

UDK BROJEVI: 821.111(417).09-31 Стокер Б. ; 821.09(091)(4-11)
ID BROJ: 179517196

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STRAINING THE LIMITS OF INTERPRETATION: BRAM STOKER'S *DRACULA* AND ITS EASTERN EUROPEAN CONTEXTS

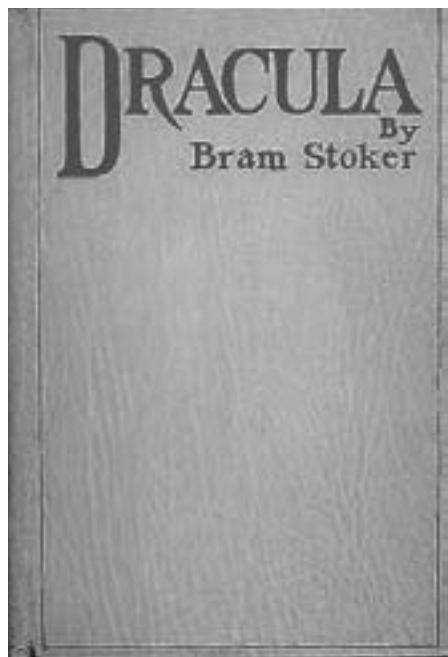
As the indisputably “canonical” text of late Victorian (and later) vampire fiction, Bram Stoker’s novel *Dracula* has decidedly benefited from the collapse of traditional standards of “literariness” and the opening up of literary criticism to wider domains of critical writing. The novel, as a consequence, has generated a phenomenal number of readings. This has been attributed to, among other things, “the uncanny ability of its central figure to call forth a diverse and even mutually contradictory set of symbolic associations”.¹ Behind *Dracula*’s “uncanny” versatility, we can detect the “aggregate” nature of his monstrosity, which thriftily “condense[s] many [negative] traits into one [Gothic] body”.² On the whole, the book’s interpreters have tended to “consume” that monstrosity through hermeneutic models evoking wide and symbolically resonant areas such as sexuality. Writing in the early 1990s, Ken Gelder singled out the sexual theme as the central topic of the novel’s critical readings.³

Significantly, during the twentieth century’s closing decade, politics became a prominent element in interpretations of *Dracula*, without, however, completely replacing sexuality. By and large, political “concretizations” of Stoker’s text tend to engage with three major themes: Ireland, the British Empire, and Eastern Europe as perceived by the western gaze. Needless to say, there are numerous thematic overlaps in/between individual critical readings. This essay will examine some interpretations belonging to the third category before presenting a reading that similarly foregrounds the text’s engagement with Eastern Europe.

Recent critical gazes on *Dracula*: from reading to re-writing

Interpretations highlighting *Dracula*’s Eastern European identity and the significance of the novel’s Transylvanian setting exemplify a well-established tendency in postmodern critical writing to problematize the legitimacy and “naturalness” of traditional conceptual frameworks by recovering forgotten or repressed contexts, (re)discovering intertextual links, and thus accounting for the cultural work that texts do. The majority of those readings are likewise linked, in varying degrees, to the tremendous political changes that occurred in Eastern and Central Europe in 1989 and in the 1990s: the collapse of repressive communist regimes, the dismantlement of the “Eastern bloc,” and the disintegration of Yugoslavia. One of the consequences of the po-

litical shifts has been the re-invention of the cultural-symbolic map of Europe through the revival of pre-WWII patterns of perception of the “old” continent’s regions. Thus, military conflicts in Yugoslavia and general economic instability in post-communist South Eastern Europe led to the reemergence of the Balkans as a geopolitical metaphor for backwardness, barbarism, and tribalism.⁴ In the process, Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* was repeatedly invoked both in western commentaries on the region and in work by local intellectuals. It is my intention here to examine some of the key aspects of the Gothic text’s extensive application to South Eastern Europe and its discontents.⁵ To my mind, this critical practice poses methodological questions about the limits (and limitations) of the interpretation of literary *œuvres* and of their contextualization in historical and geographical terms. Things are further complicated by the symptomatic presence of factual errors and inaccurate statements in some of the readings under consideration, which later interpreters have carelessly reproduced in their own work.



DRACULA, THE COVER PAGE OF THE FIRST EDITION, 1897

My examination starts with Stephen Arata’s 1990 essay “The Occidental Tourist: *Dracula* and the Anxiety of Reverse Colonization”.⁶ This text does not explicitly identify the novel’s setting as Balkan, but it may be said to have paved the way for later *Balkanizing* readings. I also look at Vesna Goldsworthy’s section on *Dracula* in *Inventing Ruritania: The Imperialism of the Imagination* (1998), two articles from the journal *Connotations* (1999–2001) by Eleni Condouriotis and Carol A. Senf respectively, and Tomislav Z. Longinović’s highly symptomatic application of the book to the Balkan condition.

Stephen D. Arata’s essay exemplifies the thematic overlap I mentioned earlier. It is as much concerned with issues of Empire and imperialism as with the novel’s Eastern European (anti)hero and setting. The author begins by stressing the importance of situating late nineteenth-century Gothic narratives such as *Dracula* in “the historical context in which these works were written and originally read”.⁷ Stoker’s text, in his opinion, “enacts the period’s most important and pervasive narrative of decline, a narrative of reverse colonization”.⁸ He distinguishes between stories of “reverse colonization,” which involve infiltration by “primitive forces [...] originat[ing] outside the civilized world,” such as in H. Rider Haggard’s *She* (1887), and “invasion scare” or “dynamite novels” premised on the rivalry between Britain and other “Great Powers” or on “articulat[ing] a middle-class fear [...] of foreign revolutionaries [...] and of [the] industrial underclass”.⁹ In both cases, privileged imperial space is threatened and/or polluted by the plans and/or actual presence of undesirable aliens.

The critic perceptively links Stoker’s novel to the genre of travel writing, itself a vehicle for cultural and political commentary. However, he does not, I feel, base his interpretation of the text’s Transylvanian setting on sound historical research. For example, Arata claims that the setting was “part of the vexed ‘Eastern Question’ that so obsessed British foreign policy in the

1880s and '90s"¹⁰ but fails to explain how Transylvania as an eastern province of the Habsburg Empire is related to a series of events that primarily had to do with the political destiny of Ottoman Turkey and its successor states.¹¹ As it happens, there *was* a connection: the Habsburg government feared that the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire and its replacement by smaller nation states might provide a stimulus for nationalism in its own multiethnic provinces and thus bring about the demise of Austria-Hungary. Transylvania was one of those provinces, and its "polyracial character"¹² is foregrounded in Stoker's novel, as is the fact that German, the Empire's official language, is the main vehicle of communication between the local people and Jonathan Harker.¹³ There is no indication in *Dracula*, though, that any particular ethnic group in the province is contemplating secession from Austria-Hungary. To be sure, Arata's vague reference to the "Eastern Question" only serves to stress Transylvania's vaguely *Oriental* location, and this is a point to which I will return in my commentary on Senf's article.

Moreover, Arata's argument that Transylvania is an appropriate setting for Stoker's vampiric fantasy because of its multiethnic diversity is supported by a passage from Charles Boner's 1865 travelogue *Transylvania; Its Products and Its People*, which refers to the Habsburg capital of Vienna rather than to the Empire's eastern province.¹⁴ While the point about the lack of ethnic uniformity in the region is valid, and Stoker's text certainly verifies the connection between vampiric transgression and "polyracial" chaos, Arata's questionable accuracy and his offhand treatment of a source, which he himself identifies as "the standard Victorian work on [Transylvania],"¹⁵ are serious flaws that detract from the value of his arguments. Significantly, in his 1994 commentary on the cultural symbolism of vampiric fiction and film, Ken Gelder negligently reproduced Arata's misreading of Boner's *Transylvania*.¹⁶

Notwithstanding its inaccuracies, "The Occidental Tourist" is full of insights, such as Arata's observation on *Dracula*'s Occidentalism, which is of paramount importance as a hermeneutic element that alerts us to the Count's cultural hybridity.¹⁷ Most of the author's critical apparatus comes from postcolonial theory, which he successfully applies to a *part* of the ambiguous terrain of South Eastern Europe. As was remarked above, Arata does not attempt to extend his reasoning to the rest of the region. Vesna Goldsworthy, however, has aptly reminded us that South Eastern Europe did not experience "conventional" colonial domination by the West but was nonetheless subjected to "the imperialism of [its] imagination," which turned parts of it into "exotic back-drop[s] in travelogues and tales of romance, adventure and political intrigue".¹⁸ The 1990s witnessed the trend to theorize South Eastern Europe via postcolonial studies. In the process, *Dracula* turned into a "crucial Balkan metaphor"¹⁹ epitomizing western exclusion of the region and its denizens from Europe "proper".

Goldsworthy's reading, which reiterates Arata's emphasis on the Count's Occidentalism, has greatly contributed to the establishment of this tendency. In all fairness, however, it should be stressed that she herself meticulously qualifies *Dracula*'s (and *Dracula*'s) "Balkanness" in her *Inventing Ruritania*. Goldsworthy relates Stoker's novel to "a gradual [...] move [within European Gothic writing] towards a Balkan setting" as "places in Italy and Spain [became] too familiar to function as successful Gothic locales".²⁰ The critic emphasizes the "imaginary" quality of *Dracula*'s Transylvanian setting²¹ and its author's syncretistic labor in "piec[ing] together an exotic historical amalgam" of a variety of textual sources.²² Goldsworthy admits that not all of Stoker's sources "deal[t] with the Balkans".²³ On the basis of this, one may well ask if the novel's setting really stands in a relation of symbolic synonymy to the Balkans, as is suggested by the title of Goldsworthy's chapter, "*The Balkans in Popular Fiction*" (my emphasis). In the manner of the *Ruritania* of her book's title, *Dracula*'s setting appears to fit other, notably *Central European*, localities as well.²⁴

Events in former Yugoslavia led to a deepening of the sense of crisis in Europe. What was at stake was the conventional sense of *Europeanness* itself. As violence escalated, references were repeatedly made to the Ottoman past of Yugoslavia and, indeed, the whole of South Eastern Europe, thus problematizing the myth of the “old” continent’s tradition of dominant Christianity. Bram Stoker’s text was drawn into the ongoing debates, and scholars from South Eastern Europe especially tended to equate its resident demon with the historical figure of Vlad Țepeș.² Eleni Condouriotis’s “*Dracula* and the Idea of Europe” exemplifies this problematic historicizing. She draws attention to a “preoccupation in the novel with [the] repressing [of] historical discourse” and goes on to argue that the repression is “selective” and “target[s] the Ottoman history of Eastern Europe”.²⁶ Moreover, in her view, the “delegitimation” of that area of European history happened at a time “when the nations newly emerging from Ottoman rule challenged the idea of Europe that had been defined through the Concert of Europe”²⁷ in the early nineteenth century. Condouriotis’s reading is thus closely linked to the Eastern Question. She does not merely mention this tangled network of historical events but attempts to examine its political implications for the British Empire and the “old” continent as a whole.

Condouriotis is at her most perceptive when she alerts us to the absence from Stoker’s novel of specific references to what must have been recent European history for the author and his contemporaries, such as the 1876 Bosnian and Bulgarian atrocities and the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–78 and its political aftermath. In this respect, *Dracula* markedly differs from Stoker’s later Balkan fantasy, *The Lady of the Shroud* (1908), which is by far more sensitive to current history and politics. However, it is difficult to accept Condouriotis’s claim that “Stoker’s reinvention of the historical figure [of Vlad Țepeș] [was] driven by his desire to disclaim [. . .] medieval, Christian Europe, reemerging into modernity, monstrously out of date”.²⁸ Further on, she maintains that since it had become “politically untenable” for Eastern Europe to be left to “linger behind the ‘Iron Curtain’ of the Ottoman Empire,” it had to be “refigured” and “brought under the cultural influence of Western Europe [. . .] without the traces of Ottomanization”.²⁹ While such a scenario may appear plausible within the context of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Balkan cultural history, there is little in Stoker’s novel to support it.³⁰ *Dracula* does refer to his epic battles with the Turks but mostly represents them as evidence of his superior strength and courage. He does not portray himself as a champion of Christianity so much, despite a brief reference to “the shame of Cassova”, i.e. Kosovo, but rather as a powerful warrior matching his might against that of the Turks. For Condouriotis, he is “an Ottomanized European” and “a blasphemous Christian hero”.³¹ Indeed, both South Eastern European history and folklore preserve the memory of such “impure” figures, and the historical Vlad Țepeș may well have been one of them.³ Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*, though, is not cast in such a role. Nor is there any ground for linking him to the Ottoman reformer Abdul Aziz, who was the Empire’s 32nd *Sultan* (not its *Grand Vizier*, as Condouriotis claims³) and ruled between 1861 and 1876.³⁴

Condouriotis’s thoughts on *Dracula* (and *Dracula*) are characterized by ingenuity and originality. All the same, one wonders whether what she presents is not, after all, a *re-writing* of the novel to fit the standards of latter-day historiography of the Balkans rather than a critical *reading* of it. Bram Stoker’s text does relate to “the idea of Europe” in significant ways, but to uncover some of those, we need to adopt a more precise historicizing approach to it and its literary contexts, as well as to take into account *Dracula*’s “aggregate” monstrosity. As was pointed out above, the text’s monster calls up a wide range of associations, and anchoring him firmly in a particular historical area invariably produces an impoverishing effect.

In her response to "Dracula and the Idea of Europe," Carol A. Senf commends Condouriotis for drawing attention to "the East" as "a region [sic] that the West continues to ignore at its peril".³⁵ She identifies Arata as the first critic to refer to the Eastern Question but offers no comment on the absence of proper historical contextualization in his reading. Senf is right in stressing the "mysteriousness" of the Eastern Europe that Stoker presents in *Dracula* and the fact that it is "more mythic than real".³⁶ What she fails to take into account, however, is that the mythologizing that went into producing the novel's Transylvania is meaningful and needs to be analyzed further. In fact, "the Idea of Europe" of Condouriotis's title has a lot to do with that transformation of observed and represented reality into myth.

Senf does not accept the parallel Condouriotis makes between *Dracula* and Abdul Aziz but is not bothered by the historical figure's faulty identification as *Grand Vizier*.³⁷ I find this transference of unverified references troubling (cf. Gelder's reproduction of Arata's mistake). In my view, it indicates that despite the enduring critical favor for (new) historicism, learned commentators do not always pay sufficient attention to sources and facts. Moreover, Senf's elision of differences between Transylvania and the larger geographical terrain of Eastern Europe (or "the East," as she terms it) implies that such differences for her are negligible. The implication may not be intentional, but that is likewise culturally meaningful.

Tomislav Longinović's "Vampires Like Us: Gothic Imaginary and 'the serbs' [sic]" identifies *Dracula* as a "narrative elaboration of past European traumas".³ Like Condouriotis, the author assumes that the novel's vampire is identical with "Vlad Dracul Tzepesh [sic]" and that Stoker's text is part of an attempt to "erase" the area of Europe's past marked by "the arbitrariness of Islamic rule".³⁹ Overall, the article is an extended meditation on South Eastern Europe's historically determined victimization, by the West no less than by the Ottoman Orient. In the process, Longinović transforms memorable episodes from *Dracula* into allegories of the West's incomprehension of the Balkan condition or of Balkan intellectuals' willful suppression of ultra-nationalism and other morally unacceptable aspects of their native legacy. The allegorizing strategy is illustrated by passages such as the following: "Not unlike the vampire, the West cannot see its own reflection in the mirror of Balkan temporality, and it buries its fears of intrusion from the East in the dark chambers of Dracula's castle. Intellectuals in "Other" Europe, meanwhile, were always torn between the mirror of the West and their own "nativist" tendencies. Also like the reflection of the Transylvanian count, the "nativist" drives of the nationalist elites were better obscured and buried deep in the cellars of medieval castles".⁴

Longinović thus re-writes Bram Stoker's text to make it accommodate his own ideas on global (in)justice. Significantly, he tries to wring compassion for "the unfortunate count, who is formed by the colonial gaze of the West which senses the presence of its own bloodthirsty past reflected in [...] the vampiric imagination".⁴¹ This interpretive manoeuvre brings the author fairly close to Prince Vlad's representation in Coppola's 1992 film, which similarly stresses the Eastern European (anti)hero's victimization and aims at invoking empathy—if not sympathy—for him.⁴² From Longinović's perspective, empathy for the Count should help the international critical audience, for whom his essay is intended, to gain a historically informed understanding of the Balkan situation and the ideological uses of vampirism and thus overcome its media-induced anti-Serb prejudices.

"Balkanizing" re-writings of Bram Stoker's novel and its central character, such as Longinović's, tend to repeat a conflationist interpretive manoeuvre, which is to be found in some of the region's western representations as well. The manoeuvre in question has to do with "the issue of adjacency by which the neighboring lands of [South] Eastern Europe [are] associated"

and which is “dramatized to suggest a sort of [shared] geographical destiny”.⁴³ As a result, territories in the region are assumed to be largely interchangeable and turn into “Balkan everycountries”.⁴⁴ While later popular fiction and film were to make use of Dracula (and of *Dracula*) in just this way, Bram Stoker did not. Therefore, critical representations of “the king vampire” as an all-Balkan (anti)hero do not so much as unmask western denigration of the region as they do perpetuate the tendency to erase distinctions and facilitate overgeneralizations about its different parts.

On the other hand, “Balkanizing” interpretations attempt to fill in certain “gaps” in Stoker’s text. Thus, a representation of Dracula as a champion of the Christian cause might well explain his desire to “sate his lust for blood” among London’s “teeming millions” as a reaction to Britain’s betrayal of that cause at, for instance, the 1878 Congress of Berlin.⁴⁵ The British delegation at the Congress favored the continued Ottoman presence in Europe and thwarted Russia’s plans for the establishment of a larger Bulgarian state in the Balkans. However, it is also possible to account for Dracula’s apparently unmotivated desire for “revenge” on his western opponents by concentrating on his literary antecedents as a Gothic villain of extraordinary malignancy. Apart from being based on presumptions about political views that Bram Stoker never expressed, interpretations that seek to read specific historical references into a text that is reticent about recent history and politics in South Eastern Europe invariably limit its suggestiveness.

Overall, *Dracula* focuses on the diagnosis and eradication of a highly objectionable form of Eastern European monstrosity by a group of westerners ironically identified by Christopher Craft as “the Crew of Light”.⁴⁶ As we saw, contextualizing the clash between the Crew and their supernatural opponent can be a tricky proposition insofar as some of the frameworks provided by recovered/uncovered contexts can reduce the text’s ideological complexity to a cluster of privileged meanings congruent with the critic’s own political and/or ethical agenda. Despite those and other perils of interpretation, I propose to recover yet another Eastern European context for Stoker’s novel.

Viewing *Dracula* through terrorist spectacles

The context in question is provided by what may be termed late nineteenth-century British and American *terrorist fiction*. The term was not used at the time but seems nonetheless an appropriate descriptor for a popular literary subgenre, which represented transgressive figures from Eastern Europe that successfully infiltrated key areas of western life.⁴⁷ The three novels I have selected for comparison with *Dracula* are Joseph Hatton’s *By Order of the Czar. The Tragic Story of Anna Klostock, Queen of the Ghetto* (1890), Richard Henry Savage’s *My Official Wife* (1891), and L. T. Meade’s *The Siren* (1898). In singling them out for discussion, I am following Arata’s advice of situating *Dracula* in “the historical context in which it was written and originally read.” Unlike the text’s “Balkanizing” interpreters, I am positioning my reading from within a predominantly *literary* context, albeit one with distinct *political* implications.

The political implications in question are closely bound up with “a distinct constellation of [...] fears”⁴⁸ and anxieties in the fin-de-siècle Anglo-American public sphere.⁴⁹ Despite British and U.S. traditions of isolationism, readers on both sides of the Atlantic could no longer feel safe from political violence that appeared to be ubiquitous. The British directly experienced the Fenian bombing campaign of 1884-85 that was known to have been planned and financed in America. More to the point, both Britons and Americans were aware of acts of terrorism taking place in continental Europe, such as the 1880 assassination of the Russian Tsar Alexander II. Moreover, fears and anxieties were fueled by the rapidity with which political violence was cov-

ered by the international media. Throughout the nineteenth century, communications had developed at an amazing speed. Apart from the "wide network of railways, steamers and telegraph lines"⁵⁰ binding all Europe together, the "old" and "new" worlds were finally joined in 1866 via a telegraph cable that was laid across the bottom of the Atlantic Ocean. The existing state of affairs tended to produce an incipient *global consciousness* as traditional contrasts between *home* and *abroad*, relative safety and unavoidable danger, were increasingly problematized.

Both Stoker's novel and these three works of terrorist fiction are preoccupied with boundaries and their transgression. This may be related, *inter alia*, to what was perceived, in the 1880s and 1890s, as an *influx* of Eastern Europeans into the West and, specifically, into the industrial cities of Great Britain and of the United States. A considerable number of those immigrants were Jewish, who had to leave the Russian Empire on account of pogroms and discriminationist legislation following the assassination of Alexander II. However, there was also an exodus of Jews from Romania and Austria-Hungary.⁵¹ Not all immigrants were politically committed enemies of tsarism or any of the other repressive political regimes in continental Europe. One suspects that economic motives played a major role in the process of migration. While the press and popular fiction writers tended to be above all resentful of the crowds of economic migrants to Britain and the United States, they were fascinated by educated, upper-class political émigrés from Eastern Europe. Even a cursory look at the *Brooklyn Times*, *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, *The North American Review*, *The Atlantic Monthly*, and *The New Englander and Yale Review* reveals a focus on Russian Nihilism and "Cosmopolitan Anarchism",⁵² as well as on the role played in them by upper-crust rebels. Some of the articles that appeared in those American editions had previously been printed in the British press or were intended for a mixed Anglo-American readership.⁵³

Anxieties over the destiny of upper-class political émigrés and, generally speaking, the destiny of a world in which tyrannical foreign empires persecuted well-educated, cultured, and enlightened individuals found expression in fin-de-siècle works of terrorist fiction such as the three novels listed above. *By Order of the Czar* was inspired by an article that appeared in the *Brooklyn Times* in 1887 (see note 52), whereas *My Official Wife* was produced by a best-selling American author, but enjoyed considerable success in Europe.⁵⁴ *The Siren* was published a year after *Dracula*, thus proving that the preoccupation with the Eastern European presence in the West did not wane as the 1890s drew to a close.

All three novels focus on glamorous female terrorists who issue out of Eastern Europe, are filled with strong hatred of Russian autocracy and other forms of political repression, and introduce elements of chaos into the otherwise orderly lives of the westerners that they come into contact with. These politically committed *femmes fatales* are made particularly dangerous by the exceptional qualities they are portrayed as possessing: they are "excellent linguists",⁵⁵ are quite above average in intelligence, and manage to exercise self-control in the most stressful situations. The worldly American narrator of Richard Henry Savage's *My Official Wife* envies the poise of "the Nihilist who could write philosophy while handling a dynamite bomb".⁵⁶ Like the Occidental Count, the female "revolutionists" are represented as culturally hybrid figures insofar as they come from European regions assumed to be backward and primitive and are related "by blood" to their indigenes but have acquired the superior knowledge and accomplishments of the West. They are thus borderline characters positioned between Eastern Europe and the West. A major part of their power lies in their "mirroring back" of some of the West's key cultural and political practices.⁵⁷

Whether or not Stoker was familiar with terrorist fiction remains conjecture. However, he could not have avoided the numerous articles about Eastern European émigrés and immigrants

that the press poured out. That he disapproved of Nihilism and anarchism is borne out by the negative references to them in *The Lady of the Shroud*, whose Nordic superhero Rupert Sent Leger places them, together with the New Woman, among the incurable ills of modern civilization.⁵⁸ While I do not intend to impose a purely “revolutionist” identity on Dracula, I believe that there are meaningful parallels between him and the central figures of terrorist fiction. As I pointed out above, the novels’ terrorist (anti)heroines embodied anxieties about the destiny of the modern world. Physically attractive, highly talented, and well educated (though victimized by a tyrannical system), the female “revolutionists” invoked sympathy in the West, which, however, did not completely occlude their potential for sexual trouble and manipulation. These glamorous women were portrayed as both victims and victimizers insofar as they ruthlessly exploited the western men who fell under their spell. Western attitudes to them were therefore marked by strong ambivalence. Viewed within this context, Bram Stoker’s vampiric Count represents the dark side of those attitudes. He stands for the dangers posed by Eastern Europeans without any of the fascinating characteristics of the terrorist *femmes fatales*. A comparison between Dracula and the (anti)heroines of the novels listed above, along the lines of gender, sexuality and power, should bear out my inferences.

Commenting on ideologically determined social and racial hierarchies, William Ian Miller recognizes the facile tendency, in critical writing, to equate states of subordination with feminization.⁵⁹ He claims that this “gender model is better at explaining certain styles of hierarchy than others” and draws attention to the “threatening style[s] of masculinity” characteristic of some traditionally “low” groups whose “manner [. . .] reveal[s] the feminization of the men above them”.⁶⁰ Miller’s reasoning is partially relevant to the representations of gender relations in the four novels under discussion. However, those representations have little to do with some “threatening” form of masculinity but are instead characterized by a disruption of the conventional masculine / feminine binary. One of the consequences of the disruption is the effective humiliation of the novels’ upper-class western male characters. In some cases, their degradation takes the form of feminization but, as will be shown, in *Dracula*, it even goes beyond that, as the pillars of patriarchy are first likened to dead animals and then threatened with the imposition of a menial, animal-like identity in the future.

The central female characters of the three terrorist novels problematize conventional distinctions between femininity and masculinity. Anna Klostock of the eponymous novel, Marie Helene (*My Official Wife*) and Vera Nugent (*The Siren*) are all portrayed as glamorously beautiful women, whose femininity is irreparably flawed. Anna starts her career as a Nihilist by killing the Russian general who raped her and had her brutally flogged. The traces of the flogging are literally *written* on her body, which is disfigured by “deep ridges and welts, [. . .] angry patches of red, and weird daubs of gray”.⁶¹ Marie Helene, who is motivated by both hatred of Russian autocracy and a desire to revenge her Jewish mother’s humiliation and death at the hands of the Russians, always carries a “little bulldog revolver” which she threatens to use even upon the American narrator.⁶² Vera Nugent is exhorted by her Nihilist mentor, Countess Fedora, to follow the example of historically renowned “phallic” women such as Joan of Arc and Charlotte Corday.⁶³ Besides, as a “siren” she appeals sexually to both men and women.⁶⁴ An attractiveness that cuts across masculine / feminine gender lines is also characteristic of Marie Helene.⁶⁵

The gender indeterminacy of the three terrorists is represented as a function of their political involvement. They are contrasted with a number of “ordinary” British, American, and Russian women, whose femininity is not in any way problematic. What makes the terrorists particularly dangerous is the *feminizing* effect they have on the western men with whom they come into con-

tact. As a result, the westerners either perform acts that are conventionally gendered “feminine” or fail to assert their masculinity in situations that call for such an assertion. Thus, Anna Klostock’s British admirer, Philip Forsyth, faints when she reveals her disfigured back to him and to her fellow-conspirators.⁶⁶ Colonel Lenox, the American narrator of *My Official Wife*, is incapable of making love to Marie Helene when she offers herself to him.⁶⁷ His impotence is glossed over as a sign of his unswerving adherence to the gentlemanly code.⁶⁸ Vera Nugent openly admits that she possesses a fatal “power of fascination” which causes “victims to fall along the way”.⁶⁹ Her British cousin Frank, an officer in the elite Coldstream Guards, is one of the “victims” that she reduces to a state of quasi-feminine passivity. It is important to bear in mind that the three (anti)heroines do not merely embody the male fear of the feminine on which psychologists and psychoanalysts have so often commented.⁷⁰ Rather, they have an enervating, *feminizing* effect on upper- class western men because of their own gender indeterminacy, that is, because they are definitely not *feminine* women in the conventional sense.

Stoker’s vampire defies traditional cultural oppositions and hierarchies, but critics have been particularly attentive to his disruption of the masculine/feminine dichotomy. Despite the assumption that the novel’s villain is of the masculine gender, there are traits that link him to femininity and female power. His name, as Christopher Craft has reminded us, is as seductively misleading as Honoré de Balzac’s (and Roland Barthes’s) Sarrasine.⁷¹ It has been suggested that Dracula shares some of the attributes of Kali, the blood-drinking Mother Goddess of the Hindu pantheon.⁷² Anne Williams has further linked the monster to other terrible feminine figures, such as Circe and Hecate.⁷³ His resemblance to the savage goddesses of classical paganism should also account for his fear of garlic, a phallic, “spear-leek” plant that was considered to be displeasing to them.⁷⁴ However, an identification of the monster as a Terrible Mother is bound to be almost as problematic as his identification as a Terrible Father who must be killed by his sons (in this case, his western opponents led by Van Helsing) in accordance with the Freudian model of tribal survival. It should be noted that Dracula is demonic precisely because the gender polarities through which human civilization (really or supposedly) operates cannot be used to describe his “personality.” This lack of fixity is also signalled by his sexuality, which is non-phallic but penetrative, and thus definitely goes beyond the masculine/feminine binary.

Moreover, the Count possesses seemingly irrepressible barbaric vigor, which manifests itself in his ability to reproduce his monstrous self through the bodies of countless number of women. Significantly, his vampiric progeny inherits his gender indeterminacy, as is borne out by his three Transylvanian daughters/brides whose soft, red lips conceal sharp, penetrating teeth. In the context of the novel, Dracula’s unholy fecundity contrasts with the sexual lassitude of his western opponents. Only one of them, the Briton Jonathan Harker, proves capable of fathering a child. The other members of the Crew of Light are portrayed as childless.

Despite his paternity, Harker’s conduct is marked by numerous signs of feminization. Thus, in the course of his encounter with Dracula’s “voracious harem”,⁷⁵ he assumes an attitude of passive expectancy, which is conventionally stereotyped as “feminine.” After Harker’s return from Transylvania, Mina finds that “the very essence of [his] strength is gone” and remarks upon his “nervous fit[s]” and “lapse[s] into forgetfulness”. She comments also on his reaction to the rejuvenated Count in the following “emasculating” terms: “[t]he poor dear was evidently terrified at something—very greatly terrified; I do believe that if he had not had me to lean on and to support him he would have *sunk down*” (my emphasis). To an age obsessed with “race,” degeneration, and the fall of empires to the extent that the late Victorian period was, such “emas-culation” could appear as very disconcerting. While Dracula’s ability to prey upon British

women is an oblique comment on the growth of degenerative tendencies in Britain, Harker's feminization directly signals the decline of the nineteenth century's most powerful empire.

By contrast, Dracula's sexual voracity is closely bound up with his ambition for absolute conquest. The ambition is expressed in a speech addressed to the Crew of Light in which he taunts his opponents with their weakness: "You think to baffle me, you—with your pale faces all in a row, like sheep at a butcher's. You shall be sorry yet, each one of you! [. . .] My revenge is just begun! I spread it over centuries, and time is on my side. Your girls that you love so much are mine already; and through them you and others shall yet be mine— my creatures, to do my bidding and to be my jackals when I want to feed".

The Count first humiliates the Crew of Light by denying them a human status. He claims that they are "like sheep at a butcher's", that is, not even live animals but slaughtered ones hanging from the meat hooks and therefore reduced to mere "thingness." The comparison implies that Dracula himself is in a position of power: he is active, whereas the pale-faced westerners are passive and helpless. Through his superior sexual power, the Count has already deprived them of their "girls," but this is only the beginning of his domination over their world. Dracula does not aim at merely appropriating their territory or material wealth. He is determined on transforming everyone, irrespective of his/her gender, into a subservient "jackal" that would do his "bidding" and provide "food" for his boundless appetite(s). The vampire's "jackal" is the absolute antithesis of the sovereign individual of the liberal tradition. Whereas the self, envisioned by the liberal imagination, operates through free choice, Dracula's creatures would be incapable of proper action.⁷⁶ Their chief "virtue" would be absolute obedience. Their existence would be a function of the master's will. This is a terrifying vision of absolute unfreedom, which clearly anticipates Orwell's dystopias.

The manipulative *femmes fatales* of the terrorist novels already live in a world of unfreedom. They are opposed to Russian autocracy and its corrupt menials, on the one hand, but, on the other, together with their associates, enact scenarios that emphatically deny the value of human life and free choice. Marie Helene proclaims that her "life is [her] country's" and so is her "honor if need be".⁷⁷ When Vera Nugent questions the tasks that her Nihilist cell imposes upon her, she is cynically told that she is completely dispensable and her life is worthless: "[w]hat is one girl's life when we consider the millions who suffer?"⁷⁸ Total dedication to the cause motivates the female "revolutionists" in everything they do. Their condition is marked by a paradox: on the one hand, they appear to be "liberated" from the constraints of conventional femininity while, on the other, they enjoy fairly little freedom insofar as they are under the total control of the secret societies they belong to. These societies compel them to restrict the freedom of others through sexual seduction and manipulation, thus hoping to extend their own power over governments, empires, and the world at large. As a result, the female terrorists are fully comparable to Dracula's "jackals". They are the agents of a future dystopian state.

Both the vampiric Count and the female "revolutionists" pose grave dangers to British society's political and moral foundations. The four novels carry an unequivocally conservative message: to ward off further trouble, the Supermonster and the unruly women are to be incapacitated. Curiously, their incapacitation takes the form of gender fixing. Dracula is submitted to what Christopher Craft has ironically called "corrective penetration",⁷⁹ which involves the puncturing of the monster's heart with a sharp object such as a stake. The sexual implication of the act is obvious: it aims at fixing the vampire's gender as *feminine* and thus resolving the category crisis caused by his dangerous bending of the masculine/feminine binary. This is also a way for the members of the Crew of Light to reassert their repeatedly problematized masculinity and proclaim their dominant position.

The terrorist women are not staked though the heart, but they, too, are reduced to passivity or inaction, which are symbolically synonymous with “proper” femininity. Anna Klostock is arrested by the tsarist police and permanently exiled to Siberia. Marie Helene is drugged into unconsciousness to prevent her from shooting the Tsar. Vera Nugent commits suicide as she finds it impossible to murder her own father and assassinate the Tsar with bouquets of poisoned roses. Through the incapacitation of the female terrorists, patriarchal society re-establishes the masculine/feminine binary as the norm and, to all intents and purposes, precludes its further disruption.

Conclusion

The similarity in conflict resolution in all four novels does not signal transference of narrative elements from one text to another. Rather, it is indicative of “the constellation of fears” and anxieties I mentioned earlier. It does not matter much whether those fears and anxieties were caused by an exaggerated image of “reverse colonization” or by an equally exaggerated impression of the influx of Eastern Europeans into Great Britain and America. As Horkheimer and Adorno have demonstrated for anti-Semitism, hatred and resentment of the Other (unfortunately) provide fuel for the “ritual[s] of civilization”.⁸⁰ However, texts such as *Dracula* and the three terrorist novels discussed here do not simply enact civilizational rituals of hate and resentment, nor separate “native” from “foreign” once and for all. As Judith Halberstam has demonstrated, such texts are also concerned with their unavoidable proximity and with the consequent disappearance of the “purity of [national] heritage and lineage”.⁸¹ The disturbing Other may be removed or destroyed, but the trace of his/her presence remains. It is tempting to judge critical readings by the number of traces they have managed to recover/uncover by situating texts in different contexts and straining the limits of interpretation.

Endnotes:

This essay first appeared in *Post/modern Dracula: From Victorian Themes to Postmodern Praxis*, edited by John S. Bak (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2007).

¹ Michael Valdez Moses, “The Irish Vampire: *Dracula*, Parnell, and the Troubled Dreams of Nationhood”, *Journal x* 2.1 (1997), 68.

² Judith Halberstam, “Technologies of Monstrosity: Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*”, *Victorian Studies* 36.3 (Spring 1993), 334. I owe the idea of the novel’s “consumption” by its critics to Halberstam’s article.

³ Ken Gelder, *Reading the Vampire* (London: Routledge, 1994), 66.

⁴ On the “disappearance” of the Balkans from Europe’s mental map during the Cold War era, see Michael Haynes, “The Rhetoric of Economics: Cold War Representation of Development in the Balkans,” *The Balkans and the West: Constructing the European Other, 1945–2003*, ed. Andrew Hammond (Aldershot, England and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004), 26–30.

⁵ There is an ongoing controversy over the use of the terms “South Eastern Europe” and “Balkans.” For a lucid commentary on the terms and some of their contextual implications, see Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans* (London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1997). In this chapter, I am going to use both terms interchangeably.

⁶ Stephen D. Arata, “The Occidental Tourist: *Dracula* and the Anxiety of Reverse Colonization,” *Victorian Studies* 33 (1990), 621–45. The essay was subsequently included in Arata’s book *Fictions of Loss in the Victorian Fin de Siecle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996). All my references are to the earlier version of the text.

⁷ Stephen Arata 621.

⁸ Stephen Arata 623.

⁹ Stephen Arata 623-24.

¹⁰ Stephen Arata 627.

¹¹ For commentary on the "Eastern Question", see Barbara Jelavich, *History of the Balkans*, 2 vols. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983). By the 1890s, the "Eastern Question" had gained new complexity as the Ottoman Empire's successor states laid claims to territories that either remained under Turkish rule or were governed by Austria-Hungary.

¹² Stephen Arata 628.

¹³ Cf. "I found my smattering of German very useful here; indeed, I don't know how I should be able to get on without it" (D 9).

¹⁴ Charles Boner, *Transylvania; Its Products and Its Peoples* (London: Longman, 1865),

¹⁵ Stephen Arata 629.

¹⁶ See Ken Gelder 14.

¹⁷ Stephen Arata 637.

¹⁸ Vesna Goldsworthy, *Inventing Ruritania: The Imperialism of the Imagination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), x.

¹⁹ Misha Glenny, "Only in the Balkans," *London Review of Books*, 29 April 1999, 9.

²⁰ Vesna Goldsworthy 76.

²¹ Vesna Goldsworthy 80.

²² Vesna Goldsworthy 81.

²³ Vesna Goldsworthy 81.

²⁴ For commentary on the relationship between Hope's Ruritania and the Balkans, see Ludmilla Kostova, "Theorising Europe's 'Wild East': *Imagining the Balkans and Inventing Ruritania*", *The European English Messenger* 10.1 (Spring 2001), 71-73.

²⁵ The classic statement of the equation is provided by Radu R. Florescu's and Raymond T. McNally's *Dracula, Prince of Many Faces: His Life and His Times* (Boston, Toronto, and London: Little, Brown, 1989). For a critical perspective upon it, see Elizabeth Miller, *Dracula: Sense and Nonsense* (Westcliff-on-Sea: Desert Island Books, 2000), as well as Andrew Smith's review article "Bringing Bram Stoker Back From the Margins," *Irish Studies* 9.2 (2001), 241-46.

²⁶ Eleni Condouriotis, "Dracula and the Idea of Europe," *Connotations* 9.2 (1999-2000), 143-44.

²⁷ Eleni Condouriotis 144.

²⁸ Eleni Condouriotis 153.

²⁹ Eleni Condouriotis 153.

³⁰ For commentary and a bibliography on South Eastern European scenarios of deorientalization, see Ludmilla Kostova, "Claiming a 'Great Briton' for Bulgaria: Reflections on Byron's Bulgarian Reception (1880s-1920s)", *Byron: Heritage and Legacy*, ed. Cheryl Wilson (New York: Palgrave, forthcoming).

³¹ Eleni Condouriotis 153.

³² On the use of "villains" in the Balkan cultural imaginary, see Keith Brown, "Villains and Symbolic Pollution in the Narratives of Nations", *Balkan Identities: Nation and Memory*, ed. Maria Todorova (London: Hurst, 2004), 233-52.

³³ Eleni Condouriotis 154.

³⁴ On Abdul Aziz, see the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 11th Edition, now a publication in the public domain.

³⁵ Carol A. Senf, "A Response to 'Dracula and the Idea of Europe'", *Connotations* 10.1 (2000-2001), 48, my emphasis. Senf's discourse is occasionally marked by a cavalier usage of symbolic-geographical terms such as "East" and "West," which, in my view, denotes dubious knowledge of geography. Nor is this tendency restricted to her writing only. Thus, in his *Reading the Vampire*, Ken Gelder situates Transylvania between "Western Europe and the Far East" (1).

³⁶ Carol Senf 51.

³⁷ Carol Senf 49.

³⁸ Tomislav Z. Longinović, "Vampires Like Us: Gothic Imaginary and 'the serbs,'" *Balkan as Metaphor: Between Globalization and Fragmentation*, ed. Dušan Belić and Obrad Savić (Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 2002), 39.

³⁹ Tomislav Longinović 39, 40.

⁴⁰ Tomislav Longinović 45.

⁴¹ Tomislav Longinović 45.

⁴² For a clarification of that aspect of the film, see Christopher McGinnigle, "My Own Vampire: The Metamorphosis of the Queer Monster in Francis Ford Coppola's *Bram Stoker's Dracula*", *Gothic Studies* 7.2 (Nov. 2005), 172-84.

⁴³ Larry Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), 185.

⁴⁴ K. E. Fleming, "Orientalism, the Balkans, and Balkan Historiography", *American Historical Review* 105.4 (2000), 1218.

⁴⁵ Matthew Gibson makes such a claim in yet another "Balkanizing" reading. See his "Bram Stoker and the Treaty of Berlin", *Gothic Studies* 6.2 (Nov. 2004), 236-51. It may be argued, however, that the Congress of Berlin was not the only occasion on which Britain supported the Ottoman Empire and thwarted Russian plans favoring the Balkan Christians.

⁴⁶ Christopher Craft, "'Kiss Me with Those Red Lips': Gender and Inversion in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*", *Speaking of Gender*, ed. Elaine Showalter (New York and London: Routledge, 1989), 226.

⁴⁷ On the use of "terrorist fiction" in a similar context, see David Trotter, "The Politics of Adventure in the Early British Spy Novel", *Spy Fiction, Spy Films and Real Intelligence*, ed. Wesley K. Wark (London: Frank Cass, 1991), 33-38.

⁴⁸ Daniel Pick, "'Terrors of the Night': *Dracula* and Degeneration in the Late Nineteenth Century," *Critical Inquiry* 30 (1988), 71.

⁴⁹ On the conception of a shared Anglo-American public sphere in the 19th century, see Michelle Hawley, "Harriet Beecher Stowe and Lord Byron: A Case of Celebrity Justice in the Victorian Public Sphere", *Journal of Victorian Culture* 10.2 (Winter 2005), 233.

⁵⁰ David Trotter 33.

⁵¹ See Jules Zanger, "A Sympathetic Vibration: *Dracula* and the Jews", *English Literature in Transition* 34.1 (1991): 34, and Carol Margaret Davison, *Anti-Semitism and British Gothic Literature* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, and New York: Palgrave, 2004), 120-27.

⁵² My reference is to an article in the *Brooklyn Times*, which describes a group of "Russian Nihilists, Polish Liberators, French Communards, German Socialists, and *Cosmopolitan Anarchists* [my emphasis]" (Hatton 271), who were forced to leave their native countries and re-settle to New York. The article provided inspiration for British journalist Joseph Hatton's novel, *By Order of the Czar. The Tragic Story of Anna Klostock, Queen of the Ghetto* (London: Hutchinson and Co., 1890).

⁵³ A good example is provided by the work of Henry Norman (1858-1939), who was on the staff of the *Daily Chronicle* but also contributed to American publications.

⁵⁴ American novelist Richard Henry Savage (1846-1903) enjoyed an international reputation, and his books were circulated throughout Europe by the Leipzig-based publisher Tauchnitz. For further details, see Ludmilla Kostova, "Love and Death Across Cultures: Richard Henry Savage's *In the Old Chateau, a Story of Russian Poland* and Late Nineteenth-Century American Images of Eastern Europe", *Dialogues: American Studies in an International Context*, ed. Milena Katzarska (Plovdiv: Zombori, 2002), 199-206.

⁵⁵ Joseph Hatton 271.

⁵⁶ Richard Henry Savage, *My Official Wife* (Leipzig: Bernard Tauchnitz, 1891), 127.

⁵⁷ On the use of "projection theory" in critical readings of *Dracula*, see Carol Margaret Davison 142-44.

⁵⁸ Bram Stoker, *The Lady of the Shroud* (1908; London: Alan Sutton, 1994), 330.

⁵⁹ William Ian Miller, *The Anatomy of Disgust* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press), 253.

⁶⁰ William Ian Miller 253, my emphasis.

⁶¹ Joseph Hatton 357.

⁶² Richard Henry Savage 160.

⁶³ L. T. Meade [Elizabeth Thomasina Smith], *The Siren* (London: F. V. White & Co., 1898), 75-76.

⁶⁴ L. T. Meade 110, 129, 145, 276, 277.

⁶⁵ Richard Henry Savage 138, 140, 142.

⁶⁶ Joseph Hatton 357.

⁶⁷ Richard Henry Savage 109.

⁶⁸ Richard Henry Savage 109.

⁶⁹ L. T. Meade 129.

⁷⁰ See, for instance, William Ian Miller, 100-5.

⁷¹ Christopher Craft 227.

⁷² Anne Williams, *Art of Darkness: A Poetics of Gothic* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), 123.

⁷³ Anne Williams 131.

⁷⁴ Anne Williams 131.

⁷⁵ Carol Margaret Davison 137.

⁷⁶ On Stoker and liberalism, see David Glover, *Vampires, Mummies, and Liberals: Bram Stoker and the Politics of Popular Fiction* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1996).

⁷⁷ Richard Henry Savage 109.

⁷⁸ L. T. Meade 73.

⁷⁹ Christopher Craft 230.

⁸⁰ Qtd. in Carol Margaret Davison 165.

⁸¹ Judith Halberstam 349-50.

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ISKUŠAVANJE LIMITA INTERPRETACIJE:
DRAKULA BRAMA STOKERA I ISTOČNO EVROPSKI KONTEKST

Sažetak:

Napuštanje tradicionalnih standarda knjevne kritike i otvaranje ka širokom spektru novih interpretacija omogućilo je jedno sasvim drugačije vrednovanje nesumnjivo "kanonskog" teksta kasne viktorijanske (i kasnije) horor literature, romanu Brama Stokera *Drakula*. Među brojnim novim "čitanjima", zapaže se da tokom poslednjih decenija 20. veka politika postaje dominantni predmet analiza, premada i dalje ne smenjujući u potpunosti seksualnost. Pomenuta razmatranja mogu se grupisati u tri preovlađujuće kategorije (iako ne isključivo): Irska, Britanska imperija i Istočna Evropa viđena zapadnjačkim okom. Ovaj rad bavi se kritičkom analizom tekstova pripadajućih trećoj kategoriji.

(KATEGORIJA ČLANKA: NAUČNI ČLANAK – KRITIKA)