The Image of Transylvania in English Literature

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Labyrinthian Images

Strange representations of Romania can be the result of either real or imaginary travels to this country. As an expression of the freedom of movement, thought and decision, a journey should represent a concrete way of communication with the Other. Besides the immediate pragmatic, economic or political purpose, the voyage expresses, in a psychoanalytical view, the profound desire of personal improvement, the knowledge and understanding of the Other, the need for new experiences and the effort of surpassing your own condition, rather than mere spatial movement. But not every traveller comes back home spiritually enriched. It depends on whether he views the Other in a contemplative or in a dominating way. The traveller is inevitably thrown into a foreign cultural labyrinth and faced with the challenge of building a sense of identity. If his own cultural fibres are powerful and rigid, the traveller will have difficulty dealing adequately with the foreign culture. The foreign country will remain an enciphered land, dark and hostile. Nevertheless, there is a way to achieve a new identity through self-discovery: a combination of knowledge of both the Other and the self.

If we consider the English traveller in Romania, we can assert that, generally speaking, he belongs to the category of detached observer, who uses his lenses "made in England" as a filter for value judgements. As a result, we enter the territory of prejudices, stereotypes and clichés, with their decisive effects upon the representations of the Other. They can seldom be avoided, harming interpersonal and even international relations. Unfortunately for us, the majority of British stereotypes concerning Romanians, which constitute the substance of this paper, circulate freely as absolute truth even today, some of them having acquired a mythical aura, as that of Count Dracula, the Transylvanian vampire, the monster who reigns over a labyrinthian realm.

A few qualifications are necessary. I refer here only to literary images of Romania, to be distinguished from historical treatises by such scholars as Professors Keith Hitchins in America and Dennis Deletant, who followed the efforts of Eric D Tappe and Trevor J Hope in England. Furthermore, legendary images of Transylvania as the native land of the monstrous Dracula are balanced by representations of the real Transylvania in the works of such scholars as Radu Florescu, Raymond McNally, Grigore Nandris, Denis Buican and Elizabeth Miller.

Not surprisingly, literary images of Transylvania as the home of the monster may offend the sensibility of many Romanian readers for whom Transylvania's image is an ideal and even sacred one: it represents the quintessence of the national history, a land blessed by God with all the possible beauty and richness, fertilized by the people's tears and the heroes' blood, the cradle of their Latin roots, source of the Romanian Enlightenment embodied in the Transylvanian School, and a province of a united Romania. Even though the positive representations surpass in number and quality the negative images, the latter have had a larger echo in the West, owing to their shocking character, and have developed into a literary sub-genre. That is why I have chosen them for this paper.

The impressions that most British travellers had of Transylvania were filtered through the lens of the cultures of its Hungarian and Saxon inhabitants, as the native Romanian population was deprived of political, economic, religious and cultural power. Most westerners have no concept of the contributions made to Transylvanian culture by its Romanian population, including such factors as the existence of the Greek Catholic Church (the Romanian Church United with Rome) with its centre at Blaj, whose members made their studies at the Western Universities, and the role of the Orthodox priests and scholars living in

the towns of Transylvania in the nineteenth century. Such representations were at the level of popular religion and popular culture. The English image of Transylvania has depended on the observer's sense of balance and objectivity. An additional factor is that in English literature and even in historiography, Romania is often pushed towards the "Balkan" area[i] with its inherently negative connotations.

Images of Transylvania as a realm of horror, haunted by the ghosts of the past, the land beyond the civilized world where all the superstitions have gathered, are not accidental. They represent the evolution of constructs based upon stereotypes and clichés created during the centuries by our British visitors. They wouldn't have taken the apocalyptical dimensions in Bram Stoker's novel had it not been for a certain frame of mind in the West: the need of projecting one's own anguish on a neutral, harmless and conveniently distant territory. Transylvania encodes cultural fears of a indistinct danger which might menace Western civilization, the worry about signs announcing the disintegration of the British colonial empire and, implicitly, an eroding of the myth of English superiority and its right to subjugate inferior, barbarian peoples. It is in this context that Stoker's novel *Dracula* needs to be considered.

As a leit-motif in British literature, from the travel journals of earlier centuries to the modern novel, Romania has been labelled as a centre of superstition. From a distinctly Anglican perspective, the superstitions are manifestations of the Orthodox piety intermingled with the primitive traditions, maintained by political systems that have annihilated individual will of thought and action in both past and modern times. Steeped in his own religious, moral, cultural, political and economic values, the English visitor has often perceived the "Oriental" model encountered in Romania as a threat. Such an alarm is raised in Stoker's *Dracula*. "If we consider the vampire as an archetype where you can mix up the same will to preserve an evil power and the threatened life," notes Denis Buican, "the one who sheds blood and the one who drinks it, the relation between Vlad the Impaler, the mythical Dracula and some other modern successors (Hitler, Stalin, Amin Dada, Bokassa, Pol Pot, Ceaucescu) could find its logic in an *a priori* of human knowledge" (9).

Transylvania becomes the very symbol of South-Eastern Europe, that "grey" strip of frontier land located between European and Oriental civilizations on the symbolic map invented during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries by the Western mind.[ii] This polarisation of Europe is perhaps the effect of the dichotomous tendencies created by the extraordinary dynamism of the Enlightenment and of Romanticism. The dark, unseen side seems to have been projected into the shadowed corner of Europe, torn between the extremes of the dominant Western dilemmas: reason vs hysteria, optimism vs despair, humanitarianism vs slavery, cosmopolitanism vs racism, democracy vs imperialism, science vs occultism, nationalism vs colonialism etc. And the dark side of the Western mind was equally tempted and afraid of the "dark side" of the world as its *double*. For example, in Bram Stoker's Victorian setting, the British seem equally afraid of their subconscious "dark side" as of the "savage" and "barbarian" people living beyond the Western world, the subconscious side of Europe.[iii] Instead of an Enlightenment approach to "Oriental" Europe as a wonderful epistemological discovery of the Other, we are faced with the crystallization of a very durable ideology, that is, the ideology of difference and inequality. The Eastern becomes the mythical, demonical enemy, guilty for all existing wrongs. And *Dracula* is a classic example of such a "demonological myth."

Before Bram Stoker, a British traveller named Captain Spencer exclaimed during a steam voyage (the symbol of civilization) down the Danube that he felt the menace of the revolutionary changes: "You must, therefore, admit that the threats of having a desolating horde of Huns, Croats, and other half-civilized nationalities belonging to Austria let loose upon us were sufficient to deter the most ardent patriotic among us from inflicting such a curse upon his country."[iv] The fear of a reverse colonization becomes another threat coming from this side of Europe, and England would be an essential target (confronted with its own dark side too, if we take into consideration Dracula's double identity: Transylvanian as well as English). By continuing in this authentic colonial tradition, British literature achieves an imaginary colonization of these remote European lands with unreal people. Vesna Goldsworthy call this process "the Imperialism of imagination" meaning the "Balkanization", the "Orientalization" and the "Exotization" of South-Eastern Europe, a concept with negative connotations and suggesting negative significances.[v]

The mystery surrounding Transylvania, which comes in part from its very name, has been cultivated by English writers beginning with the first descriptions in travel journals and diaries. In the book *A Prospect of Hungary and Transylvania* (London, 1664), an anonymous writer gave the following explanation for the genesis of Transylvania's name, taken over from the German geographers: he affirms

that it took its name from the great woods stretching between it and Hungary, the Latin name meaning "the land beyond the forest," and the Germans calling it "The Seven Fortresses" from the seven castles built long ago to defend the boundaries. It is surrounded by high hills and wall-like woods, the mountain passes being crossed with difficulty and, as well, because of some rivers -- such as the river Olt -- where a fortress called the Red Tower protects the mountain pass, and the Mures, with another fortress (33-4).

The English writer Emily Gerard Laszowska entitled her book *The Land Beyond the Forest* (1888); and later on in the 1930s, Patrick Leigh Fermor entitled his journal *Between the Woods and the Water*. Such symbolism is accompanied by the images generally associated with the labyrinth: the passage of the threshold between worlds, the way into subterraneous darkness, the fright and menacing dangers, and perplexity in the face of the unknown.

Through the Time Tunnel: from "Western Light" to "Eastern Darkness"

In a recent book (*Canetti's Fear. Documentations at the Borders of Europe*), the modern Austrian traveller, Rüdiger Wischenbart, cynically alludes to the opacity of the mental frontiers between Western Europe and the marginalized Eastern Europe, where the "Balkan" represents "the disorder" with the impenetrability especially denounced as "mysterious, cunning, filthy under the nails … expression of dire poverty" (107). His travel to "the tragic space between Europe and Asia," seems "beyond time, history and change" to "a place beyond empirical reality," as if "out of Africa," a place "where Europe ends" and "the Oriental tales begin," a "precipice between images" etc. With such a horizon of expectation, the Westerner's journey to Transylvania is equivalent to crossing the threshold from Western civilization ("Christian," democratic, ruled by the light of reason and order) to the Oriental, ("pagan," sunk into the darkness of superstitions and lack of culture, the realm of the unconscious). The American traveller Robert D. Kaplan tries to find a logical explanation for this image of Transylvania (or better put, this stereotype): "Because of the country's obscure geographical position in Europe's back-of-beyond, events in Romania, no matter how terrible, have always assumed a remote, side-show quality to people in the West" (126).

But such bizarre images of Transylvania have been employed for quite some time. The image of its inhabitants coming out of the depths of the earth inspired the poet Robert Browning in *The Pied Piper of Hamelin. A Child's Story* (1845):

In Transylvania there's a tribe of alien people who ascribe
The outlandish ways and dress
On which their neighbours lay such stress,
To their fathers and mothers having risen
out of some subterranean prison
Into which they had been trepanned
Long time ago, in mighty band,
Out of Hamelin town in Brunswick land,
But how or why they do not understand.

This legend may be based on the twelfth-century German colonization of Transylvania. The Romanian scholar, Petru Maior, one of the most important representatives of the Romanian Enlightenment ("The Transylvanian School") objected to the "fairy tales" related to the coming of the Saxons in Transylvania, mainly that of the "children guided by Satan" or coming from "under the ground." Using historical documents, Petru Maior demonstrates that the Saxons arrived in Transylvania in 1143 (218). A very interesting interpretation is given by Professor Radu Florescu, according to whom the Piper may have been a Teuton recruiter who enlisted people for the army against the Mongolian hordes at the end of the thirteenth century. Other authors identify the Piper with a Gypsy singer who lured the children to his home in Transylvania (based on the rumors that Gypsies used to steal children and that their music was enchanting). Jacques Le Goff connected the same legend with the fight against the invasions of rats in the thirteenth century (319).

Patrick Leigh Fermor, an early twentieth-century visitor to Transylvania, gives the impression of a strange people, as if coming from another world and another time. He recalls his childhood readings,

when his imagination was stimulated by Robert Browning's poem. The archetypal character of the *cave* is due to the fact that it is a symbol not only of the maternal womb, but of the earth as the source of life. The cave is at the same time the place of closing, of claustrophobia, or death, and of resurrection, too. Readers of Robert Browning undertook a subterranean journey to Transylvania, the land "beyond," a labyrinth where monsters are watching the intruders and not letting them to find the light: a tomb, an abyss. In Western representations, the underground world of Transylvania is opposed to the light of reason, and represents darkness, chaos or the passage to Hell guided by Satan himself.

The perplexity at the passage between worlds is reflected in the same way in Bram Stoker's *Dracula* as Jonathan Harker, the authentic Englishman, faces his Transylvanian adventure with calmness and lucidity. However, at his arrival in Budapest, he feels the panic of being at the gates of the "Orient": "The impression I had was that we were 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" (9). The stereotypes extracted by Bram Stoker from his readings about Transylvania show their effects:

> Having some time at my disposal when in London, I had visited the British Museum, and made search among the books and maps in the library regarding Transylvania; it had struck me that some foreknowledge of the country could hardly fail to have some importance in dealing with a noble of that country. I find that the district he named is in the extreme east of the country, just on the borders of three states, Transylvania, Moldavia and Bukovina, in the midst if of the Carpathian mountains; one of the wildest and least known portions of Europe. I was not able to light on any map or work giving the exact locality of the Castle Dracula, as there are no maps of this country as yet to compare with our own Ordnance Survey maps; but I found that Bistritz, the post town named by Count Dracula, is a fairly well-known place (9-10).

The image of the strange barbarian Transylvanian races is not new. It can often be found in many descriptions by English travellers who frequently connect the local residents with fear of the unknown. For example, W Lithgow noticed in 1616 that the country is surrounded by high insurmountable mountains and that it is covered by forests which are full of murderers. It is true that he also pointed out the beauty of the landscapes and the cordiality and hospitality of the inhabitants. These positive features are common to the majority of the English representations about Romania and are to be found in Bram Stoker's book, too. But their impact is not as powerful as that of the negative ones. Similarly, in 1652, Robert Bargrave was obsessed by the banditti and by the funeral stones built on the graves of those who were killed there. Later on, in 1807, Thomas Thorton would shiver seeing some goitrous people in the mountains and shows no sign of compassion. Generally speaking about the Romanians, Thorton considered that their national costume was wild but that men seemed helpless. Robert Stockdale, one of the three English students that travelled in the Romanian Countries between 1793-1794, did not feel at ease among the Transylvanians: "The men in Transylvania and the Banat are a large and robust race and amongst them we saw some of the most tremendous hussar figures we had seen."

The fear invoked by Transylvanians is accompanied in the travellers' imagination by the horror of the wolves' presence at night. "In the West," writes Kaplan, "the very word Transylvania conjures up images of howling wolves, midnight thunderstorms, evil-looking peasants, and the thick, courtly accent of Count Dracula, as portrayed by Bela Lugosi" (149). Bram Stoker also writes of a strange race of people. Even though they are ludicrous, his descriptions deserve our attention because they represent the quintessence of all the confusions about Transylvania that exist in foreign travellers' minds.

Let us follow the landscapes running before Jonathan Harker's eyes as he is comfortably seated in the "Orient-Express," the very sign of civilization. The images are very confused: Slovaks and Szeklers appear side by side, in their cowboy-like dress, but still looking as English, French or German peasants:

> All day long we seemed to dawdle through a country which was full of beauty of every kind. Sometimes we saw little towns or castles on the top of steep hills such as we see in old missals; sometimes we ran by rivers and streams which seemed from the wide stony margin on each side of them to be subject to great floods. It takes a lot of water, and running strong, to sweep the outside edge of a river clear. At every station there were groups of people, sometimes crowds,

and in all sorts of attire. Some of them were just like the peasants at home or those I saw coming through France and Germany, with short jackets and round hats and home-made trousers; but others were very picturesque. The women looked pretty, except when you got near them, but they were very clumsy about the waist. They had all full white sleeves of some kind or other, and most of them had big belts with a lot of strips of something fluttering from them like the dresses in a ballet, but of course petticoats under them. The strangest figures we saw were the Slovaks, who are more barbarian than the rest, with their big cowboy hats, great baggy dirty-white trousers, white linen shirts, and enormous heavy leather belts, nearly a foot wide, all studded over with brass nails. They wore high boots, with their trousers tucked into them, and had long black hair and heavy black moustaches. They were very picturesque, but do not look prepossessing. On the stage they would be set down at once as some old Oriental band of brigands. They are, however, I am told, very harmless and rather wanting in natural self assertion (11).

Nobody could imagine a stranger race of people, looking so odd even if harmless and shy, and acting like shadows on a Transylvanian stage. English travellers had experienced a general, obsessive fear of thieves in these parts of the world. But here we have a touching picturesque image of some beasts with kind souls who would harm nobody. Visitors could calmly follow their way until they ran into a vampire!

Caught in the Web of Superstitions and Despotism

Another feature of the Transylvanian labyrinthian journey is that it takes one into the darkness of superstition. For the English, with their inflexible religious and moral Anglicanism, the practices and forms of Orthodox piety are considered superstitious, and they always point out their primitive roots. That is why the resulting image is that of a gloomy Transylvania, lost in an insurmountable Middle Age, land of superstition and witchcraft, the land beyond the civilized world, the origin of the ill-fated Dracula.

Visitors notice with admiration the tolerance manifested towards the different existing religions accepted by the state, expressing, nevertheless, their regret that the Orthodox Church is not recognized as such. Kaplan meditates on this:

> While the plain of Athens below the Parthenon -- not to mention Moldavia and Wallachia -- dozed under an Oriental, Ottoman sleep, Transylvania was proclaiming the Enlightenment, with freedom and equality for both Catholics and Protestants. William Penn was so impressed that he considered naming his American Quaker colony Transylvania ...
> The religious freedom was only relative, however. The mass of native peasants -- the Orthodox Romanians, that is -- did not enjoy the benefits of this Enlightenment. They laboured at the bottom of a medieval apartheid system, in which the Hungarians and the Saxon Germans, whether Protestant or Catholic, enjoyed all the rights (150).

Two English travellers who recorded their impressions of Transylvania are worthy of note; in both cases, the Orthodox Church is judged as the centre of superstitions. The first is Rev Edmund Chishull (1702), Lord Paget's companion, who acquainted himself with the Protestant environment of Transylvania. Compared to the attention paid to all the legal religions from that province (Calvinistic, Lutheran, Unitarian) excepting Catholicism, Chishull dedicates only one confused phrase to the Orthodox religion, recognizing only that the Romanians, the Russians and the Armenians have the same religion (214). He declared that the population was convinced that they were haunted by witches, that women of all ages were executed every year for this crime, based on some testimonies that they might have harmed their neighbours, children, goods or cattle. In the Saxons' lands, they were subdued to the "water proof" (practised even in England where the so called "ducking stool" was built for it). When the poor tormented creature admitted her guilt, she was convicted to be burnt on the pyre. Chishull had to admit, however, that there were also other places less enlightened where witchcraft flourished. Elsewhere he reflects the maintenance of some medieval practices in Transylvania, acknowledging for the first time that superstitions should not be attributed only to Orthodox believers.

Although some English travellers tried to keep a temperate (though critical) tone, the same cannot be said of John Paget, whose language became malicious, with satire directed at the Orthodox Church and its forms of devotion. The "Wallachian Crosses" which he saw along the road bore "the bastard Greek letters," and "the top [was] covered in by a neat shingle-roof, something like Robinson Crusoe's umbrella" (102). His indictment of the cult of icons resounds with undisguised sarcasm:

> The semi-circular recess forms the altar, which is adorned by the most wretched prints of Greek virgins, St. Georges, and other grim saints … they are very practical illustrations of the evils of immortality, and if the husband, and wives of Demsus do not obey a certain commandment, it is not for want of knowing how the devil will catch them at their peccadilloes, for it is here painted to the most, minute details (124).

These images seem to him grotesque:

> I have often been much amused with these pictures in the Wallack churches; for, though too gross for description, they contain so much of that racy, often sarcastic wit proper to Rabelais or Chaucer, throughout with a minuteness of diabolical detail and fertility of imagination worthy a Brughel (124).

The same Protestant contempt for what they perceive as superstition (the Sign of the Cross, the fear of the dark spirits, etc) become outrageously pronounced in Bram Stoker's imagination. For Paget, the source of all superstition is the "Wallack" priests and how they keep their believers in the "darkness of ignorance" in order to manipulate them more easily. The image presented of the Romanian village priest is unfavourable, from his ordinary rustic clothes to his lack of education and culture:

> Except from a somewhat greater neatness of person, and the long black beard which hung down to his breast, the Wallack priest was in no way distinguished from the humblest of his flock. With just enough education to read the service of the church, just enough wealth to make them sympathize with the poor, and just enough religion to enable them to console them in their afflictions, these men exercise a greater power over the simple peasant than the most cunning Jesuit, the most wealthy Episcopalian, or the most rigid Calvinist. This is a strong point in favour of the Wallack priest (125).

Such judgements were influenced not only by Paget's own cultural values but from the opinions of the Transylvanian aristocracy: "If we may believe the Hungarian nobles, the Wallack priest is characterized by cunning malice, which he employs to maintain his power over the peasants, to enrich himself, and to foment discord between landlord and tenant" (126). Later, Emily Gerard Laszowska provided extensive descriptions of Transylvanian superstitions, which in turn were an important source of inspiration for Bram Stoker.

Stoker knew where to find such clichés regarding Transylvania, which he summarized in the well-known sentence: "I read that every known superstition in the world is gathered into the horseshoe of the Carpathians, as if it were the centre of some sort of imaginative whirlpool" (10). Harker's Anglican background makes him doubt the utility of superstitions against the vampires. Later on, he will understand that popular wisdom was deeply rooted into the history of mankind and that he had to rely on it. Stoker's readers also notice that, in fact, even if oddly exotic and primitive as described by the novelist, the inhabitants of the Transylvanian lands were all Christians (Orthodox, Catholics or Protestants).

As he tried to get to Dracula's Castle on the eve St George's Day, a woman begged Harker to give up because "tonight, when the clock strikes midnight, all the evil things in the world will have full sway." He continues in a mixture of patronizing bemusement and uneasiness:

> Finally she went down on her knees and implored me not to go; at least to wait a day or two before starting. It was all very ridiculous but I did not feel comfortable ... She then rose and dried her eyes, and taking a crucifix from her neck offered it to me. I did not know what to do, for, as an English Churchman, I have been taught to regard such things as in some measure idolatrous,

and yet it seemed so ungracious to refuse an old lady meaning so well and in such a state of mind. She saw, I suppose, the doubt in my face, for she put the rosary round my neck, and said, "For your mother's sake", and went out of the room. I am writing up this part of the diary whilst I am waiting for the coach, which is, of course, late, and the crucifix is still round my neck. Whether it is the old lady's fear, I do not know, but I am not feeling nearly as easy in my mind as usual (13-14).

Nor does he feel better in the coach because he can hear "a lot of words often repeated, queer words, for there were many nationalities in the crowd; so I quietly got my polyglot dictionary from my bag and looked them out. I must say they were not cheering to me, for amongst them were 'Ordog' - Satan, 'pokol' - hell, 'stregoaica' - witch, 'vrolok' and 'vlkoslak' - both of which mean the same thing, one being Slovak and the other Serbian for something that is either were-wolf or vampire" (14-15). Luckily for him he had that polyglot dictionary that could explain even the words of such a bizarre Hungarian-Romanian-Slovakian- Serbian dialect! It is important to notice that vampirism was a common subject in these parts during the nineteenth century. And everywhere one finds the same idyllic Transylvanian images, with benevolent people, shy and kind, kneeling in prayers under the burden of superstitions and fears, too gentle and naive to fight the evil that oppresses them: "By the roadside were many crosses, and as we swept by, my companions all crossed themselves. Here and there was a peasant man or woman kneeling before a shrine, who did not even turn round as we approached, but seemed in the self-surrender of devotion to have neither eyes nor ears for the outer world*" (Stoker 17).

To the Englishman, such manifestations of piety and faith in superstitions are the fruits of ignorance in Transylvania where a despotic system turned the peasants into shadows. It could not, however, destroy their kindness and goodwill: "One by one several of the passengers offered me gifts, which they pressed upon me with an earnestness which would take no denial; these were certainly of an odd and varied kind, but each was given in simple good faith, with a kindly word, and a blessing, and the strange mixture of fear-meaning movements which I had seen outside the hotel at Bistritz -- the sign of the cross and the guard against the evil eye" (Stoker 18). And the very symbol of this unspiritualized world is Dracula himself, as a warning for mankind: "reason's slumber gives birth to monsters."

Such refrains echo throughout the novel, though in different tonalities. Tuned up by Mina Harker, the notes sound warmer and more human, but essentially subject to the same rules:

> The country is lovely, and most interesting; if only we were under different conditions, how delightful it would be to see it all! If Jonathan and I were driving through it alone what a pleasure it would be! To stop and see people, and learn something of their life, and to fill our minds and memories with all the colour and picturesqueness of the whole wild, beautiful country and the quaint people … It is a lovely country; full of beauties of all imaginable kinds, and the people are brave, and strong, and simple, and seem full of nice qualities. They are *very, very* superstitious. In the first house where we stopped, when the woman who served us saw the scar on my forehead, she crossed herself and put out two fingers towards me, to keep off the evil eye. I believe they went to the trouble of putting an extra amount of garlic into our food; and I can't abide garlic. Ever since then I have taken care not to take off my hat or veil, and so have escaped their suspicions (427-9).

Such illusions are still prevalent. "Romania is a country of crazy superstitions and fantastic legends," exclaimed the British traveller Nicola Williams in her 1991 journal about a Romania suspended between "Tarzan's birthplace" and "Ovid's grave": "with its dramatic castles and medieval towns where mass tourism means you, a horse and a cart, and a handful of farmers, Romania is the wild West of Eastern Europe. Dracula fiends flock to this land of alpine peaks, Black Sea beaches, and fantastic castles in the Carpathian mountains" (11).

Eastern Europe has become the labyrinthian subconscious of the Continent. The image of Transylvania as the land of vampiric monsters does not spring from the Romanian collective mind, but is a Western construct. It represents rather the symptom of the Western thought. Rüdiger Wischenbart comments that "In the West, people believe that one can live in isolation from these zones. The Europeans from the West believe in the illusion that the modern world offers, finally, happiness with no

suffering, reason and consciousness with no subconscious, and no fear" (35). I should rather say that the distressing labyrinthian images of Transylvania are the projections of Western fears onto an oppressed and helpless East. By transplanting their own anguish beyond the Carpathians, Westerners preserve their self-image of perfection.

Dracula and his Role in the Maintenance of the Iron Curtain

The mythical Dracula has contributed considerably to the manipulation of Western public opinion about Eastern Europe. In some authors' opinion, Dracula is the symbol of a world antithetical to that of Victorian England. From this perspective, Dracula, the cursed prince from a feudal Transylvania, represented a danger to Great Britain and implicitly, to the entire world. Indeed, when Bram Stoker's book appeared in 1897, England was considered the most important world power. The one who conquered London had the whole world at his feet. That was in fact what Dracula intended. We have to add that Transylvania was not only the far off land "beyond the woods," but also a part of the Austro-Hungarian empire, allied to the German emperor, and thus England's rival in its economic expansion towards central Europe. It is not difficult to detect in Stoker's novel the echoes of Darwin's theories, especially that of Anglo-Saxon superiority over other European races. The Americans are included too, as descendants of the English colonists.

By contrast, there exists a counteroffensive of good quality research that promises, in spite of the fact that the myths about Dracula are so firmly entrenched in the West, to provide a more balanced and realistic set of images. For example, the novel *The Long Shadows* by Alan Brownjohn (which appeared in Romanian in 1996) has enjoyed great success. Whereas Stoker's Jonathan Harker arrives in a country where spirit and will-power had been annihilated by despotism, Tim Harker-Jones arrives in a Romania that survives both morally and intellectually. Such approaches help to demolish the time-worn stereotypes and cliches that one associates with the Dracula myth. Even more important are the initiatives originating in Romania itself. Two of the options are: to keep the traditional pastoral image of Carpathian resignation and fatalism, assumed mostly by the Romanian men of culture and politicians; or to replace it with a new, energetic image based on the "Dracula" model. The last option would be possible by inverting values, taking as reference points the positive terms of the dichotomies that constitute his "vampiric" personality: *life*-death, *energy*-passivity, *intelligence*-surfeit, *courage*-cowardliness, *passion*-apathy, *knowledge*-indifference, *civilization*-nature, *urbanity*-rurality, *freedom*-compulsion, etc. Marian Mincu proposes this solution in his book *Il diario di Dracula (Dracula's Journal*, Milano "Bonpiani", 1993), where Dracula is building his own "vampiric" destiny by an act of will and decision: the rejection of the real world, hostile to him, through the "self-vampirization" in the world of the text he is creating.

As professor Gail Kligman asserts, the "vampiric" myth of Dracula is cherished mostly by her fellow Americans who refuse the real existence of Transylvania and its historical, geographical and cultural background. They stick stubbornly to the idea of a legendary Transylvania, a land haunted by vampires, while for the Romanians "Dracula" remains the voivode "Vlad Tepes." And he will remain so forever !

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[i] See, for example, Olivia Manning's *The Balkan Trilogy*; Robert Kaplan's *Balkan ghosts: a journey through history*; and Forbes, toynbee, Mitrany & Hogarth, *The Balkans: a History of Bulgaria, Serbia, Greece, Rumania, Turkey.*

[ii] See Larry Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1994).

[iii] See Athena Vrettos, *Imagining Illness in Victorian Culture* (Stanford UP, 1996). Included in the so-called "somatic fictions," *Dracula* is analyzed as a Victorian attempt to solve chaotic social problems by displacing them onto matters of physiology. This displacement resulted in the collapse of perceived boundaries of human embodiment. The author examines the relationships among health, imperialism and racial theory in such popular novels as *Dracula*.

[iv] Captain Spencer, *Travels in France and Germany in 1865 and 1866, including a steamvoyage down the Danube & a ride across the Mountain of European Turkey from Belgrade to Montenegro*. 2 vol. London, Hurst & Blackett Publishers, 1866.

[v] Vesna Goldsworthy, *Inventing Ruritania. The Imperialism of the Imagination*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1998; See also: Bill Ascroft, Gareth Griffiths, Helen Tiffin (ed.), *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, London, Routledge, 1995.