

STALKING THE COUNT: Dracula, Fandom & Tourism

Reijnders, S. (2011). Stalking the Count. *Dracula, Fandom & Tourism. Annals of Tourism Research* 38(1): 231-248.

INTRODUCTION

One of the most attractive passages of Bram Stoker's novel *Dracula* (1897) describes how the bookkeeper Jonathan Harker travels through Transylvania. Journeying by train and by stagecoach, he passes through a country of endless forests and mist-shrouded hills, on an assignment to provide advice to a certain Count Dracula. The descriptions of Harker's journey are so thrilling and visual that they have acquired a permanent place in the popular imagination, thanks in part to the many reprints of the novel but also the innumerable screen versions that appeared throughout the twentieth century. For many people, Transylvania, which is currently a province of Romania, has become synonymous with the Dracula Country: a land of howling wolves, vampires, bats, and gloomy castles. In the popular imagination, Transylvania is not only on the geographic periphery of Europe, but also on its mental periphery—a kingdom where superstitions and ancient rituals are still widespread (Andras, 1999; Light, 2007: p. 749; Walker & Wright, 1997).

For a long time, the Romanian government had trouble accepting this perception. During the Communist period (1945-1989), in particular, associations with Dracula were avoided as much as possible. The stereotype of a superstitious and primitive hinterland was hard to reconcile with the image of a progressive utopian state that the Communist Party wished to present to the world (Light, 2007; Muresan & Smith 1998). Partly for this reason, for many years there was no Romanian translation of *Dracula* available. Despite this internal opposition, as early as the 1970s, a growing stream of foreign tourists began to visit the country, specifically interested in locations from the novel. Stoker's description of Harker's journey is both detailed and geographically well-informed, which made it possible for these tourists to repeat large parts of the journey step by step. And where Stoker's descriptions provided insufficient detail, the tourists were happy to fill in the gaps themselves.

A good example of this is the search for Count Dracula's castle. Stoker placed the castle in a remote location in the north of Transylvania, an area where no castle originally stood. Eager to at least find a castle, the tourists found Bram Castle, several hundred kilometres to the south. The fact that this was not the 'authentic' location was perhaps a disadvantage, but Bran Castle was in a location that was easy for the tourists to reach, and its restored Gothic style was a good fit with the image tourists had of what Dracula's castle should look like. And so, Dracula fans appropriated Bran Castle as 'their' castle—with foreign tour operators following on their heels. Today Bran Castle is actually one of the tourist highlights of the region and, despite the dubious nature of the claim, is widely known as *the* Dracula Castle, with all the associated t-shirts, mugs, ashtrays and other Dracula souvenirs (Light, 2007: p. 752-755).

A simple, but nevertheless intriguing, question is 'Why?' Why do people feel the need to associate their cherished story with specific, identifiable locations, even when this is, in fact, impossible based on the information provided in the story, and when, as in the case of Romania,

the host country provides little encouragement? What significance do they subsequently give to their visit? Finding an answer to these questions will allow us to pursue a more general issue, which the philosopher Jeff Malpas has already called to our attention: the relationship between popular narratives and the experience of landscape (cf. Malpas, 1999: p. 175-193).

In order to address this, I performed a study of two different groups of Dracula tourists in 2009. The first group was composed of a party of American tourists who took the 'Dracula Tour' in July 2009. Just one of the many Dracula tours offered in Romania, this seven day bus tour visits various Dracula sites around the country. The second group was composed of members of the Dracula Society, a British association of fans of Bram Stoker's *Dracula*. In September 2009, the Dracula Society organised a literary walking tour of Whitby, a town on the English coast where several chapters of *Dracula* are set. Participatory observations were made during both events, and in-depth interviews were conducted.

During the analysis of these interviews and observations, it became apparent that the inner experience of the Dracula tourist is characterised by the dynamic between two, partially opposing, modes. While Dracula tourists use rational terms to describe their desire to make concrete comparisons between imagination and reality, they are also driven by an emotional longing for those two worlds to converge. What these two modes have in common is their distinctly physical foundation: they are both based on a sensory experience of the local environment. In the following paragraphs, after having explained the theoretical framework and methodology used, these two modes will be separately described and analysed in the next two sections, in order to come to a synthesis in the conclusion.

MEDIA TOURISM

Though no figures regarding its exact extent are available, the influence of the popular media on the tourism sector is unmistakable. This influence works on two levels. In the first instance, books, films and TV-series contribute to the general image of a certain region or country. In this case we could speak of a convergence of the popular imagination and the 'tourist gaze' (cf. Crouch et al., 2005; Urry, 2002). On the other hand, there are tourists who are explicitly interested in the specific, identifiable locations where their favourite stories took place. This group has attracted the most attention in previous research, and it is also the focus of the current article.

Of course, it is not unique to *Dracula* that people go looking for the physical locations from their cherished stories. In recent years, a growing number of studies have addressed this phenomenon. In this way, the influence of *Lord of the Rings* on tourism in New Zealand has been investigated (Tzanelli, 2004; Beeton, 2005). Similar studies have been conducted on the *The Da Vinci Code* in Paris, London and Rosslyn, Scotland (Karakurum, 2005), *Bladerunner* in Los Angeles (Brooker, 2005), the *X-files* in Vancouver (Brooker, 2007), *Braveheart* in Scotland (Edensor, 2005), *Harry Potter* in the United Kingdom (Iwashita, 2006), *The Beach* in Thailand (Tzanelli, 2007: p. 27-56), and *James Bond* around the world (Anonymous, 2010a). Numerous studies have also paid attention to special tours which are offered to appeal to this interest, among them the Sex and the City Tour in New York, the Inspector Morse Tour in Oxford (Anonymous, 2009), the Manhattan TV Tour in New York (Torchin, 2002), or the Sopranos Tour in New Jersey (Couldry, 2008).

This type of tourism has previously been referred to as 'film tourism' (Beeton, 2005) or 'cinematic tourism' (Tzanelli, 2004, 2007). One disadvantage of this terminology is that it does not take any account of the literary dimensions of the phenomenon. Books also regularly lead to

new streams of tourists, and have been doing so for a long time. Certainly, since the 19th century groups of tourists have gone looking for the locations associated with well known novels, such as Sir Walter Scott's Loch Katrine or the Bronte sisters' Haworth (cf. Hardyment, 2000; Watson, 2006; Herbert, 1996). In many other cases, such as with Dracula, one can even talk of both book and film versions. In view of this, the more inclusive term 'media tourism' seems better suited, recognising the many-sided and historical background of the phenomenon.

Though it is true that varying terminology has been used, the subject of media tourism, on the whole, is attracting increased attention. Theoretical and empirical contributions have been made from a variety of disciplines, ranging from media studies, fan studies and film studies to cultural geography and tourism studies. Despite this attention, little is currently known about the experiences of the tourists themselves. This is remarkable, since it is precisely the inner experience of the fan or tourist that forms the key to this entire phenomenon. It is there, in the head and heart of the fan or tourist, that the fascination begins which provides the motivation to visit the locations. That is precisely where the transitional moment takes place, the instant when the world of the imagination coincides with—or possibly contrasts with—physical reality. It is thus essential to penetrate the world of imagination this media tourist brings along.

In a recent article, I developed the theoretical basis for such an analysis (Anonymous, 2010b). In that article I argued that what prompts people to visit the settings and locations of popular books, films and TV series is a search for physical references to a phenomenon that actually takes place in the mind. The French historian Pierra Nora's study of the workings of collective memory form the basis for this approach. In the 1980s Nora showed how *lieux de mémoire* such as national monuments or battlefields serve to validate the collective memory. In the same way, I argued, one can speak of *lieux d'imagination*, in which it is not so much collective memory that is validated as collective imagination. *Lieux d'imagination* are physical locations which serve as a symbolic anchor for a society's collective imagination.

The question where the need for symbolic anchors comes from was explained by using a critical adaptation from John Caughey's book *Imagined Social Worlds* (1984). In his work, the cultural anthropologist maintained that people generally live in two different worlds. On the one hand, one can speak of a 'real' world, an empirical reality, which can be observed using the senses. On the other hand, according to Caughey, there is the world of the imagination, an interconnected complex of fantasies, daydreams and stories. Though these worlds are usually separated from each other, says Caughey, there are moments when both coincide. Such moments are meaningful, because they bring two elements together: the quotidian becomes unusual, while at the same time the strange and unknown is made usual.

One of the problems with Caughey's theory, though, is that it's based on a binary opposition between an 'imagined' and a 'real' world. This imagination/reality dichotomy has been problematized in recent film theory (Creswell & Dixon, 2002; Aitken & Dixon, 2006). As Aitken and Dixon state, 'we can no longer talk of film representing, or mimicking, reality, because we can no longer assume that there is a single, coherent reality waiting out there to be filmed' (Aitken & Dixon, 2006: 327). In addition, media scholars have shown how different TV and film genres create their own 'reality-effect' (Black, 2002; Clark & Doel, 2005). In other words, it seems more justified to talk about a complex of multiple imaginations and realities, than about two separate worlds (Anonymous, 2010b).

However, this problem can be easily overcome by re-interpreting Caughey's 'world of imagination' and 'real world' as two *emic* concepts, as part of how people try to categorize their own everyday life. In my view, the distinction Caughey makes between reality and imagination is not an actual distinction, but rather a cultural construct. Because imaginations and realities are

interwoven, people feel the need to unravel them. Combining this line of reasoning with Nora's work, it can be concluded that *lieux d'imagination* should not be interpreted as indicating an actual distinction between 'reality' and 'imagination'—as Caughey would have argued—but as physical locations where the symbolic distinction between the two is constructed and 'anchored' by means of tangible 'evidence' (Anonymous, 2010b).

The goal of the present article is to investigate exactly how the 'anchoring' of imagination works in practice, using a study of Dracula tourism as evidence. This is relevant for three reasons. First, the abovementioned theory still needs to be tested in practice. By applying the approach to concrete examples of media tourism, we can test whether the theory can provide a relevant research approach or not. The existing theoretical framework of *lieux d'imagination* can be adjusted or developed as necessary.

Second, this article is empirically relevant. Dracula tourism provides a potentially rich and varied case study for investigating media tourism. It has a relatively long history, with various groups of Dracula tourists heading to Romania as early as the 1970s. Except for the turbulent years of the Communist regime's final years, the pull of Dracula tourism has remained strong. It is to be expected that the recently published 'official' sequel to *Dracula*, written by Bram Stoker's grandson, will also contribute to the popularity of Whitby and Transylvania among tourists. The diversity of these tourists is striking: Dracula inspires both people who love horror films as well as fans of 19th century Gothic novels. And while one tourist chooses a bus tour that passes all the locations, another prefers a literary walking tour. The combination of historical continuity and the social diversity of the Dracula tourists provides a good starting point to analyse the previously mentioned process of 'anchoring' in actual practice.

Without a doubt, Dracula tourism has a huge impact on the international image of Romania and on the Romanian tourist industry. There have been heated discussions in Romania about the desirability of having Dracula as a tourist attraction and national symbol (Light, 2007: p. 755-759; Muresan & Smith, 1998: p. 76). But even beyond the Romanian example, the phenomenon of media tourism has dramatic consequences for the way landscapes, regions and places are experienced and organised. Not only can media tourism affect the economic success of a region, but it can also have negative effects on local communities and ecologies (Beeton, 2005). More understanding of this phenomenon, based on concrete field work, can provide an important contribution to these ongoing debates inside and outside academia.

Methods

It seems that there are two different perspectives on which empirical studies of *lieux d'imagination* can be based. On the one hand, the anchoring of the imagination can be investigated as a social, collective process, with various parties involved, such as media enterprises, people who live in the area, local businesses, and tourists. This collective process will also have a certain developmental history. On the other hand, the anchoring can be investigated as an individual process—as an inner experience that each tourist goes through independently at a certain moment while visiting the place. Actually, these two approaches are not completely distinct, but reflect two different facets of one and the same phenomenon. Since the first approach has already been applied (Anonymous, 2010b), the current study of Dracula tourism will restrict itself to the latter.

In order to map the inner experience of the Dracula tourist, field work was conducted during two events in the summer of 2009. The first was the Dracula Tour, a seven day bus tour of various Dracula sites in Romania. This tour has been offered since 1999 by ITE, an American travel agency specialised in so-called 'terror tours.' In addition to the Dracula Tour, ITE offers

'GhosTours' of England and Scotland, and an annual 'Weekend of the Witch' in Salem, Massachusetts, the town infamous for its 17th century witch hunts. The Dracula Tour is offered twice a year, in the summer and around Halloween. In total, the two tours attract around 100 tourists a year, primarily Americans of different age groups (between 18 and 70 years old), with a relatively large proportion of students, teachers and retirees. On average, a quarter of the participants are traveling alone, while the remaining three quarters have booked together. These are not necessarily couples; for example, this summer, two sisters (Anne-Marie and Monica) and a father and son (John and Jonas) were traveling together. The American Dracula tourists are often recognizable from their dark clothing and t-shirts with the names of hard rock bands or Gothic-related texts. Approximately half of the group said they are part of, or have affinity with, the Gothic subculture.

Secondly, research was conducted during a meeting of the Dracula Society in Whitby. This association was founded in 1973, with the stated goal of providing a platform for 'lovers of the Vampire and his Kind.' The association currently has about a hundred members, primarily adult Britons between 30 and 60 years old, most of them working in the service sector, as civil servants, archivists, librarians, teachers or administrative assistants. In addition to regular evening meetings with discussions, lectures or film showings, the Dracula Society also organises trips and holidays, generally to visit locations associated with the work of Stoker or other authors of the 19th century Gothic genre. In 2009, among other things, the Society planned a weekend in Whitby. The high point of the weekend was an hour and a half literary walking tour of the old town centre of this North English seaside town, following in the steps of the characters Lucy and Mina Harker. As far as their dress, these British Dracula tourists were less outspoken than their American counterparts; still, a certain affinity for the Gothic subculture could be observed here as well.

Two methods were applied during the field study: in-depth interviews and participatory observation. The in-depth interviews took place during or after the tour. The structure of the Dracula Tour was well-suited to on-the-spot interviews: there was enough time during the bus journeys to conduct complete interviews. During the literary walking tour of Whitby, the possibility of interviewing participants was truly limited; for this reason, discussions during the walk were purely exploratory, introducing the project, and the actual interviews were conducted later by telephone. In all, 21 tourists were interviewed.

The interviews were set up in a semi-structured manner. Certain questions were determined in advance, but the list was not followed in any absolute way. The respondents were given the opportunity to introduce their own subjects and perspectives, as long as these had some relevance to the central topic: the experience of Dracula tourism. The interviews with tourists were structured under three thematic headings: motivation (e.g., How long have you been interested in Dracula? Why did you decide to take this trip?); experiences (e.g., What does it feel like to be in Dracula Country? What makes this trip interesting?); and meaning (e.g., Has this trip changed your attitude towards Dracula? What is different now that you have been here?). Later, each interview was transcribed word for word (Bryman 2004: p. 314-323).

Participatory observation was conducted to complement the interviews. This observation focused on three aspects: 1) the tour's geographical structure (departure point, route, destination); 2) the techniques the guides used to structure the tour (introducing, marking the places, placing them in context, concluding); and 3) the tourists' behaviour (reactions to the guide, contact with the surroundings, ritual behaviours). Notes were recorded in a logbook during the observation (Silverman, 2001: p. 43-80; Bryman 2004: p. 289-311).

After the tours, the transcripts and logbooks were thoroughly compared. First, similarities were sought, as these can indicate general, common structures. Then, special attention was paid to striking differences and exceptions to the rule, keeping our eyes open for the diversity and inner dynamics of the phenomenon of media tourism. Not only were the differences between individual tourists considered, but also the difference that sprung from the medium or the structure of the tour. After all, the literary walking tour has a completely different cultural-historical background than the bus tour, and it also produces a different experience of the landscape (cf. Plate, 2006).

Tracing the imagination

On a bright, sunny day, West Cliff, on the coast of North Yorkshire, presents the tourist with a majestic panorama. Down below is the historic harbour town of Whitby, with its narrow lanes and characteristic red roofs. And beyond that, East Cliff rises tens of meters above the town, topped with the ruins of an abbey, the parish church and its graveyard.

For aficionados of Dracula, this is more than just a picturesque panorama. The landscape that is displayed before their eyes is also recognisable as the setting of a particular chapter from Stoker's *Dracula*. This is the scene where Lucy wakes up in the night and—drawn by some unknown force—runs through the town in her white nightgown, climbs up the cliff by a staircase carved into the cliffside, to reach the graveyard above the town, where she surrenders herself to Count Dracula among the tombstones.

For the Dracula fans, their visit to Whitby is, in a certain sense, not their first encounter with the town, but rather a renewed encounter, the realisation of a journey which they have already taken many times in their imagination. Most of the participants of the Dracula walking tour have been Dracula fans for many years (as have their American counterparts on the Dracula tour in Romania). They have read and reread the novel, they regularly watch Dracula films, and they devour any information that has anything to do with Bram Stoker, vampires, or gothic fiction in general. Their years of fascination with Dracula means that most Dracula fans have developed a deep familiarity, not only with the story and its characters, but also with the landscape associated with the story. In their imagination, Dracula Country has practically taken physical form:

I was really young when I got this thought into my head. ... Since I was a little kid this is where I wanted to be ... There are places as a child that I always wanted to be and this is the main one here.

Rebecca (35, housewife from Florida, participant Dracula Tour)

The question remains what ultimately motivated the fans to go one step further and actually go on the journey, booking a trip to Whitby or Transylvania. The interviews show that the exact motives vary from individual to individual. Still, when asked for their reasons, most of the respondents mentioned that at a certain moment they had the thought that perhaps Dracula was more than just imagination. For example, they discovered that Transylvania is the name of a real province in Romania and that there really is a town on the north coast of England called Whitby. Another reason that was frequently mentioned was discovering information about Count Dracula's castle. Precisely these kinds of concrete objects and buildings can develop into tactile references to an imagined universe:

Ever since I found out that he had a castle in Romania, I wanted to go there. ... Since then, I've always wanted to go there, all my life.

Jason (38, civil servant from London, participant Whitby Walk)

In this regard, it is not so strange that Dracula has motivated so many fans. In his novel, Bram Stoker paid a remarkable amount of attention to creating a realistic setting. From the perspective of the novel, this topographic realism has an evident narrative function: by setting *Dracula* in a believable environment, Stoker hoped to give the supernatural events in the story a degree of believability. For the Dracula tourist more than a century later, this topographical realism provides a completely different advantage: the original novel and the later film versions provide numerous references that help the tourist to identify Dracula Country.

In fact, a similar process takes place for the Dracula tourists as was the case with Stoker, though the process is reversed. While Stoker used existing surroundings and local history to create his story, the Dracula tourists take the story itself as their point of departure, proceeding to search for signs of reality in the story. The Dracula films and the book are carefully sifted for information: references to existing place names are checked, the travel routes described are traced on the map, and departure and arrival times are compared with official travel times, preferably historical sources from the late 19th century. In this way, fans anchor Dracula Country in topographic and historical reality:

It's like trying to work out something from clues. ... To try to work out where these things would be. Where was Carfax? Where was the asylum, as it says in the book? ... We do not know [for sure], but it is certainly interesting to speculate on all these things.

Dave (66, retired, from London, participant Whitby Walk)

Obviously, not all Dracula fans are equally ardent in this pursuit. Finding reality in fiction is, in theory, a never-ending activity. One fan will put more energy into this than another; some fans become truly caught up in the research and sleuthing that is involved. On top of this, it is clear that fans accumulate a degree of knowledge over time. There are many different individuals, associations and organisations around the world which are devoted to studying everything that is associated with Dracula. This Dracula fan culture has existed for many decades, but since the spread of the Internet in the 1990s it has truly taken off. In the year 2010, potential Dracula tourists have an extensive digital archive at their disposal, with background information, travel accounts, academic studies, and commercial travel offers. In this sense, the contemporary Dracula tourist is not only following in the footsteps of Count Dracula, but also of earlier fans—the ‘scouts’ in the 1970s and the following generations of Dracula fans.

Once there, in Dracula Country, the rational analytic mode remains dominant, at least at first. Dracula fans see visiting *lieux d'imagination* first and foremost as an ideal opportunity to gather more information, in order to substantiate the ‘truth’ behind the story:

To visit the location is to see if the picture is... Well, if it corresponds in any way to the reality of it. ... That's what attracted me to Whitby.

Alan (51, civil servant from Berkshire, participant Whitby Walk)

An important part of this process is establishing factual errors: precisely those parts of the story which do *not* correspond with the physical, spatial environment. For example, it is common to

check certain travel times and routes on location. During a previous visit to Whitby, members of the Dracula Society re-enacted Lucy's nocturnal walk, with one of the female members of the society running through the historic centre of Whitby, complete with hair streaming, and wearing a white nightgown. One of the conclusions from this re-enactment was that Stoker didn't take the presence of Church Street into account: in Stoker's *Dracula*, Lucy runs across the bridge and immediately climbs the 199 steps that go up to the graveyard, but in the test it appeared that there is a considerable distance between the bridge and the stairs.

The historical context of *Dracula* is also subjected to a detailed investigation. During both of the tours, the events in the story are thoroughly compared with the historical background of the respective locations. This comparison takes a particularly prominent role in the Dracula Tour. The Romanian guide Radu Cruceru makes a point of emphasising that, contrary to what many foreign tourists like to imagine, Count Dracula is not the same as Vlad Dracula, the 15th century Wallachian prince. For Radu, just as for many Romanians, it is still hard to accept that foreign tourists associate their own national hero with a common, blood-sucking vampire from the horror genre. There is something bitter for Romanians in general that their beautiful but relatively poor country depends to a certain degree on a type of tourism based—in their view—on a negative stereotype of Romanian history and identity (Light, 2007: p. 755-759; Muresan & Smith, 1998: p. 76).

Though the guide does pay attention to Dracula, he solves this symbolic conflict between economic interests and national pride by continually pointing out the many differences between Dracula and the historical 'reality.' In practice this leads to a situation where history is employed for an authoritative treatise about what is 'real' and especially what is 'unreal' about Dracula. How do the Dracula tourists respond to such a critical approach? The interviews show that they react in different ways. Inasmuch as the historical reality agrees with the story of Dracula, most of the tourists are immediately interested. These points of agreement are seen as an important validation of the historical 'reality' of Dracula:

The fantastical bits become more plausible because they are rooted in historical fact.

Alan (51, civil servant from Berkshire, participant Whitby Walk)

It gives it more reality, quite simply. You know, it gives it a more of a real feeling. ... It makes the experience more of a reality.

John (58, profession unknown, from Chicago, participant Dracula Tour)

In her interview, Zelia (a 28 year-old female from London, studying at a teacher training college) explained that the historical background made the story 'more real, rather than just sort of a book.' For Jason (a 38 year-old civil servant from London), the background also made the story 'more believable.' And for James (a 28 year-old student from Ontario), the historical background is more than just validation, but also a way of deepening the imagination by adding to the original story:

When you see and hear that stuff you can, you know, I can imagine also a lot of things around it where the story should be.

James (28, student from Ontario, participant Dracula Tour)

Even when the story of Dracula clearly departs from historical reality, this does not pose a problem for all the fans. On the contrary, some of them warmly welcome this division of fact and fiction:

[I like] ...being in the country and hearing the actual history and finding out what is actually Hollywood and made up. To just hear the actual history behind it. To learn more of the truth behind it.

James (28, student from Ontario, participant Dracula Tour)

For fans like James, the distinction between ‘actual history’ and ‘Hollywood’ serves as a variant of the previously mentioned ‘factual errors’—tangible ‘evidence’ of the underlying dichotomy between reality and imagination. Other fans are less receptive to questioning the historical basis of Dracula. For them, historical reality becomes a direct threat to the world of the imagination—an attack on the fantastical palace that they have built and cherished over the years:

My whole life I really thought that there were vampires out there and I needed to go find them. And now that I've come here and heard that Vlad Tepes isn't... The whole vampire theory is kind of shot. ... To realize that he is just 'The Impaler' and not an actual vampire... He didn't bite anybody's neck, he just cut their heads off. Which is still good, but it's different.

Rebecca (35, housewife from Florida, participant Dracula Tour)

Earlier in this article, I suggested that visiting *lieux d'imagination* can serve to enrich the imagination. But as the last quote shows, this enrichment is not necessarily positive; for some fans it can also lead to a process of demystification. Similarly, in their interviews, both Julia (a 57 year-old librarian from London) and Dave (a 66 year-old retired man from London) commented that while a rational comparison of imagination and reality is certainly interesting, it should not be taken too far:

There are members of our Dracula Society [who] examine places and descriptions and timetables to access their accuracy or not. To me I think ... it's an interesting exercise, but it's missing the point. ... They don't have to match. ... It's almost like cataloguing something – it kind of takes away its magic, if you try to do it too much. ... I'd rather just have hints or suggestions.

Julia (57, librarian from London, participant Whitby Walk)

Following Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1817), the consumption of fiction can indeed be defined as the ‘suspension of disbelief,’ the willingness to accept the world of the imagination as real. Readers put their critical, generalised world view aside for the time being, in order to be able to surrender themselves to a particular story. Fans like Rebecca and Julia seem to experience media tourism as an extension of this ‘suspension of disbelief’—a tool which allows them to renew and, at least temporarily, extend their belief in the imaginary beyond the confines of the book or film. Superfluous information about the historical ‘inaccuracies’ of Dracula can, however, easily ruin this desire.

The resurrection of Dracula

While making a rational comparison of reality and imagination may be an interesting activity for many Dracula tourists, it does not represent the essential goal of their trip. Instead, many emphasize that they travelled to Whitby or Transylvania with the intention of deepening their emotional connection with the story. In practice, female respondents emphasised this slightly more often than their male counterparts. Still, this emotional mode is certainly not sex specific. What is, in fact, striking is that both approaches are regularly mentioned, by men as well as women, and by British as well as American fans. In many cases, both modes were even mentioned in one and the same interview. Respondents described how they would continually shift from a rational investigation of the environment to a more emotional, affective stance.

Both modes are based on a tangible experience of the local environment. Being right there, present at the location, rather than experiencing it at a distance via the media, is always central to their experience. But while the rational mode is first and foremost associated with a visual experience, a far broader range of senses is addressed in the emotional mode:

I get inspired after I see something or I read something. ... For me, the natural extension is to come to the actual place ... to experience and to see it, to breathe it and to taste it, in a way you can't on the pages of a book or on the pictures on a screen. I wanted more. I didn't want to watch it on a two-dimensional screen or read it in black and white. I wanted to drink it all in.

Jonas (33, teacher from Chicago, participant Dracula Tour)

By drinking in Dracula Country, by smelling it, feeling it, seeing it and tasting it, the fans get a livelier and more complete picture; the respondents talk about getting the sense that they have come 'closer to the story.' Other respondents describe how being at the location gave them the feeling that they were making a 'connection':

It is not so much that you are reading something, which is a separate thing from you. [Being there] you can almost imagine yourself being in the novel, a sort of bystander in the novel.

Alan (51, civil servant from Berkshire, participant Whitby Walk)

The boundary between imagination and reality, which was just so precisely identified and delineated in the previous phase, is now temporarily suspended instead. Dracula Country has come alive, and the tourists are themselves, if temporarily, guests there:

Going there and seeing it for yourself puts you in the story as well.

Zelia (28, teacher in training from London, participant Whitby Walk)

This whole tour is kind of becoming a character in the novel. ... Once you land in Transylvania and we're going through you really do feel like a character in the story, specifically Jonathan Harker. ... This is about the closest I can get to actually living out one of my favourite stories.

Jonas (33, teacher from Chicago, participant Dracula Tour)

Identifying with the story and the characters in this way also has an erotic aspect. For example, several female respondents described the pronounced sexual attraction that Count Dracula exercises. Male respondents specifically emphasised that they identified with the power Dracula

has over women. During the interviews, this glamourisation of Count Dracula flowed effortlessly into a description of his violent character:

There's parts of women that wants more of... aggressive too, like behind closed doors and like Dracula is kind of this like, charmer and everything and seducer. But then he's, you know, with the biting, it's almost more like a rough type of... taking, yeah. So many things are based around blood like with sanguin, religion, stuff like that. Like... It's a sexy thing.

Tanya (29, profession unknown, from South Beach, participant Dracula Tour)

Dracula tourists such as Tanya are attracted by the story of Dracula, partly because of its dark-romantic mix of eroticism and violence. This theme was clearly already present in the original work of Bram Stoker, but became even more pronounced in recent filmic adaptations such as Francis Ford Coppola's *Dracula* (1992) (e.g., Griffin, 1980; McGrath, 1997). This erotic dimension of the Dracula phenomenon acquires a strikingly physical character during the Dracula Tour. Being there in person on location, able to experience the possible closeness of Count Dracula, stimulates both excitement and a mild fear. One's own body is moving in and through Dracula Country, and one is exposed to all the potential risks of this place. This explains why the inner experience of the Dracula tourist is first and foremost a sensual pleasure—a pleasure that is only possible because it takes place far from home, far from America and London, in the liminal twilight of Transylvania or Whitby.

This excitement is reinforced by re-enacting certain episodes from the story on location, such as spending a night in the same hotel as Jonathan Harker or having the same evening meal ('robber steak') as Stoker described in the book. While not everybody participates equally actively in this—the British members of the Dracula Society being, for example, somewhat more reserved in this regard—such re-enactments represent an essential part of many Dracula tourists' experience.

Perhaps one of the most striking examples is the night spent in the Dracula Castle Hotel, built more or less on the 'authentic' location on Borgo Pass, which is a regular feature of the Dracula Tour. A fancy-dress ball is organised each year during the stay, and the traveling companions dress up as Count Dracula, as vampires, night nurses, the dead, or other similar characters, ideally with deep décolleté and tight leather clothing. The costumed tourists spend the evening with music, food and drink, all in the décor of the so-called 'catacombs' of the Dracula Castle. Around midnight, the party descends into the crypts of the castle, where the coffin of Count Dracula awaits them. One by one the tourists take their place in the coffin, the one with a cheery smile, the other clearly frightened. The party continues until two or three in the morning, but after this 'official' portion, various fans continue the party in their hotel rooms—thereby feeding the breakfast rumours about 'X-rated Dracula viewings' and possibly even 'biting sessions' among fellow tourists.

Of course, such re-enactments are by no means unique to Dracula. This phenomenon, where fans re-enact episodes from stories, is also known as 'ostention.' In one of the most authoritative studies in this field, the American folklorist Bill Ellis (1989, 2001) describes how since at least the 19th century American young people have organised so-called legend trips to the locations of specific stories or legends. In general these are mysterious stories of murder and manslaughter, whether true or based on rumour, taking place in isolated houses, in railway viaducts or beside remote lakes. At these locations, ritual routines are performed, such as calling

someone's name or re-enacting the events in the story, with the intention of calling these characters back to life.

One wonders whether the Dracula fans actually believe in Count Dracula's existence at the moment that they call his name. The majority of respondents denied this during their interviews. Those who did claim to believe in vampires justified their belief on the basis of rational, pseudo-scientific arguments. One frequently mentioned argument was the fact that there are known medical cases of people who regularly need blood transfusions.

But, as Ellis would argue, it doesn't in fact matter whether the Dracula fans actually believe in vampires or not. What is important is the suggestion which these procedures make—namely the idea that it could actually be possible, that vampires might indeed wander the Transylvanian nights, with Count Dracula at their head. This suggestion, made in a striking environment far from home, with like-minded companions is of itself enough to generate the necessary frisson.

In this way, the trip becomes a true re-experiencing of the story, complete with the excitement and unease that was so characteristic of the first reading or viewing experience—an excitement which is maintained in Stoker's novel to the very last page. It is just like in the story: the Dracula tourist can actually only breathe easily at the end of the journey, when the Count is finally defeated and the hero returns home:

When I go back that first night and I sleep in my bed I will be able to curl up and be safe in my bed, [back] from the wilds of Transylvania. Boy, if this Dracula was a real guy and I was going in Jonathan Harker's footsteps, you know, here I am safe and happy.

Jonas (33, teacher from Chicago, participant Dracula Tour)

CONCLUSION

More than a century after the publication of *Dracula* (1897), its eponymous main character still exercises a mysterious attraction on readers. Large numbers of tourists travel to Transylvania every year, in search of traces of the Count. They are inspired by the novel itself, or by one of the many film versions. They are members of literary associations or fan clubs, or they come as individuals. They are students as well as retired people, men as well as women. What attracts them to Transylvania or one of the other locations associated with this vampire story? And what meaning do they ultimately attribute to the trip?

This article has attempted to find answers to these questions. On the basis of an analysis of interviews with Dracula tourists, as well as participatory observation during two Dracula tours, several conclusions can be drawn. The tourists do indeed have different motives and they employ different processes to give meaning to the experience, and similarly, certain differences of emphasis were found between men and women and between American tourists and British ones; but most striking are the many similarities. There would appear to be such a thing as *the* inner experience of the Dracula tourist. This inner experience is characterised by a specific dynamics: the tension between two partially contradictory modes.

On the one hand, the Dracula tourist is driven by the desire to make a concrete comparison between the landscape they are visiting and the picture they have created of that landscape based on the book or the Dracula films. This motivation is widely encouraged by the topographic-realistic elements in the story. For example, it is common for the Dracula tourist to encounter information about the 'real' Dracula castle. The tourist then searches further, assisted

by the many publications and websites dealing with the subject, and traces all the steps that are taken by Jonathan Harker, Count Dracula, and the other characters. They can discover concrete place names or names of regions, but the more fanatical Dracula tourists also work out complete journey routes, considering travel times and descriptions of the climate. So doing, they trace Dracula Country and anchor it in the topographical reality.

Such a treatment gradually leads to the wish to go there in person. By personally visiting the locations from the book and films, fans hope they can penetrate the 'truth' behind the story. They do this by comparing the spatial descriptions that Stoker made and the visual representations from the films with the physical reality of the actual environment. This comparison of imagination and reality is continued on a temporal level, by comparing Stoker's *Dracula* with the local history, in particular the life history of Vlad Dracula. It is primarily the Romanian guides who use history as an authoritative argument about what is 'real' and 'unreal' about Dracula. The Dracula tourists welcome this information insofar as it shows historical parallels between reality and Dracula; they view these parallels as providing important validation to the story. Discrepancies produce more varied reactions: some fans see historic 'corrections' of the story as a satisfying and enriching addition, while others consider this a direct assault on their imagination, as the demystification of a cherished world.

On the other hand, the rational approach of tracing and making comparisons contrasts with a more intuitive, emotional experience of the *lieux d'imagination*. The Dracula tourists describe the desire to come 'closer to the story' and to make a 'connection' through a symbiosis between reality and imagination. They reach this by ceasing to pay so much attention to details, but instead experiencing the environment in its totality—to taste, see, hear, feel and smell it—in order to experience the story anew thanks to these sensory stimuli. These sensory experiences also have an indisputably erotic dimension, in which the tourist puts his or her own body in the proximity of Count Dracula, who is known both for his sexual attraction and for his violent character. The story is even sometimes literally brought to life. Fans re-enact certain scenes, sleep in the same hotels as the characters, and eat the same meals as the characters in the book. These re-enactments serve as the basis of a liminal experience, in which fans have the sense that they are summoning Count Dracula and are personally becoming part of the story.

These two modes have been described and analysed separately, but in practice they have a certain mutual dependence. It is only possible to come 'closer' to the story once it is clear where the story takes place, and once the location has been 'validated.' By first tracing and marking the symbolic boundary between imagination and reality, this boundary can, in a later stage, be crossed. In this regard, it would seem that one can speak of a certain anti-rational dynamics: while first there is the need to test the imagination against reality, one subsequently has the desire to remove the distinction between imagination and reality in order to temporarily become a part of another, more exciting world.

Further study is needed to determine whether this anti-rational dynamics is typical for Dracula tourists in particular, or whether it applies to media tourism in general. Of course, it is striking that Stoker's original novel also contains a strong element of anti-rationalism. The hunt for Count Dracula, which forms a leitmotif of the novel and later films, is built up around the tension between scientific knowledge and supernatural phenomena, which are not easily captured by such knowledge; this tension is personified in the story by the character of the Dutch scientist Van Helsing. At first glance, these similarities in content would appear to argue that the results of the Dracula study have a limited generalisability. Other characteristics of Dracula tourism, such as the strong emphasis on physicality and the attention to topographic realism, would also appear to have a direct connection with this specific story.

On the other hand, one could argue that the theme of anti-rationalism is not unique to the novel *Dracula*, but is a general feature of 19th century romantic literature, and to a certain extent still plays an important role in contemporary popular culture. A surprisingly large number of examples of media tourism are based on films or books in which the supernatural, paranormal or phantastical plays a major role; in this regard, one can think of the previously mentioned *X-files* tourists in Vancouver ('I want to believe') or *The Da Vinci Code* tourists in Paris and London. In this sense, the tension between wanting to plumb the depths of a mystery and still wanting to believe in an alternate reality would appear to be a more general characteristic of media tourism, centered around a desire to disenchant and subsequently re-enchant our modern world.

As for now, it is not known whether these elements are indeed present in other examples of media tourism. In order to improve on the generalisability of this paper's findings, future studies are required, taking into account the complex interactions between narrative characteristics, feelings of belonging and the experience of place.

REFERENCES

- Aitken, S.C. & Dixon, D.P. (2006) Imagining geographies of film. *Erdkunde. Archiv für wissenschaftliche Geographie*, 60(4), 326-336.
- Andras, C.M. (1999). The image of Transylvania in English literature. Retrieved October 28, 2009, from *Journal of Dracula Studies Online Journal*:
http://www.blooferland.com/drc/index.php?title=Journal_of_Dracula_Studies
- Anonymous, A. (2009). Xxxx.
- Anonymous, A. (2010a). Xxxx.
- Anonymous, A. (2010b). Xxxx.
- Beeton, S. (2005). *Film induced tourism*. Clevedon: Channel View Publications.
- Black, J. (2002) *The reality effect. Film culture and the graphic imperative*. London: Routledge.
- Botting, F. (2008). *Limits of horror. Technology, bodies, Gothic*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Brooker, W. (2005). The Blade Runner Experience: Pilgrimage and Liminal Space. In W. Brooker (Ed.), *The Blade Runner Experience* (pp. 11-30). London: Wallflower.
- Brooker, W. (2007). Everywhere and nowhere: Vancouver, fan pilgrimage and the urban imaginary. *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 10 (4), 423-444.
- Brown, J. (1997). Draculafilm: 'high' and 'low' until the end of the world. In C.M. Davison (Ed.) *Bram Stokers Dracula: sucking through the century, 1897-1997* (pp. 269-282). Toronto, Oxford: Dundurn Press.
- Bryman, A. (2004). *Social research methods*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Caughey, J.L. (1984). *Imaginary social worlds. A cultural approach*, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.
- Clark, D.B. & Doel, M.A. (2005) Engineering space and time: moving pictures and motionless trips. *Journal of Historical Geography* 31, 41-60.
- Coleridge, S.T. (1817). *Biographia literaria. Or: Biographical sketches of my literary life and opinions*. London: Rest Fenner.

- Couldry, N. (2000). *The place of media power. Pilgrims and witnesses of the media age*. London: Routledge.
- Creswell, T. & Dixon, D. (2002) Introduction: engaging film. In T. Creswell & D. Dixon (Eds.) *Engaging film: geographies of mobility and identity* (pp. 1-10). Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Crouch, D., Jackson, R. & Thompson, F. (2005). *The media and the tourist imagination: converging cultures*. London: Routledge.
- Edensor, T. (2005). Mediating William Wallace. Audio-visual technologies in tourism. In D. Crouch, R. Jackson & F. Thompson (Eds.), *The media and the tourist imagination: converging cultures* (pp. 105-118). London: Routledge.
- Ellis, B. (1989). Death by folklore: ostension, contemporary legend, and murder. *Western Folklore*, 48, 201-220.
- Ellis, B. (2001). *Aliens, ghosts, and cults. Legends we live*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi.
- Fawcett, C. & P. Cormack (2001). Guarding authenticity at literary tourism sites. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 28(3), 686-704.
- Griffin, G.B. (1980). 'Your girls that you all love are mine': 'Dracula' and the victorian male sexual imagination. *International Journal of Women's Studies*, 3, nr. 5: 454-465.
- Hanna, S.P. (2000) Is it Roslyn or is it Cicely? Representations and the ambiguity of place. *Urban Geography* 17, 633-649.
- Hodkinson, P. (2002). *Goth. Identity, style and subculture*. Oxford, New York: Berg.
- Iwashita, C. (2006). Media representations of the UK as a destination for Japanese tourists: popular culture and tourism. *Tourist Studies*, 6(1), 59-77.
- Karakurum, D. (2006). *Cracking The Da Vinci Code: an analysis of The Da Vinci Code tourist phenomenon*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Breda: NHTV Breda University.
- Light, D. (2007). Dracula tourism in Romania. Cultural identity and the state. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 34(3), 746-765.
- Lukinbeal, C. (2004) The map that precedes the territory: an introduction to essays in cinematic geography. *GeoJournal*, 59(4), 247-251.
- Malpas, J.E. (1999). *Place and experience. A philosophical topography*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- McGrath, P. (1997). Preface: Bram Stoker and his vampire. In C.M. Davison (Ed.) *Bram Stokers Dracula: sucking through the century, 1897-1997* (pp. 41-48). Toronto, Oxford: Dundurn Press.
- Muresan, A. & K.A. Smith (1998). Dracula's castle in Transylvania: conflicting heritage marketing strategies. *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 4(2), 86-102.
- Nora, P. (1984-1992). *Les lieux de mémoire*, Parijs: Gallimard.
- Plate, L. (2006). Walking in Virginia Woolf's footsteps. Performing cultural memory. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 9(1), 101-120.
- Silverman, D. (2001). *Interpreting qualitative data. Methods for analysing talk, text and interaction*. London: Sage.
- Stoker, B. (1897). *Dracula*. Westminster: Archibald Constable and Company.
- Torchin, L. (2002). Location, location, location. The destination of the Manhattan TV Tour. *Tourist Studies* 2(3), 247-266.
- Tzanelli, R. (2004). Construction the "cinematic tourist" . The "sign industry" of the *Lord of the Rings*. *Tourist Studies* 4(1), 21-42.

Tzanelli, R. (2007). *The cinematic tourist. Explorations in globalization, culture and resistance*. London: Routledge.

Urry, J. (2002). *The tourist gaze: leisure and travel in contemporary societies*. London: Sage.

Walker G. & L. Wright (1997). Locating *Dracula*: contextualizing the geography of Transylvania. In C.M. Davison (Ed.) *Bram Stokers Dracula: sucking through the century, 1897-1997* (pp. 49-74). Toronto, Oxford: Dundurn Press.