

The Transylvanian Society of Dracula as a “cultural broker” in Romania

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Abstract

Romania has long had an uneasy relationship with Dracula. Bram Stoker’s novel established an enduring association between Transylvania and vampires in the Western popular imagination that has long been problematic for, and unwelcome in, Romania. Furthermore, the confusion between Count Dracula and Vlad the Impaler has also provoked hostility and indignation among many Romanians. Thus there was tension and misunderstanding between external and Romanian perspectives on Dracula. This chapter examines the role of the Transylvanian Society of Dracula (founded in Romania in 1991) as a “culture broker” which sought to bridge these different understandings of Dracula and reduce conflict between them. The Society’s activities started with running Dracula tours, but it also organised the First World Dracula Congress in 1995, along with further Congresses in 2000 and 2003, and a series of annual symposia. These events brought together scholars and enthusiasts to engage in dialogue and debate about Dracula. These events, in turn, stimulated the development of further academic conferences in Romania. After running for 25 years the Romanian Transylvanian Society of Dracula was closed after the Fourth World Dracula Congress in 2016 but its legacy was the key role it had played in changing attitudes towards the Dracula phenomenon in Romania.

Keywords: Romania, Transylvanian Society of Dracula, Cultural Broker, World Dracula Congress, conferences, tourism, Count Dracula, Vlad the Impaler.

Introduction

Transylvania – and by extension, Romania – has come to be synonymous with vampires in the popular imagination. As Gelder (1994, 1) notes, “the name ‘Transylvania’ has been more or less completely appropriated by vampire fiction and vampire films...It is impossible, now, to hear the name *without* thinking of vampires; the very name invokes an image of something unbelievable”. But it is not just vampires: instead as Skal (1996, 194) wryly observes, Transylvania has become “a pop culture dumping ground for just about every monster under the sun – not just vampires, but just as frequently Frankensteins, mummies, werewolves”. In the Western imagination, Romania has become the ‘land of vampires’: it stands as a strange, remote and seemingly sinister twilight world, where exotic supernatural creatures run riot.

This way of thinking about Transylvania and Romania has its origins of course in Bram Stoker’s 1897 novel *Dracula*. Vampires were a well-established motif in Gothic fiction, but Stoker was the first author to use Transylvania as the home for one of these creatures. His vivid (if not always accurate) accounts of the history and geography of the region gave *Dracula* a high level of believability. Furthermore, *Dracula* enjoyed popular success on a scale never before achieved by a vampire novel. The book has never been out of print, has been translated into numerous languages, has given rise to more than 200 films, and has spawned a much broader vampire sub-culture (Light 2012, 35). Due to Stoker’s influence, Transylvania has become firmly established as the seemingly natural home of the vampire. When *Dracula* was published, Transylvania was part of the Austro-Hungarian empire. Romania gained Transylvania at the end of the First World War and in so doing it also unwittingly gained all the baggage associated with the Dracula myth (Boia 2001, 186).

Yet, for much of the 20th century, *Dracula* remained largely unknown in Romania. Bram Stoker’s novel was not published in Romanian although some Romanians appeared to be aware of its contents from a French translation of 1920. A Romanian translation of *Dracula* appears to have been prepared in the early 1970s but was suppressed as the Romanian state adopted a position of tighter ideological control and censorship (Light 2009, 4). Furthermore, in 1972 a book had been published in America entitled *In Search of Dracula* (MacNally and Florescu 1972). This famously argued that the “historical” Dracula (Vlad Țepeș, better known in English as Vlad the Impaler) had been the inspiration for Bram Stoker’s fictional Count Dracula. It was also insistent that vampires were an integral element of Romanian folklore.

This claim caused dismay in Romania. For a start, Vlad Țepeș was held in high regard in Romania as one of the medieval rulers who had fought for the country’s independence from the Ottoman Empire, and no country would wish to see one of its national heroes portrayed as a vampire. Furthermore, Nicolae Ceaușescu, the leader of Communist Romania, was eager to portray himself as the heir to the medieval rulers (including Vlad Țepeș) who had championed Romania’s national independence (Light 2012, 51). Therefore, Ceaușescu did not wish to be associated with a figure increasingly identified in the West as a prototype vampire. In addition, the claim that Romania was a land of vampire folklore was starkly at odds with Communist Romania’s image of itself as a modern, developed, industrial country. For this reason, Romania’s stance towards the vampire Dracula of Western popular culture became increasingly hostile, while it also sought to defend the reputation of Vlad Țepeș. Western tourists who visited Romania in search of Dracula were tolerated (due to the hard currency they

brought into the country) but not encouraged (Light 2012, 79). However, most Romanians knew little of the fictional Dracula or the mythology of vampires that was associated with their country.

This situation continued until the collapse of the Communist regime in December 1989. Thereafter, the state's isolationist position ended and Romania gradually opened up to a wide range of global influences, including Western popular culture. Consequently, the vampire Dracula became better known in Romania. Yet there remained widespread suspicion of the Western Dracula myth, along with continued indignation about the supposed association between Count Dracula and Vlad Țepeș. In this context, one organisation played a key role in recognising that Romania could not continue to ignore the Western fascination with the Transylvanian roots of Count Dracula: the **Transylvanian Society of Dracula** (TSD), founded in 1991. The chapter identifies the TSD as a unique "cultural broker" that was prepared to engage constructively with the Western Dracula myth, whilst also seeking to protect Romania's interests concerning the historical Dracula (Vlad the Impaler). The following discussion examines the activities of the Society after 1991 with particular focus on its efforts to promote debate and dialogue between Romanian and Western scholars about the Dracula phenomenon. In the process, Romania became a seemingly 'natural' home for academic **conferences** dedicated to the Dracula phenomenon.

The Formation of the Transylvanian Society of Dracula

After the collapse of the communist regime in December 1989 censorship was swiftly ended and, in this context, a Romanian translation of *Dracula* - probably the same version that had been prepared in the 1970s (Light 2009, 6) - was published by *Editura Univers* (a Romanian classic publishing house specialising in world literature) in 1990 (Stoker 1990). Dracula and vampire films were shown in cinemas and on TV for the first time and later, in the 2000s, the *Twilight* series was to gain a following among young Romanians. Authors, academics and intellectuals were free to debate the whole Dracula phenomenon. The Romanian public gradually became aware of Dracula and the wider vampire mythology that is associated with their country but there remained widespread misunderstanding of the Western Dracula myth.

In these circumstances one individual recognised the need for an organisation that could engage constructively with the Western myth of Dracula and vampires, whilst defending Romania's position regarding Vlad Țepeș. **Nicolae Păduraru** was a former tourist guide who had worked for the National Tourist Office during the communist period and had also written for Romania's external tourist promotion. Unlike many Romanians, Păduraru had an unparalleled understanding of the attraction of Romania for Dracula and vampire enthusiasts. In his role as a tourist guide, he had worked closely with Dracula fans for 25 years. Unlike most Romanians he had read a copy of *Dracula* that had been given to him by a tourist. He therefore understood what drew enthusiasts to Transylvania in search of the literary and supernatural roots of the Dracula myth. He was also well-informed about why many Dracula fans confused the fictional vampire with the figure of Vlad the Impaler.

Consequently, Păduraru identified the need for an organisation which could address the Dracula phenomenon from a distinctly Romanian perspective, acting as an information point or, in his words, a "lighthouse" to those from outside the country wanting to understand the literary and historical Draculas. He gathered together a group of researchers in history, ethnography and literary studies who were willing to engage with the Dracula phenomenon and founded the Transylvanian Society of Dracula (Light 2012, 118-119). The TSD was a cultural-historical non-governmental organisation with two aims. The first was cultural, centred on the analysis of the vampire Dracula of Western popular culture from a Romanian perspective. The second was historical and was concerned with establishing

the significance of the figure of Vlad Țepeș and clarifying Western misconceptions about the voivode¹. At its founding it had 24 members², but membership was open to anybody (both Romanians and foreign citizens) who shared its aims. The TSD statute allowed for the establishment of local groups ('chapters') within and outside Romania.

The role of the TSD can be identified as that of a **culture broker** in Romania. The concept of the culture broker has its origins in anthropology (Jezewski 1990, 497) but has been applied to many other disciplines and fields. The culture broker is an individual that crosses two or more cultures or groups with an understanding of, or membership of, both (Salazar 2016, 214). The role of the culture broker is to bridge or link the two cultures/groups, acting as a 'middleman' for the purpose of reducing conflict or producing change (Jezewski 1990, 497-498). Therefore, the broker intervenes, mediates, acts as a go-between, and brings people together (Jezewski 1995, 18). The process of cultural brokering requires firstly identifying a problem and understanding its causes, and then introducing strategies to resolve the problem through mediating, negotiating and networking (Jezewski and Sotnik 2005, 40-41). Performing the role of cultural broker requires awareness of, and sensitivity to, the differences in values and beliefs of two groups and an identification of what can be done to bridge these differences (Jezewski 1990, 506).

Nicolae Păduraru was uniquely positioned to play the role of cultural broker in respect of Dracula. For a start, he was keenly aware of the need for the role, given the widespread confusion outside Romania between the literary and historical Draculas. His exceptional knowledge of both the vampire Dracula of Western popular culture and the Dracula of Romanian history (Miller 1997, 83) meant that he had the necessary cultural competence (Jezewski and Sotnik 2005, 38, 42) to act as an intermediary. His other qualities – including an impeccable knowledge of English, personal charisma, entrepreneurial flair, and an extensive network of contacts – also made him ideally-qualified to act as a cultural broker. Furthermore, Păduraru's background in tourism was an important factor. In tourism destinations the cultural broker is a mediator between hosts (local people in the destination, of whom the broker is usually a member) and guests (visitors from outside the destination) (Smith 2001, 276). Păduraru was adopting a very similar role, acting as intermediary between Dracula enthusiasts from outside Romania on behalf of people in Romania.

The early activities of the TSD were small in scale and largely involved building on Păduraru's experience and expertise in tourism³. During the Communist period, the state offered a tour themed around the historical Dracula and involving visits to places associated with the life of Vlad Țepeș (Light 2012, 70-1). After 1989, the state withdrew completely from such activities. Recognising that there continued to be demand among tourists to visit places associated with both the literary and historical Draculas, the TSD started providing its own tours in 1992, initially in partnership with a private-sector travel company. Păduraru (who usually led these tours) showed considerable flair as a cultural broker in developing new products and packages intended to meet the needs of Western Dracula tourists, whilst carefully differentiating the vampire Dracula from the figure of Vlad Țepeș. These innovations included the performance of a witch trial in Sighișoara, and an evening of traditional dancing and folk tales in Aref, near to the castle of Vlad Țepeș at Poienari; and a masked Halloween Ball at Hotel Castle Dracula. The Company's Halloween tours were especially popular. Păduraru also recognised that there were few Dracula-themed souvenirs available in Romania and so introduced a range of high-quality souvenirs ('Count Dracula Treasures') for Western Dracula enthusiasts. In 1994 the TSD was able to found its own travel arm through the establishment of the **Company of Mysterious Journeys**. Over time, the *Company* developed a broad range of themed tours, of varying lengths, and with new opportunities for those who had taken a previous tour. The profits from these tours were used to fund

¹ Statue of the Transylvanian Society of Dracula, supplied by Nicolae Păduraru.

² Interview with Nicolae Păduraru by Duncan Light (15 November 2004).

³ Interview with Nicolae Păduraru by Duncan Light (15 November 2004).

the Society's other activities, particularly congresses and symposia. For some time, the Society was one of the few organisations offering Dracula tourism in Romania based on an understanding of what Western Dracula enthusiasts were seeking (Light 2012, 125).

The First World Dracula Congress

Nicolae Păduraru had long identified the need for an academic conference to debate the Dracula phenomenon and clarify Western misconceptions about Vlad Țepeș. He had proposed such an event in the mid-1980s but it had been rejected by the communist authorities⁴. In the early 1990s, Păduraru revived this idea by proposing a **World Dracula Congress** which would bring together Romanian and Western scholars with a shared interest in the Dracula phenomenon. This was a major event for which the Society did not have adequate funds. However, Păduraru succeeded in obtaining financial support from the Ministry of Tourism. The Tourism Minister, Matei Agathon Dan (who initiated the ill-fated 'Dracula Park' project of 2001-2) recognised that Romanian tourism had collapsed after 1989 and was aware that Dracula was something with the potential to attract foreign tourists to Romania⁵. Additional support was obtained from the Ministry of Culture, the Romanian Institute of Military History, the Institute of Folklore and Ethnography, and the Santa Barbara (California) Centre for Humanistic Studies (Miller 1997, 106).

Thus, the **First World Dracula Congress** was held in Romania between 24th and 30th May 1995. The official opening in Bucharest was followed by sessions in places connected with Vlad the Impaler or the fictional Count Dracula, including **Sighișoara**, **Bistrița**, and **Hotel Castle Dracula** at Piatra Fântânele. The congress ended with a banquet and award ceremony at Hotel Castle Dracula and was followed by a visit to the Voroneț monastery and, later, by a post-congress optional trip to the fortress of Poienari. The Congress was attended by over 300 people, among them many leading scholars and academics (including **John Gordon Melton**, **Clive Leatherdale**, **Elizabeth Miller**, **Raymond McNally**, **Radu Florescu**, **Bernard Davies**, **Vincent Hillyer** and **James Craig Holte**); authors of vampire fiction (including **Chelsea Quinn Yarbro**); and a diverse group of Dracula/vampire fans. The 40 papers presented addressed the fictional vampire Dracula and the historic figure of Vlad Țepeș, along with places in Romania (such as **Bran Castle**, **Hotel Castle Dracula**) associated with the Dracula myth.

The congress was significant due to the participation and engagement of Romanian academics. During the communist era academics had paid little attention to the Western Dracula myth largely because, like many Romanians, they knew little about it. The exception was medieval historians who seem to have been aware that Vlad Țepeș was widely confused with a vampire within Western popular culture and who were intent on defending the reputation of Vlad Țepeș from such associations. A number of academic biographies of the voivode were published during the 1970s and 1980s (Ciobanu 1979; Stoicescu 1976; Stoian 1989) which were dismissive of the literary vampire Dracula but it was clear that the authors knew little of the phenomenon which they were condemning and had not read Stoker's novel (Light 2012, 53-4). However, Nicolae Păduraru had succeeded in persuading some Romanian historians (Matei Cazacu, Mircea Dogaru) and ethnographers (Silvia Chițimia) to attend the Congress and give papers.

Unsurprisingly, the Congress attracted global media attention and delegates were accompanied by a substantial contingent of journalists. Media coverage was predictably and gleefully sensationalist (Miller 1997, 106-8) but it nonetheless put the global spotlight on Romania's efforts to engage with the Western Dracula myth. However, in Romania, press coverage was relentlessly negative and Romanian journalists were clearly baffled by the attraction of the Count Dracula myth. Thus the

⁴ Interview with Nicolae Păduraru by Duncan Light (15 November 2004).

⁵ Interview with Nicolae Păduraru by Duncan Light (15 November 2004). See also Munteanu and Rusu (1995)

Congress was criticised for perpetuating a stereotype of Romania as a land of vampires (Paler 1995); was accused of sustaining the confusion between Count Dracula and Vlad Țepeș (Cancioviți 1995); and was characterised as a display of kitsch-ness (Petrescu 1995). The widespread ambivalence (and sometimes hostility) of the Romanian media towards the whole Dracula phenomenon was evident.

While contested in Romania, the Congress had achieved something that had never happened before: it had provided a forum in Romania for a diverse range of people to share perspectives on both the fictional and historical Draculas. Bringing people together in this way was a key act of cultural brokering (see Jezewski 1995, 18) by the TSD. While the Congress may not have resolved the issue of Romania's uneasy relationship with Dracula, it succeeded in allowing different groups to understand each other's perspectives. In an interview about the personality of Nicolae Păduraru, Daniela Diaconescu (the co-founder and vice-president of the TSD) explained that the first World Dracula Congress was one of the principal achievements of the TSD: "This was the time when two people, Păduraru and I, succeeded in bringing together more than 300 people to one common point, generically called Dracula, and in arousing the interest (incidentally, for the first and last time) of the main tourist authority: the Ministry of Tourism and the Tourism Minister himself. This was the work of two people, and it was met with a resounding response from the major news agencies and worldwide" (Benecke 2015).

The World Dracula Congress also stimulated the worldwide expansion of the TSD (Melton 2011, 716) with the founding of TSD chapters in several other countries. These included chapters in Canada (led by Elizabeth Miller), USA (led by John Gordon Melton), Germany (led by Mark Benecke) and Italy (led by Massimo Introvigne). These chapters pursued their own activities dedicated to the literary and historical Draculas. The Canadian chapter proved to be especially active. Elizabeth Miller established a regular newsletter ("The Borgo Post") for members. She also founded the *Journal of Dracula Studies*⁶ in 1999 and acted as its editor. It proved a popular and influential forum for Dracula scholars. In her academic research and publishing, Miller also played a key role (that aligned with the objectives of the TSD) in interrogating the supposed connection between Count Dracula and Vlad Țepeș that had been promoted by *In Search of Dracula* (see for example, Miller 1997, 1998a, 2000). The Italian Chapter hosted electronic news bulletins and newsletters from the TSD on its website⁷. Thus, the TSD became a global organisation and its distinctive perspective on the Dracula phenomenon gained wider recognition. By 2001 the TSD had almost 1000 members around the world⁸.

The international chapters of the TSD subsequently proved to be very active in their own right. In 1997, the American and Canadian chapters, along with The Count Dracula Fan Club, organized a significant international conference dedicated to the theme of Dracula. Entitled *Dracula 97: A Centenary Celebration*, this was held in Los Angeles between 14th and 17th August (Melton 2011, 716). The conference was attended by over 600 people⁹ and included over 80 scholarly papers (Miller 1998b). Both Nicolae Păduraru and Daniela Diaconescu attended, along with five Romanian scholars (Constantin Bălăceanu-Stolnici, Sabina Ispas, Constantin Rezachevici, Silvia Chițimia and Marian Lupașcu) who were establishing themselves as willing to take the Dracula phenomenon seriously. A selection of the conference papers was later published as a book (Miller 1998c).

Further conferences organised by the TSD

⁶ See <https://research.library.kutztown.edu/dracula-studies/> An archive of the *Journal of Dracula Studies* is also available at <http://www.dractravel.com/drc/> (accessed 21 March 2023).

⁷ See <http://www.cesnur.org/Dracula.htm#Anchor-49575>. (accessed 21 March 2023).

⁸ <https://www.cesnur.org/2001/dracula/14.htm>. (accessed 21 March 2023).

⁹ <https://encyclopedia2.thefreedictionary.com/Dracula+%2797%3A+A+Centennial+Celebration>. (accessed 21 March 2023).

Buoyed by the success of the first World Dracula Congress, the TSD set about organising further similar events. The **Second World Dracula Congress** took place in 2000, in Poiana Braşov, and its theme was “Redefining the Diabolic from the Perspective of Contemporary Society”. However, this attracted much less press attention both internationally and in Romania. After the Congress, the TSD issued regular newsletters to keep supporters updated about forthcoming events and news from Romania¹⁰. The **Third World Dracula Congress** was held in Sighişoara from 15th to 18th May 2003. It began with a keynote paper by Elizabeth Miller which dealt with the relationship between Bram Stoker, Dracula and Transylvania. A number of the subsequent papers dealt with the theme of fear¹¹. Many international scholars attended the Congress including Mashimo Atsushi, Lokke Heiss, Jason Nolan, Mark Benecke, Victoria Amador, Julio Angel Olivares Merino, and Massimo Introvigne. The Congress was also notable for greater engagement from Romanian academics including Sabina Ispas, Constantin Bălăceanu-Stolnici, Sorin Comorosan, Alexandru Surdu, Constantin Rezachevici, Silvia Chiţimia, Marioara Godeanu, Bogdan Popa, Gabriela Rusu-Păşărin, and Mircea Dogaru.

After the Second World Dracula Congress, the TSD also introduced a series of **annual symposia**. These were usually held in May (the month of Jonathan Harker’s arrival at Castle Dracula) in various locations around Romania. At the 2002 symposium, held in Sinaia, Elizabeth Miller examined the role of Raymond McNally and Radu Florescu in bringing the figure of Vlad Tepes to the world’s attention (see Miller 2002). The 2007 Symposium entitled “Dracula – Blurring the Boundaries between Truth and Fiction” was held in Sighişoara, and one of the topics discussed was Elizabeth Kostova’s novel *The Historian*. Elizabeth Miller opened the event with a paper entitled “Blurring the Boundaries: Vlad the Impaler, Dracula, and *The Historian*”. Carol Senf, Leslie S. Klinger, Jason Nolan, Mark Benecke also presented papers, along with Romanian academics including Sabina Ispas, Sorin Comoroşan, and Silviu Angelescu. It was followed by an excursion to Hotel Castle Dracula at Piatra Fântânele. The final TSD symposium was held in 2008. Focused on “supernatural entities”, it was hosted by the **Institute of Ethnography and Folklore “Constantin Brăiloiu” in Bucharest** (Benecke 2008).

The TSD also undertook other activities to promote a greater understanding of the literary and historical Draculas and to refute the idea that Vlad Țepeş and Count Dracula were the same figure. One was the publication of *A Dracula Handbook* (Miller 2003) for sale to tourists visiting Romania. The TSD also collaborated with Welsh film-maker Michael Bayley Hughes on a documentary entitled ***Dracula: The Vampire and the Voivode*** (Hughes 2011). The documentary takes a broad perspective on the genesis of Bram Stoker’s novel and its development in time. Hughes attended the 2007 Symposium (and presented a paper). He also used the post-Symposium tour to take footage of key sights and scenes, and undertake interviews with some of the participants (including Nicolae Păduraru, Elizabeth Miller, and Marius Crişan). For example, Nicolae Păduraru (standing in front of the house in Sighişoara where Vlad Țepeş was apparently born) explains that many foreign tourists believe they are seeing the birthplace of Count Dracula. Păduraru emphasizes that “Vlad may have been many things, but not a vampire”. Elizabeth Miller speaks about Vlad the Impaler by mentioning some of the most famous legends in front of the ruins of the Târgovişte fortress; she also deconstructs the association between Count Dracula and Bran Castle. The documentary also features Poienari fortress; a folklore presentation in the village of Aref; Bistriţa (particularly the *Coroana de Aur* hotel with Jonathan Harker’s meal on the menu); Hotel Castle Dracula; and Snagov monastery (the reputed place of burial of Vlad Țepeş). Other scenes were set outside Romania in London, Whitby, Scotland (Slain’s Castle) and Dublin. The finished documentary (released in 2011) is faithful to the position of the TSD in arguing that Count Dracula and Vlad the Impaler are entirely separate figures.

¹⁰ An archive of these newsletter can be found at: <https://cesnur.org/Dracula.htm#Anchor-19575>. (accessed 21 March 2023).

¹¹ See https://www.cesnur.org/2003/dracula_05.htm (accessed 21 March 2023).

The death of Nicolae Păduraru in 2009 created a void at the heart of the Transylvanian Society of Dracula. Although Păduraru had sought to bring younger Romanians into the Society (particularly through the *Company of Mysterious Journeys*), there was nobody that was available (or equipped) to take on Păduraru's role as a cultural broker between the literary and historical Draculas. However, the Society still had life in it. In 2013, the Dutch independent scholar **Hans Corneel de Roos**, who was rapidly establishing himself in the field of Dracula scholarship started his collaboration with TSD and (and who was a long-time collaborator with the TSD) took over the role of editor of the Society's news bulletin *Letter from Castle Dracula* (2013-2016)¹²

Romanian Academics Take their Own Initiatives

Meanwhile the success of the TSD's international Congresses and Symposia had demonstrated that Romanian scholars were increasingly prepared to engage with the Dracula myth. Consequently, a number of academic events dedicated to Dracula were organised independently of the TSD. One of the first was a workshop held at the **West University of Timișoara** in Timișoara in 2013, organised by **Marius-Mircea Crișan** who had undertaken a PhD in English literature at the University of Turin (on the construction of the mythical Transylvania in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*). Examining the relationship between Romania and the Dracula myth, the event started with a presentation of the results of a postdoctoral research project on this subject (*The Impact of a Myth: Dracula and the Image of Romania in British and American Literatures*, 2011-2013), financed by the Romanian Executive Agency for Higher Education, Research and Innovation Funding (UEFISCDI). The workshop included presentations by Professor Otilia Hedeșan on the "Romanian Vampiric Complex", which examined the similarities and differences between the Romanian *strigoi* and the foreign vampire, and the Hungarian professor Farkas Jenő on "The Image of Dracula for Contemporaries and Posterity". The event concluded with a paper by Claudiu Mezaș on the relationship between Romania's national brand and the image of Dracula¹³.

Two years later, Crișan organised an international workshop (again held at West University of Timișoara) entitled *Where's the Place of Dracula: (De)constructing Stereotypes in the Study of the Mythical Space in Literature and the Arts*. It was held within the framework of the *Beliefs and Behaviours in Education and Culture* (BBEC) conference, organised by the Teacher Training Department. This event was intended to gather new perspectives on the Dracula myth in all its manifestations (literature, film, visual arts etc.) and to discuss the representations of Transylvania in the Western imagination, by debating how real spaces are "transformed" by literary perception. Among the topics discussed were the relationship between literature and film in the representation of the mythical space; the importance of the Gothic in contemporary media representations; the association of myths (such as the Dracula myth or other myths revived in contemporary times) with real locations; and the contemporary uses of the Dracula myth. Underpinning these papers was a key question: what does Dracula represent for Romanians, on the one hand, and for the Western readers, on the other?

The keynote papers were dedicated to the construction of stereotypical topoi such as the Gothic Italy (Donatella Abatte Badin) or the vampiric Transylvania (Duncan Light, Marius-Mircea Crișan), and also discussed the representation of Bram Stoker as a Fictional Protagonist in Modern Fiction (William Hughes). The conference also included papers by participants from the UK (Sam George, Kaja Franck, Nancy Schumann), Ireland (Kristin Bone), Germany (Hans de Roos, Mark Benecke, Ines Fischer), Poland

¹² See http://powersofdarkness.com/5_team/p2.htm (accessed 21 March 2023).

¹³ International Microconference of the Research Project *The Impact of a Myth: Dracula and the Image of Romania in British and American Literatures*. http://www.themythoftransylvania.ro/events_en.htm (accessed 20 March 2023).

(Magdalena Grabias, Dorota Babilas) and Brazil (Raphael de Boer). The conference was followed by a one-day tour (led by Marius-Mircea Crişan and Duncan Light and supported by the local travel agency Ultramarin) entitled *Legends and Castles of Transylvania*. It included a visit to Hunedoara Castle and the fortress of Alba Iulia. A second conference was held the following year, again at the West University of Timișoara.

The outcome of the two Dracula conferences in Timișoara was an edited volume entitled *Dracula: An International Perspective* (Crişan 2017), published by the Palgrave Gothic series. This volume was significant in representing a new stage in Romania's cultural brokering regarding Dracula, since this was the first academic publication about the fictional Dracula that was coordinated by a Romanian scholar who approached the topic from a distinctly Romanian perspective. Along with selected papers presented at the conferences, the volume included contributions from two American scholars specialising in the field of Dracula studies: Carol Senf and John Edgar Browning. According to Sir Christopher Frayling¹⁴, the volume marks an opening in the field of Gothic studies, from a field dominated by British and American experts, to a wider perspective. The volume was presented at the third edition of the Transylvanian Book Festival (Richiş 2018) and received an excellence diploma in the book saloon of the Euroinvent exhibition (Iaşi 2018).

The Fourth World Dracula Congress

In the autumn of 2015, Daniela Diaconescu announced the *Fourth World Dracula Congress*, to be held in 2016 in Dublin. This event was intended to celebrate 25 years since the founding of the TSD and to remember Nicolae Păduraru, its founder¹⁵. The organising committee consisted of Daniela Diaconescu, Hans de Roos and Magdalena Grabias. On the conference website, Hans de Roos explained the Congress initiative. He paid tribute to the role of the TSD in the development of quality research in the field of Dracula studies. He also argued that "the Transylvanian Society of Dracula needs the input from fresh and enthusiastic researchers to keep the organisation - its newsletters and initiatives included - young and alive. While the first generation of members can look back to a long and successful battle against the crude misinterpretations of the 1970's and 80's, new energy is needed to carry on the flame and keep it burning." De Roos explained that one of the main aims of the *Fourth World Dracula Congress* was "launching a new paradigm of Stoker research that goes beyond the well-known Count Dracula/Vlad Dracula debate of the last decades", and emphasises the idea that "innovation in Dracula research" will be the "key focus" of the event¹⁶.

The Congress was hosted by *Trinity College in Dublin* – the university at which Bram Stoker had graduated - between 20th and 22nd October 2016. It was attended by a significant community of Dracula scholars in a manner which somehow echoed the *First World Dracula Congress*. These included established names in Dracula studies (such as John Gordon Melton, William Hughes, and Clive Bloom), along with new names (such as Bogdan Popa, Magdalena Grabias, Duncan Light, Nancy Schumann, Victoria Amador, Mathew Burr, and Fotina Morozova). There was also a significant representation of Irish academics who specialised in Bram Stoker and Gothic fiction (Darryl Jones, Jarlath Killeen, Clemens Ruthner, Paul Murray, Sorchá Ní Fhlainn, and Dara Downy). Furthermore, while previous conferences had been dominated by speakers from the USA, UK, Canada and Romania, there was now participation from a broader range of countries including Brazil, France, Croatia, Denmark and Austria. The formal conference sessions were followed by a short sightseeing tour of Trinity College and a guided walk through Dublin, focused on the places connected to Bram Stoker and Dracula.

¹⁴ In a comment from the book's back cover.

¹⁵ "The Transylvanian Society of Dracula", <http://tsdcon25.com/> (accessed 20 March 2023).

¹⁶ "The conference initiative", <http://tsdcon25.com/> (accessed 20 March 2023).

The 2016 World Dracula Congress was the swansong of the Transylvanian Society of Dracula and an acknowledgement of what the Society had achieved. In a *Letter from Castle Dracula*¹⁷ issued after the congress, Daniela Diaconescu expressed her satisfaction for the success of the event in Ireland: “The power of the T.S.D. was, as proved once more during all of these years, to show its capability to bring under its name famous personalities from all world around”. At the same time, Diaconescu announced that the TSD in Romania was ending its activity after 25 years. She explained that the title of TSD would be taken over by the American Chapter (whose president was now Dr Anne DeLong of Kutztown University) which also took over the motto and Dragon-D sign of the Society. Kutztown University also took over the *Journal of Dracula Studies*.

Following the 2016 Congress Hans de Roos and Magdalena Grabias decided to take their activity forward under a new name: *The Children of the Night*. They were vigorous in organizing a new series of Dracula conferences (based on the model of previous TSD congresses and BBEC conferences) and taking inspiration from other events that de Roos had attended in London, Timișoara and Târgu Lăpuș (de Roos 2021, 6-17). The first *Children of the Night* conference was held in October 2018 at the Transilvania University of Brașov in Romania. Florin Nechita, an associate professor at this institution, joined Hans de Roos and Magdalena Grabias on the organizing committee, thereby ensuring Romanian participation. There were a number of presenters from previous TSD events (Victoria Amador, Marius-Mircea Crișan, Fotina Morozova) but the conference was also notable for the participation of new scholars from both Romania (such as Cristian Pralea and Georgeta Moarcăș) and other countries (such as Yuri Garcia, Kishio Sakamoto, Soraia Garcês, Margarida Pocinho, Penelope J. Goodman, Nina Anna Trzaska, Svetlana Seibel, Dax Stokes, Alicja Sułkowska etc)¹⁸. Florin Nechita coordinated the conference with the local Dracula Film Festival, and several cultural activities were organized, such as a tour of the city of Brașov, focused on the connections between the city and Vlad the Impaler. The conference was followed by a *Dracula tour* to attractions in the area, such as Bran Castle and the ruins of the medieval fortress of Târgoviște.

The second and the third editions of the *Children of the Night* conferences were held online. The disadvantage of not being in “Dracula’s homeland” was balanced by a very rich online participation. Approximately half of the participants were “newcomers” to the Dracula conferences. The 2021 edition included topics connected to the Dracula tourism, and the rich symbolism of Castle Dracula, as well as several subjects related to the complexity of the vampires and of the Dracula myth. The numerous papers (43) were planned for three days of presentations, and the event also included short film screenings and costume contests¹⁹. The total number of participants was around 90 people. As with previous conferences, various publications were produced based on the papers presented. A book of abstracts illustrated with significant photographs and slides from the presentations in the conference was published by Presa Universitară Clujeană in 2021 (Grabias, de Roos and Nechita 2021), and a further collection of selected papers was published as a special issue of the *Bulletin of the Transilvania University of Brasov*, Series IV²⁰. The third *Children of the Night* conference was again held online and succeeded in gathering more than 40 papers about the Dracula phenomenon. Presentations were increasingly taking broader perspectives and extending into new research fields

¹⁷ See

https://www.facebook.com/groups/COTNDC/permalink/1125052407579654/?comment_id=1125154854236076&comment_tracking=%7B%22tn%22%3A%22R%22%7D (accessed 20 March 2023).

¹⁸ For the conference schedule see <https://dracongress.jimdofree.com/2018-bra%C8%99ov-congress-archive/event-schedule-2018/> (accessed 20 March 2023).

¹⁹ For the conference schedule see <https://dracongress.jimdofree.com/2021-online-congress-archives/event-schedule-2021/> (accessed 21 March 2023).

²⁰ Volume 14 (63), 2021. Available online at <https://dracongress.jimdofree.com/publications/bulletin-of-the-transilvania-university-of-brasov-2021/> (accessed 20 March 2023).

such as the role of the vampire in video games. Films inspired from the vampire myth were presented and analysed in the conference²¹.

Conclusion

Dracula has long presented Romania with a dilemma. On the one hand is the fictional Count Dracula, who, in Stoker's novel, has his home in Transylvania. Romania has long been uncertain how to manage Count Dracula and the associated stereotype of Romania as a land of vampires and supernatural creatures. On the other hand, is the confusion between Count Dracula and the medieval voivode Vlad Țepeș, a figure who is held in high esteem by many in Romania. Although the supposed connection between Count Dracula and Vlad Țepeș has been subject to a vigorous (and perhaps decisive) academic critique in recent decades (Miller 1997, 1998c, 2000), the two figures remain intertwined within Western popular culture. During the Communist period the state adopted a clear position, attempting to suppress or deny any connection between Romania and Count Dracula, whilst strenuously seeking to defend the reputation of Vlad the Impaler from any association with vampires.

After the collapse of communism, the state withdrew from such intervention. In the resulting void, the Dracula of Western popular culture gradually became better known (if not particularly liked) by many Romanians, while any association between the literary and historical Draculas continued to provoke indignation and sometimes anger. It was in this context that the Transylvanian Society of Dracula was established to act as a unique cultural broker between Western and Romanian perspectives on Dracula. Thus the role of the Society was to bridge the different understanding of Dracula and reduce potential conflicts between them (see Jezewski and Sotnick 2005, 38). This was a role which no other organisation in Romania appeared to be interested in, or willing to take on. However, the TSD was only able to act in this way due to the unique positionality of Nicolae Păduraru who had the necessary cultural capital to play the role of cultural broker, mediating between internal and external understandings of Dracula.

From modest beginnings, the TSD emerged as an important actor within Romania's changing relationship with Dracula. A notable event was the first World Dracula Congress which was a first step in bringing together the Western and Romanian understandings of the Dracula phenomenon. Even if the event itself did not resolve these sharply different perspectives, it did succeed in opening dialogue between Romanian and Western Dracula scholars. The Congress enabled Romanian academics to understand the Western Dracula myth, but also to recognise that the association between Count Dracula and Vlad Țepeș was itself contested and not accepted by all Western scholars. In addition, the first Congress stimulated the foundation of a number of chapters of the TSD outside Romania, many of which were very active in their own right in promoting a fuller understanding of the literary and historical Draculas. Furthermore, the first World Dracula Congress laid the groundwork for fuller exchanges which took place in the second and third Congresses and in the numerous symposia organised by the TSD. Over time, Romanian academics proved that they were willing to take the Dracula mythology seriously. A younger generation of scholars turned their attention to Dracula and some had the confidence to organise their own Dracula conferences independently of the TSD. That such events no longer attract indignant press attention in Romania itself indicates that the country is now comfortable in hosting international Dracula conferences, something that can be attributed to the TSD.

²¹ "Children of the Night" International Dracula Congress. 18 – 20 November 2022. <https://dracongress.jimdofree.com/programme-2022/> (accessed 20 March 2023).

The Fourth World Dracula Congress in 2016 was a fitting valedictory event for TSD - Romania. After the Congress, the Society moved to America – where Dracula has long been popular – and, as yet, no organisation has taken on its role as a cultural broker in Romania. Yet the TSD's aspirations remain alive in a new phase in Dracula research and scholarship, taken forward under the *Children of the Night* banner with energetic new leadership. A new generation of scholars is turning its attention to Dracula and the Dracula phenomenon continues to generate lively debate. In Romania, Dracula is now a topic that can be taken seriously and openly discussed, and it was the efforts of the TSD that played a key role in making this happen.

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