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## **THE SYMBOLIC CONSTRUCTION OF THE MONSTROUS – THE ELIZABETH BATHORY STORY**

This article analyzes several kinds of monsters in western popular culture today: werewolves, vampires, morlaks, the blood-countess and other creatures of the underworld. By utilizing the notion of the monstrous, it seeks to return to the most fundamental misconception of ethnocentrism: the prevailing nodes of western superiority in which tropes seem to satisfy curiosities and fantasies of citizens who should know better but in fact they do not. The monstrous became staples in western popular cultural production and not only there if we take into account the extremely fashionable Japanese and Chinese vampire and werewolf fantasy genre as well. In the history of East European monstrosities, the story of Countess Elizabeth Bathory has a prominent place. Proclaimed to be the most prolific murderess of mankind, she is accused of torturing young virgins, tearing the flesh from their living bodies with her teeth and bathing in their blood in her quest for eternal youth. The rise and popularity of the Blood Countess (Blutgräfin), one of the most famous of all historical vampires, is described in detail. In the concluding section, examples are provided how biology also uses vampirism and the monstrous in taxonomy and classification.

Key words: scholarship; monstrosity; vampirism; blood-countess; Elizabeth Bathory

There are several kinds of monsters in western popular culture today: werewolves, vampires, morlaks, the blood-countess and other creatures of the underworld. By utilizing the notion of the monstrous, I seek to return to the most fundamental misconception of ethnocentrism: the prevailing nodes of western superiority in which tropes seem to satisfy curiosities and fantasies of citizens who should know better but in fact they do not. There is agreement among the region's specialists that demonization or criminalization of Eastern Europe is socially and historically constructed (cf. for example, Kovacevic 2008, Kürti 1997, 2007). But how do we come to explain one of the most

enduring myths of our westernized imagination, the longevity as well as vitality of the blood-thirsty monsters such as the Blood Countess or Count Dracula? Emerging from the almost imaginary shadow-land, Transylvania, he is by all counts one of the most pervasive cultural icon of our age. As Longinovic writes:

The vampire figures in Stoker's gothic imagination as a channel for the blood and evil that stain European stories about the past, and which determine the temporal context for understanding the otherness of "Other Europe" (Longinovic 2002:44-45).

Vampirism, and as I claim in this article, monstrosity has been fundamentally intertwined with Eastern Europe, and not only the Balkans as once Misha Glenny has claimed. The monstrous regionality, no doubt, has been undergoing a complete rejuvenation in the past decades. What is rather phenomenal as well as least explained recently, and this is something that I found in my studies that needs explanation, is the count's and his associates' current popularity. There is no difficulty in providing an explanation for vampire films in Hollywood, or its national offshoots in the west – the vampire genre is big business. By all conservative estimates, since 1930 there have been at least 150 films with the name Dracula in the title and at least 400 others that have dealt with vampire themes. However, it is rather difficult to explain why such an upsurge of interests in the vampire myth recently but I would like to offer an explanation for the fascination with monstrosity from a quasi-anthropological and East European point of view.

The creation of the other Europe was not the invention of the 20th century for well before that there were many horrific and strange customs and peoples that gave plenty for the civilized citizens to chew on. But is it only an accident that the four most enduring popular culture villains, Frankenstein, Count Dracula (Nosferatu), the Morlak and the Golem had emerged in Europe during modernity (Wolf 1975, Zanger 1977)? That all four creatures are connected somehow to Eastern European regions? There appear to be few monstrous literary figures in popular culture today that powerfully evoke not only our primal fears and taboos but also our most repressed fantasies: the evil cannibalistic Morlak, and the blood-thirsty, often charming sado-masochistic vampire.<sup>1</sup> The historical and cultural constructions of these figures are telling about the way in which these monsters have been created and where they are located. Rather than arguing that they are just simply figments of the imagination of artists, scholars and schizophrenic politicians, the monstrous as it is envisaged here, recognizes the ongoing fascination with these evil characters and points to the metaphoric construction of Eastern

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<sup>1</sup> The vampire literature is vast and I am not going to survey them in this essay, for various interpretations of vampirism and the vampire in popular culture see Dundes (1998), Gelder (1994), McNally and Florescu (1972), Perkowski (1989), Twitchell (1980).

Europe as a birthplace from which such characters rise to continually threaten the peaceful communities around the world. While balkanism represents Eastern Europe negatively as Europe's other, the monstrous East describes it as the hideous and frightful part of Europe.

I suggest that there is no disagreement among scholars that the Balkan and Eastern European region in general has been one of the major sources of otherness for the West but not only the post-wall years, but way before that historic time as Hammond (2005:135, 2007:135) and Bax (2000:317) suggest recently. For instance, Hammond suggests that in Cold War novels, "the Eastern bloc is a space defined by negatives – the evocation of absence, whether goods, leisure, wealth, commerce, democracy, and modernity" (2004:53). In fact, this region is a gloomy and dark one both in the eyes of the beholder and those from within (Wheeler 1996:30).

Vesna Goldsworthy (1998), Maria Todorova (1997), and Larry Wolff (1994) have observed that a unified balkanist discourse emerged at the outset of the twentieth century. Characterisations were made specifically around the outbreak of the Balkan wars and World War I and based on the perceived ethnic and religious heterogeneity, precarious borders and the political upheavals that were all part of the "Oriental" traits assigned to this region. And naturally, Balkanism is not the same as Orientalism, as many have argued but a uniquely stands on its own for a hierarchically arranged set of binaries about marginalization (for example, Bjelić 2002:5-8). The impurity, dangerous volatility and disorder emanating from the region soon coalesced into a verdict that the Eastern European and Balkan zone while may be geographically part of Europe, culturally and politically constituted Europe's anticivilized or dark side within (Blazevic 2007, Neuburger 2004). What is sadly lacking, however, is a dynamic that can explain the multifarious and resistant negativity coalescing into a form of monstrosity, an image that has given the region its remarkably dark and sinister reputation. At the same time, this image did offer the world of arts, literature and entertainment another fascinating and exciting yet perverse form of another Eastern Europe. This is the point of Bozidar Jezernik's insightful study *Wild Europe* (2004), in which he describes how western travellers saw the region that actually had no name until the nineteenth century and was called Illyricum and Thrace, Rumelia or Turkey-in-Europe (Stoianovich 1994).

Ostensibly, travelers visiting the Balkans in the 18<sup>th</sup> century were able to find men with tails and later in the 20<sup>th</sup> century the roots of another monstrosity, Nazism. Coupled with such victimization and liminality of the region, the monstrous became staples in western popular cultural production and not only there if we take into account the extremely fashionable Japanese and Chinese vampire and werewolf fantasy genre as well. Elizabeth Bathory, the Blood Countess (Blutgräfin), is one of the most famous of all historical vampires. She is perhaps less popular than the infamous Transylvanian Count

Dracula, known as the historic reincarnation of Vlad Tepes (the Impaler) and he – although noted for his savage and very public methods of execution – was not a vampire, but an inspiration for Bram Stoker's fictional Count (Wolf 1975). In fact, the historical Dracula is usually best known as a devout, if savage warrior noted for his successful enforcement of the law within the Principality of Wallachia. Elizabeth Bathory on the other hand is renowned as a torturer, an eater of flesh, and possibly a deranged woman who bathed in blood, a figure often cited by prominent vampirologist Raymond McNally in his book *Dracula Was a Woman: In Search of the Blood Countess of Transylvan*.<sup>2</sup>

In the history of East European monstrosities, the story of Countess Erzsébet Báthory has a prominent place. Proclaimed to be the most prolific murderer of mankind, she is accused of torturing young virgins, tearing the flesh from their living bodies with her teeth and bathing in their blood in her quest for eternal youth. Her fame in the hall of gothic horrors was secured by non other than the eclectic folksong collector, The Reverend Sabine Baring-Gould (1834-1924) who, despite his gentle love of folklore, detailed the gory persona of the blood-countess in his famous work, *The book of were-wolves* (Baring-Gould 1865). The author relies on the earlier work of Michael Wagner who in his informative and highly appreciated work tells the story of sadistic countess Elizabeth.<sup>3</sup> Because of the influential aristocratic connection, however, Wagner shies away from mentioning the countess by her full name. As Baring-Gould cites Wagner:

Elizabeth formed the resolution to bathe her face and her whole body in human blood so as to enhance her beauty. Two old women and a certain Fitzko assisted her in her undertaking. This monster used to kill the luckless victim, and the old women caught the blood, in which Elizabeth was wont to bathe at the hour of four in the morning. After the bath she appeared more beautiful than before (1965:Chapter IX).

Again, the story was not authentic but was taken from an even earlier Hungarian source, from the Jesuit László Túróczy's *Tragica Historia* published in 1729, a report later widely publicized by Mattias Bel (1584-1749) in his 1735-1742 classic historical compilation (*Notitia Hungariae*).

In 1817, as accounts of the testimonies about the alleged murders and sadistic tortures were published for the first time, national and international headlines sensationalized the already misconceived story. From that on, the literary countess took on a life of her own: the Grimm brothers wrote a short story about her, the romantic German writer, Johann Ludwig Tieck (1774-

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<sup>2</sup> See also in this context the historical analysis of Stoker's relation to Transylvania by Lőrinczi (1996).

<sup>3</sup> Michael Wagner book, *Beiträge zur philosophischen Anthropologie und den damit verwandten Wissenschaften*. Bd. 1-2, was first published in Vienna in 1794-96.

-1853), cast her as a Gothic femme fatale, Swanhilda, in his short story *Wake Not the Dead*. It is alleged that Sheridan le Fanu shaped his female vampire Carmilla on Elizabeth Báthory. If we can believe some etymological explanation the compound English word blood-bath is of mid-nineteenth century origin possibly connected to the bloody countess' rising popularity in England.<sup>4</sup>

As known from history, Countess Elizabeth Báthory (1560-1614, *Báthory Erzsébet* for the Magyars, *Alžbeta* or *Elzbieta* for the Czechs, Slovaks and Poles, and simply *Bathory* in English) was from one of the most influential Hungarian families that gave a Transylvanian prince and a king of both Poland and Hungary. Remembered in popular imagination as the "blood countess" throughout the entire world today, she was believed to live her widowhood by torturing and killing hundreds of girls and young women in order to maintain her youth as well as extravagant if dubious lifestyle. Interestingly, none of the oral testimonies mention the taking of blood-baths, a trope that figures so prominently in later imaginings. Her subsequent stories have led to comparisons with Vlad III the Impaler of Wallachia, on whom the fictional *Dracula* is partly based, and to fictional nicknames of *the Blood Countess* and even *Countess Dracula*. Both historic figures are connected to vampirism, lycanthropy, witchcraft and black magic. The modernist notions of vampirism had contested earlier, folk versions of vampirism but took part in its modernizing mission in throughout Europe since the mid-eighteenth century (Rauer 2008).

Bathory, was a Hungarian of noble blood, Tepes was Romanian, the Prince of Wallachia when said title was not in the hands of his brother. Also, although his deeds were bloody, Tepes is never reported to have drunk the blood of his victims, while Elizabeth Bathory is reputed (admittedly with only anecdotal evidence) to have not only drunk but *bathed in* the blood of virgin girls. The truth of whether she was a model for the Count will remain known only to Stoker, but certainly in the years since *Dracula* was published, the

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<sup>4</sup> That story of Western fascination with the demonic did not end there. It can be witnessed by the article about the Blutgräfin in German "Verfluchtes Weib". *Der Spiegel*, 01.01, 1990, 151-153. For non-Hungarian language books popularizing the infamous, or rather very famous, "serial killer", are Farin, Michael (1999). *Heroine des Grauens*; McNally, Raymond T. (1983). *Dracula Was a Woman: In Search of the Blood Countess of Transylvania*, and Penrose, Valentine (translated by Alexander Trocchi) (2006). *The Bloody Countess: Atrocities of Erzsébet Báthory*, Codrescu, Andrei (1996), *The blood countess*, Thorne, Tony, (1998) *Countess Dracula*, Bathory Gia Al Babel (2006), *The trouble with the pears: An intimate portrait of Elizabeth Bathory*. The Discovery channel had also aired a series "The most evil women in history" in which Elizabeth Bathory was one of the main characters (see [http://www.dailymotion.com/video/x3grjk\\_ersebet-bathory-most-evil-women-in](http://www.dailymotion.com/video/x3grjk_ersebet-bathory-most-evil-women-in)). Raymond McNally and Tony Thorne are featured as experts in this rendering of the Bathory story. To top this, National Geographic also has a similar popularizing story: "Is it real? Vampires." In this documentary, Elizabeth Miller is featured as the scholar of vampirism.

Blood Countess has exercised a powerful fascination on many writers and film-makers.

Erzsébet Báthory, known more commonly in the Western world by the anglicised name Elizabeth, was born in 1560, the daughter of Baron George Báthory and Baroness Anna Báthory. George and Anna were both Báthorys by birth; he a member of the Ecsed branch of the family and she of the Somlyó branch. Such marriage was not uncommon among the aristocracy of Europe, as the purity of the noble line was seen as paramount. The Bathory family was one of the most powerful Protestant clans in Hungary, and numbered warlords, politicians and clerics among its members. Elizabeth's ancestor Stephan Bathory had fought alongside Vlad Dracul in one of his many successful attempts to reclaim the Wallachian throne, and his namesake, Elizabeth's cousin, became Prince of Transylvania in 1571, and was later elected King of Poland. Other members of the family were less respectable however, including Elizabeth's brother (also called Stephan), a noted drunkard and lecher, and her cousin (Anna) was accused of practicing witchcraft. The young woman was highly-educated for her time, being fluent in many languages in a time when most Hungarians of noble birth – even men, who generally would have been better schooled than their female kin – were all but illiterate. She is also said to have been beautiful, although it is unlikely that anyone would have openly said otherwise of the daughter of such a prominent family. At the age of eleven, Elizabeth was arranged to marry to the much older and wealthy Count Ferenc Nádasdy.

Popular stories have it that Elizabeth's sadistic behaviour stemmed from her insanity that was observable throughout her childhood. It is said that the young girl might suffered from seizures accompanied by loss of control and fits of rage, which may have been caused by epilepsy. She was also able to witness brutal disciplinary actions administered by her family's officers on their estates. In one anecdote a Gypsy is accused of theft, was sewn up in the belly of a dying horse with only his head exposed, and left to die. Such tales afford a grisly reminder that her own acts – while excessive even by the standards of the time - were not so very far removed from deeds which would have been considered quite normal. After her marriage, Elizabeth was established as mistress of the Nadasdy estate around Castle Sárvár. Here the Nadasdys enjoyed a reputation as harsh masters, and while much of Elizabeth's cruelty is doubtless due to her own nature, Ferenc is said to have shown her some of his own favoured ways of punishing his servants. There are also tales of the couple engaging in diabolic rites and patronising various occultists and satanists. It is unusual, although far from unheard of, for retellers of the story to claim that Ferenc was unaware of his wife's perversions. Elizabeth is reported to have been a good wife in her husband's presence, but her husband was frequently absent. It is reported that during these times she is said to have taken numerous young men as well as women

lovers. After ten years of marriage Elizabeth finally gave her husband children; three daughters and at last a son, delivered in quick succession from 1585 onwards. By all reports, Elizabeth was an excellent and caring mother.

It was in her husband's absence that Elizabeth is reputed to have begun torturing young servant girls for her own pleasure with the help of her servants. Among the activities attributed to her were beating her maidservants with a barbed lash and sticks, and having them dragged naked into the snow and doused with cold water until they froze to death. After her husband died in 1604, Elizabeth spent time in Vienna and Cachtice in north-west Hungary (now Slovakia). This is the time she is said to befriend a woman who was accused of witchcraft. This is also the time that legend tells us that she discovered the medicinal effect of blood, on striking a servant girl who accidentally pulled her hair whilst combing it. After this discovery, popular conception has it that she decided to take regular baths in the blood of young girls, that is virgins only, even though none of the various horrific eye-witness accounts mention these blood baths. It is true, however, that her proclivities went largely undetected – or rather ignored – until around 1609. In fact the Lord Palatine of Hungary, Count György Thurzó, probably knew of her activities much earlier. He was her cousin however, and to protect the family name took no official action, although he may have tried to have Elizabeth confined to a nunnery. After 1609, when one of her close associate, the witch Darvula died, Elizabeth Bathory became more sadistic with her servants. When the king of Hungary ordered her arrest, Count Thurzó moved quickly to save the family as much face as possible by affecting her capture on his own terms. When raiding Castle Cachtice, soldiers supposedly found a dead girl in the hallway, and many other victims tortured in cells. The servants were immediately arrested, and Elizabeth herself was held but not taken away with her associates.

In January 1611, a show hearing was held, in which the captured servants testified to the horrendous crimes – evidences most likely extracted under torture – and were executed in a matter of days. Elizabeth Bathory was not present at these hearings, and was convicted of no crime. She was, however, confined to her castle, although her family stubbornly refused the King's demands that she be tried for her crimes. While he was probably shocked by the extent of the Countess' deeds, the King's desire for justice was almost certainly in part due to a large debt incurred against Ferenc in his lifetime. Elizabeth's conviction would have allowed the King to not only write off that debt, but also to seize the Nádasdy lands, and those held by Elizabeth as a Bathory. Consequently, the Bathorys must have brought all of their considerable influence to bear to keep that from happening. Elizabeth Bathory died while imprisoned on 21 August, 1614. The bulk of her estate was divided, according to her will, between her children. She was interred in the local church, but according to some rumours that her body was taken to be

buried at her birthplace at Ecsed since in Cachtice locals would not hear of such a woman being interred in their consecrated cemetery ground.

As I have noted above, the most common story of Elizabeth Bathory's reign of terror – that of the blood bath – is not supported by any evidence. However, the story of the Blood Countess has been seized upon by many writers and film-makers, for whom the heady mixture of Elizabeth's beauty, sophistication, extreme cruelty, lesbianism and bisexuality have formed the basis for many a prurient retelling. Twentieth-century popular culture, with its obsession with serial killers, simply has continued to exaggerate the already gory details often with the help of scholarly obsession with the story. In this fabrication, Raymond T. McNally and his Romanian colleague, Radu Florescu, deserve special mention for it was their book, *In search of Dracula*, that caused much of the damage. Described as a "true history", they claim that Elizabeth Báthory was a real "living vampiress" (McNally and Florescu 1972:156). Other scholars, notably Elizabeth Miller, whom the Transylvanian Society of Dracula awarded the title "Baroness of the House of Dracula", refute almost all sensationalizing aspects of the McNally and Florescu book (Miller 2000). Similarly, other historians also came to the rescue of Elizabeth in particular and the Báthory name in general.<sup>5</sup>

To no avail, all this scholarly pro and con debates just simply fuelled Elizabeth Báthory's "bloody" popularity, a turn assisted by the discovery of gender specific aspects of vampirism in such classic works as Goethe's *Die Braut von Korinth* (1797), and Joseph Sheridan LeFanu's 1872 *Carmilla* both identifying women as lesbian femme fatal. Therefore, the historical foundation for East European female monstrosities has been firmly established in western literary endeavours. As Radulescu writes "women from Eastern Europe, particularly Romania, and the image of Russian women as dangerous temptresses have been two of the moulds in which Western essentializing thought has cast women from these parts of the world" (2004:28). However, local myths surfaced before the western ones. The romantic Hungarian poet, János Garay (1812-1853), wrote a poem about her only topping this with an impressive historic drama in five acts, titled simply *Erzsébet Báthory*, which opened in the Pest Theatre in August 9, 1840. This production was successful: in 1865 another staged play was produced. The noted impressionist painter, István Csók (1865-1961), also took pleasure in depicting the story: in 1893 he painted his famous painting, simply titled *Erzsébet Báthory*. On the painting

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<sup>5</sup> Despite the high-standing of the aristocratic Báthorys, to be sure, their name did have a dubious reputation from the 16th century on. Elizabeth's relations have been accused of witchcraft, murder, heresy, incest, rape and homosexuality. Some of these are well-documented in Hungarian (Nagy 1984, 1988, Péter 1985). The website, <http://bathory.org/erzsbib.html>, has an extensive reference list on the foreign language literature on her. One website for example writes that she was a "Sadistic Slovakian countess of the 16th and 17th century", see <http://www.weird-encyclopedia.com/Bathory-Elizabeth.php>.



the wintry courtyard can be seen as the torturing of naked girls is commencing in front of the Countess as she sits – rather comfortably – on her throne taking pleasure in the whole scene. Csók painted one particular popular stereotype of her story: naked girls being doused with water and allowed to freeze to death. The painting – unfortunately destroyed during World War II – had caused a public outcry in Paris and Budapest at that time. However, audiences in Munich took pleasure in viewing this grotesque artwork and the young Csók received an artistic medal in recognition of his oeuvre in 1897!

Aside from novels and poetry, films also added a great deal of colour to the horrific story of Dracula and his sexually charged, mentally unstable female alterego, Elizabeth Bathory.<sup>6</sup> The genre's most successful founder is F. Murnau's *Nosferatu*, a silent film classic which features the blood-sucking count's actions, castle, and looks, elements that can be witnessed in many contemporary films. From then on, Dracula and its female counterpart have been staples of horror cinema. The British Hammer studio made *Countess Dracula* in 1971 and in order to have it really authentic a producer and a director of Hungarian background were commissioned for the project (Alexander Paal and Peter Sasdy respectively). In the beginning of the film, István Csók's painting can be seen behind the opening credits. This milestone film was followed by the German-Belgian horror production, *Daughters of Darkness* in the same year, and the French film, *Immoral Tales* made in 1974. The director of this latter was the Polish Walerian Borowczyk. After all, the Bathory family gave one of the Polish kings!

*Countess Dracula's Orgy of Blood* is an American 2004 film directed by Donald F. Glut., and the 2006 horror flick, *Stay Alive* (dir. William Brent Bell) also uses Countess Bathory in its plot. There is also the 2008 film, *Bathory*, directed by Juraj Jakubisko. An Anglo-Czech-Slovak-Hungarian co-production, it is possibly the most expensive Slovak movie ever made. *Bathory* tries to balance the picture by revealing another side of the countess, but still

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<sup>6</sup> I am only indicating here some of the Hungarian pro and con views of Erzsébet Báthory, László Nagy "A 'csejtei szörny'" in *Botránykövek régvolt históriánkban*. Budapest, 1997, Katalin Péter, *A csejtei várúrnő. Báthory Erzsébet*, 1985, Rexa Dezső: *Báthory Erzsébet, Nádasdy Ferencné. (1560-1614)*, 1908, Szádeczky-Kardoss Irma: *Báthory Erzsébet igazsága*, 1993. The early book by Rexa is notable for its clarity: the author does not pass judgement on Báthory, but remarks that if all the evidence would have come to light today there would possibly be no other name for sadism except that of bathorism. A medical doctor and psychiatrist, István Zsakó, who was familiar with Rexa's work, writes similarly in an article published in *Gyógyászat* in 1918, raising only the possibility of Erzsébet Báthory suffering from paranoia, epilepsy, and manic depression but without any decisive information admits that no real diagnosis can be given on her condition. Interestingly, the Slovak authors, Karol Kallay and Pavel Dvorak, in their 1999 book *Krvava Grofka: Alzbeta Batoryova. Fakta a Vymysly*, seem to continue with the alleged sadism and mental deficiency of the countess further reproducing the stereotype.

with the vampyric theme. In that film, the young Slovak rock singer, Katka Knechtová, has also debuted contributing to the success of the *Bathory* film. What is a remarkable development in the Bathory story is that it has even caused a minor international friction between Hungary and Slovakia. In December 2008, the Hungarian film distribution company, Budapest Film, announced that the January 2009 opening of *Bathory* has been called off for some unspecified reasons. This follows, the American-Hungarian director, Jenő Hódi's 2007 unsuccessful cinematic venture into the vampire theme with *Metamorphosis*, a film featuring Christopher Lambert. This mediocre production also supports the stereotype that Countess Bathory was a blood-sucking vampire who is resurrected by a group of foreign visitors who search for the vampire story in Hungary. More recently, the French actress-director, Julie Delpy has also embarked upon directing yet another version of the Bathory-story in her 2009 film, *The Countess*. The writer-director Delpy is apparently fascinated by the 16<sup>th</sup> century countess – in an interview she uttered "I'm scared of death, but not of aging" – who is said to have killed 400 young virgins in order to bathe in their blood to preserve her youth.

It was not only films and novels but videogames and heavy metal rock music have also invested heavily into the blood-countess' story. In the videogame, *Castlevania: Bloodlines*, Countess Elizabeth Bartley is the name of one of the protagonists (who is implied with the murder of the crown prince of Austria causing the outbreak of WWI), a figure fashioned after Elizabeth Bathory who is said to be the niece of Count Dracula. The British heavy-metal rock group, Cradle of Filth, has produced an album in 1998, *Cruelty and the Beast*, which has as its main theme the story of Elizabeth Bathory. To make it even more "authentic" the album features guest narration on certain passages by Ingrid Pitt in character as Báthory, a role she first played in the Hammer film *Countess Dracula*. The Swedish underground metal group Dissection has a song dedicated to Elizabeth Bathory ("Her blood was all clean, pure Hungarian blood."). Another death metal band, Tormentor also has a song titled *Elizabeth Bathory*. Then of course there was the famous Bathory that started in 1983, a project of Tomas "Ace" Börje Forsberg (1966-2004) whose landmark band made history of black or Viking (pagan) metal music influencing most second wave black metal bands.

### **The vampire craze and a volatile Dracula geography**

Thanks for the Irish writer Bram Stoker we have now one of the most enduring fantasies firmly planted in our minds: the vampire with the name of Count Dracula. Since the story is well known and even the vampire literature is vast, I will not discuss it here (Bogatyrev 1998, Dundes 1998). Vampirism as a form of monstrosity has the dialectics of colonisation and reverse colonisation as Ken Gelder argues (1994:12). The simple invasion of national

cultures by the western Other, like in Stoker's and Wells' novels, and then the anti-heroes returning to the homes of the colonizers is expressed by this. It is important to stress that scholarly and amateur discussion proliferated during the 18<sup>th</sup> century when the literary – often in the wake of economic and military – colonisation took place. Before Dom Calmet published his revolutionary opus, in 1746, in French, there were already in upsurge of interest about vampires all over Europe.<sup>7</sup> A whole list of treatises appeared in German in 1732 in Vienna, Leipzig, Nurnberg, Jena and Frankfurt. John Heinrich Zopfius in Halle published his dissertation on vampires in 1733 (*Dissertatio de Uampiris Seruiensibus*), Gioseppe Davanzati also wrote a similar thesis in 1744 published in Naples. As interest grew, popular presses simply could not keep up with the demands as many of these were reprinted in various languages all over Europe in the following decades.

What is noticeable in this vampiric geography is that less than a hundred years later the theme left the medical and scholarly arena of discussions (Klaniczay 1990) and appeared on the theatre stages in Europe. In this way, the literary and cultural colonisation was also achieved. The Italians got into the act first: in 1800 an opera was staged (*I vampiri*) in Naples. A year later the first German vampire novel (*Der Vampy*) was published by Ignaz Ferdinand Arnold (Ruthner 2002). As early as 1820, a melodrama in three acts was produced in Paris (*Le Vampire*) by Charles Nodier with such a success that three more followed. In Germany a romantic play in three acts was staged in 1822, and in 1828 a romantic opera opened in Stuttgart. Charles Nodier's play was immediately transported to London, with a strange twist. While the French version had its location in a gothic castle in Hungary, the London Opera show transported the vampire (this time called Lord Ruthwen after John Polidori's character) to Scotland because the proprietor believed audiences would better identify with Inner Hebrides of Scotland, its folklore, costume and characters, than with Hungary. He was right: the play was an instant success and he can be credited with popularizing the existence of vampirism in Great Britain.

From that point on, it is rather easy to follow the mass marketing of the vampire and its various fictional male and female characters throughout European stage and literature. Bram Stoker did have it easy: he simply had to make something more up-to-date of the already existing material. By coming up with *Dracula* and Transylvania – the earlier plays either had a south European or a Hungarian location – Stoker ingeniously devised a new plot (the continuation of the *Dracula* clan's blood-line) and by relocating the main story to Eastern Europe, offered the possibility for a truly transnational

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<sup>7</sup> CALMET, Augustin Dom (O.S.B.) *Traité sur les Apparitions des Esprits, et sur les Vampires, ou les Revenans de Hongrie, de Moravie, etc. Nouvelle édition, revue, corrigée, & augmentée par l'Auteur.* 2 vols. Paris, 1751. First edition is Paris, 1746).

vampire cycle.<sup>8</sup> From the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the vampire legend was able to flourish in Europe and North America without difficulties. The only exception to this was post-WWII Eastern Europe, where under the watchful eyes of the Stalinist state censors, vampirism and the Dracula story was deemed too western and wholly decadent for home consumption.

At the same time, German, French, Italian, English and American gothic horror fiction and movies were popularizing vampiric tales, grotesque Báthory stories, and reproducing Morlaks and werewolves. As is known, resituating horror into its "original" East European setting is not of recent vintage as the gothic novels will attest. Hollywood and Bela Lugosi (Bela Blasko) would also claim this well-known thread of evidence that I would not like to detail here. There are other lesser known filmic transpositions. The Spanish director, José Luis Merino in his 1970 film, *Scream of the demon lover (Il castello dalle porte di fuoco)*, places the action in an unnamed East European castle whose madman owner is Baron Janos Dalmar. Another B-movie is *The Werewolf of Washington* is no less uninteresting. A young newspaper columnist travels to Eastern Europe where he is bitten by a werewolf and after that he comes back to Washington DC – and this is where the film actually made history and not with the werewolf theme – where he infects politicians of the highest level with the deadly mutation. The 1971 Franco-German-Belgian production, *Daughters of Darkness (Les Lèvres rouges)*, directed by Harry Kümel) has as its main vampiress, the ever youthful and reinvigorated blood-countess, Elizabeth Bathory. As soon as she begins her bloody-conquest, virgins' cadavers multiply while Elizabeth, besides drinking blood, spends her time with her in-house lover, called Ilona.

Currently, Eastern Europe is connected more than just providing these to werewolf and vampire characters for films. Hollywood has – again – discovered the region as several mainstream horror flicks were made in Hungary, Slovakia and Romania. The successful *Hostel* and its sequels were both made in Bratislava, and the *Underworld* series produced in Hungary. Romania seems to be the ideal location for vampire and werewolves movies of recent vintage (*Blood and Chocolate, IIs*). The American Michael D. Sellers has directed his rather mediocre vampire horror flick, *Vlad* (2003) together with Romanians. The film was shot mostly in Romania, and concerns the story of Vlad the Impaler, better known as Dracula in filmic history. But the film – filmed entirely in Bucharest – actually continues the existence of vampires by sustaining a lengthy and elaborate discussion on the part of the protagonists how and in which way the contemporary Order of Dragon operates today. The German director, Uwe Boll, has also discovered Romania in his mediocre, but for the horror freaks an extremely bloody, action-packed movie, *Bloodrayne* (2006). In a strange but not unexpected twist, vampirism

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<sup>8</sup> I have discussed the mystique of Stoker's Dracula in my essay (Kürti 2000).

returns to Romania. The director even admitted that she paid Romanian prostitutes (150 Euro per day) to play in the gory nude scenes rather than paying decent money for actresses. The Uruguayan director, Ricardo Islas, directed his rather 2005 American movie, *Night fangs*, a tribute to the Transylvanian blood-countess Elizabeth Bathory. All these films all hark back to the 1957 classic Italian horror by Mario Bava, whose black-and-white film, *Vampiri*, already created the standard Bathory character.

### **Dracula land another Balkan story**

But then a new twist in the reverse colonisation story had occurred. It was the BBC that announced in July 9, 2000 the news: that a German financed tourist attraction will celebrate the 15<sup>th</sup> century Vlad Tepes with the opening a Dracula Land theme park built near the medieval Transylvanian city of Sighisoara. The 120 hectares park originally was envisioned to cost a 32 million USD and would be up and running by 2003 providing an attraction to mostly foreign, German, tourists.<sup>9</sup> The "fantastic plan" of the Romanian Ministry was rather a lifeless project, similarly to those already made during the early 1980s.<sup>10</sup> The following year Universal Studios mounted an attack on the Romanian government claiming that it had all the rights on Dracula, an image it created during the 1930 and 1960 by producing more than seven Dracula classics. Less than a year later, the Romanian government had announced that it was scrapping the controversial project in favour of Targoviste Castle near Bucharest. Incidentally, there were oppositions against the theme park: local ecological groups protested the grandiose alterations of the environment and even the thousands of possible jobs did not convince them of the necessity of the amusement park. UNESCO was also in thrall for the possible alternative, a more modest reconstruction elsewhere that was announced somewhere nearer to the Romanian capital. BBC also reported that even the Prince of Wales objected to such planning that would, in his words, be "wholly out of sympathy with the area and will ultimately destroy its character" (BBC News, 6 May 2002). Moreover, there was a vehement objection on the part artists and leaders of the evangelical church of Sighisoara in a circular entitled "Christian Sighisoara cannot agree with the Dracula Land". They claimed that such a negative myth would bring in thousands of tourists among whom there will be many Satanists.

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<sup>9</sup> "Dracula's myth exists. We want to package it nicely and sell it to tourists" uttered the hopeful words the then Minister of Tourism, Matei Dan. BBC News Homepage, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/1429556.stm>, last accessed August 1, 2008.

<sup>10</sup> The Romanian government was already aiming at making Dracula into a tourist commodity, see Mort Rosenbaum, "Romania is turning to Dracula for help in putting the bite on tourists' dollars". *The Sunday Times*, The Magazine, October 30, 1983, p. 15.

The 15<sup>th</sup> century Bran Castle in southern Transylvania is without a doubt known as Dracula's castle by visitors. It has been one of the foremost sightseeing targets during the 1980s when western tourists were lured by state tourist agencies to visit Dracula's castle. This was also the time when the castle was restored. Soon, however, bad fate fell on the ominous historic site. In 2006, the Romanian state decided to offer the Bran castle back to their previous owners a part of the restitution drive raging through the country. The castle ownership went back to the Habsburgs, actually to New York architect Dominic Habsburg (grandson of Queen Marie of Romania). Less than a year later, the aristocrat offered the castle to the local government for 80 million USD, a move rejected by the municipality. Then the projected price went up for around 140 million USD and it is now up for grab by anyone who is willing to buy the famed tourist object.

The Romanian repatriation is not the only geographical transport of the Dracula legend. The Scots have gotten into the act by claiming that Slains Castle, at Cruden Bay, in Aberdeenshire, provided Bram Stoker with an inspiration for the image of the nineteenth-century gothic-looking castle of Count Dracula. They were sincerely hoping that this literary connection would provide the badly needed extra lure for tourists. The English did not take this lightly. Residents of the historic fishing town of Whitby, in the Scarborough district of North Yorkshire, must have thought that the claim by the Scots was a bloody joke. They claim that Bram Stoker included Whitby in his novel because he lived at the Royal Hotel in Whitby while working on the novel, knew exactly the town's history and folklore, including the beaching of the Russian ship Dmitri, a name that became Demeter in his novel. The town has since been celebrating this connection: there is a Dracula Museum in Whitby and regular Dracula Tours for visitors. In fact, Whitby's home page has a section for "famous people" among whom are Captain James Cook and, yes, Dracula. The town even advertises itself as the "true home of Dracula".<sup>11</sup>

This, however, does not end the Dracula's travesty. In Dublin, hometown of Bram Stoker, there is a tour and game project called Bram Stoker Dracula Experience. The British travel agency, Transylvania Live, organizes real Dracula tours for tourists. Not surprisingly, the seven day "bloody trip" costs 1200 Euro. That is not the main point though: after Bulgaria, Romania has been one of the most favoured travel destinations of western tourists since 2003. The company does not make a secret that the country benefits "of free publicity due to vampire legends".<sup>12</sup>

Similarly, to the Slovaks, who are bent on domesticating Elizabeth Bathory, others are also investing heavily in planting vampirism on their home

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<sup>11</sup> See <http://www.whitby.co.uk/>, last accessed August 1, 2008.

<sup>12</sup> See the company's power point presentation at: <http://www.visit-transylvania.us/aboutus.html#4>.

turf. In Germany, Laubach (Hessen) there was a Dracula museum, a unique tribute to the myth of Dracula that has been closed down recently. In 1990, a Dracula Museum opened in New York City by Jeanne Keyes Yungson and operated until it was moved to Vienna, Austria, in 1999. In Wildwood, NJ, there was a Castle Dracula at the George F. Boyer Historical Museum, run by the adventurous Nickels family. They created the theme castle in 1977 that was up and running until 2002 when it was destroyed by arson. The Rosenbach Museum in Philadelphia, USA, houses Bram Stokers' notes and outline for the novel *Dracula* offering a Dracula festival late October for visitors. In Panama City Beach, Florida, there was also a Castle Dracula Wax Museum, a theme attraction copied in Niagara Falls as well. In Midland, Ontario, there is – since 1973 – an Enchanted Castle where visitors can go into Dracula's Dungeons and the Museum of Horrors. Edward Gorey's name may not be familiar to many but he received the Tony Awards for best revival and best costume designs for his 1977-1980 hit play, *Dracula* on Broadway. Without doubt, he made significant innovative contributions to the theatre world in his roles as playwright, producer, director, set and costume designer. After Broadway, his play was taken over by successful national road companies as well as foreign productions. Not surprisingly, The Edward Gorey House in Yarmouth Port, Cape Cod, now is also a site for Dracula fans!

And if this was not enough, during the 1979 midseason NBC premiered an unusual hour-long series consisting of a trio of twenty-minute serials. Each serial, broadcast in "chapters", ended in a cliff-hanger that was resolved in the following week's episode. NBC had high hopes for the series, which was heavily promoted by the network. Michael Nouri starred in *The Curse of Dracula*, a dark, gothic tale about the dark prince and the college students attempting kill him. In Europe, Dracula fever caught on in the stages as well. In 1992, BBC put on the original *The Vampyr* as a "soap opera". This was followed in 1997 by Roman Polanski's stage musical (*Tanz Der Vampyr*), a remake of his campy and original 1967 *Dance of the Vampires*. In 1997, to celebrate the 100th anniversary of Stoker's book, the Museum of Modern Art in New York City, hosted a Cinema Dracula film festival with more than 40 vampire films from all over the world. Dracula was a source of inspiration for many literary tributes or parodies, such as Stephen King's *Salem's Lot*, Kim Newman's *Anno Dracula*, Anne Rice's *Interview with the Vampire*, Elizabeth Kostova's *The Historian*, Fred Saberhagen's *The Dracula Tape*, Wendy Swanscombe's erotic parody *Vamp*, and Dan Simmons's *Children of the Night*. Dracula has been a character in many comic books such as Giant-Size Dracula, Requiem for Dracula, Savage Return of Dracula, all published by Marvel, but the most famous one is the Marvel comic Tomb of Dracula written primarily by Marv Wolfman and drawn by Gene Colan for Marvel Comics in the 1970s. Dracula also appeared in an animated movie called *The Batman vs. Dracula* pitting the two characters against one another, which was

aired on Cartoon Network and has been released on DVD. In Saviana Stanescu's intriguing play *Waxing West*, opened in La Mama in New York City in April 2007, demonstrates that the only real Romanian vampire was no other, than the former president of Romania, Nicolae Ceausescu!

### Conclusion

All the above may sound a bit far-fetched as an idea that in the arts as well as in politics and international relations, old national stereotypes, popular imagery and misconceived ideas – by all means part of balkanization or morlakism – survive into the 21<sup>st</sup> century and possibly even beyond. We all need to take a deep breath and accept this as one aspect, perhaps not the best one, of our human capability to order the world of arts. And possibly this is also a structural element of the fantastic, which traditionally included tales and myths, and now infiltrated mainstream popular culture in the form of video games, cell phones, satellite television and the world wide web. And if this is not enough there is the international children's toy market. The American giant toymaker, McFarlane Toys, the idea of the Canadian-born American founder-director, Todd McFarlane, has contributed greatly to the popularizing of the folkloristic bloody-countess story. In 1997, the company flooded the market with the first Monster Playset Series, toys which included Frankenstein and Count Dracula. Much more followed in subsequent years: in the summer of 2004, the third installment of the monster series appeared named *Six Faces of Madness*. Although this series is advertised as not for children under 17, the action figures – which include Attila the Hun, Billy the Kid, Elizabeth Bathory, Jack the Ripper, Rasputin, and Vlad the Impaler – is different from the earlier creations. According to the company this is: "A historical look back at some of the human race's most notorious blood-letters and miscreants. Incredibly detailed and fully accessorized, McFarlane Monsters 3 gives new meaning to the term monster." Elizabeth Bathory is shown as taking a bath naked in a tub full of blood. To give a good contrast and a prompt milieu the tub is white and lavishly decorated with gilded monsters and snakes and has dragon's feet no doubt to highlight the bather's monstrosity. She has a pompous hairdo, wears a necklace and an anklet on her left ankle which is slightly raised out of the blood-pool. In her right hand she holds a crystal glass spilling blood to allude to the horrific drinking feast, while in her left she wields a bloody, double-edge knife. To add to the dramatization of the scene, next to the tub stands a three-pronged candle holder with three severed female heads (a blonde, brunette and a black-haired one) dripping from blood. In October 2006, McFarlane Toys produced yet another version of monster toys, this time called *Femme Fatales* in which the same Elizabeth Bathory figures prominently. The six inch tall toy figure of Elizabeth Bathory is introduced as follows:



The Blood Queen of Hungary, who struck terror throughout that region in the late 1500s and early 1600s, and is said to have killed more than 600 young women. A member of the ruling class, Bathory tortured servants throughout her life. Later, with concern for her fading beauty, she began bathing in the blood of slaughtered young girls as a perverse form of a fountain of youth.<sup>13</sup>

Obviously this is how the monstrous world of the East, its culture and history, is generated and maintained for popular culture buffs. For some, such a world is part of the fantastic and humorous that makes them smile while providing them with an added adrenalin boost in their thrill seeking adventures. Such a magic world and fantasy, however, has a much more wide appeal. Popular culture aside, science, hard science, sometimes is also at fault in assisting the longevity of such image making. A beautiful orchid with blackish-red colour looking a bit like a bat is aptly named *Dracula Luer*. Another one has the colourful designation as *Liparis draculoides*. One type of dragonet fish, relative of the popular aquarium mandarin fish, has the name *Draculo*. The giant, South American vampire bat – now sadly extinct – is called *Desmodus draculae*. It has there surviving relatives (just for the fun: blood-relations), the Yellow-eared, the Great-Stripe-faced, and the White-lined bats named *Vampyressa*, *Vampyrodes*, and *Vampyrops*. The largest blood-sucking bat of South America is classified as (what else?), the False Vampire bat, or in Latin - *Vampyrum spectrum*. One of the largest bats of the genus fruit bats of Malaysia – it feeds not on blood but exclusively on fruits – is called the Large Flying Fox, or better, *Pteropus vampyrus*. None of these, however, can compete with the name of the cave-dwelling remipede crustacean that closely resembles a spider: *Morlockia ondinae* now known by its taxonomic name as *Speleonectes ondinae* (*Morlockia* is also the name of a fictional land in one of the Atari's *Dungeon Masters* game). But even this scientific etymology fades in comparison to a small, blood-sucking six-legged troglobite invertebrate from Australia that is often mistaken for a spider but in fact it is not. Its name is (gasp): *Draculoides bramstokeri*!

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<sup>13</sup> All information and descriptions are available on the McFarlene Toys homepage: <http://www.spawn.com/toys/categorytype.aspx?categoryid=6>. Last accessed, 2009-01-01.

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Bathory Erzsebet – painting circa late 17<sup>th</sup> century



Bram Stoker



Elizabeth Bathory – a 17<sup>th</sup> century painting



Elizabeth Bathory – McFarlene – Toys

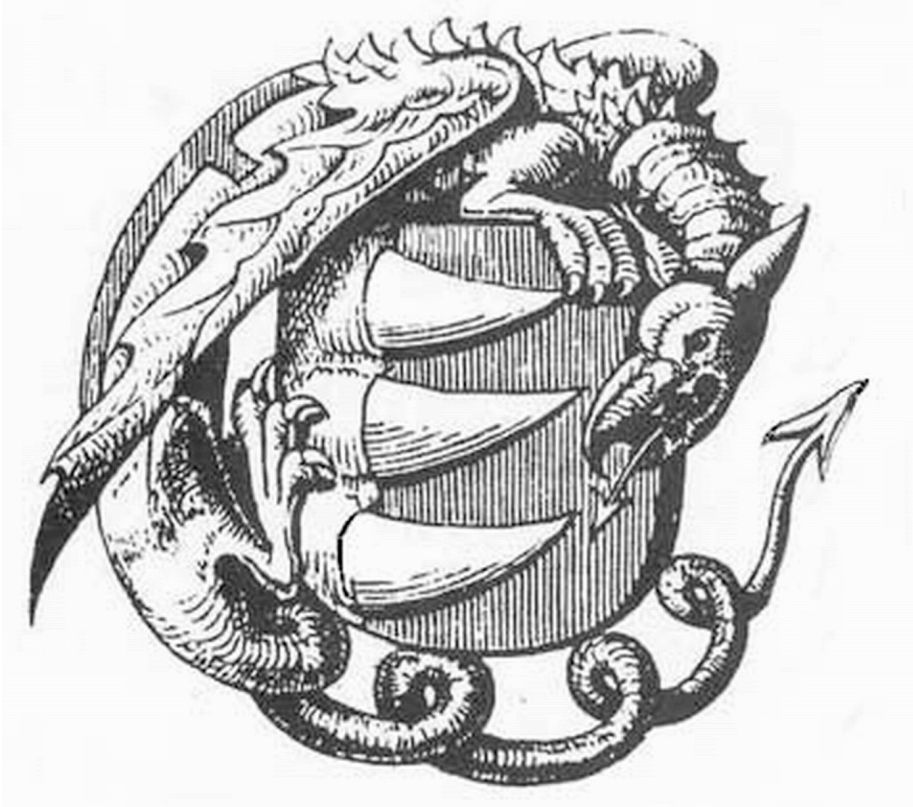


István Csók – Erzsébet Báthory 1893.



Nosferatu – F. Muranu film 1922.





The Báthory coat of arm



The only painting of Elisabeth Bathory from the 17<sup>th</sup> century



Vampire Lovers. Hammer films 1970.

## SIMBOLIČKA KONSTRUKCIJA MONSTRUOZNOG – PRIČA O ELIZABETH BATHORY

### SAŽETAK

Rad analizira nekoliko vrsta čudovišta u današnjoj zapadnjačkoj popularnoj kulturi: vukodlake, vampire, morlake, krvavu groficu i ostala stvorenja podzemnoga svijeta. Rabeći pojam monstrozno rad se bavi temeljnim zabludama etnocentrizma – prevladavajućim nakupinama zapadnjačke superiornosti u kojima alegorije zadovoljavaju znatiželju i maštu građanstva koje je navodno iznad toga, no zapravo nije. Monstrozno postaje uporabni predmet u zapadnjačkoj popularnoj kulturnoj produkciji, a ako uzmemo u obzir i krajnje pomodan japanski i kineski žanr o vampirima i vukodlacima, i ne samo na Zapadu. U povijesti istočnoeuropske monstroznosti priča o Elizabeth Bathory zauzima istaknuto mjesto. Proglašena je najplodonosnijim ženskim ubojicom ljudskoga roda, optužena da je mučila mlade djevice, zubima derala meso s njihovih živih tijela i kupala se u njihovoj krvi u potrazi za vječnom mladošću. Podrobno su opisani uspon i popularnost Krvave Grofice (Blutgräfin), jedne od najpoznatijih povijesnih vampirica. U završnom je odjeljku oprimjereno kako biologija rabi vampirizam i monstrozno u taksonomiji i klasifikaciji.

Ključne riječi: učenost; monstroznost; vampirizam; Krvava grofica; Elizabeth Bathory