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auspicious dead. The most relevant funeral aspect from this perspective is the place used to throw the water after washing the dead: in an isolated place (usually near a fence) when the water comes from a *noxious dead* (who died an agonizing death and tortured the living while being alive) and respectively at the root of a tree in the garden, when the water was imbued with the prosperity of the *auspicious dead*: "The water was thrown at the root of a tree in the garden, for the tree to bear fruit, the same way as the man did".³⁷

During the funeral procession, the members of a village take certain cautions to protect themselves from the forces of death. Ernest Bernea noticed the following protective measures in a village from Gorj: "When the dead man's cortege passes the houses in the village, certain preventive measures are taken and many significant acts are performed, all related to the representation of death: if a family has a baby, the baby is not put to sleep until the cortege goes away and water is thrown behind the dead person; encountering the cortege in his way, a man in an oxen-driven wagon stopped the wagon, took the oxbow off and remained still till the cortege passed; people who meet the cortege stop walking and if they carry a burden on their shoulder or in their hands they will put it down, take off their hats and make the sign of cross. After the cortege passes they continue their way".³⁸ This is a clear example of how the magical mentality sees death as a magnetic force that can suck up everything that is present in its direction.

Making use of historical data as a means of understanding ethnological information, I have discovered how the social-historical background of a certain period in history, more precisely how a crisis period (the outbreak of plague and other infectious diseases in Romania between 1600-1830) may in time leave its distinct mark on the funeral tradition. In the 19th and part of 20th centuries, death was still seen as a contagious disease and the dead were to be feared and kept at a distance. A great part of the funeral customs resembled the quarantine measures taken against the plague and other pestilences. It is essential to underline that this particularity of the Romanian funeral tradition had the great merit of extending the focus of the funeral tradition from the dead seen as the sole beneficiary of the funeral rites to the living and their needs during the mourning period. At the same time, the belief in the "auspicious dead" who brought prosperity to their households while alive was the positive core of the funeral tradition that in time managed to restore the warm familiarity of the living with their dead – a dominant aspect of the Romanian funeral tradition. Apart from any social-historical circumstances, the attitude of the living towards their dead makes the latter either "noxious", or "auspicious".

³⁷ *Ibidem*, Vol. I, Mehedintzi 2, 4, p. 155.
³⁸ Ernest Bernea, *op. cit.*, pp. 62–63.

TRANSYLVANIA, "A SUPERSTITIOUS LAND": BRAM STOKER'S *DRACULA* AND HIS SOURCES FOR THE NOVEL

MARIUS MIRCEA CRIȘAN

ABSTRACT

This article is focused on Bram Stoker's sources for *Dracula*, and it analyses the origin of the stereotype of Transylvania as a superstitious land. In *Dracula*, the attitude of the Western characters towards superstition oscillates between superiority and obedience. Stoker's predecessors usually show a distant and ironic attitude towards several Transylvanian beliefs and traditions, but sometimes they try to understand the deep meanings of the Romanian folklore.

Keywords: Stoker, Harker, *Dracula*, Transylvania.

When Mina Harker, one of the main characters of Stoker's famous novel *Dracula*, comes to Transylvania, she is impressed by the beauty of the places and by the hospitality of the inhabitants, but she is struck by an obvious aspect: "... they are very, very superstitious" (Stoker: 429). The fact that she uses italics to emphasise the superstitiousness of the people shows that she sees this feature as one of the defining characteristics of the region. Mina, who becomes Jonathan's wife in the novel, knows a lot of things about Transylvania before her visit. She has read Jonathan's diary in which this region is described as one of the strangest places of the world.

This idea, that Transylvania is a superstitious territory is stated from the beginning of the novel. In his diary, Jonathan Harker shows us the preconception he brings with him from London. Even before entering Transylvania, he thinks of it as of a realm of superstitions, because this is the way in which the region is presented in his readings: "I read that every known superstition in the world is gathered into the horseshoe of the Carpathians, as if it were the centre of some sort of imaginative whirlpool; if so my stay may be very interesting" (Stoker: 10).

Harker's diary describes Transylvania as a fairytale space which shelters both God's Seat and the Devil's den¹. For the British traveller, a spectacular scene

¹ See Marius Crișan, *The Land Between Good and Evil: Stoker's Transylvania*, in *English Studies*, 2006, pp. 55–78.

is opened. From the window of the train, Jonathan sees a varied landscape, castles perched on the top of the hills like in old missals, but he also notices groups of picturesque people, whose clothes and manners are different. The new region is revealed to the reader of Harker's diary as a place of Otherness.

First of all, Jonathan Harker is struck by the way in which people manifest their spirituality, by the fact that each gesture he sees becomes a ritualistic act. The signs are everywhere: the first night he spends in Transylvania, at Cluj, Harker hears a dog baying under his window all the time. When the people in Bistritza hear that his destination is Dracula Castle, they open the series of "superstitions" which will mark all his stay in the region. The landlady falls down on her knees and implores Harker to take with him a crucifix, which is pressed to him with the argument "for your mother's sake". Before Harker takes the coach which brings him to Borgo Pass, the nearest known place to Dracula Castle, the people in the courtyard of the inn point two fingers towards him – a sign of protection against the Devil's eye. When Harker and his Transylvanian companions approach a mountain top, all the locals cross themselves reverently in front of that place and tell him that that is God's Seat. During his imprisonment in Dracula Castle, Harker also becomes "superstitious" and uses the "traditional" weapons in his fight against the forces of evil (the crucifix, the garlic, the wild rose and the mountain ash), and first of all he protects himself by praying to God.

The Westerners' attitude towards superstition is dual in *Dracula*: if they are reserved and ironic in the beginning, they eventually understand that this is the only way to defend the forces of evil. The master of the English group, the Dutch Van Helsing, explains:

All we have to go upon are traditions and superstitions. These do not at the first appear much, when the matter is one of life and death, nay of more than either life or death. Yet must we be satisfied, in the first place because we have to be, no other means is at our control, and secondly, because, after all these things, tradition and superstition, are everything (p. 285).

Superstition is one of the main themes of this complex novel. In an imagological reading, Stoker's attitude towards the superstitions of Transylvania has been interpreted as a point of a vision which presents this region as a symbol of the Eastern Europe, described in opposition to the cultural values of the West.

Many elements from Irish folklore were familiar to Bram Stoker. But his notes show us that he was aware of several customs of Transylvania. The working notes for *Dracula* are kept in Rosenbach Library in Philadelphia and they have been partially published and discussed in some works, such as Elizabeth Miller's or Clive Leatherdale's books. *The Origins of Dracula*, edited by Leatherdale in 1987, is an anthology which gathers fragments from the texts consulted by Stoker and also provides a list of all works which were read by the novelist during the process of writing *Dracula*. As Miller (2006) shows, Stoker needed seven years to write

this work: from 1890 to 1897. All notes have been recently published in a volume

edited by Robert Eigheten-Bisang and Elizabeth Miller (in 2008). Stoker's working notes show that his first intention was to place the action of his vampire story in Styria (Austria), a topos which was associated with vampires in James Sheridan Le Fanu's short story *Carmilla*. But when he read about the Transylvanian superstitions, he decided to change the locale of the story from Styria to Transylvania. The text which influenced him to a great extent is Emily Gerard's article, "Transylvanian Superstitions". However, this is not the only work Stoker read on this region. He also consulted four travel memoirs: Charles Boner, *Transylvania: Its Products and Its People* (1865), Andrew F. Crosse, *Round About Transylvania* (1878), Major E. C. Johnson, *On the Track of the Crescent... the Carpathians* (1878), and a brochure on (1885), Nina Elizabeth Mazuchelli's *Magyarland...* (1881) and a brochure on Wallachia and Moldavia written by the British consul at Bucharest in the 1820s: *An Account of the Principalities of Wallachia and Moldavia* (1820).

Stoker's notes show that his main source for the superstitions in the region under discussion was Emily Gerard's article "Transylvanian Superstitions" published in July 1885 in *The Nineteenth Century*. The topic of the article and the position of the authoress are very clear from the very beginning:

Transylvania might well be termed the land of superstition, for nowhere else does this curious crooked plant of delusion flourish as persistently and in such bewildering variety. It would almost seem as though the whole specie of demons, pixies, witches and hobgoblins, driven from the rest of Europe by the wand of science, had taken refuge within this mountain rampart, we aware that here they would find secure lurking-places, whence they might defy their persecutors yet awhile (p. 130).

After such an opening, it is not surprising that Stoker read the article with great interest and was influenced by it to such an extent, that he decided to change the location of the vampire novel. In an interview published shortly after the publication of *Dracula*, Stoker admits that Gerard was one of his main sources at his interview shows that he was aware of her book on Transylvania, *The Land Beyond the Forest*. Emily Gerard spent two years in Sibiu and in Brasov (from 1883 to 1885), where she came with her husband, an officer in the Austro-Hungarian army. Gerard was fond of travelling, and in her book she described the people and places. Several chapters of *The Land Beyond the Forest* are dedicated to Transylvanian superstitions, and the information is very similar to the article published in *The Nineteenth Century*².

In *Transylvanian Superstitions*, Gerard shows that even the landscape of the region in discussion is "adapted to serve as background to all sorts of supernatural beings and monsters" (p. 130), as there are numerous caverns full of mystery, fa-

² Actually, her article is developed in some chapters in the book.

tale forest glades, and solitary lakes. According to her article, the superstitions influence the way of thinking of "the oldest inhabitants" of Transylvania, the Romanians, "so that these people, by nature imaginative and poetically inclined, have built up for themselves out of the surrounding materials a whole code of fanciful superstitions, to which they adhere as closely as to their religion itself" (p. 130).

Gerard shows that many of the superstitions reflect the fear of the devil and of his assistants, witches and dragons, and many toponyms of dangerous places have taken his name.

According to *Transylvanian Superstitions*, one of the frequent concerns of the Transylvanian peasants is the existence of hidden treasures, which can be found on some special nights, such as Christmas Eve, or the night preceding the Easter Sunday – when witches and demons betray the place where the riches were hidden, by a glowing flame. But fearing the forces of evil, the peasants would not commit the sin of approaching the hidden treasures, which are always associated with malefic spirits. However, many people wander about the hills in search of treasures on St. George's eve, which is considered one of the best nights for finding treasures. The legends say that all treasures begin to burn with a bluish flame which can guide the treasure hunters. But this is said to be the night when witches have occult meetings, which take place in lonely caverns or within ruined walls. It is a period when the peasants use different techniques to avert the presence of these spirits, such as the placing of square-cut blocks of green turf in front of the doors and of the windows, which are supposed to bar the entrance to the house or stables. Gerard writes that the peasants distinguish between the lights seen before midnight, which denote treasures kept by benevolent spirits, and those which appear at a later hour, and "are unquestionably of a pernicious nature" (p. 135).

In *Dracula*, during his night trip in Dracula's calèche, Harker discovers the blue flames which signal the places where the treasure had been hidden. The vampire count explains to his English guest, later on, that it is commonly believed that on a certain night of the year, "when all evil spirits are supposed to have unchecked sway, a blue flame is seen over any place where treasure has been concealed" (p. 32) and assures Harker that the treasure had been hidden in the region through which they came that night. In her article Gerard also writes that "sometimes the power of discovering a particular treasure is supposed to be possessed only by members of some particular family" (p. 135) and she gives the example of some peasants in Romania who asked for the help of some aristocrats' heir to find the concealed riches. Stoker uses this idea too, because during his night trip to the castle, Harker realises that Dracula, who is so proud of his aristocratic kin, is one of the few able to know the places where the treasures are hidden.

Some of the superstitions in *Dracula* are mentioned in Boner's travel book too. The gold treasures that Stoker writes about are also referred to by Boner's driver, before entering Transylvania, on his journey from Caransebeş to Hateg. Like the other Transylvanians, the driver believes in the legend of the hidden gold.

This myth is associated with a real place, a point in the mountain. The English traveller sees the driver's account as a joke, and his laughing shows that he cannot understand the meaning of the legend, taking it only as a fact. Although there are only two participants in the conversation, it is obvious that they do not belong to the same interpretative community, because the levels of narration (the driver) and of reception (the foreign traveller) are different:

On our road my driver pointed out to me a point in the mountains where one evening he had seen "a gold fire". "–And what is that?" I asked. "Tis a light which hovers over the spot where gold is buried". "–Of course you went and took possession of it," I said, laughing. "Yes, but being so far I could not find the exact spot, and therefore got nothing" (pp. 41–42).

In this dialogue we can notice the different attitude of the one who regards the myth from an interior point of view and the "foreigner" who sees everything from outside. This is one of the main distinctions in the anthropological approach, as one can see in some of the main works of anthropology, such as Claude Lévi Strauss's book *Le Regard éloigné*. The difference between the perspectives from within and from without is always great in Stoker's sources on Transylvania. The British writers prefer to express their amazement in front of some spiritual manifestations related either to traditional customs or Christian worship which they do not understand. Their aim is to create the same astonishment in the British reader who will peruse their travelogues. Johnson's or Crosse's anthropological perspectives (other two travellers who inspired Stoker) are very simple: the Transylvanian peasant fits the pattern which is established from the first time, and any reference to a certain form of spirituality is tagged as superstition³. In spite of the fact that Charles Boner's tone is even more bitter in his references to the Romanian peasant of Transylvania, he is the only male writer who does anthropological research and includes in his work some pages of Romanian folklore. But the authors who deserve the greatest attention in Stoker's sources, from the mythological and religious perspective, are the two female writers, Emily Gerard and Nina Elizabeth Mazuchelli. Whereas Gerard's role has been widely discussed so far, much less attention has been paid to the possible influence of Mazuchelli's *Magyarland*, a book which is traversed by a spiritual vision of the world.

And it is not surprising that no study of *Dracula* can avoid Emily Gerard's article *Transylvanian Superstitions*. If Stoker had not read this article, there would not have been, probably, any *Dracula*, and Transylvania would not have been associated with vampires! The idea which influenced Stoker to the greatest extent is Transylvanian peasants' belief in vampires, which is the core of Gerard's article.

³ Carmen Andraş, the author of the comprehensive book *România şi imaginile ei în literatura de călătorie britanică* [Romania and Its Images in British Travel Literature], shows that British travellers in the 19th century often see the religious practices of the Orthodox Church as superstitions (p. 374).

In *Transylvanian Superstitions*, Emily Gerard states that "nowhere does the inherent superstition of the Roumenian [sic] peasant find stronger expression than in his mourning and funeral ceremonies, which are based upon a totally original conception of death" (p. 143). She writes about the fear of the "undead", and distinguishes between "strigoi" and "nosferatu". "Strigoi" is described as follows: when the funeral customs "are not exactly complied with, the soul thus neglected is apt to wander complaining about the earth, and cannot find rest. These restless spirits, called *Strigoi*, are not malicious, but their appearance bodes no good, and may be regarded as omens of sickness and misfortune" (p. 142).

Nosferatu is a malicious creature. Here is the way in which Gerard describes it: More decidedly evil, however, is the vampire, or *nosferatu*, in whom every Roumenian peasant believes as firmly as he does in heaven or hell. There are two sorts of vampires - living and dead. The living vampire is in general the illegitimate offspring of two illegitimate persons, but even a flawless pedigree will not ensure anyone against the intrusion of a vampire into his family vault, since every person killed by a *nosferatu* becomes likewise a vampire after death, and will continue to suck the blood of other innocent people till the spirit has been exorcised, either by opening the grave of the person suspected and driving a stake through the corpse, or firing a pistol shot into the coffin. In very obstinate cases it is further recommended to cut off the head and replace it in the coffin with the mouth filled with garlic, or to extract the heart and burn it, strewing the ashes over the grave (p. 142).

There is no reference to the belief in vampires in Boner's book and he never uses this word when writing about Transylvania. Only once, and in passing, does he mention the superstition which was to be discussed by Emily Gerard later on and was to inspire Bram Stoker. What Gerard calls "vampire", Boner calls "witch". According to him, in a village this superstition came from the priest himself. Boner heard of a case when the body was disinterred and turned round in the grave, but he mentions no other details:

I know one place where the Greek [Orthodox] priest asserted that the bad harvest was owing to the number of witches in the land, and that it would not be better till they were exterminated. Reputed witches who have died are disinterred, and turned round in the grave, to destroy their spells (p. 368).

After the short mention of this superstition among Romanian peasants, Boner adds a footnote in which he explains that the belief in witchcraft exists among the Hungarian and Szekler population too, and shows that "not long ago, a Szekler woman in Ungarisch Kreuz wanted to proceed against another woman for having bewitched her" (p. 368). The information about this belief among the "Saxon" population is taken from a study in German (Friedrich Müller, *Beiträge zur Geschichte des Hexenglaubens und des Hexenprocesses in Siebenbürgen*).

One can notice that the same fear of ghosts is "translated" by two British travellers with distinct terms: "witch" or "vampire". A more accurate translation is "ghost", but it would not have had the same impact on the reading of some curious British readers (such as Bram Stoker, for example). In Stoker's sources, the anthropological perspective is not accurate enough. In the presentation of the funeral practices, Emily Gerard's perspective does not reflect the vision of the traditional community which she writes about, but rather her own position. In Gerard's description, certain elements may be associated with vampirism (the loss of blood of a vampire's victim, or the ways of destroying the ghost), but not the whole process can be subscribed to vampirism. However, Emily Gerard's "tag" of vampirism has no nuances at all.

The specialists who study Transylvanian folklore attest the belief in "strigoi", which is a supernatural being who resembles the ghost more than the vampire.⁴ There are similarities and differences between the vampire and the "strigoi": a "strigoi" is a ghost who haunts the places where he lived. If for the vampire the act of sucking blood is essential, the strigoi may have marks of blood on his mouth, but the bite is never described.

The author of *Magyarland* also writes that the Romanian peasants believe "in ghosts, vampires, and changelings", and spend much of their time "in inventing charms against the machinations of the Devil" (II 129). She states that "the belief in witchcraft also is still prevalent in Transylvania, and more than one old woman was pointed out to us even by the enlightened 'Saxons' as being gifted with that art" (II 129).

During Harker's time in Transylvania, the English character oscillates between distance from and attraction towards superstition. From the very beginning his reserve towards the "whirlpool of superstitions" is transformed into curiosity to learn everything about such beliefs from the Count. The "superstitions" which he distrusts in the beginning save his life in Dracula Castle and then in other subsequent situations. The "superstitions" become the weapons of the *Crew of Light*: the fight and the final victory depend on them. In *Dracula* there is a great ambivalence in the attitude towards superstitions, as there is no border between superstition and religion. Coming back to Emily Gerard, we can see that one of the several chapters dedicated to the superstitions of Transylvania, in the book *The Land Beyond the Forest*, opens with a quotation from Grimm, which underlines the connection between religion and superstition: "superstition in all its multifariousness constitutes a species of religion applicable to all the common household necessities of daily life" (p. 188).⁵

⁴ On the theme of the *strigoi* in Romanian folklore, see Otilia Hedeşan, *Penru o mitologie difuză and Sapte eseuri despre strigoi* [For a diffuse mythology and Seven essays about ghosts].

⁵ Stoker's working notes for *Dracula* do not prove that the novelist put down information from this book, but an interview with Stoker, (Jane Stoddard, *Mr. Bram Stoker. A Chat with the Author of Dracula*) shows that he was aware of this volume.

Such an ambivalent attitude can also be found in Stoker's female predecessors (Gerard and Mazuchelli), who always feel fascinated with "superstitions", but try to show a rationalist attitude. In the beginning of Gerard's article, the author expresses her criticism towards the persistence of superstitions in Transylvania, but the tone in the end is different, showing that she enjoyed paying attention to these "superstitions" and is aware of their aesthetic value. Although touched by the latter, Gerard has to attach her perspective to a rationalist negative attitude:

Superstition is an evil which every person with a well-balanced mind should wish to die out, yet it cannot be denied that some of these fancies are graceful and suggestive. Nettles and briars, albeit mischievous plants, may yet come in picturesquely in a landscape; and although the stern agriculturist is bound to rejoice at their uprooting, the softer-hearted artist is surely free to give them a passing sigh of regret (p. 150).

Such a critical attitude was in the line of the magazine *Nineteenth Century*, which expected a scientific tone and an overall perspective on the phenomena presented. In Gerard's book *The Land Beyond the Forest*, the superstition is more amply discussed than in her "introductory" article. Beyond the critical attitude expressed in the British magazine, one can often find sympathy and appreciation for the old Romanian customs.⁶ Gerard prizes the "rich vein of their own [Romanians] folk-lore" and writes that Romanian literature should find its inspiration in rural practices, "bridging over the space which takes them back to ancient pagan traditions". The return to original myths is, according to Emily Gerard one of the tendencies which would enrich Romanian literature: "the old stones around them will begin to speak, and the old gods will let themselves be lured from out their hiding-places. Then will it be seen that Apollo's lyre has not ceased to vibrate, and the lays of ancient Rome will arise and develop to new life" (*The Land Beyond the Forest*: 173). This invitation to Romanian writers was taken into account by Bram Stoker, who, whether or not he read this fragment, investigated several legends of old and contemporary Europe, in order to create one of the strongest myths in the world: the vampire Dracula.

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⁶ Teuceanu also admits that Emily Gerard's attitude towards the Romanians of Transylvania is different from her superficial predecessors.

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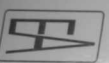
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