

Hans Corneel de Roos, *Powers of Darkness: The Lost Version of Dracula*, Overlook Duckworth, New York and London 2017, pp. 309

Hans Corneel de Roos' *Powers of Darkness: The Lost Version of Dracula* presents a remarkable scholarly endeavour in unearthing and translating *Makt Myrkranna*, the Icelandic adaptation of Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, originally published in 1901. This version, long thought to be a mere abridgment, turns out to be an extensive reworking with significant narrative and thematic divergences. De Roos' analysis and translation provide invaluable insights into the complexities of *Dracula*'s textual history, as well as the development of Gothic literature.

Powers of Darkness begins with a foreword by Dacre Stoker, Bram Stoker's great grand-nephew, discussing *Dracula* scholarship and introducing the theory that the Icelandic *Makt Myrkranna* was based on an earlier draft of *Dracula*: "Was *Makt Myrkranna* the result of translator errors, creative licence taken too far, or was this Icelandic edition simply another version of the story that Bram had been working on for years? I certainly lean towards the latter" (p. 7). This part is followed by an extensive introduction by editor and translator Hans Corneel de Roos, featuring photographs, newspaper clippings, and manuscript scans. It explores the biography of Icelandic translator Valdimar Ásmundsson, highlights differences between *Dracula* and *Makt Myrkranna*, and argues that unique elements in the Icelandic version likely originated from Stoker. The book also includes a detailed floor plan of *Dracula*'s castle, illustrated based on descriptions from the text (what a fascinating bonus!).

De Roos emphasises that “*Makt Myrkranna* was no abridged translation of *Dracula* at all: it was a radical modification.”¹ Indeed, *Makt Myrkranna* differs from *Dracula* in substantial ways, offering a condensed yet distinct adaptation. While the premise follows a similar structure, namely Jonathan Harker’s journey to Transylvania and his encounters with Count Dracula, the Icelandic version presents a much-altered storyline. In *Powers of Darkness*, the Count emerges as a more politically sinister figure, engaged in broader schemes beyond mere vampirism. Additionally, the role of Mina and the other principal characters is notably reduced, focusing the narrative primarily on Harker’s experiences and Dracula’s menacing presence.

One of the most striking differences is the portrayal of Dracula himself. Whereas Stoker’s Count is a more enigmatic and shadowy figure, *Makt Myrkranna* renders him more overtly monstrous and tyrannical. The novel amplifies its eroticism — controversial in prudish Victorian England, and politically charged undertones, transforming it into a distinct Gothic work rather than merely a variant of *Dracula*.

In his review for the Guardian, Colin Fleming comments on the translation-adaptation conundrum in the following manner: “[...] Ásmundsson took more than a few liberties and created a distant cousin of the book he was charged with rendering into Icelandic. His «translation», *Makt Myrkranna* (*Powers of Darkness*), is so totally different that you wonder if any translator before has had the gumption to go this far in reinventing an original text. While Stoker’s novel has a lot of dialogue, Ásmundsson replaced the talk with a lot of walk; barrelhouse action, really. Jonathan Harker’s trip to Transylvania is two-thirds longer in *Makt Myrkranna*; the rest of the novel, conversely, has been massively reduced. The epistolary format of the original is replaced by an omniscient narrator. Adding an Icelandic twist, Ásmundsson has plonked in numerous references to Norse literature. There are fewer bromantic moments between Van Helsing and his vampire-chasing mates — and larger doses of lasciviousness.”²

Fleming concludes with a striking question: Was *Makt Myrkranna* truly a translation, or did Ásmundsson believe he could improve upon Stoker’s work? The book still remains an enigma, as Fleming states, not only in terms of Ásmundsson’s intentions but, perhaps even more intriguingly, Stoker’s own.

De Roos’ meticulous research in *Powers of Darkness* bridges a crucial gap in *Dracula* studies. His translation retains the Icelandic text’s nuances while making it accessible to a modern audience. The accompanying analysis contextualises the origins of *Makt Myrkranna*, its connections to *Dracula*, and its broader literary significance. By comparing the Icelandic adaptation with Stoker’s original, De Roos highlights how different cultural, editorial, and perhaps even authorial influences may have shaped the text.

A key strength of De Roos’ work is his detailed discussion of *Makt Myrkranna*’s mysterious origins. He explores the involvement of Valdimar Ásmundsson and speculates on the extent of Stoker’s direct involvement. After outlining the similarities between Ásmundsson’s version and Bram Stoker’s notes, De Roos asserts: “If we are not

¹ H.C. De Roos, *Mörkrets Makter’s Mini-Mysteries*, “Bulletin of the Transylvania University of Braşov” 2021, Series IV, vol. 14(63), p. 68.

² C. Fleming, *The Icelandic Dracula: Bram Stoker’s vampire takes a second bite*, “The Guardian” 2017, 19 April, www.theguardian.com/books/2017/apr/19/icelandic-dracula-bram-stoker-translator-powers-of-darkness-valdimir-asmundsson-makt-myrkranna [access: 15.03.2025].

prepared to accept these seven similarities between Stoker's notes and the new plot elements in *Makt Myrkranna* as a mere coincidence, Bram Stoker must have passed his early plot ideas to Valdimar" (p. 36). De Roos' interpretation remains a topic of lively debate among scholars. While some consider the theory of Bram Stoker's involvement speculative, De Roos' work remains a groundbreaking contribution that fosters further discussion on *Dracula's* textual history. Furthermore, this section raises intriguing questions about the nature of literary adaptations and how a single work can be transformed across different linguistic and cultural landscapes. In the afterword to *Powers of Darkness*, John Edgar Browning predicts that "unearthing translations like *Makt Myrkranna* may become the next cottage industry in *Dracula* scholarship and entertainment" (p. 293). This proved to be prophetic, particularly in light of the later discovery of an even earlier Swedish translation of *Dracula*, which has led to further intriguing developments in the field.

Powers of Darkness is an essential read for scholars and enthusiasts of Gothic literature, *Dracula* studies, and translation history. Hans Corneel de Roos has not only made *Makt Myrkranna* widely accessible but has also illuminated its broader literary significance. His research challenges established narratives about *Dracula's* textual development and opens new avenues for exploring how the novel has been received and reinterpreted across cultures. The depth and rigor of his research ensure that *Powers of Darkness* will remain a pivotal work in Gothic literary studies for years to come. In 2022, news broke about a planned Polish translation of *Powers of Darkness*. We can only hope that this translation will soon see the light of day.

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