

DRACULA AND THE TOPOS OF MIRROR CIVILIZATIONS

MARIA-ANA TUPAN*

Abstract. *Despite his associations with Oscar Wilde, Theosophists and the Society of the Golden Dawn, who were generally constructing an idealized image of Tibet, as in Edwin Arnold's *The Light of Asia*, or digging into archaic Celtic roots, Bram Stoker is taking a critical view of antiquated models and values in his *Dracula*. Instead of the frozen masks of national identities inherited from the Holy Roman Empire, Bram Stoker unfolds a record of migrations, political conspiracies and mirror images of nomadic, rootless ethnic groups, relativizing the West/East polarity in matters of ancestry and cultural specificity. Vampire expert Abraham Van Helsing may be seen as a fictional portrait of experimenting German psychologist Wilhelm Wundt, who was Frederick Myers' acknowledged inspirational source in the elaboration of his Theosophy. In parallel to an implicit commendation of "bourgeois life in its aspiration to rationality, philanthropy and scientific spirit" (Ballerstaller 2011, 246), Stoker uses the political construction of the vampire as the embodiment of ancient Asian despotism in Wilhelm Wundt's *Ethics* in support of the contemporary cultural movement (*Kulturkampf*) in Germany and France, whose aestheticism was underwritten by a political agenda of democratic reform. The past is actually ousted from the modern world and symbolized as revenant – a popular image disseminated by contemporary libraries of occultism.*

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Rewriting the Vampire

As well as Oscar Wilde, who has Dorian Gray confess his aspiration to the status of aesthete-cum-scientist, Bram Stoker too engaged in earnest with the latest research in psychology carried out in the experimental laboratories of Germany, France or America. The School of Charcot, emulated by Dr Seward, was based on experiments conducted in public, recorded case histories, scientific hypotheses and the practice of hypnotism. Abysmal psychology necessitated

* Habilitated Professor of Bucharest University; m_tupan@yahoo.com.

some new kind of knowledge, provided, in *Dracula*, by Abraham Van Helsing, a scholar of encyclopedic knowledge, a hypnotist and pragmatist, and also a connoisseur of ancient lore and folk superstitions. The rationale behind experimentalist Dr. Seward's invitation to his former professor in Amsterdam to come over and aid him in the vampire case springs from Wilhelm Wundt's distinction between objects of nature, which can be directly observed, and social phenomena which can only be studied when they have acquired a certain stability by being reified as myths, beliefs, and customs. It is social psychology, which necessitates historical and comparative studies, that allows us to understand the soul of nations manifest in history. According to Wundt, even in more complicated individual cases, such as the one Seward is confronted with, social psychology is needed to complete experimental research: It follows, then, that psychological analysis of the most general mental products, such as language, mythological ideas, and laws of custom, is to be regarded as an aid to the understanding of all the more complicated psychical processes. In its methods, accordingly, this form of psychology stands in close relation to other sciences: as *experimental* psychology, to the natural sciences; as *social psychology*, to the special mental sciences (Wundt 1907, § 2: 4).

In England, Wundt appears to have been the Virgilian guide of the new psychology taught by Frederick Myers as co-founder of both the Theosophical Society and the Society for Psychical Research (1883), as we can infer from key passages in Myers's *Phantoms of the Living*, published jointly with Edmund Gurney and Frank Podmore in 1886. It was Myers who advertised Wundt's ideas in the Introduction to the book, in order to press home a theory of the reversed "relation of the corporeal to the psychical life", which probably was the sources of Wilde's reversal of life's priority over art in "The Decay of Lying": "It is not the psychical life," he [Wundt] says, "which is a product of the physical organization; rather it is the physical organism which, in all those purposive adjustments which distinguish it from inorganic compounds, is itself a psychical creation" (Gurney 1918, XXXVIII).

Research in the state-funded laboratories of physiological psychology, such as the one in Leipzig, which has in the meantime become as important a landmark in psychology as Jena in philosophy, might have owed its rapid spread to other countries, especially France and England, to the prestige conferred by its being backed up by a political agenda pursued by none other than Chancellor Bismarck, one of the most powerful men in Europe. He and Wundt were leading the *Kulturkampf* which defended the peaceful development of civilized manners and the increase of knowledge in modern, liberal societies, against the heritage of absolutism and clericalism supported by the still standing pillars of the Holy Roman Empire. It was in *De l'Esprit De Conquete et L'Usurpation* (1813) that Benjamin Constant had first spoken about ancient Asian despotism versus modern liberalism, a polarity which Wundt elaborated on in his *Ethics*, published in 1886, while also enlarging the frame of political philosophy to include a narrative of psychological anthropology.

Who Are You, Count Dracula?

In movies and in exegetic work, Bram Stoker's Dracula is identified with Vlad the Impaler, Prince of Wallachia (1431–1476), so called because of the ferocity with which he treated Turkish prisoners. Jonathan Harker, however, in his journey to his distinguished client, never sets foot in the southern part of present-day Romania, The Impaler's Wallachia, which was an independent principality back then, in the 15th century, nor does he reach the Castle of Bran, which is popularly known as "Dracula's Castle". Besides, Dracula is a Count, not a ruling prince.

Harker, one of the centres of consciousness, or focalizers in Stoker's novel is jotting down in his diary an experience of the frontier, a rite of passage from one type of civilization to another: [....] leaving the West and entering the East; the most western of splendid bridges over the Danube, which is here of noble width and depth, took us among the traditions of Turkish rule (Stoker 1897, 2).

Dracula's castle is "on the borders of three states, Transylvania, Moldavia, and Bukovina" (*Ibid*), on the Bogo Pass, which the castle's owner is jealously guarding, insinuating, for instance, before the driver of the coach, that he had tried to take his English guest further on into Bukovina. The count resembles one of those Marcher Lords or margraves who were making a fortune guarding borders. Bogo Pass is based upon the Eastern border of the former Holy Roman Empire. The notion of 'frontier' is so much emphasized that it is worth a more attentive look.

Austria was viewed as a mark: *Marchia Orientalis*, the "eastern borderland", or the eastern outpost of the Holy Roman Empire, separating it from the lands inhabited by Székelys, Magyars and Slavs. In the popular imagination, the former had probably attracted to themselves the warrior-like reputation of the marcher lords through whom Otto had managed to expand his empire eastwards (Schutz 2010, 61).

The Székelys derive their name from a Hungarian expression meaning "frontier guards" and were regarded as the finest warriors of medieval Transylvania. The Székely territories came under the leadership of the Count of Székelys (Latin: *Comes Siculorum*), initially a royal appointee from the non-Székely Hungarian nobility who was defacto a margrave; from the fifteenth century onward, the Voivodes of Transylvania held the office themselves ([en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ Székelys](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Székelys)).

Dracula's name was known in the Middle Ages to have derived from that of a monarchical chivalric order, *Ordo Dragonis*, of which The Impaler's father, Vlad II, had been a member. The Order, whose emblem was a crossed serpent, was founded in 1408 by Sigismund, King of Hungary (1387-1437) and later Holy Roman Emperor (1433-1437). In the book, Dracula is mostly feared on the eve of Saint George, the patron saint of the Order of the Garter, which had probably served Sigismund as a model.

The sword of the Order is carved with the mythical pattern of The Tree of Life, as represented in Magyar mythology. The list opens with Stephanus despoth,

dominus Rasciae, and Stefan Lazarević, Serbian Prince and Despot, including also Vlad II Dracul, Prince of Wallachia. The nickname (surname) “Despot” is suggestive of that ancient heritage of oppressive ‘Herrschaft’ (lordship) which could still be felt in Austria in Stoker’s time.

By contrast, Harker is coming from a civilization which seems to have discarded strict hierarchies and hegemonies. The picture of the peaceful and loving bourgeois family is pitted against the autocratic society of the East, where commoners speak beneath their breath, look aside to avoid disquieting questions or critical remarks about “Herren”. The hegemonic structure is everywhere present. Harker vanishes behind his collective representation as a statutory class: the “English Herr”. He puts up at the Hotel Royale in BudaPest and at the Crown Hotel in Bistriz. That whole portion of land was a Crown Hotel in a metaphoric sense as well, because a lot of ethnic groups – Szekelys, Magyars, Germans, Czechs, Slovaks ... – were mingling the threads of their lives here. This cosmopolitan society had been created by Empress Catherine as part of an imperial design: she had invited ethnic groups of various provenance to come over, at the state’s expense, and settle the area between the western border and River Volga.

Dracula says his kin descended from the Huns, whose migrations had presumably included the North of Europe (Iceland, Scandinavia). His “racial autobiography” is actually one steeped in Magyar mythology. It appears that his kin had sprung from one of Nimrod’s sons, Hunor, being distinct from the Magyars claiming descent from Magor. This legend, which established a link between Huns and Magyars, similar to Geoffrey of Monmouth’s dynastic succession of Aeneas, Brut and Aurelius Ambrosius, was concocted by Simon Késai in *Gesta Ungarorum* (1282-85), and used by Hungarians as a legitimating *translatio imperii* or foundational narrative. As a member of the newly emerged professional classes, has Harker documented his prospective journey in the British Museum, as the novelist himself had done, and it is worth noting that he does not include Dracula among the “Wallachs, who are the descendants of the Dacians”, or, later, among the Romanians on the return ship (“Catherine the Great”), who claim desperately that the box in which Dracula is lying be cast overboard. He is very precise about his destination: “east, and Szekelys in the East and North. I am going among the latter [the Szekelys], who claim to be descended from Attila and the Huns” (Stoker 1897, 4).

Historians, generally, claim the opposite, namely that the Szekelys were Hungarians too, of the first migration, dispatched to the east to guard the frontier, who got alienated from their kinsmen because of their isolation in the mountains. Be it as it may, Stoker constructed his character according to the superstitious spirit of the place, that is, in mythological garb. As he is trying to get information concerning his client, Harker sees people crossing themselves anxiously, looking embarrassed or frightened. They call the Count “Ordog” and the top of the mountain “Isten szek!” – ‘God’s seat!’.

In Magyar mythology, Isten, God, creates the world with the help of Satan, or Ordog. Dracula also speaks about a race begotten by the Devil on his mother

in the desert. The Magyar creation myth does indeed mention the generational role of Satan as well as of Mother God, the other major divinity, the God of War, being the very ditty that controls Dracula all the time, spurring his warrior-like instincts.

God's seat is the upper part of the Tree of Life, which is also present in Norse mythology: the Yggdresil, the gigantic tree of Norse cosmology, or the Celtic Tree of Life in *The Book of Kells*.

Such analogies between the eastward and the westward voyages of Dracula are actually more numerous. Whitby was the site of the religious competition between the rites of the Church of Rome and those of the local Celtic monks. The 664 Synod allowed the former to suppress the latter. Bukovina lies at the other end of the Holy Roman Empire bordering the rising Russian power. The ship taking Dracula to England is significantly named after Demeter, the great earth goddess, related through her daughter to the underworld. The gate of entry is Whitby, whose abbey is fabled to be hiding the body of a maid immured in its walls, as is a certain Petrof Skinsky, similarly reported to have been buried in the cemetery walls of the St. Peter church in the East (Galatz). The ship named after Empress Catherine the Great with her expansionist, imperial plans, brings back home the New Evil (De Ville) of reverse colonization. The martyred founder of the Western Christian church (St. Peter) dies symbolically in the body of another martyr in the East. It is as if Yeats' two temporal gyres matching order and disorder were here being spatialized, emptying into each other.

Vampires and ... Mitteleuropa Politics

With Wilhelm Wundt, the vampire emerged from the mists of mythology being packed and offered up as an object lesson for anthropology and political philosophy.

Dracula takes Harker back to the very roots of his mythical past. His place looks as if nothing had happened since *illo tempore*, when Hunor and Magor, the flounders of the Hun race were hunting the white stag. Dracula, who welcomes him with disparaging words ("you dwellers in the city cannot enter into the feelings of the hunter"), appears like the ghost to Wittenberg-schooled Haratio in *Hamlet* (I/1): "A mote it is to trouble the mind's eye".

The portrait of Stoker's vampire follows Wundt's *Ethics à la lettre*, as we can conclude from a parallel reading of Wundt and Stoker: Death, for instance, is the beginning of a voyage (*Meerfahrt*) to the Isle of the souls in the west, following the journey of the sun. Its rise and setting are also the only moments when Mina is free from the undead soul's grip. The undead are visible to the eye but they lack bodily substance, and therefore cast no mirror images.

In both texts, we encounter the primitive mind's sense of the community through blood ties, revived in the rites of certain modern brotherhoods, combined with the compulsive need for revenge – *Blutrache*/ blood revenge – even when

the descendants were in no way involved in their forefathers' wars. The system of fights and retribution (Wundt 1892) originates in the belief in the judgment of the dead by Rhadamanthos.

Dracula is a telling example of what Wundt calls "Selbstregulation egoistischer Triebe" (the self-regulation of the selfish tribe) [Wundt 1892, 210-11].

Identity in the land hosting Harker boils down to being positioned within the master-servant class system. Hegemony, demanded by Wundt's egotistic despot of Asian extract, is three times mentioned in the phrase used by the driver of the antiquated caleche (Dracula in disguise) in reference to the owner of the castle on the border: "mein Herr, and my master the Count".

In the class society based on hierarchy and hegemony, all the subjects are absorbed into the body of the boyar or master. The others only possess a mandated or participatory identity: In his speaking of things and people, and especially of battles, he spoke as if he had been present at them all. This he afterwards explained by saying that to a Boyar the pride of his house and name is his own pride, that their glory is his glory, that their fate is his fate. Whenever he spoke of his house he always said 'we', and spoke almost in the plural, like a king speaking. I wish I could put down all he said exactly as he said it, for to me it was most fascinating. It seemed to have in it a whole history of the country (Stoker 1897, 52).

An attentive reader will notice, however, that Dracula is not speaking of biological but moral kinship. He does claim kinship, counter to historical truth, with the "Ugrig tribe which had borne down from Iceland the fighting spirit of Thor and Woden", probably because that was just one of "other races" which shared with the Szekelys the disposition to fight like lions "for lordship". And yet the Hun and the Woden descent were related through what Benjamin Constant had relatively recently qualified as the "ancient spirit of conquest and usurpation" (*De l'Esprit De Conquete et L'Usurpation*, 1813).

To the republic/ monarchy polarity, cutting across centuries, Constant opposed an evolutionary model grounded in the ancient/modern spirit dyad. Whereas "our freedom must consist of peaceful enjoyment and private independence", "the system [...] of ancient liberty demands that the citizens should be entirely subjected in order for the nation to be sovereign, and that the individual should be enslaved for the people to be free" (Constant 1819, 10-11). In Harker's world, "there are no slaves but almost everybody must earn a living through work" (*Ibid.*), Mina, for instance, is learning shorthand to be able to assist her husband's work, whereas Dracula, in the speech which he deems fit to gratify his guest and prospective victim with, unfolds the whole array of the ancient spirit's warlike spirit, which had probably inspired Wundt's own distinction between the Eudemonismus of creative modern man and the destructive energy of murderous atavism. Harker is the typical citizen of a commercial society "qui apprécie tout par l'utilité", open to a life of travels and exchanges of goods, and indifferent to the "sterile glory of the military spirit" (Constant 1813, 11). On the contrary, Dracula belongs to a "military race whose victory is associated with glorious renown

going far beyond their existence on earth” (Constant 1819, 13). While Harker is collecting recipes in search of civilization’s domestic delights, the Szekelys have lived “from battle to battle”, enjoying only the constant pleasure of vanquishing the enemy” (Constant 1819, 19). Unlike the modern company in the novel, saving their society from the intruder in order to be able to enjoy in the future their leisurely and free lives, Dracula is one of Constant’s undead, living both outside time and outside the European civilization, playing on the “loterie de plaisir et de mort” (Constant 1813, 20). Dracula’s person is the locus of a paradoxical mix of brutality and refinement of manners, of extreme violence and greed (*Ibid.*), the vampire coveting the improvements of the West he hates and despises.

The Szekelys and the Northern warrior bands were superior races, because they were master souls. Dracula feels closer to the Berserkers of the Norse mythology, fighting like mad dogs, or rather wolves, than to his mythical Scythian ancestry: old witches, who, expelled from Scythia had mated with the devils in the desert” (Stoker 1897, 53), or to the races with which the Szekelys have been associated by historians: “the Magyar, the Lombard, the Avar, the Bulgar, or the Turk” (*Ibid.*). Instead, he acknowledges no other connection with the Magyars except for a contractual, military one: And when the Hungarian flood swept eastward, the Székelys were claimed as kindred by the victorious Magyars, and to us for centuries was trusted the guarding of the frontier of Turkeyland (Stoker 1897, 54).

The next event he mentions seems to be the admission of Vlad II into the *Ordo Draconis*. He alone had been chosen out of the four nations that had poured into that territory – Magyars, Germans, Transylvanians and Székelys – to receive the ceremonial sword steeped into the dragon’s blood: Who more gladly than we throughout the Four Nations received the ‘bloody sword,’ or at its warlike call flocked quicker to the standard of the King? (*Ibid.*)

The following passage alludes to an episode of The Impaler’s wars against the Ottoman rule and to his betrayal by his brother, Prince Radu the Beautiful: Who was it but one of my own race who as Voivode crossed the Danube and beat the Turk on his own ground? This was a Dracula indeed! Woe was it that his own unworthy brother, when he had fallen, sold his people to the Turk and brought the shame of slavery on them! (*Ibid.*)

Dracula is not a raced body (biological identity), but the very effigy of the warlike spirit (“their heart’s blood, their brains, and their swords”) haunting the people of the present, unheroic age, and feeling nostalgic about the “warlike days” which are no more.

Wundt mentions two matrices which may serve for a classification of moral types: Christian, preaching forgiveness, and the Vedanta philosophy, urging retaliation. The Count belongs to the latter. The value of a personality is relative to society’s corporate body, Wundt says, while the Count is leaving scorched ground under the master’s feet: They said that he thought only of himself. Bah! What good are peasants without a leader? Where ends the war without a brain and heart to conduct it? (Stoker 1897, 56).

Unlike Dracula, Wilhelmina is ready to sacrifice her life for the common good. It is not just her family that concerns her, but the safety of the whole of mankind, or, as Wundt puts it, personal dedication to the good of all (Wundt 1892, 235). “Egoismus”, the pursuit of personal happiness, is set over and against “Eudämonismus”, a contribution to the progress of the civil society, in the form of Friendship, Hospitality and care for the sick. The Asian Despot, Wundt says, will ask a servant to taste his food for fear it might be poisoned. The other may very well die.

On the contrary, the holy circle that saves the champions of the Good in the end unites the generous host (Arthur), the caring physician (Seward), and the true friend Van Helsing, running to their rescue. The engineering of social life was rallying both scientists and humanists under the banner of the Battle for Culture against militarism and nationalism.

Europeans were divided over dangerous versions of nationalism: Pan-Germans, Russian Pan-Slav agents, Italian irredentists or German politicians planning to take back the German territories into which Russia had extended following the imperialist designs of Catherine the Great (J. Frank 1975, 380). Bismarck was trying, which he succeeded for a while, to divert public attention from the revisionist politics of the ambitious (the forces of Ultramontanism, especially their feudalist and Slav allies” (Hayes 1994, 275), unfolding his plans for a common customs frontier and common market economic integration. By promoting a practical morality of allegiance to the state rather than to antiquated notions of hegemony and vassalage, and by prioritising the cosmopolitan exchange of cultural goods over notions of racial identity, Wilhelm Wundt and Bram Stoker contributed in their fictional/non-fictional ways to a program of universal rather than individual progress.

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