THE RE-IMAGINED AVATAR OF THE CAMPUS NOVEL - ALEXANDRU MUŞINA'S *NEPOTUL LUI DRACULA*

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Abstract:Alexandru Muşina attempts perhaps a rather ambitious project in creating a mélange of Gothic story, campus novel and post-communist criticism regarding the Communist sucking of the people's blood. His reclaiming of the national myth of Dracula – imposed on Romania by Bram Stoker – is not to be discarded either as an avenue of interpretation. The most successful of approaches would investigate the novel as an avatar of campus fiction. While the novel is inscribed in this tradition, it also varies substantially in the way the professors are depicted and perceived. The dismissive attitude towards the merits of professors - perpetuated by society at large, the state and its institutions in particular - is opposed by the respect shown to teachers during the Communist regime, with the saying "the professor is king" as particularly salient. The post-communist situation encourages the creation of a corporate model for academia, following trends in research that would bring funds – with the proposed creation of a center for the study of vampires. In addition, the political nature of departments, the administrative duties and the conference circuit all make their dutiful appearance within the pages of the novel.

Keywords: campus novel, Alexandru Muşina, Nepotul lui Dracula, appropriation, rewriting.

1. The Campus Novel from the 1950s to the 2000s

The campus or academic novel, as it is alternatively called, is a genre that can mark its inception somewhere around midcentury during the 1950s, on both shores of the Atlantic – Mary McCarthy's *Groves of Academe*, C.P. Snow's *The Masters* and Kingsley Amis's *Lucky Jim* were the first specimens that gave birth to this subgenre of the novel. A few novelists followed in their footsteps, such as Malcolm Bradbury and David Lodge, who aside from being writers were also academics, and they seemed to focus mostly on this genre, given that it was a world they were familiar with. Their novels reveal a marked change in the academe from one decade to the next, but the academe they were portraying was the Anglophone one. Lodge underscores this fact and explains it as a result of the existence of the campus that gave cohesiveness to this genre. Lodge also points to the fact that "Continental European universities were not designed as campuses, territorially defined and self-contained", rather having a random distribution that was not conducive to clear boundaries "marking off academic life from the life of the city at large." (Lodge 9) Another reason he offers for the lack of campus novels in other cultures, or at least for their scarcity, is the underlying professional dignity of European academics. However, in recent years, decades after the genre was established, such novels were written and disseminated in other cultures, among them Alexandru Mușina's *Nepotul lui Dracula*.[1]

The campus novel creates certain expectations regarding customs without credit, ranks which are not guaranteed and a culture which has not been secured, as the universities are seen as

[1] The novel has not been translated yet in English, therefore all the quotes in the paper were translated by me.

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places where rapid social transitions are taking place. (Bradbury 340) The definition of the genre as provided by Lodge points to ”a work of fiction whose action takes place mainly in a college or university, and which is mainly concerned with the lives of university professors and junior teachers (…) and to a lesser extent with their students, both undergraduate and postgraduate. In the campus novel students are usually objects perceived by the academic staff, rather than subjects from whose point of view the story is told”. (Lodge 2)

The focus on the professors shows that not a lot of actual development occurs in such novels, which would happen if the focus was on the student as in varsity novels or in *bildungsromans*. Taking the university as a setting means that these novels deal with a microcosm, which is ready-made and familiar to the writer who has been a student or is himself an academic. Nevertheless, as a microcosm, such novels will re-enact on a smaller scale the larger world and it will be a snug world, suffocating to some, with well-established rules and traditions. (Showalter 1) It will also depict “its own distinctive customs, seasons, rituals, and foibles, where the factors that motivate human behavior – power, ambition, rivalry, lust, anxiety – can be displayed and anatomised.” (Lodge 7) The “disinterested pursuit of truth and the preservation of high culture” led to unrealistic expectations, having little to do with the ‘real’ world. Yet, according to Elaine Showalter, the university was still “related to the larger society, affected by its values and problems”, at least in the 1950s and 1960s. (Showalter 119) In the 1970s, academic fiction darkened, the academics had failed to uphold the standards of the earlier models and had become seemingly obsolete, lacking any real motivation in terms of faith and service, focusing rather on their personal ambition and grasping for power. (Showalter 120) The idiosyncrasies that might have seemed endearing earlier, turned into pettiness, squabbles, and disloyal competition and the professors themselves transformed into grotesque figures. (Showalter 120) The world of the academe is isolated and insulated from the outside one, failing at aligning its ideals with those of the world at large. Nonetheless, since it is still a world populated by humans and the old Latin dictum *errare humanum est* (to err is human) still holds true in this day and age, “ordinary human weaknesses” and “ordinary eccentricities” will still be present in the academe, leading to a preference for the satiric genre. (Lodge 7) In fact, the focus on human weakness is what turns the campus novel into a satire.

As a summing up of the genre, Elaine Showalter looks towards what the future should hold – a historicized view, accepting the decline “in the ideals of the academy while acknowledging the inevitability of such transformations within institutions.” (121) Showalter also criticizes the current state of affairs in which only one side of things is presented – the life of the academics – completely ignoring the flipside – the life of the students: “In the university, I think there are two stories – those of the faculty and those of the students.” (Showalter 121) An additional criticism she supplies in her book relates to the unwillingness of departments to confront the extinction they may be facing; thus, in her view the academic novel “conceals a much deeper problem that the department does not want to confront – its own survival.” (Showalter 122) To Elaine Showalter, it seems clear that business, science and technology hold sway in today’s mercantile world, and therefore threaten the academe and especially the humanities departments where the writers of academic fiction have found a haven. (124) But she believes that this is the case due to a lack of focus of the said departments: “the departments have lost their sense of purpose and do not have the will to find a new intellectual centre,” a centre that has been out of fashion for some time now. (Showalter 125) I would like to propose that Alexandru Muşina’s novel touches upon these issues and provides satirical solutions for them.

The humanities departments in Romanian universities are always under threat. The budgetary system supporting them provides very low levels of income and the funds assigned by

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the state for the education system are woefully inadequate. The departments – and the universities – have to apply for grants and projects and use those for additional funding. The professors have to work on research, teaching and take on numerous administrative duties which cut into the time allotted for research, leading to being underpaid and overworked. In addition, the saying 'publish or perish' is endemic in the system. As a result, the business model is also present since the way funds are allotted to a university depends on the number of students. This discourages strictness in grading the students, since those students are needed for the departments to survive. In the Romanian educational system, the possibility of extinction of departments is very much present at all times, like a threat looming large. It is impossible not to confront it. Alexandru Muşina's novel discussed this sad reality of the educational system in which he had worked for years. Another issue he places in focus is the perennial PhD student, since one of the secondary characters, Remus Durac, had been a PhD student for more than a decade and had changed topics and advisors several times. Nevertheless, being a PhD student allows him to teach, and he does so. In addition, Remus Durac uses his time efficiently in having as many affairs as possible, within the faculty or on the conference circuit, which is another typical trope of the campus novel.

Wojciech Klepuszewski proposed in a paper he presented at Sibiu at the *East-West Cultural Passage: Changing Places* conference that the campus novel is close to succumbing, while Merritt Moseley states in his book on academic fiction that "we begin with an awareness that some readers, particularly those who are themselves professional academics, deplore the whole genre, and some would like to see the entire subject go away" – unflattering treatment of academics and negative contributions to views on the academe being two of the reasons cited. (Moseley 3) Another reason for this might be that the academe, in terms of the humanities, is also on its last legs due to a "conflict between academic values and the values of the world 'outside', often the industrial or commercial world." (Connor 73) Steven Connor also mentions that "the novel occupied a special place; dangerously poised between the realms of the mass market and high culture." (Connor 73) While in the Anglophone world, academic fiction is becoming old-fashioned, it is only starting its career in other cultures. For those new novels, a fresh way of looking at a 50-year-old genre, seemingly ready to retire, might provide some re-imagined avatars.

2. The Re-Imagined Avatar of the Campus Novel

In certain ways, we cannot expect these avatars to depart tremendously from the beaten path. Those would be unrealistic expectations. Thus, Alexandru Mușina's novel traces the tropes and the discourses well-established by Amis, Lodge and Bradbury among others. It deals with a university, if not a campus; it focuses on the life of a professor, though at the beginning of his career; it employs satire; it undertakes a theoretical discourse hailing from semiotics, but with forays into the realms of post-structuralism, anthropology, and cultural studies, to name but a few; the text is peppered with theorist name-dropping; the lecture halls have a very strong presence in the text as do conferences; and finally, both affairs on the conference circuit and affairs between professors and students are very much a part of the text. Where Mușina's novel departs from the beaten track is in its approach of the paradoxical situation of universities in Romania due to the budget allocated to education per student, in effect making the professors impotent in dealing with low levels of scholarship by failing said students, instead obliging them to pass them, and turning their institutions in diploma mills. In addition, Mușina provides a

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uniquely humorous treatment of the administrative apparatus of the university with former *Securitate* informers as head secretaries, fully capable of manipulating everything and everyone and the seemingly shrouded-in-mystery club to which only the crème de la crème of academics can belong. It also differs in the inefficiency and passivity of professors and enterprising spirit of students and by approaching the subject of the survival of the departments in terms of funding. Moreover, the life of the student body with their concerns is illustrated. Furthermore, the novel juxtaposes the colloquial language of students with the elevated and theoretical *langue de bois* of the professor. None of the above, however, holds a candle to the fact that the professor is king, and a vampire to boot, or to the academic lottery that concludes the university portion of the novel.

Florin Angelescu Dragolea – his name reminding the Romanian reader of flowers, angels, dragons and devils[2] all at once – is the protagonist of the novel. He is an assistant, teaching French literature at the Transylvania University of Braşov. His nickname provided by the students and based on his initials FAD leads us to another conclusion, opposite to the one initially provided by his name. FAD would mean bland, insipid or flavourless – and it is indeed how his courses are perceived by students – even "unpalatable" as the narrator informs the reader. (Muşina 6) Aside from their unpalatability, the courses are taught in 19th century French, with a perfect Sorbonne accent, while the students are used to talking to professors in a French-Romanian or English-Romanian dialect.

The Romanian educational system and the way to dodge it are explained extensively in the novel, starting from the very first pages: the professor is king of his own domain. FAD was teaching the same course in all three years, under different names: "Medieval French Literature," "Classical French Literature," "Romantic French Literature," "Modern French Literature," which were attended only by the nerds who would take copious notes. The course was based on his PhD thesis – "La sémiose de l'oubli et du souvenir chez Marcel Proust" which he teaches in his lectures word for word. While the nerds take their notes and learn them by heart, the majority of students fail the exam, since the few key phrases they learn prove insufficient for the exacting standards of professor FAD:

> If they didn't pass, they needn't worry: the new system of passing the year, introduced as a result of European Union lobbying, based on the so-called "credits," allowed them to reach their senior year with 5 or even 6 outstanding exams from the first and second years. This apparently complicated system, was also extremely convenient. For instance: no matter how many exams they had to take with professor FAD, they only had to study one course. Therefore, in the special session before the bachelor exam, they pulled up their socks, they crammed day and night, they guzzled tons of coffee and smoked truck-loads of cigarettes, they became increasingly more pale, they turned completely anemic trying, not so much to understand, but to learn by rote semiotic Proustian magic formulas, which would open the gate towards passing the exam. (Mușina 7)

FAD's method of teaching – using the same material in several courses – enables the students to pass the exams towards the end of their studies. They have to study a single course to pass several exams. The cramming sessions typical of student life are also humorously depicted by Mușina, in addition to the medieval method of study – learning by rote the entire material.

[2] In Romania, the Sunday before Easter is called the Flowers' Sunday (Palm Sunday), when people with flower names celebrate their nameday. Florin is one such name. Angelescu is a surname – a typically Romanian surname given the *-escu* suffix – which has as its root word Angel, coming from the Italian *angelo*. A more common form of this surname would be Anghelescu. Dragolea as a second surname would remind one of dragon, but in Romanian it is also connected to *drac*, meaning devil, since the origin of this word hails back to the Latin *draco* which also means snake or dragon.

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The teaching method and the learning method are not conducive to understanding, only to parroting what the professor has taught in the course. Thus, the system as it is currently set up – the Bologna system – not only allows students to reach their senior year with outstanding exams, it also presents them with an additional opportunity: a year of grace, paid for by the parents, during which the students have the chance to retake exams previously not passed. It is interesting to see what happens when the students do not pass the exams, since it is not the professor who controls the outcome, but rather the secretary. This methodology for passing exams is discussed later on in the novel, however.

The professor, as stated above, is king of his domain. While some would argue that he has to provide quality in his teaching for the payment he receives, especially since aside from the students who do not pay for their education, there are those who do pay (students trying to get a second degree and those who were unable to pass the admission exams with high enough grades), the professor still reigns in this system. The professor has not been simply transformed into someone who provides a service:

> How about the professor? He is not yet a simple service provider, a kind of intellectual masseur or kineto-therapist; he is still king, a sovereign over his own subject. Only that his is no longer, as in the past, an absolute monarchy, in which the king does as he pleases commanding that heads roll, rather he is now a modern, constitutional monarch. He may teach whatever he pleases and in whatever language he pleases, provided that democracy triumphs and all students pass the exams. (Mușina 8)

The domain, however, is not to be governed with an iron fist, but with kindness, since the professor cannot be an absolute monarch anymore, instead he has to be understanding with his subjects and allow them to pass his exams. Aside from the realm he is allowed to control as king, the professor has to be very much aware that he has to pass his students, since the university needs customers and they are funded by the state depending on the number of customers it is able to attract:

> Over here, as it were, the professor is king, he teaches whatever he likes and as he likes it. Nevermind the curriculum posted on the university website. As long as nobody complains. And nobody complains. On the one hand, because the students don't read the university website. On the other, because only those unable to graduate would ever complain. And that never happens: universities need students, as many students as possible, since the state funds them depending on the number of students. Students need diplomas, since private companies and state institutions show preference in hiring – out of inertia or perhaps the list of competencies requires it so? – only college graduates possessing a diploma. Any type of diploma will do, since they don't know anything useful anyway and they have to learn everything: „on the job", as a communist saying goes, or through all sort of trainings and team-buildings. (Mușina 6)

In addition, the passivity of students in this educational system is highlighted by Mușina. Moreover, another criticism he provides through the voice of the narrator refers to the less than practical side of the education the students receive. As it becomes clear from the excerpt, the diploma is all that the students require. It is not the education they are after, since the education received will in no way impact their future careers. Companies do not hire based on the experience you have supposedly accumulated through the education received in college, instead they expect the knowledge and experience you possess as a recent graduate to be ineffectual and useless at best, if not impractical. The companies also believe that the students need to grow out of the habits learned during their college education.

The protagonist of the novel is a tedious specimen of the academe, yet, one moment of

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boredom and a puckish idea later, and he will be turned into a star. Lulu and Bubu, the two divas of the second year, decide that he looks like Marilyn Manson and Dracula, nickname him Dracula's nephew, and as they say, the rest is history. Or not quite – they invite him to the most expensive restaurant in town where he is served a beefsteak in tartar sauce which revives in FAD/Fifi the need for blood, energizing him at the same time. In the process of describing FAD ascension to fame and fortune, Muşina also provides ample descriptions of students and student life, with their cliques and their competition in the race for popularity, better grades or a better life. The nerds are an important part of the landscape, as are the social climbers, the go-getters and the lazy students who sleep during classes. In addition, the rumour mill that constitutes the faculty is humorously illustrated in the novel.

Gossip spreads around the university soon enough and everybody talks about FAD's outing with the two students. The invented identity – that of Dracula's nephew is amply discussed by students and faculty alike. As a result, FAD's status improves tremendously. As he becomes central in the gossipy discussions that ensue, the prominent members of the faculty take an interest in his courses and increase in popularity, even though he had been previously thoroughly ignored and passed over due to his flavourless character. Consequently, he is invited to join COI (The Club of Intelligent Men – incidentally, in Romanian the initials form a word that would be the equivalent of the slang word 'balls' – a meaning that is further emphasized by the fact that membership is limited to male members of the academe). The shadow cabinet of the faculty is seen as a mythical club which allows entry only to a few chosen ones, who could be seen as the elect:

> The „shadow cabinet" of the faculty, the mythical *COI*. Shadow cabinet, you say? Mythical? Isn't that perhaps an exaggerated claim? It depends on your point of view. (…) For us, it is more important to consider what is happening in the faculty (and who is managing it) than what is happening in Bucharest, in the Parliament, even more so than what is happening in Brussels, in the U.S.A., China or the UN. The reverse might be true too: perhaps, from a global viewpoint, the *COI* doesn't even exist. But for us, yes, it is mythical. First of all, since it is inaccessible. At least if we take Cossiga's definition at face value: "Whatever man knows or believes to exist, and whatever he does not have access to, is mythical." And, if push comes to shove, why wouldn't our little community be allowed to keep its myths? (…) But what was *COI*, otherwise known as the Pentagon? Nothing more, nothing less than the Wednesday night meetings of the A-list professors in the faculty scheduled every two weeks at the restaurant: Teodor Cossiga, professor of comparative literature and folklore, Vasile Peteanu, comparatist and phenomenologist, associate professor Darius Stroescu, specialized in cultural studies, Mihail Banciu, associate professor of Romanian literature and dean, plus Andy Cruceru, the new rising star of the faculty. (Muşina 105)

The stars of the faculty are part of this shadow cabinet, which remind the reader of the Communist period when everything was done in secret. It is as if they too govern from the shadows, getting their own way as a fly by night organization might, through dishonest means. The inaccessibility of this shadow cabinet makes it all the more desirable for those who are not included in its ranks. During the meeting, the Dean and the other prominent members of faculty question FAD about the rumour that he was a vampire, thinking perhaps that with him there, they could open a centre for studying vampires:

> Let's suppose that young Florin Angelescu Dragolea, here present, was a vampire… Don't fret! We don't mind, as long as you observe the social-sanguineous contract, as Darius says. Imagine what a marvelous opportunity this would be for us, especially now with this crazy competition for grants. You don't know what academically trendy pickle to contrive to get your

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> hands on some mites, the dean can tell you all about it. We could open a research centre – strictly literary research, of course, no worries, Fifi! – of vampires. It would be the only one of its kind. With a researcher who is a genuine, authorized, certified vampire… all signed and sealed. The backers would scramble from all over the world, especially the Americans, with their vampire obsession. (…) As I live and breathe, it's worth it. 200% profitability (…) Our scientific priority would be to study not only the vampires from our folklore or from the sick Western imagination, as well as real, current, postmodern flesh-and-blood vampires. (…) If our beloved colleague, here with us, agreed to be a vampire, we'd be number one. Not even Harvard has a certified vampire among its professors, students or alumni. (Mușina 138)

Cossiga reassures FAD that his vampirism would not be held against him, as long as he does not go on a vampiric rampage. He also appeases his anxiety by saying that the research they speculate about would only be in the field of literature, soothing FAD's nerves since he might have thought that he would become a medical curiosity. Thus, the monster in their midst would not become a *curio*, instead it would be a source of income for the department. FAD's status as a vampire would need to be documented and he would have to become certified as a vampire, but that would simply increase the standing of the department since the situation of the research centre would be unique in the world, vying with Harvard for attention in terms of the seriousness of the research undertaken there.

Once FAD's identity as Dracula's nephew is confirmed through documentary evidence – old letters left by his grandfather to be read only by a male heir – he feels isolated and unable to share this occult knowledge. This secret sets him above princes, kings, billionaires and cinema stars into the Mount Olympus of postmodern imagination – placing him on the same level as Superman, Batman, Catwoman, Spiderman, Harry Potter and X-Men:

> The other secret – the story that involved Boboieru and the weekly blood intake of the Drăculești – which raised him above all the princes and kings, billionaires and movie stars and that projected him straight into the Mount Olympus of postmodern imagination, setting him on the par with Superman, Batman, Catwoman, Spiderman, Harry Potter and X-Men, was even harder to share. In fact, it was impossible to share. First of all, nobody would believe him. The world is full of raving madmen who believe themselves Dracula's heirs, or even Dracula himself. (…) Notwithstanding the false pretenses, Romanian society is so civilized, so secularised… Nobody truly believes any longer in vampires and werewolves, in poltergeists and ghouls, in ghosts, in cursed legacies and family secrets. At most, some crones in the out of reach no man's land of the mountain peaks or the gipsy women in their coloured skirts wigwagging on TV, pretending to be witches, might believe him. In his small academic world, at most, he would be regarded as a freak. (Mușina 267)

But he is also acutely aware that Romanians no longer believe in ghosts, vampires, werewolves, and witches. (Mușina 267) He finally reveals the truth about his ancestry to Lulu and Bubu, and together they sing and dance in a round, similarly to a children's ditty, on a tune entitled The Peasant in the field, with lyrics invented by Lulu on the spot: Fifi is a vampire, Fifi is a vampire, / Hurray, my sweet, Fifi is a vampire. / Dracula's Nephew, Dracula's Nephew, / Hurray, my sweet, Dracula's Nephew. (Mușina 303-304)

Lulu's enterprising spirit takes over once this disclosure occurs. Lulu contrives a plan that will allow FAD/Fifi/Dracula's Nephew to get the blood he needs. As such, she enlists the help of Mrs. Enikö Trăistaru who was an essential piece in the economy of passing exams within the faculty. Thus, if a student cannot pass an exam through honest means, and he is unable to cheat, using cheat sheets, his mobile phone or perhaps a deskmate's exam sheet, intercessions, sycophancy, cant or sexual favours, the next step was to contact Mrs. Enikö and she would pass on gifts or gravy, blackmail professors (since she knew all about the addictions, affairs or

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plagiarism of the faculty members) or as a last resort, she would modify grades in the case of forgetful professors. (Mușina 328) There was a painstaking method to this however and her motivation was that of mere survival in a corrupt system, once her services were no longer needed by the *Securitate*:

> Was Mrs. Enikö a maniac, a neurotic agent allowed to lay sleeping by the SRI (Romanian Information Service) the new name of her old and beloved *Securitate*? (…) No. Mrs. Enikö was simply making a living. Being a single mother, and since her salary as a head secretary was insufficient, Mrs. Enikö had become the turntable, the essential element in the subtle and complicated mechanism of passing exams in our faculty. Of certain exams, to be fair. (Mușina 328)

If she had to change grades in the transcripts she kept a copy of the real grades at home. The narrator cheerfully and ironically notices that a chronicler of the future would need to check Mrs. Enikö's archive if he were to render a true account of the grades received in the faculty. (Mușina 328) Another authorial comment intervenes in the text earlier making reference to this method of passing exams delineated above:

> After all, to paraphrase Darius Stroescu, in a democracy it is more important that the problems, the inherent conflicts be solved pragmatically, based on some principles, through dialogue, with rational arguments. On the other hand, in our country, even if we aren't doing all that great in the principle, dialogue or reason department, pragmatics reigns supreme. And those who enact its will are the secretary or the head of office (as it was in the old days: the chaperon or the butler). (Mușina 7)

Mrs. Enikö's role as go-between or bargain maker is once again highlighted, but the method itself refers to the application of pragmatic principles. Even while communication, reason, and principles are not seen as the strong points of the Romanians, avoiding conflict is one thing at which the Romanian people excel. When conflict is unavoidable the Romanian people will always choose to deal with it in their own way: "the Romanian people are peaceable and hate conflicts with all their heart. Thus, students, professors and university management have adopted, spontaneously and for quite a while now, the mission statement of any democracy, brilliantly synthesized in Frank Sinatra hit: „I did it my way". The Romanian way: to each his own." (Mușina 6) Obviously, this might lead to chaos since, if everyone acts their own way, leading to a multitude of ways, the rules are disregarded. Consequently, political alliances and agreements might not work, but agreements settled upon at a personal level are the way to go – namely, the Romanian way:

> For hundreds of years, in these lands we have been solving problems that are apparently unsolvable in a very specific way, a way I would call striking a bargain and shaking on it. Indeed, striking a bargain, not the so-called agreements, not the ententes, alliances, international treaties, entered only to be broken at the first opportunity. And we do this creatively, by leaving aside some… Some what? Some dogmas, all that hinders people from getting along. For us, the supreme law is Ohm's Law[3], namely, for the laymen: Treat me humanely, and I will treat you the same. Well said: human, not vampire. (Mușina 352-353)

Thus, at a political and social level, conflicts are harder to mitigate, however, at a personal level – using one's network of contacts which is the way to go in the Romanian culture – they can be solved more easily. In order to come to a solution, one needs to be able to

[3] Ohm's Law is a physics law, but the name of the physicist sounds like the word man/human in Romanian (*om*).

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understand those around one and to show consideration and empathy. Striking bargains – scratching someone's proverbial back at some point and knowing that later on that person would scratch one's proverbial back in return – is the solution provided by Muşina. In fact, the novel itself is a campus novel written the Romanian way.

To return to Lulu and Mrs. Enikö's plan, it involved passing all the students with grades higher than 7 out of 10. In return, the two enterprising ladies organized a blood drive that would allow FAD to live a more energized life, with proper nutrients. On hearing about the plan, FAD starts finding reasons why such a thing ought not to happen, but Lulu is far more insightful and quite a spin doctor to boot. In the end, she uses his own words against him – the professor is a king, a sovereign on his own domain, therefore he could easily be king at the exam. The narrator intervenes in the text to explain the paradox created here, praising this barter that Lulu has come up with – for Fifi blood was a necessity, as were the diplomas and high grades for the students for whom those things would ensure a good job, therefore a good living:

> You might object by saying that due to arrangements of this type the students are impelled to stop learning and that our educational system is gradually degrading, or that such agreements are sources of corruption which affect the whole society in the long term, no less, or that a student that received a high grade for donating blood will be tempted throughout his life to use various expedients to dodge work, to avoid putting a bit of elbow grease into it, as the saying goes. We will reject this counterargument as follows: corruption exists anyway, it is already inscribed in human nature. And, if it comes to the crunch, a bit of corruption is preferable to a blood bath and a pile of corpses. (Muşina 353)

Thus, the narrator insists that treaties, alliances and agreements are not the way to go with Romanians, who prefer dealing with each other on a personal rather than legal level. The final argument, that ends the narrator's plea for this solution – this barter of blood for grades – is one that advocates the view that this does not lead to a degradation of our educational system, since corruption is already inherent in humans and endemic in the system.

Ultimately, Fifi, crowned kind and wearing a cape, enters the lecture hall where the exam is to take place – the room is adorned with balloons and the French, Romanian and EU flags, the students are chanting slogans (the professor is always right, *non scolae sed vitae discimus* – It is not for school, but for life that we learn, reading hasn't killed anyone yet – Muşina 356). The anthems of Romania and France are sung. The atmosphere is entirely too festive for an exam in one of FAD's exams. The reason for this is that he has organized an academic lottery – giving high grades to the nerds, but picking the names of the other students who are to pass in this session with grades above 7, leaving the rest to pass during the autumn re-sit session. Finally FAD gives a speech:

> Dear students, this will be a grand moment, a moment you will remember for the rest of your lives. Never before has such an exam been seen. It is a model for the future. This age, progress itself requires it, even the European Union and the Bologna agenda require it. It is high time to outgrow the dark ages when exams were synonymous with terror, to the guillotine even, when students were pushed out of fear, not only to learn, but to cheat, to hand gravy to the professors or, *horribile dictum*, to offer sexual favours in exchange for grades! The grades were not the only reason for this gloomy inquisition atmosphere perpetuated well into the modern and postmodern age, although the grades are not to be ignored either. (Muşina 368)

Thus, formerly exams were seen as torture, as a type of inquisition or as the guillotine, and the students learned for fear, paid off the professors or offered them sexual favours. FAD

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offers a new version of the exam where moral decay and trauma would be eliminated. This new type of exam envisioned by FAD constitutes satire at its best. In addition, considering the position of the professor on the first page and on the last page of the novel, readers might conclude that Mușina applies carnivalization to great effect, since the nobody from the beginning, becomes a king at the end.

3. Conclusion

Alexandru Mușina's novel *Nepotul lui Dracula* is a campus novel with a typically postmodernist twist, through the inclusion of gothic elements, such as the vampire professor. While using the campus novel tropes and discourse, the novel goes beyond the readers' expectations, dealing not only with professors, but with students as well. In addition, the novel brings to the fore the struggle to survive of departments in the university. Moreover, the post-communist academic world still contains remnants of the totalitarian regime through the shadow cabinet and the head secretary who is a former *Securitate* agent. Mușina does not discuss in detail the communist regime and the way the educational system was set up during those times, nevertheless he refers to communist sayings that are still prevalent after the Revolution, such as learning skills on the job rather than at the university. Mușina's novel emphasizes the drawbacks of the educational system in Romania, however, he does not offer real life solutions. In fact, this re-imagined avatar of the campus novel makes great use of another typical element – satire. Carnivalizing the role of the professor – who is supposed to teach and offer solutions, but who learns a lesson from his enterprising students – is just another way for Mușina to show how professorship is seen in Romanian culture – slightly outmoded and definitely useless. The favourless professor from the beginning is turned into a king at the end, presiding over his own carnival. The vampiric side only turns FAD into a person of interest and increases his popularity, instead of ostracizing him. Thus, the humorous solution provided would be that perhaps each humanities department should have its own vampire – those who do not have a vampire, should get one.

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