

A NEW DEFINITION OF OCCIDENTALIZATION: FROM SAINT VALENTINE TO THE ROMANIAN 'DRAGOBETE' AND FROM DISNEYLAND TO THE ROMANIAN 'DRACULA PARK'

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Abstract: *The paper proposes a new definition of Romania's Occidentalization at the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st, understood as full acceptance of American values on the one hand, and as a nationalist counter-reaction on the other.*

The first part of the paper will discuss Valentine's Day and the Disneyland as two famous examples of cultural globalization, seen also as Americanization, with reference to their history, traditions and purpose in order to define them and see the message they send.

The second part of the paper will analyze the Romanian Dragobete and Dracula Park as particular examples of hybridity: an American holiday is celebrated by 21st century Romania who, at the same time, rediscovers a lost but native Dragobete; and an American Park is "copied" by the same Romania who uses a national myth as its name. This part will also include the opinions of several Western, mostly American, Professors and researchers in order to see how the 'West' perceives both Bram Stoker's novel and its connection to Romania, and those of some Romanian historians in order to see how some 'natives' perceive the myth and how they try to explain it, therefore the message Romania sends.

It is well known that globalization is mainly related to economy, to multinational corporations, and also to the spreading of a certain Western fashion and culture, preferably American, through the world, due to commerce, tourism, all kinds of media, due to the increasing access to internet, as a medium of communication and information.

Speaking about Western popular culture and fashion, let us first see the meaning of one of the United States' most famous holidays, Saint Valentine, and how it turned from an European to an American and then to a global celebration of love.

The first important written research in the U.S. that provides us with the history of the Catholic religion is *The Catholic Encyclopedia* at the end of the 19th century, a response to the lack of objectivity and accuracy or to the marginalization of Catholic subjects in previous Encyclopedias.

We are thus introduced to three Saint Valentines, according to the early martyrologies: a priest at Rome, a bishop of Interamna (Termini) – both in the second half of the third century-, and one in Africa, from whom "nothing further is known" (*The Catholic Encyclopedia*, 1), and to the Gate of St. Valentine: "The name seems to have been taken from a small church dedicated to the Saint which was in the immediate neighborhood." (*The Catholic Encyclopedia*, 1)

Further on, we have Valentine's Day in the Middle Ages, celebrated in England and France on the 14th of February when, it was believed, "birds begin to pair". And the next mention can be found in the 14th and 15th centuries, in literature, in the 34th and 35th *Ballades* of the poet John Gower, love poems written in French.

If we now pass from this *Encyclopedia* to more recent 20th century sources, I think one could apply to America and to the existence of the multitude of legends that we will further see, surrounding Saint Valentine and his deeds, Romanian Tudor Pamfile's explanation that "as usually, when speaking about the folk production, the legends about Saints are confusingly different, even those about one and the same Saint" (Pamfile 8 qtd in Simion Florea) and "legends stand for the power of creation and the fantasy of the people" (Pamfile 8 qtd in Simion Florea) who "felt the necessity to assign wonderful deeds to the Saints, extraordinary issues that astonish" (Pamfile 8 qtd in Simion Florea). Whole websites and articles, that one can easily find on the internet, talk in detail about the Christian martyr, or martyrs, about the Pagan origin of the lovers' day, in the Roman Lupercalia, about the first

love poems called 'valentines', about the first cards, as well as the jewels, candies and little hearts that are today's gifts.

Thus, St. Valentine is known for "refusing to give up his Christian faith" (Catholic Online, 1), or because he "was killed during the persecution of Emperor Aurelius" (Wikipedia, 1) and he "secretly performed marriage ceremonies" (Brunner, 1), he "fell in love with the daughter of his jailer, whom he cured from her blindness" (Brunner, 1), or he "died while helping save faithful Christians from Roman prisons" (Raposa, 1) and "he not only chose to be a priest, but was believed to have been a leader of the Christian underground movement" (Brinker, 1). The last version I am going to mention here speaks about an imprisoned priest from the Middle Ages whom the children missed "during his imprisonment and would throw flowers into his cell through the prison bars" (Raposa, 1).

'The History Channel' tells us that "he actually sent the first 'valentine greeting' himself. [...] The stories certainly emphasize his appeal as a sympathetic, heroic, and, most importantly, romantic figure. It's no surprise that by the Middle Ages, Valentine was one of the most popular Saints in England and France" (historychannel, 1)

Now that we have defined the first example of cultural globalization mentioned in my paper, let us pass on to the next one, the Disneyland, before analyzing Romania's reaction to each of them.

If at the beginning of the 20th century we had Fun Fairs in Europe and America, with little elements and only for children, which were known only to those who visited them, at the beginning of the 21st century everybody seems to know only one park, the famous Disneyland. There are also a lot of websites and articles that can be easily found by any English speaker, anytime, on Internet. I consider the one in *Wikipedia* the most interesting because it explains both the structure of the park and the purpose of its creation, taken directly from Walt Disney's words, from 1950. The first thing we need to notice in Disney's inaugural address is the idea of an American dream, which, as any American dream, is meant to become a universal model:

"....to all who came to this happy place, welcome. Disneyland is your land. Here age relives fond memories of the past....and here youth may savor the challenge and promise of the future. Disneyland is dedicated to the ideals, the dreams and the hard facts which have created America....with the hope that it will be a source of joy and inspiration to all the world." (wikipedia, 1)

As we can see from the park's structure, there are actually five parks with distinct themes, but each with its clear purpose: 'Main Street, U.S.A.', "For those of us who remember the carefree time it recreates, Main Street will bring back happy memories. For younger visitors, it is an adventure in turning back the calendar to the days of grandfather's youth" (wikipedia, 1); 'Adventureland' - "to create a land that would make the dream reality, we pictured ourselves far from civilization, of the remote jungles of Asia and Africa" (wikipedia, 1); 'Frontierland' - "All of us have cause to be proud of our country's history, shaped by the pioneering spirit of our forefathers. Our adventures are designed to give you the feeling of having lived, even for a short while, during our country's pioneer days." (wikipedia, 1); 'Fantasyland' - "What youngster has not dreamed of flying with Peter Pan over moonlit London, or tumbling into Alice's nonsensical Wonderland? In Fantasyland, these classic stories of everyone's youth have become realities for youngsters - of all ages - to participate in." (wikipedia, 1); finally, 'King Arthur's Caroussel', with a merry-go-round taken from Canada to complete the park and which has seventy-two horses carved in Germany at the end of the 19th century. New themes add today to these thematic parks conceived by Walt Disney, according to the advances of technology, such as those related to Science Fiction world. And, although Disney did not live to see his dream widely shared, Disneylands are created on other continents like Asia and Europe, as a result of surveys made on tourists in America, one example being the famous Euro-Disneyland, former Disneyland Paris.

As I said in an earlier paper called "Romanian Identity in the Context of Disneyfication", this theme park seems a "definition of the United States both due to the creator's personality and due to what he chose to communicate through the park" (Georgescu 210), meaning both the idea of an American dream defined as adventure and beautiful fairytales, and the idea of patriotism defined as one's pride with his national past and values.

Let us now see how Romania perceives these two examples of globalization, or Occidentalization/Americanization, at the end of the 20th century and beginning of the 21st.

A first reaction to Saint Valentine is its having been taken as such by the Romanian youth in the 1990s. Promoted by newspapers and broadcasted, mainly, through teenagers movies, Beverly Hills being the most popular at the time of speaking, Saint Valentine started being celebrated, first in some schools and high schools, then on a national level, first through anonymous love letters put in special boxes in high school halls, then through real gifts made to the person one loved. Quite a natural response, one might say, after years of dictatorship and political isolation, to everything that came from Occident, and, especially, from the United States.

A second reaction, emerged at the end of the 1990s and still valid today, seems more interesting to the author of this paper. We are talking about the broadcasting of a long time forgotten Romanian holiday - the Dragobete- starting with the news bulletin presented on PROTV by Andreea Esca, and gradually reaching other TV channels, newspapers and the Internet. The first news bulletin only mentioned it and gave us the example of some girls in a village, specially dressed for this occasion. Today we have articles in newspapers approaching the subject, one good example being a whole page in *Formula AS*, written by Radu Anton-Roman, then websites, concerts and even a chapter in Ion Ghinoiu's book *Sărbători și obiceiuri românești (Romanian Holidays and Customs)* where we can learn the origins, the customs and the geographical area where Romanians used to celebrate love in their own way. And if we look at the sources, we discover the name of the only Romanian ethnographer and theologian who was doing serious research on folklore at the end of the 19th century, Simion Florea Marian, with his book *Sărbătorile la Români (Romanian Holidays)*.

Here we can find out that the Dragobete is celebrated either on the 24th of February, at 'The Discovery of Saint John's Head', or on the 1st of March, being called "spring's head" or "summer's head". We also find out that two legends in South Romania consider him as being the son of Old Dochia (name from the Byzantine calendar personifying, in the Romanian mythology, mankind's impatience in waiting for the return of spring), but under different names: Dragobete Iorgovan or Dragomir. We are told that, on the 24th of February, "all birds and animals mate" (Marian, 237) and:

"In this day, in the morning, all girls and boys comb their hair, put on clean linen, and, if the weather is fine, they go to pick up snowdrops from the waterside, or they go after woods in the forest, first the girls, then the boys in groups. If the weather is bad, girls gather in their friends and relatives houses, where the boys from the neighborhood also come." (Marian, 237).

Love seems a very important element in those times for the village girls who seem to be:

".....In a competition for falling in love and there is so much joy among their mothers when they see their girls surrounded by innocent love, that many times they envy each other and there is even fight for that, in which the one not loved anymore tells to the other that she practiced magic and therefore found the love, and she used the same magic, in an ugly way, making the first not to be loved by boys." (Marian, 237).

And a last element that seems to be taken from Romanian fairytales, but that proves to have been a real habit until 1900, is the "March amulet snow", dearly waited by girls because it is given by fairies, and fairies charm even Prince Charming, as Iosif Vulcan explains us. (qtd. in Marian, 317).

Another specific Romanian reaction towards Occident, understood as America, has been the desire to copy such an attractive project, financially as well as physically, as the Disneyland, calling it Dracula Park, after the ruler that has become famous due to Bram Stoker's novel, Vlad Dracul (Vlad the Devil) or...maybe Țepeș (the Impaler).

So far research shows that there might have actually been two sources of inspiration for Romanians: the Hollywood image of Dracula inspired by Bram Stoker's novel, as suggested by Tazim Jamal and Aniela Tănase in their 2005 article "Impacts and Conflicts Surrounding Dracula Park, Romania: The Role of Sustainable Tourism Principles", and Disneyland's Park as such in the view of the author of this paper. For Jamal and Tănase:

"Popularized in Europe and in the U.S.A by German film director F.W. Murnau's 1922 silent epic *Nosferatu*, Dracula became a Western pop-culture icon in the 1930s through Hollywood movies loosely based on Bram Stoker's book, *Dracula*, published in 1897. A tourism industry based on Hollywood-style Dracula began to grow in post-communist Romania, bolstered by director Francis Ford Coppola's 1992 Hollywood blockbuster film, *Bram Stoker's Dracula*. In 2001 Miramax filmed *Dracula Resurrection* (Parts II and III) in the citadel of Sighișoara. Hoping to stimulate tourism and take advantage of a lucrative myth (Dracula-based films, novels, clubs, etc), the Romanian Ministry of Tourism initiated Dracula Park, a large theme park located near the historic town of Sighișoara (Transylvania), 300 kilometers northwest of Bucharest." (Jamal, Tănase 3)

This idea of a thematic park with a structure, which is also described in Jamal and Tănase's article, is what makes me add Disneyland as another possible source of inspiration and to call the Romanian result, a hybrid or an example of glocalization. According to this article, the project implied a:

"700-room hotel, pensions, lodgings, apartments, camping, restaurants (fast foods, snack bar, medieval restaurant and theme bar), sports grounds and a theatre hall. The on-site International Institute of Vampirology would house a resource center with books, movies and historical information. A replica of Dracula's Castle, catacombs, an artificial lake and a labyrinth garden were in the works. The plan included a security service to protect tourists." (Jamal, Tănase 5)

Although some argue that the effect should be seen as positive as in the case of the Dragobete, this time the answer seems to me quite negative. A first problem would be the difference between the purpose above mentioned, of a Disney Park, that of enchanting and entertaining both children and adults through beautiful dreams that come true. On the contrary, as the very Romanian name suggests, this version completely opposes this purpose. One might argue that Disneyland is the definition of America, while Dracula is meant to define us, Romanians. But, is that so? And, does it send a positive message to the world regarding Romania? In what follows I will present the way several American, but not only, Professors or researchers, see either Bram Stoker's novel and/or the character of Dracula and its relation to Romania.

For Professor Stephen Arata, in his 1990 "The Occidental Tourist: *Dracula* and the Anxiety of Reverse Colonization", Stoker's book was written in the context of "the decline of Britain as a world power at the close of the 19th century, or, rather, the way the perception of that decline was articulated by contemporary writers" (Arata 630). In his view, this perception means, among other things, the fear of "being colonized by 'primitive' forces." (Arata 630) And which are these forces? For him, and, perhaps for the author of the novel, if we place *Dracula* in the context of his other works, threatenings may be racial and may come from Transylvania, Romanian region standing for the 'Eastern Question' that "so obsessed British foreign policy in the 1880s and 1890s" (Arata 630), therefore reverse colonization perceived as miscegenation. And here Professor Arata makes two very interesting points. The first is a quotation from Emily Gerard, one of Stoker's sources speaking about Romanians and directly showing the idea of an undesired power of assimilation on their part.

"The Hungarian woman who weds a Romanian husband will necessarily adopt the dress and manners of his people and her children will be as good Romanians as though they had no drop of Magyar blood in their veins; while the Magyar who takes a Romanian girl for his wife, will not only fail to convert her to his ideas, but himself, subdued by her influence, will imperceptibly begin to lose his nationality." (qtd. in Arata 630)

A later quotation will actually emphasize Romanian's power to "rule as masters where formerly they have crouched as slaves" (qtd. in Arata 640), which should send a positive message. However, as Arata perceives it, "What Gerard again allows us to see [...] he is dangerous as the representative or embodiment of a race which, all evidence suggested, was poised to 'step forward' and become 'masters' of those who had already 'spent their strength'" (Arata 640).

The second point, which is much more positive in my view, and quite ignored when characterizing Dracula, is that he is "the most 'Western' character in the novel." Thus he is the most rational, intelligent, organized, punctual, learned and "a most accomplished Occidentalist" (Arata 643) with a library full of English books, of history, geography, politics, political economy, botany, geology and law books, an "Occidentalist traveling west" (Arata 643), a counter-image of Harker who is "an Orientalist traveling East." (Arata 643)

The next interesting thing in Professor Arata's commentary is that Dracula's pair as threatening England's integrity is American Quincey Morris, which gives us two representatives of two young states on their way towards modernization and consolidation as a menace to an empire in decline: "It is appropriate, then, that Morris's death, not Dracula's, closes the story proper; appropriate, too, that the confrontation between England and America is displaced to the Balkans, traditionally the arena where Western powers conducted their struggles with one another indirectly or by proxy." (Arata 645)

For Jason Dittmer, Georgia Southern University, in his 2002/2003 "*Dracula and the Cultural Construction of Europe*", Stoker's novel could be placed in the context of travel literature which depicted Eastern Europe as different from the West using certain dichotomies: (West vs. East) civilization/barbarism, mind/body, and science/magic. In his view the Count is "the vampire, whose hybrid identification (a result of his history) as both Christian and Ottoman, makes him monstrous and ultimately incoherent, a source of history that 'logically' (but alike anxiously) needs to be silenced" (Dittmer 240). What is important here in terms of the message such a character might send to the world is this idea of 'being silenced' because Dracula stands not only for Romania, but for the Balkan states as a whole. And how would these states be silenced for the author of this article? By driving the Count back "to Eastern Europe by the representatives of the West" (Dittmer 241), in other words, "the new Balkan States are disallowed admission into Europe by representatives from the West." (Dittmer 241)

His conclusion is that: "The Count *must* be from Eastern Europe for the story to have its maximum cultural resonance; the story is as horrifying as it is because Dracula is this emblem of Eastern European danger threatening the West." (Dittmer 246) The worst part refers to the permanent negative image such a project like the one Stoker's novel belongs to, (i.e. the construction of the difference between Eastern and Western Europe through travel literature, Enlightenment philosophy and the Gothic horror), shows to (American) people:

"The project has vast political and cultural ramifications, as it helps to structure the geographic imagination of the reader. Most readers of this literature will never travel to Eastern Europe and as a result will gain that perception of that place from the literature cited above (or media influenced by that literature). *Dracula*, as part of this project, is particularly important because of its literary longevity and its role as the inspiration for an entire genre of books and movies, as well as a sub-culture, each of which reconstructs the division of Europe into east and west and makes it more of a taken-for-granted fact of life." (Dittmer 247)

From Kathleen Webb's comments in her article "Creature of the Night: The Changing Image of Dracula", from 2003, we find out that the Irish writer met in 1890 a Hungarian Professor from the University of Budapest, who told him about Vlad Țepeș:

"Even if he was a Romanian national hero, the rest of Europe remembers him for the practice of impaling his victims. It is estimated that he impaled around 100.000 people, in his six years reign, but he also managed to drive away the Turks from Wallachia. Only the name of the real Vlad and his adventures with the Turks are included in this novel." (Webb, 20).

The rest, we are told, was written in the Victorian age for a British public who loved horror stories.

More recent approaches show *Dracula* as the representation of the Great Famine in Ireland, through the symbol of the coffin, in Robert Smart and Michael Hutcheson's 2007 article "Suspect Grounds: Temporal and Spatial Paradoxes in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*: A Postcolonial Reading":

"In no other vampire tale in the tradition - either in England or in Ireland - does the coffin, fifty of them in this case, play such a visible role in making the movement of the vampire from Eastern Europe to England. To someone acquainted with the many Famine scenes in which coffins are piled outside of cottiers' houses, or of wagons being led to overflowing cemeteries, the number of coffins that Dracula prepares for his colonization of England and the West resonates with cultural memory." (Smart Hutcheson 17)

For Courtney Johnson in her 2008 article "Dracula the Jew: Anti-Semitism and Hollywood's Vampire", the novel is an instance of anti-Semitism where Dracula is the Jew seen as the Christian's Western "other".

He is a fictional character having nothing to do with Prince Dracula, "a fifteenth century historical prince in Wallachia, a part of modern day Romania. [...] an ardent defender of Christendom and staunch opponent of the expanding Ottoman Empire" (Vorsino 35) whose bad name was constructed by "the skillful use of the printing press" (Vorsino 35) that is, the Saxons he had quarreled with, and through "the masterful work of the author Bram Stoker" (Vorsino 35), for Michael Vorsino in his 2008 M.A. thesis *Dracula: From Historical Voievod to Fictional Prince*.

The year 2009 perceives Stoker's book either as a battle between "good versus evil" in terms of religion, as Eleanor Bourg Donlon, in her article "Satan and the Art of Darkness. A Bite of Theology: The Catholic Aesthetic in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*." sees it, where the main character is "a supernatural being embodying the Christian concept of Satan; second, that the vampire sucking of blood is an Anti-Eucharist" (Bourg 9). In this, she seems to agree with Australian Bruno Starrs who, in 2004 was writing in "Keeping the Faith: Catholicism in *Dracula* and its adaptations", that "the novel's religious analogy is obvious" (Starrs 3), Dracula being precisely the anti-Christ who "promises eternal life through the ingestion not of sacramental wine representing the blood of Christ, but of actual human blood." (Starrs 3) In direct opposition with Dracula stands American Quincey Morris playing "the role of the Christ dying on the cross to cancel out the force of the anti-Christ [...] the Jesus-like death of Morris leads to a form of *spiritual* rebirth. He is resurrected a year later in the shape of Mina and Jonathan's baby." (Starrs 4)

Or, we have "the paranoid behavior" of the Western positive characters, as Spanish Andrés Romero Jódar calls it in his article "Bram Stoker's *Dracula*. A Study on the Human Mind and Paranoid Behavior." In his view "The novel, as part of the *fin-de-siècle* scientific period, can be interpreted as a conscious inquiry into the functioning of the mind and, most especially, into the aetiology of paranoid behavior. Thus, Stoker text's becomes a testimony of a mental disorder known as *folie à deux*, or shared madness." (Jódar 23)

Thus, Stoker left us with a negative character, largely promoted by both Hollywood films and other media, which means a threatening colonizer, the primitive and uncivilized world, a

horror story written for the British public, the anti-Christ, anti-Semitism, paranoia, a negative fictional character, even the Great Famine. Quite a negative image for the country that chose it as its 'Park' and quite a negative message sent to the world, in my view, with the exception perhaps of the only feature that didn't pass the test of time: Dracula as a cultivated Western-oriented noble.

Finally, let us now see how this connection between *Dracula* and Romania is perceived by some Romanian historians and their explanation regarding the 'Vlad the Impaler' myth, as well as the meaning of the name 'dracul'.

In his book *Istorie și mit în conștiința românească (History and Myth in the Romanian Consciousness)* Lucian Boia explains the localization of the novel in Transylvania:

"Although at the time the famous novel appeared Transylvania belonged to Hungary, and count Dracula himself was an Hungarian aristocrat, Romania inherited the myth in 1918 together with the territories beyond the mountains. Dracula would not have found his place either in the Alps (too close to the heart of the Occident), or in Tibet (too far). The Carpathians offer him a proper scenery. It is the margin of Europe: the place where Western civilization opens to an already different world." (Boia, 300).

But what do the Romanian chronicles, written during Țepeș's reign, say about this ruler? Boia's book also tells us that there were no negative images around the year 1450. The only Romanian sources written at the time show a common ruler who had built a castle in Poienari and a monastery in Snagov, but who had worked his people "until their clothes broke" (Boia, 321). The other sources are either Byzantine, when they are talking about the conflicts with the Turks, or German. According to Lucian Boia, there is only one Slavonic chronicle that speaks about his alleged sadism.

The explanation for the name of 'Dracul' can be found in Gheorghe Zbucnea's book *Diaspora românească: pagini de istorie (Romanian Diaspora: Pages of History)*. We are talking about the years 1425-1431, in Germany, especially in the town of Nuremberg, where: "In the day of the 8th of February of 1431 in that town the ceremony of his reception in the Order of the Dragon took place." (Zbucnea, 26). This same historian explains the meaning of this order, which makes me see the current meaning given to the name of this ruler, as well as to the idea of the park - 'devil', 'vampire' - as ironic:

The members of the Order, among them Vlad Dracul, were wearing two distinctive, overlapping cloaks, a red one, above which there was a green one. Around his neck he had a necklace, and from the necklace there was hanging a golden medallion engraved with a dragon, like a snake, in the form of a circle, with the tail twisted around the neck, with the back turned along and with a cross above reading in Latin: "Oh, how merciful God is!" Vlad Dracul wore this necklace all his life. (Zbucnea, 27)

Conclusion

The present study discussed Saint Valentine's Day and Disneyland as two examples of globalization seen as Americanization. Its purpose was both to explain them in terms of history, traditions and the message they send to the world and to analyze and define the way Romania responded to them in her way to open again to Western influences.

The first conclusion is that once again Romania did copy the West, defined today as America, as she used to do in the second half of the 19th century with France, but this time she 'glocalized' it, rediscovering a lost tradition on the one hand, and choosing an (alleged) national myth as the 'Park' on the other.

The second conclusion is that, as the definition of the two American examples and the analysis of several critics shows, the initial message and model is, in both cases a very positive one, regarding the country it represents, while the Romanian 'copy' is both optimistic and positive in the first case, but completely negative and unfavorable for our country, in the second.

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