Dracula; or, in the eve of St. Georg's day under a faint flickering blue flame you may find a book.

1.

Dracula was the first book I read that changed my mind. I was very young, maybe twelve years of age and I had barely any understanding of the world outside my home town. The internet wasn't around yet and I remember a whole month of uncertainty whether Bram was a man's or a woman's name but regardless of the author's gender the book was my first encounter with distance on a synchronic and a diachronic level.[1] Suddenly I understood that travelling to other places and times was as easy as turning the page.

Nearly all of the interests of my adolescence root back to that initial reading of the novel: Soon my bookshelf started filling with books about *Wij*, *Horla*, *Guzla* and *Wurdalak* and lead to broader readings of non-vampire-novels by their authors and slowly, step by step and page by page, I became a lover of literature. At the same time, I developed larger interest in history after occupying myself with Vlad Tepes and his times, as well as with Arminius Vambery, who travelled the Middle East disguised as a dervish and inspired the character of Abraham Van Helsing. I then followed the vampire's traces back to the times when he was yet a foul peasant, a zombie who brought ill luck to those who's names he called and to those who heard him smacking from the grave, followed him to the times when he was promoted by the three religions of the Balkans and used for their own interest and and to the time when Maria Theresia sent Dr. Van Swieten down south in order to examine and crush that superstition.[2] I followed him all the way to the Villa Diodati on the lake Geneva where three extraordinary artists dipped into the tradition of fantastic novels and forever changed it as the vampire turned into what he is known as

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[1] I have always kept this a secret. When asked about my first contact with literature I would either joke that it was the collected works of Lenin or I would sketch myself as a classical reader of Eugene Sue's *The Mysteries of Paris*, Jules Verne's *Two Year's Vacation* etc. to entertain myself, but about *Dracula* I think I have never opened up.

[2] In addition to these factual theories I developed idiosyncratic phantasies about enlightened writers deliberately promoting the vampire superstition in their writing in order to keep the people afraid of the dead instead of the living, hoping that the mob would exhume corpses and impale and burn them instead of burning living women for their alleged witchcraft.

nowadays: a passionate lover and dandy.

Simultaneously the vampire accompanied my initiation process as a cinephile: from the expressionist *Noferatu* of Murnau to the colourful British Hammer Horrors I watched all available screen adaptions and again one thing lead to another as the directors became familiar, their films not related to vampires became interesting to me, and not so long after, I was a lover of film. For me *Dracula* was the start of it all.

2.

What's to be found in that book that changed me so much? There are some very strong parts – some elements that forever shaped my understanding of the mythical: the coachman marking the spots of the faint flickering blue flames in the eve of St. George's day (I developed a taste for Christian nights with a pagan foundation) and the names and the descriptions of the landscapes: Bistritz, Borgo-Pass, Bukovina, Carpathians – my personal definition of the sublime.

But I think what caught my interest most and astonished me so much was the way how serious the protagonists would take their lives, their interests and their loved ones.
These people respected, cherished and valued other peoples feeling and their passions, they would take the time to carefully speak and to listen, to observe their surroundings and to note things down. One coach passenger quoting Gottfried August Bürger's *Lenore* ("Die Toten reiten schnell") and another one recognizing it seemed as far away from my life experiences as it seemed beautiful. In *Dracula* I got a glance of a time where people appreciated other people and their time (A doctor taking his patients seriously – can this be possible?). The remarkable thing was that these people were no aristocrats liberated from existential struggles, but people who got stuff done, who worked and still *felt* at the same time.

In this context, the first half of Dracula always read as a tale of hospitality and traveling for me. In Jonathan the reader finds an individual appreciating the process of travel and engaging in serious forms of preparation:

> Having had 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 nobleman of that country.

During his journey, Jonathan keeps log of his experiences in his diary and zealously notes down local observance, superstition and vocabulary: A traveling gentleman is always at once a writer, an ethologist and an ethnologist. In a passage revealing the loving and respecting relationship with his fiancée Mina and the thoroughness of his actions he decides to get the receipt of local dish he enjoyed for her:

> I had for dinner, or rather supper, a chicken done up some way with red pepper, which was very good but thirsty. (Mem. get recipe for Mina.) I asked the waiter, and he said it was called "paprika hendl," and that, as it was a national dish, I should be able to get it anywhere along the Carpathians.

In the Carpathians, the hospitality towards him starts with a letter of friendship by Count Dracula:

> ‘My friend. – Welcome to the Carpathians. I am anxiously expecting you. Sleep well tonight. At three tomorrow the diligence will start for Bukovina; a place on it is kept for you. At the Borgo Pass my carriage will await you and will bring you to me. I trust that your journey from London has been a happy one, and that you will enjoy your stay in my beautiful land. – Your friend, Dracula.’

These gestures of friendship and respect continue throughout the journey, e.g. when the Count secures the best seat on the coach for Jonathan, when the coachmen has prepared a bottle of Slivovitz to warm up his passenger and when the Counts sits with Jonathan through his dinner despite his own satiety.

Like Jonathan has prepared for Transylvania, the count has prepared for his guest and the culture he is willing to get involved with:

> “I am glad you found your way in here, for I am sure there is much that will interest you. These companions,” and he laid his hand on some of the books, “have been good friends to me, and for some years past, ever since I had the idea of going to London, have given me many, many hours of pleasure. Through them I have come to know your great England, and to know her is to

> love her. I long to go through the crowded streets of your mighty London, to be in the midst of the whirl and rush of humanity, to share its life, its change, its death, and all that makes it what it is."

When explaining the ancient customs, the folkways and the history of his own country at a seclusive conversations nearby the chimney and later asking his guest to do the same, Dracula is not a predator luring Jonathan, but inquisitive, curious, and serious about his interest in the guest's culture. Their appropinquating is gradual and gentle, slowly redeeming the given credit of trust:

> As yet I only know your tongue through books. To you, my friend, I look that I know it to speak.'
>
> 'But, Count,' I said, 'You know and speak English thoroughly!' He bowed gravely.
>
> 'I thank you, my friend, for your all too-flattering estimate, but yet I fear that I am but a little way on the road I would travel.

Throughout my adolescence I have always wished for a relationship like the one between Jonathan and the Count: distant, sincere and respectful. I read *Dracula* like a gothic novel, but surely not like a horror novel, and when I later read Fred Saberhagens *The Dracula Tape*, a reworked version of Bram Stokers novel where Count Dracula retells the story from his point of view and reveals that he never had bad intentions but that the circumstances made him fall out with Jonathan it made perfect sense for me.

In my personal reading, the second part of the novel set in Britain is mainly a tale of friendship: For the reader, the Count is gone, Burberry-cheques may have replaced the red fabric on the inside of his cape and he became a somewhat vague idea in the head of his enemies, an opponent to unite against, forever linking the fate of different men from different backgrounds bound by their loving respect for Lucy and literally giving their blood to save her while also overcoming their rivalry and difference for one noble cause. They engage in true friendship, respecting each other and taking all necessary measures for a serious situation. They combine their knowledge, power and possibilities, use their

connections, consult their teachers[3] and place their personal interests behind the group's interest. In this act of friendship and mutual support they succeed and achieve the unlikely, despite some sufferings and losses.

3.

I am well aware that this is a rather exotic reading – maybe even an idiosyncratic misreading.[4] During the years I have not met many readers who shared my opinion on the novel but I do see some similar ideas or at least their traces in some of the screen adaptions. While the more ambitious and high-budgeted Dracula adaptions usually focus on more rewarding aspects like love, passion, blood and mythology, some lower-budget and TV-production (like Jesus Franco's *Count Dracula* of 1969) contain and celebrate the elements I analysed in the previous chapter.

Lacking in all of the screen adaptions is an adequate representation of the unique mixed form of the novel consisting of different narrators and revealing itself to the reader through different media. The reader slowly and follows the storyline bit by bit through different diaries, letters, notes, a logbook and „a cutting from the dailygraph".

This narrative inconsistency and the different perspectives add a big amount of suspense to the novel's qualities mentioned in paragraph 2: it allows the reader early suspicion, which gradually grow more and more likely, but only very late can the reader gain certainty that Jonathan, Mina and Lucy had glutted the thirst of a VAMPYRE!

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[3] The fact that Van Helsing preaches enlightenment but practises his vampire hunt exclusively with old methods of superstition is critiqued by many scholars, but to me it gave a very comfortable feeling, that science and myth come from the same substratum of truth.

[4] No matter how far-off a reading is, it will not be more devious than the popular spatial, postcolonial and gender readings of the book.

Pechorin; or, No time for heroes

1.

When getting a 19th-century-book recommendation at the age of 15 by an earnest, bearded father, who would impress Russian house guests with quotes of *Evgeny Onegin* and amuse them with allusions on *Vojna i Mir* („I understand myself as a very tolerant person: the spectrum of characters I can accept in friends ranges from Knjez Andrei to Pierre Bezukhov"), one would not implicitly expect to find something of interest in there; the word *hero* in the title alone would raise expectations of meaningfulness, pathos and patina: by no means something that one would willingly read – if it wasn't to impress some Russian *krasavica*. But one's expectations couldn't have been more off the base.

When rereading a decade later the novel's Romantic dimension of the movements of individuals in time, the segregation of society into aristocracy and indign, the question of pride, corporative morals and duels would still be of interest and the accurate pinpointing of the essence of the character of Caucasian women to such a degree that it is still as valid almost two centuries later would still be as impressive, but there was another level that would resonate more with my mindset at the time: the question of the *lisnyih celovek* (or *superfluous man*).

2.

When analysing the character of Pechorin, another more universal dimension becomes apparent under this Shakespearean-Romantic tale of intrigue and love: we are dealing with a person caught between his idea(l)s and the limited possibilities of his time. Having said that, there is nothing pathetic about Pechorin: he is an anti-Werther, someone whose feeling of discomfort and alienation in time and society does not come from omphaloskepsis and overanalysing his own role in society, but from a wider examination of society as a whole. Pechorin-Lermontov can see the need of a radical change, but understands (or has experienced) that the critical mass of people who have the same understanding has not been reached and will not be reached during his lifetime.

In a time without what Lew Gumiliev calls *passionarnost* (something that was present during the times of Atatürk but was not at the late times of the Roman Empire) a hero is a superfluous character. And while one swallow does not make a springtime, the lone swallow will most probably find a way to entertain itself between the shambles of the

Caucasus and the salons of Petersburg. Pechorin is somewhere between *Byronic hero* and *decadent*, but still bearing a revolutionary momentum within him, which will be lost on the way to the decadent, who can no longer imagine a possible change in society and puts all his efforts in decorating the present form of it in beautiful, oriental, exotic ornament.

With Pechorin, there is no escapism, no Romantic descent into artificial paradises or religion. His melancholy is not a pose, not an air, not an attitude and no unique selling proposition for the ladies. This is a person who has analysed and experienced the limits of his century and came to his conclusions... Is this even a time for heroes? Let's hear the man himself: *How can I tell? ...Are there not many people who, in beginning life, think to end it like Lord Byron or Alexander the Great, and, nevertheless, remain Titular Councillors all their days?*

3.

With my latest reading of *Geroy nashego vremeni*, another poetological dimension of the novel opened up for me. I felt that in the same manner as Pechorin would surpass Werther in content, Lermontov would have surpassed Goethe and the other Romantics in form, and he would have transcended all his predecessors: Beginning with the structure, which shows some similarities to Romantic novels but breaks the limits of epistolary novels, diaries and traditional narration in favour of a multi-perspective, self-reflexive, self-referential allusive form evocating Diderot's *Jacques le fataliste.*

But where Diderot's novel seems more like an etude, an exercise in style that expands the boundaries, Lermontov takes his new-found material to form a compact genuine piece of art. There is something magical about the structure, about the places where things happen and about the stories being told: For readers of *Geroy nashego vremeni*, some constellations, some locations, some names will forever be Lermontov's.

Lermontov's reduced style, at moments even elliptic, abandons the burden of past Mannerism. His writing is *dressed in accordance with the strict rules of the best taste – nothing superfluous.* This style allows him to portray genuine interpersonal relationships as ambivalent and complex as they are, instead of transforming them to a courtly paper theatre. He even exceeds predecessors at their pet issue with his genuine descriptions of nature, and of the hill people's connection to nature that an estranged early Romantic from Jena fails to put down in his writing.

The clash with precedent forms of literature is also reflected within the interaction of the novels' characters: Maksim Maksimych, a Balzaco-Maupassantian tradition narrator

full of moral comments, high-reflexions, phraseology and Mannerism, who in his narration even versifies prose songs; Grushnitsky, the effusive Romantic, transfigured and transfiguring; and Pechorin the modern approach to literature, who will later tout for the attention of the princess, the readers and the audience, and overcome the others: the princess can no longer have any interest in limp Grushnitsky after being acquainted with Pechorin.

But can this modern approach to literature fulfil what it promised? Can it do what traditional narration and literature cannot do? Is he sincere, is he meaningful, does he know the answers to the reader's epistemological and ontological crisis? Let us again hear the man himself*: "Princess," I said, "you know that I have been making fun of you?...You must despise me." (...) "So you see, yourself," I said in as firm a voice as I could command, and with a forced smile (...).*

Der goldene Topf, 13th vigil:

Hoffman and I – Anselm is stuck in a love triangle and needs to make a decision – the dualism of artist and the bourgeois – Anselm's Apprenticeship/Journeyman Years – Hoffmann caught between Wilhelm and Amadeus – ambiguity as a life-style – creation is struggle – the writer in Atlantis.

1.

Not so long time ago, while digging deeper into the oeuvre of Gustave Flaubert, I came across his *Bibliomanie*, a tale he wrote at the tender age of 15, and I immediately found myself in familiar surroundings when finding Hoffmann in between every line of Flaubert: I considered myself at home. This would not have been the case a couple of years ago, as for a long time I could not relate to Hoffmann's writing at all. My encounter with his *Sandmann* in school did not leave too much of an impression on me (apart from the word *Automat*, which took on a new, mystical dimension in my mind), and also later tries with *Murr*, *Scuderie* and the *Serapionsbrüder* never lasted to the end: his names sounded mostly random and sometimes silly to me, his characters were far from reality and to me they seemed like puppets with long limbs and small heads (very similar to Hoffmann's drawing of Johannes Kreisler). There was always some feeling of discomfort with me and Hoffman; I had troubles understanding his mertiful position in the history of literature and finding him again and again in references to my favourite writers growing up – Poe, Pushkin, Baudelaire,.., I fell under the impression that (despite the broad success with audiences during his lifetime) Hoffmann was a writer's writer and coming to that conclusion, I had given up on becoming a fan.

Oddly it was another medium that lead me back to him. I heard of the existence of a DEFA movie called *Die Elixiere des Teufels* and already the name gave me a thrill, soon I found myself reading Hoffmann's text and although I tried hard I could not deny that there was some value added to Matthew Gregory Lewis's *Monk*, and I felt that it happened on the formal level of the text itself, on the level of words and I finally got a sense for the quality of Hoffmann, but it was a slow process for me and only during my latest reading the complex world and the style of Hoffmann fully opened up to me.

2.

Der goldene Topf, for me, is something real and highly Romantic in every way. On the first level, it tells the story of a misfit, who generally isn't hostile to the pleasures of a Philistine, but is a stranger to the world because of his clumsiness: his is failure in the outer world enables his way into the inner world, and opens new ways of synesthetic, poetic perception.

Unwittingly he stumbles into a *ménage à trois* and is all of a sudden not only caught between two girls but also between two worlds: the world of poetry and the world of reality. In the dualism of artist and the bourgeois, his problem of love is nothing less than a state of inner conflict, disunity and fragmentation.

While in the classic *Bildungsroman* in the tradition of Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister* (which is often alluded to and which is kept in the readers mind during the whole novella as a possible ending) the inner turmoil between artistic and the bourgeois self, between Apollo and Dionysus, must end in a safe space with a settling, conciliatory momentum and the adaption of the individual to the norms of society; in a Romantic context the inner turmoil must cause outer turmoil and pose a treat to the square Philistine's world.

While Novalis already negates the *Bildungsroman's* traditional ending of the struggling poet finding 'his place' in society at an ordinary occupation in his *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*[5], Hoffmann takes it one (maybe radical) step further. While Novalis strives after a romanticizing of the everyday world and a "völlige Aufhebung des Realen im märchenhaften Ideal"[6], in Hoffmann's novella the two worlds co-exist and fantasy poses a constant threat to reality. While the Atlantis of Novalis is a social paradise and therefore can easily be put aside and dismissed as an utopian dream, Hoffmann's Atlantis is purely aesthetic[7] and therefor a lurking impendence in and for all realms of the everyday world.

What is interesting about *Der goldene Topf* is the permanent permeability of the two worlds' borders. While some motives and characters are clearly associated with either one or the other[8], and some cross the border temporarily (like Veronika), in the character of the Archivarius lies a beautiful and deep link between the two worlds. The fairy tale he

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[5] The novel was known to Hoffmann; he used the same subject for his *Der Kampf der Sänger*.

[6] Peter: Braun Kommentar zu E.T.A. Hoffmanns *Der goldene Topf*. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp 2002, S.121.
[7] Ibid.
[8] E.g., Konrektor Paulmann and Registrator Heerbrand, who revealingly don't have first names but get their individual attributes from their profession.

tells at the beginning of the third Vigil turns out to be a part of its own frame. It is indeed an autobiographical story of the Lindhorst's past; the fairytale is part of its own prequel.[9] This dualism of the inner and outer world, the fantastic and the real, the poet and bourgeois is a key conflict of Romanticism and, in a broader context, perhaps of literature or the modern novel itself.

It is a very popular commonplace in the *Hoffmann-Forschung*, but in that context it is worth taking a look at the author's life for just a moment (in rare cases I think that the exposure of parallels to the author's life can be useful, but only if they are not considered the end of the interpretation but a way leading somewhere else), and find a man caught between art and business, between music and jurisprudence, at first choosing the latter for reasons of reason but never giving up the former and keeping his bockhorns for good.[10] Hoffmann becomes a manic creator, handling his bread-and-butter-job during the daytime and drawing, composing and writing at night.[11] In 1809 at 33 years of age he changes his middle name from the Prussian Wilhelm to the Mozartian Amadeus. The borders between these two worlds of Wilhelm and Amadeus bear the same permeability mentioned above: in jag, in exhilaration, in ecstasy they can be crossed, by Hoffmann himself as well as by his characters.

3.

This permeability is subject to a high expansion throughout all formal aspects of the novel. Like with all good works of art, the content is reflected in (and produced by) its form. This starts with the mixing of perspectives and semantic structures in the indexes of the single Vigils, and extends to a heterogetic narrator suddenly entering the story in Vigil 6 and becoming homodiegetic.

Both of these strategies add to the structure of the whole novella questioning the hermetic border between fantasy and reality, the internal self and the outer world, dream and reality, but there is another more significant stylistic device accompanying the reader through the whole novel: Hoffmann's highly ambiguous, polysemous writing style. His very normal everyday sentences can mean something dark or Romantic at closer

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[9] This passage already dismisses all psychoanalytical or exclusivity symbolic interpretations of the fairy world.
[10] Some scholars see the duality of Hoffmanns character reflected in the initials of *The Golden Pot*'s protagonists Anselm and Heeresbrand: ‚A' and ‚H' represent Amadeus Hoffmann.
[11] Vigil, the names of the chapters are references to work during nighttime.

examination. Hoffmann masters this style of writing like no other before and like only Kafka after him. (Scholars have yet to agree on whether Kafka was a heavy reader of Hoffmann, but I personally am very sure he was.) True writers use words that bear more than one meaning in a special context to add another semantic level, and their sentences can mean multiple things, and when it comes to the following dangerous encounter with a snake in a beautiful paragraph at the end of the second Vigil, one can not be sure whether the fight will end with Anselmus' death or with his *petite mort*:

> Die Klingelschnur senkte sich hinab und wurde zur weißen durchsischtigen Riesenschlange, die umwand und drückte ihn fester und fester ihr Gewinde schnürte zusammen, daß die mürben zermalmten Glieder knackend zerbröckelten, und sein Blut aus den Adern spritzte, eindringend in den durchsichtigen Leib der Schlange und ihn rot färbend. – Töte mich, töte mich![12]

At other passages the ambiguity is not so obvious, but close reading reveals pursuits and hints to the struggle of the artist, the struggle of creation. It seems as if Hoffmann is addressing this to himself – motivating himself to believe in his creation and to believe in his ability to create – when he lets the snake whisper to Anselmus and tell him to believe in her ("glaube – glaube – glaube an uns").

I find the struggle of a writer (or an artist in general) referenced in multiple passages (apart from the obvious subplot with the narrator). If one takes a closer look at Anselm's initiation process in the house of the Archivarius Lindhorst, one can find examples of writing that suddenly looks puerile when presented to a master, of magic that springs from words, of the sudden understanding of formerly illegible signs and of a writing process on the verge of lunacy. These are situations very well known to aspiring writers and Anselm's whole learning process he undergoes with Lindhorst can be read as a poetic-romantic metamorphosis from writer to wordsmith.

At some point in Hoffmann's life, one of the two worlds he and his protagonists are caught between becomes rampant and destroys the other. In his *Meister Flo* he mimics the real Ministerialdirektor Kamptz (a senior policeman) with his fictional protagonist

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[12] E.T.A. Hoffmann: Der goldene Topf. Ein Märchen aus der neuen Zeit. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp 2002, S. 25.

Knarrpanti to an extent that granted him many professional and juristic problems, which ultimately destroyed his civil existence and – according to some scholars – lead his body to the early grave. But while Hoffmann's material form went one way, his spirit and his works of art might just have gone the other way, to Atlantis or to the place of the writer: above the clouds, above the crowds, where the sounds are original, infinite skills create miracles....

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