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The Mysteries of the Post-Communist Vampire: Detective Features in the Novel *Nepotul lui Dracula* by Alexandru Mușina

Abstract: The association of the vampire with Eastern Europe has evolved in crime fictions which transform this fantastic character from a supernatural being to a means to comment on politics, many of them focusing on the imagological opposition between Eastern Europe and the Western world, a treatment that began with Stoker's *Dracula*. Our paper analyses the transformation of this imagological vampiric stereotype, by investigating the deconstructivist novel *Nepotul lui Dracula* (*Dracula's Nephew*) (2012) by the Romanian writer Alexandru Mușina.

Keywords: Romanian Literature; *Dracula*; Transylvania; Alexandru Mușina; Vampire Crime Fiction; Detective Story; Vampire Stereotypes.

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1. Stereotyping the Eastern European Space in Detective Vampire Stories

Some of the stereotypes of the Eastern European space were constructed, or at least consolidated by Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), a narrative in which vampire hunting is based on a strategy typical to classical detective fiction. In this influential novel, whose geography mirrors an ideological difference between progressive England and remote Transylvania, travelling from Western Europe to Eastern Europe and the other way round is a central motif, and the vampire who embodies the East is presented as both criminal and Other.

The stereotypes which connect Eastern Europe with detective fiction have been explored in several critical readings. As Vesna Goldsworthy explains, Eastern-Europe, and especially the Balkans have become the space of a "British 'narrative colonization'"¹ populated by gothic characters, invented by English-language writers.

Understanding the association between the Gothic and detective fiction is

essential, since, as Dana Percec explains, crime fiction has its roots in this genre:

Detective fiction is the result of a double permutation. First, as many critics have noticed, it is the by-product of the Gothic genre that dominated the aesthetics and imagination of the late eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries. When the fantastic and the demonic prevalent in Gothic fiction give way to the merely disruptive (socially and morally), the regulating figure of the detective emerges.²

Another critic who explores the connection between the Gothic and detective fiction is Alexandra Warwick:

Yet another form, the detective story, emerges from the knot of Gothic and sensation fiction, and the legacy can be traced from Edgar Allan Poe through Conan Doyle to Raymond Chandler's Los Angeles noir of the 1940s. The detective story, with its emphasis on the power of rationality, would seem an unlikely inheritor of Gothic, but its narrative efficacy and its fascination for the late Victorians lie in the same place – the rendering of urban modernity as Gothic.³

Other critical commentary on the link between the Gothic and detective fiction is restricted to individual works. For example, Lewis D. Moore, who studies the social conditions that influenced the origins of the detective, identifies progenitors of the hard-boiled detective as "Poe's Dupin, Sherlock Holmes, Dickens' Inspector Bucket in *Bleak House* (1853) and Wilkie

Collins' Sergeant Cuff in *The Moonstone* (1863)."⁴ Finally, Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* is at its heart a detective story. When Jekyll's friend Mr. Utterson, the lawyer tries to find out what is wrong with his friend, he plays the role of a detective: "If he be Mr Hyde, he had thought, 'I shall be Mr Seek.'"⁵

Several other novels of the late nineteenth century also link the Gothic with detection. Among these are two written in 1897, Richard Marsh's *The Beetle* and Stoker's *Dracula*. Both are told through multiple narrators, a strategy that makes the mystery all that more noticeable. *The Beetle* is divided into four books, and the final book is told by private detective Augustus Champnell who had been hired to find the heroine when she is kidnapped. *Dracula*, on the other hand, includes a number of characters who join forces to discover who had killed their friend and later track Dracula to his home in Transylvania. However, as Elizabeth Miller and Robert Eighteen-Bisang note, Stoker actually eliminated a real detective that he had, at one point, planned to include when they point to several characters who didn't make it into the novel as we know it, including "Cotford, a detective inspector."⁶ That change reduces *Dracula's* dependence on the detective format.

During the cold war, the stereotypes which oppose Communist Eastern Europe with the West were amplified, as Eastern Europe and the Communist bloc were stigmatized in Western fiction. The Communist was described as evil in detective and spy fictions. As Paolo Bertinetti, explains, in many "spy stories written in the Fifties and in the Sixties of the last century the enemy is a foreigner and

a communist.⁷ The tendency in the West to vilify Communist Eastern Europe is especially evident in films, such as *Walk a Crooked Mile* (1948), *From Russia with Love* (1963), *Telefon* (1977), *No Way Out* (1987), *Red Heat* (1988), *The Adventures of Rocky and Bullwinkle* (2000), and *Salt* (2010). It's a little harder to generalize about literature though one study, a doctoral thesis by Elena V. Baraban opens by noting that writers from the US and the former USSR demonize the other:

Crime fiction then is an important source for grasping the changes representing Russia after the Cold War. My hypothesis is that despite the changes in the political roles of Russia and the United States, the end of the Cold War and the demise of the Soviet Union continued to have a significant impact on popular fiction about Russia in the 1990s.⁸

Certainly, writers of popular fiction are guilty of demonizing characters whose views differ from their own. Dashiell Hammett, a member of the American Communist Party, is notably critical of the values he sees around him, and the detective novels written by Marxists Per Wahlöö and Maj Sjöwall have their detective Martin Beck undermine the popular view that Sweden's Democratic Socialism had produced a utopian society.

In detective fiction, the association of the vampire with Eastern Europe is rooted in an ideological distinction between Western Europe and Eastern Europe, which began with *Carmilla* and *Dracula* and was symbolized in the second part of the twentieth century by the opposition

between Soviet-style Communism and Western democracy. This ideological opposition lies at the basis of some American vampire detective novels, such as Dan Simmons, *Children of the Night* (1993) and Elizabeth Kostova, *The Historian* (2004). In *Children of the Night*, the fantastic image of Romania is constructed as a depressed "vampire country"⁹ led by a vampire clan which threatens to conquer the whole world. The secret power which controls its people with the strongest instruments of a police state may prove disastrous even in the USA, and the organization plans to take Japan as a next destination. The vampire world conspiracy is led by Dracula himself, who Simmons presents as adviser of the Communist president Nicolae Ceaușescu. Written in the first period of the 1990s, and portraying the first years of post-Communist Romania, Dan Simmons's detective novel is, in Crișan's reading, "a story obsessed with the shadows of the past," whose "narrative perspective is veiled in pessimism and suspicion."¹⁰ The pursuit of the vampire also is a main motif in Elizabeth Kostova's bestseller *The Historian* (2005).¹¹ The mythical image of Romania developed in Kostova's novel is presented as a detective story in which the scholar/detective travels across Europe in order to identify the mysterious grave of Dracula and the vampire's hidden identity. Both Simmons and Kostova continue the pattern initiated in *Dracula* of presenting the vampire as criminal and other.

The tendency of Romanian literature in responding to such negative stereotypes has been complex, but most texts either reinforce Romanian identity as opposed to the Western stereotypes or choose to parody the vampire myth¹². This parody is evident

in comical works coming from East Europe, such as the postmodernist novel of the Romanian writer Alexandru Mușina (*Nepotul lui Dracula* –“Dracula’s Nephew”, 2012¹³) or the Hungarian film *Comrade Drakulich* (2019).¹⁴ 2019 Focused on Mușina’s novel, our paper discusses the way the novel deconstructs the vampire stereotype and uses elements of detective fiction to do so.

Alexandru Mușina (1954–2013) is “one of the most spectacular writers of the 1980s generation, a constructor of myths and demolisher of utopias,”¹⁵ and *Nepotul lui Dracula* (“Dracula’s Nephew”) tells the story of a junior lecturer of French literature at a university in the Transylvanian city of Brașov, Romania, who discovers that he is a direct descendant of Voivode Vlad Țepeș. Using elements of detective fiction, Mușina parodies the contemporary vampire genre that features a sympathetic vampire, as well as historical Romanian literature that glorifies medieval times. Written in an apparently detached tone, this book expresses a postmodern approach to the connection between the Dracula myth and Romania. Besides dismantling the vampiric myth, the novel is based on “the tendency to deconstruct various cultural or discursive stereotypes by using the ironic potential of prose.” (Ramona Hărășan).¹⁶

The critics have regarded this comic novel, perceived by Claudiu Turcuș as “a flood of parodies”¹⁷, as a contribution to a new popular genre in Romanian literature. According to Raul Popescu, *The Nephew of Dracula* has “a worthy predecessor in the novel *Doctoral Thesis*, by another author from Brașov, Caius Dobrescu,” since “both novels rely on an uncompromising critique, not only of the university environment, but also of modern society in general, skillfully

using, in this sense, (grotesque) humor, buffoonery, histrionics, irony”¹⁸. The novel has also been analyzed in the broader context of the campus novel.¹⁹

The Dracula story created by Mușina combines some myths of Romanian history with the image of the postmodern vampire. There are also several elements which parody Bram Stoker’s novel, such as the construction of the main feminine character Lulu and her attraction for the vampire, the resemblance between Fifi and Dracula, the vampiric features of the Gipsy millionaire Elvis Boboieru, etc.²⁰ The relativization of values, in the spirit of postmodernist thinking, leads to a great fantastic narrative, which may suggest that the aim of literature is not to reflect reality, but to create a spectacular world.²¹ That spectacular world, however, does allow the writer to comment on his own world and to use the vampire and the detective to do so.

As Crișan and Senf argue, the emergence of vampires is a frequent motif in contemporary detective fiction²². Familiar examples include Nicola Claire’s *Kindred* series, P.N. Elrod’s the *Vampire Files* series, *Abraham Lincoln, Vampire Hunter* by Seth Grahame-Smith, the *Vampire Hunter* series by Laurel K. Hamilton, the *Southern Vampire* series by Charlaine Harris, two of Fred Saberhagen’s books in which Dracula joins Sherlock Holmes to expose crime (*The Holmes–Dracula File* and *Séance for a Vampire*) and the *Blood Hunt* series by Lee Killough. Of these examples, only the Saberhagen books and *Abraham Lincoln, Vampire Hunter* combine the vampire and the detective to comment on contemporary politics in the sharply pointed way that either Stoker’s *Dracula* or *Dracula’s Nephew* does.

2. A Post-Communist Parodic Thriller

Dracula's Nephew contains multiple elements of crime fiction. In the foreground is the detective approach of two students to establish the vampiric identity of the novel's protagonist, Florin Angelescu Dragolea (abbreviated FAD – which means “bland” in Romanian), nicknamed Fifi. In addition to unravelling the mystery of the vampire, the novel contains elements of a post-Communist thriller, which reflects both the traumas of the Communist past and the vices of a society in transition.

In addition, the novel parodies a vampire thriller. The main detection of the novel is carried out by the female students Lulu and Bubu, who discretely investigate their French literature teacher, the mysterious assistant professor FAD, whom they suspect of being a vampire. A specialist in the work of Marcel Proust, Fifi has a colorless life. After three failed marriages, he lives with his mother, Mrs. Eufrosina, and, at the faculty, he is remarked by the students only for his very boring courses. However, the rumor that he is a vampire transforms him into a pseudo-star in the faculty. Even elite professors invite him to participate in the exclusive meetings of the COI (*Comitetul Oamenilor Inteligenți* the “Intelligent People Committee”) and choose *vampirism* as a topic of discussion. In Romanian the word *coi* is a slang form of *testicle*, and its use is part of the author's subversive-burlesque strategy. The meaning of the word opens a window towards the emphasis on sexuality in the vampire novel – though the members of this committee, the elite male professors of the university, are hardly paragons of masculinity.

To test the hypothesis that Fifi is a vampire, Lulu and Bubu put into practice a real detective strategy, which involves gaining the teacher's trust. The first step of this enquiry is to invite him to a restaurant to test his reaction to steak tartare. The pleasure he has for raw meat is the first indication that Fifi is a vampire, but the two female characters need more obvious evidence. In order to obtain the information they need, and to have access to the intimate life of the investigated person, they resort to various techniques, including seduction. This is how a love affair between Fifi and Lulu begins. To convince themselves that Fifi is a vampire, the two students plan to test his reaction to human blood drinking.

Mușina emphasizes the sex appeal of the vampire. After the course, they invite him to Lulu's apartment, and after mixing the blood with several condiments, the girls present it as a new energy drink “LIFE ESSENCE A new & revolutionary formula Only for the “connoisseurs” PARIS – LONDON – NEW-YORK Bottled in Kentucky, USA” (286). Fifi finds the *energizer* “delicious ..., really delicious [...] unexpectedly ... remarkable” (286). At the taste of blood, he feels a profound transformation, as if he became another person, and is convinced that this “miraculous drink” is a “a real “Life Essence”” (286) indeed. At that moment, Fifi confesses to Lulu and Bubu that he is “a kind of vampire” and tells them his family secret. The effect of blood drinking on Fifi is obvious, as he radically changes from a shabby and boring teacher into a charming, witty and energetic man, ready to have a love affair with the irresistible Lulu. This relationship between the aristocratic vampire, which

Fifi proves to be, and the young lady suggests an ironic reference to the romance of the past. If the present is drab, boring, and bureaucratic, the past is romantic and charming.

In Mușina's novel, all the detectives are women. Besides Lulu and Bubu, another character with a detective vocation is the head secretary of the faculty, Mrs. Enikö Trăistaru. If the two students are novices in mystery solving, Enikö has had a lifelong career as an informer of the Communist political police. Although she is not a main character in the novel, the head secretary is a key character, carefully described by the narrator:

Mrs. Enikö was just eyes and ears. She liked secrets, she liked confusing, impossible situations, which, with her tenacity and her networking, she could finally solve. In addition to the reports of informants and influencers, the files of teachers and students, she passionately read police books, espionage, mysteries, Gothic novels, horror, everything that could terrify the pure soul of a Protestant. More recently, she had become a fan of Scandinavian detective novels (335-336).

This reference to the chief secretary can be interpreted as a key to reading the whole novel, which parodies all these genres connected through the motif of the vampire.

The novel has several elements of a Communist thriller, one of the most important being the contrast between truth and appearance. Although the action takes place in post-communist times, the novel reflects on the impact that 50 years of Communism had on Romanian society.

The narration suggests that at the mental level the society of the 90s and 2000s is strongly affected by the traumas experienced during the communist period. It is a novel about the ghosts of history, but especially about the ghosts of communism, which still have an effect on the daily life of Brașov, the Romanian city where most of the action takes place. The narrative focuses on the critique of the demagogic Communist society, and Mușina uses the behavior and activity of the chief secretary to illustrate the persistence of the Communist-time practices and mentalities. Enikö Trăistaru is a typical example of the behavior of an informer for the *Securitate*, the Romanian Communist secret police, a main institution of the totalitarian communist society. Trained throughout her life to denounce her colleagues, Enikö has become, in the post-communist period, "the true leader of the faculty". As the narrator explains, "the deans come and go, the chief secretary remains" (321). In her more than twenty years of working at the university, the secretary has succeeded in building a strong information network that replicates the secret police of the Communist era.

The novel carefully describes the evolution of a secret police informer from the communist period to the 2000s. Coming from Szeklerland, Enikö first worked at a cloth factory in Brașov, where she was recruited by the *Securitate*. At that phase of her informant career she rigorously wrote reports about the people who used to make political jokes, and denounced the workers who cursed the Communist regime and the Comrade Nicolae Ceaușescu, or wanted to flee across the border, and also reported on the extramarital affairs of her colleagues:

She excelled in intelligence work as an elite agent. Her timely reports, in small print, calligraphic, slightly bent to the right, with almost no spelling mistakes, were based strictly on what she had seen, heard, or been told: who told political jokes, who cursed the regime, and the Comrade..., who dreamed of the return of Transylvania to Greater Hungary, who wanted to flee across the border or marry a foreigner and emigrate, who used to traffic in coffee, whiskey, American cigarettes, jeans and women's panties, who slept with whom and so on.

Other lazier informants used to rush their reports, giving confusing information, embellishing them, and even inventing them outright, so that their norm would come out. This was not the case of Enikö... (322)

But the informant activity was not limited to her place of work. She also reported on the events that took place at the Calvinist church which she frequented. Ironically, the narrator comments: "Since the Calvinists do not have a confessional, the young mother used to confess to the *Securitate*." (323). Like any informant, Enikö had a code name: "Secuiana" ("the Szekler woman). The reference to the Szekler is Mușina's very clever way of linking the vampire tale to contemporary fiction criticizing the former Communist regime. In *Dracula*, Stoker had connected the lead character with the ancient Szeklers, which links him to a mythical past that is at odds with the technological and progressive present. In the case of Enikö, however, the context is ironic for she is connected directly to the bureaucratic present instead of the heroic past.

After being transferred on a position of secretary at the Brașov university, she became responsible for coordinating student informants. After the revolution of December 1989, she continued her collaboration with the reshuffled Romanian Intelligence Service and benefited from training courses for the collaborators of this institution. Her collaborationist activity led to her appointment as chief secretary of the faculty. Enikö is antiphrastically praised by the narrator as "a perfect professional" (324) in gathering information, and is ironically compared to James Bond: "What is the 'essence and purpose' of the secret services? For this, it would be better to ask Mrs. Enikö, James Bond or their hermeneutists" (325).

Even in the post-communist period, Mrs. Enikö's intelligence network operates according to strategies devised in the previous age of totalitarianism, and consists of teachers hired through her influence and some students who acted as informants, rumor spreaders or influencers.

In her apartment she keeps an archive with information about students and teachers:

Mrs. Enikö controlled everything with an iron fist. That's why she worked 12-14 hours a day. Not only did she always stay an hour or two overtime, but the real hardship began at home, in her three-room apartment in a block of flats in the Bartholomew district.

In the bedroom, Mrs. Enikö held a real archive: duplicates of all the catalogs since 1991, registers with students – and then graduates – from all sections (parents, notes, observation

sheets, a brief characterization, career after graduation, etc.), the up-to-date files of the 48 tenured professors and 27 associate professors of the faculty, of the auxiliary staff and so on. The files were the keystone of the entire network: not just teachers' C.V.s, publication lists, university degrees, studies, etc., but also multiple characterizations made by informing students, plus endless, seemingly unimportant, but actually essential information: wife, children, mistresses (among students or colleagues), hobbies, how good they are as teachers, if they are corruptible, less corruptible or incorruptible, casual sex with students, received bribes, how they got the doctorate and with whom etc., etc. (325-326)

In addition to professional information, the secretary's notes also contain details about the extramarital affairs of some teachers, about their wealth, their dubious business and suspected crimes. For instance, the millionaire nephew of a professor is suspected of murder: according to Enikö's notes, there is rumor that he had buried a Turkish business partner in concrete.

Fearing that her data could be stolen by hackers, Enikö does not use the computer to gather information, but takes handwritten notes even in the 2000s. She is a specialist in influence peddling, arranging exams for the students who appeal to her, and sometimes she even falsifies the grades in the register. After their graduation, she follows the careers of the students who hold important positions in key areas of society, such as politics or law enforcement. Everybody may be at her disposal,

since her notes contain relevant details about "address, marital status, telephone number, and, of course, as far as possible, hobbies, weaknesses, financial problems, wives, mistresses, etc." (329). Enikö's role of "investigator" has a parodic implication, as it illustrates the association of detective endeavors with the control methods of the Communist political police, in a postmodern manner, which suggest that Muşina mocks simultaneously the sordid paranoia of totalitarian control, and the patterns of detective and spy fiction.

Numerous episodes in the novel echo the totalitarian communist world and illustrate various abuses of communism, both during the Stalinist period and during the Ceauşescu regime. Fifi's family was a victim of the Communist regime. The Communists confiscated the entire fortune of his grandfather, the boyar Atanasie Drăculea, who died shortly after the communists took power in Romania. For Atanasie Drăculea the communists are associated with "the red plague", and their presence in the country meant for him "the coming of the Antichrist on earth" (175). After his death, the boyar's heirs had to change their name and hide their noble roots and true identity, and his daughter Eufrosina, Fifi's mother, was raised by her aunt's family. However, her adoptive father also suffered from the persecution of the communists who imprisoned him for 12 years for the simple fact that he had been a cavalry colonel in the Royal Guard. To avoid communist persecution, the family keeps all these details secret even after the fall of communism.

The obsession with the communist past comes up in Fifi's oneiric experiences as well. He dreams he is at school again,

during the Ceaușescu regime, dressed in the black uniform with a red pioneer tie around his neck. On the wall of the classroom is the picture of The Comrade... (a frequent designation for Nicolae Ceaușescu), and the teacher talks about socialist patriotism, strongly recommending the love for the country, the Communist party and The Comrade... In his dream he is terrified that they might find out about his boyar origins, expel him and send him to the correctional school.

One idea the pupils learn in the Communist school is that vampires are part of “imperialist propaganda”, “to frighten the masses around the world and discourage them from demanding their rights,” but such fantastic characters should not actually be feared. The teacher in Fifi’s dream informs the pupils that Vlad the Impaler was “a good leader, but honest, like The Comrade, and who loved justice” (316). The association between the communist president Nicolae Ceaușescu and Vlad Țepeș or other Romanian rulers was frequent during the Ceaușescu regime. As Duncan Light explains, during the 1970s and 1980s, an “extraordinary personality cult enveloped the figure of Ceaușescu” who “was no longer presented as a hero of the working class” but “as the successor to a long line of princes, kings and voivodes to rule Romania”, and many “state hagiographers” frequently likened him “to the medieval warrior-leaders of Walachia and Moldova”²³. In Fifi’s dream, the same Communist-era teacher reminds the pupils that “Our love is due first and foremost to The Comrade” (317). The comment is intended to be ironic, because Ceaușescu ruled Romania with an iron fist and was feared rather than loved.

Another feature of the detective story is the family secret. Fifi learns his family secret from the Gypsy Elvis Boborieu: that the boyars of the Dracula family fed on the blood of the Gypsies on their estate. Elvis meets Fifi, by chance, in downtown Sibiu, and recognizes the nephew of the boyar Drăculea in the stranger sitting on the terrace of a pub. He tells Fifi that there was a very close connection between his ancestors and the boyars of the Dracula family, because they donated blood to be drunk by the boyar, who, in turn, offered them protection, plenty of food and a carefree life.

After telling her mother about this meeting, Mrs. Eufrosina confirms that she is the daughter of the boyar Atanasie Drăculea and hands Fifi a letter from her father and an iron military suitcase containing the boyar’s inheritance. Both the letter and the suitcase are secret. The code is that they can only be opened by the boyar’s grandson or great-grandson: “Let it be given to my grandson or great-grandson, but only if the Red Plague has passed, if he is a man and found out about me by himself” (225).

The boyar’s letter contains an alternative history of the Romanians, a sort of historical thriller based on a secret kept by the boyar family for centuries. The terrible truth he reads in his grandfather’s letter confirms the story he learnt from Boboieru: “since our ancestor Bogdan Drăculea, the love child of Vlad the Impaler, our kin has been kept alive with human blood” (227).

The metal suitcase contains an invaluable treasure, diamonds, emeralds, precious rubies, large gold coins, maps and documents attesting the history of the boyar family, as well as the golden crown of Ti-homir, also known as Negru-Vodă, the first ruler of Walachia.

At the end of the letter, his grandfather asks him to keep the secret of his family as well as that of his inheritance, and ensures him once more that he is a “great boyar, master of Perișani, bone of a prince, descendant of Vlad Țepeș and Tihomir” (240).

The fear of theft is another element specific to classical detective literature which is mocked in this postmodern novel. After finding the family treasure, Fifi fears that he and his mother could be robbed. However, at the same time, he also fears the authorities, and thinks that they could confiscate their inheritance and convict them of trafficking and illegal possession.

3. Blood and Corruption

The association of blood with corruption is one of the main themes developed in *Dracula's Nephew*. The evolution of the character from innocent academic to corrupt opportunist is described gradually in this novel which reveals illegal behavior committed in the university environment. At the core of the narrative are several actions that break both university ethics and civil law. The first disruptive element has to do with the correct relationship between the teacher and the students. The assistant professor FAD breaks a norm of university ethics by having an affair with one of his students, Lulu, a sexual transgression that leads to the discovery of the hidden side of his identity, the fact that he is (a kind of) vampire. It is a deep connection between breaking the law and revealing one's true identity. If we move to the general level of law, even if the novel's narrative line does not involve literal murder, certain violations definitely occur. The reader discovers

elements of corruption, influence peddling, exam fraud. The novel describes the transformation of a correct, uncompromising and incorruptible teacher into a character who is willing to give up any standards of honesty and fairness. The agreement that the vampire teacher reaches with the students is for him to give them all passing grades in exchange in exchange of a quantity of blood they would donate for his personal consumption. Because the objectivity of the assessment is flawed from the start, the only reasonable solution that the corrupt teacher can find in order to create the illusion of a “natural” diversity is chance. Thus, the grades are awarded by simply drawing lots, a strategy that mocks and epitomizes rampant academic corruption.

The exchange of blood for grades is an act of corruption because the students are not motivated to study for the exam, and the teacher benefits from the blood that they donate. The idea of this pernicious trade belongs to the student Lulu, who becomes the teacher's girlfriend, but it is put into practice through the secretary of the faculty, Mrs. Enikő Trăistaru.

Crime fiction also investigates the peculiarities of the criminal world. *Dracula's Nephew* illustrates the complexity of the underworld in post-Communist Romanian society. Beyond official laws, many social conventions are based on a negotiable morality. The fact that corruption can penetrate even the university environment is illustrated by the arrangements made by the secretary Enikő Trăistaru. The same secretary who specializes in exam fraud has compromising information about members of parliament, police chiefs or employees of other key institutions, and can anytime achieve her goals through the

masterful use of blackmail. As the narrator ironically explains, Enikö Trăistaru “contributes to maintaining the social balance, to the proper functioning of the faculty” as she “manipulates the professors, the elephants, if you want to call them like that” (333).

Even the main character of the novel, the apparently innocent lecturer, seems to evolve and become more corrupt, as a result of his association with the Gypsy clan of blood industry. After corrupting the integrity of the exam with the consent of the students, Fifi initiates a relationship with the Gypsy Elvis Boboieru. The connection of Gypsies with crime is one of the stereotypes mocked in *Dracula's Nephew*. The novel suggests the global dimension of the blood trade carried out by this leader of the Gypsies. Elvis Boboieru constantly exports blood to Germany, but also has French, British, American and Jewish clients. To explain the success of his business, Boboieru states that “blood is a stronger currency, stronger than the dollar and the euro, [...] stronger than gold and oil”. (189)

The criminal world also involves human trafficking. Boboieru establishes a modern form of human trafficking, inspired by the practices connected to the historical slavery of the Gypsies. In order to obtain quality blood for export, Boboieru raises orphaned or abandoned children, who in turn donate blood for his business. He acts as an uncontested master over these would-be donors. In order to control their lives, he encourages them to get married and lead a life based on family values. To protect them from any disease that could affect their blood, Boboieru exercises strict control over them. Convinced that the soul without sin leads to high quality blood, he

built a church attended by blood donors, who are contractually forced to confess to a priest who had previously been a bandit. His theory is that “business without faith does not work” (188). He behaves authoritatively in his family, where discipline is the most important rule, and his seven children obey him unconditionally.

Boboieru earns about a hundred thousand euros a month from this *blood farm* which includes a centralized system, with nurses, special equipment for blood collection and transportation. His business network is vast and includes customs officers and other authorities, who receive bribes so as not to disrupt the Gypsy's business.

Ramona Hârșan noted that this “new-generation Dracula” becomes “something of a burlesque and well-meaning Godfather, acquiring the aura of a local baron whose social success is based upon what Eduard Banfield called ‘familial amorality’, i.e. a corruption system based on personal closeness, from kinship to close friendships, clientelar relationships, partnerships or allegiances.”²⁴ According to the same critic, Alexandru Mușina's novel reflects this “type of amorality that indisputably went on fueling corruption in Romania after the fall of Ceaușescu's regime.”²⁵

Another example of corruption which can be identified in *Nepotul lui Dracula* is the connection between the criminal world and the police. When Fifi asks Boboieru how to get to his house, Boboieru says that he doesn't need the exact address, because any policeman can direct him to his palace. In fact, the first policeman he meets on his way to the palace is visibly intimidated when he hears where Fifi is going, and greets him respectfully.

The novel also describes the opulence of the criminal world. Elvis Boboieru has an impressive fortune and is proud of his luxurious Swiss watches, three Mercedes cars and a palace with 27 towers on the banks of the Cibin. This millionaire “blood merchant” (379) lives in a palace that looks like “a combination of the Taj Mahal, the Russian cathedral and the Capitol” (379). The massive door to one of his rooms is decorated with gold, as is the chandelier in the living room, and the floor is of marble. On the walls of the palace, paintings by Nicolae Grigorescu, a celebrated 19th century Romanian artist, are ostentatiously exhibited.

After turning into a “vampire”, Fifi also changes his dress style and becomes “the new star of the faculty”. If previously his clothes looked second-hand like (during his first courses, the two female students thought that “he dressed like he was taken out of the dumpster” p. 19), when he goes to visit Boboieru, he is dressed in a white tuxedo, with a gilded shirt and a purple bow tie. He comes accompanied by Lulu, who is wearing a gold chain and an emerald brooch and drives a fire-red Ferrari (373).

The submission to the clan leader is important in the criminal world, and, in *Dracula's Nephew*, it reflects the medieval mentality which lay at the basis of the relationship between the boyar and his subjects. Boboieru promotes the values of the world in which the boyars had full power over their subjects. In the palace of this rich Gypsy, a huge photographic portrait of Fifi's grandfather, Boyar Athanasie Drăculea (1900-1950) hangs on the wall in a central position, and, next to it, the image of the Gypsy's grandfather. Boboieru himself becomes a modern boyar and has

absolute control over the destinies of the Gypsies who donate blood for his business. The rigid hierarchy here echoes the relationships of the medieval world, a world that depended on the absolute loyalty of masters and subjects.

In an ironical way, this parodic novel feints to oppose the need for progress, necessary for the evolution of any society, and to celebrate instead the return to an archaic past, based on a worldview in which a hereditary aristocracy lorded over their subjects. Though it doesn't share a political perspective with the Swedish detective novels written by Per Wahlöö and Maj Sjöwall (ten novels between 1965 and 1975) that criticize Sweden's Social Democracy and demonstrate that it is designed to benefit the wealthy rather than ordinary people, it too uses popular fiction to explore social issues. This criticism of social norms goes back to Poe and Dickens and is developed further by writers such as Dashiell Hammett.

Reading the novel from the angle of crime fiction reminds readers that vampires can be used to symbolize basic predatory relationships between people that predate the contemporary world and will presumably outlast it. In fact, *Dracula's Nephew* clearly reveals that vampire violence is more direct and honest in that they prey on others only to ensure their survival. That directness contrasts the lofty ideological justification of modern unscrupulous and corrupt predators. In the case of *Dracula's Nephew*, their corruption undermines politics, education, law enforcement, and even families.

Our interpretation of Alexandru Muşina's novel supports the idea that, by the rhetoric of the comedy, *Dracula's*

Nephew is a multifaceted work which criticizes the flaws of a society in transition, by provoking roars of laughter to its readers. The story constructs a reversed mirror of the Post-Communist world, which reveals Romania's traditional obsession with the past (fear of the authorities, secrecy, the shadow of the secret police), as well as some of the problems which the Romanian contemporary society has faced since the fall of the Ceaușescu regime in December 1989.

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