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Cover Page Footnote

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“Built on the corner of a great rock, ... it was quite impregnable.” (*Dracula* 49)

Much has been written on Stoker's possible models for Castle Dracula. Some point to castles in Great Britain visited by Stoker; others to historical fortresses in Romania associated with the Wallachian prince, Vlad the Impaler.¹ But scant attention has been paid to the descriptions of castles provided in four specific texts that we know Stoker consulted while working on his novel: Charles Boner, *Transylvania: Its Products and its People* (1865); Major E.C. Johnson, *On the Track of the Crescent* (1885); Nina Elizabeth Mazuchelli, *Magyarland* (1881); and Andrew F. Crosse, *Round About the Carpathians* (1878).²

The most significant of these potential influences is Terzburg (mentioned in Boner, Mazuchelli and Crosse). This is the famous castle of Bran, originally named after Törzburg, the German name of the village of Bran. This castle has been often associated with the myth of Dracula and has even “won” the name of Dracula's Castle. For example, almost every Romanian tourist brochure refers to it as such. But is there any connection between the fortress of Bran and the castle of Stoker's vampire? While it is true that, as Elizabeth Miller suggests, the connections have been vastly exaggerated,³ Bran Castle might very well have influenced Stoker. I base this contention on the likelihood that Stoker saw an illustration of the Terzburg/Bran fortress in Boner's book and possibly another that appeared in *Magyarland*.

¹ See for instance Raymond McNally and Radu Florescu, *In Search of Dracula* 7-15, 60-78, 150.

² For a list of Stoker's known sources for *Dracula*, see *Bram Stoker's Notes for Dracula: A Facsimile Edition*, eds. Robert Eigheten-Bisang and Elizabeth Miller, 304-305. This book also contains the actual notes that Stoker recorded from these four books: Boner (240-243), Johnson (220-233), Mazuchelli (200-205), Crosse (210-219).

³ Miller discusses the relationship between the fortress of Bran and Castle Dracula in *Dracula: Sense & Nonsense* 130-132. Arguing that the connection has been exaggerated, to the point that it has been written that Bram Stoker himself (who never was in Transylvania) visited this castle, she contends that it is next to impossible that Stoker knew of Bran Castle. She explains that the association of this fortress with the myth of Dracula started when overseas visitors began flooding into Romania looking for the vampire Count and subsequently projected everything they knew from Stoker's novel onto this castle.



Castle of Terzburg (Boner 278)

It is a reasonable assumption that if a writer is using a source for verbal description of an unfamiliar country and if the source also includes illustrations, he will be influenced in some part by the images. Among the many drawings of mansions, fortified churches and fortresses, Boner includes one of Terzburg/Bran. Of all of the drawings in Boner's book, this is the most similar to Stoker's castle. Boner presents Bran as a natural barricade "built on a rock rising just where the mountains on either side slope down and meet as if to barricade the way" (278). It is a prototype of a romantic fortress not only because of its position, but also because of its interior:

Nothing can be more romantic than the fortress; its position among the solitary rocks, its construction and seeming inaccessibility, make it the very ideal of such sort of dwelling. It might have been the abode of some robber knight, or of Blue Beard, who from the windows high up over the perpendicular rock saw and defied the knights scouring across the plain riding amain to save their sister's life. A path up the rocks leads to the entrance, which is gained by mounting an outer wooden stair, and crossing

a trap-door or drawbridge in the flooring. Within are narrow passages and galleries, strange nooks and zigzag stairs, and dark corners irresistibly attractive, and in the thick wall was a low prison where no ray could ever enter. (278-279)

Like Castle Dracula, it is perched on a rock and seems inaccessible. In *Dracula* the inaccessibility is more emphatic: "The castle is on the very edge of a terrible precipice. A stone falling from the window would fall a thousand feet without touching anything!" (38). The citadel of the Count is built on the corner of a great rock, so that on three sides no "sling, or bow, or culverin" (49) can reach.

In both cases the visitor on his way to the castle has to ascend. In Stoker, the whole trip to the castle follows an ascending route; in Boner, one has to climb a path up the rocks leading to the entrance. Boner sees the construction as a gothic castle, with passages and galleries, and associates it with extraordinary stories, as the castle seems to be populated by heroes of Romantic fiction or horror fairy tales. In his description we also find the gothic association between nobility and villainy, as he writes that the castle might have belonged to a robber knight. This is the only castle in Boner's book associated with a fictional villainous possessor. And it is the only castle Boner describes as a potential place of horror. The strange nooks and zigzag stairs, as well as the dark rooms, suggest an atmosphere similar to the one described by Harker in Dracula's castle. The darkness and the mystery of the castle are irresistible for Boner, as they will be for Stoker's character. The dungeon mentioned by Boner reminds us of the fact that Harker sees the whole castle as a prison and describes himself several times as a captive: "The castle is a veritable prison and I am a prisoner" (38). The dungeon in Boner is devoid of light; when Harker enters the castle after midnight, he notices that no ray of light comes from the black windows of the ruined castle.

Bran Castle is also mentioned in *Magyarland*. For Mazuchelli, the castle is a tourist attraction. Her way to this spot is a special experience, as, before seeing the castle, she is impressed by the magnificence of the Făgăraș Mountains, with "their noble buttresses and steep sides surrounded by a thousand watercourses, showing rugged in the sunlit portions, and blue, deep and mysterious in the shadows" (2:149-150), but she is also surprised by a group of wild looking gipsies who perform some roadside acrobatics, as a form of begging. Before reaching the castle, she also notices herds of black buffaloes idly browsing, which "give quite an Eastern appearance to the scene" (2:150). Magnificent mountains, gipsies and the "Eastern appearance" are associated with Dracula's Castle too.



Illustration in *Magyarland* (2:151)

For Mazuchelli, Bran is representative of Transylvanian castles, which, being “very interesting, and, like those of the Robber Knights of old, are almost invariably perched on the summit of some inaccessible mountain or high pinnacle of rock, where the dwellers could defy all foes” (2:151). Her description of the village of Bran as “situated on the extreme confines of Transylvania,” and “one of the most barbarous description, inhabited solely by herdsmen and their families” resonates in the backward rural environment described by Stoker. The author of *Magyarland* shows that at the architectural level, the Western and Eastern elements coexist in the structure of Bran Castle. Like Dracula’s Castle, this ancient fortress dominates the landscape, and Mazuchelli emphasizes its position, in a similar way to Boner:

The castle or fortress, which, with its many turrets and towers, is a mixture of the Byzantine and Gothic architecture, stands on the topmost ridge of an isolated rock commanding the pass into Wallachia, and was originally garrisoned by a military religious Order of Teutonic Knights. It is approached by a steep pathway, the interior of the castle being entered by a small postern under the tower now reached by a wooden staircase, but in ancient time by a movable ladder. (*Magyarland* 2:151)

There is no proof that Mazuchelli read Boner’s description of Bran.⁴ But like Boner, she describes the castle as a gothic place, the ideal spot of a fairytale world. Her attitude, after more than twenty years, is, however, similar to Boner’s, whom she sometimes seems to paraphrase:

⁴ Indeed, she most likely did not. Although Boner is quoted by other British travelers who visited Transylvania after him, the author of *Magyarland* seems not to be aware of his book. Mazuchelli narrates how the English traveler is remembered by several Transylvanians who met him about twenty years ago. The fact that she spells his name “Bonar” instead of “Boner” suggests that she was not familiar with his book. When people talk to her about Boner, she has a rather indifferent attitude, which makes me doubt that she heard about his contribution.

Anything more wild and romantic than the position of the castle cannot be conceived, its accessories reminding the spectator of the nursery tales of his childhood – of Blue-beard and Giant Despair. Inside there are grim passages, trap-doors, and yawning depths, all bearing silent witness to the troublous times when these borders were invaded by the Tartar and the Turk. (2:151–152)

The picturesque aspects of Bran Castle are emphasized in the image of the bivouac the author takes near this fortress. She spends the night in the company of some inhabitants of Terzburg, “so barbarous and formidable a folk” who take care of her trip in the region, and before falling asleep watches how “the setting sun was blazing on the castle walls” (2:152). Despite the similarities, nothing in Stoker’s Notes indicates that he was aware of these descriptions.

A brief reference to Bran can be found in Andrew F. Crosse’s *Round About the Carpathians*, another of Stoker’s known sources for *Dracula*. Crosse notices the fortress when he rides over the Terzburg Pass: “The picturesque castle which gives its name to this pass is situated on an isolated rock, admirably calculated for defence in the old days” (213). He also writes briefly of the history of the citadel, underlining its importance in the defence of the Transylvanian frontier, as well as the role of the German community in the tenure of the fortress.

Among his *Dracula* Notes are several excerpts that Stoker took from E.C. Johnson’s *On the Track of the Crescent*, including descriptions of the castles of Gornești (Gernyeszeg, in Johnson), Brâncovenesti (Vécs), and Beclean (Bethlen in Hungarian). One that is relevant to the discussion at hand is his description of a Transylvanian chateau at Gornești. Stoker made these notes:

Transylvanian house usually built two wings with central archway main entrance – upper room open stone corridors, staircases, floors etc. and furniture polished oak – strips of carpet beside rest of floor uncovered.
(*Bram Stoker’s Notes* 230-231)

Johnson also describes this building as “furnished throughout in a very luxurious manner,” the carved cabinets “beautifully inlaid à la Louis Quatorze” and the ceiling of the dining-room magnificently painted with classical subjects” (246). In his novel, Stoker stresses the richness of Dracula’s castle.

Another possible inspiration for Stoker is Johnson’s description of the castle at Brâncovenesti – in Hungarian Marosvécs (or Vécs, in Johnson). On his way to this castle, Johnson observes some manifestations of people’s religiosity. He visits a Romanian church and describes the crosses by the roadside and the people who are worshipping Christ in front of them. Only after he passes a big cross does the “grand old castle” (256) come into view. In *Dracula*, before meeting the Count, Jonathan Harker also notices many crosses by the roadside and the people’s absorption in praying in front of the

shrines in natural settings. Johnson describes the building as the prototype of a medieval castle that dominates the surroundings. Like Stoker's imagined castle, it has frowning battlements and old towers. Placed on a steep hill, the castle dominates the whole village and the comparison of its placement with the relationship between chickens and hens reflects the medieval rapport between the aristocrat and his vassals. The relationship between Dracula and the Transylvanian peasants has also been interpreted in similar terms, because the vampire count exploits the unhappy peasants, feeding himself and his "brides" on their blood, as happens with the child brought to the castle.

The winding approach, the spiral staircase and the panoramic view towards the mountains are other elements found in Stoker's book. Here is Johnson's first impression of the castle at Brâncovești:

Perched on a height, its frowning battlements and grim old towers presented a perfect picture of a medieval stronghold, while the cottages which constituted the village if Vécs were clustered round the base, like chickens round the parent hen. The approach to the castle wound round the hill on which the latter stood, and, after passing this, we crossed the drawbridge which spanned the moat, and drew up before the hall-door, in front of which was a charming terrace, planted with trees and flowers. From here there was a lovely view down the road by which we had come, and up the valley to the mountains. (256-257)

Like Harker, Johnson is also kindly received by the landlords of the castle. The castle at Brâncovești is full of history and the hunting trophies are associated with the warlike times when the ancestors of the aristocratic hosts "made their mark in the sanguinary field of war in days gone by" (257). Dracula is proud of his warlike ancestors and his castle is the place where Harker learns about Transylvanian history. In the castle at Brâncovești, Johnson enters a long picture-gallery, wherein hung the portraits of several warriors, "grim-looking Magyars, in gorgeous attire, and with fierce moustaches whose up-curved points seemed to endanger their eyesight."

The old tower of the castle is the witness of a terrible medieval time. Like Stoker's future castle, it is a place of horror, where the prisoners were tortured. It is a dark place, as light can enter only through a long slit, and there is no window. In this torture-chamber the prisoners who had been racked and tortured were cast through a trap in the floor into a deep pit below, to spend in pains the short remnant of their lives. The castle had also dark dungeons, even below the level of the moat, where the wretched prisoners had passed "weary years in damp and darkness, without a ray of light, or of hope" (259). The antique tower, where "monsters, capable of inflicting such fiendish cruelties on their fellow-men have lived" (259), is haunted. The castle is a typical medieval place, as "there is no doubt that in the Middle Ages such horrible practices were pretty general" (259).

But the castle of Vécs mirrors both past and present; it presents its English visitor the hell of human existence, but also the delight. While some parts of the castle reflect the cruel medieval past, other rooms are places of delight because of the artistic objects they

present. If Harker sees Dracula's castle as a great museum, Johnson is also impressed by the interiors of this building. With a tall easel in one corner of the room and a great piano in another, the great drawing room looks like a museum space, furnished and ornamented in the most luxurious manner, with "magnificent Gobelin tapestry," exposing handsome glass cases full of old coins, medals, military orders, inland cabinets, mosaic tables, and escritaires, thick Turkish carpets, or impressive chandeliers.

Even more than the beauty of the interiors of the castle, the natural scenery impresses Johnson. In a little wood next to the gardens, the English visitor finds an ideal place for admiring the whole valley: the forests, the smallness of the people seen in the distance, the ascending road, the unconquerable position of the castle, the height of the mountains in the background, the peak "Isten-Szék" (God's Seat). All of these traits appear in Stoker's novel. The landscape associated with Castle Dracula is indeed very similar to Johnson's descriptions.

Other descriptions from Johnson that Stoker noted refer to the two castles of Beclean (Bethlen in Hungarian) – the newer and the older one, as Johnson refers to them. Johnson visits the new chateau and leaves it on a moonless night. Although Bethlen Castle is presented as "a heavenly spot" (272), certain elements resonate in Stoker's novel, such as the large gate at the entrance to the chateau or the old fine architectural elements (the stone steps in the Florentine cinquecento style, the handsome balustrade). The new castle has two wings, and Johnson takes the left one, which was unoccupied. Like Harker's room in Castle Dracula, the room Johnson takes here is only partially furnished, but is fine and octagonal in shape. If Harker's room gets less light, Johnson's has three large windows, with a view of the adjacent mountains, with their forest-clad sides, and the winding stream running at their base. The furniture is plain, but comfortable. The cool mountain air gave Johnson a strong appetite; he takes aristocratic dinners, and a frequent chicken dish is *paprikás csirke*. In Dracula's castle, Jonathan's first meal consists of chicken.

Another element that may have inspired Stoker is the dress of the gentlemen. When he visits the older castle at Bethlen, Johnson finds the aristocratic family gathered at the table and notices that "all the gentlemen wore black coats, black trousers, and boots up to their knees" (273). Seeing the people who take part in a meeting about the elections, the traveler notices again that they are dressed in black or grey coats, like in England. Thus, it is possible that Count Dracula's black clothes are inspired in part by Johnson.

During his sojourn at this castle, Johnson took a raft driven by a Slovak and crossed the Mureş in order to climb a hill in the neighbourhood. This Slovak does not accept money from the English visitors, showing that he works for the Count who owns the castle. In Stoker's novel, the Transylvanian vampire count is served by Slovaks. The rafters who carry Dracula's box from Galaţi to the neighbourhood of Dracula castle are also Slovaks.

Charles Boner's description of the castle at Criş (near Sighișoara) might also have caught Stoker's eye. While not referred to specifically in the Notes, there are points of similarity. This castle is the property of a Hungarian nobleman. Boner crosses the hills and passes through a very bad road before arriving there: "None but horses of the country

would have dragged a waggon up such steep, and through hollow ways so narrow that our vehicle was always tilted on one side” (365). One is reminded of the comment in *Dracula* about the bad state of the Transylvanian roads: “it is an old tradition that they are not to be kept in too good order” (16). Dracula’s abode is a “vast ruined castle” (24). The Count notes, “the walls of my castle are broken; the shadows are many, and the wind breathes cold through the broken battlements and casements” (35). At Criș, Boner is impressed by the decay in which he finds the old castle. When he visits Transylvania, many of the destructions since the 1848 revolution were still not repaired: “And so this old place so historically interesting, so picturesquely beautiful, moulders year by year into decay. Thus here in a once handsome room, the blue sky looks in through the broken roof” (365). The entrance is “by a broad stone archway into a large court, where all that meets the eye tells of ancient time.” At the end of the court there is a “massy tower to which a covered flight of steps leads, as well as to an open gallery that runs along one side of the court.” Like Dracula’s castle, this building fascinates its visitor with the remembrance of the past. The two tenses used in the description of this castle, present and past, emphasize the melancholic reaction of the English visitor. All that was once glorious is ruin at the time of his visit: the second court is a garden “where formerly were handsome halls, as the remains of frescoes and the slender shafts of columns plainly show” (363-364).

Harker too is aware of history while walking in Dracula’s castle. For him, the discovery of this fortress means a meeting between contemporaneity and history. He sits “at a little oak table where in old times possibly some fair lady sat to pen, with much thought and many blushes, her ill-spelt love letter” (49) and narrates in his diary in shorthand his own experience in the castle. Harker enjoys the experience of the past, and realizes that “the old centuries had, and have, powers of their own which mere ‘modernity’ cannot kill” (49). He imagines the rooms in the old time of the “remorseless wars” when the ladies waited for their husbands to come back from the battlefield. While exploring the home of the mysterious count, the English solicitor finds great heaps of golden coins older than three hundred years, old chains and jewelled ornaments. What he observes is different from what he sees in an English museum, because the ancient has another value:

There are certainly odd deficiencies in the house, considering the extraordinary evidences of wealth which are round me. The table service is of gold, and so beautifully wrought that it must be of immense value. The curtains and upholstery of the chairs and sofas and the hangings of my bed are of the costliest and most beautiful fabrics, and must have been of fabulous value when they were made, for they are centuries old, though in excellent order. I saw something like them in Hampton Court, but they were worn and frayed and moth-eaten. (29-30)

Boner observes at the castle of Criș that “Everywhere are interesting traces of antiquity” (364). In his view, this castle has several gothic elements, such as the court, the

garden with historical relics, the cellar (which was also used as a chapel), the coats-of-arms. While describing the building, the author shows several times how impressed he was by the signs of the past (for example, see 365).

Two other castles described by Boner are worth noting: Hunyadi Castle and the fortress of Deva. Because of a fire, which broke out at Hunyadi Castle in 1854, a few years before Boner's visit, "the noble castle" is transformed into "a place of desolation." Boner is impressed by the grandeur of this castle, situated "on a steep limestone rock," and presents it as "the most picturesque of castles, that of the great Hunyadi, ruinous and blasted by fire, but still grand in its proportions, and imposing from its commanding and massy forms." The gothic elements are present here too: two rivers which meet at the foot of the rock on which the castle stands, the bridge, high up in the air, which "led across from the steep bank to the portal of this royal palace," the large courtyards, the corridors, the "bow-windowed chambers overlooking the roaring current beneath," the chapel "defaced and desecrated," "the mighty cellars once well stored with luscious Transylvanian wine," the broad regal terrace with a view upon the plain. "There are so many remains of what is beautiful, that it is painful they should be thus left, uncared for..." (527), Boner concludes. This castle is also mentioned by Crosse, who although he could not visit it, writes about the famous building associated with John Hunyadi, who was born near by, and who subsequently built the castle. Situated on a lofty spur of a rock, washed on three sides by two rivers which unite at its base, and accessed by a high draw-bridge, Hunyadi fortress has a "romantic and singular position" (158). Also in a ruinous state is the fortress of Deva, placed on the top of a hill, but in spite of the sadness provoked by the state of the building, the traveler feels here the same fascination with history and nature. This castle, too, offers a panoramic outlook and Boner writes, "the view from the castle which is very much higher than Heidelberg, is magnificent" (530).

There can be no doubt that the fictional Castle Dracula had many inspirations, including – of course – Stoker's own imagination. But the preponderance of echoes in Stoker's novel of books that we know he consulted (whether he took notes from the relevant passages or not) leads to the conclusion that his sources played an even more prominent role than previously acknowledged.

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