played a major role into the changing of cultural history whether or not Emily Gerard knew it. The most interesting part of this book concerning this discussion is the latter half, which focuses on vampires in Romania: "In Roumania, bodies are disinterred at an interval of three years after death in case of a child, of four or five years in the case of young folk, and of seven years in the case of elderly people. If the decomposition is not complete, it is supposed that the corpse is a vampire" (Gerard 45). There are two types of vampires: the live-vampire (those who are destined to be vampires after death such as witches or wizards) and the reanimated-corpse vampire—the strigoi and the moroi. Gerard alludes to the variety of vampires when she writes "In general dead vampires come out every night except Saturday, when they are to be found in their graves. The vampires that are reanimated corpses or spirits of the dead disappear, like all evil spirits, at cockcrow" (61). The belief in vampires caused trouble for the rulers of the time, and, in a document written by Ureche (Historian of Roumania), he indicated that, in 1801, "the Bishop of Siges sent a petition to the ruler of Wallachia, that he should order his rulers of provinces to permit no longer that the peasants of Stroesti should dig up dead people, who had already been dug up twice under the idea that they were vârcolaci" (49). Vârcolac is used sometimes instead of strigoi, though can also be interpreted as a werewolf-like creature.

The unique ways to get rid of a vampire differ from one area to another. For example, in Romanap "the vampire was disinterred, undressed and put in a bag. The clothes were put back into the coffin and sprinkled with holy water, the coffin put back into the grave, and the grave closed.^{vii} A strong man carried the body to the forest. The heart was cut out, and the body cut up and one piece after another burnt. Last of all was burnt, and those present came near so that the smoke passed over them, and protected them from evil" (53). In another city, Zărnești, "when the vampire is dug up, iron forks are put into her heart, eyes, and breast, and she is reburied with her face downwards" (53). Garlic may also be placed in the mouth and the nose of the dead, and also placed in the coffin. Since vampires are recognized by specific events (like the family and livestock die soon after someone's death), we can safely deduce that sometimes vampires were the result of an epidemic.

In these explanations, what I noted was that Count Dracula's abilities seem highly exaggerated to what Gerard recounted as folk truth. Of course, Gerard wouldn't have been able to recount absolutely every piece of Romanian superstition that exists. For example, in his book *Vampires, Burial, and Death* published in 1998, Paul Barber compiles a number of specific details from traditional vampire lore adopted by Stoker. Barber notes how in fictional stories, a vampire needs to take his "coffin and a supply of dirt from his original burial place," a detail we see Stoker prioritize in his novel (Barber 83). Nonetheless, Gerard's vampire seems less powerful than the infamous Dracula and more dead. In all the ways to defeat a vampire, the vampire has to first be in its grave and then desecrated. Count Dracula was defeated while alive. Naturally, there is a clear reason as to why Gerard and Stoker's vampires differ: Count Dracula is a character and not simply a specimen of a creature. He had to be appealing, threatening, and charismatic. To kill Count Dracula while he is asleep in his grave could be seen as cowardice of behalf of the main characters and make for an anti-climactic end. The truth about Romanian vampires is, regrettably, rather anti-climactic.

The folk beliefs are born due to the folk's inability to explain facts and phenomenon, their lack of education, and their lack of scientific and medical knowledge. For example, the book mentions digging out a body at 3, 5, or 7 years after the funeral of the deceased. Depending on the soil composition and body decomposition, bodies might be found in different stages, creating vampire tales. Embalming a body is also practiced in Romania and, depending on the technique and products used, the body might retain its features longer. Also, even after death, the hair and nails continue to grow, and one may also think of clinical deaths that had people buried alive. The superstitions around the vampire are not as fantastical as the ones shown in books or movies. People in those times did not know much about medicine, the normal decomposition of a human body, or the environmental implications. The microorganisms that affect the human body after death were not known by our ancestors. To "them, if the body continued to change in color, move, bleed, and so on (as it in fact does), then it continued to live" (Barber 91) How do we explain the living vampire, or strigoi, though? An explanation of the living vampire may be medically related. People who have porphyria (a rare blood disorder) become sensitive to light, and their teeth may be red or brown in color. This disease was prevalent in Eastern Europe and physicians "recommended that some nobles replenish their blood by drinking the blood of their subjects" (Florescu et al. 132). Differences from what was familiar would have caused people to

be wary and give a name to those suffering from this disease, thus becoming superstitious of them. These superstitions were most common in smaller villages and rural areas during pre-communism. Once people moved to big cities during communism, the superstitions got lost. Also, because the communist party banned religion, some of the practices and beliefs died.

Are we already starting to get away from what is purely Romanian and what is the product of years of vampire history pushed onto Romania? We return back to our friends Florescu and McNally. These writers embarked on a trip following Stoker's locations from Transylvania in order to discover if there is historical basis for the novel. They found out that many locations from the book do exist and are accurately described; for example, the town of Bistrița, Fundu and Verești villages, Borgo Pass, etc. Even the ethnic minorities found in Transylvania (e.g. Romanians, Saxons, Hungarians, etc.) are "known and are distinguished from each other by Stoker" (8). In trying to locate the castle they come across the remains of a small fortress located not far from Borgo Pass, but this is too small to be the famed castle. However, close to the Pass is the Bistrița Castle. During 1451-1456 it is said that Dracula lived somewhere in this castle's vicinity, but there is no concrete evidence in this matter. "Wallachian chronicles (...) place Castle Dracula high up on a rock on the left of the Argeș" (65). Today, they are ruins of a structure, and nothing more. So why do people associate Bran castle to Dracula if he did not live or owe this? This castle is built on a mountain and "conveys more than any other existing castle in Romania, the legacy of the age of Dracula"; movies, tourism, and commerce made this castle into a legend (63). Most stories about Vlad Țepeș outside of Romania are horrifying and serve as a warning for what happens when we go down a life of cruelty. The German Catholic monks who wrote them depict him as a "demented psychopath, a sadist, a gruesome murderer, a masochist," while the Romanian stories portray him as a leader who tried to protect his people, and implement a set of strict code of ethics on his land that at times were done though cruel means; which is nothing new or different that the practices used by other rulers in Europe during these ages (80).

To this day, Romanians in Transylvania still believe in some of the superstitions that Gerard wrote about. For example, garlic as a deterrent for vampires continues to be popular in folk tradition. The most efficient weapon is a wooden stake driven into the heart of a vampire during daytime when it is sleeping. "Crosses made from the thorns of wild roses are effective in

keeping vampires away,” claim the two authors (Florescu et al. 122). Because Romanians are mostly Orthodox Christians they resort to many customs and traditions to keep their dead relative soul away from the house and guide it towards the next world. The Orthodox belief is that the souls will not enter the next world for 40 days, thus they make many donations, offerings, and religious services for 40 days after a death.

Explaining the bat apparition in Romanian fairy tales, it is known within the country as a creature of bad luck. Florescu and McNelly confirm this and say “The connection between Dracula, the devil, the bat, and the vampire becomes clear when one understands that in Romanian folklore the devil can change himself into an animal or a black bird. When he takes wing, he can fly like a bird or a bat. Satan seeks also to be nocturnal. During the day he remains in the quiet of Hell, like the bat in its refuge; when day is done, the night is his empire, just as it is the bat” (Florescu et al. 125). The bat also takes on a religious attribute and is associated with hell, based on this description.

What about the vampire as a character? They can exist as more than just a spook used for cautionary tales and, with all of the fascinating traits associated with them by Romanians, it would be a shame not to take advantage of them and write them as characters within tales. “If the real Vlad Țepeș was not the vampire of Stoker’s imagination, the real Transylvania is not and has never been a savage wilderness filled with gloomy forests, ominous animal cries, and crumbling ancient castles,” Adriana Groza explains. (Groza 8). In their folk stories, the vampire is not a romantic hero, but a human who lived within the village before they were transformed—one who is connected to the villagers and returns to the village after their transformation. They do not choose to be a vampire, are not invincible, have limited powers (i.e. changing into a dog). “The creature of Romanian folklore was embedded in a real, human culture, reflecting the apprehensions and anxieties of common people seeking to make sense of their existence” (11). Stories about vampires are usually told to reinforce good behaviors and to establish customs, because in Romanian stories “most of the stories instruct by means of negative models, warning the risks entailed by violation, for, otherwise, the vampire might get you” (11-2). They also promoted the distinction between who was considered “like everybody else” and who was an “other.” Not to mention, “the Transylvanian vampire story helps to domesticate death, normalizing the rhythms of life and immunizing us against our ultimate fears” (13).

One thing that separates the folk vampire from the Gothic vampire role is the fact that the heroine is not a damsel in distress—like Lucy in Stoker’s novel. For example, in many stories about vampires, the women are capable of standing against the vampire and conduct elaborate strategies to defeat them. Groza explains that “in addition to votive lamps and holy water, the story incorporates the rich Romanian tradition of counter-curses, magical rhymes and herbal remedies” used to defeat the evil (38). Another thing that is very un-Gothic about the folk vampire is their class: They are not shown to be wealthy people of class.

While Groza’s book had multiple vampire stories, two stories in this book stood out as unique in their own way. One is “The Vampire’s Friendship.” The vampire in this folk tale is saved by a human who is the only one who can see him, and, in exchange, he gives the man a valuable gift. The story shows that one good deed deserves another, and the man learns through this vampire’s lessons who is his real friend and how to handle difficult situations. It is interesting to note that the vampire seems to have a tail, and this is the only thing making him different visually from a human. He does have magic, appearing to the characters as a handsome man and woman; manipulating their perceptions of what he really is.

Vampire stories in Transylvanian folklore also include the loss of a loved one, such as a husband (or sometimes a wife), who turns into a vampire and comes back to their spouse. Usually, the vampire is defeated. The second story that caught my attention is about a young couple. The man is drafted to go to war and the woman is left behind, but before he goes, he promises her that he will return to her no matter what and that “not even death will have the power to separate us” (143). Going against what we think might happen, he does return to her, and they get married, but she notices he is missing from home during the night and becomes jealous. The woman goes for advice to a roma (usually, they are involved in tales as experts in magic and the unknown; sometimes dark arts, and many associate them with witches—this is an outdated and damaging stereotype) and they teach her what to do to discover her husband’s secret. The woman follows him into the night and learns that he is a vampire, as she sees him biting a man and drinking his blood. She then commits suicide in order to be with him, and the story concludes suggesting that they might both be now vampires, but it does not confirm this fact.

These stories show that vampires have been unfairly villainized and painted as always being denizens of evil because of the influence of *Dracula*. It also shows that the vampire tale had already been present before the book's arrival and, when it came to character developing, prioritized a character that felt more human—something that is extremely prevalent in modern media. In conclusion, should we dub *Dracula* as an irredeemable text for what it has done to a famous historical person, a cultural tradition, and the image of a nation in general? I cannot give a simple “yes” or “no” answer. *Dracula* is well-researched and unapologetically knows its genre. Stoker planned for his book to sell, but it is unlikely that he had planned for it to greatly affect the perception of a nation for all time. It also brought attention to Romania and its history, even if many inaccuracies were formed along the way. People fascinated with the novel and interested in knowing more about the inspiration behind it would not have an impossible time coming to the truth.

As we can see, vampires are complex in Romanian culture just as they are in any other culture. They have evolved with time, and yes, some of this evolution is a direct influence from a shrinking world and influenced texts. Romania takes these influences and makes them their own, creating a fascinating cryptid culture and complicating their already rich history into something amusing and entertaining.

4. Globalization Sensation

We may have *Dracula* to thank for the absolute plethora of media that now exists on vampires. They have become a staple for Halloween costumes and forbidden romances, appearing in books, movies, video games, and so much more. Of course, many times, this media may want to pay homage to the iconic text which started a globalization sensation; sometimes with awkward consequences. For example, one article written by Life Magazine on the “World’s Most Haunted Places” erroneously writes that Bran Castle “once belonged to 15th century prince Vlad Tepes” (70).^{viii} This is not to criticize the authors in any way. Just typing the question “who was the king of Transylvania” on Google will lead to Vlad Țepeș’s name dominating the first page of results. It is hard to compete with such an influential novel like *Dracula*. Vampires have become a collaborative effort worldwide and are no longer constrained to tropes found in classical texts. In order to breathe new life into the concept of the vampire and create stories that are exciting and relevant to the times and culture of the author, writers have created new traits and storylines. These new traits play into how we view Romania, Bran Castle, *Dracula*, genre, and more. Can they be considered welcome contributions?

This chapter first starts where we began our journey: Romania. *Dracula* is, after all, a novel from Britain, so a vampiric novel from Romania would be an example of global writing. What about an example of a work of vampire media after *Dracula*, with its influences already being felt across Europe? Would there be traces or influences of the tale that placed Romania as the vampire hotspot? Enter a novel lost to an English-speaking audience. In fact, I had to enlist the help of my mother to read a copy of the story currently available only in Romanian and French.^{ix} Why was the novel not as popular as its predecessor despite possibly being more “authentic” (if we consider texts about Romanian vampires written by Romanians to fall into this category)? One possible explanation is that there simply was just not anything new or revolutionary about this novel. It follows similar Gothic genre tropes and storytelling like so many other novels of the time. *Miss Christina* by Romanian-born author Mircea Eliade was published in 1936, and it is a romantic supernatural fantasy story. The main antagonist is a strigoi woman, which already shows a way in which it can be seen as authentically Romanian. Rather than claiming her to be a vampire, Eliade’s word choice of strigoi—a term that could have been confusing for the Western European reader—may also be a reason as to why the novel did not

gain the same amount of fame as other classic vampire texts preceding it. The novel has five human characters (Professor Nazarie, the painter Egor, Mrs. Moscu, Simina, and Sanda) and our strigoi character comes in the form of the title character, Miss Christina. It is interesting to note that the word "strigoi" is mentioned only seven times in the text and that we do not see Miss Christina biting a person and feeding on blood. Instead, she shows other vampiric traits, like the ability to manipulate people and steal their energy. She is also victim to some of a vampire's weaknesses, like being unable to enter a room unless invited. In the story, Miss Christina is the sister of Mrs. Moscu who was killed 30 years ago by her jealous boyfriend at around 16 years of age. Her body was never found, and thus she never had a proper burial. As explained in Chapter 3, proper funeral rites are crucial in Romanian tradition and not doing them properly can result in the birth of a strigoi. Miss Christina, when alive, was the kind of person who flirted with men and performed acts of cruelty, making her the perfect candidate for an evil strigoi. The villagers believed when she was alive that she drank the blood of young family members and cattle. Evil in the form of a vampire appears to be a common theme in classical texts and *Miss Christina* showcases this. This is yet another similarity with *Dracula*. Eliade, if he so desired to paint strigoi and vampires from Romania in a positive light, could have portrayed Miss Christina as a woman who was dealt with an unfair hand after death. The primary reason why she became a strigoi after all is because she received an unfair burial. By making her cruel when she was alive, it cements the strigoi as an irredeemable creature that is a product of emotions like malice (and, as we will see in later vampire media, this common trait of the vampire takes a drastic turn).

Miss Christina starts off with a classic dinner scene in which the main characters, Egor and Nazarie, are guests at Mrs. Moscu's house, the sister of the deceased Miss Christina. The death of her sister shows to have clearly affected the mind states of herself and her youngest daughter, Simina, who frequently acts as if she were possessed. After dinner, Mrs. Moscu takes her family and guests to Miss Christina's room, and here they see a portrait of the deceased that gives off a cold and melancholic feeling to all present. Egor, however, sees the painting with a feeling of awe. In his eyes, Christina seems like she is smiling a somber smile at him only. The macabre beauty of the painting consumes him and he becomes inspired to recreate it as his own. Paintings and mirrors hold a certain power; not just in Romanian folklore. In many cultures, when a family member dies, the people of the household will cover mirrors and paintings so that the soul won't fly into them and continue living within the house. It is possible that, at that

moment, the group is not just looking at a painting of Miss Christina, but Miss Christina herself. Egor's desire to recreate the painting may symbolize him bringing Miss Christina back to life by making the memory of her new and relevant.

As the novel continues, Egor and Nazarie learn more about the cruel horrors of this family and how they do not just stop at Miss Christina. For example, the young daughter, Simina, eagerly recounts tales of murder to Egor, unsettling him to the point that he stabs her with a stake at the end of the novel. While only Miss Christina is the vampire (strigoi) here, her family shares many similar traits with her, creating what could be the start of the wealthy vampire family popular in modern works (and also suggesting a mentality that becoming a monster is an indirect influence of the company one keeps). Despite the red flags, Egor refuses to leave Mrs. Moscu's house because he is smitten with Mrs. Moscu's older daughter, Sanda, who, peculiarly, does not have the same murderous traits that her mother, sister, and aunt have, complicating the evil vampire family mentality.

Miss Christina appears for the first time in Egor's dreams, and the strong smell of violets follows her. She tells him, "Don't run away Egor, don't be afraid because I am dead" (which, quite frankly, would probably make one even more afraid) (Eliade 28). Her appearance and accentuation of the fact that she is dead gives her a lot of ghost-like qualities, but any theory that she is merely a ghost is dashed when she then tries to seduce him by telling him "Your blood is too dear, my love... From here, from this word, I will come every night to see you. First in your dreams Egor, then in your arms, my love" (29). As previously stated, Miss Christina is never shown actually consuming blood while in her strigoi form. Her focus on Egor's blood though suggests that she does need it to survive, either literally or figuratively (as in she needs a life force). The next night, she appears in Egor's room again and once more states that her love for him takes away her need to feed—"I don't want to lose you, I don't need your blood... I want you to let me love you [...] You are alive, I come from another world. You cannot understand, no one can understand... I didn't want to kill you my love, I wanted to get engaged to you..." (45-6). While Miss Christina clearly has antagonistic intentions and is acting through deceptive means in this scene, the love between a vampire and human being one of sacrifices is yet another theme we see crossing into modern vampire romances. This motif frequently found in the novel resembles a few of the verses of Mihai Eminescu's "The Morning Star." This is an extremely

famous poem in Romania, and tells the tragic romance story between an immortal star (Lucifer) and a mortal princess, seemingly to reinforce the idea of the undead versus the human. The inclusion of this theme of a forbidden love between a mortal and immortal in one that is seen around the globe, but Eliade could have been inspired by the passion of this influential author and poem from his home country when writing Miss Christina's speech to Egor on how they can still find love by being together despite their differences (when it is, in truth, impossible). This love of Miss Christina's could have been born from simply her character when she was alive, but it is also possible that Egor's desire to recreate her through a painting and bring her to life could have encouraged her actions.

The last time that Egor meets Miss Christina in his room (and, keep in mind, he still finds no love in his heart for her), she aims to seduce him by undressing. Yet, this action proves to be her downfall and Egor is brought into action once he sees the wound in her stomach left by the weapon her boyfriend used to kill her, still bleeding out fresh blood. In an effort to get rid of Miss Christina, Egor drops a gas lamp on the floor, thus starting a fire in his room. Miss Christina disappears once she sees the fire, but she is seen in the courtyard climbing into a carriage and leaving the property. The villagers become aware of the fire and gather around the house. Egor calls upon them to get rid of evil. As they riot around the house, Egor enters Christina's room and destroys her painting, impales the possessed Simina with a stake, and leaves, unfortunately leaving Sanda to die alone in the burning house. The whole house burns down. There is no happy ending in this vampiric tale, but it is suggested through the destruction of the painting and the possessed Simina's death that Miss Christina is gone for good.

Miss Christina greatly resembles the Western European Gothic novels of the period with its commentary on class, its dark and foreboding atmosphere, and twisted love. Mircea Eliade wrote this novella while in Romania; however, he moved to France afterwards to escape the growing communist regime. With the communist regime also limiting the amount of folk superstitions, *Miss Christina* might have been a way to introduce some of it back into Romanian literary history with its strigoi character. It is a unique mixture of Western European storytelling and Eastern European (Romanian) characters and tropes Mircea Eliade is known to be first a historian of religion and philosopher, and then a fiction writer, and his interests are clearly seen in this novel. Miss Christina, like all vampires (and evil spirits), comes out in nocturnal settings.

There is a belief in Romanian folklore (like in so many other cultures) that someone who does not follow a righteous path in life will go to hell, thus the path of debauchery and cruelty she takes during her life is reflected in her life. In an article from 2021 entitled “Representations of Evil in the Novels MISS CHRISTINA, THE SNAKE AND ISABEL and THE DEVIL’S WATERS” by Constantin Ivanov, he explains that the novel “reveals the folk elements from archaic beliefs and some occult representation about the world and the realm of the dead” (Ivanov 75). Ivanov’s claim supports the idea that *Miss Christina* could be considered more authentically Romanian than a copout of Western Gothic novels. The attention to folk elements is not unique however, as we clearly see them being used in *Dracula* with heavy influence from Emily Gerard’s work on superstition. One scene that Ivanov goes into detail explaining is Miss Christina’s portrait and how it seems to communicate with each male character as “Nazarie felt terror like a claw pressing on his chest” while Egor “was struggling to realize where so much melancholy and fatigue flowed in her soul, in front of this virgin who looked him in the eyes, smiling familiarly, as if she had chosen only him from the whole group, to tell him only about her loneliness” (77). Thus, the painting is a demonic force and the only way to defeat it is to destroy the portrait. These feelings are built on superstition. In the fire that destroys Mrs. Moscu’s house, this painting filled with terror is destroyed, “killing” Miss Christina in the process. It is unique from the stake impaling and decapitation of older vampire tales and adds flavor to what would otherwise be just another example of the same old tale. All vampires have a weakness. This is the balance and the curse that they bear. If not for some of these peculiar weaknesses, vampires would be all too powerful.

Miss Christina shows signs of having been influenced by *Dracula*, but we need to go further out and closer to our times. The year was 2009, and I was enjoying my life as a third grader. Seeking some sort of entertainment on the playground, I accepted the request to roleplay with some other girls a scene from a film that was all the rage: *Twilight*.^x *Twilight* brought with it all of the blood-sucking horror elements of vampires... but made it hot. No longer was the vampire a villain, but a misunderstood love interest who would defend you with their superhuman abilities. The angst of an immortal vs. a mortal falling in love was established and people sucked it up (pun intended).

Once again, I bring up a previous argument made in which I claim that vampires should be seen as more like succubi than zombies. What makes vampires so appealing is their aesthetic. Notice how none of the vampires examined throughout this entire thesis show any sign of poverty. Vampires become a symbol of class and sexuality being expressed. We have multiple examples of this being shown: Dracula is a count living in a mansion with three seductive women. Ruthven is a lord who attracts the attention of many with his unusual beauty. Miss Christina lives in a luxurious house and is a massive flirt. The high class of these antagonistic characters would have been a common trope in Gothic novels and gives vampires the agency to get away with passing as human and only dining on the finest of blood by being around the wealthy. The rich status would also make them someone worthy of being around and also more attractive. Being bitten by a vampire is a sexual act (and sometimes has the same connotations). And with so many quid pro quos of vampire tropes, you can never run out of interest content and loopholes for them. Of course, you have your horrific and ugly vampires, but in the modern era, the forbidden dark romance tale spun by them reigns supreme. To showcase this, I would like to take you on a brief analysis of two modern vampire romance books.

At the time of writing this, Lynsay Sands has written thirty-five books for her steamy Argeneau contemporary vampire series published by Avon books. Her first book in this well-received series, *A Quick Bite*, takes place in modern Canada. Lissianna (a vampire) has been spending her centuries (over 200 years) feeding the old-fashioned way (by biting her victim); that is because she has a tendency to faint at the sight of blood (hemophobia). In this era, vampires consume blood via blood bags. Already, we are seeing a quirky approach on the vampire: one that is, oh no, scared of blood. This trait makes Lissianna as a monster character more likable. Additionally, it makes the moment of the bite with her fated partner more special. He's not just a regular meal. He's deluxe. We are also introduced to the fact that she is just one member of a large and complex vampire family. The vampire family is a trope that we see starting to appear in books like *Miss Christina* in subtle ways, but seem to make a large appearance in the modern era of vampire writing as a way to accent their lavish class, showcase their immortality and history, and give vampires traits that can be associated as human-like. The vampire family also allows for more character complexity as the leading vampire character faces the conflict of tradition and love. There becomes a reason for why a mortal-immortal relationship is forbidden beyond "that's just the way that it is". The vampire family also implies that

vampires can be created not simply through performing evil deeds; instead, they were innocently born to be a monster. This gives them the opportunity to be redeemed and wallow in angst.

Sands goes on to describe vampires as young and beautiful, with silver blue eyes (a unique twist on the typically red-eyed vampires that show how blood is the only thing they see). They are incredibly strong and can read minds, modify memories, put thoughts in humans' heads, and manipulate them—but they can do this only one or two times per person. Any more than that and humans would remember the truth regardless. Their vampire teeth retract, letting them blend in perfectly among society and they come out only when they feed. Neither of the classic ways of killing a vampire works on them as “neither holy water nor garlic would hurt them. Sunlight was another matter, they wouldn't burst into flames if they stepped out into it, but it did make life easier to avoid it” (Sands 54). The sun becomes nothing more than a slight allergy that damages their skin and forces their body to work on overdrive. They can be killed though, so immortality does not equal invincibility.

This is where the story gets absolutely wild and Sands adds her own narrative to the vampire lore. Turns out, vampires are just people who lived thousands of years ago in Atlantis. This advanced civilization created a treatment via nanotechnology that was implanted in sick patients to help them with recovery. Over time, this was passed down to their offspring. Since threats to the body are always existent, the nanotechnology did not self-destruct as planned; thus the individuals who received the treatment became semi-immortals. The nanotechnology requires a fresh supply of blood in order to keep the body healthy and young. It's, lowkey, kind of genius. The love interest—a psychologist named Dr. Hewitt further learns that there “was a time when coffins and crypts were the safest place for us to sleep, protecting us from both the sunlight and anyone who might hunt us, but the time is past” adding on to this unique vampire lore (175). This would not be a contemporary vampire novel if we didn't have the characters who are trying to get rid of them. A priest within this book uses garlic, holy water, crosses and they even attack Lissianna and plunge a stake through her body, always, comedically, failing to complete their plan. This point of the book also brings up another trope of modern vampire media: the vampire hunter. Van Helsing has become synonymous with the vampire hunter—the eternal enemy of the vampire who is a walking encyclopedia of vampire knowledge that no normal person would understand. (This trope is also used in the “enemies to lovers” genre in

other media to further accentuate a forbidden romance between eternal enemies.) As previously stated, modern vampire media creators do like to pay homage to the original work of vampire fiction and *A Quick Bite* is no exception. The author picks at Stoker's *Dracula*, by having her characters claim that "he wrote that Drac had a harem of female vamps in his castle and was still chasing after Lucy and Mina" (184). Renfield (the man in the sanatorium in *Dracula*) is mentioned a couple of times in the novel as well as a warning of the possible side effects of having your memory wiped out and becoming mad.

Equally popular to the vampire romance novels is the fantasy novel. These novels will accentuate the war between humans and the undead even more (but still occasionally bring up the topic of romance). Enter Elise Kova's *A Duel with the Vampire Lord* published in 2022. To twist it up, this fantasy romance novel is inspired by the tale of Snow White, but "dark". That's the thing about vampires that makes them so appealing. As a creature of darkness, they can make any other story just as dark as them. In Kova's world, the vampires are afraid of two things: silver and salt. What makes this weakness interesting is that silver and salt are typically weaknesses prescribed to the fae folk, blurring the line of whether a vampire is one born as human or one born as a monster. What caught my attention in this novel are the descriptions of the vampirs and the myths used. First off, the term being used here—vampir—instead of vampire is how Romanians would actually say the word. The leading vampir's appearance, Ruvan, shows him as having sunken eyes, "folds of flesh sag underneath, leathered with an age that must be ancient [...] what would be white in human's eyes is black for him, making the deep recess they sit in on his face all the more pronounced. At their center is a gleaming yellow iris" (Kova 32-3). Most of his teeth are human-like, except for his canines. Even if he is the love interest, he is not described as being attractive (at first). Only after making a blood oath with the heroine does he get to return to his real form, which is very attractive human-like in appearance. It is through the power of blood (a.k.a. life.. and I guess love) that he regains his youth. (Similar to the character of Dracula.) His castle is located in the snowy mountains, and it is falling into ruins, symbolizing a need to be isolated and separate from the common folk.

The villain of the book is also a vampir. Interestingly enough, he is a human who turned himself into one. (Making him more evil than one born as a monster, perhaps?) In order to break a curse, a sacrifice must be made and the main female protagonist commits the ultimate sacrifice.

Fear not though. Ruvan saves her by turning her into a vampire. This last part of the story—turning one into a vampire in order to save their life, is also common in vampire stories. It is an escape card and a way to up the angst, making the ending so much more rewarding. It can also be a curse though. Sometimes, vampires can only turn one person into a vampire, and this person will become their soulmate for all eternity. Other times, vampires (showing off their humane sympathy) will find that the burden of living a thousand years as a vampire is too much of a curse to pass onto a human; even if it is to save their life. The argument is that living and seeing all of your friends and family die while you live on is a great toll. In a sense, vampires make room for the immortality and mortality couple, making the immortal an omniscient god. The vampire is an immortal who still has some thread of humanity and weakness, thus balancing out even slightly the power imbalances that come with such a pairing.

The main transition that we see in these two modern novels in comparison to classic texts is the transition from monster to human. The charm of the vampire is taken to no longer be a negative trait, but a desirable one. This reflects on how our current society is more welcoming toward free expression of sexuality. There would be little reason to retain the same mentality of fear of Eastern European “exoticness” that Stoker exemplified in *Dracula*. Another notable transition that we see is one from superstition to tradition. The two arguably go in tandem, but because of the complex history of the vampire novel, modern authors can begin to work with a tradition of what it means to be a vampire—a question that is strengthened by the vampire family trope. Superstition still plays a prevalent role, but more often than not, it is the vampire rather than the human that is more aware of the superstitions and weaknesses they have. This self-awareness aids in making the vampire more sympathetic, but it also aids in showcasing the vampire as a parody—nothing is new to them except the ignorance of the human character that has entered their world.

I would be remiss as a person if I didn’t include Japanese pop culture media of vampires via graphic novels, or manga in this conversation; mostly for the fact that this is the cultural media that I have consumed the most. This has its place in the discussion, of course. Even with a wide plethora of their own unique cultural cryptids and spirits, other countries and nations have looked at the European vampire and fitted them into their own fiction. Some well-known examples include *Millenium Snow* by Bisco Hatori which tackles the similar question of whether

to live a short life as a mortal or an extremely long life as a vampire is better. The main character, Chiyuki, has a terminal illness that will prevent from seeing her next winter. Toya, a vampire, can increase her lifespan by forming a partnership with her, but if he does so, then she will be forced to live as a blood-sucking monster for a thousand years as his lover. *Millennium Snow* features a love triangle with a werewolf, four years before *Twilight* was published. Vampires and werewolves have always been pitted against each other. Could it perhaps be because they both can blend in with human society despite being monsters?

What about humans blending in with monsters instead? *Rosario Vampire* by Akihisa Ikeda tells the story of a boy who, unknowingly, gets sent to a high school for monsters like werewolves and mermaids who wouldn't hesitate to rip a human like him to shreds. He finds a friend in Moka, a girl who is said to be one of the most powerful monsters ever—a vampire. Comedic hijinks ensue as this poor little human tries to fit in in a world that he doesn't belong in.

Sometimes, even if you do belong, you still fight against your kind. *Vampire Hunter D* by Hideyuki Kikuchi is a staple of the Japanese vampire genre and, just like the title suggests, is about a vampire hunter by the name of D who lives in the year 12,090 A.D. when vampires have taken over the world. What makes D unique is that he is a dhampir. Dhampirs are a creature from Balkan legends that are the offspring of a vampire and a human. Typically, the vampire is the father, while the human is the mother, but this is not exclusive. What is also fascinating about *Vampire Hunter D* is the futuristic world that it is put in—a kind of dystopia (but a gun-slinger one in this novel).

Which brings me to *Seraph of the End* by Takaya Kagami. This ongoing series tells the tale of a boy, Yuichiro, who escapes the grasps of vampires who keep children like him for food, and falls into the hands of vampire hunters, living in Japan, post-apocalypse. At a vampire hunter's school, he learns the skills necessary to defeat the ones that imprisoned him and killed his friends. His will is tested however, when he discovers that a close friend that he thought was dead was turned into a vampire. Now on opposing sides, how can Yuichiro confront this betrayal and gain back his friendship? In this series, the queen of the vampires is a woman called Krul Tepes—an homage, no doubt, to Vlad Țepeș.

There are not only vampire hunters present in this medium, but also vampire doctors. *The Case Study of Vanitas* by Jun Mochizuki takes place in old steampunk France, and features a human by the name of Vanitas who has a book that can heal vampires that have turned corrupted by a villain who misuses their true names. Specific vampire clans have unique powers, like the Archiviste clan who can read the memories of any one whose blood they consume. *The Case Study of Vanitas* also has an influential character that plays homage to a classic work of vampire fiction. ...And it's not from *Dracula*?! No, instead he is a reference to *The Vampyre*. Lord Ruthven is a charming vampire in this world and also a teacher for some of the younger characters. He dons an eyepatch (possibly symbolizing *The Vampyre*'s Ruthven's one dead eye).^{xi}

Lastly, for the Japanese media portion of this discussion, we have *Castlevania*—a video game series and hit anime about fighting vampires and other demons from hell. As I started the first episode of this anime, I jumped up and ran to my mother. “Mother! Vlad Țepeș is in Wallachia!” I said. Indeed, the series starts out by placing the location in the kingdom of Wallachia rather than Transylvania. He is a vampire from the start of the series, and falls in love with a human. Together, they have a child named Alucard.^{xii} Vlad's human wife is accused of being a witch, however, and she is burnt at the stake, incurring Vlad's wrath and dooming the people of Wallachia to an onslaught of demons. A common legend concerning the real Vlad Țepeș is that he too had a lover who was burned at the stake, though accounts on Vlad's love life are not certain.

In 2022, Hollywood released its own history of Vlad Țepeș, but as a vampire, in the form of *Dracula Untold 2*. That's right, 2! This is a sequel from a live-action film from 2014. In the original film, Vlad Țepeș is the prince of Wallachia and Transylvania and his enemy is none other than the Ottoman Empire! Acknowledging that his kingdom is too small and powerless to fight this great enemy, he makes a deal with a folk legend—a vampire—to become a vampire for three days with superhuman abilities. The catch is that he has to resist the urge to drink blood, or else he will be a monster forever. The film makes a point to show the connection Vlad had with the Ottoman Empire and his relationship with the Sultan. Naturally, there are inaccuracies (it is a vampire horror fantasy after all), but the attention to some historic detail shows that interest in Romanian history is not forgotten when talking about the vampire.

Romania has become a hot spot of not just vampire activity in media, but also any supernatural entity, like in *Harry Potter*. The strigoi and moroi have their time to shine too in *Vampire Academy* by Richelle Mead, in which the good, living vampires are the moroi, while the bad, corrupted vampires are the strigoi. Strangely enough, the action in this series takes place in the forests of none other than Montana. What the globalization and evolutionary branches of the vampire show is that Transylvania and *Dracula* serve more as blueprints than an actual step-by-step guide of what the vampire is. Now, our modern perception of the vampire can exist anywhere: from France to Montana. They can do anything they want and their connotations are not necessarily evil and negative. They are anti-heroes fighting to survive in a modern age and willing to fight true evil. The Romanian vampire (if we can still call it that), it seems, has gone global.

5. Fame and Reclaim

There is possibly no other nation we associate a creature of legend with so much. It has gotten to the point where Transylvania seems almost like the name for a mythical place—A place where vampires run wild and live in dark forests and imposing Gothic castles. While after some investigation, we do see vampires having an influential role in Romanian folklore, the vampire craze is not a product of inner works, but rather outer works. Is this a problem?

The obvious answer is “no,” as long as we are able to separate fact from fiction. Many people are still superstitious, but don’t expect to see garlic cloves hanging around in everybody’s house. Some may even believe in vampires to this day, but this is not inclusive. People are not actors. Vampire fiction is fun, of course, and many Romanians may partake in it. Some celebrities and athletes, like tennis star Jacqueline Christian, have donned on a black cape for good humor. In an interview with Transylvania Open—a women's tennis association that holds matches in Cluj-Napoca, Romania, from 2021, she said, “I kept telling myself I've worked a lot for this moment, I've earned it, that was in my mind. This is very special, to get this result at home, especially wearing Dracula's cape. I hope to wear it until Sunday” (Transylvania Open). Could Dracula the vampire even be seen as a symbol of national identity and pride? Christian is not the only Romanian who has partaken in the vampire aesthetic in order to represent their country. It is easily recognizable and memorable. Everyone has read or watched at least one vampire tale in their life, so it also appeals to a large community. Why stop something that is both productive and fun?

Locations within Romania do not stray away from these associations. As previously stated, Bran Castle is now visited by thousands of people, and there are Halloween parties and ghost effects throughout the castle. On the last level, there is a restaurant where you can dine with Dracula and spend the night in a comfy coffin. Hunedoara castle, the place where Vlad Țepeș was imprisoned toward the end of his life, is also visited by those who are looking for ghosts and paranormal activities. Next to Bran Castle, there is an open market where local vendors sell Dracula and Vlad memorabilia donning the name and aesthetic of both the vampire and the king. There are cafés and restaurants with Dracula themes: coffee tables in the shape of coffins with red velvet and plastic skeletons peeping through the glass (as of the last time I personally had the opportunity to visit this famed place).^{xiii} When one exits the castle, they end

up in a narrow tunnel haunted by ghosts and vampires (just like a haunted house in the United States). In the international market, Romania still benefits from vampires. For example, I had recently come across some cheese at her local store: “Transylvanian hard-cheese – aged in a spine-chilling Romanian salt cave” and “Transylvanian hard-cheese soaked in red wine – aged in a spine-chilling Romanian salt cave”. Spine-chilling and scrumptious. I mean, what can be more authentic than cheese with all the shepherds mentioned in *Dracula*? (That’s a joke, but the Romanian cheese that accentuates the spooky reputation of Transylvania is very much real.) Throughout the years, Romanians have also put Țepeș’s portrait on postal stamps—once in 1976, commemorating 500 years from his death, and then again in 1997 along with Brans Castle in a series of stamps dedicated to Romanian stories and legends.

Nowadays, most young Romanians embrace Halloween, Dracula, and the fun built around this. There are still remote cities who are rooted in traditions (and recently a few History Channel documentaries about vampires brought attention to a horrifying story of a man whose grave was desecrated, and whose heart was burned and consumed by the ones who believed him to be a vampire—an example of superstition going to the extreme levels), but vampires are overall treated like the character of legends that they are. It is important to note that in the years since the Communist Regime fell, Romanians are turning back to traditions, beliefs, and holidays they were not openly allowed to observe, so, more so than ever, these tales are a way to bring back a national identity.

Even with the pride and reclaim that comes with adapting the vampire into Romanian culture, the vampire still serves to overshadow settings and creatures that are found originally in Romanian folklore. These creatures should be considered equally important (or even more so) in the mission to reclaim cultural identity because of their authenticity. I believe that the best way to go about this mission is by enlightening people about the fascinating stories that do exist. By bringing awareness and allowing for these stories to spread, we can continue to showcase the richness of a folk culture that Romania is proud of. The following are brief descriptions of various creatures and settings of Romanian folklore. Passed down through oral tradition from a myriad of villages, each person may describe these creatures a little bit differently. I would like to thank Carmen (my mother) and Sergiu (my uncle) for their invaluable contributions in this section, and Adrian (my father) for going back to Romania this year to bring back authentic

Romanian texts and stories. They provide just one perspective of a complex mythos, of course, but what they shared is engaging and exciting.

Moroi and strigoi have already been explained, but one other creature often associated with them is the *pricolici*. The *pricolici* resembles more of a werewolf than a vampire, but like the vampire, they are creatures that are undead; said to be the product of especially violent humans that have risen from their grave. The *vârcolac* is another wolf-like creature of folklore. This creature is just your standard werewolf, for the most part, who can shapeshift. They are not as blood hungry as the *pricolici*. Romania has one of “the largest wolf populations of EU nations, with a rough estimate of 2,500 wolves,” according to *The Guardian* as of 2018. A large wolf population could explain why these two creatures are prevalent in cautionary tales.

Hydras, serpents, wyverns—Romania is not alone in providing its own type of dragon, in the form of the *balaur*. This dragon is most similar to the Greek hydra with multiple heads (there is no specific number). *Balauri* are featured as the villains in many folktales that are defeated by a hero, and the Romanian hero of myth comes in the form of Făt Frumos, or Prince Charming (Făt coming from boy and Frumos coming from handsome). He goes through standard heroic trials and sometimes acquires companions. The famous Romanian author, Mihai Eminescu (mentioned in Chapter 4 for his poem “The Morning Star”), includes the character in his book, *Făt Frumos din Lacrimă*. Not only will he fight the *balaur*, but also the *zmeu*—two creatures closely associated with fabled school of black magic run by the Devil, *Scholomance* (*Rom. Șolomanță*).

A magic school in Romanian folktales?! Oh, yes. Not only that, but the *Scholomance* is mentioned in *Dracula* as well. In Chapter 18, it is explained that “The Draculas were [...] 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, where the devil claims the tenth scholar as his due” (253). It is also mentioned in Garad’s book on *Transylvania Superstitions*. This school, located in Transylvania, teaches its students—the *Șolomonari*—magic and how to speak with animals, all completely in the dark (being a hotspot for strigoi and other villainous creatures). The end goal is to become the Weathermaker and control the weather from a dragon stead. ... Yes. Weather-controlling

dragon riders are a thing. Who is accepted as a Șolomonar is debatable, though there are some stories that say that those with red hair and blue eyes are more susceptible for being a member of this school. Not all Șolomonari are evil, and some could even benefit villagers by changing the weather in their favor, but it is best to be cautious. The Bran Castle Tourist Guide claims that they are “impure beings, cursed by God, having sold their souls to the Devil to control the skies” (90). You may start to notice a pattern with some of these creatures of Romanian folktales: more often than not, they start off as regular humans. These denizens of evil are created by the humans who are cruel and corrupt. Thus, a figurative monster of a human turns into a real monster. Would this serve to make them feel more real? They are not completely “others”; just reflections of the inner darkness in one’s soul.

Some evil, though, just exists. The zmeu’s appearance is a point of contention. They are often mistaken as pure dragons like the balaur, but are more often seen as anthropomorphic dragon shape-shifters or ogres. Some even list them as vampires. Like the balaur, they have a tendency of kidnapping fair maidens (this time, with the goal of marrying them), and being defeated by a hero. They carry a club called a *buzdugan* and this club is part of a common saying in Romania. If someone is arriving to a location soon, they will say “I am throwing the buzdugan” (a.k.a. The door is about to be (figuratively) kicked down). For tourists visiting Romania, one can visit the Grădina Zmeilor (Zmeu Garden) Nature Reserve located near the historical Cluj. This well-kept secret of natural beauty is open to the public. In this reserve, tourists can admire large natural rock formations that are sometimes referred to as dragons, and many of the rocks have names and stories behind them based on their appearance!^{xiv}

Another maiden-stealing ogre is the *căpăcun* that is described as having a confusing, yet anthropomorphic experience with multiple limbs and organs and the head of a dog. They are very vicious and will attack and eat anyone who crosses their path. Another human-like creature is the *uriaș*, which is Romania’s equivalent of the giant. Their origin story is similar to that of the Greek titans in which they started off with being docile but soon claimed war on humanity. Christian storytelling is often put in place when describing their actions.

From large, we go to small. The *spiriduș* is a small, fairy-like creature that serves as a familiar. They serve devils and demons and can be summoned often in exchange for the

summoner's soul after death. They may also take on the appearance of a bird. Maybe even possibly a bat. Lastly (but certainly not the end of a repertoire of colorful creatures) is the *iele*—beautiful nymph-like faeries that can be found in the forest or bathing in springs. They do have a tendency of lashing out to anyone who is rude to them, but all they really want to do is dance. Of course, a passerby may get distracted by their merry-making and stray off the path like a sailor being tempted by a siren's call, never to be seen again.

While the story of the vampire is fascinating and enjoyed by many both inside and outside Romania, its large presence serves to prevent these stories from having their moment to shine. Therefore, it is important to share these tales of truth and legend, so that are not lost forever. This includes the truth of *Dracula* and its inspiration. What started as just the setting for a Gothic novel snowballed into a cultural identity and a collaboration amongst nations and creators to make a complex and fluid creature of the night. Based on true superstitions, but laced with inaccuracies, *Dracula* and other texts of the time began to make a reputation for Transylvania that would permanently affect its historical landscape and create a new one. They are fun. They are expressive. They are even a little bit spooky. The tale of the vampire is one that everyone can sink their teeth into.

ⁱ Hand, Richard, and Márta Minier. “The Vampire Special.” 2017, pp. 199–201. https://doi.org/10.1386/jafp.10.3.199_2. “This source is used to prove that there is debate on whether or not vampire media is a form of cultural appropriation or appreciation in Romania.”

ⁱⁱ The Chinese vampire said to date back to 600 B.C. is not to be confused with the more widely-recognized jiangshi, or “hopping vampire,” that made its appearance in Chinese folklore in the 16th century.

ⁱⁱⁱ Note that Vlad Țepeș was the ruler of the Romanian region of Wallachia, and not Transylvania.

^{iv} The use of magic in Romanian folklore is touched upon in a brief description of the dark magic school *Scholomance* found in Chapter 5. Strigoi can be found in this location.

^v This famous tale of Vlad’s trickery over the Ottomans occasionally adds that he released rabid bats to attack the Ottomans as well, but this is most likely to be an exaggeration added as an effect of his associated vampire image.

^{vi} This guide is given to tourists when visiting Bran Castle and is available in many languages. A big thanks goes to my father who obtained this guide during a visit to Romania in 2022 (which also means that this is the most up-to-date presentation of information that Bran Castle offers as of writing this thesis).

^{vii} Peculiarly, Romanap is not on any Romania maps, and may be a typo of Gerard’s.

^{viii} The cover of this magazine features Bran Castle, showcasing its recognizability as being a haunted or spooky place.

^{ix} English translations of the novel do exist but, at the time of writing this thesis, they are out-of-print and out-of-stock. French translations of the novel are the most popular.

^x Looking back, I could have been so popular if I was more aware of the fact that I was Transylvanian back then, instead of lowkey thinking that the place my parents came from was a myth thanks to vampire media and showed off my “authentic vampire-ness”. *Twilight* was the first time that I became aware of vampires and the stigma surrounding them, so perhaps flaunting this persona could have also had a negative effect.

^{xi} (Spoiler alert) Just like Lord Ruthven in the classic tale, Lord Ruthven in this *The Case Study of Vanitas* is shown to be deceptive and betrays the trust of the main characters.

^{xii} Cleverly, “Alucard” is just “Dracula” spelled backwards as he is meant to mirror his infamous father. This play on the name is not as uncommon as one may think and is also the name of the protagonist of the action horror manga series *Hellsing*.

^{xiii} My grandfather on my mother’s side was a talented carpenter and had a hand in designing these tables that were present during my last visit in 2012. This exemplifies how the castle has also become a collaborative project for the people living in the area.

^{xiv} The word “zmeu” symbolizing the anthropomorphic dragon is identical for the Romanian word for kite. It is similar to the Romanian word for raspberries as well (zmeură), and most zmeu are depicted as being red.

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