

Hans Corneel de Roos in interview with Adrien Party for Vampirisme.com about his research on *Makt myrkranna*, the Icelandic sister version of *Dracula*.

INTRODUCTION

Hans Corneel de Roos is a Dutch photographer and art historian who has been based in Munich since 1986. He studied Political and Social Sciences in Amsterdam and Berlin and has been involved in Dracula Studies since 2010. He has visited Romania ten times to make photos and do research for the planned Dracula Travel Guide [LINK: www.dractravel.com](http://www.dractravel.com) he has authored together with Dacre Stoker, Bram's great-grandnephew. He discovered, among others, the place Bram Stoker had in mind for his fictitious Castle Dracula and for the Scholomance, the mythical Devil's School. He also solved the mystery around Count Dracula's lifetime identity. At the beginning of 2014, he discovered that *Makt myrkranna*, the Icelandic version of Dracula, was no conventional translation of Stoker's novel, and started translating the Icelandic text [LINK: www.powersofdarkness.com](http://www.powersofdarkness.com). He initiated and moderated the Fourth World Dracula Congress that took place at Trinity College, Dublin in October 2016, [LINK: www.tsdcon25.com](http://www.tsdcon25.com) and is cooperating with Transilvania University of Brasov now to launch a new series of international Dracula congresses, starting in 2018. [LINK: https://dracongress.jimdo.com/](https://dracongress.jimdo.com/) For his new photo and art school project on Bantayan Island, Philippines, [LINK: www.carmillacreations.com/](http://www.carmillacreations.com/) he is cooperating with Meisei University, Tokyo.

Some weeks ago, you published *Powers of Darkness*, the first English translation of the Icelandic version of Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, which turned out to be more than a straight translation. What led you to this discovery?

I am afraid that my incurable curiosity is to blame, and a certain scepticism about established truths. In December 2013, I was reworking an essay about the relationship between fact and fiction in *Dracula*. The preface to the Icelandic edition of *Dracula* has been known since 1986, since Richard Dalby presented a translation of this foreword. Here, Stoker stated at least three times that all the events described in the novel had *really* taken place. But it also contained a cryptical remark to the Ripper Murders, "**which came into the story a little later,**" according to Dalby's translation. In *Dracula*, however, the Ripper Murders are not mentioned. I decided to check the Icelandic text, directly from the source, and wrote to several libraries in Reykjavik. First I received a scan of the preface, later I found the rest of the novel. From 13 January 1900 on, it had been serialized in a newspaper, *Fjallkonan*, edited and published by Valdimar Ásmundsson. When I started to translate some lines from it, I found scenes and characters that were not present in *Dracula*. Since Dalby's first article in 1986, everyone had followed his assumption that the Icelandic version had been an abridged translation only. But it turned out to be a complete modification.

You learned Icelandic in order to translate the book. How many years did it take you, between the first discovery till the book release? Are you the only person involved in the project?

Powers of Darkness was released on 7 February 2017. My provisory report on *Makt myrkranna* was published in February 2014 in the news bulletin of the Transylvanian Society of Dracula. That was just twelve days after I discovered that the Icelandic version had its own plot and additional characters. Up till that time, I never had learned any Icelandic. I had been in Iceland in 2002, but everyone speaks perfect English there, just like in Holland. I had to use the Google translator to create a very primitive draft. I was lucky enough to find 25 native Icelandic speakers from all over the world who helped me improve it. After each round, I worked through the text again, and from comparing the translation to the original, I started to learn Icelandic myself. Icelandic is extremely tough, as it has retained all its inflections and declinations since medieval times. You do not only need good dictionaries, you also need a database to recognize the dozens of forms for each word. But with the help of my Icelandic partners, I did pretty well, I think, and in the end, I even was able to crack some nuts that were too hard for modern Icelanders. Since Valdimar's times, the language has changed a bit, and I had to study how certain expressions had been used in other newspapers and books from that time. Many other people were also involved in smoothening and perfecting the English text: Pienette Coetzee and her sister Lounette Loubser, my agent Allison Devereux, John E. Browning – who also wrote the afterword – to mention only a few of them. Ásgeir Jónsson, who edited the third edition of *Makt myrkranna* in Icelandic, [LINK:](#)

<http://www.bokafelagid.is/products/makt-myrkranna> also helped me very generously with his background knowledge over the last three years.

REFERENCE:

De Roos, Hans Corneel. *Makt myrkranna – Mother of all Dracula modifications? Letter from Castle Dracula*, Icelandic Issue, 3 February 2014. <http://www.mysterious-journeys.com/pdf/letter-feb-2014.pdf>

How is it possible that nobody ever studied the Icelandic novel, although the preface had already been translated?

Part of the answer lies in Iceland's linguistic isolation. As just said, learning Icelandic is very hard – still today, I can only decipher it, not speak it. Scholars teaching at universities have to accomplish their research within a narrow financial budget, with limited time, and most of their research goals are already predefined by the structures they have to operate in and by the predominant discourse of their field. So, none of these people in academic positions ever took the effort to look into an exotic text such as *Makt myrkranna*. It takes surplus energy to transcribe an Icelandic text from a book scan you have to get from Reykjavik first, and try to translate it yourself, although two professional English translations are available already. In 2004, Robert Eighteen-Bisang from Vancouver privately commissioned a new translation by Silvia Sigurdson, as he was not happy with the Dalby translation. It was no real improvement, though, but I did not know that yet. After typing out the preface, I took one line and entered it into the Google search mask, to see whether anyone had ever published on it. That is how I came across the rest of the Icelandic text. All Icelandic newspapers have been scanned as part of a huge digital archive. But first you must make these other steps, without knowing what they may be good for. That is also how I made my other important discoveries about *Dracula*, like the location of the Count's Castle, or of the Scholomance, or about the lifetime identity of the Count. I described this anti-method in an unpublished essay: *The Hermeneutics of the March Hare*.

Why is this preface not included in the original English novel?

That is still a riddle today. Book collector John Moore from Dublin believed that the Icelandic preface was part of Stoker's original manuscript, that had been rejected by his publisher, Constable, as being too long. Moore even claimed to have seen this very piece of text as part of the original *Dracula* typescript. In the 1980's, it was in the hands of John McLaughlin, a Californian collector, before it was auctioned at Christies and went to Paul Allen. But as I found out, Moore's transcript of this "lost document" proved to be identical, word for word, with the Sigurdson translation I just mentioned. Robert even showed me the translation contract and his discussion with Silvia about the text. This meant that Moore's text could not have been the original; after translating it into Icelandic and then back, the text could not have remained the same.

REFERENCE:

De Roos, Hans Corneel. *Bram Stoker's Original Preface to Dracula revealed? Letter from Castle Dracula*, Easter Issue, 18 April 2014. http://www.mysterious-journeys.com/pdf/letter_easter_2014.pdf

Isn't it a bit surprising that the Icelandic translation was one of the first to be made from *Dracula*? In our own country, the first translation is from 1919, much later than this Nordic translation.

Um... Is it possible that most French people have a certain aversion against everything that comes from England? Not even Stoker's first name is spelled correctly here. The French refuse to use English words such as "computer." But the Icelanders also invent their own native forms for words such as "television," or "cell phone." Unlike Iceland, that was dependent on imported horror stories, the French had their own strong tradition of suspense literature, though, long before *Dracula* was published. Marie Nizet's *Le Capitaine Vampire*, published in Paris in 1879, in many respects was much better written than *Dracula*, and I suspect that Stoker used some ideas from it – not in *Dracula* itself, but in *The Lair of the White Worm*. Maybe the French felt that Stoker's novel was superfluous?

LINK: <https://www.noosfere.org/icarus/livres/niourf.asp?numlivre=2146577929>.

REFERENCE:

De Roos, Hans Corneel. *Marie Nizet's Le Capitaine Vampire – And where it failed to influence Stoker. Letter from Castle Dracula*, Autumn Issue, 28 October 2015. <http://www.mysterious-journeys.com/pdf/letter-november-2015.pdf>

Did Bram Stoker manage to translate the book by himself, without asking help or involvement by his own English publisher?

Per his publishing contract, that he had written himself, Stoker was free to sell foreign-language versions of *Dracula*. [LINK: http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/thr-esq/bram-stoker-dracula-contract-304155](http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/thr-esq/bram-stoker-dracula-contract-304155) But he certainly did not understand Icelandic, although his Count boasts to have Icelanders among his ancestors. The Icelandic was all done by Valdimar Ásmundsson, who spoke six languages, next to his knowledge of Latin and Greek.

In your own introduction, you did an impressive work to recreate the map of the whole castle. Is this only possible with *Powers of Darkness*, given the fact that the castle part (the Thomas Harker story) is quite longer than the one published in *Dracula* (1897)? What was your method to work on this subject?

You are correct. In *Makt myrkranna*, the Transylvanian part is simply much longer than in *Dracula*, and in his diary of 10 May, Thomas Harker reports on an all-day exploration tour he makes through all four wings of the castle, on different levels. He wanders through the portrait gallery, through the former ladies' quarters, the entrance tower, then down a spiral staircase, arriving at an underground crypt and a chapel. From there he climbs up to the fourth floor again, discovers the Count's treasure chamber and private bedroom, then finds himself in the dining room again. During another trip, he visits the bedroom of the Count's first cousin, and finally, he discovers a secret staircase that leads to an underground temple, where he witnesses horrible scenes of blood and human sacrifice. While translating the Icelandic, I had to imagine all these routes and spaces anyway, so I wondered, if some consistent plan was at the basis of all this. I started with handwritten sketches, trying out all possible combinations, and found out that there was only one logical way to make all descriptions match with each other. Then I worked it out in PhotoShop. Finally, Pienette Coetzee, a young talented graphic artist volunteering in my studio, reworked these ground plans in a wonderful, medieval style, as can be seen on our project website www.powersofdarkness.com. Maps, photos and other graphics have always been essential in my research. The true location of Castle Dracula, for example, could only be discovered by intensive study of old military maps of the Borgo region. Basically, my whole involvement in Dracula Research only developed after I had made an elaborate *Dracula* photo story, and wanted to add some extra texts and illustrations to my book *The Ultimate Dracula*. I just see that the book's price in France has already climbed to over 1,000 Euros! [LINK: https://www.amazon.fr/Dracula-Including-Ultimate-Stoker-2012-05-24/dp/B01JXTXMJ4/ref=sr_1_8?ie=UTF8&qid=1489830787&sr=8-8&keywords=The+ultimate+dracula](https://www.amazon.fr/Dracula-Including-Ultimate-Stoker-2012-05-24/dp/B01JXTXMJ4/ref=sr_1_8?ie=UTF8&qid=1489830787&sr=8-8&keywords=The+ultimate+dracula)

REFERENCE:

De Roos, Hans Corneel. *The Ultimate Dracula*. Munich: Moonlake Editions, 17 April 2012.

In your introduction to *Powers of Darkness*, you discuss several ways how *Dracula* may have come to Iceland and whether Bram Stoker and Valdimar Ásmundsson ever met or exchanged letters. Still, no final proof of a contact has been found yet. Isn't that discouraging?

Trying to find the true connection between *Dracula* and *Makt myrkranna* has been a real challenge, and the answer was very surprising. In the first edition of *Powers of Darkness*, it could not be included yet, as it only emerged after the release of my book. In a certain sense, it was the direct result of publishing *Powers of Darkness*, and of all the international publicity it has created. Although my hypotheses will need to be updated now, I am glad that I have been able to get ahead!

You are speaking in riddles.... can you please explain?

Over the last three years, I tried to find a link between Bram and Valdimar. I searched for letters or an English-language draft or a license agreement in the Icelandic archives and I made an elaborate map of all social networks connecting Victorian England to Iceland. There were almost a dozen people in England that could have connected Bram and Valdimar. Seven different plot ideas from Bram's early notes on *Dracula* turned up in *Makt myrkranna* again, although they were not published in the final version of *Dracula*. Therefore, I suspected that Stoker might have passed these early ideas to Valdimar, or even might have sent him an earlier draft for his novel - directly or through common acquaintances. That would explain the similarities. It would have been quite a coincidence if Valdimar spontaneously would have moved Carfax back to East-London again, or given

the Count a deaf-mute housekeeper, or let the vampire make social calls to Lucy's sickbed – elements all mentioned in Stoker's early notes.

In his blog, Jason Colavita just wrote a critical review of this theory. He believes that all these parallels could be explained from other causes.

LINK: <http://www.jasoncolavito.com/blog/why-the-icelandic-dracula-adaptation-is-probably-not-evidence-for-a-lost-original-version-of-bram-stokers-classic-vampire-novel>

As I answered to Jason, I am very happy with his article, as he took the trouble to check my sources and came up with some surprising results, e.g. that deaf-mute housekeepers were not as rare in Victorian England as I suspected. But that there would be *seven* of such parallels, not just one or two, makes it improbable that they all were based on pure chance alone, I think. In this point, Wayne Miller agrees with me.

LINK: <http://www.vampires.com/regarding-powers-of-darkness/>

Moreover, Valdimar was no novelist. After my book had been released, I discussed the matter with Ásgeir Jónsson again. He has always believed that Ásmundsson had translated an *existing* text, not created a *new* one. In Spring 2016, I discussed the style of the Icelandic preface with Professor Jón Karl Helgason, Professor Gauti Kristmannsson and Professor Ástráður Eysteinnsson, of the University of Iceland and the University of Reykjavik, and with three different research professors at the Arní Magnússon Institute. High-ranking experts, and they all supported Ásgeir's idea, with different linguistic arguments. But still it was a matter of interpretation, about what was usual and correct Icelandic in Valdimar's time, and what was not. Now we know for sure that Ásgeir was right from the very beginning – I quoted his first assessment already in the *Letter from Castle Dracula* of 3 February 2014. Ásgeir was very surprised himself, however, when I told him so, because the evidence came from an unexpected corner.

From what corner?

From Sweden. Some Icelandic scholars, such as Professor Guðni Elísson **LINK:** <http://starfsfolk.hi.is/en/simaskra/1502> from the University of Iceland, suspected already 20 years ago that *Makt myrkranna* might have had Scandinavian roots. But he never published on it, and he never found this hypothetical Scandinavian source. My colleague Simone Berni from Pisa even has travelled to Malmö and Stockholm to search for an early Swedish version of *Dracula*, before he published his book on the early translations of *Dracula*.

REFERENCE:

Berni, Simone. *Dracula by Bram Stoker – The Mystery of the Early Editions*. Translation by Stefano Bigliardi. Macerata: Bibliothaus, April 2016.

But he only searched for books, as he told me, not for newspapers and periodicals. And that is where the answer finally came from.

What answer?

When I came home from the Philippines on 2 March, I found an email from a Swedish author, publisher and literary scholar, Rickard Berghorn. He lives in Bangkok. Richard told me that *Makt myrkranna* must have been based on *Mörktrets makter*, an early Swedish adaptation and serialization of *Dracula*. It appeared in the newspapers *Dagen* and *Aftonbladet* from 10 June 1899 on. Of course, I was stunned! It seems that the same had been happening in Sweden as in Iceland. As Rickard told, Swedish scholars had known about *Mörktrets makter* already, but never paid attention on it. They simply could not imagine that this text might be important for *Dracula* scholars all over the world—although such early translations and serializations of *Dracula* have become a hot topic since David Skal discovered the first US serialization in the *Charlotte Observer*, starting on 16 July 1899.

REFERENCES

Browning, John E. (ed). *Bram Stoker's Forgotten Writings*. New York: Palgrave, 2012.

De Roos, Hans Corneel. "*Buda-Pesth seems a wonderful place*" - How a Hungarian newspaperman produced *Dracula's* very first translation and serialisation. *Letter from Castle Dracula*, June 2016.

Only the publicity around my *Powers of Darkness* book led Rickard to recognize that the titles of the Swedish and the Icelandic versions are identical: both mean Powers of Darkness! I reported on this already in the *Children of the Night Conference Bulletin* [LINK: https://dracongress.jimdo.com/conference-bulletin/](https://dracongress.jimdo.com/conference-bulletin/). I thought it was my duty to inform at least the colleagues that had been involved in the Fourth World Dracula Congress in Dublin, where I gave my first lecture on *Makt myrkranna*. But an Icelandic journalist, Anna Margrét Björnsson, who had already interviewed me for *Icelandic Monitor*, found this news bulletin and asked what this was all about. This way, the news spread to Iceland. A late satisfaction for Guðni Elísson.

Just like for *Makt myrkranna*, one wonders why this Swedish version never received any international attention before your book was published?

As we can see already from Guðni's and Simone's efforts, for non-Swedish scholars, *Mörkrets makter* is hard to find if you do not know what and where to look for exactly. *Mörkrets makter* is also the (Swedish) title of a controversial stage play by Leo Tolstoi, written in 1886. And of course, "Powers of Darkness" is a standard expression in many discussions about Good and Evil. In the meantime, I found out that an entry about the serialization in *Dagen* has been added to the Swedish Wikipedia page on Bram Stoker on 22 March 2014, when I was already working on my translation of the Icelandic version. [LINK: https://sv.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bram_Stoker](https://sv.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bram_Stoker) It was added by Görgen Antonsson, a librarian who worked on library catalogues for 15 years. This way, he must have come across the title – but obviously, he did not realize its significance for Stoker fans outside of Sweden; it was not copied to the matching Wikipedia pages in other languages. As the publication date, Antonsson mentioned 1900 – not quite correct, as the first serializations started in 1899 already.

Whatever the case, starting from Rickard's hint, I found several advertisements in *Aftonbladet*, *Dagens Nyheter* and other Swedish newspapers, offering new readers a separate reprint. By special request to the Swedish National Library, I got a scan of the first page of this reprint already on 3 March. The rest arrived on 8 March. A very nice surprise was that this version had illustrations! I started reading and the same day, I sent my first notes to my agent in New York. In my conclusions, I wrote her that Rickard must have been wrong in saying that *Mörkrets makter* would even be longer than Stoker's *Dracula*, and that the diary form was continued through the whole novel – as he had stated in his first message and in the interview for the Conference Bulletin. During the following days, I continued working on my comparison between the Swedish and the Icelandic text, checked my word count again, and asked Rickard if maybe, he was working from *another* text version than I was. This way, we found out that the newspaper instalments Rickard had found indeed were longer, in total, than the 264-page reprint version I had been working from, and that they indeed kept to the epistolary style known from *Dracula*. From that point on, it was obvious that Valdimar had been working from the reprint version I had studied, not from the daily episodes Rickard had found.

Why is that so obvious?

We may assume that Valdimar wanted to see the end of the story first, before he decided to translate it to Icelandic. The newspaper serializations had not ended yet when the first instalment of *Makt myrkranna* started in *Fjallkonan* in January 1900, but the complete reprint had been released in September 1899 already. For Valdimar, it was much more convenient, of course, to work from a neat reprint booklet, instead of sorting out the daily or bi-weekly newspaper issues. Moreover, he would have preferred the shorter version, as *Fjallkonan* appeared only twice per week with only four pages. He abridged the story even further, to around 55,000 words. Especially the events after Harker's stay in Transylvania were condensed, from 25,000 words to 10,000 words. That is why the second part of *Makt myrkranna* reads so sketch-like. The plot line is the same as in the Swedish reprint, though, and we find countless literal translations from Swedish to Icelandic, and the same chapter structure in the later parts, instead of diaries and letters. The Swedish descriptions are somewhat richer and the transitions smoother. But like in *Makt myrkranna*, the Count is terminated still in London, once Van Helsing's team has found out what is cooking in Carfax. Mina is never attacked, and the Count does not flee back to Transylvania.

This means that you landed another scoop by locating the true matrix of *Makt myrkranna*?

The hint that *Makt myrkranna* must have been based on *Mörkrets makter* came from Rickard, obviously, so the laurels for pointing this out go to him. For my part, I was lucky enough to locate and access the *correct version*

first, that is, the reprint version Valdimar must have worked from. We even do not know whether he ever read the daily instalments. This means that the first analysis, how *Makt myrkranna* was developed from the Swedish text, goes on *my* account. I hope that this repairs my reputation as a literary sleuth a bit [laughs].

Could you give us a few examples of your findings?

For me, as the translator of the Icelandic text, *Mörkrets makter* contains dozens of eye-openers. I will give just three small examples:

1. When Wilma visits the Icelandic Castle Dracula, she gets attacked by some invisible person. I suspected the blonde girl, wandering through the deserted hallways as the mysterious “White Lady.” The Swedish text, however, mentions the attacker's “naked, hairy arms”, so that we know now that it must have been one of the ape-like brutes.
2. The secret door used by the old housekeeper woman can be opened by pressing a certain nail head. The Swedish “spik” matches the English “spike.” In the Icelandic text, Valdimar used “typpi” that in modern Icelandic means “penis.” Later he used “hnappur” = “button,” but wondered all the time why Harker had such difficulties finding such a button on the naked floor.
3. In the Icelandic Journal of Thomas Harker of 21 May, Harker gets ready to enter the secret stairways and lights his “járnbrautar ljósberanum,” literally “railway lantern.” Not even the research professors at the Árni Magnússon Institute for Icelandic Language ever had heard of this word, as in 1900, Iceland did not have a public railway system, and still has none today. But in Sweden, the Västra Stambanan was completed in 1862 already, so that Swedish writers were familiar with trains and their lanterns; in the Swedish edition, Harker mentioned his “lilla jernvägslykta,” which literally means “little railway lantern.” Ásmundsson created a new Icelandic word that never was used again later!

For normal readers, this all may be less exciting than for me. But for them, the Swedish reprint version also comes with some goodies, such as the chanting adepts of the Count, the delirious scenes Dr. Seward experiences during the evening party at Carfax, or the extended role of Mary Holmwood. The Swedish version also offers more detailed name information: “Atkinsson” as the name of the English family in Budapest, the daughter of the innkeeper in Zolyva is called “Marga Vasarhély,” the senior detective is called “Captain Barrington Jones,” the London action takes place at Victoria Street and Park Street, etc. The Count’s conspiracy is linked to “Jokula Adonais,” which associates it with Hebrew religion.

In what respect remains *Makt myrkranna* unique?

I could not check everything yet, but as I suspected already, Valdimar must have added the many references to old Norse Sagas that make *Makt myrkranna* so intriguing for fans of Nordic culture. In the Swedish version, the young lover of the Countess simply jumps into the abyss. In *Makt myrkranna*, he jumps from the “Family Bluff” – an inside joke referring to Gautrek’s Saga; the family described in the saga is very simple-minded. And in while in Harker’s Journal of 25 June, the Swedish version refers to Tannhäuser and his stay at the Venusberg, the Icelandic version refers to the similar saga of Hildur, the Elven Queen. Valdimar also added books on Alchemy, Astrology and Magic of the Middle Ages to the Count’s library, making his castle more Hogwarts-like.

Will a translation of the Swedish texts solve all mysteries around the Scandinavian *Dracula* versions?

I am afraid not. Most of the questions I worded for *Makt myrkranna* now simply will shift to the Swedish versions. How did *Dracula* come to Sweden? Was it a pirated version or did Stoker contribute to it, or at least authorize it? Was there any personal connection between Stoker and the Swedish newspapermen? How did the discussed elements from Stoker’s notes end up in the *Mörkrets makter*? Where did the subplot of the passionate Countess and her jealous husband come from? How could the Swedish editor be familiar with the Thames Torso Murders? Or with Van Helsing’s special status as a “real character”? Did the Hamlet quote come from Stoker himself? Why does the preface mention Dr. Seward as a good friend of the author, although he dies in the story? But these are all questions my Swedish colleagues should try to answer now. They have been sleeping over this text for 118 years, and it is time that they take care of their own piece of the *Dracula* puzzle now.

No new *Dracula* research projects for you?

The magazine *Gingernuts of Horror* has already called me “quite possibly the foremost expert on Stoker’s creation” – so it is time to retire now! [laughs]. LINK: <http://gingernutsofhorror.com/fiction-reviews/powers-of-darkness-the-lost-version-of-dracula> Rickard’s message hit me when I was already packing to relocate to the Philippines. I am building a little art and photo school there to help educate local kids and train interns from Asia. As this Swedish connection has taken all of my attention since two weeks, my time schedule has been ruined now. I feel responsible for my *Makt myrkranna* project, of course, and for the quality of the research around it. But mostly, I will focus on supporting students and a younger generation of researchers. On the way home to Munich, I received an essay for proofreading, written by Professor Prodosh Bhattacharya of Jadavpur University and one of his students, about two early adaptations of *Dracula* created in Bengal. There is a lot of interesting fresh research going on, and together with Magdalena Grabias from Lublin, Marcia Heloisa Amarante from Rio de Janeiro and Florin Nechita from Romania, I try to support it with our new *Dracula* Conference Series.

We thank you, Hans, for this interview.