

## DEATH AND IMMORTALITY IN *DRACULA'S DIARY*: READINGS THROUGH *CORPUS HERMETICUM*

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### Abstract:

*The knowledge existent at present, which generates the need for a new approach to the myth of Dracula, refers to an almost unanimous reception based on the novel published in 1897 by Bram Stoker and on the tens of the subsequent portrayals which have induced a social and cultural paradigm standardized as commercial kitsch. Within this fictitious construct Dracula has been expounded in manifold keys. However, to ordinary perception, his figure is reduced to the semi-caricatural vampire character, the living-dead craving for blood. This article aims to answer a series of questions about the representations of Dracula and their relevance to the fields of cultural and literary studies: Which is the "real" Dracula? Which are the psychological, cultural, social and historical impulses determining the actions of the character and the established myth? To what extent the deeds of the personage can be accounted for through the instrumentality of psychological impetus and by the agency of cultural, philosophical, esoteric, and occult principles? Thus can the "real" Dracula be integrated into an ampler context of culture and civilization, where his alienation and his monstrosity belong less to the paradigm of "the other", of "the stranger" and refer more to the revealing of some of "our" intimately repressed human features?*

*The article proposes a critical examination and reinterpretation of Dracula's image, starting from the novel Jurnalul lui Dracula (Dracula's Diary) (1992) by the Romanian writer and academic Marin Mincu. Original responses are being suggested to the questions defined previously – through several writing and literary theory techniques, including references to Corpus Hermeticum.*

*By comparing and contrasting the hermetic philosophical text and the Romanian novel, the essay aims at finding out whether the entire construct of the myth of Dracula can be explained through two cultural and philosophical aspects, namely death and immortality. It also offers a new reading, another conceptualization of a familiar but debatable subject, which reinterprets and even rejects the mainstream view. The work by the extremely well-informed Romanian academic, which was first published in Italy, has nothing in common with Bram Stoker's ("vampiric falsification", asserts the author in the preface...), but vividly portrays the "real" Dracula, the Prince Vlad the Impaler, imprisoned in the underground cave of a castle under the Budapest Danube, writing a journal between February, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1463 and August, 28<sup>th</sup>, 1464. In his diary the character recalls his*

*historical fate and legendary destiny through references to aspects of Romanian culture and civilization considered in a European context. For instance, the study approaches topics such as: the religion of Zalmoxis as the philosophical and existential foundation of the Romanians; Dacians' attitude towards death, as described by Herodotus, which might have influenced Pythagoras, Socrates, the Eleusinian and the Orphic Mysteries; the boycott of history by the Romanian people (an echo from philosopher Lucian Blaga's writings); the orality of the Romanian culture (as opposed to the written culture of the western Europe); the oral folkloric creations, the ballad Miorița (The Little Ewe) and the fairy-tale Tinerețe fără bătrânețe și viață fără de moarte (Youth without old age and life without death), etc. All of these are put forward within the humanistic, Renaissance context of the epoch, given that Dracula was a friend of Marsilio Ficino, Nicolaus Cusanus, Pope Pius II, Cosimo de' Medici, etc. Researchers will discover new speculative themes and directions with regard to the seemingly exhausted myth of Dracula.*

**Keywords:** Corpus Hermeticum; Dacians; death; Dracula; immortality; Zalmoxis.

The year is 1462. Sultan Mehmed II crosses the Danube River at the head of 150,000 men, an army “second in size only to this emperor’s invasion of Byzantium” in 1453 (Chalcocondil 1958: 285), overrunning the small principality of “Dacia” (i.e. Wallachia). On the night of 16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> June, the Prince of Wallachia breaks into the Ottoman camp leading 7,000 “Dacians” (i.e. Romanians) in an attempt to capture or kill the Sultan (Chalcocondil 1958: 287-288). In the aftermath, the Ottoman army advances on the capital Târgoviște only to come across a gruesome sight:

“when they saw their own people impaled; the army of the emperor stumbled on a field of stakes (...). And there were big poles in which there were thrust men, women and children, about twenty thousand, as they say; a spectacle for the Turks and for the emperor himself! Even the emperor, taken aback with astonishment, kept on saying that he could not take the country of a man doing such terrible deeds and, above all, knows to make such a use out of his reign and of his subjects. He added that a man doing such deeds would be able of more. And the other Turks witnessing the crowd of impaled people, got terribly frightened. There were small children hanging from their mothers in the stakes and the birds had made nests in their chests.” (Chalcocondil 1958: 289-290).

As a consequence, the exhausted Ottoman army beats a hasty retreat to the south of the Danube. On the other hand, the Prince of Wallachia, aged 31, is imprisoned, by his supposed ally, the Hungarian King Matthias Corvinus, in a castle from Visegrad, for the next twelve years. The name of the

Wallachian Prince is Vlad III, also known as Vlad the Impaler or Vlad Dracula. This is where and when we find the “real” Dracula, in the novel written in Italian by the Romanian academic Marin Mincu and published in Italy in 1992: *Il diario di Dracula/ Dracula’s Diary*, a fictitious introspection covering the interval from February, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1463 to August, 28<sup>th</sup>, 1464.

The novel itself is a gem for any hermeneutic approach, as its dense and puzzling philosophical, psychological and cultural content unveils itself throughout the hidden paths of complex narrative construction. The “figure in the carpet” is diverse, but no less authentic, according to the perspective or interest of any potential viewer. At the heart of the novel, in one of the footnotes provided by the discoverer and editor of the journal – none other but Marin Mincu himself – one can read the following graphic description:

“Sometimes the journal reveals itself as a genuine construction site, crowded with all sorts of materials: small entries, digressions, marks, recollections, small philosophical treatises, meditations and different readings on the most various subjects, materials discussed according to tradition, founded on hearsay or on written records; and there are quoted passages all the same, from texts belonging to all epochs and to all languages (this should not come as a surprise, as it was his ordinary way to work), historical annotations, speculative insertion, comparative exercises in mythology, philosophy and ethics, raw samples of his stories.” (Mincu 2004: 130).

Therefore, an attempt to draw up an essay on any of the numerous subjects tackled in the *Diary* is an endeavour deemed to be incomplete due to the formal fragmentation and labyrinthine framework in the first place. However, the real challenge is to unravel the inner meaning, Dracula’s outlook on the essential themes debated in his own *Diary*. The Dracula that Marin Mincu portrays is a complex character, a well-educated intellectual at the crossroads of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, acquainted with the works of several of his contemporaries (such as Nicolaus Cusanus, Marsilio Ficino, Pope Pius II, Cosimo de Medici etc.), a figure tormented by contradictions, interpreted either as a prolepsis of Faust (Givone 2004: 230) or as an anticipation of Nietzsche (Bigongiari 2004: 221; Givone 2004: 230; Klobas 2004: 236; Giuliani 2004: 250). Without minimizing or declining any of these possible readings, the present essay shall look into the *Diary* in order to select two of its haunting ideas, *death* and *immortality*, in an attempt to decode it through *Corpus Hermeticum*.

*Corpus Hermeticum* is mentioned in the novel no less than fifteen times. In an introduction to the novel, written in Florence in 1987, Marin Mincu tells about his “discovery” of the *Diary* in an underground dungeon of

the castle in Visegrad where Dracula was imprisoned. The *Diary* is supposed to have been written by the Wallachian Prince in the Cyrillic alphabet, in the Romanian language, interpolated between the lines of a Greek manuscript of *Corpus Hermeticum*, well hidden in the prison walls (Mincu 2004: 21). From the very beginning the reference to the religious and philosophical ancient text should guide any specialized reader towards a possible comparative reading. Then, in a letter addressed to Pope Pius II, Dracula casually makes mention, between brackets, that he found a copy of the manuscript of *Corpus Hermeticum* for Marsilio Ficino (Mincu 2004: 49). This detail is developed later on, when Dracula says that Marsilio Ficino had asked him to bring to Florence “all the scholars from Constantinople and all the books of occult knowledge”, plus the book of all books, *Corpus Hermeticum*. The Wallachian Prince managed to do this, thanks to a Macedonian hermit (Mincu 2004: 153). This is how Ficino’s well-known Latin translation was made possible in 1463. Moreover, while in Rome, summoned by the Pope, Dracula meets Cusanus and introduces him to a Latin version of *Logos teleios*, named *Asclepius*, suggesting to the German scholar the source for the work *De beryllo* (1458). Dracula buys the same *Logos teleios* when he travels to the East and hands in to his friend Marsilio Ficino, both of them making a compared reading with *Poimandres* to look for further doctrine teachings (Mincu 2004: 156-157). Whereas all these references to *Corpus Hermeticum* might have been considered as incidental, all the rest stand for Dracula's complex inner philosophical belief, as expressed in his *Diary*. To the Prince, “with the texts from *Corpus Hermeticum*, Hermes Trismegistus made a synthesis of all wisdom and magic” (Mincu 2004: 157). *Corpus Hermeticum*, especially *Poimandres*, seems to be the referential work for Dracula: “I had studied *Corpus Hermeticum* thoroughly.” (Mincu 2004: 105). Dracula debates upon its teachings with Ficino or Cusanus (Mincu 2004: 148), or he reads them over and over again, in solitude, in his underground prison, while writing his *Diary*. Towards the end of it, he mentions his source for the last time: “I return to *Corpus Hermeticum* all the time: I feel a depraved rapture when reading it...” (Mincu 2004: 190). Among the many quintessential issues raised in *Corpus Hermeticum*, Dracula's introspection mirrors some of them through various associations or dissociations. For now, we shall focus on the topics of death and immortality.

Death and immortality are omnipresent subjects in the *Diary*, Dracula approaching them from various angles, from the first pages -- “My peasants truly believe in the immortality of the soul” (Mincu 2004: 28) to one of the last entries -- “And I shall find again my Immortality” (Mincu 2004: 219). For the present essay, at least, the key fragment is to be found somewhere in the middle of the novel. The excerpt is called, not incidentally, *Zalmoxis*. Here Ficino shows a letter to Dracula, which was written by Colucio Salutati

to Roberto Guidi di Battifolle when Petrarch died. The influence of the doctrine of Hermes Trismegistus is already noteworthy, according to Ficino. To Dracula, entire passages such as the following look as if taken from *Poimandres*:

“... wipe your tears, oh, sons. This disintegration, indeed, in which we free ourselves from the burden of the corruptible part, is not something disastrous and fatal; but unseals to me the path towards a glorious return. You have no reason to cry when you send your father to the glory of true life and to receive immortality, such a long-awaited reward...” (Mincu 2004: 125).

Dracula stops Ficino from reading and tells him the following:

“‘Look’, I told Marsilio, ‘what the teachings of Zalmoxis have become and how they have been interpreted. No doubt that in the same manner, more or less, the initiator of my ancestors had also spoken when he gathered his fellow countrymen in the *andreon* of his house before he died.’ Marsilio stood deeply absorbed in thoughts, and then he took the *Histories* of Herodotus from a shelf and read the chapter about Zalmoxis again. I let him meditate on how the original myths arise and flow, on the surprising modalities of their evolution, which also occur through more or less manipulative assumptions or falsifications. When it comes to writing, there is an entire matter of manipulation. He who knows his sources better has the capacity to produce better writings.” (Mincu 2004: 125-126).

To Dracula, Zalmoxis represents the original myth, Pythagoras, Socrates (Mincu 2004: 158), the Orphic and the Eleusinian Mysteries (Mincu 2004: 161), and *Corpus Hermeticum* enlarges upon this idea: Dracula states that he “got rid” of the concept of God “or, better said, I have entirely assimilated it to my ancient god, the one the text of *Poimandres* speaks about” (Mincu 2004: 49); “The spirit is universal and embodies itself in many and ephemeral forms, as in *Poimandres*...” (Mincu 2004: 189). Zalmoxis is mentioned explicitly nine times in the *Diary*, and the implicit references are many. To find out anything about the doctrine of Zalmoxis one has to read, just like Ficino, the *Histories* of Herodotus. Thus, a comparison between the concepts of death and immortality in *Corpus Hermeticum* and in *Dracula’s Diary* is illustrative. It comes as a little surprise that Dracula provides the entire fragment from Herodotus, in Greek language and alphabet, in a letter addressed to Pope Pius II, when His Eminence shows interest in the ancient religion of the Wallachians (Mincu 2004: 158-161). Herodotus makes mention of the belief in immortality of the Getae, “who are the bravest and

the most upright in their dealings of all the Thracians”. The following three paragraphs are essential in this sense:

“94. And their belief in immortality is of this kind, that is to say, they hold that they do not die, but that he who is killed goes to Salmoxis, a divinity, whom some of them call Gebeleizis; and at intervals of four years they send one of themselves, whomsoever the lot may select, as a messenger to Salmoxis, charging him with such requests as they have to make on each occasion; and they send him thus:—certain of them who are appointed for this have three javelins, and others meanwhile take hold on both sides of him who is being sent to Salmoxis, both by his hands and his feet, and first they swing him up, then throw him into the air so as to fall upon the spear-points: and if when he is pierced through he is killed, they think that the god is favourable to them; but if he is not killed, they find fault with the messenger himself, calling him a worthless man, and then having found fault with him they send another: and they give him the charge beforehand, while he is yet alive. These same Thracians also shoot arrows up towards the sky when thunder and lightning come, and use threats to the god, not believing that there exists any other god except their own.

95. This Salmoxis I hear from the Hellenes who dwell about the Hellespont and the Pontus, was a man, and he became a slave in Samos, and was in fact a slave of Pythagoras the son of Mnesarchos. Then having become free he gained great wealth, and afterwards returned to his own land: and as the Thracians both live hardly and are rather simple-minded, this Salmoxis, being acquainted with the Ionian way of living and with manners more cultivated than the Thracians were used to see, since he had associated with Hellenes (and not only that but with Pythagoras, not the least able philosopher of the Hellenes), prepared a banqueting-hall, where he received and feasted the chief men of the tribe and instructed them meanwhile that neither he himself nor his guests nor their descendants in succession after them would die; but that they would come to a place where they would live for ever and have all things good. While he was doing that which has been mentioned and was saying these things, he was making for himself meanwhile a chamber under the ground; and when his chamber was finished, he disappeared from among the Thracians and went down into the underground chamber, where he continued to live for three years: and they grieved for his loss and mourned for him as dead. Then in the fourth year he appeared to the Thracians, and in this way the things which Salmoxis said became credible to them.

96. Thus they say that he did; but as to this matter and the chamber under ground, I neither disbelieve it nor do I very strongly believe, but I think that this Salmoxis lived many years before Pythagoras. However, whether there ever lived a man Salmoxis, or whether he is simply a native deity of the Getai, let us bid farewell to him now.” (Herodotus, Book IV, 93-96)

To Dracula, there are several details to be emphasized in this fragment. Firstly, Herodotus, a proud Greek, was reluctant to admit that Zalmoxis, a Thracian, might have been the predecessor of Pythagoras. As a result, he put forward the hearsay evidence that he was a slave, a “historical lie” which, however, the honest historian corrected in the last passage above. The latest academic research endorses Mincu’s outlook:

“The Pontic and Hellespontine Greeks, with whom Herodotus communicated, had perceived a resemblance between Pythagoras’ teaching of metempsychosis, which was often identified with the doctrine of immortality (...), and the religious beliefs of the Getae (a resemblance which was certainly superficial and in no way pointed out the real contacts between them), and made Zalmoxis not just a student but a slave of Pythagoras. (...) It was Pythagoras’ doctrine of the immortality of the soul and his σοφία, including practical shrewdness, which attracted the attention of the Hellespontine and Pontic Greeks and brought him into connection with Zalmoxis. (...) the Hellespontine and Pontic Greeks made Zalmoxis Pythagoras’ slave and student, in which capacity he remained until the end of antiquity, more and more yielding to the civilizing influence of his teacher.” (Zhud 2016: 448, 451, 462).

Secondly, “the Getae believed in the immortality of the soul and in a happy existence after death”. (Mincu 2004: 161) Two of the immediate arguments for that are their legendary bravery when facing death as warriors and the serenity of the chosen messenger when he accepted to die. Thirdly, there is “the creation of the initiation scenario of his return in the fourth year, after he has remained occulted in the kingdom of death for three years. (...) The occultation and the epiphany of Zalmoxis had made the Getae accomplish that *Katabasis*, namely the descent into the Inferno (*descensus ad inferos*) as an initiatory death.” (Mincu 2004: 161)

The occultation, or the *Katabasis*, the descent into the Inferno as an initiatory death, with its ultimate promise of an epiphany, is an issue which Dracula comes back to repeatedly, with explicit or implicit suggestions of drawing a parallel between himself and Zalmoxis.

“Just like Zalmoxis, I lie here, occulted underneath the earth, and I shelter voluptuously in the matrix. I am pleased with my new condition. I hear that there, above, many regret me and I am missed. (...) But I do not want to get out, henceforth. And I want the entire world to keep on waiting for me forever, mindful of any of my attestations, on the prolonged path which I invent myself, in my fictitious stories.” (Mincu 2004: 83); “now, after my occultation” (Mincu 2004: 97); “I have built an underground lodging for myself, in the same manner as Zalmoxis. (...) I shall come out alive from here, for Zalmoxis assures all those who believe in him that none of them will die. If, later on, I shall succeed to come back alive on Earth, it will be in a reincarnation, we shall see which one.” (Mincu 2004: 170); the subjects “prostrated themselves to the ground adoringly, as if I were Zalmoxis.” (Mincu 2004: 182).

These extracts make it obvious that Dracula wishes to endure the experience of Zalmoxis, or even to substitute him, for the ultimate promise of achieving immortality, using any method possible.

One way of attaining immortality is through rebirth, a possibility mentioned in the first pages of the *Diary*: “My condition is that of a man which seems to revive gradually, after a long illness, wiping the last trace of his former memory. The feeling is that of a mysterious life that begins right now, and compared to which the one lived until yesterday is nothing but a trifling endeavor.” (Mincu 2004: 28) It is also explained in *Corpus Hermeticum*, mostly in “The Seventh Book, His Secret Sermon in the Mount Of Regeneration, and the Profession of Silence. To His Son Tat”: “1. Tat. In the general Speeches, O Father, discoursing of the Divinity, thou speakest enigmatically, and didst not clearly reveal thyself, saying, That no man can be saved before Regeneration.” In the same book, Hermes Trismegistus unfolds the nature of rebirth, “45. the Intellectual Generation”, implying “leaving all bodily sense”. The idea that what is immortal is the faculty of reasoning, or the striving for knowledge, is often reiterated throughout the books of *Corpus Hermeticum*. In “The Second Book, Poemander”: “38. And let Him that is endued with Mind, know Himself to be Immortal;”, and those who “76. Walked in Error, and have been Darkened in Ignorance”. In “The Ninth Book, A universal Sermon to Asclepius”: “21. For the first, God is intelligible, not to himself, but to us, for that which is intelligible, is subject to that which understandeth by Sense.” Or in “The Fourth Book, The Key”: “28. ...the virtue of the Soul is Knowledge; for he that knows is both good and religious, and already Divine.” As for Dracula, his spiritual rebirth through “enlightenment” may be considered a constant feature of his life, as his written introspection stands as a witness for his countless readings in

various philosophical books, his astronomical investigation through a telescope from a tower both in the capital of Wallachia, Târgoviște (Mincu 2004: 153), and during his imprisonment, in Visegrad, as an endless routine at night time, (Mincu 2004: 38, 52, 84, 93, 126, 145, 152, 213), his initiation in the esoteric order of Rosicrucianism, by Christian Rosenkreutz: “It was easy for me to accede to the sect, as I was profoundly imbibed with the secret cult of Zalmoxis and I have studied *Corpus Hermeticum* thoroughly.” (Mincu 2004: 105). To Dracula, once again, the source of all wisdom is the doctrine of Zalmoxis.

Though Herodotus does not describe in detail what the teachings of the ancient initiator were, one may safely infer that reasoning or knowledge were among the constituent salient features. Fortunately, among the scarce ancient testimonies about Zalmoxis, there are others to make this clear. Strabo’s *Geography* comes second, with quite a lot of information on the Thracians, Dacians and Getae (7.3.5-10). To sum up, Zalmoxis could make great premonitions by interpreting celestial signs (Dracula’s long-life astronomical investigations can be seen as a mirror of these preoccupations), he became a reclusive figure living in a cave, refusing to see most people (see Dracula’s unwillingness to get out of his underground prison, “the matrix”), somebody else (usually a high priest, such as Decaeneus) continued to live in the cave long after Zalmoxis died (Dracula makes mention of the secret cult of Zalmoxis, still existing in the late Middle Ages), keeping the teachings of Zalmoxis alive (for example, vegetarianism and cutting down the grape vines in order to live without wine). Perhaps of even greater significance is Plato’s testimony in *Charmides* (156-158), where he describes the physician Zalmoxis, a very special sort of “healing man”, for whom the faculty of reasoning has a particular spiritual status:

“Socrates: ... Such, Charmides, is the nature of the charm, which I learned when serving with the army from one of the physicians of the Thracian king Zamolxis, who are said to be so skilful that they can even give immortality. This Thracian told me that in these notions of theirs, which I was just now mentioning, the Greek physicians are quite right as far as they go; but Zamolxis, he added, our king, who is also a god, says further, that ‘as you ought not to attempt to cure the eyes without the head, or the head without the body, so neither ought you to attempt to cure the body without the soul; and this,’ he said, ‘is the reason why the cure of many diseases is unknown to the physicians of Hellas [Greece], because they are ignorant of the whole, which ought to be studied also; for the part can never be well unless the whole is well.’ For all good and evil, whether in the body or in human nature, originates, as he declared, in the

soul, and overflows from thence, as if from the head into the eyes.

And therefore if the head and body are to be well, you must begin by curing the soul; that is the first thing. And the cure, my dear youth, has to be effected by the use of certain charms, and these charms are fair words; and by them moderation is implanted in the soul, and where moderation is, there health is speedily imparted, not only to the head, but to the whole body. And he who taught me the cure and the charm at the same time added a special direction: ‘Let no one,’ he said, ‘persuade you to cure the head, until he has first given you his soul to be cured by the charm. For this,’ he said, ‘is the great error of our day in the treatment of the human body, that physicians separate the soul from the body.’ And he added with emphasis (at the same time making me swear to his words), ‘Let no one, however rich, or noble, or fair, persuade you to give him the cure, without the charm.’

Now I have sworn, and I must keep my oath, and therefore if you will allow me to apply the Thracian charm first to your soul, as the stranger directed, I will afterwards proceed to apply the cure to your head. But if not, I do not know what I am to do with you, my dear Charmides.” (Plato, 156-158)

It emerges that Dracula undergoes a personal rite of initiation into immortality through a spiritual “rebirth”, with reasoning and “cure of the soul” as main “methods of approach”, following the teachings of his ancient god Zalmoxis, as mirrored in *Corpus Hermeticum*. There are various ways in which reason can be voiced so that the soul can achieve spiritual immortality. Dracula makes good use of two: action (for physical, material “cure”) and writing or the “fair words” alluded to by Plato (for intellectual, spiritual “cure”). Both have an immediate and personal cause for Dracula, as explained in his *Diary*; and both have a philosophical correspondence in *Corpus Hermeticum*.

“The Fourth Book, The Key”, states: “4. For his Operation or Act, is his Will, and his Essence, to Will all Things to be”. “The Fourteenth Book, Of Operation and Sense”, explains: “16. But Acts or Operations are immortal, and that which is immortal, is always in Act...” Dracula, in his *Diary*, gives two revealing justifications for his actions. In a fragment called *minima moralia*, the Prince says: “I am reading the *Nichomachean Ethics*. Aristotle cannot convince me; an abstract moral law is of no use to anybody. (...) I am more moral than all the others who accuse me, as I had the courage to carry out and to take upon myself my actions, good or bad, however they may have been. (...) In the end, to some precepts of *maxima moralia* I oppose *minima moralia*.” (Mincu 2004: 39). His second confession is from a

fragment entitled *poesis* and may stand as the essential passage for the way Dracula understands to achieve immortality through action and writing, immersing the reader into the inner grounds of a tormented soul.

“I wanted to say nothing else but that I have chosen a violent Death. I made my option for action, not for metaphysics. I want to take revenge for all the centuries of this people’s indolence and resignation. I want to punish my own stock so that I can make them wake up from oblivion; I want to provoke them and to instigate them to face their history, their most terrible destiny. I, Dracula, Knight of the Dragon Order, Grand Master of the Oriental Order of Death, exculpate myself to You, Your Sanctity, for all those I have done after I saw you do not want to help me. You left me alone, when You realized that I was great. Alone against them all. Alone against History. You abandoned me all, when you understood that I was strong. What you wanted to give me was power, it is true, but You still carried on as administrators. Nothing more, and nothing less. They used to tell stories only about my bloody deeds. The impudent words. I was confined to this prison by my friend, Matthias Corvinus, the one who should have helped me and rescue me from the Turkish invasion. He set me free indeed: he put me in chains. It would have been too great a glory for me to be accepted as a defeater of Mehmed II, the conqueror of Constantinople. Better, therefore, in prison, like some malefactor. Better to have people write just monstrosities about me. Better to pass for an oddity of History. Not my horrible image in History worries me, but oblivion; I make notes on what I know, the truth of the exploits, facts which belong to me alone, for I have understood that false writings will be compiled on my account, and a distorted image, which does not belong to me, is being spread. By all means, so many deeds embellished on my cruelty cannot be disavowed easily, but the way they are told is very tendentious; they want to make me look like a monster, one of those depraved ‘happenings’ or ‘accidents’ of History. I would like to show, here, the way in which what I understood to spread through my actions was usually falsified, with salacious insolence: that is a poetics of the existence meant as pure violence, as an act of programmatic transgression, through the instrumentality of which life and death are being challenged and any of their fictitious status is being profaned.” (Mincu 2004: 103).

The main idea is that Dracula wanted to ensure his place in History, and thus his immortality, through decisive actions, no matter if (or precisely because) they were immoral and violent. However, among the many remarks these

fragments can induce, the original cause of Dracula's actions is to be found in the following statement: "I want to take revenge for all the centuries of this people's indolence and resignation. I want to punish my own stock so that I can make them wake up from their oblivion". Dracula has a deep love and hate relationship with his own people, the Romanians. While still in the beginnings of the *Diary*, one can find a seemingly casual statement: "You are dead if you cannot manage to live in the past, in the present or in the future. My stock is renowned for their ability to barricade themselves in the past when the present is not favorable. They do not love the real time: they build themselves a mythical frame, a time of their own, and last stone-still inside it, without interferences with the present. Yes, it may be that, in this way, they boycott the time, however boycotting themselves and excluding themselves from the universal banquet of History." (Mincu 2004: 46). This theory is not original; it is an echo of Lucian Blaga's work (the most illustrious Romanian philosopher, thus adding a plus of likeliness). For Dracula, the theory operates between obsession and frustration, as he explicitly makes mention of it seven more times throughout his entire *Diary*. Here is another sample:

"It is curious how much the habit of anonymity could cement itself here. Somebody makes something magnificent, something important, and prefers to remain anonymous – and this forever! Well, not me!" (Mincu 2004: 51); "It would be easier for me to vanish and to lose myself in anonymity. Then I think once again to the doom of my people. And I am obstinate to resist. To escape from the trap of anonymity is not an easy endeavor." (Mincu 2004: 70); "The anonymity is a relinquishment of the individuality which belongs to the Orient. Therefore, as I am a contemporary with Enea Silvio Piccolomini, I must break the circle of anonymity." (Mincu 2004: 70); "I convince myself more and more that my people is destitute of any pride. They behave as a flock of coward sheep, hesitantly allowing others to molest them, in such a state of sleepy lassitude, that the one which commands does not even need a whip. They have no reaction to tyranny and the more they are worn out, the more they obediently accept to be mastered, as if it were a curse. If they are not be ruled by great tyrants, such as me, it will be hard for them to ever be able to raise their head and get out of the darkness of history. Their genius is that of boycotting the real history: this is proven by more than one thousand and three hundred years of absence of any event. They stay hidden in the dung of anonymity, until they exhaust any possibility of defense; it is only then that they come to light, but with their heads buried in the dust like the ostrich and without even realizing their own sacrifice. Practically, our history stopped in the year 106, when Trajan conquered Dacia,

after the second Dacian war. At the time, Decebalus paid a dear price for his rebellion: as he did not accept to be subjected by Trajan, he ordered all the chieftains of his people to be poisoned, to put it briefly, he attempted to kill the emperor himself and, when a centurion probably took him prisoner, he cut his own throat with his sword. This tragic episode is, even today, harrowing. The king of the Dacians takes shelter in the shade of an oak and cuts his jugular. There is no other gesture more profound in the entire history of the Dacians and the Wallachians.” (Mincu 2004: 123-124); “From Decebalus until me there has been a darkness of thirteen centuries filled with Byzantine history in which we, even if only in secrecy, were the protagonists. It was that epoch when, in order to hold out against the pressure of the barbarians, we plunged into anonymity.” (Mincu 2004: 194); “I shall take revenge, at last, for the anonymity which lies heavy on my people, like a doom.” (Mincu 2004: 201)

The vindictive prospect is shared by two of the novel’s exegetes: “We are presented with a prince as an avenger of the anonymity which lies heavy like a doom on his people” (Carageani 2004: 242); “However, he writes especially in order to overcome ‘the trap of anonymity’, that vocation of relinquishment, typical of the Oriental, which he feels in his blood” (Pellegrini 2004: 256).

Dracula’s love for the culture and civilization of his people is tremendous, and the attempt to interpret it leaves room for an essay on its own. For now, the present essay simply identifies the main reason which triggers all Dracula’s bloody actions: “my biggest vanity was that of defeating the Turks so as to induce the revival of the war strength, the pride and the might of the Dacians (daoi). We, the Wallachians, are wolves.” (Mincu 2004: 128-129). In this respect, a parallel between Dracula and Decebalus has its own significance (the comparison between their fearful attempts to kill the invading emperor, their ruthless decisions to kill their own noblemen, their refusal to surrender by all means, the fact of being betrayed by some of their own kin). Nevertheless, there is one clear difference: Dracula does not commit suicide, an extreme deed which secured the historical (perhaps even metaphysical) immortality of the Dacian king. To Dracula, “Life is *actio*, the rest – shit.” (Mincu 2004: 70), a very personal way of interpreting the teachings of his ancient Dacian god Zalmoxis, as reflected in *Corpus Hermeticum*. However, Dracula does not commit suicide for a good reason. While ruling his country, Dracula took care most of the “physical cure” of his people, through extreme actions, which secured his immortality howsoever: if Zalmoxis cut down the vineyards, Dracula cut

down the people themselves, stepping on a very thin red line between rational and paranoiac actions. In the words of a Greek historian, who was Dracula's contemporary: "In order to strengthen his reign, he might have killed about twenty thousand men, women and children in a short time; (...) before long, this led to a radical change and this man transformed the organization of Dacia completely." (Chalcocondil 1958: 283). Once in prison, unable to act any longer, he looks after the "cure of the soul", through "fair words" – as expressed by Plato in *Charmides* when referring to Zalmoxis –, which is by way of writing. In this respect, *Corpus Hermeticum* makes mention of speech as a possible path to immortality: in "The Eleventh Book, Of the Common Mind to Tat" one can find the following: "60. Hermes. Consider this also, O Son, That God hath freely bestowed upon man, above all other living things, these two, to wit, Mind and Speech, or Reason, equal to immortality. 61. These if any man use, or employ upon what he ought, he shall differ nothing from the Immortals." succeeded by "The Twelfth Book, His Crater or Monas": "9. For he divided Speech among all men, but not Mind".

It is debatable whether the Dacians used writing or not. Some speculate that writing was prohibited by their holy men as a sacrilege. In any case, no written records of the language were preserved because, in the aftermath of the Roman conquest, most material, physical traces of the Dacian culture and civilization were meticulously destroyed and thus, any hypothetical royal archives vanished. Written records of Romanian language in its beginnings are absent; there are no written documents to have been preserved until the 16<sup>th</sup> century (a historical misfortune, as any of the other neo-Romanic languages are younger correlatives, Romanian being a language of its own extremely fast and early, in the 7<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> century already). The first ever written document in Romanian that can be dated reliably, June 29<sup>th</sup>-30<sup>th</sup>, 1521, is an espionage letter. *Scrisoarea boierului Neacșu din Câmpulung* ("The Letter Written by Boyar Neacșu of Câmpulung") is addressed to Hans Benkner, a magistrate from Brașov, warning him about the imminent attack of the Ottoman Empire on Transylvania. In these conditions, *Dracula's Diary*, dated 1463, may stand as a fictitious historical and linguistic document... No matter, Dracula makes an attempt to have immortality granted through writing.

In Mincu's novel, Dracula decides to break away from a defining characteristic of his culture, orality, for he is not sure *he* will achieve immortality if it were not for the *written* accounts of his deeds, written not by a third party, but by himself. However, Dracula believes writing is something more, a therapy and even a way of living, *the* way of living.

"Until now, it has never crossed my mind to note the events of my life. (...) it is only due to an absence that the impulse for

writing has been born.” (Mincu 2004: 51); “My existence is being displaced, in a more and more conclusive manner, in the space of writing.” (Mincu 2004: 60); “The uttered word clarifies everything, delivers things from their obscurity, shifts them from the uncreated world into the impure materiality of the fulfilled deed. The written word takes part, through the act itself of being written, in the process of genesis: the written signs permeate through the primordial darkness which prevails in my cave and fill it with presence. The moment I am writing, a strong odor of sacrificial blood spreads around me. I am writing with myself. The violence of my histories becomes converted in an exorcistic therapy.” (Mincu 2004: 89).

One can easily identify the voice of the specialist in semiotics Marin Mincu when approaching the status of writing from within the larger theme of creation. Dracula’s cultural, philosophical and psychological dilemma of the priority of writing over speech may find its solution in Derrida’s deconstruction theory, as expressed in the second chapter, “Linguistics and Grammatology”, of his 1967 *Of Grammatology*. Here Derrida argues that speech is already in itself a way of writing, the whole existence is firstly written, and then it happens, and is eventually communicated. By writing his (imaginary) diary, which includes the fictional “horror folk stories” about himself, Dracula institutes a (fictitious) existence in its written form *ab origo*. Then, this written “mental trace” will be taken over by people through a reiterated spoken practice, becoming part of an oral tradition. Thus, the myth (and implicitly Dracula) ensures its (his) immortality by means of writing.

Dracula’s relation to his own writing is conflicting, for he feels the need to dissociate his written endeavor from the *oral* specific feature of his culture, a characteristic he admires and blames at the same time.

“I must write, whatever may befall: I want my written mark to last like an insect crushed between two books, beneath the weight of the signs. The oral manifestation: behold the nightmare. We have been living in orality as in a tunnel of time for thousands of years now. Our myths, fairy-tales, our songs are an unknown treasure of beauty. Let us escape this doomed condition and make ourselves well-known, here is the goal.” (Mincu 2004: 59); “The written word entails a new look and a new caliber to the world: that is why some did not make use of writing, precisely so that they would not distort their actual cognition of reality. The oral speech is being preserved in the collective voice which resists the transgressions of subjectivity. Orality has helped people preserve the profound aspects of life. An oral culture does not fall into disrepair, does not waste itself,

it remains alive for ever. I take upon myself the violation of orality.” (Mincu 2004: 121); “... it is only when I am writing that I understand the trap of orality which, ever since the Trojan War, has retained us in a lifelong anonymity. Orality means sloth, cowardice, slavery. We must regain verticality; master the art of writing...” (Mincu 2004: 136); “I explain to him that in our country no written compositions circulate, yet he does not understand; then I insist on telling him that in our country, with some exceptions, people can neither write nor read. And that everything is handed down by word of mouth. It is a matter of an oral tradition that has its origins in a very high vision of the world from which any vulgarity remains excluded. The oral stories of the Wallachians, plenteous in their essence, are related in a solemn tone.” (Mincu 2004: 140-141); “...another way of stumbling into the damned orality. Nevertheless, who knows? Perhaps, sooner or later, in the future, this could become precious.” (Mincu 2004: 211).

Two literary critics mention the issue, yet having dissimilar, even opposite interpretations: “Marin Mincu’s *Dracula* rehabilitates and vindicates the oral culture, the Romanian folklore, as an expression of a millenary wisdom.” (Carageani 2004: 245); “Nevertheless *Dracula* writes as well to get out of the condemnation of the oral culture of his country.” (Pellegrini 2004: 256). They are both right.

There is a simple explanation for *Dracula*’s hesitation when referring to the orality of Romanian culture. There are two fundamental oral creations in Romanian folklore, defining the culture itself, and both deal with the subject of death and immortality. Not surprisingly, *Dracula* addresses both in his *Diary*, over and over, in an attempt to disentangle his own attitude to death and relationship to immortality. A parallel reading with *Corpus Hermeticum* is, once again, revealing.

In its beginnings, the *Diary* comprises the following note: “If I weren’t who I am, I would like to be that shepherd-poet, who persists in going over the limit of death by himself, so that he can reconcile to the cosmos and become one with it./ One can see he belonged to the school of Zalmoxis, where he learned to adore the serene vision that transpires from that doctrine which amazed even Pythagoras.” (Mincu 2004: 39). In this extract, *Dracula* refers to one of the most important pieces of Romanian folklore, *Miorița* (*The Little Ewe*). In brief, upon finding miraculously about the imminent probability of his death, a shepherd happily imagines a fortunate rite of passage, with himself blessed to have married a princess during a ceremony attended by the elements of nature, and marked by the falling of a star. This first allusion suggests that the oral anonymous ballad

operates as an aesthetic conversion of the ancient religious doctrine of Zalmoxis, that Dracula longs for having the same metaphysical experience as his disciple, the shepherd-poet from the poem, *and that he cannot have it*, for he is “who he is”, thus, something else. Dracula cannot, as yet, imagine a serene “rite of passage” for he is doomed not to die. His destiny is that of staying alive for a little bit longer, in order to shock his fellowmen through extreme actions, in order to write his fictitious story, and thus ever last alive in the memory of his people, in the oral and, what is even more, in the mental tradition of mankind. Towards the end of his diary, he inclines to last neither dead, nor alive, thus achieving (a false) immortality in an alternative way, perhaps not as much as a result of an egocentric personal will, but as an altruistic sacrifice: people have a psychological need for his presence.

Further entries are relevant to Dracula’s inner craving to experience death as the defining initiatory way to achieve immortality:

“In the Carpathians, my subjects do not worry about death at all, but embrace it as the sole and authentic self-manifestation. One day or another I shall get a thorough taste of this great delight of the thanatic living, typical of my people.” (Mincu 2004: 50); “In another song, which goes by the name of *The Enchanted Ewe*, the hero, on the contrary, surmounts any limit and the bodily boundary destined to him; his reference space expands here until it becomes *cosmic*.” (Mincu 2004: 70); “I am not sure if you are acquainted with that anonymous song where death is conceived as a nuptial deed and where, strangely, the despicable murder, perpetrated through infamous treachery, specific to this wicked people, is dealt with as a problem of metaphysics. Why, after all, the individual must strive against the averse fate? The occurrence of evil cannot be stopped in any way. It is better therefore to foresee it, to make it yours, for thus we shall be reintegrated in the great body of Mother Nature, which will give us a purer destiny, a mythical destiny. Certainly, I shall die, it is said there, but I know that I shall die and the fact of knowing, this willful acceptance of my death makes me transcend the mortal condition, redeems me from dying, delivers me! Great conjectures are done with regard to this, for the ancestors of my people were born as poets and have conceived Orpheus, yes, but also Dionysus.” (Mincu 2004: 102); “If I am doomed to die...’ behold the key-statement where the young shepherd confronts the essential test: to be or not to be as a man. At first reading, this personal attribution of death seems too abstract: to solve the harrowing and dilemmatic expectation through the compensatory union of the Cosmic Nuptials is not easy at all. Nevertheless, the shepherd passes the most difficult inner test and steps out victor. (...) The shepherd knows the inevitability of his own death, and

his metaphorical thinking becomes thus the mediation towards a reintegrating vision.” (Mincu 2004: 177).

The vision of the anonymous oral poem of the Romanian folklore is hence the following: the acceptance of death, seen as apparent disintegration for the actual reintegration and thus achieving immortality. Throughout *Corpus Hermeticum* one can find numerous passages dealing with the same problems and quite often they do seem to echo the very same vision:

“The First Book”: “65. The Generation of Man is Corruption, the Corruption of Man is the beginning of Generation.” “The Tenth Book, The Mind to Hermes”: “105.... the World is changed, because every day part thereof becomes invisible; but that it is never dissolved. 106. (...) Occultation is Renovation.” “The Eleventh Book, On the Common Mind to Tat”: “87. Tat. Therefore, O Father, do not the living things in the World die (...) 89. For they do not die, O Son, but as compound Bodies they are dissolved. 90. But dissolution is not death; and they are dissolved, not that they may be destroyed, but that they may be made new.” “The Fifteenth Book, On Truth to His Son Tat”: “40. For without corruption, there can no Generation consist. 41. For Corruption followeth every Generation, that it may again be generated. 42. For those things that are generated, must of necessity be generated of those things that are corrupted, and the things generated must needs be corrupted, that the Generation of things being, may not stand still or cease.” “The Sixteenth Book, That None of the Things that are, can Perish”: The world “8...as Immortal, it is ever living, and ever immortal.”

Even other Hermetic Texts, such as *The Virgin of the World*, express the same idea: 23. the bodies’ “[final] dissolution [shall be] a benefit and a [return to] the fair happiness of former days.” (Mead III 1906: 111).

A peculiar detail finds its own parallelism likewise: the shepherd from the anonymous folkloric ballad is warned about his imminent death by an enchanted little ewe. In *Corpus Hermeticum*, “The Eleventh Book, On the Common Mind to Tat”: “105. For with this living wight alone is God familiar; in the night by dreams, in the day by Symbols or; Signs. 106. And by all things cloth he foretell him of things to come, by Birds, by Fowls, by the Spirit, or Wind, and by an Oak. 107. Wherefore also Man professeth to know things that: have been, things that are present, and things to come.”

This “cosmic hierogamy” (Mincu 2004: 156), such a “profound poetic depiction of death”, which neither the Egyptians, nor the Greeks were able to imagine (according to the fictitious Ficino), was made possible on the strength of the Thracian ancestry of the Wallachians, as Dracula states

(Mincu 2004: 109). However, even if the vision of the anonymous oral poem of the Romanian folklore *Miorița* (*The Little Ewe*) meets the teachings of Zalmoxis and those of Hermes Trismegistus, Dracula never, along his written introspection, embraces the path to immortality, by means of voluntarily accepting the disintegration of his physical, palpable being. When making a last note of the poem (enclosing a complete translation of the ballad into Italian), Dracula debates upon the complex and abstract meaning of the word “path” in Romanian, as employed in the anonymous creation. It signifies “destiny”, the hero “gets into possession of the ‘path’ fated by a transcendental being” (Mincu 2004: 198). Tragically, the most genuine disciple of the ancient, original religious and philosophical teachings cannot attain immortality by means of observing the doctrine, for he is not allowed to, his foredoomed path is another. He is not doomed to die.

Sadly, Dracula knows very well that not dying is futile: “...wanting to stop death, which is a *hybris*...” (Mincu 2004: 85). This delusion is dealt with in another Romanian essential anonymous oral creation, a story named *Tinerețe fără bătrânețe și viață fără de moarte* (*Youth without old age and life without death*), which Dracula debates upon even more extensively. In a nutshell, the hero, Prince Charming, refuses to be born until youth without old age and life without death are promised to him. Once born, he successfully transcends several initiatory trials and thus achieves immortality, *without having died previously*. However, once immortal, he soon realizes his unnatural condition and thus all he is longing for is his mortal state. Consequently, he becomes mortal again and dies reconciled with himself. Dracula narrates this philosophical story to his friend, the adolescent Lorenzo de’ Medici, as a sample of the anonymous Romanian oral creation. The latter is excited and perplexed for what he considers the *unhappy* ending, dissimilar to ordinary stories. “It appears as here, he says, the hero has no other purpose or no other plan in life but search for his own death” (Mincu 2004: 141). In a very detailed critical and philosophical reading of the story, Dracula comes to the following interpretation of the final part, without actually being able to find his own place in the state of Prince Charming:

“The place in which is to be found what the hero is looking for is impossible to attain, precisely because it is not specific to his world, but to other orders. On the contrary, frankly speaking, it is seemingly a matter of a rather symbolic place, since nobody ever succeeds in reaching there, where one dies of boredom. Fairies living there are aware of the impotence of the mortals to last in the secret place. (One cannot exist in the space of the immortality where everything stands still)./ That is why the hero himself eventually finds The Vale of Tears as a redemption site and remembers that he took no care of his feelings at first, given than,

all at once, he is overwhelmed by the desire to meet his parents again and see the places where he spent his childhood again. At that time, he comprehends his own ephemeral duration of a frail creature and makes his courageous option to re-enter into the cycle. He left home to seek for eternal youth and life, but he eventually decides to come back there in order to die, that is to individually recoup his existential destiny. He walks off looking for immortality, however, just to convince himself that death is the sole deliverer. For the moment, he secures his immortality. In other words, when he makes sure of the sterility of the everlasting life, he longs to return to his ephemeral state. Hence, to be able to apprehend the meaning of death, of his own death, firstly he must go through the actual experience of immortality. (...) To refuse immortality – here is a surprising *hybris*. To embrace death in order to be able to come to life in the others afterwards. This would be a possible solution too. However, I am frightened by death because of the state of putrefaction my body has to endure. Yes, I should die, I agree, but not entirely. I would like, for example, that my body should be able to avoid the state of total degradation and thus it may be retrieved alive in time and space. Prince Charming was much too honest and gave up what he had much too easily. I must find the way not to die entirely, not to die for ever. I do not know why this fairy-tale saddens me irreversibly every time I remember it.” (Mincu 2004: 142-143).

The fairy-tale is most obviously a variation on the same theme as the previous ballad, in which death is accepted as the only natural path to immortality. However, the last sentences indicate Dracula’s definite parting from the teachings of his ancestral god, Zalmoxis, expressed aesthetically in the Romanian oral anonymous creations and philosophically in *Corpus Hermeticum*. Whereas Dracula’s initial hubris was his will to stop death, his subsequent hubris is the very opposite: the rejection of immortality. As a consequence, he vehemently dismisses the prospect that his body would decay (unlike Prince Charming’s body which, according to the ancient teachings, literally disintegrates into dust at the very end of the fairy-tale). Dracula’s immediate interest is therefore to preserve his own body, as he is confident the soul is immortal anyway (“Dracula aspires to an ‘immortality of the body’”, Pellegrini 2004: 257). This is in direct contradiction to the teachings of Hermes Trismegistus, as expressed both in *Poimandres* and in *Asclepius*, which is another major dissociation from the doctrine Dracula loves dearly, but cannot embrace.

“I am convinced of my immortality. My spirit is immortal. It is only the body which goes into the state of putrefaction and

degradation. The substance of my body decays and feeds the worms of the earth. My turn to fatten them will come as well. This unavoidable process of carnal degradation is seemingly due to the action of the Sun which, according to Asclepius, is supposed to be the creator of all material forms. If it weren't for the Sun, my body would last intact, it would not be corruptible, and we would feel as living under a gigantic ice bell able to preserve our flesh young eternally. I must move further north. Towards total winter. It would be the only solution to keep my body in a state of perfect conservation, so that I can inhabit it whenever I feel like. (...) It is only the body in need to be redeemed from the penance. The spirit knows nothing of this peril: it is incorruptible..." (Mincu 20014: 163).

Dracula's repulse of the sun is very much inconsistent with its role as defined by Asclepius: "12. The Sun is the preserver and the nurse of every class. And just as the Intelligible World, holding the Sensible in its embrace, fills it [all] full, distending it with forms of every kind and every shape – so, too, the Sun distendeth all in Cosmos, affording births to all, and strengtheneth them. When they are weary or they fail, He takes them in His arms again." (Mead II 1906: 273). Throughout his *Diary* Dracula makes crystal clear his pathological dislike of the Sun, both by his contentment in living underground and by his constant unwillingness to go out during the daytime, opting only for nocturnal wandering in the skies. This comes as an even greater bewilderment as Dracula is very much aware of the true meaning of the hermetic teachings, down to the minute detail of using the terms "corruptible" and "incorruptible" when referring to the disintegration of his body, mirroring the very speech of Hermes Trismegistus. An explanation might be found in a (would-be) personal reading of a few lines from "The First Book" of *Corpus Hermeticum*: "61. Of a dissolvable Body, there are two Times, one from sowing to generation, one from generation to death. 62. Of an everlasting Body, the time is only from the Generation." Dracula is probably convinced (or, at least, desperately tries to convince himself) that some bodies are immortal and wants to make sure his is one of them. However, the true meaning of these lines is another, as it can be safely inferred a few lines further on, which sounds like an echo of the main idea of the anonymous fairy-tale *Youth without old age and life without death*: "70. That which is mortal, cometh not into a Body immortal, but that which is immortal, cometh into that which is mortal." No matter how Dracula might try to decode the hermetic teachings, they say the same: one has to die first in order to become immortal. Deep down inside, Dracula is aware of all these, as his fascination with the fairy-tale is constant, since he comes back to it as if listening to a mermaid or to a swan song. "When I had listened to it for the

first time in that village, it had enchanted me and I had learned it by heart. But I love it when somebody tells it to me like this, as if it were my mother or my nanny.” (Mincu 2004: 181-182). That is because, being neither dead, nor quite alive, *not being mortal*, he misses the greatest gift human beings were destined for, being also mortal, not just immortal, as another passage from Hermes Trismegistus makes clear, in what seems another perfect echo from the anonymous fairy-tale: “4. In fine, He hath made man both good and able to share in immortal life,—out of two natures, [one] mortal, [one] divine. And just because he is thus fashioned by the Will of God, it is appointed that man should be superior both to the Gods, who have been made of an immortal nature only, and also to all mortal things.” (Mead II 1906: 348-349). Dracula is very much aware of this, though he is reluctant to admit it. His constant fascination with the two anonymous oral folk creations (both of which are a plea for the acceptance of death, and of mortal nature) stands as an implicit argument.

Throughout the written introspection, one can notice Dracula’s indecision when talking about his own death. In short, he would like to die, he is longing for death, but he is afraid or reluctant to it, for he is aware he cannot freely accept it. The very first sentence of his *Diary*: “I believe that I shall be buried alive in this den dug underneath the Danube.” (Mincu 2004: 25) leaves room for a series of oscillations, at the end of which Dracula finds himself suspended in between the worlds, neither alive, nor dead: “The titan of action, the ruthless criminal turns into a living-dead who is afraid of the ‘sterility of the everlasting living’, who feels the entire horror of not having an end, of lasting into eternity in those banal daily emergencies – like in the portrait done to him at the Vienna court: ‘immense eyes, incredibly liquid, turned into stone and hyaline, turned towards the other world’” (Pellegrini 2004: 258).

“I am obsessed by a terrible nightmare. I keep on dreaming a dreadful ocean of blood that comes near threateningly. I shall die drowned in the blood of my victims. If I shall die.” (Mincu 2004: 29); when having a feeling that the Danube River could overflow into his burrow: “It could happen anytime. I was indulging in the tension that was tearing me up, producing some sort of exaltation, during which my intellectual abilities built up to a climax. I knew I was still able to save myself, yet I did not want to. (...) I laid for a long time with the feeling of a very near asphyxia caused by the water, and that very presentiment urged me to resist in no way. I even relaxed, so that I could get a thorough taste of the terrifying liquid which was about to flood me, little by little, when, suddenly, I remembered my diary. I came to my senses, I raised and I realized it was nothing else but

a nightmare.” (Mincu 2004: 123); “...to live in order not to live. I am the vampire of the peasants’ beliefs and legends. I cannot die since I shall never be just alive or... just dead. I shall always be both one and the other. I shall return for ever.../ ...who can stop me to be immortal?/ ...death goes round in the surroundings, it is here, in the cell; I feel the way it is waiting for me patiently and affectionately in a corner, yet it does not touch me. What an awful boredom!/ ...however, immortality is a solution only if you can master it...” (Mincu 2004: 133); “...neither shall I die nor alive should I be...” (Mincu 2004: 184).

One last delusion in his attempt to find peace in the abnormal condition he has to take on like a burden is another personal (an erroneous) reading of his ancient god’s teachings: “The movements of Zalmoxis (the occultation and the epiphany) teach us that there is no difference between life and death” (Mincu 2004: 122), and of Hermes Trismegistus: “... there is no above and no below... There are but The Overlapped Worlds, forged by Hermes Trismegistus in *Tabula Smaragdina*...” (Mincu 2004: 86). It is true that, according both to Zalmoxis and to Hermes Trismegistus, life and death should be regarded as having a similar nature, yet with one quintessential difference from what Dracula would like to achieve (i. e., the condition of the living-dead): the embrace of mortal nature. A correct decoding of the similar “overlapped worlds” is to be found, for example, in “The Fourth Book, called The Key”: “93. Wherefore we must be bold to say, That an Earthly Man is a Mortal God, and That the Heavenly God is an Immortal Man.”

A significant detail ought to be maintained in Dracula’s previous seemingly delirious confessions: when he was just about to obtain salvation by dying (in a dream), he was abruptly baffled by the necessity of writing his *Diary*. The main impediment on Dracula’s path to “normal”, doctrinaire immortality is the need of writing itself, which will eventually become his path, The path to immortality. “For at least five centuries I have been destined to last stigmatized, according to the writings of Piccolomini. There is nothing else to do but wait. The time of Dracula will come.” (Mincu 2004: 110). Five centuries later, Marin Mincu the author starts writing the novel and after some more years Marin Mincu the narrator miraculously “discovers” *Dracula’s Diary* in a transparent attempt to do justice and to make the “premonition” come true. “Now I exist only in legend, where I have transferred myself completely. Or perhaps the legend has replaced my real existence.” (Mincu 2004: 146) This is exactly what his destiny was about: to establish a reference, a paradigm, a myth. Afterwards he might have just as well departed, for he had secured the everlasting life anyway, anyhow: “...from my cell I am sending you a greeting *post mortem*. Do not deceive yourselves; I am alive, anyway more alive than you: and I defy you even at

this very instant when you are reading my diary...” (Mincu 2004: 192). The Diary looks unfinished and, thus, open-ended. The historical figure Vlad the Impaler was freed to fight against the Turks for a final brief reign in 1476. To the fictitious Dracula, this might have been a wished-for suicidal ritual act, as he was about to embrace a certain death and, perhaps, deliverance. The historical Vlad the Impaler was consequently killed by his own aristocracy.

Was Dracula right in his extreme actions and shocking writings, as depicted by Marin Mincu in the fictitious diary? That is difficult to assess, depending upon the reference, principles and values one shares. Apparently, his uncommon character infringes upon common sense, as torturing and killing people is unacceptable, no matter the reasons one may find for such actions. Yet, according to *Corpus Hermeticum* (in “The Thirteenth Book, Of Sense and Understanding”): “17. And therefore, they that have that Knowledge neither please the multitude, nor the multitude them, but they seem to be mad, and to move laughter, hated and despised, and many times also murdered.” At the end of his *Diary*, Dracula confesses to being, once more, a true believer in the religious and philosophical occult doctrine, unique and universal, formally expressed in the Hermetic Texts: “And I shall take the burden to live a life according to the Universal, Mystery Law!” (Mincu 2004: 219). Consequently, Dracula was, at least to himself, a neophyte benefitting from Knowledge, a genuine disciple of the hermetic teachings, whose destiny might have been disagreeable while alive, but whose true meaning was yet to be revealed in an indefinite future: “A day shall come when the insight, thanks to our instruments, will be able to reach further and further, also in the depth of ourselves, in the abyss of our conscience from which we have not been delivered yet.” (Mincu 2004: 219). Or, in the words of the master, Hermes Trismegistus, the same idea of an indefinite future when humankind, ever so inquisitive, will be able to understand the undeciphered, sometimes dark realms of human conscience and of all existence, which are not compliant yet:

“25. (...) it is a daring work, this making man, with eyes inquisitive, and talkative of tongue, with power henceforth to hear things even which are no concern of his, dainty of smell, who will use to its full his power of touch on every thing. ‘Hast thou, his generator, judged it good to leave him free from care, who in the future daringly will gaze upon the fairest mysteries which Nature hath? Wouldst thou leave him without a grief, who in the days to come will make his thoughts reach unto mysteries beyond the Earth?’ 26. ‘Men will dig up the roots of plants, and will find out their juices’ qualities. Men will observe the nature of the stones. Men will dissect not only animals irrational, but they’ll dissect themselves, desiring to find out how they were

made. They will stretch out their daring hands e'en to the sea, and cutting self-grown forests down will ferry one another o'er to lands beyond. [Men] will seek out as well the inner nature of the holy spaces which no foot may tread, and will chase after them into the height, desiring to observe the nature of the motion of the Heaven'. 'These are yet moderate things [which they will do]. For nothing more remains than Earth's remotest realms; nay, in their daring they will track out Night, the farthest Night of all.'" (Mead III 1906: 113-114).

Mirroring the premonition of Thrice-Greatest Hermes, what Marin Mincu proposes to the reader can be interpreted as an aesthetic counterpart to ancient philosophy. The imaginary *Dracula's Diary* is in itself a 'daring work' indeed, whereas the protagonist and narrator Dracula is the 'making man' par excellence. The 'inquisitive eyes' find a parallel in his constant strive for Knowledge, and the 'talkative tongue' in the endeavor to write down his confession. Dracula uses 'to its full his power of touching on everything', as both his acts and fair words seem to transcend the limit of normality most often. He 'gazes upon the fairest mysteries of Nature' when challenging the physical and mental capacities of humankind, and 'his thoughts reach unto mysteries beyond Earth' when (desperately, hopelessly) trying to observe the ancient teachings of his God. His entire existence is a haunting attempt to live according to the 'Mystery Law'. Dracula dissects himself thoroughly, and his introspection is a written proof of his 'desire to find out how he was made', expressed by his obsession to achieve immortality and by the implicit debate on the nature of mortality. Even more, Dracula 'also seeks out the inner nature of the holy spaces which no foot may tread, and chases after them into the height, desiring to observe the nature of the motion of the Heaven'. He does that by the instrumentality of his endless gazing to the stars with the telescope and, more significantly, through his inquiries into the nature of immortality, i. e. the motion of Heaven. And after all these 'moderate things' are exhausted, when nothing more remains, Dracula 'tracks out the Night, the farthest Night of all', as he plunges into the abyss of the conscience, which is seemingly delirium and insanity.

In one of the last entries of the diary, called *immortality*, Dracula cannot sleep as he is worried about people's reaction to the apparent death of Zalmoxis at the time when this is temporarily occulted in the cave, as a ritual of *katabasis*....: "...and they grieved for his loss and mourned for him as dead...' But why did they mourn for him? This phrase at the end echoes in my ears, gnashing like the truth between the jaws of the Sphinx. They knew his body represented a limit, a prison breaking his wings, and for all that they wept." (Mincu 2004: 218) To this day, Vlad is a figure his people are looking back at with high esteem, a reference to invoke the aid of, ever awaiting for

*to come back*. As for foreigners, their repulse, appeal and fascination with Dracula are ever growing. Dracula is every one of us, hence immortal.

The essay follows the interpretation of the actions and thoughts of the historical figure Vlad the Impaler as depicted by the Romanian scholar Marin Mincu in the fictitious *Dracula's Diary*. Out of the complex narrative construction the essay selects two subjects, *death* and *immortality*, in an attempt to decode them through *Corpus Hermeticum*. The parallel reading is considered on the strength of numerous explicit or implicit references to the hermetic philosophy, which the essay identifies and expounds. Further on the study discloses that, to Dracula, Zalmoxis represents the original myth, *Corpus Hermeticum* simply enlarging upon it. To emphasize the concepts of death and immortality in the teachings of the mythical figure Zalmoxis, the essay turns to the testimony of Herodotus, focusing on the occultation, or the Katabasis, the descent into the Inferno as an initiatory death, as Dracula is drawing a parallel between himself and Zalmoxis, for the ultimate promise of achieving immortality. One way of achieving immortality is through rebirth, namely the intellectual regeneration, i.e. reasoning, or the striving for knowledge, approached both in *Dracula's Diary* and in *Corpus Hermeticum*, something the study punctuates. The essay looks into the testimonies of the spiritual rebirth in the teachings of Zalmoxis, with Plato's 'cure of the soul' explained in *Charmides* identified as a revealing reference. Reason, voiced through action and writing, is underlined in a contrastive analysis of the fictitious diary, of the philosophical hermetic texts, and of the Zalmoxian myth. The essay emphasizes that Dracula wants to ensure his place in History, and thus his immortality, through decisive actions, no matter if (or precisely because) they were immoral and violent, thus transcending the 'trap of anonymity', a cultural defining feature seen as an obstacle on the path to immortality. In the wider context of the Dacian and Romanian cultural salient feature, writing is interpreted as orality as well, given that the conflicting relationship between orality (speech) and the written word finds a possible resolution through the Derridian philosophy of deconstruction. Orality, an expression of anonymity and thus apparently an impediment to immortality, is interpreted by focusing on two Romanian folkloric creations, which Dracula debates upon relentlessly. *Miorița (The Little Ewe)* and *Tinerețe fără bătrânețe și viață fără de moarte (Youth without old age and life without death)* share the vision of the acceptance of death, seen as apparent disintegration for an actual reintegration and eventual achievement of immortality. The essay emphasizes the consistency of this vision at the confluence of the teachings of Zalmoxis, the aesthetic expression of the anonymous Romanian folk creations, and the philosophical expression of Hermes Trismegistus' *Corpus Hermeticum*. At the same time, the study reveals Dracula's parting from this vision as he rejects being mortal as a

necessary intermediary experience; he is obsessed with achieving “direct” immortality, by maintaining the status of the living-dead. Though Dracula is intimately longing for death, he is reluctant to accept it due to the need of writing, which will eventually become his path, The path to immortality. At the end, the study attempts a final parallel reading of an entry from *Dracula’s Diary* and an excerpt from a hermetic text, punctuating that Marin Mincu’s proposal can be interpreted as an aesthetic counterpart to the ancient philosophy and that Dracula was, at least to himself, a neophyte benefitting from Knowledge, a genuine disciple of the hermetic teachings, whose destiny might have been objectionable while alive, but whose true meaning is yet to be revealed in an indefinite future. As the repulse, appeal and fascination with Dracula are ever growing, the essay stresses that Dracula is every one of us, hence immortal. Future research can deal with the subjects of *androgyny and regressus ad uterum*, and *creation*, in further contrastive readings between *Dracula’s Dairy* and the hermetic texts, revealing the relationship between death and immortality in their turn.

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