



Blue-Blooded Dracula Fantasy with an Idyllic Coda – Dana Grigorcea's third Novel, “Die Nicht sterben”. Translation into English¹

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Abstract

All three hitherto published novels by Dana Grigorcea do explicitly refer to Romania. Had her first novel been set in the Danube Delta and her second in Bucharest, so the plot of the recently released novel *Die nicht sterben* is located in the touristic town B. (= Bușteni) at the foot of the Carpathian Mountains. Based on Bram Stoker's *Dracula* as literary pre-text, the plot of *Die nicht sterben* interweaves elements of Romanian history, Romanian contemporary events as well as elements of the family history of the first-person narrator. The present paper is focused especially on the female narrator's bodily, erotic and flying fantasies. The social and moral revolt which manifests itself first and foremost in the vampires' urge to impale, subsides in the end in uncritical idyllic and narcissistic self-reflection.

Keywords

Dracula by Bram Stoker; Vlad the Impaler; Vampirism; Eroticism; Romanian History and Present



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Фантазия о Дракуле с голубой кровью и идиллической концовкой – третий роман Даны Григорчи “Die nicht sterben”. Перевод на английский¹

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Аннотация

Все три вышедших романа Даны Григорчи прямо отсылают к Румынии. Если действие ее первого романа происходит в дельте Дуная, а второго – в Бухаресте, то сюжет недавно вышедшего романа “Die nicht sterben” разворачивается в туристическом городке Б. (= Буштени) у подножия Карпатских гор. Основанная на “Дракуле” Брэма Стокера как литературном претексте, фабула “Die nicht sterben” объединяет элементы румынской истории, современной румынской действительности, а также элементы семейной истории рассказчика. Особое внимание в данной работе уделяется телесным, эротическим и полетным фантазиям героини. Социальный и моральный протест, проявляющийся в первую очередь в стремлении вампириш к пронзанию, в конце концов утихает в бескровной идиллии и нарциссической саморефлексии.

Ключевые слова

Дракула Брэма Стокера; Влад Цепеш; вампиризм; эротизм; история и современность Румынии



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At the Ingeborg Bachmann Competition in Klagenfurt in 2015, Dana Grigorcea won the 3sat Prize for the text of her second novel “Das primäre Gefühl der Schuldlosigkeit” (The Primary Feeling of Guiltlessness), which was published the same year by Dörlemann in Zurich (Grigorcea, 2015). Her first novel, also written in German, was published in 2011 under the title “Baba Rada. Das Leben ist vergänglich wie die Kopfhare” (Baba Rada. Life is as transient as the hair on your head) (Grigorcea, 2011). The novel won the Swiss literary prize “Pearl” and was also published in Zurich by KaMeRu. A decade later, in 2021, Dana Grigorcea's third novel, “Die nicht sterben”(Those Who Never Die), was published by Penguin in Munich.

Dana Grigorcea was born in 1979 in Bucharest. She graduated from the Faculty of Foreign Languages at the University of Bucharest with a degree in German and Dutch philology, studied theatre and film directing in Brussels and holds a Master's degree in Journalism from the Danube University Krems. She has worked as a press, radio and television journalist in Austria (Vienna), Germany (Bonn) and France (Strasbourg). She was also German correspondent for Romanian Radio and Television. Besides columns, essays and short literary prose, Grigorcea also writes children's books. She currently lives in Zurich with her husband, the writer Perikles Monioudis, and their two children.

All three of Dana Grigorcea's novels published to date have an obvious reference to Romania. Her first novel is set in the Danube Delta. The thirty short chapters weave together a multitude of narrative threads that Thomas Bürgisser describes as a remarkable “web of village gossip, slapstick, deep seriousness and bitter tragedy”¹ (Bürgisser, 2021), the texture of which Wolfgang Bortlik comments: “It is rare to read such a collection of quaint customs and adventurous entanglements from the fringes of Europe” (Bortlik, 2021). And Heini Vogler summarises his impressions of the novel as follows:

Dana Grigorcea tells a fantastic, almost fairytale-like story set in the Romanian Danube Delta. It is a kind of picaresque novel: Baba Rada is a witchy, primordial Mother Courage, a magical woman with an exuberant temperament. Baba Rada is a sensual parable of provincial Romania, past and present. (Vogler, 2021).

In her second novel, *The Primary Feeling of Guiltlessness*, Dana Grigorcea returns via the literary and artistic route, this time to her hometown of Bucharest. Victoria, the novel's protagonist, who, despite her triumphant name, is not a child of the regime change: like the writer herself, she is an immigrant (Grigorcea, 2015, p. 84), born ten years before the Romanian revolution, who lived in Zurich and has now returned to Bucharest, not least in order to reclaim her family's property (houses, vineyards, forests, tombs).

Those who expect this novel to depict the differences between West and East, or between Switzerland and Romania, will probably be disappointed. Instead, the reader witnesses the protagonist's total immersion in the nostalgic memories

1 Quoted from the author's website from the collection of press reviews of her first novel, at: <https://www.grigorcea.ch/865027/alle-bucher>



that bind her to the Romanian capital. Only occasionally does her gaze drift to Zurich, and then from “Café Schnapps” (Grigorcea, 2015, p. 41) or “Sprüngli Confectionery” (Grigorcea, 2015, p. 88, p. 132) back to Bucharest. In Victoria's imagination, Zurich even becomes a Bucharest of a higher order:

Because that's what I liked so much about Zurich, that I recognised the places I'd never been to before; it was my Bucharest, but not the one I only knew a few streets and neighbourhoods of, but the one I'd always thought was whole (Grigorcea, 2015, p. 89).

What binds the narrator Victoria to the present is her fiancé Flavian, who drives her around Bucharest in a shiny Aston Martin DB 5, and the somewhat unfortunate bank robbery story, which is supposed to explain why Victoria has time to devote to her beloved Bucharest without any distracting professional activities. Although the bank robbery motif recurs at various points and could have structured the novel, it is drawn into the flashbacks as the narrative progresses, and is abruptly cut short at the end.

Those who are not put off by the superficial construction of the plot and a certain formlessness of the entire narrative will enjoy Dana Grigorcea's Bucharest novel. With great attention to detail and factual accuracy, she evokes, shapes and captures a vivid and at the same time fading image of Bucharest, which is both alive and vanishing. Victoria's childhood in the Cotroceni district, the streets and squares of the city, come to life before the reader's eyes. The protagonist's family is vividly described, her friends appear in the past and present, colourful characters enter the cityscape: the old bank robber Mr Rapineau, the therapist Mrs Miclescu, the chiromancer Romni, the pretty Remailleuse. Each of these characters brings a special flair to Grigorcea's kaleidoscope of memories, seductively interwoven with the omnipresent scent of Bucharest lime.

Romania's recent history also appears in the novel, not only as the background of certain streets and buildings, but also as events, for example the so-called Miner-iades of 1990 or Michael Jackson's visit to the Romanian capital in 1992, during which the King of Pop greeted the people of Bucharest with the phrase “It's great to be here in *Budapest!*”. The realities of the heroine's life are woven into this historical setting: a fall due to her mother's fault into a lidless sewer shaft, multiple trips on the children's bus No. 368, the pioneer years, and a passion for chess.

The wedding in Mogoşoaia, the visit to Buşteni and many others enrich the Romanian line of the novel and enable the narrator to demonstrate her fluency in language, her desire to describe, her urge to tell and remember. It remains incomprehensible that, for all the authenticity of what is portrayed, only the figure of Gigi Becali is encrypted under a pseudonym. The fact that the Romanian entrepreneur, politician, philanthropist and owner of the football club “Steaua Bucharest” (since 2017 - FCSB) is named after the famous Romanian poet and philosopher of culture Blaga, can perhaps be perceived as a bitter irony: Lucian Blaga's mioritic



space goes to the former shepherd Gigi Becali, who capitalistically exploits it as a property speculator for the real estate market in Bucharest's suburbs!

Overall, Dana Grigorcea's second novel paints a dazzling picture of Bucharest and evokes memories of childhood and youth spent in the Romanian capital. It describes a special feeling of existence, a primal sense of innocence (Grigorcea, 2015, p. 104) that cannot be found anywhere else and at which many of Victoria's Swiss colleagues can only sigh with envy: "I wish I could experience something like that..." (Grigorcea, 2015, p. 132).

Dana Grigorcea's third novel, entitled "Die nicht sterben" ("Those Who Never Die"), is again set in Romania, specifically in the village of B. on the edge of the Carpathian Mountains, which can easily be identified as the small tourist town of Bușteni in the Prahova Valley at the foot of the Bucegi Mountains. The nameless narrator, who studied painting in Paris but then returned to Romania, has numerous childhood memories of this popular Romanian holiday resort, which she shares in a sentimental manner in her novelistic and at the same time confessional tale, to paraphrase Schiller. At first these heartfelt outpourings are dominated by idyllic and elegiac beginnings, then, as a third element of sentimentalism, satirical notes are added. The picture of memories unfolded by the narrator has a double dimension. These are not only her personal memories of the communist regime in Romania, but also family stories, mainly from her great-aunt Margot, whom the first-person narrator affectionately calls Mamargot. They overlap with the heroine's memories, infiltrating and even replacing them. These stories date back to the interwar period, when a wealthy upper-middle-class or aristocratic family owned vast tracts of land, later nationalised by the communists.

A vivid example of this is the holiday villa in B., where the family spends their summer vacation annually. Year after year, the family has to bribe Mayor Sabin with gifts in order to be allowed to spend their holidays in this villa, which used to belong to the family. For a few weeks every summer, the villa is freed from the "unspeakable communist kitsch" and transformed back into the good old days with furniture brought in from Bucharest (Grigorcea, 2021, p. 10). Instead of trinkets and knick-knacks, stuffed squirrels or glass perch on a string, the villa's living room is decorated with a Persian carpet, a large silver-framed mirror, Turkish sabres and Arabian plates. In the narrative present of the novel, the status quo ante is definitively restored. The once expropriated villa was returned after the regime change and now, as in the good old days, is back in the possession of the family. The change of name of the villa symbolises this. While under communist rule it was called "Villa Diana", now it has returned to its old name "Villa Aurora": the goddess of the moonlit night is replaced by the goddess of the dawn, dark times give way to new, brighter and more hopeful ones (Grigorcea, 2021, p. 27).

In addition to the aspect of memory, there are numerous other fundamental aspects of the novel, which will be listed here without claiming to be complete, even though they cannot be discussed in detail in this article. First of all, there is the narrative style and its inconsistency. In Grigorcea's novel, the old-fashioned and



seemingly ponderous style of the first-person narrative, which is evident, for example, in frequent addresses to the reader, repeatedly leaves the realistic level and glides over into visionary or imaginary fantasy worlds. A second aspect is that of Romanian history and present. Grigorcea's novel creates a comprehensive picture of Romanian society that emphasises diachronic differences and at the same time enables comparisons of systems, not only within the country but also in a European context.

For example, the phenomenon of labour migration described in the novel or the fate of the first-person narrator herself, who made a conscious decision to return to Romania: “But I stayed, went abroad only briefly and returned. Yes, I looked at everything like a rabbit at a snake” (Grigorcea, 2021, p. 16).

Another fundamental aspect of the novel is the history of the Wallachian Voivode Vlad III and his family, which is extensively portrayed in the novel, beginning with his father Vlad II, who, as a member of the Order of the Dragon, was nicknamed “Dracul”, and his three sons Mircea, Vlad and Radu, with the middle one, nicknamed “Drăculea”, becoming famous as Vlad Țepeș (Vlad the Impaler), not least because of his mention in the final verses of the Romanian national poet Mihai Eminescu's Third Letter (Scrisoarea III).

In connection with this, it is worth mentioning another aspect to which the epigraph of the novel refers – a quote from Bram Stoker's “Dracula” – the vampire motif and, in this regard, the genre of gothic novel. Other literary allusions in the novel “Die nicht sterben” can be found in Gorky, especially in his play “Summerfolk”, or in Chekhov, whose story “The Lady with the Dog” Dana Grigorcea used and literarily adapted in the novella “The Lady with the Maghrebian Dog”, published in 2018. Overall, this latest novella by Grigorcea, as well as her third novel, raises the question of a literary remake or, to put it bluntly, literary parasitism.

Another aspect of Grigorcea's novel is art history. The famous portrait of Vlad the Impaler is described and analyzed in detail on several pages of the novel (Grigorcea, 2021, p. 31, 134, 225), Romanian artists such as Ștefan Luchian, Nicolae Grigorescu, Theodor Aman, or Arthur Verona are mentioned, as well as Edvard Munch, James Ensor, Paul Gauguin, and other painters representing European art. The first-person narrator's own painting, an ink drawing entitled “Man in a Goat Costume” – receives a review in the novel (Grigorcea, 2021, p. 37).

Ubiquitous corruption is another aspect of the novel in which not only Romanians but also Austrians are depicted in an unfavourable light, whether through illegal logging or questionable hunting licenses. Whether the appropriate political and legal response to such corrupt behaviour is to impale the culprits, as the novel repeatedly suggests, is open to debate. Another aspect of the novel, involving, in particular, Great Aunt Margot, who constantly talks about the “hegemonic class” (Grigorcea, 2021, p. 11, 135, 138, 159), as well as the narrator herself, is the motif of class arrogance. Family members and their friends, devoted to literature, art, and music, communicate in bourgeois allusions, converse in French and Latin



quotations and all feel vastly superior to their non-status-appropriate surroundings. Great Aunt Margot adorned her villa “more stylishly than Queen Maria adorned the nearby Bran Castle” (Grigorcea, 2021, p. 27). It is therefore not surprising that the narrator, who also openly and directly accuses her friend Arina of social envy, is herself of princely blood and descended from Vlad the Impaler in direct genealogical succession.

Another aspect of the novel is the incorporation of folkloristic or religious customs, some of which blend together: for example, incense and the cross play a role in Christian worship but also in vampire legends. This includes folk dances, such as the goat dance, as well as general superstitions primarily upheld by the housekeeper, Miss Sanda (Grigorcea, 2021, p. 72). By the way, garlic and mirrors mentioned in Bram Stoker's novel also play a role here.

Another aspect of the novel is the question of cinematic models or influences on certain sequences of the novel. For example, the cannibalistic scene in the first chapter of Grigorcea's novel seems to be inspired by Peter Greenaway's film “The Cook, the Thief, His Wife and Her Lover”; the sharpening of the senses that occurs in the eleventh and twelfth chapters is a sign of transformation, as in Mike Nichols' film “Wolf”, with Jack Nicholson in the title role; Arina hovering over the Carpathian Gorge reminds us of the hovering female fighters of the Wǔxiá film genre, for example in the films of Ang Lee (“Tiger & Dragon”) or Zhang Yimou (“Hero”); not to mention the genre of splatter films with their gushes of blood, which also flow abundantly in Grigorcea's novel.

Another foundational aspect of the novel is narrative fantasies. The traditional narrative style of the novel “Die nicht sterben” is occasionally interrupted by fantastical episodes. For instance, the novel contains physical, erotic and flight fantasies – the night side or flip side of the elegant existence of the narrator, who parades through Villa Aurora in a splendid velvet kimono, showcasing her “noble pallor” (Grigorcea, 2021, p. 203).

In the following, we would like to take a closer look at the fantasies mentioned, especially since the entire novel “Die nicht sterben” could be understood as a literary fantasy based on Bram Stoker's novel “Dracula” (by analogy, for example, with Pablo de Sarasate's violin fantasy based on Bizet's opera “Carmen”) from which, as mentioned, the epigraph for Grigorcea's third novel is also taken in the form of a lengthy quotation. Just as in the musical compositional form of the fantasy, in Dana Grigorcea's novel, the predominant elements are loose, unformed, amorphous, unstructured, which seeks to replace what it lacks in form and order with emotionality and expressivity. Thus, the realistic elements of the narrative (the story of Vlad the Impaler, contemporary history of Romania, the family history of the storyteller) and its literary pretext (Bram Stoker's novel) serve as a springboard or trampoline for the flights of fantasy of the storyteller; thus, she rises above the lows of reality and reorganises the reality perceived from above, from the height of bird's flight. Let's start with the flight of fantasy!



The first time the narrator takes to the skies is after coitus with a vampire, which we will discuss later in the context of erotic fantasies. She throws herself “as if in a dream, and yet not” (Grigorcea, 2021, p. 153) from the very window from which the vampire lover has just disappeared. But the fall miraculously turns into flight: “But suddenly I felt light and agile, like a free thought, already not knowing neither ascent nor descent” (Grigorcea, 2021, p. 153). Her flight takes the narrator over the visible signs of the Dracula hype or Dracula fakes of B., over the centre of corruption, the estate of Mayor Ata, the son of the former mayor Sabin, and further over the forests around B., where the loud roar of a stag catches her attention. Like an eagle, the newly turned vampire swoops down on the animal and feeds on its blood, after which, naked, with hair blowing, she continues her night flight, which takes her up the cliffs “over the cable car wires to the famous Sphinx meadow and further to the Caraiman Cross”.

I solemnly descended into the shadow of the cross.

Standing here, I could not help but read the nickel-plated plaques of the Hero Cult Association attached to the pedestal.

Queen Mary ordered the cross to be erected after she saw the Carpathians in a dream, “splattered with the blood of the heroes of the homeland”. It is considered to be the highest cross in the world (Grigorcea, 2021, p. 156).

“From above” – such is the eloquent title of the thirteenth chapter, from which the above quotes are taken; the vampiress looks down on B., on Villa Aurora, on the cemetery with the family vault, where Madame Didina, Margot's cousin recently crashed in the mountains, is buried along with Vlad the Impaler and his lover Ecaterina Fronius Siegel. Here, at the Caraiman Cross, the narrator suddenly howls like a wolf, standing naked and bare before the Lord – be it of the Wallachians, be it of the darkness, be it of the vampires – who, unfortunately, does not respond to her call. Left alone, the narrator continues her flight: over cleared slopes and torn-up squares, over the wood depots of the company Schweighofer, suspected of corruption, over villages and factory ruins, over gas stations and residential buildings, over meter-high billboards for “Money Transfer”, over paths and places of childhood, and indeed, over childhood itself! “My country!” (Grigorcea, 2021, p. 158) she exclaims, sailing over Romania, almost like Hans Magnus Enzensberger in his poem “Landessprache” (“National language”), and adds:

“I flew through the area with the diligence of a princely messenger, exploring the country and its people, noting the mismanagement, the abandoned construction sites, cars wildly parked on the sidewalk, the absurdly excessive number of benches in the park, the numerous currency exchange points and lottery sales” (Grigorcea, 2021, p. 158).

Following a landing on the roof of a car, the aerial journey over Romania continues, culminating in the protagonist's final assessment of her homeland as a “deserted, abandoned place” (Grigorcea, 2021, p.160). The second flight fantasy tells the story of a beautiful young woman killed by a neck bite – she was found



in the woods but soon disappeared again. Turning into a vampire, the beauty emits piercing screams in the forest at night. Flying like a bat, sliding like a spider, howling like a wolf, the protagonist sets out to find the beautiful vampire emitting these piercing screams and eventually finds her. She is just about to stake Ata, the corrupt mayor: holding him by his spread legs, she then pulls him forcefully onto a fence post, “so that the tip of the post shot out between his shoulder and head” (Grigorcea, 2021, p. 240).

Finally, the third flight in the last chapter of the novel is connected to Ata's father, former mayor Sabin, who, through decades of corrupt rule, is responsible for all the moral ills of the town B. Sabin came up with the idea of posthumously staking the suicide victim Traian and then secretly placing the body in Vlad the Impaler's tomb to stir up the Dracula hype and advertise the resort town at the foot of the Carpathians. With Sabin in her grip, the protagonist hovers over B. like a fearsome avenging angel: “He should die on the same stake as his son; I would watch from the garden table.” (Grigorcea, 2021, p. 257). But the desire for revenge and justice that the narrator indulges in throughout much of the novel (Grigorcea, 2021, p. 176, p. 192, p. 243) is ultimately not consistently achieved. Sabin escapes with his life, and the protagonist ceases to be a vampire. In the last sentence of the novel, she even regains her lost reflection.

The three flight fantasies in the novel thus form a dialectical triad. Following the thesis of the destroyed and lost homeland comes the antithesis – the merciless pursuit of those guilty of the current misery. The synthesis proposed by the protagonist at the end of the novel, however, lacks any societal relevance and instead finds its aim in solipsistic self-reflection: “This is the art of life and the best way to celebrate life: the joy of self-contemplation” (Grigorcea, 2021, p. 259).

The self-portrait, self-image, self-reflection is the noble way out of the dichotomy of thesis and antithesis, in which the staking vampires are still entangled, such as Traian's wife Arina, who belongs to the “Basse-Classerie” (hegemonic class). She also delivers a militant appeal at the end of the XXII chapter:

The vampire bite is not a punishment, like a stake is. It is the redemption of one who has been enslaved, betrayed, and humiliated. Bring me your weak blood! And then take and drink all from the blood of the Prince. You, powerless ones, who want to become powerful. This is the blood bond of those who fight for justice. [...] I am the ever-living vampire of Count Dracula's blood, I am the eternal vengeance of the righteous. (Grigorcea, 2021, p. 244).

In addition to flight fantasies, erotic fantasies also play a special role in the novel “Die nicht sterben”. Before becoming a vampire, the narrator used to take nocturnal walks through B. and constantly thought of her youthful love Traian, whose grave she visited one night on the cemetery of B. with a self-picked bouquet of flowers. Surrounded by bats, she approaches the earth mound of the fresh grave:

I'm not exactly sure what happened next. A force rose within me and pulled me up, my vertebrae cracked, and I felt a new lightness and at the same time this excite-



ment, that I could reach faster. Reach for what? I breathed with an open mouth, with a sigh so hoarse that it sounded like the trickle of distant rubble. And then I fell with the stones and clumps of earth down into this earthy darkness, which was still warm and yielding in a way that it itched and tickled me, and I rolled in the rising vapors and made grunting, crying, and mooing sounds, pressed my forehead to the ground, licked the small stones, put them in my mouth and gargled with them, then spat them out again (Grigorcea, 2021, p. 132).

In the fantasy drama *Titane*, which won the Golden Palm for Best Film at the 74th Cannes Film Festival in 2021, the main character has sex with a car. Similarly, the heroine of Grigorcea's fantasy novel "Die nicht sterben" engages in sex with a fresh and still warm grave. This first erotic encounter is prepared by physical fantasies hinting at an impending metamorphosis of the narrator: "Yes, night after night I felt a power, an indistinct force growing within me, and as the white mist rose, it ran through me, causing me to row with my arms like a commander driving his troops forward into battle" (Grigorcea, 2021, p. 129).

The narrator's second erotic encounter begins with a popular scene from the Dracula films: "The parallelogram of moonlight had shifted onto my bedspread" (Grigorcea, 2021, p. 149). Then the approaching encounter is suggested by an increasingly strong smell of incense, although incense, along with garlic and a cross, is actually one of the magical defences against vampires. Once again, a physical fantasy precedes the erotic encounter. The narrator feels "cold and then hot again with a thousand pricks under her armpits and between her legs and between her lips, in the inside of her mouth, everywhere where skin lay on skin and wanted to open up" (Grigorcea, 2021, p. 150). Now the long-desired man finally brushes against the windowsill, slides under the sheets and spreads himself over the woman sighing with lust, who immediately embraces him. The previously experienced physical sensation, which oscillates between heat and cold, is now repeated in the erotic encounter with the nocturnal lover. The beloved is "smooth as a waxed marble statue and just as lukewarm" (Grigorcea, 2021, p. 150). "Intoxicated," says the narrator during lovemaking in various positions, "I yearned for ecstasy, my exhaustion was accompanied by an insatiable longing" (Grigorcea, 2021, p. 151). Then comes the climax, when Dracula, following the example of the Maria Lactans, exposes his breasts to his mistress, and the latter in turn reaches the peak of satisfaction as a vampire.

We didn't kiss on the lips, our faces slipped away from each other too quickly, but when I saw his nipple with half-open eyes, I sucked on it and took a bite, his blood splashed into my mouth, lukewarm and sticky on my tongue.

"We are of the same blood," he whispered.

I sucked on his nipple until he pushed me away and rose with a certain movement, a black-shrouded figure, gray in the moonlight (Grigorcea, 2021, p. 151).

The nocturnal lover thus reveals himself to be a blood relative from the past, turning the act of love into a centuries-spanning incest. Vlad II, the narrator's ancestor, was admitted to the Order of the Dragon at the Imperial Diet in Nurem-



berg in 1431, the same year his son Vlad the Impaler and Austrian poet Oswald von Wolkenstein were born. It seems likely that Father Dracul and his son Drăculea were fluent in Middle High German, and knew how to use this idiom effectively as a sign of noble lineage at crucial moments. The “bluot zi bluoda” of the Second Merseburg Charm could also have been quoted by the Impaler, especially since it is a healing spell. However, the hot-, cold- and blue-blooded lover seems to be in a hurry after the intimate encounter and has no interest in the bourgeois conversation.

“Don't go, please don't go!” I was shaking all over, I wanted to say something – but what? It didn't come to me. I wanted to quote from books, yes, about the woman who traced her lover's shadow on the wall, the beginning of all painting.

I wanted to say something, but he was already in the window frame, standing there alone, casting no shadow.

Then I grabbed him by his black garment, but he was gone, and now I stood alone at the window, with black smoke in my hand, which soon dissipated (Grigorcea, 2021, p. 151).

In Dana Grigorcea's novel, fantasies always dissolve into thin air, leaving the narrator alone at the end: with her feelings, her memories, her islands of blue-blooded bourgeois bliss in the midst of a despicable environment. Repulsed and disgusted by her corrupt and lost homeland, the narrator's gaze finally turns to the mirror, to herself. During her vampire phase, when she was tormented by the holy wrath of justice and fantasies of revenge, she had lost her reflection in the mirror (Grigorcea, 2021, p. 189). Even worse, the self-portrait she had painted on the easel had turned – in analogy to Oscar Wilde's *Picture of Dorian Gray* – into a portrait of Vlad the Impaler (Grigorcea, 2021, p. 190).

Only after the first-person narrator has abandoned the social and political struggle and is cured of vampirism does she come to her senses and dive into self-reflection. “Let it be the look in the mirror! No one feels disgust looking at themselves in the mirror and thinking about themselves, on the contrary” (Grigorcea, 2021, p. 259). Together with the superstitious Miss Sanda, the narrator sits at the end of the novel on the bench by the lilac bushes in the garden, flooded with shimmering evening light, and looks at the window of the villa, which has now lost all connection with the vampiric events. “In the glass of the open window I saw the reflection of both of us” (Grigorcea, 2021, p. 260).

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