“Strange corpses”: Magyar elite discourse about popular belief in the undead, 1717-1922

By

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Abstract

This thesis examines belief in the undead in the Kingdom of Hungary from the beginning of the eighteenth century to the start of the twentieth century. It focuses on the relationship between the intellectual elite and superstitious beliefs surrounding reanimated corpses. The research reveals that Hungarian elites did not relegate superstitious belief to a backward, enchanted past. On the contrary, the revenant played an important role in defining the contested boundary between life and death, which was problematized by both Hungary's religious pluralism and the struggle between modern medicine and folk healing. By associating the undead with epidemics of plague and cholera in the eighteenth and nineteenth century, intellectual elites legitimized the belief in the returning dead and shaped the way medical institutions addressed disease and death. In the second half of the nineteenth century, one might have expected superstitious beliefs to decline and rational, disenchanted discourse to increase. However, irrespective of scientific advancements, the belief in revenants endured in popular culture and even in some form in elite discourse. The eastern borderland of the Habsburg Empire had a unique history of undead belief that inspired sensational forms of enchantment, such as the figure of the Vampire, that spilled out of the sphere of folklore into popular print and scientific discourse. Far from achieving the Enlightenment goal of overcoming irrational superstition, the vampire demonstrates how new forms of enchantment emerged instead.

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Introduction

In a quiet, rural village of Kiscsula in Hunyad county in Hungary, strange occurrences started to happen after the death of a 70-year-old Wallachian peasant widow named Péterné Grosán.[1] A few days after her death, a disease broke out amongst the flock of her son, Péter Grosán, killing twenty sheep in a short period of time. Grosán was deeply disturbed by the loss of his sheep, and his distress was further heightened by the fact that his two young children fell ill. He expressed his suspicion to the villagers that there might be some supernatural cause behind the death of his sheep and the illness of his children. Some of the villagers told him that the spirit of his mother emerged from the grave at night, transforming into a vampire and sucking the blood of the sheep and children. According to the villagers, the only way to save his children was to dig up his mother's corpse, stake her heart and burn her body. Following the villagers' advice:

> On January 20, in the middle of the night, Péter Grosán went to his mother's grave with six others. They dug up the body, pierced it with sharp iron rods, stabbed an axe through the chest, and then laid the body face down and set it on fire. After that, they put the corpse back into the grave and, satisfied with their work, went home.[2]

Contrary to expectation, this astonishing tale does not originate from the era of early-modern times when people's lives were steeped with superstitious beliefs. Instead, it is from the early twentieth century, a time when most European societies considered themselves to be 'modern'. The newspaper *Magyarország*, where the incident was reported to have occurred in 1911, sheds light on a lingering belief in the supernatural, despite the prevailing notions of modernity. The report transports us to a world where progress coexists with deeply ingrained beliefs in the supernatural. Regardless of the growing concept of rationality and scientific thought, some enclaves of society—ranging from peasant farmers to educated elites—continued to hold on to age-old traditions and fears. Thus, these

[1] Hunyad was an administrative county of the Kingdom of Hungary, of the Eastern Hungarian Kingdom and of the Principality of Transylvania. Its territory in Transylvania, is in today's Romania.
[2] *Magyarország* 18. No. 47 (February 24, 1911).

modern narratives of the returning dead offer an opportunity to examine the limits of modernity and the role of the supernatural beliefs in shaping or challenging modern progress.

In the example above, the corpse was subjected to the same execution methods as others during the early-modern period, raising questions about how superstitious practices around the dead persisted and evolved at the popular level. The endurance of these superstitious practices calls into question Max Weber's concept of disenchantment, which refers to the process by which modernisation and rationalisation have diminished the influence of traditional and religious beliefs.[3] Some scholars have raised valid critiques regarding its limitations, acknowledging the way that different societies, cultures, and individuals may have experienced disenchantment in distinct ways.[4] In this thesis, I examine Weber's argument in a way that acknowledges the complexity of disenchantment, considering its historical context, cultural diversity, and the coexistence between rationalization and alternative belief systems.

This thesis delves into popular and elite mentalities regarding a specific aspect of supernatural belief relating to the undead in the Hungarian Kingdom from 1717 until 1922. It shows how people in the past incorporated these beliefs into the narratives that shaped the way that individuals understood themselves and their society. For Magyar writers, the undead phenomena represented the nation's complex relationship with modernity. By exploring liminal states, Magyar writers addressed the blurred lines between life and death, symbolized the existential struggle of a society caught between progress and tradition in the modern age. Hungary's geographical position between Eastern and Western Europe added to this tension. Magyar writers incorporated these elements and provided deep insights into national identity and the ongoing search for balance in a rapidly changing world. By discussing the returning dead, these writers depicted the existential fears and uncertainties inherent in the Hungarian experience, highlighting the difficulties of reconciling tradition

[3] Max Weber 'Science as a Vocation', in: H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills eds. *From Max Weber* (New York: Free Press, 1946).

[4] See: Richard Jenkins, 'Disenchantment, Enchantment and Re-enchantment: Max Weber at the Millenium', *Max Weber Studies* 1, no. 1. (2000): 11-32. ; Raymond L. M. Lee, 'Modernity, mortality and re-enchantment: the death taboo revisited', *Sociology* 42 (2008): 745-59; Alexandra Walsham, 'The Reformation and "the disenchantment of the world" reassessed', *Historical Journal* 51 (2008): 497-528; Julian Holloway 'Legend-Tripping in Spooky Places: Ghost Tourism and the Infrastructures of Enchantment', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 28. no. 4 (2010): 618-37; Thomas Waters, 'Magic and the British Middle Classes, 1750-1900', *Journal of British Studies* 54, no. 3. (2015): 632-53.

with the demands of modernity. Drawing on a variety of methodologies including cultural history, the history of medicine, intellectual history, and the history of ideas, this thesis analyses Magyar attitudes towards the revenant phenomenon to contribute to the understating of the cultural narrative that shaped Hungarian identity. The thesis, therefore, argues that the beliefs in the supernatural not only persisted throughout the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries, but also responded to and shaped Hungarian scientific development, urbanisation, and religious and political change.

Literature review

Understanding what people in the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries meant by the term 'supernatural' poses a significant challenge. Throughout much of Europe's Christian history, supernatural occurrences were categorized into two main types: those considered miraculous and attributed to God, and those termed 'preternatural' and caused by demons or natural laws not yet comprehended by humans.[5] Examining the various reasons individuals classified an event as supernatural or ordinary provides insight into the way people articulated their belief and scepticism. The supernatural, therefore, was a fluid category, the boundaries of which were frequently redefined by the personal values and judgments of individuals. By acknowledging the diversity of perspectives and beliefs regarding disenchantment, my thesis redefines the supernatural in a way that does not strictly separate 'intellectual' from 'popular' knowledge.[6] I focus on a specific supernatural belief—the concept of the harmful dead whose mystical activities are connected to the physical corpse. These entities, encompassing the returning dead, vampires, and deceased witches, will be collectively referred to as 'revenants' throughout this study to provide a comprehensive term. These 'strange corpses' are believed to possess the power to inflict harm from beyond the grave, offering a captivating exploration of the interplay between cultural beliefs about the returning dead and philosophical questions regarding the line between life and death.

[5] See: Andreas Sommer, 'What Is a Supernatural Phenomenon? Aquinas, Hume, and Alfred Russel Wallace's "Naturalistic Spiritualism"', https://www.forbiddenhistories.com/2019/01/aquinas-hume-wallace/ Accessed: March 20, 2024.
[6] Kristof Smeyers, 'Supernaturals: Qualifying the Supernatural', *Magic, Ritual, and Witchcraft* 16, no. 3. (2021): 381-88.

In the European context, disenchantment typically denotes the diminishing influence of witchcraft beliefs. It is often associated with the Enlightenment period, spanning from the late-seventeenth to the early-eighteenth century, characterized by advancements in natural philosophy and medicine.[7] Peter Gay suggests that the Enlightenment was inspired by French philosophers who challenged the influence of religion. These philosophers aimed to weaken the authority of traditional institutions, especially the Catholic Church.[8] While Gay's account of the Enlightenment remains influential, recent scholarship has challenged his idea. For example, William J. Bulman argues in *God in the Enlightenment* that the new philosophical ideas of the Enlightenment did not exist in a hostile relationship to the religious ideas of eighteenth century.[9] Instead, he asserts that there were dynamic and complex interactions between faith (religion) and reason (philosophy) that were central to the intellectual and cultural developments associated with the European Enlightenment. Bulman's work contests the notion that the Enlightenment was solely characterized by the rejection of religious beliefs in favour of reason and rationality.

Ulrich L. Lehner points out that, for Catholic Enlightenment thinkers, serious intellectual engagement with witchcraft and vampirism did not imply a rejection of the supernatural or spiritual aspects of the Catholic faith. Rejecting the supernatural would have undermined core aspects of Catholic doctrine and belief. Rather, for these Catholic Enlightenment thinkers, the supernatural elements and miracles within the Christian faith could coexist with the rational ideas of modern science and philosophy. They sought to reconcile faith with reason.[10] In Hungary, Dániel Bárth's work on exorcism in the second half of the eighteenth century shows how exorcists used the ritual to remedy a wide range of medical problems beyond the metaphysical maladies associated with paranormal symptoms.[11]

The Enlightenment was not born fully formed; instead, it progressed across Europe at different times and to varying degrees. Austria and Hungary, for example, interpreted

[7] Brian P. Levack, 'The Decline and End of the Witchcraft Prosecutions', in: *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe. The Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries*, ed. Bengt Ankarloo (London: The Athlone Press, 1999) 1-94.
[8] Peter Gay, *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation*, vol. 1, The Rise of Modern Paganism (New York: Alfred E. Knopf, 1966).
[9] Bulman, William J., and Robert G. Ingram (eds), *God in the Enlightenment*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).
[10] Ulrich L. Lehner, *The Catholic Enlightenment: The Forgotten History of a Global Movement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016) 125–53.
[11] Dániel Bárth, *Benedikció és exorcizmus a kora újkori Magyarországon* (Budapest: L'Harmattan, 2010)

Enlightenment ideals in relation to the legacy of idiosyncratic traditions and regional concerns. Enlightenment historiography has long implied that the political and intellectual leaders of the Austrian Enlightenment had, almost without exception, been influenced by the principles of rationality.[12] Only recently have scholars studied the Enlightenment as a popular movement and cultural upheaval that progressed at a different pace in different places.[13] Today, we talk about enlightenments in the plural, rather than the Enlightenment as a single phenomenon.[14] While these studies from the last three decades have transformed our understanding of the Enlightenment, there is still a lack of information concerning the non-Austrian territories of Eastern Europe in the secondary literature. Indeed, historians have not paid a great deal of attention to the absolutist Enlightenment governance of the Habsburg Empire in the middle of the eighteenth century, which emphasized centralisation and bureaucratisation to create a strong hierarchic infrastructure in fields such as public health. Physicians and the educated segments of society tended to espouse the ideals of the many smaller Enlightenment movements, which varied across non-Austrian territories and were disseminated to the public at an uneven rate and varying degrees of success.

Since Weber published his work, scholars have challenged and expanded the theory of disenchantment by showing the persistence of superstitious beliefs alongside the forces of modernization. As a partial continuation of Weber's theory, Keith Thomas wrote in 1971: 'witchcraft, magical healing, divination... are all now rightly disdained by intelligent persons. But they were taken seriously by equally intelligent persons in the past'.[15] Thomas highlights a shift in societal attitudes towards these superstitious practices over time, and the significant role that the supernatural played in the thought and discourse of the educated elite. Yet in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer suggest that the triumphal narrative of reason conquering superstition merely reveals enlightenment to be another version of the very thing it proposes to abolish: 'Myth is already enlightenment,

[12] Peter Gay, *The Enlightenment: The Science of Freedom* (London, W.W. Norton& Co. :1969), 98-125.
[13] Gábor Vermes, 'Eighteenth Century Hungary: Traditionalism and the Dawn of Modernity', in: *Austrian History Yearbook 37.* (2006) 212-40.
[14] László Kontler, 'Introduction: The Enlightenment in Central Europe?', in Trencsényi Balázs and Michal Kopecek (eds.), *Discourses of Collective Identity in Central and Southeast Europe (1770-1945). I: Late Enlightenment – Emergence of the Modern National Idea* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2006), 34.
[15] Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic: Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century England* (London: Penguin Books, 1991), ix.

and enlightenment reverts to mythology' (xviii). In its claim to liberate civilization from the tyranny of the irrational, enlightenment becomes another for of tyranny: 'The proscribing of superstition has always signified not only the progress of domination but its exposure'.[16] Ernest Gellner presents another contrasting view to Weber's, suggesting that the industrialization of society led to a resurgence in enchantment.[17] Josephson-Storm contests common understandings of Weber's work, which often suggest that Weber depicted a world devoid of magic. Instead, Storm suggests that we can better comprehend Weber's ideas by recognizing how magic persists alongside modernity.[18] Robert Scribner argues that magic changed (rather than disappeared) in the wake of the Reformation. Scribner's argument implies that while the Reformation may have altered the forms and expressions of magic, it did not eliminate its presence entirely. This perspective suggests that magic persisted in different guises, adapting to the changing socio-political and religious landscape of post-Reformation Europe.[19]

Michael Hunter has expanded upon the concept of disenchantment by focusing on the decline of belief in magic throughout Britain. Hunter points out that science did not always conflict with magic: while magic might have changed over time, it did not disappear completely, and it was not always at odds with science or medicine.[20] Owen Davies' work offers evidence of the persistence of irrational superstitious practices and beliefs from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century.[21] Similarly, Jonathan Barry's study of witchcraft in the southwest of England between 1640 and 1789 suggests that beliefs in witchcraft and magic persisted into the eighteenth century and changed over time, partly because of the rise of newspapers. Barry also discusses the idea of the decline of magic by challenging the view that people thought about magic in terms of a reductive binary opposition where it either exists or does not exist. By looking at medical astrology, Barry shows that magic

[16] Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer. *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 31.
[17] Jason Ananda Josephson-Storm, *The Myth of Disenchantment*, *Magic, Modernity, and the Birth of the Human Sciences*, (London: The University of Chicago Press, 2017), 35.
[18] Ibid. 300.
[19] Robert W. Scribner, 'The Reformation, Popular Magic, and the "Disenchantment of the World"', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 23 (1993): 475–494.
[20] Michael Hunter, *The Decline of Magic: Britain in the Enlightenment* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020).
[21] Owen Davies, *Witchcraft, Magic, and Culture, 1736–1951* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999).

remained significant in various ways.[22] Furthermore, historians uncovered persistent instances of witchcraft prosecution, although at reduced levels compared to the preceding centuries. Examination of regional contexts unveils diverse beliefs concerning the presence of witches and the persistence of prosecution and punishment, even after the Enlightenment.[23]

In *Enchanted Europe*, Euan Cameron explores the cultural history of Europe from the medieval times to the Enlightenment. It investigates the interplay between superstition, reason, and religion within European societies during this transformative time.[24] Likewise, Mark Wadell's work provides a comprehensive examination of the intricate relationships between magic, science, and religion. It offers a survey of how these elements were interconnected during the early-modern period in Europe. The book delves into the various ways magic, science, and religion impacted one another and moved apart from each other in the eighteenth century.[25] Furthermore, Wadell's work goes beyond exploring the convergences between and reveals how these interconnections gradually separated in the eighteenth century. It sheds light on the developments that took place during this era, which led to significant changes in people's perceptions of the supernatural, magical practices, and religious beliefs. In terms of England, Owen Davies's research shows the enduring fear of witch accusations even after the witch trials had ended. Using sources from popular literature and oral tradition, he shows that the fear of witches and the belief in their supernatural powers continued to prevail for centuries, reaching well into the twentieth century.[26]

Further research, on Germany, France, Scotland and Ireland, supports these arguments. Many of these studies show that magical beliefs persisted across different levels of society and over long periods of time, regardless of geographical location.[27] Research on

[22] Jonathan Barry, *Witchcraft and Demonology in South-West England, 1640–1789* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 4.
[23] Michael R. Lynn (ed.), *Magic, Witchcraft, and Ghosts in the Enlightenment*, (Routledge, 2022), 6.
[24] Euan Cameron, *Enchanted Europe, Superstition, Reason and Religion* 1250-1750, (Oxford University Press, 2010).
[25] Mark A Waddell, *Magic, Science and Religion in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge University Press, 2021).
[26] Owen Davies, *Witchcraft, Magic, and Culture, 1736–1951*, 120-66.
[27] See for example: H. C. Erik Midelfort, *Exorcism and Enlightenment: Johann Joseph Gassner and the Demons of Eighteenth-Century Germany* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005); Lizanne Henderson, *Witchcraft and Folk Belief in the Age of Enlightenment: Scotland, 1670–1740* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016); Gábor Klaniczay and Éva Pócs, eds., *Witchcraft and Demonology in Hungary and Transylvania*

witchcraft, ghosts, apparitions, and similar phenomena demonstrates that the notion of the disenchantment of the world, which refers to the belief that the world became less magical or supernatural over time, is actually 'modernity's creation myth', as Malcolm Gaskill put it.[28] There is a great deal of academic research examining, for example, how witchcraft persisted in popular culture even after losing intellectual currency.[29] Scholars revealed that the concepts surrounding magic, witchcraft, and ghosts developed unevenly after the eighteenth century, experiencing periods of deepening, evolution, and innovation. In Eastern Europe, for example, ideas were influenced by the influx of knowledge from other regions, such as the Ottoman Empire, and the cultural interactions fostered the dissemination of beliefs across various societies.[30]

While most of the scholars working on disenchantment focus on Western Europe, my thesis examines the territory of the Hungarian Kingdom, which, I argue, suggests a different scenario than the one Weber claimed occurred in the West. The Enlightenment did not reach all levels of society and transform traditional beliefs at an even pace; instead, enchantment and re-enchantment emerged at different times in response to societal changes. While the scholarly works I note above on the decline of witch trials and the emergence of vampirism have made substantial contributions to nuancing the uneven development of disenchantment, these works tend to concentrate on a narrow timeframe and limited geographic scope rather than offer a comprehensive analysis of the long-term processes involved.[31] Historians acknowledge that witch accusations and corpse executions can be found after Maria Theresa's reign (1740-1780), and Péter Tóth points out that the

(Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017); Andrew Sneddon and John Fulton, 'Witchcraft, the Press, and Crime in Ireland, 1822-1922', *The Historical Journal* 62 , no. 3. (2019): 741- 64.

[28] Malcolm Gaskill, 'The Fear and Loathing of Witches', in: *Spellbound: Magic, Ritual & Witchcraft,* (ed.) Ceri Houlbrook, Malcolm Gaskill and Owen Davies (Oxford: Ashmolean Museum, 2018), 99.

[29] See: Monica Black, *A Demon-Haunted Land: Witches, Wonder Doctors, and the Ghosts of the Past in Post-WWII Germany* (New York, 2020); Karl Bell, 'Breaking Modernity's Spell — Magic and Modern History', *Cultural and Social History*, IV. (2007): 116; Waters, *Cursed Britain: A History of Witchcraft and Black Magic in Modern Times*, 187, 201–13.

[30] For Eastern-European witchcraft, see: Gábor Klaniczay and Éva Pócs, *Witchcraft and Demonology;* Gábor Klaniczay, *The usage of Supernatural Power: The Transformation of Popular Religion in Medieval and Early-Modern Europe* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1990); Éva Pócs, *Fairies and Witches at the Boundary of South-Eastern and Central Europe* (Helsinki, 1989).

[31] Péter G. Tóth, 'The Decriminalization of Magic and the Fight Against Superstition in Hungary and Transylvania, 1740-1848', In: Klaniczay and Pócs (eds.), *Witchcraft and Demonology in Hungary and Transylvania*, 291-317; Ádám Mézes, *Doubt and Diagnosis: Medical Experts and the Returning Dead of the Southern Habsburg Borderland (1718-1766)* PhD Thesis, (Budapest: CEU, 2019).

'fight against superstition' only began after Joseph II's accession to the throne in 1780.[32] Furthermore, Ildikó Kristóf emphasizes the lack of research regarding witch accusations and corpse executions in the nineteenth century, despite their persistence under changed conditions.[33]

Historians have found evidence of ongoing witch trials, albeit at lower levels, even after the Enlightenment period. The same pattern applies to the figure of the revenant—or the returning dead—as accusations and executions persisted well into the twentieth century. The concept of the 'dangerous dead' as introduced by Paul Barber, sheds light on fascinating aspects of how certain cultures perceived the deceased as a potential threat to the living. The term 'dangerous dead'—including vampires and other forms of the undead—underscores the idea that death does not always signal the end of an individual's influence on the living.[34] Recently, scholars have delved into the phenomenon of vampirism, exploring its historical and cultural groundworks (I will go on to explore this history in relation to Hungary later in the introduction).[35] This scholarly investigation of the vampire has encompassed a thorough examination of medieval and early-modern beliefs surrounding the notion of the undead corpse.[36] Additionally, scholars have turned their attention to dissecting the extensive body of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century primary literature that participates in and constructs the world of vampire phenomena.[37] Moreover, there is a gap in the historical research on vampire history following the Enlightenment. While significant research addresses post-Enlightenment vampirism, it tends to focus on

[32] Péter G. Tóth, *Boszorkánypánik és Babonatéboly* (Budapest: Balassi Kiadó, 2020), 492.
[33] Ildikó Sz. Kristóf, 'Boszorkányüldözés a kora újkori Magyarországon: kutatástörténet, eredmények, teendők – 2013-ban', *Boszorkányok, varázslók és démonok Közép-Kelet-Európában*. (Balassi Kiadó, Budapest), 53.
[34] Paul Barber, *Vampires, Burial, and Death: Folklore and Reality* (Yale University Press, 1988).
[35] For vampire history, see: Agnes Murgoci, 'The Vampire in Roumania', *Folklore* 37 (1926): 320-49; Carla Coraddi-Musi, *Vampiri europei e vampiri dell' area sciamanica* (Catanzaro: Soveria Mannelli, 1995).
[36] John Blair, 'The Dangerous Dead in Early Medieval England', *Early Medieval Studies in Memory of Patrick Wormald*, (ed.) Stephen D. Baxter et al. (London, 2009), 539–59; Nancy Mandeville Caciola, 'Wraiths, Revenants and Ritual in Medieval Culture', *Past and Present 152* (1996): 3–45; Peter Mario Kreuter, *Der Vampirglaube in Südosteuropa: Studien zur Genese, Bedeutung und Funktion. Rumänien und der Balkanraum (Romanice / Berliner Schriften zur romanischen Kultur- und Literaturgeschichte)* (Berlin: Weidler, 2001).
[37] Stephen Gordon, 'Emotional Practice and Bodily Performance in Early Modern Vampire Literature', *Preternature: Critical and Historical Studies on the Preternatural* 6, no. 1 (2017): 93-124; Koen Vermeir, 'Vampires as Creatures of the Imagination: Theories of Body, Soul, and Imagination in Early Modern Vampire Tracts (1659–1755)', *Diseases of the Imagination and Imaginary Disease in the Early Modern Period*, (ed.) Yasmin Haskell (Turnhout, 2011), 341–73; Kathryn Morris, 'Superstition, Testimony, and the Eighteenth-Century Vampire Debates', *Preternature: Critical and Historical Studies on the Preternatural* 4, no. 2. (2015): 181-202.

contemporary literary/filmic representations of the vampire.[38] My thesis proposes that such accounts are incomplete without a more robust history of the Eastern-European vampire and other forms of the returning dead.

Studies of Central and Eastern European revenants include work by Éva Pócs, who draws attention to the 'unburied', 'unbaptized', 'thirsty' dead, werewolves, and vampires in an inquiry into the duality of body and soul.[39] In terms of the vampire, Gábor Klaniczay suggests that the public fascination with Serbian vampires in the 1730s and the phenomenon of the returning dead in Moravia in 1755 had a profound influence on the Western European imagination, overshadowing the figure of the witch that had previously captivated people.[40] Ádám Mézes examines the vampire panic unfolding in the Banat region, a southeastern area of the Habsburg Empire inhabited by Serbs, in the eighteenth century. Mézes analyses a surgeon, Georg Tallar's detailed reports titled *Visum repertum*, which deal with the exhumation of 'vampire-suspect' corpses.[41] My thesis builds upon this body of research by providing a comprehensive analysis of the enduring influence of enchantment both during and after the Enlightenment era. Unlike previous studies that primarily link the medieval and early-modern periods, my research establishes connections between the early-modern era and modernity, showcasing how enchantment has persisted into the twentieth century. By examining this extended timeframe, my thesis demonstrates how enchantment evolved in relation to societal contexts, such as educational and religious changes. In doing so, I position the figure of the Eastern revenant at the centre of a European narrative of uneven disenchantment that negotiates between the triumph of modern progress and the persistence of obsolescent beliefs that, like the revenant itself, will not go away.

[38] See for example: Carol A. Senf, *The Vampire in Nineteenth-Century English Literature*, (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988); *The Vampire in Nineteenth-Century Literature Feast of Blood* (ed.) Brooke Cameron and Lara Karpenko (London: Taylor & Francis, 2022); Erik Butler, *Metamorphoses of the Vampire in Literature and Film Cultural Transformations in Europe, 1732-1933,* (New York: Camden House, 2010).
[39] Éva Pócs, *Élők és holtak, látók és boszorkányok*. (Budapest: Akadémiai, 1997); Éva Pócs, *Between the Living and the Dead. A Perspective on Seers and Witches in the Early Modern Age* (Budapest: CEU Press, 1999)
[40] Gábor Klaniczay, 'Decline of Witches and Rise of Vampires in 18th Century Habsburg Monarchy', in: *Ethnologia Europaea* (1987): 165-80.
[41] Ádám Mézes, *Visum Repertum: Georg Tallar és az 1753-as Vámpírvadászat* in: Gábor Klaniczay & Éva Pócs (eds.):*Boszorkányok, varázslók és démonok Közép Kelet-Európában* (Budapest: Balassi Kiadó, 2014), 109 -54; Ádám Mézes, *Doubt and Diagnosis.*

Covering the years from 1717 until 1922, this thesis draws upon Fernand Braudel's *longue durée* approach to history.[42] The time period here holds great significance as it serves as a bridge between the late early-modern period and the modern era. This long-duration perspective allows for a detailed exploration of the development of beliefs and practices surrounding 'strange corpses' and the afterlife in Hungary. By analysing the discourse of the intellectual elite over the span of three centuries, the study uncovers valuable patterns and shifts in cultural attitudes towards death and the afterlife. This extended timeline provides my thesis with the ability to construct a narrative about how societal changes, including technological progress, shifts in social structures, and cultural exchanges, have influenced (and were influenced by) superstitious beliefs and practices in Hungary. Indeed, the long-term approach enables my thesis to capture the intricate interplay between tradition and modernity, shedding light on how historical developments have impacted the understanding and treatment of death-related phenomena, such as hospitals, epidemics and so on. By exploring how belief evolves over a long span of time, my thesis identifies pivotal moments that have marked shifts in the Hungarian perception of the afterlife and how it has been intertwined with the treatment of corpses considered 'strange' or exceptional.

Research questions

I developed three questions to guide my research. Collectively, they address the shifting attitudes toward life and death. Individually, these questions explore this central theme from diverse perspectives, encompassing elite discourse on death, the evolution of medical approaches to diseased bodies and corpses, and the propagation of undead beliefs through popular culture. Through these inquiries, I aim to provide unique insight into the Hungarian Kingdom, shedding light on previously overlooked medical literature and newspaper articles by Magyar authors concerning the phenomenon of re-animated corpses. These sources unveil unexpected connections between Hungarian modernity, magical thought, and supernatural beliefs. My research delves into each research question independently, yet collectively they offer varying vantage points from which to examine the lingering role of

[42] Jo Guldi and David Armitage 'Going forward by looking back: the rise of the longue durée', in: *The History Manifesto by Jo Guldi and David Armitage* (Cambridge University Press, 2014), 14-37.

superstition in Hungarian modernity. While research question 1 was set up at the beginning of my project, research questions 2 and 3 were formulated later in the process due to the constraints imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic, which prevented access to archival materials. Instead, I explored online published materials from the domains of medicine and popular culture, uncovering a wealth of sources concerning the belief in the undead in Hungary.

1. What impact did change and conflicting opinions about the passage between life and death have on popular and elite discourses?

This research question was designed at the onset of my project as a more general way to discern how cultural and scientific shifts have influenced the historical understanding of the transition from life to death. Additionally, the question involved analysing the societal implications of these changing beliefs, such as their influence on attitudes towards mortality, grief, religious practices, and rituals surrounding death. Originally, my thesis was focused solely on the eighteenth century. However, further research unveiled the necessity of adopting a *longue durée* approach to gain a comprehensive understanding of the question. Examining the continuity of these issues over three centuries enabled a deeper exploration of the diverse opinions on life and death within both popular and elite discourses.

2. How did medicine respond to the revenant issue in the age of Enlightenment and during the nineteenth century?

The first two chapters of the thesis were structured to examine the responses of the medical elite to the phenomenon of the undead. Originally focused solely on the responses of the eighteenth century, further research revealed a persistent engagement with the concept of the revenant among medical professionals even after the Enlightenment. Particularly during epidemics such as plague and cholera, medical professionals continued to grapple with the complexities surrounding the undead, which allowed me to extend the investigation beyond the initial timeframe. Medical professionals frequently encountered instances where bodies appeared to exhibit signs of life after death, sparking debates within medical circles regarding the nature of death and the possibility of premature burial. Furthermore, beyond the realms of science and medicine, the phenomenon of revenants was also interpreted through cultural and religious perspectives. Notions surrounding death, the afterlife, and the supernatural heavily influenced how individuals perceived and

responded to reports of revenants. Religious beliefs often played a significant role, with some viewing revenants as manifestations of divine punishment or demonic influence. Additionally, cultural practices related to death, burial rites, and mourning rituals shaped perceptions of revenants and influenced the measures taken to prevent their occurrence.

3. How were revenant beliefs shaped by the transformation of popular and elite culture over the period 1717-1922?

This question was the latest development of the project, due to the decision to investigate cultural history through online published materials. The transformation of popular and elite culture from 1717 to 1922 significantly reshaped popular beliefs, particularly regarding phenomena like vampirism. As Western societal structures evolved with industrialization, urbanization, and globalization, elite cultural influences disseminated new ideas and ideologies that challenged traditional beliefs. However, alongside these transformations, popular beliefs of the harmful dead persisted and were even reinforced through cultural mediums like literature, art, and folklore. However, examining how the Magyar elite reinvented the vampire myth reveals markedly different attitudes compared to those found in the West. Given the facts that the vampire myths originate in the region of the Eastern territories of the Habsburg Empire, my research revealed the surprising absence of general supernatural element in Hungarian literature. This suggest that the Magyar elite used the vampire phenomenon and other magical beliefs to express issues related to identity formation during the period of nationalism, attitudes towards Austria, and anxieties prevalent during the *fin de siècle*.

Sources

An overview of Hungarian history attests to the role of bloody conflicts in expanding and contracting both territory and population, contributing to a multifaceted and evolving sense of Hungarian identity. The crucial Battle of Mohács in 1526 resulted in the Hungarian army's defeat by the Ottoman forces; consequently, Hungary turned into a contested region between the Ottoman and Habsburg empires, marking an extended period of conflict.[43] Following the defeat of the Ottomans in the Great Turkish War, most of Ottoman Hungary

[43] See: Géza Pálffy, *Hungary between Two Empires 1526–1711*, Translated by David Robert Evans (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2021).

was ceded to the Habsburgs under the Treaty of Karlowitz in 1699. In the eighteenth century, Hungary was determined to recover from the destruction caused by the Turks. As the ideas of nationalism and liberalism gained ground in the early nineteenth century, Hungary underwent a change in sentiment towards Habsburg rule that culminated in the 1848-49 revolution and uprising against the Habsburgs. This period of transformation led to the pivotal Austro-Hungarian compromise of 1867, a consolidation that birthed the Austro-Hungarian Empire. However, the aftermath of World War I brought further shifts. The 1920 Trianon Treaty imposed significant changes, resulting in Hungary losing a staggering 72% of its territory. In addition, the revised borders excluded around 3.5 million ethnic Hungarians.[44] This thesis focuses on the region that was part of the Hungarian Kingdom between the time it was reclaimed in 1699 until the end of World War I, which today is divided amongst several countries in Central Europe (such as Transylvania and Slovakia).

In the eighteenth century, the Hungarian Kingdom encompassed a diverse range of ethnicities and cultures, where the Hungarian elite (Magyars) coexisted with various ethnic groups, including Slavs, Germans, Romanians, and others.[45] The interconnectedness of different cultures within the Hungarian Kingdom enables this thesis to explore how the figure of the revenant was constructed by drawing together many different beliefs and practices about the undead. When delving into source analysis, the thesis examines the viewpoints of the Hungarian (Magyar) elite towards the various ethnic groups contained within the Kingdom, attending to nuances that arise from regional specificity of this elite discourse (rather than striving for absolute historical accuracy). By focusing on how the Magyar class perceived and interpreted supernatural events and superstitious beliefs, my research uncovers the way the elite class protected their status by projecting backwardness upon marginalized groups such as Romanians and Bulgarians.

Analysing sources from the Hungarian elite presents a challenge due to the inherent variability in these sources. The quality and content of a source can differ significantly based on factors such as the writer's educational background, religious beliefs, and political

[44] More in: *Trianon 1920-2020 Some Aspects of the Hungarian Peace Treaty of 1920*, Eds. Róbert Barta, Ádám Novák, Róbert Kerepeszki, Krzysztof Kania (Debrecen: University of Debrecen, 2021).
[45] See: László Katus: 'Die Magyaren', in: Adam Wandruszka and Peter Urbanitsch, (eds.), *Die Habsburgermonarchie 1848–1918*, *Band III: Die Völker des Reiches*, (Vienna, 1980), 410–488; Péter Hanák, *Die Geschichte Ungarns. Von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart* (Essen: R. Hobig, 1988); Tóth István György (ed.): *Geschichte Ungarns* (Budapest, 2005).

perspectives. As my thesis focuses on the superstitious beliefs surrounding the undead, it must take into consideration how the contextual factors that contribute to an author's publication also inform his or her perspective on the truth-value and cultural-social function of undead belief. The primary sources employed here predominantly consist of published materials, ranging from medical records and dissertations to private correspondence and newspaper articles. Medical records and dissertations provide valuable insights into the biology of death and corpse anatomy, while private letters offer glimpses into personal beliefs and cultural attitudes that might not have been explicit in public discourse. Newspapers here serve as a reflection of the broader societal views and debates. Additionally, my research draws upon primary materials such as novels, poems, and cinematic works to add a cultural dimension to the study, capturing how beliefs about the undead were reinterpreted through artistic and popular mediums. The limited archival material in this reflects the primary focus on the attitudes of the elite towards the daily lives of the general population, rather than delving into the actual, lived experiences of everyday life. The research is geared towards understanding the perceptions, beliefs, and viewpoints held by the elite stratum of society, shedding light on how its perspectives reflected and shaped the broader popular culture.

This thesis examines how elites reacted to continued belief at the popular level. The recently digitalised conversion of many eighteenth and nineteenth-century Hungarian newspapers has made it easier to access materials compared to physical collections. The study uses material from the beginning of the eighteenth century, at the time when the history of the Hungarian press began. During this time, Hungarian-language editions were not supported by Austrian leadership, so publications appeared in Latin. In 1780, the *Magyar Hírmondó* was published in Pozsony (today's Bratislava) under the editorship of Mátyás Rát, the first newspaper in the Hungarian language. Following the 1848-49 revolution, the era saw a substantial increase in the growth of Hungarian press products, which have been collected on the archival websites *Hungaricana* and *Arcanum*. I sourced the materials for chapter one and two through *Hungaricana*, the Semmelweis University Central Library that can be accessed for the collection of *Klasszikus orvosi könyvek* (Classical Medical Books). In addition to exploring Hungarian (Magyar) attitudes towards the undead belief in the territories of the former Hungarian Kingdom, this thesis explores the way Austria and Germany used superstition to evaluate the progress (or lack thereof) of specific

Hungarian regions. The investigation into Austrian and German attitudes provides insight into how neighbouring societies viewed the uneven development arising from the diverse ethnic and cultural landscape of the Hungarian Kingdom.

I encountered some difficulties by drawing primary source material from online archives. One challenge arose from accounting for author's point of view and ideological assumptions. While the reader might expect a newspaper to report facts, these reports were often heavily influenced by factors such as the nationality and religious beliefs of the writers. A second challenge arose from the wealth of material available. I had to set boundaries for the project that excluded discourse from Croatians, Romanians, Bulgarians, and others, instead focusing solely on the Hungarian (Magyar) perspective. This narrow focus limited the comprehensiveness of my analysis, which may not fully capture the diverse array of supernatural beliefs and practices prevalent throughout the broader Central and Eastern European context. Focusing on the elite perspective, however, enabled me to draw out the way undead belief was used to police the boundary between national, ethnic, and social class differences. A third challenge arose from gaps in the documentation. This is evident with some Hungarian materials that have not been completely catalogued or made accessible online. As a result, the organisation and online availability of the sources has influenced the development of this thesis. While additional materials might exist, my engagement with online archives has provided the evidence necessary to support my claims about the evolving role of the harmful undead in Hungarian culture.

The lack of archival material poses significant limitations on the usability of historical sources and the breadth of topics they can adequately cover. For instance, when considering gender in revenant accusations and trials, it is challenging to draw definitive conclusions. Many newspapers report only include surnames or initials, making it difficult to ascertain gender. Hungarian grammar further complicates matters as it is a gender-neutral language without gendered pronouns. While gender can sometimes be inferred from context, it is often unclear, rendering generalisations unreliable. Additionally, most authors—whether medical professionals, newspaper reporters, novelists, poets, or movie producers—were male. Therefore, our understanding of represented revenants, especially vampires is predominantly shaped by the male perspective. Unlike in Victorian England, where many ghost stories were authored by women, no vampire literature originated from

female authors.[46] These representations of undead belief were often influenced by the conventions of popular genres such as Gothic and Romantic literature, which deployed sensationalized narratives of revenants to captivate readers and drive sales. To what degree was the cultural framing of undead belief a product of the literary marketplace? Journalists often drew upon these generic conventions in their ostensibly more objective reporting, blurring the boundary between an everyday reality and a horrific fantasy through the entanglement of fact and fiction.

Methodology

By focusing on the Hungarian (Magyar) elite viewpoint, this thesis draws attention to a unique and often overlooked perspective within the broader context of undead beliefs, covering a period of over 200 years to provide a historical/cultural narrative of how beliefs in revenants and other supernatural entities were perceived and represented by a particular segment of society. I investigate how both scientific discourse and popular culture inform belief in the revenant, and I will analyse the diverse forms of this belief and its deployment to fulfil certain social and cultural functions (especially as a mechanism for othering 'backward' communities). Given the extensive scope of the research, spanning various time periods, geographical regions, and disciplines, I used a diverse array of methodologies to analyse the sources and support my claims. The project draws on a multidisciplinary approach to account for the way discrete fields—such as medical treatises, newspaper journalism, and literary/filmic representations—overlap around the undead to negotiate the boundary between popular and elite.

I use the terms popular and elite to identify a cluster of shared attributes. In the context of this study, elite refers to individuals or groups within society who hold positions of higher socio-economic status, education, influence, or authority. They often belong to the upper classes of society and are associated with refined cultural tastes, formal education, and access to resources that shape their perspectives and behaviours. In contrast, popular pertains to the beliefs, practices, customs, and expressions that are prevalent among the

[46] Ghost stories by female authors see, for example: Elizabeth Gaskell, 'The Old Nurse's Story' (1852); Mary Ridell, 'The Open Door' (1882); Rosa Mulholland, *The Hunted Organist of Hurly Burly* (1891); Mary E. Wilkins Freeman, *The Shadows on the Wall* (1902).

broader masses of society. It encompasses the cultural aspects that are accessible to a wide range of individuals and often emerge from everyday life. Popular culture is influenced by shared experiences, trends, and informal forms of education, such as folklore, collective experiences, and media.[47] While my research focuses on elite discourse, it uses this discourse to reflect upon the complex interplay between undead beliefs at both the popular and elite level, revealing the points of agreement or conflict in the cultural significance of these supernatural entities. The fundamental aim of this thesis is to show how the beliefs of both strata of society contributed to shaping the broader cultural narrative concerning the undead.

The elite discourse on harmful corpses—including discourse by medical and bureaucratic professionals—reveals how the elite were driven by changing aims and agendas, adopting old and new forms of enchantment that aligned with and furthered their evolving pursuit. The term learned elite, refers here to a distinguished group of intellectuals encompassing diverse professions, including but not limited to medical practitioners, members of the clergy, politicians, newspaper editors, poets, and writers. These intellectuals were also influenced by the legacy of outmoded, traditional beliefs that continued to inform the cultural norms of their time and place. Depending on their profession, these intellectuals approached the topic of harmful corpses with varying degrees of scientific objectivity and mystical lore, often incorporating elements of enchantment into their work. Moreover, the distinction between elite and popular culture was not always clearly defined, as intellectuals within local communities, such as local priests, pastors, and doctors, occupied a dual cultural identity that served as a bridge between both groups.[48] The ongoing interaction between the learned elite and popular culture blurs the distinction between the two, making it challenging to draw the clear boundaries that contribute to the social hierarchy.[49] My thesis suggests that superstition and belief in harmful corpses serves as another way of blurring the distinction between the elite and popular, challenging stereotypes that associate the elite class with knowledge and the popular with ignorance.

[47] See: Peter Burke, *Popular culture in early modern Europe* (New York: Harper & Row, 1978).
[48] For example: Ambrus Miskolczy, *Felvilágosodás és babonaság - Erdélyi néphidelem-gyűjtés 1789-90-ben* (Budapest: L'harmattan Kft., 2016); Dániel Bárth, 'The Lower Clergy and Popular Culture: Introductory Remarks to a Current Research Project', *Historical Studies on Central Europe* 1, no.1. (2021): 177–212.
[49] Peter Burke, 'Popular Culture between History and Ethnology', *Ethnologia Europaea* XIV. (1984): 5-13; Peter Burke, *What is Cultural History?* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2008), 20-28.

This thesis reveals that, despite being part of the elite, members of this class often presented similar belief patterns to ordinary people regarding the harmful dead, drawing on the same deeply engrained folk narratives and traditions.

The interaction between professional opinions and popular beliefs surrounding 'strange corpses' also reveals how societal perceptions of death and the afterlife evolved as a negotiation between the demystifications of Enlightenment rationality and the authority of inherited traditions. To demonstrate the substantial impact of these beliefs and practices on the Hungarian elite, my thesis examines both medical and cultural perspectives. The medical perspective explores the way harmful corpses, especially the vampire phenomenon, influenced the practices and theories of medical intellectuals in Hungary during the eighteenth and nineteenth century. Medical historians have shown that during the eighteenth and nineteenth century, the passage between life and death was being redefined by medical discourse.[50] The medical debates reveal that the practitioners involved mystical elements in medical treatments, the belief in miraculous cures, and the integration of supernatural explanations into medical frameworks. As part of the learned elite, medical practitioners engaged with and contributed to the continuation of undead beliefs within their field, impacting not only medical practices but also public health perceptions and actions, such as funeral customs.[51] Thus, my thesis draws on the history of medicine to make the claim that epidemics like plague and cholera, as well as the development of medical institutions such as hospitals and public health initiatives, took shape not only in relation to the healthy or diseased body, but also in relation to the pathological body that stubbornly refuses to remain dead. By examining how medical knowledge incorporated notions of the supernatural, particularly during periods of belief in the undead, we gain insight into how the medical elite reconciled rational thought with lingering superstitions.

Contagion, a belief rooted in the idea that a deceased individual could transmit disease to the living, was particularly strong during periods of major epidemics, when people sought explanations for the rapid spread of diseases and misfortunes in their

[50] See: Shane McCorristine (ed.), *Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Mortality and its Timings: When is Death?*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).
[51] See for example: Lilla Krász, 'Quackery versus professionalism? Characters, places, and media of medical knowledge in eighteenth-century Hungary', *Studies in History and Philosophy of Biological and Biomedical Sciences* 43, (2012): 700-9.

communities.[52] The fear of contagion from the deceased led to the development of various rituals aimed at preventing the spread of diseases. As Amy Chambers writes, 'the pathological origins of the vampire' was the foundation for later fictionalizations that 'imagine vampires can be treated as a virus' (1710).[53] The belief in these contagious corpses, including the harmful dead such as witches and vampires, played a crucial role in shaping medical responses to epidemics and outbreaks. The very possibility of the walking dead offered a new kind of epidemiological horror, serving as malevolent and mobile vectors for the spread of disease on a massive scale. This thesis examines how belief in the undead evolved during periods of major epidemics, such as plague in the eighteenth century and cholera in the nineteenth century. By examining the historical context and intellectual debates on medical knowledge, my thesis sheds light on the mixed responses on how the Hungarian elite understood and interpreted contagion.

Throughout the outbreaks of plague and cholera, there was a notable resurgence in superstitious beliefs regarding malevolent and contagious corpses; thus, the first two chapters of the thesis also investigate the medical theorisation of corpses as spreaders of diseases. The vampire bite serves as one way that the dead could transmit both biological and moral corruption to a living victim. According to Peter Kreuter, the belief that being bitten by a vampire could turn someone into a vampire after death was not a widespread notion in South-East European folklore.[54] However, Ádám Mézes demonstrated that in certain cases of Rascian and Wallachian vampires in the eighteenth century, this concept did play a significant role.[55] Throughout the cases analysed in this thesis, the act of blood-sucking by the returning dead may not always be evident but the element of contagion remains consistent across all instances. The concept of contagion connects the renewal of superstitious beliefs with disease outbreaks, medical understanding, cultural beliefs, elite perceptions, and public health responses. By examining the role of contagion within the

[52] Alan Macfarlane, *Witchcraft in Tudor, and Stuart England. A Regional and Comparative Study* (Harper & Row, New York: Evanston, 1970), Éva Pócs: 'Gondolatok a magyarországi boszorkányperek néprajzi vizsgálatához', *Ethnographia* 94 (1983): 134–46; Gábor Klaniczay: 'Boszorkányhit, boszorkányvád, boszorkányüldözés a XVI–XVIII. Században', *Ethnographia* 97 (1986): 257–95.
[53] Chambers, Amy. 'Virological Vampires', in: *The Palgrave Handbook of the Vampire*, (ed.) Simon Bacon, (London: Palgrave, 2024), 1710.
[54] See: Kreuter, *Der Vampirglaube in Südosteuropa.*
[55] Ádám Mézes, 'Vampire Contagion as a Forensic Fact: The Vampires of Medveđa in 1732', *Historical Studies on Central Europe* 1 (2021): 149–76.

context of contagious corpses, my thesis explores how these intertwined factors influenced societal attitudes, such as the revival of superstitious practices during times of health crises.

Chapter three and four focus on the role of culture, which was informed by and helped to shape belief in the undead. Literature, art, and film served to popularize and disseminate idiosyncratic and regional narratives about the undead, which were woven into the fabric of the ostensibly Enlightened Western European and Hungarian (Magyar) elite culture. This examination focuses on the works of poets, novelists, and artists who incorporated supernatural elements into their creations, revealing the tacit beliefs of the authors and the profound interest of their predominately elite readership towards the mystical and otherworldly. As authors transform folkloric stories about revenants into novels, poetry, and film, however, they also invest their literary creation with the aura of fictionality that creates an imaginative distance between the reader and the horrifying content. Novels about vampires, such as *The Vampyre* and *Dracula* for example, often explore themes of mortality, power, and desire, allowing readers to delve into fantastical worlds and supernatural phenomena. In contrast, nineteenth-century journalism approached the topic of vampires with a focus on reporting purported factual occurrences or beliefs prevalent in society. Journalists aimed to present information objectively, relying on firsthand accounts, interviews, and documentary evidence to depict events as accurately as possible. The press serves as active participants in shaping societal narratives rather than passive observers.[56] Journalism on revenants framed the harmful dead and grisly events within the context of folklore and superstition rather than as verifiable occurrences. My research, therefore, investigates the role of cultural gatekeepers such as literary authors, reviewers, newspaper editors, and opinion leaders, in promoting or challenging harmful corpse narratives within the broader intellectual elite and society at large. Cultural expressions of beliefs provide a platform for exploring the unexplained or the mysterious, allowing people to grapple with existential questions and fears that science cannot answer.

I examine Austrian, German, and English works, including novels, short stories, and newspaper articles, to identify a pattern of negative attitudes towards the Hungarian territories, which they often portrayed as backward, superstitious, and an origin point for potential contamination of more 'civilized' nations (consider, in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, the

[56] Stephen Vella, 'Newspapers', in: *Reading Primary Sources : The Interpretation of Texts from Nineteenth and Twentieth Century History*, (ed.) Miriam Dobson, and Benjamin Ziemann (Taylor & Francis Group, 2008), 192.

emigration of the titular vampire to London). The Western European elite drew upon the revenant to 'other' Eastern Europe, simultaneously positioning the region as ignorant and a potential threat from outside, ready to infect Western civilization with the horror of regressive, superstitious beliefs. While superstition played a significant role in medical, religious, and political discourses the Western European elite expressed concern regarding popular superstition and credulity during the Enlightenment. Western elites considered belief in the undead as proof that popular superstitious practises remained unreformed. [57] The Eastern European discourse on the barbaric returning dead reveals that the educated elite, bureaucrats, clergyman, and doctors appeared less progressive and less modern than their Western European counterparts. But the revenants of Eastern Europe, and the horror and belief that they inspired, also served as a mirror where Western authors could reflect back the irrationality and horrors that lingered in spite of Enlightened disenchantment.

My thesis takes a critical perspective on the implicit and explicit bias carried by Western European representations of Eastern Europe, and it compares this negative attitude to a similar one that Hungarian writers expressed toward the superstitious beliefs of minorities living on the Hungarian borderlands. Just as the educated elite in Western Europe perceived the East as barbaric and superstitious, Hungarian intellectuals adopted a comparable approach towards their own cultural peripheries. As scholars such as Clemens Ruthner and Thomas Bohn observe, the liminality of the vampire that troubles the metaphysical boundary between life and death has a geographical counterpart in the proliferation of vampire events in the borderland regions of European nations.[58] Ruthner writes that 'vampire folklore emerged mostly in the border lands and contact zones of the great empires of Europe' within the region that Bohn calls a 'sort of "vampire belt" [that] clearly stretched along the frontiers of Kievan Rus' and the Tsarist Empire, the Polish Lithuanian Union and the Ottoman Empire, as well as the Habsburg Empire and Prussia'. Bohn. [59] Thus, the vampire provides a discursive arena in which the politics of belonging are negotiated between the 'superstitious' peasant and the 'enlightened' elite, between the 'backward' borderlands of Europe and the 'progressive' Western nations. Superstition, as a

[57] Ádám Mézes, *Doubt and Diagnosis,* 75-110.
[58] Clemens Ruthner, "Outbreaks of the Balkan Village Vampire in the Eighteenth Century." *The Palgrave Handbook of the Vampire*. (Ed). by Simon Bacon, (London: Palgrave, 2024), 73-90.; Thomas Bohn, *The Vampire: Origins of a European Myth,* Translated by Francis Ipgrave, (New York: Berghahn, 2019).
[59] Ibid. Ruthner, 73.; Bohn, x.

form of 'othering', served as a critical point of reference for discussions on progress, modernity, and cultural identity of the Hungarian elite. While otherness is a subjective phenomenon that depends on personal views, an issue of imagination and experience rather than reality, when otherness is scaled up to the level of demographics and the nation it can profoundly reshape the geopolitical reality for large groups of people. Works of Maria Todorova and Larry Wolff provide important accounts of the negative attitudes of the Magyars towards the minority of their own country.[60]

In the exploration of the cultural history of death, one can observe the significance of shared experiences and emotions that revolve around the concept of mortality. Philippe Ariès, using the long-term approach, spanned over two millennia of Western history to analyse the shift in Western attitudes towards death over the centuries. His work was not constrained by specific chronological or geographical boundaries.[61] In contrast to Ariès' examination of cultural practices independently from their political and socio-economic context, more recent studies integrate cultural history with political, social, and economic aspects.[62] In recent literature on the history of death, there has been a shift towards emphasizing continuity. This scholarship highlights the notion that modernity did not necessarily lead to a complete loss of enchantment or spiritual meaning. In contemporary scholarship, there is also an expanded focus on the social landscape that goes beyond elites and delves into the inner experiences of everyday individuals. This exploration incorporates a diverse array of sources, spanning from intellectual to popular culture.[63] The thesis contributes to the field of death studies by showcasing how cultural history can elucidate both the changes and continuities in the perception of death across different societal strata in Hungary. The belief in the possibility of returning from the dead or attaining an afterlife has powerfully shaped cultural practices, beliefs, and narratives. By exploring the various manifestations of enchantment regarding the beliefs that the dead can return and harm the living, the thesis challenges the traditional and somewhat simplistic notions of disenchantment, which often depict societal evolution as a linear progression marked by the

[60] Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans* (Oxford University Press, 1997); Larry Wolf, *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment* (Standford University Press, 1994).
[61] Philippe Ariès, *Western attitudes toward death from the Middle Ages to the present* (Baltimore, 1974); *L'homme devant la mort* (Paris, 1977); English translation: *The hour of our death* (New York, 1981).
[62] Hannah Malone, 'New Life in the Modern Cultural History of Death', in: *The Historical Journal* 62. no. 3. (2019): 833-52.
[63] Walsham, 'The Reformation and "The Disenchantment of the World"'.

triumph of reason over supposedly outdated superstitious beliefs.[64] Rather, the thesis reveals that the enduring presence of these beliefs served as a catalyst for shaping diverse discourses, both within the realm of medicine and across cultural contexts. In the following section, I embark on a brief exploration of the revenant's historical significance, laying the groundwork for the subsequent chapters.

Early-modern revenants

Supernatural beings were utilized by authors of the early-modern area to convey specific messages, with ghosts often serving as harbingers of divine judgment or guides for the deceased soul's journey, while restless corpses were typically featured in cautionary tales about sin and punishment.[65] The Protestant reformers brought about a significant change in the understanding of the harmful dead by eliminating the concept of purgatory. This change transformed the previous close connection between the living and the dead, which was facilitated by the medieval practice of prayer and intercession.[66] Since magical entities could no longer be associated with purgatory, there emerged a belief that they came from hell and were directly connected to the Devil. This perception contributed to periods of heightened anxiety about the Devil's influence, leading to waves of witch-persecution following the Reformation.[67] The concept of possession, which was intricately tied to the Devil's influence, added further complexity to the historical context that shaped the boundary between life and death, good and evil.[68] Revenant cases were often interpreted through this lens of possession and devilry. A striking example can be found in Hungary, where Bodó Mátyás, in his 1751 work titled *Jurisprudentia criminalis*, delved into the

[64] Mézes Ádám, *Doubt and Diagnosis*, 6.
[65] Polina Ignatova, 'The Undead: Ghosts and Revenants', in: Philip Booth and Elizabeth Tingle (eds), *A Companion to Death, Burial, and Remembrance in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe, c. 1300–1700* (Leiden: Brill, 2021): 418–38.
[66] On medieval magic see: Helen Parish (ed.) *Superstition and Magic in Early Modern Europe: A Reader* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014); Michael Bailey, 'From Sorcery to Witchcraft: Clerical Conceptions of Magic in the Later Middle Ages', *Speculum* 76, no. 4 (2001): 960-90; Claire Fanger, 'Christian Ritual Magic in the Middle Ages', *History Compass* 11, no. 8 (2013): 610-18; David J. Collins, 'Magic in the Middle Ages: History and Historiography', *History Compass* 9, no. 5 (2011): 410-22.
[67] On magic and Reformation see: Alexandra Walsham, *Providence in Early Modern England* (Oxford: OUP, 2001); Peter Marshall, and Alexandra Walsham eds. *Angels in the Modern World* (Cambridge: CUP, 2006); Pierre Birabaum, *A Tale of Ritual Murder in the Age of Louis XIV: The Trial of Raphael Levy, 1669* (Stanford, California: SUP, 2012).
[68] Sarah Ferber, 'Demonic Possession, Exorcism and Witchcraft', 575-92.

question of how to approach apparitions where a demon assumed the guise of a deceased individual or an image. This inquiry extended to whether such corpses should be subjected to the drastic measure of burning. Bodó's work, over time, evolved into a widely recognized textbook, signifying its considerable influence on legal and cultural perspectives during that period. Notably, it is crucial to acknowledge that Hungary's secular legal system during this era embraced the principles derived from canon law. According to these principles, it was firmly held that the fate of the wicked, practitioners of magic, or those accused of witchcraft entailed both demonic possession and eternal damnation.[69]

The loss of purgatory also resulted in a stronger focus on the physical body of the deceased. Instead of the prayers for the soul, these efforts went into elaborate funeral practices, lasting memorials, and care for the deceased body itself.[70] Protestantism and Catholicism shared a similar negative view of the human body, both living and dead. The body was considered a source of temptation and sin, and efforts were made to resist its urges and mutability. During medieval times, people also believed that parts of dead bodies could be used as medicine: blood, bones, fat, and sweat from human bodies could be eaten, prepared, or put on the skin to heal different health problems like epilepsy, ulcers, and pain in the joints. This was a common practice among both lay people and doctors who believed that human body parts had special powers, powers that animals and plants did not have.[71] From the Renaissance and throughout the Enlightenment there was significant progress in the investigation of the body and the development of a new scientific understanding of anatomical systems and processes. The way people understood the human body also changed during this period with a growing emphasis on direct observation and experiments (I explore this topic in more detail in chapter one).

[69] See more: Tóth, *Boszorkánytéboly* 165-66.
[70] Andrew Gordon, Thomas Rist eds.,*The Arts of Remembrance in Early Modern England: Memorial Cultures of the Post Reformation* (Routledge, 2016); Theo Brown, *The Fate of the Dead: A Study in Folk-Eschatology in the West Country After the Reformation* (Folklore Society, 1979).
[71] Richard Sugg, *Mummies, Cannibals and Vampires: The History of Corpse Medicine from the Renaissance to the Victorians* (London: Routledge, 2011).

Modern revenants

During the nineteenth century, the significance of the corpse in medical education reached a zenith. This era witnessed the creation of a multitude of medical schools across Europe; this expansion of medical education, however, went hand in hand with an escalating demand for deceased bodies to facilitate the study of anatomy and medical procedures. At the same time, numerous reports emerged that established a connection between corpses and mystical attributes. These attributes were notably associated with criminal corpses, which were employed in the practice of corpse medicine – a belief that the deceased body held remedial potency and could be utilized as a form of curative treatment.[72] This intriguing practice reflects a complex interplay between early medical beliefs, superstitions, and cultural perceptions of the human body, especially in death.

The volume *Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Mortality and its Timings* advances our understanding of mortality by challenging the time of death as a solely biological phenomenon. It asserts that this temporal aspect is profoundly intertwined with social, cultural, and even philosophical dimensions. This perspective invites us to consider that societal norms, beliefs, rituals, and even the way we perceive and construct the concept of mortality itself informs the timing of death.[73] For instance, different cultures and historical periods exhibit diverse approaches to death, mourning, and commemoration, each with its unique temporal dimensions. In essence, the juxtaposition of these two ideas – the historical practice of corpse medicine and the contemporary understanding of the social aspect of death – underscores the dynamic nature of how we as humans have engaged with and conceptualized mortality throughout history. It highlights the interplay between scientific, cultural, and social factors in relationship with death and the deceased.

Most of the scholarship on death tends to focus on what it signifies within Western European contexts. In contrast, Hungarian historiography has not explored the concept of death after the Enlightenment in great detail, nor has it investigated, as my thesis does, the relationship between death and the revenant. Although some studies briefly acknowledge the superstitious beliefs surrounding the deceased, there has yet to be a comprehensive

[72] See: Emma Battell Lowman and Sarah Tarlow (eds.), *Harnessing the Power of the Criminal Corpse* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).
[73] McCorristine, *When is Death*?, 1-16.

and substantial research endeavour in this area. In terms of medical history, studies concerning cholera have indeed delved into the resurgence of superstitious practices associated with the handling of corpses.[74] Historians have examined the connection between folk healing and modern medicine in nineteenth-century Hungary, and they explore the prevalence of superstitious customs at the local level.[75] In the context of premature burial, a significant body of work demonstrates that the fear of being buried alive persisted in the Hungarian consciousness until the twentieth century.[76] This thesis aims to fill the gap within the field of modern revenant historiography by analysing the intriguing and often overlooked aspects of revenant lore and beliefs after the Enlightenment.

In investigating harmful corpses during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in Hungary, this thesis seeks to reframe the role of magical belief within the framework of popular culture. While ascribing a collective mindset to any group can pose difficulties, as this method could unintentionally disregard the influence of individual perspectives and the changes in viewpoints that occur over time. The enduring and pervasive allure of the resurrected undead, particularly the captivating vampire myth, however, has ingrained itself deeply within popular culture. This legend of blood-sucking immortals has remained a recurrent and influential theme in various artistic expressions, including poetry, novels, and numerous other art forms. Throughout these portrayals, vampires are commonly depicted as timeless creatures driven by an insatiable craving for blood. In the texts of nineteenth-century novelists and poets, such as Bram Stoker, the vampire legend transcended its supernatural roots and assumed a profound metaphorical significance, particularly in relation to human sexuality. These seductive beings of the night came to symbolize hidden desires, forbidden passions, and the allure of the forbidden in the realm of sexual representation.[77] My thesis carefully traces these changes in the representation of the vampire, showcasing the increasing influence of the returning dead on popular culture. It demonstrates how the vampire legend has persistently captured the human imagination,

[74] László Somogyi, 'Az 1872-1873. Évi Kolerajárvány Orvos és Kultúrtörténeti Vonatkozásai', *Fons* XXII. No.3. (2015): 363–71.
[75] Eszter Ágnes Fazekas, 'A népi gyógyítás és a modern orvoslás viszonya a 19. Századi Magyarországon', *Művelődés-, Tudomány- és Orvostörténeti Folyóirat* 2. no. 3 (2011): 183-97.
[76] Ildikó Horányi, *A látszatos halál, A magyarországi tetszhalál-fóbia története* (Budapest: Semmelweis Orvostudományi Múzeum, 2003).
[77] See: Roger Luckhurst, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Dracula* (Cambridge University Press, 2017), 76-84.

adapting, and changing to mirror society's evolving attitudes towards death, desire, and sexuality.

Revenants in Hungary

A vast amount of literature exists on the topic of witchcraft, encompassing both European and Hungarian contexts. While witchcraft beliefs are outside of the scope of this thesis, it is important to note that witch belief frequently overlaps with the concept of the harmful corpse in the Hungarian Kingdom. As I will go on to examine in chapter one, there is a significant connection between witchcraft and the idea of a corpse causing harm from the grave (known as *magia posthuma*). In these cases, the suspected witchcraft is revealed through material evidence and signs after their death, including clothing in mouth, flowing blood, or intact skin. The deceased allegedly return from the grave to scare, torment, and even suck the blood of people. The intertwining of witchcraft accusations and vampire trials emerged quite early within local legal procedures. Although, at this point, we cannot yet talk about vampires, as the concept had not yet become consolidated into a recognizable figure that signified the same thing across different contexts (I explore this topic in more detail in chapter one).

Recorded executions of harmful corpses in Hungary date as far back as 1662, when the authorities in the town of Gyöngyös undertook an investigation into allegations of sorcery linked to the individuals Cántor Jánosné and Margit Czortos. Interestingly, these corpse executions even gained approval from the Turkish authorities: permission was often granted, as Muslims believed all Christians went to hell anyway, so why not allow them to execute corpses as well![78] In the village of Kis-Kerék, predominantly inhabited by Romanians, in 1709, the villagers dug up the corpses of a man, two women and a young girl as they believed them to be *strigojs* (witches) and the cause of some deaths that had occurred in the village at the time of the plague. The villagers wedged stones into their

[78] 'Cántor Jánosné és Paija Czoitos Margith boszorkányok haláluk utáni elégetéséről'; 'Cántor Jánosné és Czortos Margith boszoikányok sírból való felásásáról', in: Sugár István: *Bűbájosok, ördöngösök, boszorkányok Heves és külső Szolnok vármegyében*, Boszorkányperek 1645-1814 (Budapest: Magyar Tudományos Akadémia Könyvtár, 1987), 23; See more examples in: Judit Kis-Halas, 'Divinatio Diabolica and Superstitious Medicine: Healers, Seers and Diviners in the Changing Discourse of Witchcraft in Early Modern Nagybánya' in Klaniczay and Pócs (eds.), *Witchcraft and Demonology in Hungary and Transylvania*, 159-219.

mouths and drove a stake into their hearts. According to the records corpses were executed in the same way in four other villages:

> The news is spreading across the province, the belief that plague is caused in many places by evil spirits through the souls of many. Reports have stated that, in many places, to stop the epidemic, locals have used the effective antidote of excavating suspected corpses, mutilating them, and stabbing them in the middle of their chest.[79]

Similar executions can be found in court records: for instance, an account from the Transylvanian village of Dés from 1723 claims that a woman who had died at a time of plague was accused by her own daughter of having come back from the dead to take children and adults away. The court record states that the body was dug up. The corpse's state of decay, however, contrasted with the belief that revenants did not rot. Therefore, the magistrates stated that they had been given false information.[80] During the plague of 1737-1742, in Dés village on August 2, 1742, the magistrates, after official inspection, ordered the opening of the grave of Pila Bába, as they believed that the 'dead [were] rising from their graves'. The authorities sent to investigate had to examine whether the faces of the exhumed bodies were red and if there was blood flowing after they were staked. As they established that Pila Bába was definitely 'reanimated', they burned her body.[81]

These examples suggest a significant overlap between the peripheral beliefs surrounding the undead and those associated with witchcraft. In chapter one I will expand upon Ádam Mézes's findings regarding the 1755 *magia poshuma* case and Péter Tóth's work on the 'fight against superstition' during the reign of Joseph II (1765-1780). I will also engage with research on the witchcraft trials of the eighteenth century: while witchcraft trials were diminishing in England and Europe, Hungary experienced a notable surge in witch trials during the same period. Unlike the attention given to the eighteenth century, there has been a noticeable lack of recent research on the topic of revenants in Hungary during the

[79] Sámuel Köléresi, *Pestis Dacicae anni MDCCIX scrutinium et cura* (Sibiu: Heltzdörffer, 1709), 111-13.
[80] 'A meny, Mezei Ferencné hiresítette azt, hogy anyósa: Mezei Péterné hazajáró és az gyermekeket hordgya, már a nagy embereket is hordani kezdette' Jun 26,1723. in: *Boszorkányok, kuruzslók, szalmakoszorús paráznák*, ed: Kiss András (Kriterion: Kolozsvár, 2004) 161-64.
[81] See: Klaniczay, 'Decline of Witches', 165-80.

later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Despite this gap, existing historical studies generally concur that belief in witchcraft and vampirism, as well as other superstitious notions, dwindled within the elite class while persisting in the realm of everyday life.

"Vampirism"

Simon Bacon writes that the 'story of the vampire is not a straight line but a rhizomic networks of connections, resonances, and contradictions'.[82] However, scholars have spent a great deal of energy to define the origin and legacy of term "vampire". The word *Vampyr* first appeared of the pages of the *Wienerisches Diarium* newspaper in 1725.[83] The report was sent from Habsburg Serbia to the Vienna administration about the strange events in the village of Kisilova (Kisiljevo). Shortly after this in 1732, vampiric events in another Serbian town, Medwegya, served as what Massimo Introvigne calls the 'detonator for the great European explosion of interest in vampirism, especially in Germany and France'.[84] Though the history of the term vampire is difficult to reconstruct throughout the eighteenth century, the figure of the vampire absorbed a variety of revenant experiences from various cultures that were concentrated in the region Clemens Ruthner has called 'a veritable "vampire belt" [that] runs particularly through eastern and southeastern Europe'.[85] Revenants of the southern borderland were known by Germans as *Blutsauger* (Bloodsucker) or *Vampir* (Vampire). In the Banat, they called them *Moroi*, and in the Moravian-Silesian border Germans and Latin sources used the words *Gespenst* (*Spektrum*/Ghost) or *Geist* (Spirit).[86]

The term "vampirism", however, will assume greater significance in the second part of the thesis, where it will be used to investigate the enduring presence of vampirism in

[82] Simon Bacon, "Introduction." In: *The Palgrave Handbook of the Vampire*, 5.
[83] Georg Tallar, *Copia eines Schreibens aus dem Gradiscker District in Ungarn*. *Wienerisches Diarium* 58, July 27, 1725; For works on vampires see: Ádám Mézes, 'Georg Tallar and the 1753 Vampire Hunt: Administration, Medicine and the Returning Dead in the Habsburg Banat.' In Éva Pócs ed., *The Magical and Sacred Medical World* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2019), 93-136.
[84] Massimo Introvigne, "The Theological and Esoteric Debate on the Existence of Vampires (17th–19th centuries). 2. An Epidemic of Vampirism in the Austro-Hungarian Empire." *Bitter Winter: A Magazine on Religious Liberty and Human Rights*, 10 August 2024, https://bitterwinter.org/the-theological-and-esoteric-debate-on-the-existence-of-vampires-17th-19th-centuries-2-an-epidemic-of-vampirism-in-the-austro-hungarian-empire/. Accessed 1 May 2025.
[85] Ruthner, "Outbreaks of the Balkan Village Vampire in the Eighteenth Century.", 74.
[86] See: Mézes, 'Doubt and Diagnosis', 18-9.

popular beliefs and entertainment. My research reveals that, during the nineteenth century, the term vampirism encompassed all malevolent corpses; with the emergence of vampire literature, the figure took on even more diverse manifestations. The phenomenon of vampirism forms a particularly important facet of my larger exploration into the cultural history of undead, harmful corpses. Drawing a line of demarcation between instances of vampirism and harmful witchcraft, or even cases of demonic possession, can present a formidable challenge. My goal, however, is not to provide a taxonomy of harmful corpses, but to investigate the role of these revenants in the realm of elite discourse and popular culture. Rather than delve into an analysis of the intricate details of these cases, I intend to illuminate the way these incidents were discussed among the elite as part of larger discussions about societal progress and geopolitics, the tension between social classes, the biology of death, and the boundary between life and the afterlife.

Legends associated with "vampirism"

The exploration of vampire legends such as those surrounding Elizabeth Báthory and Vlad Tepes offers a fascinating departure from traditional historical accounts of vampire cases, as they may not directly involve the reanimation of physical corpses. However, delving into these legends remains of significant importance due to their profound influence on the broader portrayal of the undead phenomenon in popular culture. By examining these tales, we gain insight into how they have shaped literature and artistic representations throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Moreover, as chapter four will show, these legends are intricately linked to public beliefs and associations surrounding vampires, blood, and immortality. By unravelling these connections, we can better understand the enduring fascination with "vampire" lore and its cultural impact over time.

According to the newspaper *Ország-Világ*, Bram Stoker was familiar with the legends of Vlad Tepes and Elizabeth Báthory when he wrote his famous book, *Dracula* (1897).[87] Stoker combined the two tales, creating the modern vampire: the Transylvanian count, who rises from the dead, preying on young virgins by sucking their blood, until he is killed with a stake. The legends of Báthory and Tepes had already gained significant traction and

[87] 'Drakula első száz éve, séta egy páratlanul sikeres mítosz körül', *Ország-Világ* 31. no. 47 (November 25, 1987).

recognition across Europe, and the publication of Bram Stoker's book in 1897 further amplified their popularity. Furthermore, Stoker's portrayal of the vampire eventually congealed into a stereotype, inspiring artworks, novels, and films centred around this theme. Examining the representation of the undead not only enables us to understand the influence such representations exerted on the arts, but also provides a perspective on how societal viewpoints towards death and the afterlife have changed within the sphere of popular culture.

Today, it is widely known that Bram Stoker drew inspiration from Vlad the Impaler when naming his iconic character, Count Dracula. Vlad III Dracula Tepes gained notoriety for his gruesome acts and military conflicts against the Turks, which were extensively documented by numerous authors from Greece, Turkey, Russia, Serbia, Hungary, and Romania. Vlad Dracula was born in Transylvania in 1428/31 and according to legend had a macabre penchant for dining amidst his dying victims and even dipping his bread in their blood. Vlad Tepes, also known as Vlad Dracul, gained fame for his fierce battles, although he never ruled over Transylvania but over Walachia from 1456 to 1462 and again in 1476. Thus, the association between Count Dracula and Transylvania stems from the folkloric association between the vampire and the region rather than from history.

Hungarian researchers have developed interpretations of Vlad Tepes's actions.[88] Dracul's stories spread throughout Europe before 1485, first orally and later in manuscript form. Four German-language manuscripts are known, and the stories listed are very similar on many points.[89] Jenő Farkas argued that Dracula was a victim of a plot against him, due to his conflict with the Transylvanian Saxons. The pictures of the German woodcuts, which show Vlad dining among the stakes are historically inaccurate as these woodcuts were also used as made-up political propaganda.[90] Tepes admitted to massacring more than 20,000 Bulgarians and Turks in his letter to the Hungarian king in February 1462. A copy of the

[88] Lajos Elekes, 'Magyar–román államkapcsolatok a dunatáji magyar nagyhatalom korában in Magyarok és románok II', Deér József and Gáldi László eds. (Budapest: A Magyar Történettudományi Intézet Évkönyve, 1944), 11; János Hóvári, 'A rettegett Drakula Vlad Tepes, 1428/31-1476', In: Gyula Szvák (ed.) *Koronás portrék*, Budapest (1987): 103- 27.

[89] The four Dracula manuscripts: *Geschichte Drakofe Waide*, St. Gallen, Stiftsbibliothek, Cod. Sang. 806. The St. Gall 'Dracula' Manuscript (Switzerland); *Ein wünderliche und erschröckenliche hystori von einem groszen wüttrich genant Dracole wayda, der do so gar unkristenliche martter hat angelegt, die menschē als mit spissen, auch dy leüt zu tod geslyffen, etc.* (Published:1419, Bamberg, Bavaria, Germany) in the British Library, London; one at the library of Lambach Abbey in upper Austria, one at the Municipal Library of Colmar in France.

[90] Radu Florescu and Raymond T. McNally, *Dracula, Prince of Many Faces: His Life and His Times* (Little Brown Publishing, 2009).

letter was sent to Matthias II and later to Pope Pius, who recorded the Latin translation of the letter in his historical work.[91] Romanian historians, with very few exceptions, accepted the view that the letter was a forgery. King Matthias arrested Vlad Tepes and launched a large-scale propaganda campaign against him. Soon after, Tepes was described as a perpetrator of 'terrible cruelty' and these texts came to the European public consciousness through Mátyás's court from Hungary. The story suddenly flooded the whole of Europe in the form of contemporary periodicals. By the 1480s, German newspapers and prominent historical works retold the story of Dracula.[92] From 1485 to the middle of the sixteenth century, the history of Vlad Dracul appeared in several editions in Germany, which caused great publicity throughout Europe at that time. The earliest surviving edition is the small booklet by an unknown author, printed by Bartholomaeus Gothan in Lübeck around 1485. The only known copy of this publication was placed in the Hungarian National library with the collection by the founder of the library Ferenc Széchényi.[93] The work, which consists of only 6 letters, tells the horrors of Vlad in Transylvania and Wallachia in the years from 1456 to 1462.

It is still unclear how much Stoker knew about the history of Dracula. On August 8, 1890, Stoker went to the public library in Whitby where he found a book published in 1820 by William Wilkinson, which recounted the history of the principalities of Wallachia and Moldavia (now in Romania). Wilkinson's history mentioned a fifteenth-century prince called Vlad Tepes who was said to have impaled his enemies on wooden stakes. He was known as Dracul – the 'son of the dragon'. The author also added in a footnote: 'DRACULA in the Wallachian language means DEVIL. The Wallachians used to give this as a surname to any person who rendered himself conspicuous either by courage, cruel actions, or cunning'.[94] This exact quote can be seen in Bram Stoker's notes, and many scholars assume that the author's inspiration to name his vampire 'Dracula' derived from the medieval nobleman. However, Elizabeth Miller urges caution: 'Because we now know so much about Vlad …

[91] Pope Pius II, *Pii secvndi pontificis max. Commentarii rerum memorabilium, quae temporibus suis contigerunt* (Frankfurt, Officina Aubriana, 1614). 296-318; Published in Romanian by N. Iorga, *Scrisori de Boieri, Scrisori de Domni* (Valenii de Munte, 1932), 161- 67.
[92] Jenő Farkas, 'Drakula összeesküvés-elméletek hálójában', *Világtörténet* 32 (2010) :13-9.
[93] An., *Uan deme quaden thyranne Dracule Wyda* (Lübeck: Bartholomaeus Gothan, c. 1485).
[94] William Wilkinson, *An Account of the Principalities of Wallachia and Moldavia: with Various Political Observations Relating to Them* (London: Printed for Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme and Brown, Paternoster-Row. 1820), 19.

many assume that Stoker had access to the same wealth of information. But that is a dangerous assumption'. For Miller, speculations like these require additional evidence to be persuasive; however, the lack of evidence has not prevented these speculations from taking on the status of fact in the public consciousness.[95]

For a significant period, literary scholars believed that Stoker's original manuscript, consisting of 541 pages, had been lost. It was found in a barn in northwestern Pennsylvania in the early 1980s. It included the typed manuscript with many corrections and handwritten on the title page was *THE UN-DEAD*. This suggests that Stoker decided to change the title to Dracula at the last minute.[96] By choosing the name Dracula, Stoker not only gave his novel a more recognizable and memorable title but also drew upon the historical figure of Vlad the Impaler. Another reason for the change in title could be marketing considerations. Publishers often have input into the titles of books, aiming to attract readers and generate sales. The name Dracula had a certain notoriety arising from Tepes's legacy that may have helped to market the title to prospective readers. The tale of the murderer Vlad Tepes was popular in the early-modern era in Central- Eastern Europe, although the contemporary accounts do not mention any vampiric qualities. Vlad Tepes's association with vampirism arose from Stoker's immensely popular *Dracula*, which cemented the connection between the historical figure and the vampire archetype.

Another influential vampiric legend, Elizabeth Báthory (1560-1614), who is often referred to as 'Countess Dracula', 'Countess Faust', 'The blood Countess', 'The first Hungarian vampire', and so on. These names suggest that Báthory's legend can be read in multiple ways: as a cautionary tale of a Protestant woman who befriends the Devil, or as an archetypal vampire who attains immortality through the consumption of fresh human blood.[97] The Jesuit monk László Thuróczi published his account of Báthory as part of a

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[95] Elizabeth Miller, 'Back to Basics: Re-Examining Stoker's Sources for Dracula.' *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts*, vol. 10, no. 2, (1999): 190.

[96] The original manuscript bears the novel's original title, probably typed by Stoker in London between 1890 and 1897, it is the only surviving full-length manuscript of Dracula. https://rosenbach.org/collection/english-literature/ Accessed: December 12, 2022.

[97] Works on Báthory Erzsébet: László Nagy, *Az erős fekete bég*, *Nádasdy Ferenc* (Debrecen: Zrínyi Katonai Kiadó, 1987); Katalin Péter, *A csejtei várúrnő.* (Budapest: Helikon Kiadó, 1985); Raymond T. McNally, Dracula was a woman. In search of the Blood Countess of Transylvania (London,1987); Ágnes Várkonyi, 'Közgyógyítás és boszorkányhit: Mária Terézia boszorkánypereket beszüntető törvényének újragondolásához'*, Ethnographia* 101. no. 3-4 (1990): 384-437; Irma Szádeczky-Kardoss, *Báthory Erzsébet igazsága. A koncepció jelei Báthory Erzsébet ügyében* (Nesztor, Budapest, 1993); Tony Thorn, *Countess Dracula. The life and times of the Blood Countess*, *Elisabeth Báthory* (London, 1997).

history of the Kingdom of Hungary and its rulers. Published in 1729, over a century after Báthory's death, Thuróczi's narrative formed the foundation for a cult dedicated to Báthory that still exists today. In the book, Thuróczi describes Báthory as the former owner of the castle and settlement in the town of Csejte. The woman, corrupted by the Reformation and vulnerable to the work of the Devil, wanted to fulfil the most ancient human desire: eternal youth and eternal life. Turóczy says: 'One who truly believes in Christianity can win eternal life by Christ alone, while the Devil, taking advantage of female vanity, has diverted Erzsébet Báthory from this path.'[98] Thuróczi's tale presented Protestants as incapable of resisting temptation by the Devil. As I discuss above in relation to Protestantism and purgatory, Catholic authors believed that revenants, which are typically undead beings or ghosts, raised questions about whether people could be certain of their salvation. As a Jesuit, Thuróczi scored an easy victory over Protestantism by reminding his readers that revenants were a reminder that while the physical body decays after death, the soul faced more than just the possibility of either going to heaven or being damned.

The myth of Báthory penetrated the public consciousness of the Hungarians and also made her famous all over the world. According to the tale, the countess, terrified of ageing and the loss of her beauty, slapped a servant girl in the face in her anger. The servant's blood dripped onto the skin of the countess's hand, which rejuvenated in the exact spot where the blood fell. According to Turóczi, this was the moment when Báthory developed her idea to restore her youth and beauty by bathing in the blood of unmarried girls:

> Would human blood be that strong? Her eyes lit up at the sight of the crafty art of Devil-possessed women. After this realisation, Bathory begins to think vulgarly about her appearance. Could it be? If such a small amount of blood offers such great effect, what would it be capable of if I were completely soaked with it?[99]

[98] László Turóczi, *Ungaria suis cum regibus compendio data* (Nagyszombat, 1729), in: Lengyel Tünde and Várkonyi Gábor, *Báthory Erzsébet- Egy asszony élete* (General Press, 2010), 216-17.
[99] Ibid. 217-18.

Báthory is subsequently accused of killing hundreds of maids over the years with the help of her accomplices. Once Báthory was apprehended for her crimes, she was walled alive in one of the rooms of the castle in Csejte, where she died at the age of fifty-four.

According to the legend, Báthory slaughtered six hundred virgins. This accusation has been studied by historians, and by analysing the court records, historiography has proven many times over that Elizabeth was the victim of political sham-trial.[100] According to the court records, Magnate György Thurzó made an investigative visit to Csejthe Castle in Hungary on orders from King Matthias and discovered Countess Elizabeth Báthory ordering a torture session of 600 young girls, and while 327 witnesses were interrogated, only 107 gave valuable testimony. 220 witnesses saw and heard nothing and only two people, Dezső Benedek and Jakab Szilvási claimed that they saw 'a lot of torture'. The rest of the witnesses claimed they only heard that the countess was torturing young girls, but they had never actually seen it.[101] Interestingly, none of the testimony mentions the countess bathing in blood, the image that figures so significantly in later imaginings. This suggests that the accusations were false, as the only living person who could give a statement was not asked to do so. In January 1611, Báthory and her accomplices were put on trial for 80 counts of murder. All were convicted, but only Báthory escaped execution.

At the time of the Báthory investigation, English public opinion was feverish with a similar case: that of Lady Frances Howard, Countess of Somerset (1590-1632), who had been accused of murder, poison making, and black magic. Frances and her husband were arrested for murder in 1615 after a three-year investigation. The couple were sentenced to death but later sent to the Tower on the orders of James I. They received a pardon from the King in 1622 and were later released from prison. The Countess died 10 years later at the age of 42.[102] Contemporary London newspapers sensationalized the investigation of the Countess, which was carried out with the attention of the public.[103] In contrast, knowledge of Báthory's investigation was limited to the individuals involved in giving testimony. As far

[100] Ibid. 218.
[101] MNL OL, Kincstári levéltárak, Magyar Kamara Archivuma, Acta Publica (E 142), Fasc. 28. No. 19.
[102] Anne Somerset, *Unnatural Murder. Poison at the Court of James I.* (London, 1997).
[103] Collected in: Francis Bacon, *A true and historical relation of the poysoning of Sir Thomas Overbury with the severall arraignments and speeches of those that were executed thereupon : also, all the passages concerning the divorce between Robert, late Earle of Essex, and the Lady Frances Howard : with King James's and other large speeches / collected out of the papers of Sir Francis Bacon* (London: Printed by T.M. & A.C. for John Benson and John Playford, 1651).

as we know from the court documents, not even Báthory received a notification of the charges against her or when the testimony against her began. The Magnate conducted the investigation in secret without any legal control; this highlights the absence of transparency and accountability in the legal proceedings, raising concerns about potential abuses of power and injustice.

Centuries later the story of the 'blood countess' spread in German, French and English publications, which integrated the generic conventions of eighteenth-century novels and horror stories into the telling of the tale. This is how the figure of Báthory became a female vampire, a characterization that was fully embraced by Hungarian historian, Dezső Rexa, in his book written in 1908.[104] The Hungarian poet Endre Ady named one of his villains, István Tisza, 'the male Elizabeth Báthory' in one of his poems.[105] Another Hungarian poet, János Garay wrote a poem titled Elizabeth Báthory, in a historic drama in five acts, which opened in the Pest Theatre on August 9, 1840. The impressionist painter, István Csók, won a gold medal at the 1897 Munich International Exhibition for his portrayal of Erzsébet Báthory's cruelty (unfortunately, the paining was destroyed during World War II).[106]

The narrative of Báthory's reign of terror—which allegedly included torturing, drinking, and bathing in virgins' blood—has no historical evidence for support. But this has not stopped many writers and filmmakers from seizing upon her sad tale for inspiration. The twentieth-century popular culture obsession with serial killers has continued to exaggerate the original tale, and the idea that drinking the blood of young women to restore youth continues to terrify and thrill readers and audiences. A report from the *Szegedi Híradó* newspaper (dated 1862) provides an intriguing historical counterpart to this modern fascination with blood and rejuvenation. The reporter narrates the capture of a 'grey-haired man', 72 years of age, at a train station in France. The old man was arrested for using a chemical substance to render a young girl unconscious and subsequently drinking her blood from her neck. In his confession to the authorities, the man disclosed his belief that consuming the blood of a youthful maiden would grant him renewed vitality.[107] The newspaper report not only calls attention to the enduring presence of notions centred

[104] Dezső Rexa, *Báthory Erzsébet* (Budapest: Benkő Gyula Udvari Könyvkereskedése, 1908).
[105] Ady Endre, 'Rengj csak, Föld' in: *A Magunk Szerelme Versek* (Nyugat,1913).
[106] '*Báthori Erzsébet*, *Csók István festménye'*, *Vasárnapi Újság* 39, no. 42 (September 29, 1895): 645.
[107] *Szegedi Híradó* 4, no. 69 (27 August 1862): 3.

around rejuvenation through blood consumption, a concept that has been found in Europe from medieval times, but also the captivating power of these narratives.[108] In the chapters that follow—especially chapter three and four—my thesis dissects how popular and commercial culture contributed to the resurgence and re-imagination of prevailing beliefs in the undead. To do this, I analyse how these narratives were preserved, reshaped, and adapted to suit evolving societal contexts.

Chapter summary

Chapter one addresses elite concerns about the incompatibility between popular mourning practises and beliefs in the afterlife, on one hand, and sanitary considerations in times of epidemics, on the other. The intellectual elites, far from showing a united front against common people's beliefs, admitted some aspects of them while rejecting others. Physicians continued to admit the possibility of spiritual intervention while priests and ministers marshalled new scientific ideas against their confessional rivals, arguing that those communities were 'superstitious'. The agents who propagated Enlightenment ideals—from doctors to bureaucrats to scientists—each pursued their own agenda, but they remained tethered to traditional and superstitious beliefs that blurred the boundaries between the natural and the supernatural as well as those between elite and popular culture (a boundary that is clearly delineated by Weber's theory of disenchantment). The chapter also considers how the increasing influence of bureaucracy and the rationalization of social institutions further contributed to the disenchantment process. Bureaucratic systems aimed to eliminate mystical elements from governance and administration by promoting rationality. Like many Enlightenment intellectuals of this era, these bureaucrats approached popular beliefs in supernatural forces with a rational and analytical mindset; rather than denying their existence outright, these thinkers and reformers sought to make sense of these irrational beliefs by investigating their cultural, psychological, and social dimensions.

Chapter two focuses on the transformation of nineteenth-century ideas and beliefs around death, both in popular and elite culture, as a result of modern medicine and epidemics such as cholera. The uncertainty around the boundary between life and death

[108] Francesca Matteoni, *Blood beliefs in early modern Europe*, PhD Thesis (University of Hertfordshire, 2009).

and the continued disengagement of the authorities from burial practices saw the emergence of new forms of irrational beliefs, notably the fear of being buried alive. In the face of widespread fatalities due to large-scale epidemics, common folk resorted to folk medicine rather than physicians, who were in short supply and whose conflicting views were a source of anxiety rather than comfort. Both folk beliefs and the medical discourse of the time shared many elements of superstitious beliefs about corpses and the ambiguous passage between life and death. These similarities attest to the interconnectedness of different knowledge systems, revealing that even in supposedly rational and scientific domains such as medicine, elements of superstitious beliefs and folk traditions persisted.

Chapter three explores how the undead corpse became a source of fascination in literature, plays and other forms of popular entertainment written by Western authors. As Western authors fictionalized the vampire, beliefs about the undead remained strong in Eastern Europe, where revenants were popularized in printed newspapers and broadsheets. Evidence suggests that these beliefs were still widely discussed in print until the middle of the twentieth century. Interestingly, the Hungarian Monarchy itself used the same process of 'othering' against its ethnic minorities on the borderlands that Central Eastern Europe itself was subject to in the West. During the 1848-1849 Hungarian Revolution, the question of 'who is Hungarian?' suggested that political participation should be based on ethnic and cultural criteria that excluded the ethnic minorities of the borderlands. These minorities were framed as superstitious, based largely on their continuing belief in the undead. This interplay between the Western fascination with the undead and the persistence of undead belief in the East takes place alongside the use of 'othering' within the Hungarian Monarchy toward its marginalized inhabitants, suggesting the importance of supernatural belief as a pivot point for questions of ethnic and national identity.

Chapter four examines the glamourization of the Eastern European undead in Western European media at the turn of the twentieth century: a Western attempt to 're-enchant' the world as a response to the rapid and unsettling development of popular commercial culture. This chapter expands on scholarship about the cultural representation of the undead at the *fin de siècle* and art nouveau in Central Eastern Europe. This re-enchantment, I argue, was tied to the burgeoning realm of popular commercial culture; indeed, the rise of mass media, including newspapers, magazines, and cinema, allowed for the dissemination of these captivating narratives to a new audience. The allure of the

eastern undead, steeped in centuries of folklore and mystique, lent itself perfectly to the flourishing entertainment industry. The late nineteenth and early twentieth century was a golden age of belief in supernatural forces and energies, ghost stories and spooky phenomena which took the forms of movies, novels and plays about the undead. This chapter reveals the way these popular representations changed Hungarian attitudes towards death and dying. For example, spiritualism offered an alternative approach to knowledge where the supernatural experience was not based on traditional religious beliefs but based on the evidence of an afterlife. The chapter examines the rise of print culture and the spread of literacy, as these factors played a crucial role in the transmission and popularization of certain ideas about the undead.

Overall, the first two chapters investigate the responses of the medical elite to the phenomenon of revenants, revealing a complex blend of reactions. Chapters one and two also highlight the challenges faced by the elite in addressing undead issues, particularly in a context where influential religious beliefs still held sway. Moving into the nineteenth century, one might expect to see a decline in the discursive presence of superstition and a corresponding increase in the presence of rational, disenchanted discourse. However, this was not the case: the educated elite continued to grapple with the revenant problem in relation to the lingering force of superstition and beliefs about the undead. The final two chapters illustrate that, irrespective of scientific advancements, a belief in revenants, especially in vampirism, endures through popular culture, entertainment, and even some forms of elite discourse. Chapters three and four, therefore, provide insight into the transformation of these superstitious beliefs in harmful corpses over time, while the object of fascination—revenants—remains a consistent presence.

Chapter 1.

The role of superstition in the changing cultures of knowledge

Introduction

> It is certain that the evil spirit, by the permission of God, has done works which completely transcend natural causes […] No Christian can deny that some people were possessed by the evil spirit; therefore, the evil spirit has power over human bodies. Hence, the question here is not whether such extraordinary activities (vampirism) are possible but rather the entire difficulty lies in proving that a certain event has actually occurred and, if it has, in demonstrating that it is an event that surpasses the powers of natural causes. […] It is also true and certain that as the arts and sciences progress, miracles diminish. The posthumous magic (*Magia posthuma*) in question here serves as new evidence.[109]

Gerard van Swieten's words from his 1768 work, *Vampyrismus*, reflect a profound intellectual engagement with the complex connection between supernatural beliefs, religion, and scientific inquiry during the Enlightenment era, exemplifying how supernatural issues challenged the intellectual elite. Van Swieten states that Christians cannot deny the existence of supernatural activities, which includes acknowledging the events influenced by evil spirits. Instead of focusing on the possibility of such happenings, he focuses on the need for evidence to prove that such events have occurred and that they go beyond what can be explained by natural causes. At the same time, van Swieten suggests that belief in vampires may decrease as society advances in knowledge and science, highlighting the historical tension between religious beliefs, supernatural phenomena, and the progress of science.

Van Swieten played a pivotal role in paving the path for the Austrian Enlightenment and revolutionized both the Austrian health service and medical university education.[110] Van

[109] Gerard Van Swieten, *Vampyrismus von Herrn Baron Gerhard van-Swieten verfasset, aus dem Französischen ins Deutsche übersetzet, und als ein Anhang der Abhandlung des Daseyns der Gespenster beigerücket* (Augsburg, 1768), 7. https://www.gutenberg.org/files/30886/30886-h/30886-h.htm Accessed: August 11, 2022.

[110] See more: Boro Bronza, 'Impact of Gerard Van Swieten on the development of Austrian medicine throughout the 18th century', *Scripta Medica* 1, no. 52 (2021): 59-68.

Swieten's enduring interest in supernatural phenomena was also influential, and it mirrored the uncertainty experienced by many intellectuals of his era. Like his contemporaries, he grappled with the challenge of addressing the supernatural in the revenant problem, which pertained to reanimated or undead corpses that showed malevolence toward the living. Eighteenth-century medical discourse, both Austrian and Hungarian, on the revenant problem intertwined the unnatural and the natural. As the intellectual elite of the era adopted a more empirical and scientific approach to understanding the world, it remained influenced by deep religious convictions and did not reject the idea of magic or the potential for the dead to come back to life.

In the latter half of the eighteenth century, influential figures, such as van Swieten and Sámuel Rácz, an important figure of Hungarian-language medical education, wrote on the topic of the revenant and frequently incorporated supernatural elements like demonic magic, spirits and possession into their discussions. For these practitioners, the medical field was not only defined by objectivity, empiricism, and rationalism, but also by the legacy of metaphysics and superstitious beliefs that imbued every element of their practice. This chapter will show the diverse responses of the intellectual elite of the eighteenth century in addressing superstitious matters, focusing on the special role of the revenant. I argue that these mixed responses of the intellectual elite can be traced back to the authors' enduring religious belief and their uncertainty in navigating medical objectivity within the framework of the age of reason. The tension arising from this dual influence—religious and intellectual—shaped the complex role of revenants to create a discursive space where the epistemologies of science, religion, and tradition could overlap.

Considerable research has been conducted on supernatural discourse, including topics related to witches and revenants during the eighteenth-century Habsburg Empire, including Hungary.[111] While these works explore the responses of the intellectual elite to the supernatural, they often limit their scope to the reign of Maria Theresa (1740-1780) and Joseph II (1765-1790). While the scope of my thesis extends to the early twentieth century, the responses of the intellectual elite at the time of the Enlightenment are crucial to my account, as these voices shed light on developments in the following centuries, particularly regarding the concept of disenchantment. This chapter shows that the intellectual elite of

[111] See: Mézes, *Doubt and Diagnosis*; Tóth, *Boszorkánypánik és babonatéboly*; Miskolczy, *Felvilágosodás és Babonaság*.

Hungary, as opposed to the elite of Western European nations, did not see a sharp contradiction between their faith and the scientific methods they employed to differentiate the natural from the supernatural.

This chapter focuses on the cultural condition of the Hungarian Kingdom after the Habsburg reconquest from 1683 onwards.[112] During this period, the Hungarian Kingdom faced the interlinked ravages of constant battle and epidemics. The fear of plague reinforced a range of existing supernatural beliefs-especially beliefs surrounding harmful corpses. The authorities attempted to address the increasing public panic around harmful corpses by regulating customs related to the dead. The significant role of the revenant in shaping public health policy demonstrates the slower penetration of Enlightenment ideals into the Hungarian Kingdom when compared to Western Europe. The Enlightenment had its most profound influence in Vienna, where the political elite resided, and it gradually extended its reach into Hungary and Transylvania. This chapter examines how the Hungarian intellectual elite, including influential physicians and local priests, deployed discourse about the revenant and harmful dead in similar ways and for similar ends. My analysis reveals that religious and superstitious beliefs played a major role in the development and dissemination of Enlightenment thinking in the Hungarian Kingdom, as members of the educated elite found no inherent conflict between Enlightenment rationality and metaphysical conviction.

Context on the Habsburg Empire and Hungary

The Habsburgs rapidly expanded into the south-eastern regions of Europe, disrupting the geopolitics of the region and adding new cultural conflicts and transcultural exchanges.[113] The Habsburg expansion was accompanied by the Counter-Reformation, further intensifying the feeling of transformation within the Empire. The Habsburg Empire reached its greatest extent after the reconquest of Hungary from the Turks between 1683 and 1699. Prior to this time, however, Hungarian history was defined by constant war and oppression by foreign

[112] See: Charles Ingrao, *The Habsburg Monarchy, 1618-1815* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); R. J. W. Evans*, The Making the Habsburg Monarchy, 1551-1700* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).
[113] See: Timothy Olin, 'Cultivating an Orderly Society: Physical and Mental Landscapes on the Habsburg's Southern Frontiers', *Austrian History Yearbook* 48. (2017):159-72.

powers. The Ottoman Empire first attacked Hungary in 1390, and Hungary only became free after the treaty of Passarowitz in 1718.[114] With the loss of Mohács in 1526, the Habsburgs retained the western part of the Kingdom of Hungary, the Ottomans ruled the middle, while the east became the Transylvanian Principality, governed by Hungarians under Ottoman overlordship. The centuries of constant war and the militarisation of everyday life caused enormous damage to these territories.[115] Most of the basic infrastructure was destroyed, the urban centres declined, and the medieval settlement structure was damaged.

The cultural centres and religious institutions of these territories suffered similar damage. Monasteries, noble courts, and parishes were destroyed in great numbers, causing a vast cultural, economic, and psychological loss across the region.[116] Situated between the Catholic West and the Islamic East, the Kingdom of Hungary acquired the title of the 'bulwark of Christianity'. The Reformation deepened religious divisions, and many religious groups blamed one another for the collapse of the country. John Elliott writes that:

> The threat posed by Islam gave a powerful impetus to the yearnings for Christian unity … But, the stronger the pressure for unity, the greater the resistance … The European world that emerged from the sixteenth-century confrontation with Islam was a world set on the path of political, religious and cultural pluralism.[117]

The threat posed by Islam during the sixteenth century sparked a desire for Christian unity among European nations while inspiring an opposing tendency toward political, religious, and cultural pluralism, where diverse political systems, religious beliefs, and cultural

[114] On the Ottoman Empire, see: Gábor Ágoston, 'The Ottoman Empire and Europe' in: *The Oxford Handbook of Early Modern European History, 1350-1750. Volume II. Cultures and Power*. (ed.) Hamis M. Scott (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 612-37; Virginia H. Aksan, 'Locating the Ottomans Among Early Modern Empires', *Journal of Early Modern History*, Vol. 3. (1999): 103-34; Colin Imber, *The Ottoman Empire, 1300-1650: The Structure of Power* (Palgrave, 2002); Gábor Ágoston, 'The costs of the Ottoman Fortress-System in Hungary in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries', *Ottomans, Hungarians and Habsburgs in Central Europe. The Military Confines in the Era of Ottoman Conquest.* Ed. Géza Dávid and Pál Fodor (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2000).

[115] Pál Fodor, 'Hungary between East and West: The Ottoman Turkish Legacy', in: More Modoque. *Die Wurzeln der europäischen Kultur und deren Rezeption im Orient und Okzident: Festschrift für Miklós Maróth zum siebzigsten Geburtstag* (Budapest: Argumentum Kiadó, 2013), 403.

[116] Ibid. 409.

[117] John Elliott, 'Ottoman–Habsburg Rivalry: The European Perspective', In: *Süleyman the Second and His Time*, Eds. H. İnalcik and C. Kafadar (Istanbul, 1993), 161–62.

traditions coexisted. The cultural impact of the Hungarian reconquest can be felt in the re-Catholicisation and emergence of cross-cultural exchange and in Hungary's response to the spread of Enlightenment ideals from the West.

Stereotypes of Hungarian backwardness were perpetuated through travellers' accounts that documented—but more often invented—examples of the region's 'less civilized' nature. The elite of Western European nations often warned travellers against going to Hungary. In the letters of Lady Mary Wortley Montague, the wife of the British ambassador of Constantinople, we read that Prince Eugene warned her about travelling through Hungary on her way to Turkey in 1717. Lady Mary wrote:

> That I may have the convenience going by the water; assuring me that the houses in Hungary are such, as are no defence against the weather; and that I shall be obligated to travel three or four days between Buda and Essek, without finding any house at all, through desert plains covered with snow; where the cold is so violent, many have been killed by it.[118]

This personal account highlights the larger role those Western opinions played in shaping negative cultural stereotypes of Eastern Europe, particularly Hungary. The emphasis on the inconvenience of the journey arising from the lack of suitable accommodations portrays Hungary as a challenging and inhospitable place.

Contrary to the warnings she had been given, Lady Mary found the territories to be far from unpleasant. In fact, she reflected on her initial apprehensions and the exaggerated fears that were instilled in her with a sense of amusement: 'I can hardly forbear laughing, when I recollect all the frightful ideas that were given to me of this journey'.[119] While she brushes aside the stereotypes of Hungary as a dangerous or uncivilized place, she registers the melancholy results of war on decimating the population and culture:

> We continued two days travelling between this place (Nomuhl) and Buda, through the finest plains in the world, as even as if they were paved, and

[118] Letter XXI. (1717) in*: Letters of Lady Mary Wortley Montague, written during her travel in Europe, Asia, and Africa; to which are added Poems by the same author*, (1822), 59.
[119] Letter XIII. (1716), 40.

> extremely fruitful; but for the most part desert and uncultivated, laid waste by the long wars between the Turk and the Emperor […] Indeed nothing can be more melancholy than, in travelling through Hungary to reflect on the former flourishing state of that kingdom, and to see such a noble spot of earth almost uninhabited.[120]

Lady Mary captures the nostalgia for the former glory of Hungary, evoking a sense of loss and sadness. She portrays the devastation caused by the conflicts and paints a picture of a once-thriving landscape that has been left largely uninhabited and neglected.

In addition to enduring population decline in the aftermath of Ottoman rule, these territories were faced with another challenge: the lingering presence of certain diseases, leading to regular epidemics. The swamps and floodplains that occupied a significant part of the country's territory were breeding grounds for malaria, which was a nationally widespread disease even as late as the 1840s (especially in the Banat). Similarly, the spread of rabies by animals was a source of danger in Hungary. Data between 1712 and 1722 attests to an extremely high number of rabid dogs.[121] The so-called Hungarian disease, the *morbus hungaricus* (or typhus fever), was extremely common, especially among German soldiers. Coberus Tobias wrote the following about the disease in 1685:

> Hungarians live cleaner in all respects and take better care of their health than foreigners. They are more careful in their choice of drinking water and only drink poor quality water when they are in great need. However, German soldiers, tormented by thirst, often used swamp water as drinking water […] these were the inherent factors that led to the country to become a 'graveyard of Germans'.[122]

[120] Letter XXIII. (1717), 63.
[121] Gyula Magyary-Kossa, 'Régi magyar gyógyszer a veszettség ellen', *Állatorvosi lapok* 10 (1904): 310-14.
[122] István Kovács, 'Európa élvonalában a népek tavaszán, A szabadságharc egészségügye és honvédorvosai', *Kortárs,* 45 (2001): 6.

Tobias identifies the cause of disease with the hygiene of foreigners rather than the practices of Hungarians or the land itself; indeed, the Hungarian countryside merely requires the proper knowledge and respect to maintain human health.

Due to poor diet, malnutrition, and the many fasts required by the Orthodox Church, scurvy became a common ailment amongst Romanians in the eighteenth century. Alcoholism emerged as a social problem in the first half of the nineteenth century, although in some areas, such as Northern Hungary, it was already considered a public disease since the seventeenth century. The distilled alcohol, which provided an opportunity for the landlord to sell low-quality grain and potatoes, flooded the pubs with cheap and potentially dangerous liquor. Authorities were forced to deal with alcoholism as a disease that significantly reduced the number of men fit for military service.[123]

While the bubonic plague swept over Europe in 1720 and 1743, it was a persistent epidemic in Eastern Europe throughout the eighteenth century. The plague no longer affected the Habsburgs from the West, but the East remained vulnerable to the contagion passed along by merchants and wandering Romani caravans. From the middle of the sixteenth century, due to the development of Hungarian writing culture, more records remained of the epidemics. While only a limited number of records have endured for entire regions of the Hungarian Kingdom, the urban chronicles, documenting both religious and secular figures, pertain solely to the smaller local communities. Emil Schulteisz highlighted the major plague epidemics: the outbreak between 1708 and 1711 was the deadliest in the eighteenth century, causing half a million deaths in Hungary and Transylvania. During Rákóczi's War of Independence (1703-1711), Rákózczi's army decreased from 16,000 to 3000 due to the plague. According to the records, between 1717 and 1719 nearly half of the population died in Transylvania. Another two outbreaks battered the regions: one that lasted from 1737 to 1741 and another in 1744, which caused more than 310,000 deaths. An epidemic in 1755-1756 in Bereg county caused 4,000 deaths. Another series of outbreaks burst out in 1758-59 in Banat, in 1771-71 in Transylvania, and a final one in 1795 in Szerém county.[124] This last outbreak of plague was followed by the occurrence of more epidemic

[123] András Gergely (ed). *Magyarország története a 19. században*, (Budapest: Osiris Kiadó, 2005), 61.
[124] Emil Schulteisz, 'A magyarországi járványok történetéről', *Fejezetek az orvosi művelődés történetéből. Magyar Tudománytörténeti Szemle Könyvtára* 62 (2006): 196–207.

diseases, but the economic, military, and moral impact of these other afflictions was far less significant than the bubonic plague (or the cholera epidemic that would follow in 1831).[125]

Lack of proper medical treatment was a major factor in the high mortality rate in the Hungarian territories. The poor and sick hospitals, *domus infirmorum*, of the medieval times were mostly alms-houses, which provided basic nursing without professional medical treatment.[126] In sixteenth and seventeenth-century Hungary, the condition of sick hospitals was influenced by the Turkish occupation. The Turks did not establish organized healthcare for Christians in the occupied territories. They established military hospitals in the larger military forts, such as Pécs, Temesvár, and Szolnok, to care for their own patients. The Turks destroyed hospitals and the diseased areas were protected through temporary quarantine. During the reconquest against the Turks, the occupied territories acquired military, camp hospitals that were usually maintained by the Church. The operation of hospitals depended largely on the financial strength of the founders and the central government did not regulate these organisations; therefore, there was no set of uniform rules to guide the practice of nurses and doctors. By the middle of the eighteenth century, the process of hospitalization began, resulting in the creation of a modern hospital exclusively for the care of patients.[127] The frequency and devastation of epidemics served as the primary motivation for constructing hospitals. According to Kapronczay, a national survey in 1744 identified 86 hospitals, with this number rising to 181 by 1792. Many of these hospitals, however, were little more than poorhouses, where the role of patient care was marginal. [128]

Hungarian territories not only suffered a shortage of hospitals, but also of doctors and specialists. Daremberg observes that in Paris in 1768, there were 148 physicians and qualified specialists increasing to 172 in 1789. By comparison, in the whole territory of Hungary around 1720, it is estimated that only 40 medical doctors, 20 pharmacies, and about 120 health professionals could be found.[129] Gyula Magyary-Kossa draws attention to

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[125] László Kiss, 'Látták, hogy jön? Védekezési kísérletek az első Magyarországi kolerajárvány idején', *Történeti Demográfiai Évkönyv* (KSH Népességtudományi Kutatóintézet, 2005), 79-92.
[126] László Kiss, 'Az ispotálytól a modern kórházig. Kórházak Magyarországon a 19. század végétől a második világháborúig', *Századvég* 10. No. 37. (2005): 49.
[127] Paul P. Bernard, 'The Limits of Absolutism: Joseph II and the Allgemeines Krankenhaus', *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 2 (1975): 193-215.
[128] Károly Kapronczay, 'Egészségi és katona-egészségügyi állapotok a Rákóczi-szabadságharc idején', *Valóság* 47, no. 3 (2004): 46-57.
[129] Győző Birtalan, *Európai Orvoslás az Újkorban (1640–1920),* (Budapest: Medicina Könyvkiadó Vállalat, 1988), 29.

the fact that the number of doctors decreased after the Turkish and Rákóczi wars. As a result, there was a recurring complaint during the eighteenth century about the shortage of doctors in large areas.[130] The Habsburg government called on the Vienna faculty of medicine to arrange doctors to be sent to Hungary's plague-affected areas. Most of the doctors did not respond to the call due to the low salary offered by the Hungarian chamber.[131] The people of the villages, therefore, turned mostly to healers and pastors skilled in the treatment of illness. Theological training included knowledge of *medicina pastoralis*, which provided general medical advice, experiential herbal knowledge, and guidelines about hygiene. Often, the priest was the only intellectual in the countryside.

The shortage of doctors in the territories arose from the absence of a dedicated university system and, later, by the lack of a medical faculty within universities. The establishment of universities played a crucial role in advancing medical education and training, providing a platform for the dissemination of medical knowledge and the development of skilled physicians in the eighteenth century. Herman Boerhaave (1668–1738), who was teacher to many students at the University of Leyden played an important role in developing a robust medical education system in the Habsburg Empire. His work influenced the Catholic Gerard van Swieten, who moved to Vienna in 1774 from the Netherlands as the court physician of Maria Theresa. Involved 'in the typical problems and attitudes of the time', van Swieten was an innovator of new medical reforms, introducing many health and administrative practices to the Protestant states of contemporary Europe.[132] Van Swieten was given unprecedented power to modernize healthcare. His complex role arose from the relationships he forged between health, education, and government.

A proponent of the enlightened ideas of Dutch citizenship, van Swieten believed in working for the public interest. One of the defining elements of the centralization and regulation of health care was the reform of the University of Vienna. In just five years, between 1749 and 1754, van Swieten modernised the medical faculty, transforming the university's underdeveloped curriculum and infrastructure into one of the premier medical

[130] Gyula Magyary-Kossa, *Magyar orvosi emlékek* IV. (Budapest, 1940), 124, 126, 186, 201, 237.
[131] Ibid. 27.
[132] Frank T. Brechka, *Gerard van Swieten and his world 1700-1772*. (The Hague, 1970), 2.

institutions in Europe.[133] The University of Vienna was completely reorganized between 1749 and 1756 and van Swieten became the founder of the 'first medical school in Vienna'.[134] By doing so, he emphasized the role that institutions played in the perception and reproduction of cultural and social values, including both traditional and new, enlightened forms of knowledge favoured by the educated elite. Van Swieten's influence extended beyond his immediate circle. His reforms and ideas influenced subsequent generations of educators, administrators, and intellectuals in the Habsburg Empire and beyond. The perception that institutions were influential in shaping cultural and social values was perpetuated through the dissemination of van Swieten's principles and the continued development of educational systems that embraced his vision.

Through his position on the court censorship committee, van Swieten had the opportunity to achieve a higher level of medical knowledge by loosening the censorship of the Jesuits. In addition to updating the faculty with scholars from abroad, he introduced new textbooks, developed a standardized examination system, and supplemented the curriculum with the Dutch model of clinical education, case descriptions and registration techniques, radically transforming the Central Eastern European medical discourse and methodology. However, eastern territories controlled by the Monarchy proved his biggest challenge, as these places bore the scars of Ottoman rule in the form of an absence of educational institutions, medical training, hospitals, and doctors.[135]

The influence of van Swieten can be found in the 1770s and 1780s, when the Habsburg health centralization program entered a second phase across the Empire. The Faculty of Medicine of the University of Nagyszombat (Trnava) opened in Hungary in 1770/1771 (the institution was established by Maria Theresa on 7 November 1769). Everything from the structure of the building to the design of the curriculum was modelled on the Viennese programme, with five professorships, all filled by van Swieten's students. Van Swieten described his work organizing and modernising the Habsburg state health administration in his *Generale Normativum*, which was published in German in January

[133] Erna Lesky, 'Gerard van Swieten. Auftrag und Erfüllung'. In: Erna Lesky and Adam Wandruszka (eds): *Gerard van Swieten und seine Zeit.* (Verlag Hermann Böhlaus, Vienna, 1973), 11-62.
[134] József Antall, 'Magyar-holland orvostörténeti kapcsolatok. Gondolatok, teendők, kutatási irányok'. In: István Bernáth (ed.) *Hollandból magyarra…Kultúrhistóriai tanulmányok és szemelvények*. (Budapest: Terra, 1986), 113-148.
[135] Emil Schultheisz, *Fejezetek az orvosi művelődés történetéből*, (Piliscsaba: Magyar Tudománytörténeti Intézet, 2006), 196–207.

1770. *The Generale Normativum* regulated the status and scope of activities of doctors, surgeons, and midwives uniformly throughout the Empire. In Hungary, *The Generale Normativum* was translated into Latin in December 1770.[136]

Van Swieten played a pivotal role in advancing education, as evidenced by his private correspondence with the Hungarian medical elite. His influence can be found in István Weszprémi's works, who also started to write aiming to encourage public education. Weszprémi was an influential medical doctor during the middle of the eighteenth century, and he sent van Swieten a transcript called *A brief education on the upbringing of young children.*[137] Van Swieten held the responsibility for censorship during that period, and insights can be gleaned from his letter to Weszprémi:

> I am happy to admit that although I love the Hungarian language, I do not understand it as well as I would like to understand everything about it without hesitation. Still, I was pleased with the little effort I put into your dissertation on medical education for young children. This experiment confirmed my intention to read the rest as well. The benefits of this little work are so great that it deserves publication. True, it would be easier to take the mace out of the hands of Hercules, as to take their prejudices from the women. Nevertheless, it is hoped that at least the smarter ones will back down, and the fathers will learn how to use their authority to protect what is useful. God be with you! *Vale et me ama*![138]

The private letter showcases Van Swieten's appreciation for the Hungarian language and his interest in understanding various aspects of Hungarian culture. It also highlights his positive impression of the dissertation on medical education for young children, along with his awareness of the societal prejudices that challenge medical advancements. Van Swieten's optimistic outlook and concluding well-wishes convey a sense of encouragement and

[136] Translated into Hungarian with comments in: Péter Balázs, *Generale Normativum in Re Sanitatis 1770. Szervezett egészségügyünk 1770-es alaprendelete.* (Budapest: Magyar Tudománytörténeti Intézet, 2007), 109-60.
[137] István Weszprémi, *Kisded gyermekek neveléséről való rövid oktatás* (Kolozsvár, 1760).
[138] Letter 1. Gerard Van Swieten letter to István Weszprémi, (Vienna, 1759. April 24.) In latin in: *Magyarországi tudósok levelezése* VI. Ed. Szelentei N. László and Vida Tivadar (Budapest: Argentum Kiadó: 2013), 13.

support. Van Swieten's letters not only attest to his considerable work in the advancement of medical knowledge and infrastructure, but also his integration in the social networks of the Hungarian elite.

Re-Catholicisation and the Catholic Enlightenment

From the beginning of the eighteenth century, the Habsburg Empire implemented Enlightenment-era reforms while pursuing a re-Catholicisation agenda, spurred by the desire to re-establish Catholicism as the dominant religious and ideological force in the Empire.[139] Habsburg rulers aimed to reinforce the influence of the Catholic Church and ensure its continued authority in shaping societal norms and values. The Habsburgs sought to counter the influence of Enlightenment ideals and maintain traditional social structures and the authority of the Catholic Church.[140] Some scholars suggest that the Habsburg's ambivalent relation to Enlightenment ideals arose from the disparity in the size of the bourgeoisie in Central Europe compared to Germany or France: the lack of a robust bourgeoisie muted the impact of the Enlightenment in countries such as Austria.[141] Only Catholics could hold government positions during the Habsburg Enlightenment. Protestants and Calvinists who devoted themselves to medical studies had to study abroad. Roman Catholic students could attend universities in the hereditary provinces, but Protestant students had to enrol in German and Dutch universities, which required a significant financial sacrifice because of the great distance. Protestants could not graduate from the

[139] For religion under Ottoman rule see: Marc David Baer, *Honored by the glory of Islam: conversion and conquest in Ottoman Europe* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008.); Gábor Ágoston, 'Muslim Cultural Enclaves in Hungary under Ottoman Rule', *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 45, No. 2/3 (1991): 181-204; Felicita Tramontana, 'Contestes conversions to Islam: narratives of religious change in the early modern Ottoman Empire', *Mediterranean Historical Review* 287. no. 1 (2013): 82-6; Maria Todorova, 'The Balkans: From Discovery to Invention', *Slavic Review* 53. no. 2 (1994): 453-82; Fikret Adanir, 'Religious Communities and Ethnic Groups under Imperial Sway: Ottoman and Habsburg Lands in Comparison', in *The Historical Practice of Diversity - Transcultural Interactions from the Early Modern Mediterranean to the Postcolonial World,* ed. Dirk Hoerder, Christiane Harzig and Adrian Shubert (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2003); Paula Sutter Fichtner, *Terror and Toleration- The Habsburg Empire Confronts Islam, 1526-1850* (London: Reaktion Books, 2008).

[140] On Catholic Enlightenment, see: Ulrich L. Lehner, 'Introduction: The Many Faces of Catholic Enlightenment', in *A Companion to the Catholic Enlightenment in Europe*, ed. Ulrich Lehner and Michael Printy, (Leiden: Brill, 2010) , 1-62; Harm Klueting, 'The Catholic Enlightenment in Austria or the Habsburg Lands', in *A Companion to the Catholic Enlightenment in Europe*, ed. Ulrich L. Lehner and Michael Printy (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 127-64.

[141] See in: János Ugrai, *A központosítás és modernizáció ellentmondásai, A bécsi állam (uralkodói) oktatáspolitika megszületése a 18. század második felében* (Budapest: Új Mandátum Könyvkiadó, 2014), 33-39.

inherited provincial universities because the solemn oath required them to adhere to the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary, which they clearly rejected dogmatically. This state of affairs lasted until 1781, until the publication of Joseph II's *Tolerance Decree*.[142] Despite the steep cost, Dutch universities played a major role in educating Protestants and Calvinists: Franeker, Groeningen, Utrecht, Leyden, Amsterdam, and Harderwijk were home to many Hungarian students.[143] The Netherlands, in particular, served as a hub for disseminating scientific knowledge across Europe, as the Protestant students brought modern medical developments back to the country that rejected them.

Prior to the *Tolerance Decree*, only individuals who adhered to the Catholic faith were eligible to hold positions within the Empire and participate in scientific endeavours. The presence of Catholic dogmas in the teaching of science and philosophy, therefore, remained uncontested by opposing viewpoints, playing a major role in the structure and objectives of academic disciplines. The philosophical life of the Habsburg monarchy and Vienna was often criticised as lacking the diversity of opinion so prevalent in the intellectual circles of England or France. During his visit to Vienna in 1779, Sir Nathaniel William Wraxall complained that the Catholic religious prejudices prevented the expression of 'true' philosophy and 'real' religion, which made little progress amidst a population filled with superstition (especially during the reign of the devout Catholic Maria Theresa).[144] Of course, this negative cultural stereotype could be projected both ways. Maria Theresa, a zealous Catholic, often criticised Protestant countries in her letters to her son who aimed for religious tolerance in the Empire. Maria Theresa lambasted the Protestant communities, suggesting that Catholics demonstrated a greater level of commitment and dedication to their beliefs. She implied that, Protestant provinces struggle to attract and retain workers, leading to a lack of progress and development. She expressed her concerns about upsetting the relationship between religious belief and the socio-economic well-being of a given state, suggesting that simply possessing religion is insufficient without a genuine appreciation,

[142] Péter Balázs, *Mária Terézia 1770-es egészségügyi alaprendelete 1–2*. (Piliscsaba – Budapest: Magyar Tudománytörténeti Intézet Semmelweis Orvostörténeti Múzeum, Könyvtár és Levéltár, 2007), 40.
[143] Réka Bozzay, 'Holland egyetemek hatása a 17-18. századi magyar orvoslás kultúrtörténetében', *Tanulmányok* 6. No. 1-2 (2015): 25-38.
[144] William Nathaniel Wraxall, *Memoirs of the Courts of Berlin, Dresden, Warsaw, and Vienna, in the years 1777, 1778, and 1779.* Vol. 2 (London: 1800), 247, 261.

love, and effort to preserve and propagate it.[145] Maria Theresa expressed her concerns about the religious perspectives prevalent in England, when her son, Maximilian voiced his intention to visit the island nation in 1777:

> The English […] are almost all Deists, Infidels, and Free Thinkers. I tremble, lest an intercourse with such a nation should contaminate your manners and shake your belief in everything sacred among Catholics.[146]

Here, she expressed fear that engaging with a nation that allowed for such religious liberty could have negative consequences. Theresa worried that the English influence could corrupt the moral values and religious beliefs of Catholics, potentially leading to a loss of faith in sacred matters.

Maria Theresa's objective of re-Catholicization was intertwined with the Catholic Enlightenment, during which Catholic intellectuals engaged with Enlightenment ideas. These intellectuals aimed to find a balance between their religious beliefs and the new intellectual challenges of the time. Some members of the Catholic Church saw the need for change in the Church's structure and religious practices, urging government involvement in developing the reforms. However, the ambitions of the thinkers associated with the Catholic Enlightenment extended beyond reforming the Catholic Church. Ulrich L. Lehner and Bernard Plongeron point out that the reformers actively engaged in self-reflection and discussions about the important social and religious issues of their time. They showed a dedication to intellectual exploration and an openness to the advancements of the Enlightenment while maintaining their religious beliefs.[147]

The Enlightenment greatly influenced the realm of literature and theatre within Austria, bringing about a shift in cultural expression and fostering new ideas, perspectives, and forms of artistic representation. The literary company called *Deutsche Gesellschaft*

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[145] Maria Theresa to Joshep II. *Exchange of Letters between Empress Maria Theresa and her Son Joseph II, Austrian Co-Regent, on the Subject of Religious Toleration (1777)*, Source of English translation: C.A. Macartney, (ed.) *The Habsburg and Hohenzollern Dynasties in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries, in Documentary History of Western Civilization* (New York, Evanston, and London: Harper & Row, 1970), 153.
[146] Letter XXX. Vienna, February 11, 1779. In: Nathaniel William Wraxall, *Memoirs of the Courts of Berlin, Dresden, Warsaw, and Vienna, in the Years 1777, 1778, and 1779*. Vol. 2 (Cambridge University Press, 2012), 321-22.
[147] Lehner, 'What is "Catholic Enlightenment?"', *History Compass* 8 (2010), 166–78.

formed during this time, played an important role in developing the taste of the educated Viennese elite for the refinements of 'high' culture and art. As part of this process, opera became popular from the 1760s: Christoph Willibald Gluck's *Orfeo ed Euridice* was performed in 1762, and in the same year, seven-year-old Mozart appeared in the prestigious companies of Vienna.[148] In 1776 Mozart wrote the following about the spirit of the age:

> We live in this world in order always to learn industriously, and to enlighten each other by means of discussion, and to strive vigorously to promote the progress of science and the fine arts. […] I live in a country where music has very little success, though, exclusive of those who have forsaken us, we have still admirable professors, and more particularly composers of great solidity, knowledge, and taste.[149]

For Mozart, the purpose of human existence consisted in the pursuit of knowledge, enlightenment, and progress. He expressed the belief that human striving must be channelled into constant and diligent learning, enlightening one another through discussions, and actively striving to advance science and the fine arts. However, he complained about Austria's lack of recognition or appreciation of these pursuits, noting the many remarkable composers who possessed exceptional expertise, knowledge, and artistic sensibilities.

Austria's flourishing literary, musical, and theatrical scene was accompanied by a surge in the publication of newspapers. The dynamic exchange of ideas and the hunger for knowledge prompted the emergence of numerous periodicals that catered to the growing demand for information and discourse. In the short interval between 1761 and 1770 an impressive total of 31 new periodicals found their way into the hands of eager readers.[150] These newspapers served as a platform for intellectual engagement, offering a diverse

[148] Dolf Lindner, *Der Mann ohne Vorurteil. Joseph von Sonnenfels, 1733-1817*, (Vienna: Österreichischer Bundesverlag, 1983), 28-39.
[149] 'To Father Martini. Salzburg, Sept. 4, 1776.' In: Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, *The letters of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1769-1791)*, Translated From The Collection Of Ludwig Nohl (New York: Longmans, Greens and co., 2 vols, 1866), Vol. I., 54.
[150] See: Dolf Lindner, *Der Mann ohne Vorurteil: Joseph von Sonnenfels, 1733-1817*. (Vienna: Österreichischer Bundesverlag, 1983)

range of content covering various topics of interest, including critical essays, political commentaries, and discussions on philosophy, literature, science, and social issues.

In Western Europe, the Enlightenment inaugurated a golden age for the bourgeoisie, who began amassing the fortunes that would fuel the increasing political power, social mobility, and prestige of the class as a whole. In contrast, the bourgeoisie in Central and Eastern Europe were relatively weak and underdeveloped as a class, necessitating the emergence of other social strata to spearhead the Enlightenment. In Hungary, the middle nobility and the burgeoning intellectual class assumed the responsibility for driving forward the ideals of the Enlightenment. The proponents of the German Enlightenment had a broader reach in Hungary compared to the writers of the French Enlightenment. This disparity can be attributed to the fact that the radical ideas embraced by the German Enlightenment thinkers resonated more closely with the societal progress taking place in Hungary; moreover, Hungarian intellectuals were more likely to speak and read German than other European languages. The popularity of works by Herder, Gottsched, Klopstock, Lessing, Goethe, and Schiller attests to the Hungarian preference for German Enlightenment thinkers.[151]

Scholars have pointed out that Hungary's cultural and intellectual progress was slower and less advanced when compared to countries like France and Germany:

> It is symbolic that the first Hungarian lexicon appeared in 1830, several decades after the French encyclopaedia. There is also a significant time difference between the first Hungarian weekly and the first German edition. All this shows that our development did not reach the degree to which the adjoining Germans reached later. In ordinary words, this means backwardness.[152]

The mention of the first Hungarian lexicon appearing several decades after the French encyclopaedia implies a delay in the compilation and standardization of the Hungarian language compared to the French. Similarly, reference to the time gap between the first

[151] Emil Niederhauser, 'Felvilágosodás és nemzeti mozgalom Kelet-Európában', *Kisebbségkutatás*, 11. No. 2 (2002): 585-95.
[152] Elemér Mályusz, *Magyarország története a felvilágosodás korában* (Budapest: Osiris Kiadó, 2002), 127.

Hungarian weekly publication and the first German edition indicates a delay in the development of journalism and print media in Hungary compared to Germany.

While scientific societies proliferated across Western European countries, the development of these societies in Hungary was paralyzed by a bureaucratic process of suggestions, drafts, and rejections. In addition to material considerations regarding cost, sectarian politics contributed to the repeated refusal.[153] When Mátyás Bél formulated the proposal for a Hungarian society of scientists in 1718, the French, English, and German academies had been operating successfully for a long time.[154] Hungary lacked the state power to establish independent scientific centres and did not have the same cultural traditions that recognized the role of science in social, economic, and cultural development. The Masonic lodges played a significant role in the propagation of Enlightenment ideas amongst the elite class. Authors who belonged to Freemasonry where often well-travelled and had studied aboard at Protestant universities, and their publications disseminated newer medical knowledge to the public.

In Hungary, belonging to a Masonic lodge played an important social role for the members of the Protestant noble intelligentsia, who were practically expelled from political life enjoyed by their Catholic counterparts. The total number of lodges in Hungary in the 1780s was approximately one thousand, and its members were mostly Protestant. The main goal of the Hungarian Freemasonry Regulations was to eliminate social inequalities, and it designated the tasks of Freemasons operating in various fields to improve social and political relations. At the beginning, the Freemasons were welcomed by the modern-minded Joseph II, but the group became among the harshest critics of Josephine politics, especially in its late stages. Of course, the Masonic patent of Joseph II in 1785 stoked this antagonism by greatly limiting the operation of the lodges.[155] Thus, the Masonic lodges became the gathering places of the Josephinist support and the enlightened aristocratic intellectual opposition.

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[153] István Rumen, Béla Hegedüs, Margit Kiss, Réka Lengyel and Gábor Tüskés (eds), *Fénykeresők-Felvilágosult társaságok, irodalom és tudomány Közép-Európában*, (Budapest: Magyar Nemzeti Múzeum, MTA Bölcsészettudományi Kutatóközpont Irodalomtudományi Intézete, 2017), 9-17.

[154] Mátyás Bél's proposal for the organisation of a Hungarian Scientific Society: *Matthiae Belii: De vetere litteratura Hunno-Scythica exercitation* (Leipzig: Monath, 1718) 4. OSZK 177.167.

[155] András Forgó, 'Katolikus felvilágosodás és politikai reformmozgalom, szerzetesek a megújulás szolgálatában' in: *Politikai elit és politikai kultúra a 18. század végi Magyarországon*. Ed. Szijártó M. István and Szűcs Zoltán Gábor (Budapest: ELTE Eötvös Kiadó, 2012), 125-26.

Supernatural landscape

The idea that the corpse can come back to life and harm the living has persisted across various cultures and throughout different periods in Europe. Archaeological records from medieval times have revealed instances of burials associated with vampires and individuals believed to be at risk of becoming vampires. These burials exhibit distinctive patterns, with particular attention given to disfiguring the feet, hands, and mouth of the corpse.[156] Some corpses have been discovered deliberately positioned upside-down, with their faces towards the bottom of the grave. Alternatively, individuals have been found with wooden stakes driven through their bodies. Stones have also played a significant role in these rituals, often placed either on top of the corpse or within the grave itself. In certain cases, stones have been positioned within the mouth of the deceased.[157] Archaeological discoveries associated with vampire burials have been documented since the eleventh century in regions such as the Balkans, Central Europe, Eastern Europe, and Southern Europe. These vampire burials differed from conventional burials by serving as a form of punishment that was intended to ease social fears. Historical records and archaeological evidence frequently intertwine different types of punitive burials, making it difficult for the historian to differentiate between burials associated with beliefs in vampires and those meant to penalize criminals, suicides, carriers of plagues, or even suspected witches.[158]

These unorthodox funerary and mortuary practices, however, can serve to illuminate the prevailing beliefs and prejudices within a community, as well as the role that the deceased individual played within that community. Moreover, these rituals underscore the enduring agency of the dead in the lives of their surviving family members. Funerary practices encompass a wide range of customs, ceremonies, and traditions that vary across cultures and time periods. These practices were deeply intertwined with the cultural, religious, and societal values of a community. They reflected how a society perceived death, the afterlife, and the transition from life to death. In Hungary, for example, in graves from

[156] Tracy K. Betsinger and Amy B. Scott, 'Governing from the Grave: Vampire Burials and Social Order in Post-medieval Poland', *Cambridge Archaeological Journal* 24, no. 3 (2014): 470.
[157] David Barrowclough, 'Time to Slay Vampire Burials? The Archaeological and Historical Evidence for Vampires in Europe', (Cambridge: Red Dagger Press, 2014), 2.
[158] Ibid. 10.

the Avar and Early Árpádian periods, skeletons have been found with the bones of their hands or knees fastened to the bottom of the grave with large iron nails.[159] Evidence of heart-piercing with a knife has been discovered on corpses in graves from the time of the *Honfoglalás* (Hungarian conquest) in the late ninth and early tenth centuries. The heart piercings were likely performed by family members and intended to prevent the deceased from causing harm.[160] This act was a powerful measure indicating that the community took the potential spiritual or physical threat posed by the deceased very seriously and sought to prevent any possible harm. These practices have persisted and evolved over the centuries, particularly during periods of heightened fear and concern, such as outbreaks of diseases like the plague and cholera.

Even as late as 1831, during the funeral preparations for Dániel Zeyk who died of an unknown disease, a ritual was performed in which his mouth, hands, and legs were bound. His mouth was bound because 'Satan had always spoken through it', his hands were bound as 'they had never worked for the public good, but instead, they had corrupted others and disrupted public peace', and his legs were bound because 'they had never walked the path of righteousness'.[161] The evil words and actions committed by Zeyk during his life take the symbolic form of the fetters that the villagers used to imprison his corpse. It remains uncertain, however, whether the ritual was intended solely as a form of punishment or contained some other superstitious significance. Moreover, five other individuals underwent similar rituals: justifications for the punishment cited the individual's 'genius in ignorance' or 'wickedness often residing within holiness'. These individuals were believed to have 'actively sought to deteriorate the town of Marosvásárhely'.[162] The overall purpose of this ritual was likely to symbolically address any negative aspects of the deceased's life and to prevent their potentially harmful influence from persisting after death and corrupting the social fabric of the community.

Villagers and priests deployed a variety of methods to prevent the deceased from returning to harm the living, and these practices persisted into modern times. The concept of revenants, especially that of vampires, evolved from these beliefs. Although the vampire

[159] Magyary-Kossa, *Magyar Orvosi Emlékek* VI., 89.
[160] László Fodor, 'Honfoglaláskori leletek Heves megyében', *Kelet-Közép-Európai Történelmi Tanulmányok* 23 (2023): 28-9.
[161] MNL, R.298- II- 1- 1831.32/ 1831. Nov. 19, Kolozsvár
[162] Ibid.

phenomenon is associated with Slavic beliefs, its exact origins and naming remain unclear.[163] Amidst the geopolitical confusion arising from frequent conflicts and the subsequent transfers of territory and shifting borders in the southern territories of the Habsburg Empire, it is impossible to pinpoint the true origins of the earliest 'vampire cases'. The Ottoman-Habsburg wars, which took place from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries, were characterized by extensive land campaigns in various regions, including Hungary (which also encompassed Transylvania, now in Romania), Vojvodina (in modern-day Serbia), Croatia, and central Serbia. These are precisely the areas from which many of the historical vampire reports originated. The combination of warfare, political conflicts, and diverse cultural and religious influences in these regions likely contributed to the development and spread of vampire folklore during that period. Scholars have noted, however, that the rise in vampire cases might not result from a statistical increase in actual accusations, but rather an increase in the administrative handling and documentation of such cases by the centralized Habsburg government during that time.[164] This administrative focus on vampire cases likely contributed to the perception that vampire incidents were on the rise, even if the underlying beliefs and practices remained relatively consistent.

The Ottoman influence on the vampire phenomenon has been a topic of interest for researchers. Although European vampire lore has its roots in the regions that were once part of the Ottoman territories, vampirism was not a widely held belief among Anatolian Muslim populations. Within the Ottoman territories, vampire traditions were also present amongst the Greek populations residing on the Aegean islands and Crete, and nearly all instances documented in Ottoman sources pertain to Christian communities.[165] These accounts offer insight into the perspective of Ottoman authorities, who were tasked with preserving the principles of Islamic orthodoxy. Scholars have examined the educated elite discourse about the Ottoman vampire and the role of vampirism in the Balkans during Ottoman rule.[166] However, vampire studies only have analysed a minimal number of

[163] See: Katharina M. Wilson, 'The History of the Word "Vampire"', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 46, No. 4 (1985): 577-83.
[164] László András Magyar, 'Az erdélyi vámpír-betegségről', *Kharón* 7. No. 3 (2003): 75.
[165] Karen Hartnup, *'On the Beliefs of the Greeks': Leo Allatios and Popular Orthodoxy* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 173–236.
[166] Marinos Sariyannis, 'Of Ottoman Ghosts, Vampires and Sorcerers: and Old Discussion Disinterred', *Archivum Ottomanicum* 30. (2013): 195-220., Elvira Bijedic, *Vampirismus auf dem Balkan zur Zeit der osmanischen Herrschaft and Über die Falle von 'Vampirismus' in den Balkangebieten des Osmanischen Reiches*, (MA thesis, Heidelberg: Heidelberg University, 2010).

Ottoman sources, due to two key factors. First, the language barrier makes these sources inaccessible to many researchers. Secondly, the number of available Ottoman sources is limited. The sources cited below, provide insights to the attitudes of the Ottoman authorities regarding the vampire traditions (though I do not claim to offer a comprehensive explanation of the traditions themselves).[167]

Vampires in the Ottoman Empire served as a shared cultural element amongst its diverse ethno-religious communities. These narratives reflected the Empire's multicultural character, as each community contributed its own beliefs and traditions to the evolving vampire lore. Research has shown that the first sources on folkloric vampires in the sixteenth century were produced by Catholic missionaries during the Catholic Counter-Reformation. These missionaries travelled into the Ottoman lands and generated a significant number of sources on vampirism. Ironically, their primary goal was often to suppress superstitious beliefs and their associated practices.[168] During the early-modern period, Muslim authorities acknowledged the existence of vampires. The religious debates of the Reformation era, however, played a pivotal role in introducing the vampire phenomenon. These narratives reflected a Catholic campaign against superstition, portraying the Greek and Slavic laity as ignorant and influenced by superstitious rituals; indeed, Christian Orthodoxy and the folkloric vampire were connected as symptoms of the East's backward reliance on superstition.[169]

While some medieval and early-modern sources about vampires can be found, the figure experienced a cultural resurgence predominantly in the early nineteenth century. In 1833, the official gazette of the Ottoman state, known as *Takvîm-i Vekâyi'*, published a noteworthy account regarding two undead janissaries in Tirnovo (modern-day Bulgaria). These janissaries were dispatched by a Christian professional vampire hunter, using methods such as stakes, boiling water, and fire.[170] In the late nineteenth century, another Ottoman source on folk beliefs referred to ghosts. These supernatural beings were reported

[167] Marinos Sariyannis, 'Ottoman Accounts of Vampirism', *Journal of Vampire Studies* 2. No. 2. (2022): 214-19.
[168] Salim Fikret Kırgi, 'An Early-Modern Horror Story: The folk Beliefs in Vampire-like Supernatural Beings in the Ottoman Empire and the Consequent Responses in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century', (CEU MA thesis, Budapest: 2017) Published in: *Osmanlı Vampirleri: Söylenceler, Etkileşimler, Tepkiler* (Istanbul: İletişim, 2018).
[169] See more in chapter three.
[170] Kırgi, 'An Early-Modern Horror Story', 63-4.

to appear in Edirne, where they were commonly called '*hortlak*', and in Manastır (Bitola), where they were referred to as '*vampir*'.[171]

The terms Turks and Turkish in historical contexts mainly referred to Muslim Ottomans, but also encompassed people from various regions that were part of the Ottoman Empire. These individuals may not have hailed from what is modern-day Turkey, but could have originated from places like Albania, Bosnia, and other Ottoman-controlled territories. The Ottoman Empire was a diverse and multi-ethnic entity, so the term Turks was used broadly to denote those who were part of or adhered to the Ottoman rule, which extended far beyond the borders of present-day Turkey. Similarly, the term Hungarian raises questions about the role of regional identity in relation to vampire incidents.[172] While many vampire cases originated in the territories of the Hungarian Kingdom, the individuals involved may not have been ethnically Hungarian and, instead, from one of the various ethnic backgrounds within the kingdom's borders. Vampire folklore is often associated with specific regions and territories rather than strictly tied to the ethnicity of the individuals involved, reflecting the diversity of the populations within these historical regions.

Vampirism has often been associated with Turkish territories, particularly in the most famous vampire case from 1732 involving Arnold Paole. Augustin Calmet, in his influential work, made statements regarding this connection between Turkish rule and vampirism. Paole often told people that he 'had often related that in the environs of Cassovia and on the frontiers of Turkish Servia, he had often been tormented by a Turkish vampire'.[173] Muslims were connected to the concept of vampirism in other ways, particularly in the belief that they were skilled vampire slayers. Christians often considered Muslims to be suitable candidates for eliminating vampires because they believed that they were immune to the curse of vampires. According to Mcclelland, local governments hired Turkish vampire slayers from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century to deal with vampire pests. This belief in the efficacy of Turkish vampire-hunting likely arose from the idea that different religious practices and beliefs held protective powers against supernatural threats

[171] Ibid. 23-4.
[172] See chapter three.
[173] Antoine Augustin Calmet, *From The Phantom World, The Philosophy of Spirits, Apparitions* (London: Richard Bentley, 1850), 37-8.

like vampires.[174] In the eighteenth century, however, reports tended to represent members of Romani or Romani-related communities (often referred to as Gypsies) as the best vampire slayers.[175] Diversity of religious belief and social marginality serve as positive qualities in the Turkish and Romani vampire slayer, who seeks to destroy similar qualities that have been twisted in the body of the revenant into the more sinister forms of evil and 'otherness'.

As I note in the introduction to this thesis, a notable cultural connection exists between harmful corpses (often associated with vampire folklore) and harmful witches. I will now explore this connection through an examination of the witch trials and witch-hunts that occurred in the territories of the Hungarian Kingdom during the eighteenth century. These historical events provide important context for understanding the broader beliefs and practices related to supernatural phenomena during that time, including the persecution of individuals suspected of witchcraft. At the beginning in the 1560s, due to the Reformation, Europe underwent social and cultural transformations that extended into areas like Hungary and Transylvania. These changes resulted in heightened levels of collective fear and anxiety that fuelled an increase in accusations of witchcraft. In this tense atmosphere, authorities recognized the importance of conducting thorough investigations, and they carefully recorded the details of such cases. Treating these accusations with serious, formalized legal procedures marked a pivotal moment in the history of witchcraft trials and how societies responded to claims of supernatural occurrences.[176]

While witch accusations decreased across Europe by the eighteenth century, Hungary saw a sudden increase in accusations beginning in the 1690s and reaching a peak in the 1710s. Hungary also hosted its largest witch trial in 1728-1729. In the city of Szeged, in the area now referred to as Boszorkánysziget (Witch Island), a significant event unfolded on July 23, 1728. Thirteen individuals were simultaneously tied in groups of four to stakes, with the intention of burning them. Prior to this gruesome act, the suspects had undergone a water trial that assigned guilt based on the ability of the accused to float. Following the trial,

[174] Bruce A. McCelland, *Slayers and Their Vampires: A Cultural History of Killing the Dead* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2006), 99-100.
[175] See: Mézes, *Doubt and Diagnosis*; Elvira Bijedic, *Vampirismus auf dem Balkan*.
[176] Péter Tóth, 'Boszorkányok, kísértetek, ördögi megszállottak, Politikai látomások és boszorkányüldözés Erdélyben az 1580-as években' in: *Démonok, látók, szentek Vallásetnológiai fogalmak tudományközi megközelítésben,* ed. Éva Pócs (Budapest: Balassi Kiadó, 2008), 71.

the accused were pierced with long needles to discover any physical marks associated with the Devil on their bodies. A vast number of sources arose from these trials, including the testimonies and statements of witnesses and suspects in the Hungarian language. The official language for the prosecution, defence, and court records, however, was Latin and some submitted documents were prepared in German, attesting to a gap between the linguistic competence of those involved in the trial and the educated elites in charge of interpreting the evidence.[177]

During the trial, six men and six women were burned at the stake. In a letter requesting an appeal for her accused husband, Szubin Beda described the spectacle of a corpse execution during the trial:

> Three elderly women who were in shackles, and presumably out of fear, departed from this world one after the other. Of these, the first one was buried, then exhumed and cremated. After that, the other two who had similarly passed away were also cremated, along with a fourth person who had been dead for approximately a year and a half and had received a proper burial. This individual was exhumed from the cemetery of the Franciscan Fathers without their knowledge or permission, as the other accused individuals had also declared her to be a witch.[178]

János Reizner (1847-1904), a former chronicler of Szeged, provides insight into the historical context behind these witch hunts in the city. He suggested that the period of increasing witch accusations in Szeged was marked by a combination of natural challenges (drought), religious beliefs attributing hardships to irreligiosity, and social and ethnic tensions, all of which created a state of upheaval and turmoil. These factors contributed to a climate of fear and hysteria that pushed villagers to look for a scapegoat.[179] Moreover, the Ottoman Turks

[177] Gergely Brandl and Péter Tóth, eds., *Szegedi boszorkányperek 1726–1744. A magyarországi boszorkányság forrásai. Várostörténeti források = Quellen zur Ungarischen Hexerei. Stadthistorische Quellen 5* (Szeged: Balassi Kiadó – Budapest: MNL Csongrád Megyei Levéltára, 2016), 21-39.

[178] Copy of a letter from Györgyné Mihalovity Szubin Beda, Requesting and Investigation into the City's Legal Services from the Chancellery in: MNL CsML IV. A 1021 b, 66, Ir. 41. Printed versions: Palugyay 1853. II. 199–201; Linzbauer 1852–1856. I. 794–95; Reizner: 1900. IV. 456. CCVII/41. Translated to Hungarian in: *Szegedi Boszorkányperek*, 232-33.

[179] Reizner János, Szeged története I–III. (Szeged: Szeged Szabad Királyi Város Közössége, 1900); IV.: Szeged története IV. (Szeged: Szeged Szabad Királyi Város Közössége, 1900).

were perceived as a threat that added to the general atmosphere of hysteria. At the peak of their confession, the accused witches renounced their Christian faith, admitted to engaging in carnal relations with Satan, and confessed to sowing the seeds of evil in the world. They also admitted to selling rain to the pagan Turks, thus causing drought and famine in the city of Szeged.[180]

The phenomenon of demonic possession has deep historical roots that stretch back to the very beginnings of Christianity. Throughout the centuries, the question of the Devil's role in possessing corpses has intrigued scholars and theologians alike. The educated elite asserted a clear distinction between witchcraft and possession. They viewed witchcraft as a crime that warranted punishment, while possession was perceived as a condition that required remedy and treatment. Members of the elite class expressed deep concern about the possibility of malevolent spirits or forces that could afflict individuals through various forms of possession.[181] Efforts to address the impact of possession on individuals went through several stages of development. Notably, the Catholic Church played a significant role in attempting to systematize and codify the practice of exorcism. Exorcism manuals were continually refined and created during the early-modern period as part of these efforts. Dániel Baráth's research, focusing on the Kingdom of Hungary, offers valuable insights into the dynamic nature of exorcism, demonstrating that Petrus Szmendrovich engaged in exorcisms to address a wide range of physical ailments. Crucially, these exorcisms were not confined solely to cases exhibiting supernatural symptoms. The multifaceted nature of exorcism as a practice played a crucial role in addressing various forms of suffering and affliction, encompassing both physical and spiritual dimensions.

The role of the supernatural in the medical discourse of the Austrian Enlightenment

The intellectuals of the Age of Enlightenment, both Catholic and Protestant, were strongly concerned with the possibility and impossibility of interacting with the afterlife. The

[180] Gergely Brandl and Péter Tóth , *Szegedi Boszorkányperek,* 16.

[181] On possession see: Sarah Ferber, 'Demonic possession, exorcism, and witchcraft', in B. P. Levack (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe and Colonial America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 575-592; Moshe Sluhovsky, *Believe Not Every Spirit Possession, Mysticism, & Discernment in Early Modern Catholicism*, (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2007); Nancy Mandeville Caciola, 'Spiritual Physiologies: The Discernment of Spirits in Medieval and Early Modern Europe', *Preternature: Critical and Historical Studies on the Preternatural*, 1. (2012):1-48.

representatives of theology, medicine and demonology all had an interest in defining the scope of their own material evidence to effectively diagnose the symptoms of social crisis. Some decline of traditional religious authority and the rise of scepticism and secularism, led to questioning of long-held religious doctrines, including those related to the afterlife. As some intellectuals began to prioritize reason and scientific inquiry, they sought alternative explanations for the existence and nature of the universe, often challenging established religious teachings. Numerous key questions were formulated: Is it possible to interfere with the existence of demons? Is there material evidence of the worldly presence of the souls returning from purgatory?[182] Therefore, this part of the chapter explores the role of the afterlife in European discourse. In particular, I argue that the Austrian and Hungarian intellectual elites saw no contradiction between their religious faith and the scientific method, even as they used that method to delineate the boundaries between the natural and the supernatural or true religion and superstition.

While the vampire discourse started in 1731-32, one of the most influential vampire cases occurred in Hermersdorf village in 1755 when the corpse of Rosina Polakin was exhumed from the cemetery. The villagers complained that she was a vampire who attacked their families at night. They believed Pokakin had been cursed by Marianna Saligerin, who passed away a year later. The local council took these accusations seriously, leading to the disinterment of thirty corpses, of which nineteen were burned for the crime of *magia posthuma*. Relatives of the convicted corpses were compelled to use hooks and ropes to drag the bodies through a hole carved into the cemetery wall. Subsequently, the corpses were beheaded and burned. These vampire executions had a precedent in the village. In 1723, just 13 days after a funeral, a corpse was burned due to suspicions that the deceased's grandmother had been a witch. A similar fate befell another family member a year later. In 1731, nine corpses, including seven children, were executed on suspicion of being vampires. The gravity of these vampire executions prompted the Empire to send medical physicians to investigate. Following the investigation, Maria Theresa sent two of her court doctors to the village to examine the circumstances surrounding the 'vampire-killing'

[182] See: Éva Pócs, 'Megszálló halottak – Halotti megszállottság', *Lélek, halál, túlvilág. Vallásetnológiai fogalmak tudományközi megközelítésben – Tanulmányok a transzcendensről 2* (Budapest: Ballasi Kiadó, 2001), 121-39.

rituals. The reports attributed the actions of the villagers to a combination of superstitions and fears driven by natural illnesses.[183]

Based on the surgeon's reports of Johan Lorenz Gasser (professor of anatomy) and Christian Franz Xaver Wabst (military chief physician), van Swieten stated that:

> No Christian can deny that there are persons possessed by the Evil Spirit, and that consequently this malignant spirit can act upon human bodies. Its likewise true that the Demon disturbs men with noises and frightening visons.[184]

Van Swieten did not deny the existence of evil spirits that can possess and cause visons in their human victims, revealing his conservative attitude about the existence of magic and Demonic activity. Van Swieten's Catholicism impelled him to affirm the possibility of resurrection and anchoring his belief in this way also opened the possibility for more nefarious forms of resurrection and undead mischief. This attitude was very common during van Swieten's time. For example, the German Georg Tallar, who wrote the most detailed first-hand vampire treatise about *moroi* cases in Banat, sought to provide medical explanations for supernatural phenomena in Wallachian folktales.[185] Klaus Hamberger writes that with the report of the regimental surgeon Georg Tallar from the Banat in 1766, the debate about a possible afterlife in the grave was more or less concluded; vampirism was finally no longer classified as a return of the dead, but as a febrile "imagination" of the living in the course of an infectious disease.[186] After studying the Wallachian folklore, Tallar concluded that the vampire problem in Banat only afflicted Wallachians, as Germans and foreign settlers never suffered from such a disease. Moreover, even after conducting experiments, he still considered the possibility of satanic influence.[187]

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[183] Mézes, 'Georg Tallar and the 1753 Vampire Hunt', 93-136.
[184] Gerard van Swieten, *Vampyrismus von Herrn Baron Gerhard van-Swieten verfasset, aus dem Französischen ins Deutsche übersetzet, und 67l sein Anhang der Abhandlung des Daseyns der Gespenster beigerücket* (Augsburg, 1768).
[185] Georg Tallar, *Visum Repertum anatomico-chyrurgicum, oder gründlicher Breicht von den sogenaannten Blutsäugern, Vampier, oder in der wallachischen Sprache Moroi, in der Walachey, Siebenbürgen, und Banat: Welchen eine eigends dahin adgeordnete Untersuchungskommission der löbl. K. k. Administration im Jahre 1756 erstattet hat* (Mössle, 1784).
[186] Klaus Hamberger, *Mortuus nonmordet: Dokumentezum Vampirismus 1689–1791*, (Vienna: Turia and Kant, 1991)
[187] Detailed work on Georg Tallar: Mézes, *Visum Repertum*, 109-54.

Van Swieten also stated that the principal source of the vampire phenomenon arose from schismatic Greek beliefs that the Devil can possesses both the soul and the body. This was an influential argument (which I go on to discuss in more detail in chapter three) for the missionaries of Counter-Reformation Catholicism who produced the first accounts about the existence of vampires in the Orthodox community of the Ottoman Empire.[188] The writings of these missionaries impacted Western perceptions of the vampire, which served as a counterpoint to narratives about Habsburg modernisation. These discourses tended to use belief in the folkloric vampire as a way to amplify traits of ignorance and superstition that they associated with the Orthodox Church. Van Swieten also believed that the Orthodox Church recognised the vampire phenomenon, although more nuanced passages acknowledged the vampire's strategic importance in controlling the laity through fear:

> The witchcraft of the dead (*magia posthuma*), which is the subject of our discussion, is another of those examples. Because all those events only occur in areas which are still unenlightened. It has also to be assumed, that the schismatic Greeks [the Orthodox Church] are the main propagator of these superstitions.[189]

Van Swieten believed the Orthodox priest's ritualistic execution of the corpse fostered vampire beliefs for financial reasons. This issue came up again later on, in 1784, when Joseph II warned the Orthodox Church to take greater part in the fight against vampirism.[190]

While van Swieten's work acknowledges the potential involvement of the Devil in vampire phenomena, it is not a work of natural philosophy that attempts to disprove the existence of the vampire. Instead, his texts borrow more from the genre of law, marshalling evidence from legal experts and past trials to critically examine any flaws or inconsistencies

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[188] See: Petr Bogatyrev-Stephen Reynolds and Patricia Ann Krafcik-Bogdan Horbal, *Vampires in the Carpathians: Magical Acts, Rites, and Beliefs in Subcarpathian Rus* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988); Andrew Marsham, 'Attitudes to the Use of Fire Executions in Late Antiquity and Early Islam', István Kristó-Nagy and Robert Gleave (eds.), *Burning of Heretics and Rebels in the Late Umayyad Iraq.* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), 106-27.

[189] Andreas Ulrich Mayer, *Abhandlung des Daseyns der Gespenster, nebst einem Anhange vom Vampyrismus* (Ausburg, 1768), 1-23, 'Vampyrismus von Herrn Baron Gerhard Van-Swieten verfasset, aus dem Französischen ins Deutsche übersetzet, und als Anhang der Abhandlung des Daseyns der Gespenster beigedrücket' *,* 9.

[190] Franciscus Xav Linzbauer, *Codex Sanitario-Medicinalis Hungariae* (Buda, 3 vols, 1852-56), vol. 3, 'Sepultuare et superstitio de sanguisugis Gr. R. n. U. Concl. Cons. N: 25087., die 2. Novbr. 1784', 112.

in their approach. Like other intellectuals at the time in Vienna, he perceived no conflict between his religious faith and his enlightened scientific approach:

> What ignorance! What terrible foolishness! The Olomutz consistory vaguely writes about certain signs that have allegedly been found on the bodies of the vampires. But they are not listed or described anywhere. Two Church officials, who have never seen a dissected body in their lives and know nothing of human anatomy (as they themselves confessed to the commissioner) are the witnesses on whose expertise the verdict to burn the bodies has been based.[…] From all this it is also clear that the Olomutz consistory did not actually leave the bodies nearly enough time to rot, and that this 'sign for posthumous magic is thus completely null and void'.[191]

Van Swieten criticizes the lack of expertise and knowledge demonstrated by two Church officials who served as witnesses in the vampire cases. According to him, these officials confessed to having no experience with dissection and possessed no understanding of human anatomy. Van Swieten devalues the testimony of these individuals who lacked relevant expertise, underlining the flawed procedures used to judge the accused and authorize the burning of bodies. He indicates that the Olomutz consistory did not allow sufficient time for the bodies to decompose naturally, indicating a rush to draw conclusions and perform spectacular corpse executions. The very alacrity in reaching judgment invalidated any claims or signs related to posthumous magic or supernatural phenomena, which lack a substantial body of supporting evidence. Overall, van Swieten's report takes a critical view of the Olomutz consistory's handling of cases involving alleged vampires. Their actions were based on inadequate evidence, lack of expertise, and insufficient time for a proper investigation. Van Swieten's frustration and disbelief suffuses his language, providing a rhetorical way of registering his strong disagreement with the consistory's methods in these matters.

Reflecting on the poor handling of these cases, van Swieten underlines the severe consequences for both the accused individuals and the larger community. Mismanagement

[191] Van Swieten, *Vampyrismus*, 16-17.

had a profound effect on the physical and emotional lives of individuals who often suffered fatal consequences based on anecdotal evidence of embittered rivals. Instead of calming the atmosphere of panic and suspicion, such cases stoked widespread fear and disorder. Van Swieten's report about the threat of vampires to social unity influenced Maria Theresa to take vampire cases very seriously. He writes:

> What number of misfortunes may have resulted from these events? One might imagine that many people, including those who are ill or heavily pregnant, are escaping the area in panic, and end up dead on the streets. Their only comfort being that in this way their dead bodies are at least not subjected to the same shameful process. The inhabitants, permeated by a constant fear, are ready to leave their home and their yard just to move to a different place. In one word: everything is in disorder.[192]

In van Swieten's view, vampire executions contributed to regional destabilization. People, even the ill or heavily pregnant, would often flee their homes in a state of panic, exposing the most vulnerable members of the community to exposure on the streets. The intensity of feeling that inspired villagers to abandon their homes supported van Swieten's representation of fear as a kind of contagion: terror of the revenant, fanned by the flames of legislative mismanagement, gave rise to the more profound pathologies of social instability. Without denying the existence of revenants, van Swieten harshly criticised how ambiguous laws about how to evaluate evidence, judge the accused, and mete out punishment contributed to dangerous states of social unrest. Replacing the legislative authority of law with that of fairytales made possible human suffering and death far beyond the capacity of even the most fearful harmful corpse.

Van Swieten addressed his *Remarques sur le Vampyrisme de Sylésie de l'an 1755* to Maria Theresa, which contained a piece from Joseph Pitton de Tournefort's *Relation d'un voyage au Levant* (1718).[193] De Tournefort recounts the tale of a botanist traveller who

[192] Ibid. 22-23.
[193] Gerard Van Swieten, *Remarques sur le Vampyrisme de Sylésie de l'an 1755, Par. M. le Baron van Swieten faites á Sa Majesté imp. et royale. Avec la version. Par M Antoine Hiltenprand.* (Augsburg: Mayer, 1755).

witnessed the rites used against the Greek *vroucolacas* in 1701.[194] Van Swieten's text was integrated into Maria Theresa's 1766 act, the *Lex Caesaro-regia*. Van Swieten's text also features in the 1770 into the *Constitutio Criminalis Theresiana*, which made the judicial procedures against magic more rigorous than before:

> Silliness and ignorance, which gave rise to simple-minded admiration and superstitious practices, has finally led to a situation in which credulity has gained support everywhere among the people, who have become incapable of separating reality from illusion. [195]

Historians have commonly espoused the view that we do not encounter superstitious activities, such as witch trials or vampire executions, in the judicial files after 1768, a view that has resulted in obscuring our knowledge of these issues in the latter part of the eighteenth century.[196] My research, however, reveals that neither the cases nor the discourses surrounding them declined. Van Swieten's manuscript was translated from French to Italian by Giuseppe Valeriano Vanetti and published in 1756. This edition was also translated into German and extended with notes in 1768 under the title of *Vampyrismus*, included as an appendix to the Bavarian priest Andreas Ulrich Mayer's *Abhandlung des Daseyns der Gespenster*.[197] Van Swieten discovered these cases through the literary works of Western European doctors, travellers, and philosophers, which he used as the raw material for his interpretations of the *magia posthuma* phenomenon in Moravia, classifying it as example of vampirism.

Van Swieten's work was widely circulated and influential in the German-speaking world, as the western elite drew upon his text to ridicule vampiric beliefs and urge the need to civilise the Habsburg Empire's inner savages. Van Swieten's ideas resonated in other forms of writing as well: the author of a 1775 article in the widely circulated German newspaper, *Reichspostreuter*, criticized superstition, fanaticism, witchcraft, and tales of

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[194] Joseph Pitton de Tournefort, *Relation d'un voyage du Levant* (Lyon: Anisson and Posuel, 1717).
[195] Linzbauer, Codex sanitario-medicalis Hungariae, 3, 776-85, 'Lex caesareo-regia ad exstirpandaiu superstitionem ac rationalem judicationem criminalem Magiae, Sortilegii *(1766)*'..
[196] For witch trials after 1768 see: Péter Tóth, 'The Decriminalization of Magic and the Fight Against Superstition in Hungary and Transylvania, 1740-1848', 291-317.
[197] Andreas Ulrich Mayer, *Abhandlung des Daseyns der Gespenster, nebst einem Anhange vom Vampyrismus*, by (Ausburg, 1768).

magical horrors, though he acknowledged the fearful way these beliefs spread quickly amongst the common folk. The article mentioned notable thinkers of the time, such as Locke, Shaftesbury, D'Alembert, and Diderot, who were proponents of reason and Enlightenment. The author also gestured to Father Calmet as a historian and defender of the beliefs in vampires as a way to counter these beliefs. Echoing van Swieten, the author attributed the persistence of superstitious belief to the availability of books that appealed to and confirmed its readers' deeply engrained beliefs in ancient and unseen horrors. As long as these misleading books were in circulation, the belief in vampires and similar concepts would persist. Overall, the article attempts to debunk the belief in vampires and superstition to advocate for rationality and Enlightenment thinking. It points out the prevalence of the regional specificity of these beliefs as well as the role of influential books in contributing to widespread ignorance.[198]

Many authors recognised that folk customs related to dying were imbued with the fear of the returning dead, and that superstitious rituals were often performed to prevent premature burial. The concern of the common folk regarding physical death was reflected in medical research where it remained a popular subject throughout the eighteenth century. Discussions concerning premature burial revolved around death as a transitional process, which raised uncertainty about the definitive signs of death, known as *signa mortis*. Western scholars during the eighteenth century recognized the need to establish a precise definition of both life and death to advance the field of medicine.[199] The same concerns also appeared in Hungary during the eighteenth century, which was heavily influenced by the ideas that emerged in Germany about the signs of suspended animation.[200]

Vampirism played a significant role in Western European premature burial discourses, as the vampire phenomenon complicated the ability to universalize signs of death. Benjamin Frizschius's dissertation of 1697 was the first to propose that the vampire could be a person buried alive. He denies the possibility of the dead returning from the grave or being buried alive, offering an alternative explanation around satanic practices. According to Frizschius, Satan himself hid in the corpse, giving rise to distinctive sound

[198] *Reichspostreuter* Jun 29, 1775.
[199] See: Claudio Milanesi, *La questione della morte apparente (1740-1913),* (Bologne, 1981); Martin Patak, *Die Angst von dem Scheintod in der 2. Hälfte des 18. Jahrhunderts* (Zurich: Juris, 1967).
[200] For the eighteenth and nineteenth-century Hungarian literature on premature burials see: Horányi, *A látszatos halál- A magyarországi tetszhalál-fóbia története.*

effects.[201] The most extensive study on this subject was published by Michael Ranft, who studied at the University of Leipzig. In 1728, he published a dissertation titled *De masticatione mortuorum in tumulis,* which he later expanded with additional Serbian cases from 1732.[202] He attributed the strange noises from the grave to the mastication of the dead; after considering the evidence, he attributed the beliefs to the disturbed imaginations of superstitious Papists.

Ranft expounded the idea that, during epidemics, individuals often developed misconceptions about the dead body, driven by exhaustion and fear. He offered psychological justifications for both the phenomenon of *masticatio mortuorum* and the belief in vampires, attributing the eerie sounds emanating from graves to chemical reactions. Ranft unequivocally rejected the possibility of live burials, but he engaged in reasoned discussion regarding the *vis vegetans* theory, or the belief that vital energy may persist in the deceased. He also explored the concepts of 'sympathy and antipathy' and pondered whether the deceased could influence the fate of their living relatives.[203] Essentially, Ranft attempted to find a scientific or rational basis for the belief that the living and the dead were connected through supernatural or mystical aspects.

The role of superstition in Hungarian medical discourse

This section of the thesis illustrates how the Hungarian elite deployed medical discourse to address similar issues arising from burial. Van Swieten's considerable influence over many amongst the medical elite contributed to a burgeoning discourse surrounding supernatural phenomena such as the undead and burial practices. Delving into the intersection of medical thought and the supernatural, I unravel the threads that held the superstitious prejudices and medical objectivity of the Hungarian elite tenuously bound together.

Parallels emerge between Western and Eastern European approaches when we examine Enlightenment-era discourse on premature burial. This discourse extended into

[201] Philippus Rohrius- Benjamin Frizschius, *Dissertatio historico-philosophica de masticatione mortuorum.* (Leipzig University, 1679).
[202] Published in German: Michael Ranft, *Tractat von dem Kauen und Schmatzen der Todten in Gräbern, Worin die wahre Beschaffenheit derer Hungarischen Vampyrs und Blut-Sauger gezeigt, auch alle von dieser Materie bißher zum Vorschein gekommene Schrifften recensiret werden* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1734).
[203] Gábor Klaniczay, 'Decline of Witches', 175.

Hungary, mirroring the intellectual currents observed in the broader European Enlightenment context. The first work of note is by Dávid Sámuel Mádai, who was born in Selmecbánya (today's Slovakia) and studied in Halle. A member of the prestigious *German National Academy of Sciences Leopoldina*, Mádai expressed concerns about premature burials causing the dead to return to life. Writing at the time of the plague epidemics in 1738-39, he believed that people could be revived after 24 or 30 hours, so he argued that burials should not take place until 36 hours after death.[204] Maria Theresa's previous regulations stated that the corpses could not be buried earlier than 48 hours after death, although this 'excluded the bodies of those who died from epidemic illnesses'.[205] From the 1770s onwards, serious measures were taken to regulate burials. The sheer quantity of revision to the policy regarding burial, however, implies that there was something wrong with the practical implementation of the regulations.[206] Interest in the subject grew not only from a medical perspective, but also from a theological one. Péter Bod was born in Transylvania and a pastor of the Reformed Church, and his work *Szent Hilárius* published in 1768 questioned whether it was possible for someone to die twice. His writing demonstrated that religious considerations and themes played a significant and defining role in burial practices.[207]

István Mátyus, who studied in Utrecht, considered premature burial in his Hungarian work, particularly *Diaetetica I-II* and *Ó és Új Diaetetica I-VI*. As a significant figure of the Hungarian Enlightenment, Mátyus made significant contributions to the advancement of domestic medicine. His legacy includes the formulation of guidelines promoting a healthy lifestyle, investigations into factors influencing both physical and mental well-being, endeavours aimed at extending lifespan, and initiatives focused on illness prevention. In a cultural context where such ideas were novel, his pursuits showcased a remarkable level of enlightened and progressive thought. Additionally, he played a significant role in the discourse surrounding vampires, particularly advocating delaying burial to mitigate the risk of premature interment. In 1762, Mátyus used the vampire phenomenon to illustrate how

[204] Dávid Sámuel Mádai, *Szükséges oktatás, miképen kiki e mostani behatolt döghalálban és elragadó betegségekben Isten kegyelme által magát őrizheti és orvosolhatja, némely hihető relatiókkal egyetemben, mely jeles hathatósági voltának légyen e traktácskában dicsért orvosságoknak* (Halle, 1739).
[205] Horányi, *A látszatos halál*, 61.
[206] See chapter two for more on this topic.
[207] Péter Bod, 'Szent Hilárius (1768)', in: Anna Szalay ed., *Szent Hilárius* (Budapest: Szépirodalmi Könyvkiadó, 1987), 212.

the boundary between life and death: 'was not clear cut from these accounts that it is not so easy to give a true description of Life and Death as some might think'.[208] He recommended for instance to delay burial for at least 48 hours after death:

> Those who have truly died; indeed, no one can resurrect them except the One living God, who is the Lord of Elements and Death. However, within them, there remained a spark of life, from which they could be revived. Such are the creatures in their hiding places throughout the winter, appearing to be dead, like birds and other animals. They are typically revived by the warmth of spring. This is the reason why our glorious and sovereign Queen, in Vienna and in other German provinces, does not allow any deceased person to be opened up or buried for 48 hours. On the contrary, it is a useless superstition that those who have truly died, whose blood has remained fresh and warm for a long time, and whose faces still have a rosy complexion, are not really dead but pretending to be so. In reality, they are not alive, but they emerge from the earth at night from their graves and feed on the bodies of people and children dying in some hot pestilence, living off their blood. They were indeed dead, but the reason their blood remained fresh and warm, and their faces were rosy, is due to a very healthy and bloody condition in which their bodies were, caused by a severe illness that prevented the blood from clotting.[209]

In his discussion of resurrection and the superstitions surrounding death, Mátyus asserted that while only God can truly resurrect the dead, some cases of mistaken death might arise from a lingering spark of life that could bring the individual back in a way analogous to that of a hibernating creature in spring. He rationalized the warm blood and rosy complexions of some corpses by attributing these phenomena to a severe illness that prevented blood from clotting, causing the appearance of healthy blood in the deceased bodies.

[208] István Mátyus, Kibédi: *Diaetetica. Az az a jó egészség megtartásának módját, fundamentumosan elö-ado könyv* I. (Kolozsvár, 1762), 13.
[209] Ibid. 31.

> These people in reality are dead, the fluidity and warmth of their blood and the red cheeks caused by the fact they had healthy, sanguine temperament and died very suddenly, of a hot-natured disease, which stopped the blood from coagulating. Their bodies in the cold winter were rushed to burial into a cold, clayish soil, which stopped them from decaying until the spring, which warmed the soil. This is also the reason why such people coming back from the grave, or as the Greeks call them *vampyrius*, are never found in summer or autumn.[210]

Vampire characteristics resulted from the sudden death of individuals with a healthy, sanguine temperament, particularly when a disease with hot-natured symptoms prevented the blood from coagulating properly. The cold, clayish soil of winter prevented the bodies from decaying, uncannily preserving the characteristics of life. Discourse on the connection between vampirism and premature burial persisted well into the nineteenth century (as I go on to discuss in chapter two).

Mátyus also engaged with a phenomenon related to sleep paralysis or nocturnal disturbances. He mentioned that in the past (before the Enlightenment) when people were not well-informed about the workings of the natural world and still held many superstitious beliefs, doctors and their patients often attributed sleep paralysis, pressure and suffocation to supernatural figures such as revenants, witches, or demons.[211] For Mátyus, the growth of scientific knowledge and the study of natural phenomena helped dispel superstitions among doctors. Nevertheless, these beliefs remained prevalent amongst the uneducated, who ascribed superstitious significance to these nocturnal terrors. This suggests that similar superstitious beliefs endured in certain segments of society at this time. Mátyus observed the diversity of beliefs regarding these supernatural beings even within the Christian community: 'these *incubi* and *succubi* are regarded by some as mere products of the imagination, while others consider them to be genuine entities'.[212] This illustrates that even among individuals who professed the Christian faith, there was a variety of viewpoints on the nature of these creatures.

[210] Ibid. 12.
[211] Ibid. 405.
[212] Ibid. 406.

Mátyus also highlighted the role of education, particularly in physics and metaphysics, in protecting the mind against fear and 'dread of signs that occur in nature, superstition, useless imagination, apparitions, witches, and demons'.[213] Since the knowledge of physics and metaphysics remained beyond the reach of the majority of people, Mátyus addressed his work to the educated elite. While the educated elite viewed these superstitious beliefs with fascination and an opportunity to delve into the mysteries of the natural world, for everyday people these superstitions constituted a significant part of their lived reality. For example, *Magyar Hírmondó*, the first Hungarian language newspaper, reported that in the county of Sáros in 1778, a villager was accused after his death of rising from his grave at night and frightening and harming (by strangling) his family members and other villagers. The people were so afraid that after nine o'clock in the evening, no one dared to walk alone in the village. The community decided to exhume and cremate the man's corpse. The newspaper editor, Mátyás Rát, represented the event with a degree of ironic distance, claiming that it would have been more appropriate to 'cut the veins of the terrified people to dispel their fear' rather than exhuming the unfortunate deceased.[214] This showcases the divergence in perspectives regarding superstition across popular and elite levels: while the educated elites saw these beliefs as a subject of curiosity and treated villagers with an ironic distance, everyday people remained deeply affected by their beliefs in the supernatural.

Elite discourse continued to question the role of the Devil well into the late eighteenth century. Weszprémi's research in 1778 suggested that the concept of malevolent corpses also extended to creatures known as *lidércz* in Hungary. *Lidércz* is a pressing entity, who gathers at night (*lidércnyomás*) and often also sucks the victim's blood.[215] He referenced a portion of the work by Péter Méliusz Juhász, a priest from Debrecen, published in 1570, which delved into these intriguing beliefs. For Weszprémi, these beliefs raised complex questions regarding who or what was responsible for the torment experienced by people. Was it the Devil who possessed the body, created illusions that lead the living to

[213] Ibid. 488.
[214] *Magyar Hírmondó*, February 5, (1780): 88.
[215] See more on lidérc in: Ágota Muraközi, 'A lidérc a nyírségi néphitben' in: *A Nyíregyházi Jósa András Múzeum évkönyve* 10. (ed.) Dezső Csallány (Nyíregyháza: Jósa András Múzeum, 1968), 183-200; Éva Pócs, 'We, Too, Have Seen a Great Miracle`: Conversations and Narratives on the Supernatural Among Hungarian-Speaking Catholics in a Romanian Village' in *Vernacular Religion in Everyday life*. *Expressions of Belief*, ed. Mario Bowman and Ülo Valk (London& New York: Routledge, 2012), 246-80.

believe they were being tormented by the deceased? Or was it the work of witches who inflicted suffering upon people? Juhász offered an explanation tied to the concept of *vital Spiritus* or life force. He suggested that clots in the blood became lodged in the lungs, causing people to experience the sensation of a *lidércz* sitting on their chest during the night.[216]

Even as late as 1794, Sámuel Rácz, a philosophy professor at the University of Buda, incorporated topics such as vampires and other supernatural magic into his university medical textbook on scientific medicine. Rácz, originally from Transylvania and born in Gyulafehérvár (Alba Iulia) to a Calvinist family, underwent a conversion to Catholicism while studying at the University of Vienna.[217] In his teachings, he conveyed to his students that the phenomena related to the undead were natural occurrences:

> To determine whether the souls of the deceased or other spirits, such as demons or any other kind of spirit, can manifest visibly to living humans and cause harm is not the responsibility of the doctors. It is the responsibility of theologians and psychologists, not the doctors, to ascertain whether the wandering soul in the present is a genuine soul or merely imagination or something else.[218]

Rácz emphasized that a physician's duty was not to debate the existence of these undead creatures but to diligently investigate individual cases to ascertain their authenticity. He encouraged doctors to consider the misconceptions around vampirism and the power of the imagination.

Rácz delved into the concept of the odour of decay and argued that a potent stench could trick people into believing that the corpses were visible. This phenomenon was often attributed to the practice of shallow burials, which allowed the noxious scent to mingle with both natural and artificial fumes in the environment. In such circumstances, the powerful and pervasive odour had the uncanny ability to deceive people's senses and create false

[216] Weszprémi István, *Svccincta Medicorvm Hvngariae et Transilvaniae Biorgaphia* (Vienna, 1778) in Hungarian translated by Kővári Aladár, *Magyarország és Erdély orvosainak rövid önéletrajza* 1. (Budapest, 1962), 111-13.
[217] Pál Kótay, 'Rácz Sámuel, a magyar orvosi oktatás hajnalán', *Erdélyi Helikon* (1940), 73-89.
[218] Sámuel Rácz, *A borbélyi tanításoknak második darabja a törvényes orvosi tudományokról, és az orvosi politziáról*, (Pest, 1794), 174-75.

perceptions, leading to the belief that they were witnessing something supernatural or extraordinary, such as the apparition of a corpse.[219] In alignment with the views of van Swieten, Rácz emphasized the critical importance of surgeons and medical practitioners conducting thorough and diligent examinations when faced with such cases.[220]

Rácz's next chapter addressed miracles, which he classified into 'three types of miracles: real, thought, and fabricated'.[221] Rácz's acknowledgment of three types of miracles exemplified his attempt to strike a balance between progressive Enlightenment ideas and his Catholic faith. His exploration of miracles, while consistent with his Catholic beliefs, also engaged with the Enlightenment's emphasis on categorization and empirical analysis. According to Rácz, a real miracle, whether it be healing or another kind of miraculous act, bypassed the power of nature. He acknowledged the difficulty of finding proof for a real miracle, as the boundaries between nature and the supernatural could not always be perfectly understood, citing the preservation of the body in the coffin as insufficient evidence of holiness or possession by the Devil. More support was required to prove sainthood, such as evidence of the individual living a very holy life and performing real miracles. While Rácz did not address vampire cases specifically, his discussion of the distinction between real miracles and undecayed corpses underscores the larger discursive negotiation between the natural and the supernatural that informed belief in the revenant.

> A person who lives with sober wisdom cannot deny that God, who created everything out of nothing, can perform supernatural acts, He did not give this world unlimited power, and He can create another world of even greater power out of nothing. Furthermore, every wise person acknowledges that, even if we do not always know the limits of the power of nature, we often know how limited it is. Thus, miracles are possible, and they occur when a greater power does something beyond the power of nature.

For Rácz, a rational person cannot deny the possibility that God can perform supernatural acts, as God created everything from nothing and is thus not limited by the power of the

[219] Ibid. 158-59.
[220] Ibid. 139., 144., 150.
[221] Ibid. 150.

natural world. Therefore, miracles are possible and can occur when a power greater than that of nature intervenes. In this context, miracles become meaningful events that go beyond the capabilities of the natural world, involving forces greater than what nature itself can produce. Rácz, therefore, aimed to educate people about the relationship between the supernatural and the natural world: he instructed that the concept of miracles, which involved occurrences defying the boundaries of the natural world, could coexist with reason due to the influence of a higher power.[222]

Rácz's category of the *gondolt csoda* refers to improbable events that have a natural explanation, such as an individual's recovery from a seemingly incurable illness. While both the general populace and medical practitioners might perceive this as a miracle, there could be—and likely was—a rational explanation for the recovery. However, Rácz acknowledged that physics and medicine had not yet developed to the extent that they could account for these phenomena completely. Rácz also believed that in order to identify a *gondolt csoda*, one could look for signs such as the patient not achieving full recovery from their illness or experiencing a relapse. One last type of miracle is the 'fabricated' miracle, which was created by deceitful individuals for financial gain or those feigning holiness.[223]

In summary, Rácz saw miracles as a valid concept within the context of medicine because they offered a connection between the supernatural and the natural. He believed that miracles represented instances where something beyond the ordinary laws of nature appeared to intervene in the healing process. For a Catholic like Rácz, the idea of miracles offered a bridge between the supernatural and the natural that enabled him to connect his professional interests with his deeply held spiritual beliefs. In Catholic theology, miracles were often viewed as signs of God's presence and a reminder of God's ability to transcend the ordinary laws of nature. These occurrences reinforced the concept of God's engagement with the lives of creation, including the realm of healthcare. This blend of religious influence and Enlightenment thinking in Rácz's work is representative of the broader intellectual landscape of his era. It demonstrates how individuals could navigate the tension between faith and reason, seeking to find harmony between their religious convictions and the emerging empirical and rationalist perspectives of the Enlightenment.

[222] Ibid. 150-51.
[223] Ibid. 151-52.

The examples I discuss above attest to ways Hungarian medical intellectuals of the second half of the eighteenth century remained closely associated with discussions of the supernatural. They directed their collective efforts towards seeking empirical or natural explanations for various supernatural phenomena, particularly the concept of the undead, which intersected with medical and public health discourse on premature burial. In their pursuit, they attempted to bridge the gap between traditional beliefs and emerging scientific knowledge without denying the possibility of supernatural influences. This ongoing engagement with the supernatural within a medical context showcases the dynamic interplay between science, religion, and superstition at the time of the Enlightenment.

Superstitious beliefs and practices were not antithetical to 'progress', but a meaningful element that worked alongside reason to enable advancements in medicine and science. In small communities, the reliance on home remedies and local folk-healing traditions often prevailed. These close-knit settings often had established ways of addressing common health issues, which were passed down through generations. Additionally, the influence of the local priest and religious beliefs held significant sway over the lives of everyday people. In many cases, religious rituals and prayers were considered powerful tools for healing, sometimes even more so than medical interventions. This interplay between traditional practices, community customs, and religious beliefs continued to shape healthcare decisions and practices in such areas, highlighting the enduring influence of these factors in the face of advancing medical knowledge.

Revenant belief in Transylvania

The process of secularization amongst enlightened intellectuals did not signify a complete disengagement from ecclesiastical matters; instead, it marked a shift in their approach, and even priests started to disseminate Enlightenment works.[224] Priests began to take an interest in local superstitions as well, seeking to use this knowledge to develop ways to dissuade people from superstitious belief. They aimed to prove their theories on the revenant phenomena by investigating local traditions, using this new knowledge to reform the Catholic Church. By the end of the eighteenth century, an intellectual movement

[224] Ambrus Miskolczy, *Felvilágosodás és Babonaság, Erdélyi néphihedelem-gyűjtés 1789-90*. (Budapest: L'Harmattan, 2006).

emerged with the aim of implementing reforms inspired from Enlightenment ideals. These changes initially manifested at the elite level of theological thinking and gradually informed the worldview of various layers of the clergy, facilitated through seminaries for priestly education.[225]

This can be seen in a circular letter written in 1789 by Michael Brukenthal, commissioner of the Transylvanian district of Fogaras, in which he sought knowledge about the superstitious beliefs and rites that existed among the people of the region. He received answers from three Saxon Lutheran pastors, three Calvinists, one Unitarian minister, and one Greek Catholic priest.[226] Ambrus Miskolczy published these letters in 2016, rejecting the idea that the letters were written at the request of the monarch, Emperor Joseph II. Indeed, that same year (1789), a handbook was issued to district officials confirming an order dating from 1787, that was probably an inquiry into popular superstitions and their origin. Although this order was specifically issued for Galicia (divided today between Poland and Ukraine) we do not know if Joseph II also asked for a similar report on superstition in Hungary and Transylvania.[227] However, Miskolczy discovered a document that reflects the popular mentality toward the superstitious beliefs of the late eighteenth century. This document portrays the beliefs of Transylvania's diverse population, who spoke different languages and followed various faiths. The letters also provide insight into the mindset of the educated bureaucratic class of the time, highlighting the significant role of the clergy and priests on influencing the imagination of the common people they oversaw.

Michael Brukenthal followed the footsteps of his uncle, Samuel Brukenthal, who was governor of the Habsburg Grand Principality of Transylvania between 1774 and 1787. From an early age, Samuel's travels and sojourns abroad gave him the opportunity to meet influential scholars who were involved in the funding of a Masonic Lodge in Halle (Samuel was a Freemason throughout his life). He was also a leading figure of the Masonic lodge of Nagyszeben in Transylvania. He travelled back to Transylvania with knowledge that he had acquired in German societies and Universities, and he had far-reaching connections throughout Europe. Samuel's nephew, Michael Brukenthal, joined the Masonic lodge in 1789, and soon began to collect superstitious beliefs and rites among the multi-cultural

[225] Péter Tóth*, Boszorkánypánik és babonatéboly*, 121.
[226] The letters published in: Miskolczy, *Felvilágosodás és Babonaság*.
[227] Ibid. 61-2.

people of Transylvania. His enormous letter collection includes details of many superstitious beliefs involving magic and healing. I focus here on the pastor's answers to Brukenthal's request:

> What kind of superstitious beliefs exist among people, even today and how deeply they believe the wonder of the soul of the dead at night; *vulgo Vampir,* in latin *Sanguisugae* or ghosts, *Lüdértz* and their appearance to people, superstitious signs, with which the troubled souls torture people at night […].[228]

This collection, therefore, provides insight into the elite response to belief in the returning dead, which was informed by first-hand information from pastors, priests and ministers that held sway in their communities.

The first letter to answer Brukenthal's request was from Bodros Samuel Köpeczi, a Calvinist pastor, who mentioned Joseph II numerous times in his letter, attesting to his support of the monarch. In the preface to his letter, Köpeczi noted: 'in my county, [the] priest before me […] gave more credit to the words of the midwives than to the words of the wise men'.[229] Of all these documents, Köpeczi's report is the most thorough, which suggests that he was particularly interested in reforming the superstitious beliefs of his flock at that time. Following a Christian tradition for which all belief in the supernatural is the work of the Devil, he described at length the fear of ghosts, belief in witches, and fortune tellers' tales as forms of superstitious activity. He noted the belief about witches who could harm from the grave, noting that weakness and fragility were often interpreted as signs that the evil spirit, *gonoszok* has drunk one's blood.[230] Köpeczi added that:

> Witches take and kill not only in life. They harm in their death, they come back from the grave and take people with them. The only way to make sure they

[228] Michael von Brukenthal: 'Kívánvá tudni, mitsoda babonaságok és bal vélekedések uralkodjanak...', Segesvár, 26 April. 1789; in German: 'Da mir daran gelegen ist zu viβen waβ für Vorurtheile und Aberglauben noch unter dem gemeinen Mann herschen...' in: Miskolczy*, Felvilágosodás és babonaság*, 131-36.
[229] Köpetzi Bodos Sámuel, '...igyekeztem fizetés igéréssel is...', Kobor, 13 July. in: Miskolczy*, Felvilágosodás és babonaság,* 136-61.
[230] Ibid. 150.

> stay in the grave is to dig up the grave, turn the corpse face down and pin it down.

He also noted that the children of an old Romani woman wanted to execute her corpse, as they believed her to be a witch, but that Köpeczi managed to convince them against doing such a thing.[231]

The next entry in Brukenthal's report is a letter from the Protestant minister Bálint Baló. The tone of the letter is extremely emotional, registering the author's embarrassment about writing about such a topic. Baló's letter tells an interesting story that had happened to him 'a few years back':

> I was here in *Fagaras* in a lodge, and one of us (who we all believed was an intelligent man) would swear that one night a *Lélek* (Spirit) appeared in front of him. He was extremely scared of the Spirit and started to pray devoutly. However, the Spirit encouraged him, and started to talk to him about important issues […] and forbid him to talk to anyone about that conversation. The others knew that I did not believe in such things, and some of them said: […] "Who would not see it clearly? the appearance of the dead's spirits is only the Devil's work, who appears in human form […] his aim is to take possession of people in any way that he can".[232]

Baló did not deny the possibility that the spirit of the dead could return, even in physical form, assigning corpse reanimation to the Devil. In recounting these experiences, Baló reflected the beliefs and experiences of the individuals involved, exploring the tension between those who were open to the existence of spiritual encounters and those who attributed such phenomena to the Devil's influence. Relying heavily on personal anecdotes, Baló argued that lack of education in younger children explained the spread of irrational beliefs.

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[231] Ibid. 152.

[232] Baló Bálint, '...a' magam tulajdon tapasztalásaival, egy Rendbeszedett Írással, Excellentziádnak igen alázatoson udvarolnék' Fagaras, 20 January, 1790. In : Miskolczy, *Felvilágosodás és Babonaság*, 167-87.

The Unitarian minister, János Bodor, answered Brukenthal's request with a letter in four parts entitled *A description of all the superstitions spread among the foolish people in 1789, including a systematic account of the supposed antidotes by methodology*. The first part dealt with *De Crassioribus Supersitionibus* (witches); the second part is about *De Incubus deu Ephialtibus* (creatures such as *Lidércz*) the third part is about *De vagis seu Errantibus mortuorum Animabus* (wandering dead spirits), and the fourth addresses *De Spectris Seu Phantasiis* (ghosts). Bodor discussed these beliefs in detail, listing the antidotes that villagers would use against these supernatural creatures (Bodor refrained from judgmental personal comments).[233] Interestingly, these antidotes include food made with garlic, garlic kept in bed, and wearing crucifixes around the neck--all elements familiar to anyone versed in vampire lore.

The next entry—in what seems a glossary of East-Central Europe's religious diversity—is provided by the Romanian Orthodox priest, Ioan Halmaghi, who stated that belief in ghosts was due to irrational beliefs passed on from parents to children. For Halmaghi, therefore, superstitious belief had deep roots in people's minds, as intractable as nursery rhymes. Christianity was supposed to be a cure for superstitious beliefs, although some of them were kept alive and disseminated due to the poor education of villagers. Halmaghi also argued for the creation of schools to control the spread of superstitious beliefs in the younger generations.[234] He clearly took advantage of Brukenthal's request to emphasize the need for education in his community. He also mentioned that many priests were at one with their people in their belief in the supernatural, observing that priests 'are not distinguished from the people by anything except the knowledge of reading, singing, and the knowledge of worshiping sacraments'.[235]

There is not much to say about the three Saxon Lutheran pastors' letters as they report no first-hand experience of superstitious beliefs in their communities, instead quoting exclusively from contemporary literature on the topic. Johann Gottfried Schenker, for instance, clearly tailored his answer to Brukenthal's request, entitled *Wamyren oder Blutsäuger*, (Vampires or Blood-suckers), from publicly available sources. Strangely enough,

[233] János Bodor, '…amit cask a' lényegről megtudtam, leírtam…' Sz. Mihály, October 13, 1789. In: Miskolczy, *Felvilágosodás és Babonaság,* 161-67.
[234] Ioan Halmaghi, '…non sine dolore observare debui…' Fogaras, October 22, 1789. In: Miskolczy, *Felvilágosodás és Babonaság*, 161-167. Translated to Hungarian by Fazekas István, 198-208.
[235] Ibid. 203.

he even concluded his discourse on the execution of corpses with the innocuous words: *Ruhe sanft, armer Vampyr!* (Rest gently, poor vampire!).[236] While it could be interpreted as a gesture of sympathy or respect towards the mythical creature, the use of the word 'poor' might also imply a sense of pity, condescension, and criticism, further reinforcing the idea that vampires are not to be taken seriously.

Notwithstanding the variety of responses to Brukenthal's enquiry from these respective clergymen, we know that these beliefs and practices were common even as late as the nineteenth century as local communities re-interpreted the figure of the revenant or malevolent witch to suit contemporary concerns; for example, assigning to the harmful dead a role in the medical understanding of epidemics and disease.[237] As mentioned above, Empress Maria Theresa's decree of 1766 forbidding 'posthumous magic', was not successful, as the close-knit communities passed on their belief system from one generation to the next. As the Orthodox priest mentioned above, the problem arose from the fact that parents passed on these superstitious beliefs to their children. Of course, we cannot take at face value the clergymen's answers to Brukenthal's request. Judging by the tone of the letters, these clergymen may well have been ashamed about the level of superstition among their flock. But they still provided detailed information that helps to reconstruct how these religious figures judged the belief-system of their flock. These small Transylvanian communities displayed a fear of the supernatural that derived from the syncretic mixture of old belief systems and religious ideas, which shaped each community's idiosyncratic response to the undead.

Recent historiography has shown that religion played a key role in shaping emotions, including the interpretation of beliefs in a physical rather than spiritual afterlife, especially in the context of the Protestant challenge of the Catholic doctrine of purgatory. Examples of the interplay between new theological ideas and popular beliefs are numerous throughout Christian Europe.[238] Within Catholicism, Purgatory provided a channel of communication with the souls of the dead for centuries. Protestantism challenged some of the traditional

[236] Johann Gottfried Schenker 'Uiber Vorurtheil und Aberglauben in Siebenbürgern', Schäßburg, February 15, 1790. in: Miskolczy, *Felvilágosodás és Babonaság*, 274.
[237] See chapter three and four.
[238] See: Bruce Gordon, *The Place of the Dead in Late Mediaeval and Early Modern Europe*, ed. with Peter Marshall (Cambridge University Press, 2000).

ways that Christians dealt with the fear of death and grief for the dead.[239] Nevertheless, traditional beliefs about the dead survived the spiritual upheaval of the Reformation and Turkish reconquest, displaying a tremendous resilience in the face of theological shifts and attempts at reform on the part of different Christian denominations (such as those discussed above in response to Brukenthal's request). The Protestant Church, in particular, was faced with a considerable challenge to fulfil the spiritual needs of communities that had been deprived of legitimate channels for their fears (purgatory) and often resorted to superstition.[240]

Moreover, not all members of the clergy thought that belief in the returning dead was anti-Christian but rather understood it as the work of the Christian Devil. As the spiritual leaders of their community, they were perhaps ashamed to admit that they had failed in their mission: that some of their flock did not follow Christian faith to the letter, believing in supernatural phenomena as the Devil's work rather than admit these beliefs had a pagan origin. Malevolent witches, both alive and dead, ghosts, and blood-sucking spirits were common currency in many communities. Instead of denying the existence of these creatures, priests, pastors, and ministers, used the opportunity offered by Brukenthal's request to highlight the need for building new schools and developing a more robust education for the local community. In fact, the diverse elements of popular culture highlighted here, including pagan and folkish, were not that different from the Christian and Classical beliefs of the governing elites from antiquity onwards. These small village communities demonstrate that the disenchantment of the world did not replace ancient beliefs. The pastors who repeatedly called for reform and education are a useful source for the study of popular religion if we accept that they reflect real beliefs or practices that have, to some extent, been shaped by the theological bias of the author.

[239] Craig M. Koslofsky, 'Souls: the Death of Purgatory and the Reformation' in: *The Reformation of the Dead, Death and Ritual in Early Modern Germany, 1450–1700*. (Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), 19-39.
[240] Ulrich L. Lerhner, *The Catholic Enlightement-Forgotten History of Global Movement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 125-53.

Conclusion

The chapter showed how the medical intellectual elite of Austria and Hungary in the eighteenth century navigated the complex interplay between natural explanations and supernatural beliefs. The profound changes taking place during that time, as scientific advancements and rational thinking gained momentum, challenged long-held traditional beliefs and practices. The medical intellectuals acknowledged the power and efficacy of scientific inquiry, embracing the idea that the natural world could be understood through observation, measurement, and logical reasoning. However, while embracing natural explanations, they also acknowledged the widespread belief and enduring significance of the supernatural and magical thinking. They recognized that these beliefs were deeply ingrained in the cultural fabric of society, and that despite the advancements of science, the allure of the mystical and the unexplained remained strong. Rather than reject supernatural beliefs outright, the intellectual elite of the era approached them with a nuanced perspective. They understood that supernatural beliefs and magical practices played a crucial role in people's lives, providing explanations for phenomena that science had not yet fully illuminated. The discourse of both van Swieten and Hungarian elite underscores the enduring influence of religion in discussions surrounding the revenant phenomena. Despite the advancements of the Enlightenment, the medical elite did not dismiss the possibility that magic, and the Devil still played a role. The Brukenthal letters reveal that, while the cultural diversity within these regions attests to many different forms of the undead—from witches, vampires, to ghosts—the fear of the revenant was the same across various regions and religious communities.

Chapter 2.

‘The ‘dead’ need not be buried’: superstition and death in the nineteenth century

Introduction

This chapter focuses on how ideas and beliefs around death were transformed in the nineteenth century as a result of epidemics and the influx of modern medicine in Hungary. I will show that the medical professionals’ uncertainty about death offered new ways for superstitious beliefs, especially phenomena of the undead, to re-emerge in the medical discourses of the nineteenth century. In the face of widespread fatalities due to large-scale epidemics, the general population chose to rely on traditional or folk medicine instead of seeking the assistance of physicians. Particularly during cholera outbreaks, even healthcare professionals were incorporating elements of folk medicine, which served to modernise the field of medicine itself. This chapter argues that the folk beliefs and medical discourse of nineteenth-century Hungary shared many elements of superstitious beliefs about corpses and the passage between life and death.

Contemporary medical literature that focused on cholera, including medical dissertations, private letters, and medical books, reveals a significant interplay between medical knowledge and popular beliefs. Many of the documents addressing the cholera outbreaks grappled with the lack of clear criteria for determining the transition between life and death. The swiftness and virulence of cholera often left medical practitioners grappling with the challenge of accurately determining the point of death. This uncertainty likely contributed to a convergence of medical discourse with popular beliefs, blurring the lines between empirical observations and cultural interpretations. Additionally, the disconnect between official authorities and burial practices during cholera outbreaks played a role in shaping new forms of irrational beliefs. The fear of premature burial, which revived, as I discussed in the previous chapter, in response to the ravages of plague, appeared again in response to the cholera outbreaks.

In the nineteenth century, the rationalization of magic and the mystification of science both played important roles in shaping the modern concept of death. Medical professionals investigated how death and its rituals were influenced by the bureaucratic control of

graveyards and the commercialization of burials.[241] While medical professionals of the nineteenth century interrogated the concept of death from a biological perspective, very little progress was made to implement changes to the everyday life in villages and small towns of Hungary, where customs related to death and the dead hardly changed from previous centuries. Most villagers passed away at home surrounded by family and the rite of burial was strictly regulated by the Church and community tradition. In times of sickness, they turned to healers who practiced folk medicine, rather than doctors.[242]

This chapter, therefore, will focus on the Habsburg Empire, specifically the underdevelopment of medical services within the Hungarian territories. I will examine how the educated medical elite responded to cholera, particularly in relation to natural treatments, superstitions, and questions surrounding the deceased and corpses. The discourse surrounding the management of the dead during a cholera outbreak involves addressing questions about the disposal of corpses, concerns about contagion from deceased individuals, and cultural practices related to death. These challenges pushed at the epistemological limits of the educated medical elite, who sometimes offered superstitious explanations and treatments to cover the gaps in medical knowledge. Thus, investigating in the strategies of medical professionals deployed to address the concerns arising from cholera, including the development of protocols for handling and burying the deceased, as well as the dissemination of information aimed at demystifying the connection between corpses and the spread of the disease.

The response to cholera was not immune to the pervasive influence of deeply ingrained superstitions. The educated medical elite found themselves navigating a landscape where folk beliefs often clashed with scientific reasoning. This chapter explores how these conflicts manifested, examining instances where superstitious practices hindered or complemented medical efforts. Whether it was the reluctance to adopt certain treatments due to ingrained beliefs or the incorporation of rituals alongside medical interventions, the interplay between science and superstition was a defining feature of the response. I also aim to address a gap in historiography, there is currently no research on the nineteenth-century

[241] Péter Hanák, *The Garden and the Workshop- Essays on the Cultural History of Vienna and Budapest*, (New York: Princeton University Press, 1998), 105.
[242] Owen Davies, 'Cunning-Folk in the Medical Market-Place During the Nineteenth Century', *Medical History*, 43 (1999): 55-73.

medical discourse concerning the return of the deceased and the superstitions surrounding corpses in Hungary. László Kiss conducted investigations into the cholera epidemics in Hungary, while László Somogyi explored the relationship of the rural population to cholera, delving into local superstitions and superstitious practices during the time of cholera.[243] However, neither scholar provides detailed accounts of the role that the corpse and revenant beliefs in cholera epidemics. Eszter Fazekas, Katalin Simon, and Zoltán Fónagy have published valuable scholarship on the development of modern medicine in Hungary in relation to epidemics and folk healing.[244] Unlike these scholars, however, I am primarily interested in beliefs, additionally I offer a cultural history of the contested belief in the returning dead and how it acted as a kind of ideological spectre that haunted and disturbed the rationalization of medicine in Habsburg Empire.

Progress and stagnation in the field of medicine

As a result of the advancement of medical science during the Enlightenment, the secular government replaced local churches as the sole authority in charge of regulating death and took over the traditional roles associated with mourning: inspecting the body of a dying or dead person and instituting burial practices.[245] In the course of the nineteenth century, science and medicine moved increasingly apart from religious and spiritual influences, but crucially they never truly rejected them. Deciding the line between life and death became more and more a scientific, rather than theological question. As a result, there were many unanswered questions about the timing of death and the passage into the afterlife. The contested boundary between life and death has received growing scholarly attention.[246] Historians have investigated how the stricter burial regulations affected everyday life,

[243] László Kiss, 'Dögvész és epekórság – a pestis és a kolera Magyarországon a XIX. Században', *Valóság* 9 (2004): 19–30; László Somogyi, 'Az 1872–1873. évi kolerajárvány orvos- és kultúrtörténeti vonatkozásai', *Matarka* 22, no. 3 (2015): 363-73.
[244] Eszter Ágnes Fazekas, 'A népi gyógyítás és a modern orvoslás viszonya a 19. századi Magyarországon', in: *Kaleidoscope History* 3, no. 3 (2011): 183-97; Katalin Simon, *Sebészet és sebészek Magyarországon 1686-1848*, (Budapest: Semmelweis Kiadó, 2013); Zoltán Fónagy, ''Orvost csak hírből ismer' – Egészség és betegség a hagyományos társadalomban', *Ponticulus Hungaricus* XVIII. no. 6 (2014). https://www.ponticulus.hu/rovatok/limes/fonagy-zoltan-orvost-csak-hirbolt-ismertek.html#gsc.tab=0 Accessed: Jun 11, 2023.
[245] More on that in chapter three.
[246] For example: Thomas Schlich and Claudia Wiesemann, (eds.) *Hirntod -Zu Kulturgeschichte der Todesfeststellung* (Frankufurt: Suhrkamp, 2015).

especially the introduction of new sanitary practices during plague or cholera epidemics. László Kiss has shown that the growth of healthcare in the first half of the nineteenth century still had little impact on traditional society.[247] Until the 1830s, for example, hospitals were only built in larger cities, and they only dealt with infectious patients, not with surgery.

At the turn of the eighteenth century, Austria's health care system was particularly underdeveloped in comparison to the countries of Western Europe. Maria Theresa recognised this problem and aimed to improve the situation. The Monarchy's healthcare system was defined in the first half of the nineteenth century by the *Generale Normativum*, published by Maria Theresa in 1770, which defined key tasks for the improvement of healthcare. The compromise of 1867 between Austria and Hungary also led to the modernization of the Hungarian public administration. With the *Act of Communities* (1871), communes became responsible for their poor, which included financial responsibility for hospital fees.[248] However, significant cultural and economic differences between different Hungarian regions of that period could be found. Historians have argued that the nineteenth century was the age in which religious authority over death was contested by the rise of science. Philippe Ariès, for example, showed how physicians and doctors replaced priests and ministers at the deathbed.[249] These changes, however, did not take place all over Hungary at the same place, particularly in rural areas, where superstitious beliefs flourished even after the Enlightenment. Locals turned to healers for help in times of sickness: these local figures explained the patient's ailment using supernatural terms in aim to heal and comfort them. The influence of superstition can also be seen in the witch trials, where a large percentage of the accused were practitioners of popular healing and/or magic during the nineteenth century.[250]

The continued prominence of healers and shamans in public health can be attributed to the limited capacity of the State to provide widespread healing services. While it was the assigned task of the Josephinist State to counter the demand for magical healing by providing supervision and health education, the low number of available doctors prevented

[247] Somogyi, 'Az 1872–1873. évi kolerajárvány orvos- és kultúrtörténeti vonatkozásai', 363-373.
[248] Péter Balázs, 'Népegészségügy Magyarországon a XVIII. század és a belátható jövő között', *Egészségtudomány* 52, no. 2 (2008): 14-28.
[249] Philippe Ariès, T*he Hour of Our Death: The Classic History of Western Attitudes Toward Death over the Last One Thousand Years*, trans. Helen Weaver (London: Allen Lane, 1981), 559–601.
[250] Tóth, *Boszorkánypánik és Babonatéboly*, 175.

modern medical treatments to reach everyone. The popularity of healers can be explained not only by the shortage of doctors, but also the high cost of medicines and medical care, which made the cheaper option of folk medicine a tempting—if not the only affordable—alternative. The shortage of doctors was accompanied by a shortage of midwives, whose numbers did not rise alongside the rapid increase in the population.[251] Therefore, the State confronted an increasing and unsatisfied demand for doctors; as a result, Hungary devoted its energies to addressing the surplus of urgent cases rather than reform the medical infrastructure or implement new practices, a state of affairs that lasted until 1871. The State targeted 'charlatanism' and untrained 'healers', employing propaganda to marginalize them within society. Meanwhile, many learned doctors faced poverty and inadequate training despite their expertise. This disparity underscores the challenges within the healthcare system, where regulation and access to resources were often unevenly distributed.[252]

Due to the state of public medicine in the early nineteenth century, a great deal of resentment arose towards the medical community and healing methods of the time. The officially recognized healing techniques had barely changed since they were established from the middle of the eighteenth century, and even new scientific discoveries did not significantly inform accepted practice. These practices included bloodletting, emetic, and abdominal distention; they also included the administration of high-concentration chemicals that often-caused symptoms of poisoning, so the patients fell victim not to their original illness, but to the side effects of the medicine.[253] Rather, the peasant communities turned to the local 'healer', who administered folk medicine that drew upon the knowledge passed down from ancestors. Like the chemical treatments of the medical profession, however, the remedies of the local healer often worsened the condition of sick people instead of healing them. Bloodletting, a popular healing method, flourished in the nineteenth century:

[251] Fazekas, 'A népi gyógyítás és a modern orvoslás viszonya a 19. Századi Magyarországon', 184-185.
[252] See: József Fábián: *Természeti tudomány a köznépnek. A babonaságnak orvoslására és a köznép közzül való kiirtására ... Egy réztábla rajzolattal* (Weszprém, 1803); Antal Pucz, *A babonának és az ő sokféle nemeinek rövid előadása. A tudatlanok tanítására és a félékenyek megnyugtatására* (Esztergom, 1822); Pál Böszörményi, *A köznép számára készült kézi könyv, mely Szőlőske nevű falu állapotjának leirásában előadja minemű hibák, rendetlenségek, balvélekedések és babonák vesztegetik a köznépet, mimódon lehet azokat orvosolni, kiirtani és jóra hozni stb.* Schlez után szabadon fordítva 1–2. (Debrecen, 1824); Márton Halász, *A vasárnapi gyermek. Babona-irtó könyvecske nép számára* (Pest, 1845).
[253] Fazekas, 'A népi gyógyítás és a modern orvoslás viszonya a 19. Századi Magyarországon', 186.

> After a new wave of literary vampire motifs had fascinated the educated middle classes at the beginning of the nineteenth century, vampirism became an existential confrontation in a completely different way, and not just for the upper classes and the educated: as bloodletting.[254]

In his book, Olaf Briese argues that bloodletting was a universal therapy against cholera in the nineteenth century. He suggests that vampire texts drew together science and the supernatural through combining competing interpretations of blood as symbolic of supernatural power or vital fluid. Briese draws connections between medical technologies and vampirism in order to show how bodies and identities were constituted and affected by the dangerous circulation of blood. [255] Bloodletting was particularly widespread technique in Hungary. As Ferenc Éder writes in his medical dissertation in 1835:

> In our beloved country, the abuse of bloodletting is extremely high, because according to the common people, partly from inherited prejudice, partly because of the words of many poorly preforming doctors, they consider it to be the one and only medicine that can be used in all diseases.[256]

Under the influence of François Broussais, the head doctor of the Val de Grace Hospital in Paris and surgeon in Napoleon's *Grande Armée*, bloodletting gained in popularity and the use of leeches spread rapidly, especially in France. Broussais applied the practice to cure many diseases, ranging from fevers to irritation of the gastrointestinal tract and widespread inflammation.[257] He proposed that all diseases resulted from an excess build-up of blood and inflammation, which could be treated through relaxants, bloodletting, and leeches, and he received a nickname *le vampire de la médecine*. A group of French physicians followed Broussais's cure, prescribing leeches to newly hospitalised patients—often before even

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[254] Olaf Briese, *Angst in den Zeiten der Cholera* Vol. 2, *Seuchen-Cordon*, (De Gruyter, 2003), 110.
[255] Olaf Briese, Angst in den Zeiten der Cholera Vol. 1, *Über kulturelle Ursprünge des Bakteriums* (Berlin: Academie Verlag, 2003), 388-412.
[256] Ferenc Éder, *Dissertatio inauguralis chirurgico-medica de evacuationibus sanguinis, quam ... pro gradu doctoris medicinae rite consequendo conscripsit. = Oktatási értekezés a vér-kiüritésekről, mellyet orvos doctorrá emeletetésekor ... közre bocsátott* (Pest, 1835), 8.
[257] His main works are: François-Joseph-Victor Broussais, *Histoire des phlegmasies ou inflammations chroniques, fondée sur de nouvelles observations de clinique et d'anatomie pathologique* (Paris, 1808) and *Cours de pathologie et de thérapeutique générales* (1834).

seeing them. This practice garnered a great deal of criticism, such as a German medical pamphlet by Friedrich Alexander from 1830, which framed the excessive bloodletting by physicians as a form of vampirism in the nineteenth century.[258] Despite these criticisms, the practice gained great popularity in Europe and the leech trade often featured in newspapers in relation the Broussais cure in France:

> Many leeches are still exported from Germany and Hungary to France. The wagons for this purpose are specially made, and they can fit 5-600 thousand leeches in them (...) Often five or six carts leave for France within a week.[259]

Later sources suggest that Hungarian leech exports remained at a permanently high level: in 1840, Ferenc Való, a surgeon from Félegyház, complained about the availability of leeches due to their 'highly inflated price'.[260]

Albert Ferenc surgeon from 1868 provides a glimpse into the prevailing medical practices and beliefs of the time, particularly regarding the use of leeches and bloodletting in rural areas. According to him, common people highly valued leeches, storing them in a jar throughout the summer to extract and preserve the blood they sucked. Despite mentioning the decreasing popularity of bloodletting by 1868, Ferenc indicates that the practice was still pervasive. Rural peasants often approached doctors with requests for venesection (direct bloodletting from a vein) or cupping (a method involving suction on the skin to draw blood). Barbers-surgeons and community doctors, however, were hesitant to perform these procedures without a medical prescription, indicating a level of regulation over such practices. Ferenc noted a peculiar belief among the people during that time: when they underwent bloodletting, they always perceived their blood as black. Patients felt a sense of satisfaction in getting rid of what they perceived as 'bad black blood'. In cases where the doctor did not comply with the villagers' requests for bloodletting, Ferenc mentioned that some individuals preferred to return home without medicine. In chronic cases, the patient could travel to another city in search of someone willing to perform venesection or

[258] Friedrich Alexander Simon, *Der Vampirismus im 19. Jahrhundert Über wahre und falsche Indikation zur Blutentziehung* (Hamburg, 1830).
[259] *Orvosi Tár* III, no. 9 (1831): 288.
[260] *Orvosi Tár* IV, no. 15 (1840): 244-45.

cupping.[261] This underscores the persistence of traditional medical practices and the strong belief in the efficacy of bloodletting among the rural population in Hungary.

One of the reasons why contemporary medical discoveries had so little impact on everyday life can be explained by the shortage of doctors. There were few doctors in the territories of Hungary; in 1720, there were 37 medical doctors, most of them non-Hungarian. In 1830, there were 640 Doctors of Medicine and 1276 surgeons. In 1850 there were 932 Doctors of Medicine and 1014 surgeons.[262] While a limited number of doctors and hospitals could be found in bigger cities, people in smaller towns and villages struggled to receive medical help. The physician József Csorba stated in 1829 that:

> In villages, where the Doctor is 4-5 hours away, what a big problem waiting is, how dangerous the delay! Giving the deep and pretentious science, which involves a lot of thinking, trying to put that into the hands of the common people, or giving prescriptions, would be useless in this regard, and even harmful. But not to teach them what is useful or harmful to them; in their illness, what should they prevent themselves from, what home remedies they should resort to, would it be unloving, even cruelty.[263]

Csorba emphasized the importance of teaching people how to help themselves. This included understanding what precautions to take, what to avoid during illness, and what home remedies they could employ. Csorba also mentioned that there was mistrust towards doctors, especially in smaller communities.[264] The mistrust towards doctors, as I will demonstrate, was very common during this time.

The numbers of doctors increased after Joseph II introduced the *Toleranzpatent* in 1783, officially opening the doors of universities to Jews. This led to the rapid appearance of Jewish students in the Empire's medical faculties and their rise in medical profession. By the end of the eighteenth century, some Jewish students appeared at the Faculty of Medicine in

[261] Ferencz Albert (ed.), *Heves és Külső-Szolnok törvényesen egyesült vármegyéknek leírása* III. (Eger, 1868), 291.
[262] György Gortvay, *Az újabbkori Magyar orvosi művelődés és egészségügy története* I (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1953), 66., 237.
[263] József Csorba, *Hygiastika vagy is orvosi oktatás, mit kell tenni az egésség fenn-tartására, és a' betegség gyógyítására addig is, míg orvos érkezik* (Pest, 1829), VII.
[264] Ibid. IX.

Pest, but even more in the Universities of Vienna and Prague. Though Bohemian and Austrian universities switched to German language education at the beginning of the nineteenth century, Latin was the language of education in Pest until 1843. In the Faculty of Medicine of Pest, between 1825 and 1848, out of 798 students 343 were Jews, so almost 1/3 of the total number of students. The students in surgery preferred to take part in the German-language training as they often came from areas not inhabited by Hungarians.[265] This problem was raised by József Baronyay, the Chief physician of Bereg County's work in 1834, who claimed that the language barrier caused misunderstandings that fuelled mistrust towards doctors:

> It is impossible for the common people of the country to obtain popular medical education, in which the doctors speak foreign languages; and this is precisely one of the main reasons why there are so many village quacks in our country, because the sick people would rather suffer or die, or entrust themselves to the terrible hands of ignorant midwives and quacks, than turn to a Jewish doctor with whom they cannot speak in their own languages.[266]

This, according to Baronyay, contributed to the fact that very few villagers sought professional help. While the medical profession held quackery in disdain, it often represented folk medicine in a more positive light. The doctoral dissertation of Mózes Kremzir, chief physician of Nagykanizsa hospital, has been cited by ethnographers, linguists, and medical historians since the 1870s. In his dissertation in 1837, he not only recognized the effectiveness of many folk medicines and remedies, but also attributed importance to superstitious beliefs. Kremzir found that even if the prescribed medicine did not have a curative effect, confidence in the power of the drug helped even patients who were thought to be incurable:

> A great majority of the folk medicaments are superstitious. We should however note on these superstitious drugs that firstly ... in certain cases they

[265] Károly Kapronczay, 'Adatok a hazai orvosképzésben részt vevő zsidó hallgatókról a században', *Valóság* 60, no. 3 (2017): 54-8., 56.
[266] József Baronyay, *Köznépi orvostudományról* (Pest, 1834), 31.

> can still cure due to the great impression they exercise on the imagination . . . diseases which would resist to healing through the years and were considered as incurable could be eliminated alone owing to the strong faith of the sick in the power of the drug. Secondly, together with the superstitious drugs, certain materials are used which in fact carry out curing… [267]

Kremzir understood the power of belief that could make some folk remedies efficacious, and advocated applying them, if possible, rather than exclude them outright.

Wertner Mór, who gained a medical degree at the University of Vienna in 1872 and lived in Pozsony between 1890 and 1893 as the chief county physician, stated that magical beliefs were still very much involved in medicine:

> The research of today's natural science and medicine cannot take into account mysticism and its branches; in its search for irrefutable truth, it cannot bind itself to dogmas, nor be influenced by the products of a sick imagination, which move in supernatural circles. It is different in practical life; it cannot ignore mysticism and superstition with a noble smile, and therein lies a certain degree of authority that mystical medicine can claim for itself.[268]

Mór claimed that folk medicine had played a significant role in healing since antiquity. These 'home remedies' were often based on superstition and remained popular. Mór also raised concerns about how the ignorance of common people about the practices of modern medicine encouraged the persistence of superstition:

> How could mystical medicine be passed down to posterity? very easy! For obvious reasons, medicine based on natural laws and their research is just as difficult to communicate to the general public through reporting, as today's surgery is through observation […] What was comprehensible and easy to

[267] Mózes Kremzir, *Disquisitio critica quorumdam remediorum popularium Hungaricorum. Dissertatio inauguralis medica = Némelly magyar nép-gyógyszerek biráló vizsgálása* (Pest, 1837) quoted in: Mihály Hoppál and László Törő, 'Népi gyógyítás Magyarországon', *Orvostörténtei Közlemények*, (eds.) József Antall and Béla Buzinkay (Budapest, 1975), 78.
[268] Wertner Mór, *Orvos-régészeti tanulmányok* (Budapest, 1883), 67.

> understand from it, therefore, passed down to the people, while the charms connected with the flourishing insanity of magic could only come down to our times through monopolization.

According to Mór, mystical medicine spread all over the world in idiosyncratic forms arising from regional traditions. He also discussed examples of superstitious medical beliefs from Hungary, observing that 'folk medicine, despite its foolishness and impracticality, is still not as harmful and it can only be considered a dangerous game; but the same cannot be said of medical superstition'.[269] Mór believed that the presence of superstition in professional medicine was more harmful than folk remedies for the health of individuals. Underscoring the deadliness of medical superstition, Mór stated that the level of religious faith and education in the populace was connected to the way some medical professionals irresponsibly drew upon superstitious beliefs for potentially dangerous treatments.[270] In summary, Mór categorized folk medicine as relatively harmless though ineffective, while he condemned superstition in professional medicine as a genuinely hazardous phenomenon with potentially fatal consequences for the patient.

Medical professionals, alongside their exploration of folk remedies and natural cures, demonstrated an ongoing interest in the influence of the supernatural on health practices. While the discourse on vampires was not as prevalent in the nineteenth century as it had been in the eighteenth, evidence of this belief persisted in the writings of Ferenc Xavér Linzbauer (1807-1888). Linzbauer's comprehensive *Codex Sanitario-medicinalis Hungariae* (1868) asked critical questions regarding the classification of vampirism as either superstition or a legitimate disease. Linzbauer stated that bloodsucking was a superstitious practice 'against healthcare', separating the practice into two different vampirisms: '*wampyrismus* created by superstitious belief' and vampirism that is 'based on illness'.[271] This dual classification underscored the complexity surrounding the concept of vampirism, acknowledging both its cultural and medical importance. A positive review of Linzbauer's book appeared in *Allgemeine Wiener medizinische Zeitung* in 1869: the reviewer asserted

[269] Ibid. 67.
[270] Ibid. 70.
[271] Xavér Ferenc Linzbauer, *Codex Sanitario-medicinalis Hungariae* (Buda, 1868), 106.

that it 'deserves full attention from a purely constitutional and medical point of view'.[272] In this case, medical and journalistic discourse validated vampirism as a serious concern, refraining from mockery and acknowledging its significance.

Linzbauer noted the persistence of vampire beliefs in various territories of the Habsburg Empire. However, in most medical discussions, the term 'vampire' was not explicitly employed. Instead, the vampire was replaced with increased references to revenants, witches, and *magia posthuma*, reflecting and validating the notable rise of corpse executions during cholera epidemics. This observation suggests a significant link between medical discourse and popular superstitions. While the explicit use of the term 'vampire' declined in medical discourse, the rise in reference to related supernatural beliefs and superstitious practices suggests a complex interplay between health crises and traditional supernatural beliefs.

Medical interest in the supernatural could be seen as late as 1899. Károly Laufenauer, who was the first in Hungary to thoroughly study hysteria and hypnosis and establish neurological research, published a book about the belief in witchcraft. In 1881, Laufenauer was appointed an attending physician at the capital's Saint Rókus Hospital, and in 1882, promoted to a chair at the newly organized department of psychiatry and medicine of the University of Budapest. According to Laufenauer, the association between hysteria and witchcraft remained constant from the Middle Ages to the present time. He suggested that witchcraft arose from the abnormal functioning of the nerves; this nervous disorder, he explained could appear like an epidemic.[273] His work was published in the *Orvosi Hetilap* at the Hungarian Scientific Academy meeting on December 12, 1898, where Laufenauer discussed the reading of *The Hódmező Vásárhely witch trials (1730-1758)* from a neurological point of view. The medical journal reviewed his lecture:

> The fact that in the last century both educated and uneducated people believed in witches must have had a very deep cultural reason. These trials clearly prove that the main source of the belief in witches lay in tradition passed down from century to century, in education and in the lack of medical

[272] *Allgemeine Wiener medizinische Zeitung* 28 (1869).
[273] Károly Laufenauer, *Előadások az idegélet világából* (Budapest: Természettudományi Könyvkiadó Vállalat 63, 1899).

> knowledge. In the family circle, the little child was scared with witch stories, they heard the same on the school benches, the adults talked about it, because it was discussed quite often during trials. Therefore, it is not surprising that the people, when they fell into a physical or mental illness, or when their property was damaged, immediately attributed it to the Devil and the work of witches.[274]

The review, therefore, acknowledged that in Hungary the belief in witches in the eighteenth century was still very prominent and concerned the academic elite even as late as 1898.

The convergence of traditional and modern medicine

The efforts of enlightened absolutism led to the establishment of the initial elements of the healthcare system, however, the impact of these developments on traditional society was limited. Until 1830s, hospitals were only established in larger cities, and they focused primarily on treating infectious patients instead of those requiring surgery. In smaller villages where doctors were scarce, sick people sought medical assistance from midwives, surgeons, or barbers. Before the nineteenth century, Hungary lacked the personnel and modern medical infrastructure compared to other European countries, which contributed to a unique situation where folk and modern medicine co-existed. Starting from the early nineteenth century, however, the organizational structure of Hungarian healthcare underwent changes that slowly defined the boundaries of official and folk medicine. Like advancements in other natural sciences, medical science experienced significant evolution during this period, shifting from speculative approaches to more practical and evidence-based methodologies. As the fields of folk medicine and modern medicine became increasingly distinct, however, they were not necessarily positioned as antagonistic to one another. Unlike the development of medicine in most European countries, Hungary incorporated certain practices from folk medicine into its modern healthcare system.[275]

At the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth, official healing practices were primarily based on the use of medicinal herbs. Knowledge of the

[274] *Orvosi Hetilap* 42, no. 51 (1898): 641.
[275] Fazekas, 'A népi gyógyítás és a modern orvoslás viszonya a 19. Századi Magyarországon', 183-95.

herbs and medicinal plants were disseminated through medicinal books and family traditions. For example, József Csapó's popular work on herbs appeared across multiple editions. Csapó's book contained information about 1100 plants, presenting the external and internal use of medicinal herbs in a form accessible to laypeople. In the early nineteenth century, Diószegi Sámuel wrote in his *Orvosi füveskönyv* that:

> The adherence to home remedies and resorting to them is inevitably necessary among the people, as it can boldly be said that only a fiftieth part of the nation lives with the assistance of learned doctors and pharmacy remedies, while the rest either relies solely on nature, turns to home remedies, or seeks charlatans...[276]

Bugát Pál, in the 1838 edition of the *Orvosi Tár*, recognized the importance of researching and preserving folk medicine:

> In our country, countless remedies circulate in the hands of the people as home remedies, which every doctor in his own region should not scorn but rather observe, and even appropriately appreciate. Just as the grammarian or the belletrist does not create but cultivates the language of the people, so too can medical science derive its origin from folk-healing knowledge and enrich itself over time...[277]

Bugát encouraged doctors to create topographies and medical site descriptions from their places of practice to catalogue the folk remedies used by traditional healers.

In nineteenth-century Hungary, the folk remedies of peasants could be classified into four categories based on the illnesses addressed. Magical remedies involved non-invasive practices, using incantations, curses, singing, and gestures to dispel illnesses. Mechanical interventions included treatments for physical injuries like dislocations and fractures, as well as therapeutic measures such as massage for back and waist pain. Surface interventions focused on external treatments like inducing sweating, applying compresses, bathing,

[276] Sámuel Diószegi, *Orvosi fűvészkönyv, mint a' magyar füvész könyv praktika része* (Debrecen, 1813).
[277] *Orvosi Tár* I, no. 17 (1838): 273.

smoking, and mending wounds. Internal remedies encompassed the ingestion of healing teas and infusions, reflecting a holistic approach to health issues. These diverse approaches attest to the multifaceted nature of traditional healing practices among peasants during this period.[278]

Midwives also played a crucial role in providing healthcare in nineteenth century Hungary, especially in rural areas where access to formal medical services was limited. Midwives, known as 'bábák' in Hungarian, were skilled practitioners who assisted women during childbirth and provided care for mothers and new-borns. Despite their essential role, midwives faced a complex societal landscape influenced by both traditional folk-healing practices and evolving medical perspectives. Midwives were often deeply integrated into local communities and were trusted figures in assisting with childbirth. They relied on a combination of practical knowledge passed down through generations, personal experience, and sometimes traditional remedies. In the absence of modern medical facilities, midwives became the primary healthcare providers for many women in both urban and rural settings.[279]

The perception of midwives, however, was not universally positive. As evidenced by historical texts like *Malleus Maleficarum* (1486) there were instances where certain individuals, including midwives, were unfairly associated with witchcraft: 'no one does more harm to the Catholic faith than midwives'.[280] Such negative portrayals were rooted in superstitions and contributed to societal scepticism about the practices of midwives. The Hungarian word 'bába' (midwife) is of Slavic origin, where it primarily means 'old woman', but the term also carries the secondary meaning of 'witch'. Similarly, the witches and evil old women in Hungarian folk beliefs were described as 'bába' or 'vasorrú bába' (iron-nosed witch).

[278] Fazekas, 'A népi gyógyítás és a modern orvoslás viszonya a 19. Századi Magyarországon', 186-90.
[279] On midwifes, see: Lilla Krász, 'Quackery versus professionalism? Characters, places and media of medical knowledge in eighteenth-century Hungary', *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science Part C: Studies in History and Philosophy of Biological and Biomedical Sciences* 43 (2012): 700-09; Lilla Krász, *Születés és anyaság a régi Magyarországon: 16. század - 20. Század* (Budapest: Eötvös Loránd Kutatási Hálózat Bölcsészettudományi Kutatóközpont Történettudományi Intézet, 2023); Lilla Krász, 'A női kommunikáció struktúrái a bábaság intézményének 18. századi átalakulásában: Vádaskodás és ellenállás, meggyőzés és együttműködés', *Századok* 153, no. 2 (2019): 291-312.
[280] *Malleus Maleficarum*, quoted from: Christopher S. Mackay, *The Hammer of Witches: A Complete Translation of the Malleus Maleficarum* (Cambridge University Press, 2009), 212.

Due to the influences of Enlightenment-era healthcare reform in the middle of the eighteenth century, significant changes occurred in maternity care and midwifery services in Hungary. The opening of the medical faculty at the University of Nagyszombat initiated the training of healthcare professionals in Hungary, including midwives. The activities of midwives gradually came under state supervision: Maria Theresa's healthcare decree, *Generale Novativum in re Sanitatis* issued in 1770, was the first comprehensive healthcare regulation that legally defined the scope of midwives' work. In their decrees for public health improvement, both Maria Theresa and Joseph II, made it mandatory to educate midwives and subjected their work to periodic medical inspections. The activities of midwives, which had operated for centuries through experiential methods, became subject to theoretical and practical examinations. To officially recognize their work, midwives had to participate in organized education. As a result of these efforts, a small number of certified midwives emerged from university courses; in addition, a larger group of midwives received basic theoretical knowledge, completing courses in obstetrics offered by county physicians or surgeons and undergoing examinations. Despite these improvements, the state of healthcare in villages and smaller towns remained extremely backwards in the second half of the nineteenth century, and contemporary doctors blamed midwives for the deplorable conditions of obstetrics. Despite the opportunity for education, the vast majority of midwives were from the peasant class, possessing practical experience but lacking theoretical knowledge. Many of the accusations of witchcraft resulted from the vulnerable social class position of midwives.[281]

In urban areas, some doctors were resistant to the new techniques of modern medicine and preferred traditional healing practices. These doctors acknowledged the value of scientific research, but they insisted on integrating any new discoveries within the existing framework of popularly supported practices. Rather than breaking with established traditions, these doctors were cautious about fundamentally altering the prevailing medical mindset.[282] The urban centres of Hungary were more receptive to the late eighteenth-century intellectual trends from Western Europe, which challenged the established

[281] Krász Lilla, ''A mesterség szolgálatában': Felvilágosodás és 'orvosi tudományok' a 18. századi Magyarországon, *Századok* 139, no. 5 (2005): 1079-86.
[282] Lívia Kölnei, 'Az alternatív orvoslás kezdetei Magyarországon, Az 'Orvosi Tár' alternatív gyógyítással és egészségmegőrzéssel foglalkozó cikkei, tudósításai 1831 – 1848'', *Orvostörténeti Közlemények* 51, no. 3-4 (2006): 35-77.

principles and methods of medicine. This suggests a growing openness to alternative approaches, as conventional medical practices were perceived as incapable of responding to the urgent health needs of the population. A wave of diverse practices emerged, including Mesmerism, homeopathy, Brownianism, Broussaism, phrenology, and alternative healing practices centred around lifestyle modifications and water cures.[283] This proliferation of unconventional approaches to medicine can be seen as a manifestation of a new form of belief or modern superstition that gained prominence during this period.[284]

Among the alternative healing trends, Brownianism found early popularity in Hungarian territory, emerging as early as the turn of the century. While its recognition undoubtedly did not reach the same level that homeopathy did, it captured the attention of the medical community until it declined in popularity in the 1820s. Mesmerism reached Hungary around the 1810s. The presence of magnetizers applying Mesmer's teachings and methods can be documented throughout the 1830s and 1840s. This healing method flourished from the 1850s within the spiritualist movements and had a significant impact among the bourgeois, intellectuals, and nobility. Homeopathy had the largest following in the 1840s, with dedicated institutions that included both doctors and lay healers. Homeopathy had its heyday in the 1860s and 1870s. Hydrotherapy was particularly attractive to wealthier individuals who could afford the expenses associated with travel and treatment. Hydrotherapy patients tended to belong to the lower and upper-nobility, bourgeoisie, and intelligentsia. Hydrotherapy's popularity peaked in the 1840s, although in the second half of the century, there was a resurgence in interest and use of this therapeutic method.[285]

The convergence of traditional and modern medicine can be linked to the historical context of the nineteenth century when interest and belief in the supernatural intersected with medical discourse. As I will go on to show, this convergence took a distinctive turn in Hungary with the outbreaks of cholera. The devastating impact of cholera, marked by its high mortality rates and the elusive nature of its origins, prompted a dual response within society. On one hand, the medical community grappled with the scientific challenges posed

[283] Brownianism refers to the system of medicine developed by the Scottish physician John Brown. Brownianism is sometimes referred to as the Brunonian system of medicine.
[284] Gabriella Vámos, 'A népi orvoslás és az alternatív gyógymódok kapcsolata', *Művelődés-, Tudomány- és Orvostörténeti Folyóirat* 5, no. 8 (2014): 143-54.
[285] Kölnei, 'Az alternatív orvoslás kezdetei Magyarországon', 35-77.

by the disease, while on the other, individuals sought solace and explanations from supernatural beliefs. During the cholera epidemics of the nineteenth century, medical discourse incorporated both traditional and supernatural elements. In the absence of a clear scientific understanding of the disease, medical practitioners often found themselves resorting to a blend of modern medical interventions and traditional practices. Simultaneously, the general population, faced with the harsh realities of the epidemic, turned to supernatural explanations and remedies to make sense of the inexplicable.

Superstition around strange corpses in the time of cholera

Cholera arrived in Hungary in 1831. One month after the outbreak, on 5 August 1831, reports from 333 regions stated that 11,987 people were infected and 4,876 dead.[286] While cholera caused the greatest devastation in Hungary during the epidemic of 1872-73, it returned in 1886 and 1892 (after the turn of the century, it appeared only a few more times). Public health measures and medical treatments deployed against the cholera pandemic were similar to those taken against the plague. These measures were governed by a health decree issued by Maria Theresa in 1770, which advocated the use of quarantine to slow the spread of disease but limited the isolation period for the sake of trade and economic considerations.[287]

Cholera pandemics struck the rest of Europe from 1832, at the time when European culture and literature celebrated the 'age of beautiful death', where tuberculosis slowly beautified its victim with thin body and pale skin. In contrast to the 'beautiful death' of tuberculosis, cholera killed rapidly with symptoms such as vomiting and diarrhoea, leaving its victims with sunken eyes and blue-grey skin. Cholera shocked people not only due to its fast and gruesome symptoms, but also its origins:

> At the hight of a self-confident area of economic growth, material progress and scientific achievement and expanding European domination over the world, here was a disease that came from the 'uncivilised' East and challenged

[286] Emil Schultheiss and Louis Tardy, 'Short History of Epidemics in Hungary until the Great Cholera Epidemic of 1831 (On the basis of historical sources)', *Centaurus* 11, no. 3 (1966): 279-301.
[287] Balázs, 'Mária Terézia 1770-es egészségügyi alaprendelete', 1014.

> common assumptions of European cultural and biological superiority by demonstrating the vulnerability of even the most civilised people to a disease associated mainly with oriental backwardness.[288]

Even the name given to cholera, such as *cholera asiatica*, Indian cholera, *cholera orientalis* suggests its Eastern origin. The orientalization of cholera imbued the disease with a monstrous otherness, so that medical texts referred to cholera as the 'demon from the East', an 'avenging angel', or 'foul demon's breath'.[289]

Cholera in the nineteenth century, therefore, did not escape magical associations and evoked memories of the revenant histories that characterized the age of Enlightenment and times of plague.[290] Villagers increasingly blamed the dead for spreading the disease, which contributed to a steep rise in executions of the corpses of people who had perished from the disease. In some villages, people believed vampires sucked the blood from cholera victims and injected it into healthy people.[291] Doctors were in almost complete darkness regarding the pathogenesis and cure of cholera. The central question was: was cholera an epidemic disease that spread from person to person? In the absence of an effective research method, doctors and quacks experimented with their own remedies in various places, and obsolete folk cures regained popular appeal and validity. The cause of the disease became known in 1883, which slowly put an end to the debates surrounding its spread.[292] The lack of preparation against the first cholera epidemic garnered much criticism both at the time and later on. The fight against the epidemic was hamstrung by the ignorance of medical professionals, who did not understand the nature of the disease or how to best treat it.

Cholera significantly influenced the foundation of medical institutions, such as the Viennese Doctors' society, which played an important role in developing awareness about public health issues during the second half of the nineteenth century. After the revolution of 1848, the medical faculty changed its policy and the so-called second Vienna School was

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[288] Richard J. Evans, 'Epidemics and Revolutions: Cholera in Nineteenth-Century Europe', *Past & Present* no. 120 (1988): 119-20.
[289] Sarah Schuetze, 'Mapping a demon malady: cholera maps and effect in 1832', *Common-place* (2016) http://commonplace.online/article/mapping-a-demon-malady/ accessed: Jun 12, 2022.
[290] See chapter one.
[291] Briese, *Angst in den Zeiten der Cholera* 1, 388-412.
[292] Kiss, 'Dögvész és epekórság', 21.

established. From the 1850s Vienna had overtaken Paris as the leading European centre for clinical education. Vienna was transformed into a major cultural and intellectual metropolis. In eighteenth-century Vienna, there were fewer hospitals, and they functioned more as nursing homes and resting places for pilgrims than centres of healing (just like elsewhere in Europe). The function of hospitals began to change with the opening of the first public hospital run by the state in 1784, the *Allgemeines Krankenhaus*.[293] The General Hospital supplied the medical faculty with 2000 corpses per year for educational purposes, more than all the other German medical schools put together.[294] Hospitals increasingly focused on practical training and practice-based university education. It is within this contest that these developments laid the basis for the second Viennese school of medicine. The construction of cholera hospitals, which drew on the design of military hospitals to improve efficiency, were part and parcel of an important public campaign to stop the epidemic. Yet, despite the important role they played in combatting the epidemic, they had a bad reputations because they were closed to the public and only allowed doctors in and bodies out.[295]

A similar narrative applied to Hungary from the second half of the eighteenth century, as new hospitals offered institutional care to the sick and poor. The various nursing institutions in the cities emerged from the so-called poorhouses, which were originally created to serve the urban poor, disabled, and unemployed. As medical reports were made mandatory during the regime of Joseph II, it became possible for the legal authorities to control the conditions of professional patient care. Although the care and nursing of the poor continued in hospitals for a long time, their management was placed under medical supervision. The distinction between medical care for ill patients and care for the poor was officially made in Hungary in the 1820s. Until the second half of the nineteenth century, the organization of patient care and the management of hospitals in Hungary remained mostly unchanged and inadequate to the health demands of the population. In 1848, 92 hospitals with approximately 3,000 beds were operating. The cholera epidemic of 1872-1874 caused

[293] Karl Heinz Tragl, *Chronic der Wiener Krankenanstalten* (Vienna: Böhlau Verlag, 2007), 28-33.
[294] Tatjana Buklijas, 'Cultures of Death and Politics of Corpse Supply: Anatomy in Vienna, 1848–1914', *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 82, no. 3 (2008): 572.
[295] Richard J. Evans, *Death in Hamburg: Society and Politics in the Cholera Years*, *1830–1910* (Penguin Publishing Group, 2005), 461.

enormous destruction: the number of deaths nationwide is estimated at 180-250,000 people.[296]

Of the hospitals in the 1870s, only the Rókus Hospital in Budapest was somewhat adequate; according to the press of the time, the other hospitals showed the 'most primitive conditions'.[297] Budapest embarked on a significant hospital development initiative after the epidemic, planning the construction for three public hospitals in 1876. The tender for the first institution was won by Alajos Hauszmann, who carefully studied foreign hospitals and designed the new building in a pavilion system.[298] This new hospital design was developed in France from the eighteenth century and became popularised in England in the middle of the nineteenth century, improving the ventilation and decreasing the mortality rate.[299] The older design of Hungarian hospitals placed patients suffering from various diseases in a large common space, often several people to one bed. Only patients displaying the contagious symptoms of an epidemic disease were quarantined away from the healthier patients. Even as late as May 1895, Dr. Kálmán Müller, director of the Rókus Hospital, complained about overcrowding, writing in the *Pesti Hírlap* on February 17, 1895:

> The overcrowding of patients in hospitals is such, that they have to be accommodated even until the new hospitals are completed. […] at this time, 60-70 recovered patients are discharged from the hospitals every day and the same number are admitted; due to the lack of space - 60-70 patients turned away. It is natural that many of them therefore die.[300]

He also stated that the Üllői hospital, with a capacity for only 560 patients, currently cared for a total of 1,077 of them.[301]

Cholera disproportionally affected the poor, malnourished people living in overcrowded apartments, since the cholera pathogen entered drinking water through the

[296] Kiss, *Dögvész és epekórság,* 22-4.
[297] *Pesti Hírlap* (February 17, 1895).
[298] Katalin Czar, 'Hauszmann Alajos pavilonos kórházterve' (*A természettudományok, a technika és az orvoslás tárgyi és épített emlékei : benne a 'MECHWART-ÉV'*, 2008), 208-9.
[299] G. C. Cook, 'Henry Currey FRIBA (1820–1900): leading Victorian hospital architect, and early exponent of the "pavilion principle', *Postgraduate Medical Journal* 920, Vol. 78 (2002):352–359.
[300] *Pesti Hírlap* (February 17, 1895).
[301] Ibid.

contamination of improperly functioning sewer systems. Doctor János Török reported in 1874:

> Cholera usually destroyed more among the poor in our country, for example, among servants and gypsies who lived crowded together [...] and even more so, in the midst of more filth, in greater poverty, and if they were exposed to fatigue, getting wet, and catching a cold. Ignorance and incomprehension also contribute to the spread of the problem. These were expressed in doubts about the usefulness of the disinfection ordered again and again and the early recommended procedure against diarrhoea, and therefore manifested in an unfathomable indifference to both, as well as in the neglect of patient care, fuelled by the prejudices experienced at the time of every epidemic, which only increased mistrust towards both the authorities and doctors.[302]

Here Török refers to the role that ignorance and lack of understanding played in the spreading cholera. People often had doubts about the effectiveness of preventive measures like disinfection, which resulted in widespread indifference toward the public health measures intended to combat the spread of the disease. The perceived failure of the medical response to the cholera epidemic—which arose from a lack of knowledge, resources, and infrastructure—ingrained prejudices and mistrust towards both authorities and doctors. Török cited his own experience as representative of the many demoralized doctors who were often forced to go from one sceptical district to another, where they 'reluctantly fulfilled the duty imposed on them'.[303]

Many works were written on how to prevent cholera in the Hungarian medical literature of the nineteenth century, which can be divided into three groups.[304] The first

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[302] János Török*, Észleletek az 1872-73-ik évi cholera-járványról orvosgyakorlati és államorvosi megjegyzésekkel*. in: *A magyar orvosok és természetvizsgálók 1874. aug. 24-aug. 29-ig Győrött tartott XVII. nagygyűlésének vázlata és munkálatai*. (ed.) Ipoly Fehér (Budapest: Franklin nyomda, 1874), 215.
[303] Ibid. 226.
[304] See: Friderik Eckstein, *A' járványos cholera' okai, különös tekintettel annak eredetére Pesten.* Orvosi Tár, III. (1831): 148–170; Gábor Pávay, *A kolera, különös tekintettel az óvó rendszabályokra, fertőztelenitésre és Pozsony közegészségügyi viszonyaira* (Pozsony, 1884); Géza Kresz, *Állitsunk fertőtlenitő intézeteket a kolera s egyéb ragályos kórok terjedésének meggátlására* (Budapest, 1886); Lajos Petz, *A győri kolera-járvány 1886-ban* (Budapest: Magyar Orvosi Könyvkiadó Társaság 1887); Aladár Kovách, *A kolera*

group included reports prepared during the epidemic by various levels of the county administration, such as district doctors and chief medical officers. The second group were ethnographic collections. These were not necessarily of contemporary origin, as the data most likely been collected by ethnographers from the second half of the twentieth century. The third group consisted of didactic texts to enlighten people and disseminate interesting information about folk medicine and superstitions.[305] The epidemics sharpened the distinction between professional physicians and quacks, with increasing regulation to improve and socially validate the practices of medical practitioners. However, cholera sources reveal that even the new regulations did not fully separate official medicine from the sway of superstitions and folk medicine, elements of which can be found in the medical journals of the time. These records provide a unique window into the beliefs and practices that shaped healthcare and healing methodologies among diverse communities. While the social distinction between professional doctors and non-professional quacks widened in the nineteenth century, these records suggest that both groups embraced natural and alternative healing practices to a similar extent.

The first Hungarian medical journal, called the *Orvosi és Gazdasági Tudósítások*, was published in 1802. However, only three issues were published, presumably due to the lack of funds and interest. Discourse on cholera was published in *Orvosi Tár*, a medical journal established in 1831 and published on a monthly basis. Both doctor Pál Bugát (the editor) and Ferenc Schedel (future editor of the paper) appealed to the 'Physicians of our country' and criticised the lack of medical collections in Hungarian due to the primacy of German and Latin in education. Foreign medical works were rarely read by Hungarian doctors or surgeons as their knowledge of these languages was insufficient.[306] The *Orvosi Tár* stopped publication by the end of the Hungarian Revolution of 1848 and was replaced by the *Orvosi Hetilap* in 1857, the oldest, still in-print, Hungarian medical publication.

(Budapest,1892); Géza Kresz, *A kolera és az ellene való védekezés* (Budapest, 1892); Gyula Oláh, *A fertőtlenités kolera idejében. Orvosok, hatóságok, községi elöljáróságok és a kolera ellen okszerűen védekezni akaró közönség használatára* (Budapest, 1892); László Markó, *A kolera és védelmezésünk* (Miskolc, 1893); Endre Korbélyi, 'Az 1866-iki járványos cholera elméleti és gyakorlati ismertetése', in: *A magyar orvosok és természetvizsgálók Rimaszombatban tartott 12. nagy gyűlésének munkálatai* (Pest, 1867), 282-285., 283.

[305] More on the sources see: László Somogyi, 'Az 1872-1873. évi kolerajárvány orvos és kultúrtörténeti vonatkozásai', 363-73.

[306] Pál Bugát and Ferenc Toldy, *Hazánk' orvosaihoz* (Pest, November 25, 1830).

In the pages of the *Orvosi Tár* from 1831, Dr. Ferencz Staincz, the second primary care physician of Zabolcs county, addressed 'Cholera in general, and its epidemic in Zabolcs in particular'. Staincz examined the last stages of cholera, stating that death from the disease was often not real death but an apparent death: sometimes, he observed, the corpse's 'fingers, hands, legs and sometimes even the facial muscle [were] convulsing'. Staincz reported cases where the person believed to be dead later woke up:

> The 'dead' need not be buried, as terrible examples would be recorded (from a neighbouring legislature) where all the cholera dead were buried in a common grave, and some climbed out of the grave as they have been awakened by the warmth of all the rotting bodies.

Staincz's work underscored the fear and misconceptions surrounding the handling of cholera victims during the outbreak, reflecting the prevailing beliefs and practices of that time; for example, he reported that:

> Many doctors suggest that the dead who died of cholera should be stabbed in the heart or brain, place a good bunch of poppy seeds in their mouth, or 30-50 drops of blue acid (*acidum hydrocyanicum*).

Staincz described these unconventional practices as 'inhuman' and 'cruel', but the mere fact that he documented them suggests their prevalence within the medical community. According to Staincz, the recommended course of action was to wait for the corpse to emit a foul odour and turn black. Given that this transformation could occur in less than six hours, he advised to promptly bury the deceased without elaborate ceremonies, thus ensuring expediency in the burial process.[307]

Staincz provided criteria to help doctors distinguish the last two stages of cholera from the symptoms of appendicitis. Moreover, he listed some strange practices that could 'heal the cholera': such as covering the whole body of a patient with a sheet and soaking them in a very warm bath with spicy wine and steam or dripping Spanish wax on the

[307] *Orvosi Tár* I, no. 12 (1831): 208-9.

patient's stomach and limbs. After recommending these practices, the author concludes by saying: 'I worked among cholera patients, much more than others, and I have saved many from cholera, or brought them back from the edge of death'.[308] Medical professionals like Staincz, faced with the urgency and severity of the disease, often resorted to unconventional or folk-medicine practices in their attempts to combat cholera. The acknowledgment of having saved patients from the brink of death indicates the desperation and experimentation that characterized early responses to cholera outbreaks, revealing a historical context where medical knowledge was evolving in the absence of established treatments.

The uncertainty surrounding the signs of death and fear of the dead led to a resurgence of corpse executions. Dr. Antal Cserszky (1779–1834), a Doctor of Medicine and surgeon who held his medical degree from the University of Vienna, was the official chief physician of Bereg county and a member of the St. Petersburg Academy of Medicine and Surgery from 1811. Cserszky wrote about corpse executions in *Orvosi Tár* in 1832:

> There are still some very silly people in our noble county, who, according to the common old religion, attribute the cause of sudden death to the murderous soul believed to return to the body after the death. The body of such a person would be dug out of the grave, cut into pieces, the head would be placed between the legs, the body would be placed in four sacks and tied back into the coffin. Such a case happened in Volócz, where the graves of a man and a woman were dug up at the beginning of August, and the fact that no-one died afterwards from unknown causes was attributed to the performance of this act![309]

Cserszky highlighted the existence of superstitious beliefs and practices in this county, which attributed sudden deaths to a vengeful soul returning to the body after death. This belief led to the exhumation and ritual execution of the deceased as a means to prevent further harm or misfortune. As I discuss in chapter one, similar beliefs about victims transforming into revenants or walking corpses had emerged during eighteenth-century plague outbreaks.

[308] Ibid. 210.
[309] *Orvosi Tár* II, no. 5 (1832): 147-8.

These revenants were thought to be responsible for spreading the disease and causing more deaths. To prevent further harm, communities executed these revenants through grisly public spectacles, such as decapitation or staking.

Just like with the plague in the eighteenth century, many nineteenth-century villagers held the belief that cholera could be halted by executing the corpse of the person thought to be responsible for spreading the disease. This practice stemmed from the notion that the deceased person's spirit continued to be a source of danger and that their physical body needed to be destroyed to prevent further outbreaks. Across the eighteenth and nineteenth century, the rituals surrounding the treatment of the deceased reflect a belief system driven by fear and a desperate attempt to protect the community from harm. The exhumation and ritualistic treatment of the bodies that Cserszky described in Bereg county served a similar purpose, aiming to prevent further misfortune by executing the vengeful corpses believed to be causing sudden deaths.

According to a report of Dr. József Horváth, the chief physician of Zabolcs county, magical and superstitious beliefs could be observed among the educated. He reported in the *Orvosi Tár* in 1846:

> It should be noted that, even from the higher circles, they [elite] receive a very ridiculous superstition of the lowest of the people. It is commonly believed that no one should be praised for their good health because it will cause misfortune or illness; and according to this, evil-minded people can do a lot of harm. In the Russian language, for this harming act this verb*: sglásit* (from this word "*glaz*"= eye) are used; in Hungarian: *megigézni* [to enchant] (someone with their eyes); in French: *le regard du mauvais oeil;* in Italian *gettatura* or *occhita*. [310]

Horváth explained that people associated the cause of illness with the 'evil eye' or *menia sglásili* (meaning 'I was enchanted' or 'they looked at me with the bad evil eye'). Horváth's observations regarding the presence of magical and superstitious beliefs among the educated adds an intriguing dimension to the discussion.

[310] *Orvosi Tár* III, no. 11 (1846): 169-170.

Horváth concluded with this statement: 'This superstitious belief did not reach all the upper circles, but it is not completely free from it either'.[311] Similar superstitious practices are reported in the writings of Pál Plosz, a university professor and member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. He observed that nurses in epidemic hospitals, protected themselves against the cholera outbreak in 1848, by drinking wine steeped in the spicy bags that had been placed on the patient's belly.[312] Superstitious practices persisted even in professional healthcare settings, stemming from a combination of cultural traditions, personal beliefs, and a sense of desperation during an epidemic. The presence of magical or superstitious beliefs among educated individuals during times of crisis questioned the narrative that education alone could eliminate such irrational beliefs.

According to other sources, superstitious beliefs permeated the entire Habsburg Monarchy. On 6 September 1831, the royal cholera commissioner Baron Lőrinc Orczy reported that the Romanian inhabitants of Arad County were digging up the bodies of those who had died from cholera, because the disease was thought to be caused by witches or animal-shaped vampire. At night, horses were led to the cemetery, and the graves that the horses refused to jump over were identified as contaminated and the corpse exhumed. (This practice can also be found in the eighteenth-century records, according to Magyary-Kossa Gyula). This unusual practice was rooted in the belief that horses possessed an innate sensitivity to spiritual energies and could detect the lingering presence of the deceased and other malevolent entities.[313] After excavating the corpse, villagers pierced with it iron forks, removed the heart, and smeared themselves with the blood of the corpse. Such cases occurred in Arad, Gyulica, Vadász and Kerülős. In Kerülős, for example, a team of about sixty people dug up the dead despite a ban by the local Catholic priest and officials.[314]

Around 1833, the local Walach (i.e. Romanian) population in Magyarbénye (Biia) believed that a woman (a convicted witch) had killed several people after her death. The villagers opened her grave, revealing a body that looked almost alive: red on one side and yellow on the other, with a small tail that served as the physical mark of a vampire. The villagers immediately turned the corpse over onto its stomach and drove a stake through its

[311] Ibid.
[312] Dr. Plosz, 'Közlés a choleráról', in: *Orvosi Tár* IV. (1848)
[313] Magyary-Kossa, Magyar Orvosi Emlékek IV, no. 277 (Budapest: Magyar Orvosi Könyvkiadó Társulat, 1940), 87.
[314] Linzbauer, *Codex sanitario-medicinalis Hungariae* III/4, no. 2858 (1861): 315.

back. According to the report, the corpse released a deep sigh that was thought to be the moment when the soul left the body. This incident occurred during a cholera epidemic and the case study was published by Friedrich Müller, a teacher in Segesvár, in an 1857 collection of witch tales.[315]

During epidemics, the explanatory power and widespread appeal of superstitious beliefs greatly increased. János Varga, in his 1877 compendium of folk customs the *Book of Superstitions*, wrote the following about cholera:

> While the wiser man, knowing the cause of the trouble, seeks the right remedy for it; the superstitious man explains the cause and its cure with superstitious beliefs. Yet epidemics have the most natural explanation and cause. Deteriorated water: debris and fumes coming out of rotting bodies that poison the air; immoderate enjoyment of unripe fruits; all are dangerous causes of epidemic diseases. In times of war, or famine, when the decay of human corpses who have died in battle or starvation and have been buried for some time, usually poisons the life-giving air in such a way that the epidemic is a natural consequence of war and the devastation of starvation.[...] This is how cholera originates and spreads; and it is a rather sad thing that such a trouble is attributed by the great mass of the superstitious people to the witches and the wicked.[316]

According to Varga, epidemics such as cholera arose from various natural factors. Foul water, decaying bodies, and contaminated air and food all serve as possible causes for epidemic diseases. In times of war or famine, the decay of unburied corpses poisoned the life-giving air, thus leading to the spread of disease. These factors provided a natural explanation for the origin and propagation of diseases like cholera. Varga expressed his dismay at the majority of superstitious individuals who attributed disease to witches and wicked forces, registering his frustration with the prevalence of irrational beliefs that attribute supernatural causes to natural phenomena. Varga advocated for a more rational

[315] Friedrich Müller, *Beiträge zur Geschichte des Hexenglaubens und des Hexenprozesses in Siebenbürgen*. (Braunschweig: 1854) in: *Pesti Napló*, no. 275 (1857).
[316] János Varga, *Babonák könyve* (Arad, 1877), 36.

understanding of epidemics that used scientific knowledge to develop appropriate remedies. By presenting the rational perspective in contrast to superstitious beliefs, Varga highlighted the importance of scientific and evidence-based inquiry in addressing epidemics.

Varga's book was written in response to a 300-forint prize set by Hungarian doctors and naturalists for the composition of a scholarly work on the superstitious beliefs and folkloric customs of village life. The prize intended the book for educated readers as a way to better understand the nineteenth-century peasant who still professed the same superstitious beliefs from centuries ago.[317] Varga's prize-winning book was filled with accounts of popular superstitious beliefs. The fact that the book was written in response to a prize set by Hungarian doctors and naturalists revealed a deliberate effort to bridge the gap between the educated audience and the realm of folk beliefs and customs. Despite nineteenth-century progress in education and medicine, superstitious beliefs remained rooted among the people of the country. Both the prize and Varga's book suggest that the educated elite did not dismiss these beliefs but attempted to understand them as a significant (if problematic) factor in the evolving society.

One of Varga's stories about a settlement in Temes county recounts how a village 'seer' accused a witch of introducing cholera to the village. According to the 'seer', the cholera would remain until the witch, who recently died from cholera herself, was exhumed and the villagers ate from her heart. The villagers, led by an officer, dug out the corpse, cut out the heart and divided it amongst themselves. Interestingly, neither the seer nor the village officer ate a piece of the heart. Those who had consumed the heart died shortly afterwards: 'if they had not already been infected by the terrible disease, they definitely infected themselves from the consumption of the rotting, sick part of the body'. The story soon spread to the authorities: the seer and the officer were arrested and later sentenced to prison.[318] This account illustrates how crisis can drive desperate people toward superstitious beliefs that encourage extreme and potentially harmful practices. Fearful of the cholera epidemic, the villagers turned to supernatural explanations and ritualistic acts as a means of protection. However, the consequences of such actions were devastating. For Varga, the example served as a stark reminder of the dangers associated with superstitious beliefs and the potential harm that could arise from acting upon them without scientific

[317] Ibid. V.
[318] Ibid. 36.

evidence or rational thinking. This case highlighted the risks involved in consuming decaying human flesh, which could lead to the spread of diseases or further health complications.

There were reports of similar acts in other settlements in the country which were committed out of superstitious faith. Varga commented:

> It is a common saying that not even an animal hurts the dead of its own species; only humans can be so foolish as to sink below the animal, to disturb the corpse of their fellow human being in their grave, and -even to describe it is awful! - even eat it.

Varga also recounted a tale about another unnamed village, where the rumour persisted that the cholera would not subside until the body of an elderly woman, who had recently died of cholera and was believed to be a witch, was exhumed, and buried on her stomach. Therefore, the villagers dug up the rotting corpse and reburied it face down.[319] Varga's commentary critiqued these superstitious practices, highlighting the irrationality and moral degradation involved in disturbing the deceased and cannibalising human remains.

Peasant beliefs often anthropomorphized various diseases, assigning them human or animal characteristics. This anthropomorphising helped people to conceptualize and understand diseases, making them more tangible and relatable within their worldview. Peasant beliefs often depicted cholera as an exhausted, emaciated figure, taking on the form of a thin, shrunken man. This representation reflected the physical toll that cholera took on the human body, which caused severe dehydration and weight loss. By personifying cholera in this way, peasants created an image that could be understood and feared. Moreover, humanizing the disease allowed individuals to attribute intentions to cholera, making it easier to comprehend its bodily effects as a form of wickedness. Cholera also appeared in animal form: during a cholera outbreak in Debrecen, people saw a strange, human-like creature roaming around the town, which the locals thought was cholera itself. The creature was later captured and beaten to death. The corpse was taken to the city in triumph, where it was quickly revealed that the murdered 'cholera devil' was an Italian traveling circus monkey who had escaped a few days earlier.[320] While cholera could appear

[319] Ibid.
[320] Ibid. 37.

in human or animal form, it was also believed to originate from the attacks of demons or by demonic possession of the body. However, the narratives about cholera demons are almost exclusively from Transylvania, Bukovina, and Moldavia and reflect a strong Romanian influence. The names of demons and diseases were mixed over time. For example, the word *csuma* first meant plague and, later, cholera. The word also had other meanings: one well-documented defensive ritual was that if the community was threatened by an epidemic, they wove a 'plague garment' or 'cholera robe' for the demon. This could be understood both as a means of appeasing the demon, and as a sacrificial offering- this was a common Balkan belief.[321]

At the time of the first cholera epidemic, riots broke out all over Europe due to significant social tensions, and Hungary was no exception. Cholera, just like elsewhere in Europe, mostly spread among the lower classes, which increased the already high tensions and mistrust towards the elite:

> Cholera did not demand as many victims from the noble class as they were living in better health conditions, and therefore the people suspected the lords and the doctors of poisoning the people. It degenerated into a bloody rebellion, especially in the counties of Sáros, Zemplén, Szepes and Abauj (today in Northeastern Slovakia) where the people set fire to the noble's gates in rage and murdered them. In one village (Mernye), nine people were beaten to death by a rebel crowd at once, including the chief judge, the clerk, the priest, and a 15-year-old girl was empaled on a stake. The rebellious people did so, burning alive the lords and doctors of the county, or cutting the unfortunate victims to pieces and bury them.[322]

Members of the nobility, who were spared from the high mortality rates of cholera due to their better living conditions, became targets of suspicion and blame for the common people. The suspicion arose from the discrepancy between the number of cholera victims

[321] More in: Pócs Éva, *Népi vallás és mágia Közép-Kelet-Európában – Válogatott tanulmányok II.* (Budapest: L'Harmattan, 2019), 46-47., 99-101., 106.
[322] István Bálint Nagy, *Kolerajárványok Csanád Vármegyében, Adatok Csanád Vármegye Közegészségügyének Történetéhez* (Makó, 1928), 74.

among the nobility and the general population. The people, fuelled by fear and a sense of injustice, began to suspect that the nobles and doctors were intentionally poisoning the population.[323] This mistrust and resentment escalated into a violent action against the noble class. Overall, the report revealed the devastating consequences that could arise when fear, suspicion, and resentment took hold of a community in the face of a deadly epidemic.

Distrust towards the elite and the professional healthcare system was widespread during the times of cholera. Even doctors expressed suspicion toward certain medical professionals in their own field. Medical advice could be found in newspaper articles, while cautionary notes were often provided regarding quackery and ineffective remedies. Dr. Bflvi S. composed an article for the newspaper *Vasárnapi Újság* in 1855 that contained advice for protecting oneself during a cholera outbreak and advice about certain practices. The article suggested that even the poor should enjoy their lentil and bean soup but recommended removing indigestible parts while cooking. It emphasized moderation in all things, especially in the simplicity and brevity of dinners. The text also cautioned against blaming harmless water for cholera and warned against excessive consumption of alcoholic beverages during the epidemic. It pointed out that being accustomed to wine and beer did not mean one should entirely abstain during the outbreak, but rather to still enjoy alcohol in moderation. The article also stressed the importance of ventilation in one's living space and attention to the cleanliness of clothing for the proper functioning of the skin. Bflvi S. suggested:

> Remove those who do not contribute but are likely harmful quacks, who pile him up with various ineffective remedies. Immediately summon a doctor in whom you have trust and follow his beneficial advice because only a qualified professional can thoroughly understand the nature, focus, degree, the manner of the impact of life force, and the constitution of the sick in relation to the quality of the disease-causing agent. Align the medical prescription with these most harmoniously.

Bflvi S. advised against relying on harmful quacks who may offer ineffective and potentially harmful remedies. Instead, he urged seeking the guidance of a qualified doctor, underscoring the importance of consulting a medical professional for accurate information

[323] Ibid. 75-6.

and appropriate treatment during a health crisis.[324] Bflvi S.'s article provided a comprehensive set of recommendations that encompassed dietary choices, hygiene, alcohol consumption, and medical consultation during a cholera outbreak. The underlying theme throughout was one of moderation, informed decision-making, and a reliance on qualified medical professionals for guidance.

The fact that Bflvi S. had to urge his readership to trust doctors' attests to a larger societal and cultural mistrust of the medical profession. The lack of trust in doctors was apparent in the reports from *Magyar Újság* regarding a court case involving Dr. Dániel Fazekas and Kornél Lipthay. In this case, Fazekas accused Lipthay of blackmail, as Lipthay had threatened to expose him for allegedly practicing without genuine medical qualifications. During the court proceedings, Lipthay expressed his disdain for doctors, stating,

> I do not have much respect for doctors; I consider antiseptic to be a fraud, I think influenza is a scam, previously called a common cold; cholera, too, was just invented by doctors to cater to the interests of brandy producers.[325]

This statement not only reflected Lipthay's personal scepticism towards the medical profession but also echoed a broader sentiment of mistrust in the medical field during that period. Such attitudes may have contributed to individuals seeking alternative or unconventional sources of healthcare.

In 1899, *Magyar Újság* reported a disturbing incident involving József Zsurka, who was believed by villagers to be returning from the grave at night and potentially spreading the cholera epidemic in the village. The fear surrounding his supposed nocturnal activities led the entire village to take drastic measures, enforcing what the villagers referred to as the 'superstition law'. According to this law, the villagers believed that the souls of the deceased, especially those suspected of returning as malevolent spirits, could be bound by piercing their hearts with an iron tool, effectively nailing them to the coffin. The enactment of such a village 'superstition law' reflected the relation between fear arising from the cholera epidemic and the prevalence of superstition in shaping community decisions. In

[324] *Vasárnapi Újság*, no. 35 (September 2, 1855).
[325] *Magyar Újság* 7, no. 137 (May 1898): 9-10.

response to these fears, close relatives of Zsurka took matters into their own hands. Armed with shovels, hoes, and lanterns, they ventured into the cemetery at night and exhumed the three-month-old corpse to carry out the gruesome act of piercing the heart. The newspaper's commentary added an eerie touch to the narrative by noting that, following this macabre intervention, the spirit of Zsurka had not manifested itself again. [326] This statement might be read as containing a degree of irony that highlights the absurdity of the villagers' beliefs and actions; nevertheless, the statement attests to the power of superstition in shaping the behaviour and decisions of peasant communities, even in the face of a deadly epidemic like cholera.

J. H., a pioneer of geographical science in Hungary and a member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, summarised ordinary people's attitude toward medical care in 1867. Hunfalvy explained that the population was generally satisfied with the limited number of medical professionals in their county. The peasants, he believed, lacked a strong desire for medical attention. The poverty of the population contributed to their contentment with fewer medical resources. Professional medical attention was reserved for rare and serious cases, suggesting that routine healthcare was not a common priority. Traditional or folkloric remedies were still prevalent and tended to be the first choice for common ailments. Moreover, if modern medical treatments failed to provide relief, people reverted to folk remedies. Between the prohibitive cost and the failure to cure all patients, modern medicine was treated with a degree of mistrust and suspicion by the general population. Only wealthier and more educated individuals were mentioned as seeking treatment. Trust in modern medical treatments appeared limited, leading to a preference for alternative methods unless a clear diagnosis and prognosis were provided by medical professionals in advance. [327]

Mistrust was not only directed towards medical professionals but also towards the government. In 1892 *Népszava* reported that the Russian government was involved in a systematic effort to subdue the Hungarian population by fostering superstition and alcoholism. Additionally, the author confirmed a popular rumour that doctors poisoned or

[326] *Magyar Újság* 8, no. 63 (March 1899): 9.
[327] János Hunfalvy (ed.), Gömör és Kishont törvényesen egyesült vármegyék leírása (Pest, 1867), 120-1.

prematurely buried poor patients while curing the wealthy for their own gain.[328] This rumour reflected the fact that trust in the medical establishment was divided along class lines, with rural peasants and villagers primed to view the profession as corrupt. Unhelpful and even satirical advice regarding dealing with cholera also appeared in newspapers such as *Szegedi Híradó*. The advice was presented in a humorous and sarcastic manner, intending to make light of the seriousness of cholera:

> If someone is so afraid of cholera that it has become an obsession for them to the point of panicking, swallowing two or three doses of rat poison ensures that they will not die of cholera.

Framing the advice to those in a state of panic by cholera, the article advised people to 'cease to live for a week and then revive again'.[329] The satirical suggestions poked fun at the irrationality of extreme fears and offered absurd solutions as a form of commentary or social critique at a time of crisis.

Similarly, an article in *Borsszem Janko* from 1872, titled 'The most reliable cholera remedies' listed bizarre ideas on how to avoid the disease. For instance:

> Make a small bag from fine cotton and sew it with light blue beads on the outside; put the fresh content of three extinguished tallow candles in this bag; then tie the bag under your nose and wear it while you are on the street.[330]

It is very clear that this suggested remedy lacked any scientific basis for its effectiveness. The combination of a bag, light blue beads, and tallow candles satirized the superstitious folk remedies that opposed solutions based on medical knowledge. Another example from *Hon* (1873) described a tragicomic incident in Debrecen where a Jewish woman fell victim to cholera and was later found to be a man. The community's response to this discovery was particularly noteworthy. The belief spread that the cholera had, in some inexplicable manner, transformed her from a woman into a man.[331] Blending superstition and fear, this belief reflected the mysterious nature of the disease by showing its ability to transform the

[328] *Népszava* 20, no. 30 (July 1892): 4.
[329] *Szegedi Híradó* 14, no. 135 (November 1872): 2.
[330] *Borsszem Jankó* 5, no. 255 (November 1872): 8.
[331] *A Hon* 11, no. 200 (September 1873): 2.

individual's gender.

In Hungary, as elsewhere, strict lockdown and isolation was more likely to occur in the cities, while the implementation of even minor measures such as disinfection was likely to cause rebellion in the villages. Even during the epidemics that occurred in the second half of the nineteenth century, implementing strict public health measures often caused social unrest.[332] The mysterious disease was accompanied by unfamiliar measures such as quarantine and disinfection, which prohibited traditional customs related to death. The social tensions increased with the implementation of strict regulations on dealing with the sick and the dead. Horányi's research shows the effect of cholera on death rites and mourning in Hungarian communities, and he argued that the provisions aimed at severing the patient from the family circle were met with fierce resistance among the people and only served to strengthen family ties. While visiting the sick and the dead was forbidden, people often declared that they would rather die than stop visiting their loved ones.[333]

Members of the lower classes stuck to their traditional cultural practices, and they insisted on their burial rituals. László Marko, a chief physician of Borsod county, cited the following case in 1892:

> The wakes and the vigils for the dead must be prevented. Due to the government decree, the mortuaries required to be in the cemeteries of all villages and used, if necessary, on such occasions! […] Burial should be done within 36 hours. The gravel pit should be at least 2 meters deep. I am well aware that all these measures cut deep into religious and reverential sentiments; but we often find that power mitigated with tact can overcome what seems impossible.[334]

The extension of civil rights to Jews and their integration into Central European communities added another layer of burial practices, such as interment on the day of death before sunset. This rule was based on the idea that if the body was not covered by earth, the soul would remain partly attached to the body and continue to linger after burial. During

[332] See: Petz, *A győri kolerajárvány 1886-ban.*
[333] Ildikó Horányi, 'A nagy járványok hatása a halotti rítusokra és a gyászreakciókra', *Kharón* 3, no. 3 (1999): 71-100.
[334] Markó, *A kolera és védekezésünk*, 40.

this time, Jews believed the dead could even feel the pain of bodily decay. Therefore, methods such as exhumation or autopsy that would further increase this pain were strictly prohibited.[335]Jewish traditions also came into conflict with official burial regulations, especially when the fear of apparent death extended the interval from death to burial to a minimum of two to three days. Jewish medical practices 'involve[d] magical activities, sorcery and demonology—referred to by nineteenth-century doctors as a manifestation of superstition'.[336] Social tensions were increased by the conflict between strict regulations and the rigorous rules regarding burials and funerals in Jewish communities.

'When is death?' The problems of apparent death

In Europe, the phenomenon of apparent death and premature burial had been a source of concern for centuries.[337] This fear grew into one of the greatest horrors of nineteenth-century Europe, especially during the cholera epidemics. Among southern Serbs, Croats, Romanians, and northern Slavs, fear of premature burial intersected with the fear of the returning dead, which became amplified by the lore and widespread belief in vampires. Due to the uncertainty over the signs of death, the phenomenon of apparent death turned into a problem for both educated medical professionals and uneducated peasants, who approached the blurred line between life and death from very different angles.[338] The emergence of the topic of apparent death also forced the governing elite, intellectuals, and doctors to educate the public. During the epidemics of plague and cholera, corpses had to be buried fast, even before the signs of bodily decay. In the nineteenth century, there was still no universal and agreed upon signs of death, and surgeons and physicians often warned about the hazy boundaries between life and death.[339]

[335] Mordechai Breuer, *Modernity Within Tradition: The Social History of Orthodox Jewry in Imperial Germany* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), 257.
[336] Marek Tuszewicki, 'German Medicine, Language and in Popular Medical Practices of the Eastern European Jews (Nineteenth to Twentieth Century)', in: *Jewish Medicine and Healthcare in Central Eastern Europe Shared Identities, Entangled Histories,* (eds.) Fritz Dross, Marcin Moskalewicz and Ute Caumanns (Springer International Publishing, 2018), 71.
[337] See chapter one.
[338] Václav Grubhoffer, 'Fear of Seeming Death in Eighteenth-Century Europe', in: Albreich Classen (ed.) *Death in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Times, The Material and Spiritual Conditions of the Culture of Death* Vol. 16 (De Gruyter, 2016), 491.
[339] Horányi, *A látszatos halál*, 18-25.

From the 1830s onwards, the issue of apparent death became a major focus of Hungarian medical life and public interest. The reasons for this can be explained by the reactions to scientific and theological progress in the course of the nineteenth century, including the development of romantic literature. The rise of romantic literature and its exploration of themes related to morbidity, fear, and the supernatural had a significant impact on the public consciousness. Romanticism often delved into the darker aspects of human existence, including the exploration of death, the afterlife, and the mysterious or uncanny. The fear of being buried alive, which is closely associated with apparent death, became an integral part of romantic aesthetics. The romantic movement, therefore, played a role in popularizing the fear of premature burial, so it is no coincidence that the development of Hungarian romantic literature coincides with the rise of writings dealing with apparent death.[340] This fear found expression not only in literature but also in other cultural and intellectual spheres. From the 1830's, works discussing the issue of apparent death were among the chosen topics of university medical doctoral theses.[341]

Investigations of premature burial showed the widespread fear of being buried alive. For example, Farkas Horváth, a doctor from Kanizsa, wrote a letter to the County of Zala in 1837 that related some strange events that took place in the town's cemetery. A committee was sent to investigate in 1838, which included District Judge Ferenc Koppány, Chief Servant Judge Zsigmond Rajky, and County Chief Medical Officer József Fleischhacker. These men questioned the witnesses about a story that spread after the death of the local villager Ignác Polák:

> A certain Ignác Polák, a soap maker from Kanizsa, who lived a very disorderly life in other respects and was drunk every day, suddenly became very ill on 13 June and began to vomit blood, and during the vomiting he fainted and fell into a coma, but later a *Slávy* surgeon helped him regain consciousness. However, the next day, on June 14th, the vomiting came back, and at that time he really died, and he was buried on 16 June. The widow of this Ignác Polák, together with her many children, fell into great misery and mourned bitterly this sad situation; in this state, some women who went to comfort her

[340] Ibid., 89-90.
[341] See: József Korompay, *Orvosi értekezés az álhalálról* (Buda, 1836); Franciscus Walla, *Dissertatio inauguralis medica de asphyxia* (Pest, 1840).

> wanted to make her believe that her husband had not really died, but that he had only feigned death both the first and the second time, and it is believed that he was buried alive. This was later accepted as fact and spread throughout the city and after the news that sounds had been heard from the grave, on 19 June a large number of people went to the cemetery and demanded that the grave of the named Ignác Polák be dug up.

This story reflected the prevailing superstitions and anxieties of the time, emphasizing the profound impact that such beliefs could have on the community. It also captured the level of distress experienced by individuals who had recently lost loved ones and the damage rumours and unfounded claims could wreak at times on vulnerable people. According to the story, when the judge saw that the villagers had already started to exhume the body of Ignác Polák, he sent for the county surgeon. He also heard rumours about strange noises coming from the grave of a pregnant women named Katalin Németh who was buried on 6 June. The deputy judge, therefore, ordered the exhumation of Katalin Németh.[342]

The surgeon attached a medical report after the exhumation of the corpses, which included the following observation regarding the corpse of Katalin Németh: 'On this occasion, it was said that Katalin Németh, wife of Jósef Lepold, was screaming out from the grave. She was taken out of the grave in her coffin for examination'. The medical report concluded that both Ignác Polák and Katalin Németh were buried dead. The rumour undoubtedly stemmed from the fact that the priest did not adhere to the prescribed procedures for handling the deceased bodies, failing to observe the required 48-hour waiting period before burial. The surgeon blamed the priest who attended the pregnant woman's burial only 23 hours after her death. The surgeon wrote:

> That is why 48 hours were ordered for the funeral, but maybe in some cases, even that time is proven not enough, as you can see from the history of Transylvania, you can read this from the papers of 1836 and 1837. So, our Laws are sacred, but where? Only on paper.[343]

[342] MNL OL, Helytartótanácsi Levéltár, Magyar Királyi Helytartótanács, Departamentum sanitatis (C 66) 1838. F. 8. p. 24 a.
[343] Ibid.

This case showed that breaking the 48-hour moratorium on burial, mandated in Maria Theresa's *Generale normativum in re sanitatis* (1771), led to the belief in live burial. These examples attest to the clash between regulations and the local burial practices. *Generale normativum* already takes into account the danger of infection, so it excludes those who died of an epidemic disease.[344] The storage of corpses was obviously a big problem for the population, even if from 1771 a decree required the construction of mortuary chambers in the cemetery so that the deceased were not kept in their own homes.

The social unrest arising from the timing of burials arose from the fact that medical knowledge could not mark the exact line between life and death. An incident in the spring of 1841 made the problem of apparent death a public issue when the details of József Bay's strange funeral were published in *Pesti Hírlap*, a popular, widely circulated newspaper. A report of Munkács on the 22 February of 1841 related a 'terrible incident' that happened in the village called Surány. A wealthy person of the village died and was buried in the family crypt. 2 years later, when workers wanted to take another corpse to the crypt, they found his body in a strange position:

> And there he came back to life and tried to escape by force. He tore open the heavily nailed top of both coffins and even tore off a piece of plank in his strain. He got out of the coffin and climbed to the door (where he was found) where he died of hunger and thirst and desperate in unsuccessful screams. How long he was trying to escape? In what kind of horrible pain, he must have died? […] why do they not examine the dead before burying in our country? Why are they buried before the (signa mortis) that is the clear sign of the death? If wealthy people get buried like this, are these cases going to happen more often in poorer areas?[345]

The story highlighted the general fear of live burial, especially as people became aware of the lack of consensus in the medical field about the timing of death. The story also raised concerns about the social disparities that raised the potential for similar cases to occur more

[344] Judit Lakner, *Halál a századfordulón* (Budapest: História, 1993), 41.
[345] *Pesti Hírlap*, no. 23 (1841): 187.

frequently in poorer areas. If wealthier individuals did not receive thorough examinations and precautions before burial, then what kind of treatment could the poor expect from the medical establishment? Distressing questions about premature burial reflected the need for improved practices and protocols surrounding pronouncing someone dead and burial procedures.

Despite delaying burial for three days after death, a significant number of individuals believed that this timeframe was insufficient. Lajos Kossuth (politician and governor-president of the Kingdom of Hungary during the revolution of 1848–1849) commented on this apparent-death case in the *Pesti Hírlap*. Kossuth emphasized the need to keep the necessary burial time, which depended on the rotting of the dead body:

> Medical science is generally forced to admit that death has no other reliable proof than putrefaction. Therefore, we should not understand the prohibition that one should not bury before three days, that it is allowed after three days, regardless of whether there are signs of death or not. In this regard, it becomes necessary to inspect the dead body.[346]

In his opinion, recognizing the rotting of a corpse is a particularly difficult task, which required specialists with a medical diploma. István Széchenyi (a Hungarian politician) accused his political rival of scare tactics by stoking the fear of live burial that was already widespread in the public consciousness.[347] Post-mortem examinations, therefore, became mandatory nationally and a dead person could not be buried earlier than two days. In most places, however, this was not possible. Modern morgues suitable for observation had not been built in Hungary (while modern facilities of this kind were routinely installed in Western Europe). Instead of implementing new, unenforceable rules, Kossuth argued for stronger enforcement of the existing ones: he wanted to create rooms in every settlement where the dead would be isolated and observed until they started to decay.

In medical discourse, a similar concern regarding the timing of burial is evident. In his medical dissertation on apparent death in 1844, József Kocsis stated: 'between the life in passing and the real death, there is also an intermediate state, which we call apparent

[346] *Pesti Hírlap*, no. 3 (1841): 18.
[347] Széchenyi István, *A' Kelet Népe* (Pest, 1841).

death, in which life and death reach each other'.[348] The author expresses his frustration that poor people strongly believed that 'one cannot help one who must die'. He cited this as the reason why many people refused medical help and urged pastors and teachers to enlighten them.[349] Kocsis also declared that, since putrefaction was the only true sign of death, it was very important to wait until the visual and olfactory symptoms began. Kocsis, similar to Kossuth, did not believe that bodily decay commenced earlier than three days in every case: 'rather, this should be enshrined in law: no one should be buried before the body begins to rot'.[350] Kocsis also urged the construction of mortuaries and argued that it would benefit wealthier people more than others, because of their lifestyle, they were more likely to have illnesses that could cause apparent death.[351] Recognizing the financial burden that building a morgue entailed, Kocsis suggested restricting funeral pomp, fortunes spent on tombstones, coffins, and expensive clothes at funerals: he lamented that 'the vanity of the world blinds and extinguishes the world of reason' and that the funeral customs of the Jews were to be commended, since they buried their dead in a very simple ways.[352]

From the middle of the nineteenth century, funerals and mourning became more and more ostentatious, with large-scale funerals and monuments for the wealthy; indeed, funerals provided a good opportunity to show off wealth. Hanák states that this also happened in Austria-Hungary: 'Death cost money, a lot of money, and it became increasingly expensive as every stage from the final heartbeat to the grave and beyond became commercialized'.[353] Due to the growing bureaucratic control of graveyards, death and its rituals were transformed by the commercialization of burials. As a consequence of urbanisation, in bigger towns and cities, death started to belong only to families and friends rather than the whole community. The ritual of mourning also changed as the long mourning periods became formalised in a few hours.[354]

The nineteenth century cases of live burial provided another reason to draw the attention of the local authorities to a safer and more professional way of dealing with the sick and the

[348] József Kocsis, *Dissertatio inauguralis politico-medica de necessitate necrocomiorum, quam ... publicae disquisitioni submittit ... = A halottas-házak szükségéről* (Kecskemét, 1844), 12.
[349] Ibid. 28.
[350] Ibid. 23.
[351] Ibid. 25-27.
[352] Ibid. 34.
[353] Hanák, *The Garden and the Workshop,* 100.
[354] Ibid. 102-3.

dead. In Hungarian literature of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, the romantic depiction of the apparent dead gives way to a realistic, novelistic, and humorous approach.[355] The phobia that permeated society, therefore, became more like a novelistic narrative, although it did not completely disappear from the people's beliefs. The definition of death was still uncertain after the appearance of the first EKG device in 1908, when it was recognized that the electrical activity of the heart could be detected even after clinical death. The most definitive account of death was formulated in 1968, when dead became equated with brain death.[356] Until then, both popular and elite culture relied upon their own traditions and social norms regarding the perception of death and the timing of death. The lack of agreement by the medical professionals on the signs of death and the limited involvement of the authorities on burial practices contributed to the popular fear of being buried alive and sustained irrational beliefs of mourning communities.

Conclusion

Building upon the work of chapter one, in which focused on the medical landscape of the eighteenth century, this chapter has explored how ideas about health and diseased evolved —as well as failed to evolve — during the nineteenth century. The convergence of scientific progress, societal shifts, and evolving paradigms played a central role in shaping medical responses. I have focused on the intensification of fear regarding the undead and premature burial during cholera outbreaks. Many writers attributed these fears to the implementation of or resistance to preventative measures in local communities. Far from mere irrationality, the dread of being buried alive or come back to life as a revenant, served as a poignant manifestation of broader anxieties surrounding mortality and the mysteries of death. This fear influenced cultural practices and fuelled the imagination, creating a nightmarish scenario that permeated societal perceptions of death and funerary customs.

Furthermore, the challenge of managing the dead during epidemics was compounded by a scarcity of physicians and conflicting medical opinions, which contributed to a pervasive sense of uncertainty and distrust in formal medical care, especially among the lower classes. In response, rural—and, to a lesser degree, urban— communities turned to

[355] For example: Kálmán Mikszáth, *Szent Péter esernyője* (Móra Ferenc Könyvkiadó, 1895).
[356] Horányi, *A látszatos halál,* 18-19.

folk medicine, drawing on traditional, accessible, and cheaper practices that infused remedies with elements of ritual, folklore, and communal support. The striking parallels between folk beliefs and medical discourse during this period underscored the intrinsic connection between cultural traditions and scientific understanding. Despite advancements in medical science, both the general population and medical professionals often shared culturally embedded superstitious beliefs to navigate the enigma of death. This mutual reliance on elements of superstition suggests that, even amidst scientific progress, there remained a deep-seated dependence on the authority of traditional and regionally specific interpretations of the transition from life to death.

Chapter 3.

Magic and the supernatural in popular culture (1748-1867)

Introduction

Where chapters one and two focused on the role of epidemics to examine how eighteenth- and nineteenth-century medical discourse evolved in relation to superstitious belief in revenants, the next two chapters will focus on the transmission of ideas about supernatural belief in broader popular consumer culture. This chapter questions the narrative of European 'disenchantment' and increasing secularization over the course of the nineteenth century by examining the discrepancies that arise from the Western imagination of a sophisticated, enlightened, and rational Western Europe in contrast to the backward, superstitious, and unruly Eastern European 'other'. While the complex relationship between 'modernity' and magical belief has been the focus the recent scholarship in Western Europe, the same cannot be said about Hungary.[357] Scholars have only recently acknowledged the continued existence of revenant and witchcraft accusations in regions in and around Hungary in the post- Enlightenment era.[358]

This chapter begins with the German literary preoccupation with the supernatural, which critiqued Enlightenment confidence from the middle of the eighteenth century and showed that western culture continued to be fascinated by magic. While the Romantic reaction to the Enlightenment took a variety of forms in different regions, the focus here will be on the powerful and influential Romantic movement in Germany and Central Europe. In particular, the concept of 'the Orient' offered Romantic writers and poets a magical place where extraordinary events could happen beyond the prosaic boundaries of Western imagination. I argue that growing literacy and modernization did not undercut the social and intellectual bases for magical beliefs; rather, Gothic and Romantic revivals of 'folk' culture re-invented superstition and magic. German folk tales, for example, resituated the vampire from the Eastern European remotest rural areas to the urban spaces of the middle classes,

[357] Karl Bell, 'Breaking Modernity's Spell: Magic and Modern History', *Cultural and Social History* 4 (2007), 115-22; Thomas Waters, 'Magic and the British Middle Classes, 1750-1900', *Journal of British Studies*, 54:3 (2015): 632-53; Jason Crawford, 'The Trouble with Re-enchantment', in: *LA Review of Books* (September 2020) https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/the-trouble-with-re-enchantment/ Accessed: November 7, 2022.
[358] Ágnes Várkonyi, 'Connections between the Cessation of Witch Trials and the Transformation of the Social Structure Related to Medicine', *Acta Ethnographica Hungarica* 37, no. 1–4 (1991): 425-77; Tóth, 'The Decriminalization of Magic and the Fight Against Superstition in Hungary and Transylvania', 291-317.

bringing elements of the supernatural into the domestic spaces of the nineteenth-century bourgeoisie.

The second part of this chapter focuses on Hungary. While in Western Europe supernatural phenomena were aestheticized through Gothic and Romantic literature, in Hungary supernatural phenomena appeared mainly within the realm of the periodical press. This suggests that while interest in the supernatural was present in Hungarian culture, it was more commonly expressed and consumed through publications like newspapers and magazines than literary works like novels or short stories. Unlike thrilling literary tales of supernatural horrors, newspaper reports grafted an aura of objective reality to their representation of the harmful dead. These newspapers reflected the beliefs, superstitions, and cultural narratives of their readership, suggesting not only the pervasiveness of these beliefs, but also the role of the press in shaping and disseminating cultural ideas and folklore amongst the general population.

While there is evidence that beliefs in witchcraft and revenants continued to exist after the Enlightenment, the supernatural discourse did not feature in the contemporary literature of Hungary. During the era of nation-building in Hungary, the growth of the arts and the status of the Hungarian language were dominant themes. Literature thus played a crucial role in fostering national self-awareness.[359] The supernatural, however, gained wider significance in the printed press. Newspapers help us understand the cultural concerns of the nineteenth century: Owen Davies has shown the importance of the newspaper archive in terms of witchcraft studies after the witch hunting period officially ended.[360] The mass digitisation of newspaper archives has only recently allowed scholars to find unexplored resources. Analysing how newspapers represent the supernatural, especially belief in witchcraft and revenants, challenges the teleological view of disenchantment, especially as the 'disenchantment of the world' has always been the disenchantment of the Western world. As I will go on to argue, the presence of the supernatural in Hungarian newspapers distinguished Hungarian national identity from the borderland minorities of the Hungarian Monarchy, who were consistently represented as uneducated and credulous about the existence of supernatural beings.

[359] János Kenyeres, 'Manifestations of Hungarian Identity in Literature', *Hungarian Cultural Studies*. E-Journal of the American Hungarian Educators Association 12 (2019): 4.
[360] Owen Davies, *Witchcraft, Magic and Culture 1736-1951* (Manchester University Press, 1999).

Benedict Anderson famously argued that the printing press played a key role in creating nationalism. National identity was an 'imagined community' formed through participation in a shared print culture exemplified by the publication and consumption of newspapers. In reading these common texts, individuals could imagine themselves as part of a collective that shared a common culture and national identity.[361] The image of an idealized and shared past became an effective tool for the formation of community identity in the nineteenth century. The newspapers were a battleground where the boundaries of Hungarian nationality were drawn along the lines of belief or non-belief in the supernatural. Tamás Hofer has shown that the elite in the nineteenth century developed 'rival notions of 'Hungarian-ness'' where different representations and interpretations of folk culture emerged.[362] The question 'who is Hungarian?' was the basis of political participation, especially at the time of the Revolution (1848-1849), and this chapter shows how a distinctive national identity was created by displacing witch and revenant beliefs onto the borderland minority.

The supernatural in German literature

In this section, I focus on German literature from the middle of the eighteenth century, where the supernatural appeared with regularity. Ghosts, witches, and revenants were not only lingering remnants of a superstitious past, but they also played a significant role in the Enlightenment discourse and its ideal of progress.[363] Alongside poems, plays, and novels, German philosophical and medical texts, newspapers, and journals debated supernatural beliefs and the possible existence of supernatural creatures. Azade Seyhan writes that 'in the German context, Romanticism cannot be seen as a movement that reacted to and replaced the German Enlightenment', but rather as an extension of 'the critical practice instituted by the Enlightenment itself'.[364] These writers often turned to 'an occult code or a forgotten past' to capture the feeling of social uncertainty and frustration with the limits of

[361] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (Verso, 2006). Originally published in 1983.
[362] Tamás Hofer, 'Construction of the 'Folk Cultural Heritage'', *Ethnologia Europaea* 21 (1990): 145-170.
[363] See chapter one.
[364] Azade Seyhan, "What is Romanticism, and Where Did It Come From?" *The Cambridge Companion to German Romanticism*, (ed.) Nicholas Saul (Cambridge UP, 2009), 8.

reason.[365] Echoing Adorno's critique of the Enlightenment, Seyhan writes that 'The Jena Romantics see [the production of knowledge] as the creation of a "new mythology." The very term denotes the impulse to look for appropriate conceptual models in the past'.[366] Thus, in striving toward new modes of expression and paradigms of understanding, the German Romantics went 'back to the future' by privileging the past, the occult, and myth creation.

While there are numerous works on fairies, witches, ghosts, and other supernatural creatures that span the Enlightenment, Gothic, and Romantic eras, I focus here on the representation of the vampire, which attracted the most attention in debates about the supernatural. During the Enlightenment, the vampire was often represented as a creature of the 'barbaric East', and, as I will show later, literary representations of the vampire retained this connotation of cultural otherness. The Romantic vampire emerged as a sinister manifestation of the other as parasite, serving as what James Twitchell has called 'a serious analogue for the process of energy exchange involved in human interactions'.[367] By focusing on the role of the supernatural in the public culture of Central Europe, this section sets the groundwork for a comparison with Hungary from the middle of the eighteenth until the middle of the nineteenth century. The similarities and differences demonstrate the importance of the supernatural in the construction of national identity and the distinction between 'Eastern' and 'Western' Europe.

Between the Enlightenment and Romanticism, there was a German literary movement called *Sturm und Drang*, or 'storm and stress'. This name highlighted the role of nature's power to inspire the artist and emphasised the role of emotions present in nature. *Sturm und Drang* was an attempt to break out of the Enlightenment vision of reasonableness and reassert the significant role of irrationality in social customs and cultural practices.[368] Nick Groom describes *Sturm und Drang* as 'writings of extreme states, unrestrained passion and imaginative excess that conjured the supernatural back into

[365] Ibid. 9.
[366] Azade Seyhan, *Representation and Its Discontents: The Critical Legacy of German Romanticism,* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 6.
[367] James Twitchell, *The Living Dead: A Study of the Vampire in Romantic Literature*, (Durham: Duke UP, 1981), 142.
[368] Bruce Duncan, 'Sturm und Drang Passions and Eighteenth-Century Psychology', *Literature of the Sturm und Drang*, (ed.) David Hill (Boydell & Brewer, 2002), 47- 68.

mainstream literary culture and led directly to Gothic Romanticism'.[369] Privileging states of passionate and imaginative extremity, *Sturm und Drang* found a ghoulish champion in the figure of the vampire, which embodied the persistence of irrationality and superstition alongside the Enlightenment values of reason and rationality. The poets of the *Sturm und Drang* movement were the first to imbue the vampire with the sinister qualities of desire and violence.[370] The vampire contests the rational opposition of sexual attraction and repulsion, drawing the two passions together into a horrific and yet irresistible fantasy.

While the vampire phenomenon emerged from the Habsburg Empire, it was German culture that gave birth to the modern literary vampire. Heinrich August Ossenfelder's short poem *Der Vampir* (1748) provided one of the first literary representations of the vampire, adding sexualized qualities to the figure that continue to influence representation up to the present day. Christlob Mylius, the editor of a popular scientific journal *Der Naturforscher*, invited Ossenfelder to write a poem that reflected the themes of vampire reports. This particular report was on the *Lettres juives* by Boyer d'Argens, which had been published in May 1748.[371] Ossenfelder's poem *Der Vampir* addressed the theme of the journal by combining the facts contained in medical reports with literary elements. In the poem, a male narrator anticipates seducing a young maiden named Christine who, faithful to the Christian teachings of her mother, rebukes his loves. The speaker frames his plan as a vampiric act of sexual violence: when Christine is 'sleeping' he will 'drink [her] into a vampire'. After his "vampire kiss" he imagines her 'to tremble / And weakly, like one dying, / Sink down into my arms'. Heide Crawford writes that Ossenfelder 'introduces the image of the vampire as a figure who is simultaneously erotic and dangerous; he is the seducer unto a hedonistic lifestyle - an image that would prevail into present times'.[372] Thus, the speaker of *Der Vampir* uses the vampire as a metaphor for an erotic alternative to normative Christian morality: 'Are not my teachings better / Than those of your good mother?'.

While Melton writes that 'the emergence of the modern literary vampire began with [Ossenfelder's] exploration of the vampiric theme in German poetry,' the poem draws upon

[369] 99.
[370] Heide Crawford, "The Cultural-Historical Origins of the Literary Vampire in Germany", *Journal of Dracula Studies*, vol. 7, no. 1, (2005): 1-9
[371] See chapter one.
[372] Crawford, "The Cultural-Historical Origins of the Literary Vampire", 8.

northeastern Hungary as the source for the German literary vampire.[373] The speaker contrasts Christian beliefs against the folk beliefs of 'people along the Tisza' who 'Believe staunchly and heyduck-like / In vampires that bring death'. In addition to identifying vampire belief with Hungarian river Tisza, the speaker references the 'heyduck-like' quality of the believers, a term derived from the region of Hungary to refer to a brigand or foot soldier. The speaker mentions that he will take his 'revenge' in Tockay, a German name for a town along the western side of the river Tisza in north-eastern Hungary (Tokaj).[374] The word 'Tockayer' was the correct term for the wine of the region (Tokaji in Hungarian) that was popular in Germany at the time. The poem's geographical setting provides an important link to Flückinger's report *Visum et Repertum*, specifically his investigations of vampirism in the region of Serbia east of Tisza. Moreover, the 'Tockay' region associates the first known literary vampire with an area of Central-Eastern Europe where the stories of the vampire originated, setting a trend that would be followed from that point on.

Scholars have argued that the affair between the vampire and the religious girl described in *Der Vampir* metaphorically indicates a forced intercourse.[375] Clemens Ruthner suggests that the poem could also be read as an allegorical warning against the threat of seduction in the context of Christian belief: 'The text plays off the sexually demanding (vampire-like) love of the lyrical "I" against the moral principles of the young girl and her mother, principles which are denounced as pure superstition'.[376] The conflict between Christianity and superstition, which the poem captures between the maiden 'Christiane' and the aggressively seductive vampire, must be read in relation to the poem's publication in an Enlightened scientific journal. The framing device of the publication suggests that the author was using the metaphor of the vampire to reflect on the debates between religion, superstition, and rationality that prevailed in the Enlightenment. The speaker's frustration and anger regarding the Christian beliefs of his 'dear young maiden' and her deeply religious mother shows the role of the vampire as a metaphor for the conflict between superstition and religious faith that persists despite the influence of the Enlightenment.

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[373] J. Gordon Melton, *The Vampire Book, The Encyclopedia of the Undead* (Visible Ink Press, 2010), 533.
[374] Henrich August Ossenfelder, 'Der Vampir' (1748).
[375] Jörg Waltje, *Blood Obsession-Vampires, Serial Murder, and the Popular Imagination* (Peter Lang Publishing, New York, 2005), 27.
[376] Clemens Ruthner," Bloodsuckers with Teutonic Tongues", *Dracula: The Shade and the Shadow*, (ed.) Elizabeth Miller, (Los Angeles: Desert Island Books, 1998,), 32.

The blood-sucking vampire found its rightful place among the themes of horror, loss and death that were becoming more popular through genres such as the Gothic novel. Horace Walpole's novel, *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), is often cited as the novel that started the Gothic movement. The novel included supernatural elements and eerie castle basements that addressed themes of death and violence in a thrilling new way.[377] While the rise of Gothic literature is often associated with the English literary tradition, scholarship has shown that it was an international phenomenon that also included German literature.[378] Scholars have examined German examples of 'graveyard poetry' from the early to the mid eighteenth century, which included symbolic elements such as croaking ravens, mouldy tombstones, bones, skulls, and disinterred bodies.[379] The graveyard setting of this poetry was inspired by contemporary social and political issues, such as war, pandemics, and religious anxiety, which contributed to the influential motif of the 'dead lover returns'.[380] Soon, the figure of the undead lover became a convention in both Gothic literature and English Romanticism.[381]

For example, Gottfried August Bürger's 1774 ballad *Lenore* intertwined Gothic 'Graveyard poetry' and elements of Romanticism. The poem was translated into English by Sir Walter Scott as *William and Helen* (1797) and later four other translations appeared, such as by William Taylor and Dante Gabriel Rosetti. The ballad, which made an impression in both Germany and England, was one of the earliest pieces of writing with references to the undead in European literature. But the word vampire was not used by comparison to *Der Vampir* where 'vampire' appeared three times in 24 lines. Although the ballad is not an example of vampire literature, it includes numerous supernatural elements and other vampire characteristics that would go on to influence the conventions of vampire fiction.

The ballad tells the sad story of a young woman (Lenore) who loses her fiancé (Wilhelm) due to his sudden death at war. When Lenore confesses her loss of religious faith, her zealous mother entreats God on her behalf: 'O enter not in judgement, Lord! The pious

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[377] Clive Bloom, 'From Horace Walpole to the Divine Marquis de Sad', in: *The Palgrave Handbook of Gothic Origins* (ed.) Clive Bloom (Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), 2.
[378] See for example, Andrew Cusack and Barry Murnane (eds.), *Popular Revenants: The German Gothic and Its Literary Reception, 1800-2000* (Rochester: Camden House, 2012).
[379] Eric Parisot, 'Graveyard Poetry and the Aesthetics of Horror', in: *The Palgrave Handbook of Gothic Origins* (ed.) Clive Bloom (Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), 245.
[380] Heide Crawford, *The Origins of the Literary* Vampire, 22.
[381] See: Hugh Shields, 'The Dead Lover's Return in Modern English Ballad Tradition', *Jahrbuch für Volksliedforschung* 17 (1972): 98-114.

mother prays; Impute not guilt to thy frail child! She knows not what she says'.[382] Lenore does not appeal to God as 'No sacrament can quench this fire, Or slake this scorching pain; No sacrament can bid the dead Arise and live again'.[383] Lenore's lost faith in God implies that Christian concepts such as the afterlife failed to comfort people grieving the loss of loved ones. In the ballad, at midnight, a mysterious stranger in the form of Wilhelm knocks on the door in search for Lenore and asks her to accompany him to the 'bridal bed'. Vampire-like characteristics can clearly be found here, as the un-dead Wilhem arrives from Central-Eastern Europe and only travels at night: 'We saddle late-from Hungary I rode since darkness fell; And to its bourne we both return Before the matin-bell'.[384] Lenore observes the uncanny coldness of his skin—'My love is deadly cold'—and questions his manner—'But why so stern and cold?'—establishing the trope of corpse-like coldness that will become very common in later representations of the vampire.[385]

The graveyard where Wilhelm takes Lenore is described like a coffin: 'Tis distant fast, low, damp, and chill, and narrow'.[386] When they arrive at the cemetery, the horse disappears and the armour falls from the rider, revealing a conventional representation of Death: a 'ghastly skeleton'. The 'bridal bed' is nothing more than the grave where Wilhelm`s body rests. The ground beneath Lenore's feet crumbles while ghosts dance in the moonlight, teasing her about her lost faith in God and Heaven: 'E'en when the heart's with anguish cleft, Revere the doom of Heaven, Her soul is from her body wrest; Her spirit be forgiven!'.[387] Horrific elements such as death, the undead lover, graveyards, coffins and skeletons helped shape some of the key characteristics of Gothic literature. Some of the English translators hesitated at introducing the superstitious ballad to an English-reading public, as they thought it was offensive towards religion.[388] *The Monthly Review* from 1796, commented on the unexpected interest in translation as:

[382] *The chase, and William and Helen: two ballads, translated from the German of Gottfried Augustus Bürger. By Walter Scott* (John Murray: Edinburgh, 1807), XII.
[383] Ibid. XVII.
[384] Ibid. XXIX. While Scott includes Hungary in his translation, the original poem references Bohemia.
[385] Ibid. XXX., XXXIX.
[386] Ibid. XLV.
[387] Ibid. LXVI.
[388] Waltje, *Blood Obsession-Vampires,* 35.

> Proof of the increased relish among us for the modern German school of literature – a school of which the marvellous, the horrid, and the extravagant constitute some of the most prominent features.[389]

In Germany the ballad was classified as a *Kunstballade*—a literary ballad that imitated oral folk ballads—and supernatural elements such as revenants often played a part in these traditional poems. This new form of writing influenced British poets such as Samuel Taylor Coleridge.[390] The most influential aspect of these ballads arose from the way they intertwined folkloric superstition with Christian morals.

Although *Lenore* became widely circulated in Germany and England, the most well-known vampire piece was in Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's collection of poems, *Die Braut von Korinth*, originally published in 1797.[391] These poems greatly influenced the development of Gothic literature and English Romanticism, and they played a key role in popularizing vampire literature. As Christopher Frayling suggests, Goethe was 'the first to make the vampire respectable in literature' due to his status in literary circles.[392] In *Die Braut von Korinth*, the dead rise to reunite with a loved one. When a young Athenian arrives in Corinth for his marriage, his rest is disturbed by a pale young girl wearing a white dress and veil. The young man believes the girl to be his bride, and they fall deeply in love. As the young girl is, in fact, already dead, the young man must die as well in order to be with her. Goethe's poem set some of the conventions for the literary representation of the vampire: the pale face, cold body, lack of appetite, and the desire for only blood-coloured wine. Goethe adapted and popularized the most significant theme in Ossenfelder's poem: the immortality of the vampire becomes a metaphor for the immortality of love, yet the lovers remain separated by the ontological gap that divides the living from the dead.[393] The possibility or the impossibility of love between mortals and the undead is a recurring theme

[389] *The Monthly Review*, 'Stanley's and Pye's, Transt. of Bürher`s Lenôrè' 20 (1796): 322.
[390] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, in: Samuel Taylor Coleridge and William Wordsworth, *Lyrical Ballads* (London: J& A. Arch., 1798).
[391] Die Braut von Korinth' (1797), in: Friedrich Schiller: *Musen-Almanach für das Jahr 1798* (Die Perfekte Bibliothek, 2015), 88–99.
[392] Frayling, *Vampyres*, 43.
[393] Raul Calzoni, "Liminal Figurations of the Vampire in the German Enlightenment, *Sturm und Drang* and Romanticism." *Monstrous Anatomies: Literary and Scientific Imagination in Britain and Germany during the Long Nineteenth Century*, (ed.) Vita Fortunati and Elena Agazzi, (Vienna: V&R Unipress, 2015), 41-60.

in vampire literature, which takes explicitly erotic forms in twenty-first century fiction, such as Stephanie Meyer's *Twilight* series.[394]

The setting of Goethe's poem in Corinth attests to the wider significance of ancient Greece in contemporary German culture. German scholar Johann Joachim Winckelmann (1717-1768) first articulated the differences between Greek, Greco-Roman, and Roman art. Winckelmann was the most significant figure in the Greek revival of the eighteenth century, believing that 'the only way for us to become great, or even inimitable, if possible, is to imitate the Greeks'.[395] However, some unsavoury elements from ancient Greek culture also gained influence in eighteenth-century Europe: the *vrykolakas*—the ancient Greek version of the Slavic vampires—popularized the practice of staking, beheading, and burning vampires in their graves. The French traveller Joseph Pitton de Tournefort published a popular account of his tour across Greece and Asia at the turn of the century under the title of *A Voyage Into the Levant* (1718).[396] This account ridiculed the Greek islanders for their credulity regarding the existence of vampires and their superstitious practices for executing the deceased. Tournefort justified his critique of peasant superstitions with scientific reasoning, suggesting that the locals were afflicted with a 'brain epidemic' resembling rabies.[397] As Simon Bacon shows, the term '*vrykolakas*' can be found in the folklore in Croatia, Bulgaria, Bosnia Herzegovina, and Montenegro. [398] Greece, therefore, plays a significant role in the Balkanization of supernatural creatures.

John Polidori set his short novel *The Vampyre* (1819) in England and Greece as a way of contrasting English domesticity against the threat of the primitive, continental 'other'. This contrast was registered by the narrator's dismissal of the possibility for 'a young man of English habits [to marry] an uneducated Greek girl'.[399] Likely inspired by Goethe's *Die Braut von Korinth*, Polidori's vampire originates from Greece, attesting to the association between vampirism and an orientalised 'Eastern' Europe on one hand, and the literary influence of vampire writing from Germany on English authors on the other.

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[394] Stephenie Meyer, *Twilight* (2005), *New Moon* (2006), *Eclipse* (2007), *Breaking Down* (2008).
[395] *Reflections on the Painting and Sculpture of the Greek* (London,1765) translated by Henry Fuseli (1741–1825), https://www.gutenberg.org/files/61317/61317-h/61317-h.htm accessed: September 14, 2021.
[396] See: Tournefort, *Voyage into the Levant*.
[397] Ibid. 144.
[398] See: Simon Bacon, 'The Vrykolakas, the Wandering Jew, and the Flying Dutchman', in Clive Bloom ed., *The Palgrave Handbook of Gothic Origins*,(London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2021), 573-89.
[399] John William Polidori, *The Vampyre: A Tale* (Sherwood, Neely, and Jones: London, 1819).

Scholars have recently expanded upon the relationship between German Romanticism and what Edward Said has called 'Orientalism', or the Western tendency to stereotype the East as primitive, static, traditional, superstitious, and despotic.[400] Fascinated by the East, German writers, poets, and philosophers incorporated their passion for the exotic lands into their works in both positive and negative ways. In the eighteenth and nineteenth century, the geographical conception of the Orient was not limited to the Asian continent; for the Romantics, the 'exotic other' included regions east of Austria. Countries such as Hungary were still mysterious for travellers well into the nineteenth century; for example, Adolf Schmidl's guidebook published in Vienna in 1835 stated that few Western Europeans travelled to Hungary, which led to misconceptions about its backwardness.[401] Austria's eastern border marked the end of Western civilization, and anything beyond this boundary tended to be represented as either an exotic or barbaric 'other'. Bram Stoker's vampire combines both qualities, which he amplifies by situating Jonathan Harker's treacherous journey in the Carpathian Mountains.

In the eighteenth and nineteenth century, authors and readers drew upon orientalist themes to define their national identity in opposition to the foreign other. For German writers, the Eastern other offered a political opportunity to imbue national identity with a powerful sense of belonging. By representing the vampire phenomenon as an exotic, barbaric creature from the 'East', these writers distinguished their own national identity and *Volksgeist* as superior and more 'civilized'. An important strand of German Romanticism attempted to create a distinctively German identity by retrieving traditional German folk tales.[402] The Grimm brothers, for example, collected fairy tales, folk poetry, songs, and sagas. Their famous first collection of tales was published in 1812 under the name of *Die Kinder-und Hausmärschen gesammelt durch die Brüder Grimm and* responded to the desire to recreate Germany's unique folk culture and national literature.[403] Karl August *Musäus's Volksmärchen der Deutschen* (1782-1786), and Ludwig Bechstein's *Deutsches Märchenbuch*

[400] See for example: Nicholas A. Germana, *The Anxiety of Autonomy and the Aesthetics of German Orientalism* (Camden House, 2017).
[401] Adolph Schmidl, *Reisehandbuch durch das Königreich Ungarn mit den Nebenländem und Dalmatien, nach Serbien, Bukarest und Constantinopel* (Vienna, 1835), 20, 15.
[402] Nicholas A. Germana, *The Orient of Europe: The Mythical Image of India and Competing Images of German National Identity* (Cambridge, 2009), 245.
[403] Martyn Lyons, 'New Readers in the Nineteenth Century; Women, Children, workers', in: *A History of Reading in the West* (eds.) Guglielmo Cavallio and Roger Chartier (University of Massachusetts Press, 1999), 328-29.

(1845) also satisfied the longing of the people for a German identity. The strong desire for German identity not only led scholars to distinguish their own national literature from that of the Orient, but also to turn to the literature of the medieval past. Though German Romanticism 'was essentially reformist in intention', it drew upon a 'longing for a reinstatement of the medieval past' to create a powerful mythology of their nation.[404]

Romantic authors used supernatural elements to represent issues ranging from the nationalist reaction to the Napoleonic conquests to the glorification of the fairy tale and folk poetry, via an enthusiasm for the Middle Ages and the Orient. Although the supernatural is not present in all Romantic literature, the authors often used the supernatural to conjure fantastic new worlds that the reader could not experience in real life. The Romantics also celebrated the simplicity and richness of nature. In *Frankenstein* (1818), for example, the English Romantic author Mary Shelley represented the monstrous consequences arising from scientific hubris that showed little regard for the laws of nature.[405] While *Frankenstein's* conception of social justice is rooted in the Enlightenment, the novel also offered a Romantic critique of the Enlightenment belief that scientific knowledge could resolve all of society's problems. While Enlightenment principles suggested that improving society was the best way to address the inherently evil aspects of human nature, the Romantic values displayed in Shelley's *Frankenstein* suggested that the corruption of humanity's innate goodness arose from society.

The interest of *Schauerromantik*, or the 'dark side' of the human existence, can also be seen in E.T.A. Hoffmann's *Fantasiestücke* in 1814 and *Nachtstücke* in 1817. In his novel *Die Elixiere des Teufels* (1815), Hoffmann developed the motif of the doppelgänger, where the good and bad aspects of an individual split into two different identities.[406] Goethe also explored the dark side of Romanticism in his 1813 ballad *Der Totentanz*. Romantic authors inspired a revival of interest in the dance of death, which often took the shape of the midnight revelry of skeletons. Hans Holbein's (1497–1543) *danse macabre* woodcuts (1526)

[404] Frederick Beiser. *The Romantic Imperative: The Concept of Early German Romanticism,* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2003), 25.
[405] Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* (London: Lackington, Hughes, Harding, Mavor & Jones, 1818).
[406] E. T. A. Hoffmann, *Phantasiestücke in Callot's Manier* (Berlin, 1813); *Die Elixiere des Teufels* (Berlin, 1815) (eds.) Henry Garland and Mary Garland, *The Oxford Companion to German Literature*, vol. 3 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

influenced not only Goethe's work, but also Ferenc Liszt's *Totentanz* (1849) for piano and orchestra and Saint-Saëns' *Danse Macabre* in 1874.[407]

For the Romantics, therefore, death and the longing for death became themes of artistic experience. From the late eighteenth century, the erotic intertwining of love and death fascinated Western Europe. Philippe Ariès argues that the Romantic Movement significantly transformed the approach to death by creating a cultural model of a 'beautiful death'. This romanticised experience of death suggested that it should not be approached with dread but with enthusiasm.[408] Roy Porter describes the followers of this trend as 'Bright young things, seeking public attention, positively sought to look tubercular, as if delicacy and a tenuous grasp on life made them all the more appealing'.[409] As I discuss above in chapter two, the 'beautiful' death from tuberculous was opposed to the grotesque symptoms of cholera. The nineteenth century aestheticized the deathbed as a site that could provide inspiration to others.[410]

Between around 1790 and 1830, Romanticism served as a reaction against Enlightenment rationality by reviving emotion in arts and literature. In doing so, it offered a way to view illness, disease, and death as offering aesthetic possibilities that made them something more than a universal enemy to humanity.[411] In her study of Romantic and Victorian authors, Katherine Byrne suggests that vampirism and consumption shared qualities that united them in the literary imagination.[412] Consumption was often portrayed in literature as a 'disease which beautifies one physically as well as spiritually'.[413] Consumption not only enhanced its victims' physical appearance, but also targeted the already beautiful.[414] In Henry Peach Robinson's 1858 photograph *Fading Away*, a consumptive female rests on her deathbed amidst wealthy surroundings, accompanied by her family and friends. The thinness and paleness of the young woman situates her in limbo between life and death. Roy Porter argues that this 'wasting effect was portrayed to have

[407] Sophie Oosterwijk, 'Of Corpses, Constables and Kings: The *Danse Macabre* in Late Medieval and Renaissance Culture', *Journal of the British Archaeological Association* 157 (2004): 61-90.
[408] Philippe Ariès, *The Hour of Our Death,* 473.
[409] Roy Porter, *Flesh in the Age of Reason* (Penguin, 2005), 118.
[410] Helen Bynum, *Spitting Blood: The History of Tuberculosis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 90.
[411] Carolyn A. Day, *Consumptive Chic: A History of Beauty, Fashion, and Disease* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), 46.
[412] Katherine Byrne, *Tuberculosis and the Victorian Literary Imagination* (Cambridge: CUP, 2011), 124-149.
[413] Clark Lawlor, *Consumption and Literature: The Making of the Romantic Disease* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillian, 2006), 166.
[414] Helen Bynum, *Spitting Blood: The History of Tuberculosis*, 77.

enhanced female beauty'.[415] The disease characterized by coughing, thinness, fever, and the expectoration of blood became a sign of beauty; thus, consumption became both idealized and feminized, and it profoundly influenced concepts of beauty and fashion. The 'fashionable disease' of consumption intersected with vampire discourse through the gradual draining away of the victim's life, the coughing up of blood, and enhancing the sexuality of female victims.

The aestheticization of death occurred alongside a growing fear about being buried alive. The introduction of death registration and newly funded cemeteries shortened the interval between death and burial and enhanced the fear of being buried alive. Stories involving live burial such as *The Buried Alive* by John Galt (1821) and *The Premature Burial* by Edgar Allan Poe (1844) also became extremely popular.[416] David Baker et al. write that the 'association between vampire legends and the development of German Romanticism … traces a direct link with the rise of the vampire in British literature'.[417] 'Lord Byron's 'The Giaour' (1813) and John Keats's 'La Belle Dame Sans Merci' (1819) represented vampire-like animated corpses that remained in the grave by day and emerged to prey on the living at night (a symptom often attributed to premature burials at the time).[418] In the nineteenth century, therefore, interest in the practices and emotions surrounding death was mixed with anxiety about the immortality of the soul which became an important concern for the wider public.[419] These concerns had a political and social significance in nineteenth-century Vienna, which underwent major cultural transformations as it grew rapidly in size and population. Moreover, the spread of literacy across class boundaries reshaped modern popular culture. By the end of the eighteenth century, the state had begun to regulate basic schooling, and the rates of literacy in Central Europe skyrocketed from 15% in 1800 to 90% in 1900.[420] These enormous changes, therefore, expanded the market for entertainment like

[415] Roy Porter, 'What is disease?' *The Cambridge Illustrated History of Medicine*, (ed.) Roy Porter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 107.
[416] John Galt, 'The Buried Alive', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* 10. no. 56. (1821): 264; 'The Premature Burial (1844)' ,in: *The Portable Edgar Allan Poe*, (ed.) J. Gerald Kennedy (London: Penguin Books, 2006), 57-70.
[417] David Baker, Stephanie Green and Agnieszka Stasiewicz-Bieńkowsk, "Vampiric transformations: the popular politics of the (post) romantic vampire", *Continuum : Journal of Media & Cultural Studies,* Vol. 35, no.2. (2021): 171–77.
[418] Byron's *The Giaour* (1813); Keat's: *Lamia and La Belle Dame Sans Merci* (1819).
[419] James Corrigan, *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Emotion*, (ed.) James Corrigan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 4.
[420] Tim Kirk, 'Popular culture and politics in imperial Vienna', in: *The City in Central Europe, Culture and Society from 1800 to the Present*, Eds. Malcolm Gee, Tim Kirk and Jill Steward (Ashgate, 1999), 159-74.

the so-called *Schmutz und Schund* ('filth and trash') literature, which prompted bourgeois anxieties about the possibility of this 'filth' threatening the established social order.[421]

The expanded reading public had an unprecedented variety of material to choose from, such as genre fiction, ghost stories, gothic horror, and crime. As this section shows, during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the supernatural held significant sway over literature in Germany and Central Europe. German Romantics, in particular, used 'the vampire as an embodiment of contemporary social anxieties, taboos, and fears that range in severity from adultery, divorce, infanticide, and abuse to necrophilia and cannibalism' (350). Despite these horrifying markers of otherness, the Romantics also portrayed the vampire as 'particularly mysterious and difficult to pick out in a crowd', 'a more human-seeming monster' that could 'blend into society, unnoticed and even desired, until it is almost too late'.[422] This Romanticized vampire not only became a fixture in the burgeoning print culture of Western European metropolises, but also extended into growing cities like Vienna and Budapest, where mass markets for pulp fiction thrived. However, despite the developing print culture in Hungary, its literary marketplace took a different trajectory from its European counterparts. In the next section, I will examine the role of the supernatural in the Hungarian literary marketplace, where revenants appeared in the pages of the newspaper rather than the novel.

The supernatural in Hungarian literature

The Hungarian historian Péter Hanák pointed out that Western attitudes towards death could not be found in the culture of Budapest at the time. The Romanticised mixture of fear and love of death did not feature in Hungarian poetry, as poets understood love and death differently. According to Hanák, Hungarian literature and culture was dedicated to social and political ideas and filled with the problems of public life; thus, Hungarians approached death as a political and social problem, rather than a source of entertainment.[423] The supernatural did not gain a significant presence in Hungarian literature until the second half

[421] Malcom Gee and Tim Kirk (eds.), *Printed Matters, Printing, publishing and urban culture in Europe in the modern period* (Ashgate, 2002), 3-4.
[422] Heide Crawford, "Vampires and Vampiric Entities", 364.
[423] Hanák, *The Garden and the* Workshop, 98-109.

of the nineteenth century (when it had appeared in English Romanticism between 1780 and 1830). The aestheticization of death, therefore, was not the first thing that Hungarian authors drew from the supernatural; rather, their focus was on highlighting the role of the supernatural in defining social and political 'otherness'. By sharing news of supernatural events from the borderlands, these authors not only entertained the masses, but also made political statements, drawing attention to issues such as ethnic tensions, territorial disputes, or cultural clashes in the border regions.

In Western Europe, Gothic and Romantic poems, novels, and books were filled with supernatural creatures; in contrast, the vampire did not make its first appearance in Hungarian until 1793, with József Gvadányi's 1793 poem about how to get rid of a vampire. According to the story, the main character helps to kill a vampire who cursed its neighbour's cow. To do so, he calls upon the vampire and reads magical words from the Bible, so that the vampire will no longer appear. He arranges a room for a seance, covering all the windows, positioning five chairs around the table, scribbling secret spells on the wall, lighting candles in two glass lanterns, and so on. Eventually, he manages to rid himself of the vampire and the cow recovers from its illness.[424] This interesting story did not gain much attention at the time. It is also interesting that Gvadányi used the word 'vampire', as the word had not been used in Hungary to describe supernatural activity. In the territories of the Hungarian Kingdom, revenants and witchcraft were linked together: usually a witch came back from the dead to torment the living.[425]

Nearly fifty years later, the vampire appeared in Pál Gyulai's *Romhányi* poem on the war of independence (1848-1849), where he compared the Austrian nation to a hungry blood-sucking vampire:

> So thought the wisdom of Vienna,
> And Europe believed it,
> They sent their hungry vampire-nation
> To suck out the blood of our hearts… [426]

[424] Gróf József Gvadányi, *Kontó Pálnak, egy magyar lovas közkatonának és gróf Benyovszky Móricznak életek Földön, Tengereken álmélkodásra méltó Történettyeiknek, 's véghez vitt Dolgaiknak LE-ÍRÁSA, a' mellyet Hazánk Dámáinak kedvekért Versekbe foglalt gróf GVADÁNYI JÓZSEF Magyar Lovas Generális*, (Pozsony and Komárom, 1793), 159-64, 11.
[425] See Introduction.
[426] Pál Gyulai, *Romhányi Canto I, stanzas 1–2*, in: *Gyulai Pál Válogatott Művei* (Szépirodalmi Könyvkiadó, 1989), 23.

This comparison between the vampire and Austria can be found repeatedly at the time, both in literature and public print (I will go on to discuss this more later on in this chapter). Vampire creatures also appeared in János Vajda's poem called *Egyedül* in 1858, and later on in works by Kálmán Mikszáth (1886) and Mihály Babits (1902-1908). In addition to the vampire, the witch increasingly appeared in Hungarian literature from the middle of the nineteenth century. The affinity between Central European witchcraft and vampire beliefs lies in shared roots in folklore and role as symbols of societal fears, anxieties, and cultural identities. At this time, scholars interpreted the stories of folk beliefs and sought to reconstruct a distinctively Hungarian identity from this 'heritage'. It was no longer presented merely as a reprehensible superstition or a collective historical trauma, but as a much more complex and nuanced image was developed in relation to it.[427]

The lack of magical, supernatural creatures in Hungarian literature until the middle of the nineteenth century can be explained by the fact that Hungarian culture was not filled with such a robust mythology of imaginary creatures as Western Europe. It has been pointed out that there are not many mythological elements in Hungarian poetry. The reason for this, Dezső Németh suggested, was that Hungarian mythology is a diverse and somewhat fragmented collection of stories and beliefs, rather than a single, cohesive mythological tradition. The comparative analyses in these works are viewed more as scholarly studies than genuine mythological narratives.[428]

In an article titled 'The poetry of folk beliefs and superstitions' from 1837, the writer Lőrinc Tóth stated that:

> Every nation, in the West as well as in the East, both at a higher or lower level of education, has its own superstitions, wonderful, mysterious traditions, and supernatural beings, benevolent or harmful, horrors and fears, which filled some with reverent horror, which has a certain poetic nature; and they provide very interesting material for the poets of the 'people' to float their creative powers; moreover, they can also provide history and antiquities with

[427] Kornélia Steinmacher, 'A boszorkányság 19. századi irodalmi tükre, a bűnbakképzés és normaszegés határpontjai Arany János Vörös Rébék, Mikszáth Kálmán Galandáné asszonyom és Cholnoky Viktor Polixéna kisasszony pöre című műveiben' *A normán innen és túl*, (eds.) Janka Kovács, Viola Lászlófi and Zsófia Kökényessy (Budapest: Történeti Kollégium, 2017), 145-63.
[428] Dezső Németh, *Mitológiai Elemek a Magyar Költészetben* (Budapest: Változó Világ Doktori Iskola, 2017), 7.

> authentic data in the investigation of the old religion, customs and history of the people.[429]

The author argued that Hungarian imaginary creatures did not have the same power of calling as the 'lovely elves, water nymphs and capricious dwarves of the Western peoples' or the bright, luxuriant fairies of the 'East'. In Hungarian culture, the witch—who was swinging on the broomstick, harming children, milking cows, waiting at crossroads, and pressing and choking sleepers—did not express the same beauty and interest as the languid creatures of the Western poetic tradition.

> In this part of our Hungarian literature, it is very barren and so far, it can hardly show any products that would have flourished secretly sweetly from the mystical material of ancient folklore, folk traditions, and superstitions.[430]

Therefore, the author argues, the differences between these imaginary bestiaries was the reason Hungarian writers were not as interested in the supernatural as in Western Europe.

Scholarly investigation of folklore emerged around the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as a sub-field of modern historiography and coincided with the development of European nation-states. The origins of what came to be known as folklore research drew upon two main sources: firstly, the Enlightenment ideals that prompted the publication of a series of books that critiqued the irrationality of superstitious beliefs in the past. Secondly, the Hungarian intellectual class expressed an interest in exploring their ancient, pre-Christian culture, driving them to engage with the study of superstitious beliefs.[431] This research outlined the relatively limited variety of supernatural creatures in Hungarian folklore by comparison to neighbouring ethnic groups in Central and Southeastern Europe.[432] This phenomenon may be attributed to the adoption of Christianity coinciding with significant changes in the Hungarian environment and way of life. Additionally, the influence of the beliefs of neighbouring ethnic groups further displaced

[429] Lőrincz Tóth, *Athenaeum* 46 (Pest, December 7, 1837), 721.
[430] Ibid. 725.
[431] Dóra Kolta, *Ady Lírai Mitologizmusának Folklorisztikus Motívumrétegei*, PhD thesis (Budapest: Pázmány Péter Univeristy, 2013), 71.
[432] Tekla Dömötör, *A Magyar Nép Hihedelemvilága* (Corvina, 1981), 74

native Hungarian mythical beings. The remaining supernatural creatures in Hungarian folklore often represented simplified versions or combinations of creatures found in the folklore of neighbouring territories.[433]

There are several instances of Hungarian criticism of the supernatural in Western European writing, especially in the context of German literature. The writer Szaniszló Töltényi explained in 1825:

> Nowhere are people more closely related to witches, charmers, and sorcerers than among the Scandinavian peoples. There can be no doubt that Goethe's imagination was guided by these when he wrote his famous Ballad *Erlkönig*.

Töltényi observed that the Germans did not have their own ballads or national epics to preserve their stories. He further argued that the collection of Büsching and Hagen (*Sammlung Deutscher Volkslieder*) had little poetic merit. The ballads of Löwen, Gleim, Schiebetier and Weiss were merely commonplace; according to him, only Goethe was exceptional.[434] The overuse of supernatural elements was also the target of criticism in 1847:

> It is amazing that in every German play, devils, witches and all kinds of spirits appear, as if it were impossible to sing in the hard-pronounced German language without supernatural help.[435]

According to this Hungarian author, the German use of the supernatural was a means toward an end-a way of covering up deficiencies at the level of language.

This criticism mirrored that of supernatural representations in Hungarian literature for instance in an article entitled 'Folk tales in Hungary' published in 1847 in *Magyar Szépirodalmi Szemle*. While the authors acknowledged the existence of supernatural elements in Hungarian plays, he stated:

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[433] Dezső Nagy, 'Természetfeletti Lények, Világkép' *Folklór* 3. (1975): 84-97.
[434] *Hasznos mulatságok*, no. 7 (Pest, 1825): 52-3.
[435] *Budapesti Hiradó*, no. 668 (September 26, 1847), 218.

> The invention and presentation of the witches' adventures in *János Vitéz* is not without purpose. It is more artistic than popular, because the revelation of the sky through the death of the witches is a humanistic idea, which is difficult to find within the common people, because people continue to believe in the existence of real witches, and that is why people feel no need to glorify the Enlightenment in such ways.[436]

This review was based on *János vitéz*, an epic poem written by Sándor Petőfi in 1844, which gained immense popularity in Hungary and is considered a classic of Hungarian literature today. While the author criticised the popular superstitious belief in witches, he suggested that witches could serve an artistic purpose when connected to the representation of higher themes. The same critic also stated that:

> This tale can convince us that (…) folk poetry may still have value in our country by piecing together the ruins or scraps left over from superstition; this convinces me that if we avoid false knowledge, perhaps we can go further along this path just like other nations, for whom the forms of false knowledge are already more ingrained.[437]

He advised Hungarian authors to represent the supernatural with a degree of aesthetic distance; such distance enabled the supernatural to express truth rather than 'false knowledge'. The publication in which this review appeared, The *Magyar Szépirodalmi Szemle*, was a Hungarian literary newspaper that also included criticism, theoretical articles, and foreign literature reviews. While the paper ceased to exist within a year of its launch, failing to reach the necessary 400-500 subscribers needed to survive, its discussion of the aesthetic value of the supernatural attested to a larger cultural debate about superstition.

While most members of the educated elite disapproved of popular belief in the existence of supernatural creatures, Imre Madács's greeting speech as a new member of the Literary Society expressed a more encouraging view toward magic. He advised poets to include fairies, dwarfs, witches, and other traditions in their work:

[436] 'A népmese Magyarországon', *Magyar Szépirodalmi Szemle*, no. 24 (December 12, 1847): 379.
[437] Ibid. 380.

> Let no one say that our enlightened age does not believe in all this! Shocking, great events, in which a higher power directing the fate of the world becomes visible, so to speak, make people prejudiced. We see our greatest and most enlightened men, before a decisive battle, looking at small coincidences right or left. They anxiously watch the flight of the bird or hear the stirring sounds of the waking dawn. Sometimes we are shocked by a mysterious prediction, and the fantastic figures of the children's stories, the whole world of children's memories take on the colour of reality in the solemn moments of our lives. He who mourns his dead loved one shudder at the sight of a falling star and hears the encouraging words of the happy love fairy in the softly rustling breeze. This is the inexhaustible poetry of the human bosom.[438]

Madács called attention to the function of magical thinking in literature, drawing on examples from Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, Byron's *Manfred* and Goethe's *Faust*. Madács also highlighted the existence of other legends and tales that could be used to enrich Hungarian literature. His own Romantic ideas can be seen in his famous work, *Az ember tragédiája* [The Tragedy of Man], published in 1861. This dramatic poem elaborated on ideas similar to Goethe's *Faust* and Milton's *Paradise Lost*. Until the second half of the nineteenth century, Hungarian literature lacked representations of the supernatural. While these beliefs still widely existed in the Hungarian Kingdom, authors were hesitant to fictionalise them in literary forms as a way of proving their equality with Enlightened nations such as Germany. By avoiding supernatural content, Hungarian literature pushed against the narrative of social and cultural backwardness, making a spectacle of intellectual 'progress' to assert belonging with 'West' rather than 'East'.

By dissociating themselves from superstition and emphasizing their commitment to reason, rationality, and Enlightenment values, Hungarian intellectuals aligned themselves with the progressive ideals of Western Europe. This deliberate effort to distance themselves from superstition and embrace Enlightenment principles was seen as a crucial step in asserting their cultural and intellectual parity with their Western counterparts. For many

[438] 'Irodalmi munkálatok Madách Imre: Az aesthetika és társadalom viszonyos befolyása' (Székfoglaló), in: *A Kisfaludy-Társaság Évlapjai, Új Folyam* 1 (Pest, 1860-1863), 183-84.

Hungarian authors, the 'West' represented economic and social advancement that was worthy of emulation. However, the 'West' also functioned as a superior, foreign influence against which the distinctive national culture and character of Hungary had to be protected. Hungarian writers expressed despair over the perception that their country was being pushed further east and 'balkanized', referring to the fragmentation and perceived cultural and economic decline associated with the Balkans.[439]

'The other': Hungarian displacement of supernatural beliefs to the borderland minorities

In Hungarian literature, Romanticised magical and supernatural creatures did not find their space in the pages of novels and fictions; instead, they appeared as a different form of entertainment through the contemporary press. It was a common practice of the educated elite in European urban centres to use supernatural belief as a way of to distance themselves from the peasantry. French, English, and German newspapers often discussed superstition as a distinctive characteristic of the people and cultures of 'Eastern Europe'. Therefore, Larry Wolff's remarks about how Westerners invented an Eastern Europe for themselves is especially relevant for the history of supernatural. The disintegration of the Ottoman Empire in the nineteenth century raised the question of European identity. This took the form of the 'Eastern question'—an ongoing European debate about the distribution of territory and influence in the midst of Ottoman decline that had the potential for determining new borders for Europe. To what extent could European identity be stretched and what would constitute the 'other' to this identity? Wolf argues in his book that the territories of the Ottoman Empire were already seen by the Western colonialist consciousness as an exotic 'other' where civilization did not restrain potentially dangerous elemental instincts.[440] It has been pointed out, however, that Eastern Europe was also the object of the West's colonised consciousness, as the region was grouped into attempt to 'orientalise' Russia or treat it as part of 'Asia'.[441] As I will show later in this chapter,

[439] Hofer,'Construction of the 'Folk' Cultural Heritage', 158.
[440] Larry Wolff*, Inventing Eastern Europe:* The *Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment* (Stanford University Press, 1994).
[441] See for example: Oscar Halecki, *A nyugati civilizáció peremén: Kelet-Közép-Európa története* (Osiris-Századvég: Budapest, 2000).

Hungarian mass media constructed the Balkans as its 'other', imitating the larger pattern of 'othering' that Western Europe projected on its Eastern periphery.

Larry Wolff also shows that, since the Enlightenment, Western travellers represented 'Eastern Europe' as an uncivilized, 'exotic other'.[442] The publication and popularity of travelogues reached a peak in the second half of the eighteenth century in Germany and England. August Ludwig Schlözer, professor of statistics at Göttingen, wrote in 1777: 'we Germans travel more often than perhaps any other people on Earth: and this dominant fashion of travel is always one of the beneficial features of our nation'.[443] These travelogues, which contained science-related travel descriptions and fictitious, literary accounts, offered the reading public information about current public events and distant landscapes. As Maria Todorova had shown, however, the opinions of Western travellers, diplomats, and experts often varied on a wide-ranging scale, resulting in different combinations of understanding, objectivity, positive and negative biases.[444] Newspapers gradually took over the informative role of travelogues. The construction of a network of roads, hotels, and restaurants created the preconditions for mass tourism, and 'modern' guidebooks contained information about distant regions that made individual travelogues unnecessary. Goethe wrote in *Wilhelm Meister's Wandering Years* (1828/29):

> The time is past when people rushed adventurously into the wide world. Thanks to scientific travellers writing with wisdom, copying artistically, we are everywhere, sufficiently well-instructed to know tolerably what we have to expect.[445]

Goethe highlights how the proliferation of media transforms the way people interact with and understand the world: the necessity of first-hand experience has been replaced by the convenient wisdom contained in travel writing. Such writing, Goethe observes, tells the reader 'what … to expect' and therefore serves as a lens that shapes the reader's perception

[442] Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe*, 17-49.
[443] A. L. Schlözer*, Entwurf zu einem Reise-Collegio* (Göttingen, 1777), 3.
[444] Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans* (Oxford University Press, 1997), 76-9.
[445] Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, 'Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship & Wilhelm Meister's Journeyman Years', in: *The Collected Works of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe: Novels, Plays, Essays & Authobiography: Wilhelm Mesiter`s travel, Faust Part One and Two, Italian Journey*, (eds.) Nathan Haskell Dole, Kuno Francke and Arthur Mee (E-artnow, 2019), chapter IX.

of otherness. German stereotypes of Eastern Europe framed the region as a backward, uncivilized place that required transformation or domination by a foreign power. German writers described Eastern Europe as an anarchic land filled with ignorant and superstitious people.[446] By defining Eastern Europe in this way, Enlightenment thinkers invented a Western identity by means of contrast.[447] Revenant cases served as an important topic for drawing these anti-Eastern prejudices to the surface, as one German newspaper article put it in 1773:

> The famous cases of vampires, or blood-sucking dead, in Poland and other regions 40 to 50 years ago, gave the world an insight of the great credulity of which the uneducated, ignorant bunch is capable in Poland. The rays of light which illuminate the other parts of Europe do not seem to be able to penetrate into this unfortunate land. […] It can be agreed that Poland is on the edge of ruin, they base their prophecy on the spirit of hate, jealousy, ambition, and selfishness that spirited the citizens.[448]

These pieces were published in the *Reichs-Post-Reuter*, which was one of the most important political newspapers of Northern Germany in the eighteenth century, contributed to the Enlightenment movement and had widespread influence. It also states:

> This absurd opinion on vampires and other dreamy imaginings is not entirely out of fashion, and it will not change, as long as certain books, infected with such sinful errors, from blind ignorance, are still found around these lands.[449]

Throughout the Enlightenment period, the Habsburgs aimed to wrest its population away from an 'Ottoman East' toward a 'Habsburg Europe'. The Habsburg rulers saw the transformation of these eastern territories as crucial for consolidating their control and asserting their European identity, attempting to bring these peripheral regions into

[446] Charles W. Ingrao, 'The Early Modern Period', in: *Germans and the East*, (eds). Charles W. Ingrao and Franz A. J. Szabo (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2008), 59-63.
[447] See: Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe.*
[448] *Reichspostreuter* (October 25, 1773).
[449] *Reichspostreuter* (Jun 29, 1775).

alignment with Habsburg norms of governance, religion, and culture.[450]

For the Western imagination, the symbolic geographies of the East have not changed greatly since the eighteenth century. Larry Wolff and Maria Todorova showed that the ideas of the East in eighteenth-century examples bear a striking resemblance to the ones represented in Western media today. Both Wolff's and Todorova's books suggest that the East-Central European area occupied a special intermediate position between the West and the East. Compared to the 'West', Eastern Europe was backward, primitive, and barbaric. According to Todorova, discourse about the Balkan region began to spread in wider circles of the Western European public in the twentieth century.[451] Balkanism, as Todorova calls it, was different from Orientalism. From a Western point of view, the Balkans appeared as a frighteningly distorted reflection--not as completely 'other' to Europe but a dark side of the same entity. For the nineteenth-century Western European, Constantinople represented the true romantic Orient, while the Balkans were considered only as an insignificant, dark gateway: a necessary evil on the way to more exotic travel.[452] Todorova claims that Balkan 'otherness' was only a manipulative fiction of the West, created by the western elite in order to define its superiority more easily.[453]

Territories such as Serbia have been viewed as Eastern and containing Oriental influences; this can be seen in the 1868 edition of a newspaper called *Die Gartenlaube für Österreich*, which demonstrated interesting theories to explain the beliefs in vampires:

> It remains very striking that, the countries bordering the Turks and Oriental territories, such as Serbia, first brought vampire mania into the world […] Thus, with the help of dream-producing opium, the vampire ideas may have spread.[454]

The association of vampire belief with the influence of opium was not new. As early as 1733, Johann Christoph Harenberg suspected that vampire hunters operated under the influence

[450] See: R. J. W. Evans, *Austria, Hungary, and the Habsburgs. Essays on Central Europe, c.1683-1867*. (Oxford Univeristy Press, 2008).
[451] Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*, 13.
[452] Ibid. 89.
[453] Ibid. 197.
[454] 'Der Vampyrismyus and die Vampyre', *Die Gartenlaube für Österreich* no. 37 (September 7, 1868): 442-43.

of opium or other kinds of hallucinogenic drugs.[455] However, rather than suggest that opium contributed to vampire belief, the authors suggested that superstitions pushed fearful, ignorant people to take refuge in drugs: 'Such traumatic dreams, fantasies, hallucinations and visions, caused by the imagination lead to real madness and melancholy; the state of madness is connected with the emotional pain'.[456] The consumption of opium was primarily associated with the East and Muslim peoples, where alcohol was a forbidden substance. Similar negative attitudes can be found in Hungarian newspaper articles where the authors discussed the opium addiction of the Turks: 'as they are not allowed to drink wine, they are intoxicated or stunned with opium'.[457] While opium was seen as a problem in Turkish society, English doctors prescribed it liberally, even giving it to women for menstrual pain and children for hiccups. Despite its potential dangers, opium had a growing allure in English society, as it was seen as an ancient and mystical treatment capable of inducing otherworldly experiences.[458]

While the European 'other' was defined in terms of West and East, these definitions were contested and blurry. Emil Niederhauser distinguishes the following historical regions in Eastern Europe: Western-Eastern Europe (Czech Republic, Slovenia), Central- Eastern Europe (Poland, Hungary, Croatia and the Baltic States), the Balkan countries (Romania, Bulgaria, Serbia, Macedonia, Bosnia, Albania) and Eastern-Eastern Europe (Russia, Ukraine, Belarus). According to Niederhauser, in the historical Central and Eastern European region, the feudal order survived and only began to modernize from the end of the nineteenth century. The Balkan states were characterized by the absence of their own ruling classes and a weak, mostly ethnically foreign bourgeoisie.[459] In contrast to Western ideas of progress, Eastern Europe was paralyzed by a weak civil society, backwardness of industry, delayed urbanization, the lack of trade and infrastructure, the traditionally important role of the State in the economy, and the preservation of social order.

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[455] See: Johann Christoph Harenberg, *Vernüftige und Christliche Gedanken über die Vampire oder Bluthsaugende Todten* (Wolfenbüttel, 1733).
[456] 'Der Vampyrismus und die Vampyre', *Die Gartenlaube für Österreich*, 445.
[457] *Vasárnapi Újság* 2, no. 43 (January 25, 1835): 340.
[458] See: Thomas De Quincey, *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* (Taylor and Hessey: London, 1823).
[459] Eszther Bartha,'Az egzotikus 'másik?'– Kelet-Európa fogalmak a jelenkori magyar historiográfáiban', *Kelet-európai sorsfordulók : Tanulmányok a 80 éves Palotás Emil tiszteletére*, (ed.) József Juhász (L'Harmattan, 2016), 343.

In the fourteenth and fifteenth century, the emergence of centralized states in Eastern Europe was an encouraging sign of parity in socio-economic development between Eastern and Western Europe. However, the military victories and expansion of the Ottoman Empire set back the development of the region. Eastern European cities became impoverished, industry and trade declined, and the unified nation-states were replaced by rulers from the Ottoman Empire. Niederhauser suggests that this history led to the dilemma of 'modernization versus nationalism' that still divides the states of the region today. The issues of national identity and independence have adversely affected the much more fundamental issue of social and economic progress in Eastern Europe.[460] The idea of Magyars as the shield of the Christian World against Muslim invaders played a major role in the self-awareness of Hungarians for centuries. As previously discussed, however, for Germans and other Western Europeans the 'East' started at the border of Austria. This image of Eastern Europe also informs the 'otherness' of the vampire in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*: Transylvania appears as a land of barbarism, and Dracula even brings the 'life-giving' soil to England with him in the coffin.[461] Anxiety about the East pivoted around the possibility that its barbarism could infect Western civilization.

Positioned between East and West, between the 'European' Austria and the 'Oriental' Ottoman Empire, Hungary experienced an identity crisis:

> The historical right embodied in the nobility, which, as a result of the extension of rights, argued for the superiority of the Hungarian ethnicity (…) because even if in a democratized form, the question of 'who is Hungarian?' was the basis of political participation.[462]

The West meant 'Europe' in Hungarian writings, which implied the desirable traits of social and economic development.[463] Irina Popova showed that both Austrians and Magyars used

[460]On Eastern Europe concept see: Emil Niederhauser, *A nemzeti megújulási mozgalmak Kelet-Európában* (Akadémiai: Budapest, 1977); *A jobbágyfelszabadítás Kelet-Európában* (Akadémiai: Budapest, 1962); Emil Niederhauser, 'A kelet-európai fejlődés egysége és különbözősége', in: *Magyar Tudomány* 9 (1988): 668-81; Emil Niederhauser, 'A kelet-európai fejlődés kérdéséhez', in: (ed.) Ring Éva, *Helyünk Európában* (Budapest: Magvető Könyvkiadó, 1987), 212–22.
[461] Bartha, 'Az egzotikus 'másik?'', 341-49.
[462] Éva Petrás, *Nacionalizmus és politikai romantika, Vázlat a magyar nacionalizmusromantikus elemeiről és a politikairomantiáról Magyarországon* (Budapest, 2006), 48.
[463] Tamás Hofer, 'Construction of the 'Folk Cultural Heritage'', 158.

maps as a tool to 'identify the geographic limits of their power' in their aim to construct national identities,.[464] Popova also pointed out that Hungarians identified themselves by region and religion rather than language, as both foreign and Hungarian authors considered multilingualism as a sign of backwardness. Authors believed that a unified Hungarian language would push Hungary closer to the European model of the nation state.[465]

Part of the centralization goal of the Habsburg Monarchy took the form of 'Germanization', which aimed to install German as the administrative language in Hungary at the end of the eighteenth century.[466] Contrary to the monarch's intention of unification, 'Germanization' awakened a wave of nationalist sentiment that set the groundwork for the reform era and the birth of politically effective Hungarian nationalism. Due to the language reform movement, a modern, standardized Hungarian language was created, which became the medium of national literature and public discourse. The reforms contributed to the instalment of Hungarian as the official language over Latin in the country in 1844.[467] This 'imagined community', however, was not only based on common language and culture, but also on common origin and ethnicity.[468] In 1810, Dániel Berzsenyi had asked 'what is Hungarian now?' in his poem *Magyarokhoz*. Influenced by German Romantics, Berzsenyi's stress on the word 'now' contrasted the contemporary, deplorable condition of Hungary against an ideal, unified, and independent Hungary from the past.[469]

These cultural dilemmas and fears attest to the Hungarian desire to create an identity that would distinguish them from the 'backward' East. Magyar elite attempted to consolidate a Westernized Hungarian identity by projecting supernatural and magical belief onto border minorities. Magyars were conspicuous in their emphatic denial of superstitious belief in the revenant:

> With us, thank God! such nonsense no longer finds credit among the lowest classes; and all the intelligent ones who have influence over our lower classes

[464] Irina Popova, 'Representing National Territory, Cartography and Nationalism in Hungary, 1700-1848', *Creating the Other Ethnic Conflict & Nationalism in Habsburg Central Europe*, ed. Nancy M. Wingfield (Berghahn Books, 2003), 19.
[465] Ibid. 26.
[466] See chapter one.
[467] Petrás, *Nacionalizmus és politikai romantika*, 42.
[468] Tamas Hofer, 'Construction of the 'Folk Cultural Heritage'', 154.
[469] Dániel Berzsenyi, 'Magyarokhoz' (1810) https://mek.oszk.hu/06200/06222/html/makolt180560007.html Accessed: December 21, 2023.

> will promote our wise and blissful government's intention to spread true religiosity and true enlightenment to the ordinary people, so that all other kinds of mischief will perish.[470]

According to these authors, most of these backward beliefs can be found in Hungary's southern borders with Serbia and Romania, which Hungarian society considered to be 'East'. This distinction in Hungarian identity around belief in the supernatural intensified over the course the nineteenth century. From the reform era onwards, the intellectual elite suggested that Hungary belonged to the West as a historical community that could and must be strengthened by modernizing according to the Western pattern. These authors ascribed misconceptions about Hungary and the delayed modernization of the country to the presence of an internal, 'oriental' other that they associated with the southeastern regions.

The development of Hungarian journalism was also a nearly hundred-year delay compared to the first European newspaper launches. This was due to the Turkish occupation and the subsequent colonizing policies of Habsburg rule, a Hungarian bourgeoisie, which is one of the most fundamental conditions for the creation of a periodical press, could not develop. The country's small bourgeoisie was foreign-speaking, primarily German. The start of the Hungarian-language press was facilitated by an enlightened national renewal movement, which aimed at the cultivation of Hungarian language and the development of Hungarian literature and cultural life. The representatives of this movement recognized the necessity of improving social relations and developing the economy, sciences, and national culture.[471] The first Hungarian language newspaper, *Magyar Hírmondó*, was published in Pozsony (the capital city of Hungary until 1830). The newspaper started in 1780 and it played a decisive role in the development of national scholarship and culture at the end of the eighteenth century. The purpose of the paper was to provide authentic information about domestic and foreign events and to inspire Hungarian national culture. Lack of inventive work on the part of the later editors and loss of readers' interest led the paper to cease publication in 1788. The opening issue, on

[470] 'Vampír. A keresztény hit 's ép-ember ész legjobb őr-eszköz a' vétkes babona ellen', *Fillértá*r 1, no.1 (Pozsony, March 1, 1834): 7-8.
[471] Domokos Kosáry, *Művelődés a XVIII. századi Magyarországon* (Budapest : Akadémiai Kiadó, 1996), 533-42.

February 5 in 1780, reported a vampire-like, returning dead figure under the title 'Incredible Thing'. The strange case had ostensibly occurred in 1777 or 1778 in the village of Hertnek in Sáros county (northeastern Slovakia) when a resident was accused of murdering his family and other villagers at night after his death. He killed with the 'the wind of death', strangling his victims with an invisible pressure. The villagers were so terrified not a single person would 'dare to cross' the village alone after nine o'clock in the evening. Therefore, the villagers exhumed the corpse of the man and burned it.[472]

In the same year, on May 10 in 1780, *Magyar Hírmondó* reported another piece of horrific news. In the county of Kraszna in eastern Hungary (today's Romania) a woman died in childbirth and was buried the same day. However, the husband did not believe that his wife had actually died. Upon his repeated request, the villagers dug the women out of the grave, and 'when she was dug out, she was found lying upside down in the coffin'.[473] The authors used the stories to point out that ignorance and 'superstition' contributed to excessive fears that were harmful to society. While the newspaper did not have a wide readership at the time, its audience included members of the educated elite. Between 1780 and 1782, the *Magyar Hirmondó* subscribers included 123 were landowning nobles, 45 were Roman Catholic priests, 18 lawyers, 18 estate managers, and 12 military officers.[474] The newspaper was created by the educated members of the state administration, and they saw potential in reaching out to readerships outside of the elite, who only spoke the national language of Hungarian.[475]

These articles demonstrate that the elite still had a great interest in superstitious beliefs and that the 'fight against superstition' of the previous decades had not been successful across all levels of society. This can be seen in an article published on 24 January 1781 in *Magyar Hírmondó* which reported the scandalous case of an old woman who had been held in the prisoner dungeon of Kolozs county (today's Romania). This woman was rumoured to transform people into cats and other animals, and many people who fell ill complained that she was a witch with the power to curse. According to the editor of the newspaper, Mátyás Rát, these were 'remnants of old ignorance and superstition'. Writing

[472] *Magyar Hírmondó* (February 5, 1780): 88.
[473] *Magyar Hirmondó* (May 10, 1780): 298.
[474] István Kuszák, *Ráth Mátyás, az első magyar hírlapíró* (Győr: Harangszó, 1940), 23.
[475] Tóth, *Boszorkánypánik és babonatéboly*, 14.

two months after Maria Theresa's death (1780), Rát advised the historians and poets of his time to:

> Not to forget (…), among the many notable and distinguished actions of her Majesty, to mention in praise that she put an end to that unseemly superstitious ignorance, which, to the eternal disgrace of the human race, led many poor mothers, only because they grew old and were discouraged from using many charms, to be condemned to fire without any mercy![476]

Magyar Hirmondó reported in 1782 that a superstitious old midwife with her son and daughter-in-law dug a grave in the cemetery in Hódmezővásárhely (today's southeast Hungary) where a young woman had been buried two weeks before. The midwife took some pieces of the corpse's hair because of 'some superstition to be followed', and the daughter-in-law took the dead's funeral clothes, which she wore later to a pub dance. The clothes were recognized at the party and the culprits were caught. While the article did not report what happened to the grave robbers, it considered the case a glaring example of human ignorance and superstitious actions.[477] The newspaper continued to report such cases in later issues, which distinguished it from other similar publications at the time. Other newspapers that contained information about Hungarian domestic affairs were often written in a foreign language, such as *Wienerisches Diarium*, and did not report on these cases of villager superstition. The *Magyar Hirmondó* was published twice a week and reached at least a thousand people; many of its readers later became active in the revival of literary and public life of Hungary.[478]

A similar case can be found in a different newspaper, which ran under the same name, *Magyar Hírmondó* (published in Vienna between January 2, 1792 and May 30, 1803). The article appeared in 1794 under the title of 'Hungary', and it reported the following from Szolnok on June 25:

[476] *Magyar Hirmondó* (January 24, 1781): 49–50.
[477] *Magyar Hirmondó* (April 20, 1782): 244.
[478] Tóth, *Boszorkánypánik és babonatéboly*, 468.

> We can be proud of the fact that, as well as in other provinces of Europe, in our country [Hungary] as well, many superstitious beliefs and actions have now generally been dispelled by the world of 'common sense'; however, we are sad to see that some of these beliefs still remain among them, or mostly among the more single-minded people, and it is necessary to make frequent reminders about this subject, so that our Church and School Teachers can all the more effectively stimulate us to enlighten the 'Common People', as that is the only true way to eradicate the dangerous occurrence of 'ignorance' - the 'superstitions'.[479]

The author was concerned that the unusual drought in Szolnok would revive the belief in witchcraft amongst 'uneducated' people, who would demand that some women be subjected to ordeal by water.[480] 'Witch swimming' was a common test to see if the accused were in fact witches:

> Every old woman is in constant danger of being called a witch and being taken to the nearest water and thrown into it; this is the witch trial. If she does not sink into the water, she is usually considered a witch, and is either mercilessly beaten to death or drowned.[481]

In this case, the water test did not take place, as 'the number of false imaginations was far exceeded by the smarter ones, who considered such disgraceful desecrations without foundation'.[482]

In 1798, an article on witchcraft belief appeared in *Magyar Kurir*, the second Hungarian-language newspaper (published between 1786-1834, *Magyar Kurir* was the longest-lived Hungarian-language newspaper of the era). According to the article, many women believe in the existence of witches with an evil desire to corrupt people:

[479] *Magyar Hírmondó* 6, no. 1 (July 1, 1794): 12.
[480] Ibid. 13.
[481] *Fillértár mindennemű közhasznú ismeretek terjesztésére* 2, no. 5 (Pozsony, April 4, 1835): 37.
[482] Ibid. 13.

> The other day, in this spacious forest on our border, with its mountainous valleys, full of tall beech and pine trees, and ringing with the sound of cool breezes, someone went out with the intention of gathering the grass of the deer's tongue, which grows on the banks of a stony abyss called Maleha.[483]

It was believed that if someone picked the herb they would be bewitched. The description of the borderland deploy poetic language to create an image of nature; but unlike the Romantics, who celebrated nature's sublime beauty, the author of the newspaper presents nature as a threat to be avoided.

The front page of the *Hazai Tudósítások* from 1807 is dedicated to witchcraft. It starts with a decree from Coloman the Learned, who was King of Hungary from 1095 and King of Croatia from 1097 until his death in 1116. *De Strigis vero, quae non sunt, nulla quaetsio fiat…* (As for the matter of strigas, there is no such thing, therefore no further investigations or trials are to be held…). The striga is a shape-changer or *lidérc*, so, according to the law, no one could be prosecuted for such a thing. The article also discussed the history of witch prosecutions in Hungary, which mainly consisted of old women: 'There are no witches', the author noted, 'but it is not enough to save them from the undeserved accusation; it is necessary and in good taste to give the old women the respect they deserve and to highlight their merits, which are very great for the human race'. The author separates the witch belief-accusations from the positive effects arising from the folk healing of old women. He argues that old women functioned as the doctors for smaller villages and rural areas, and, now that ignorance had dissipated, the origins of disease could be found in natural causes which the pious ancestors considered devilish or a secret evil craft.[484] The author asserts that belief in witchcraft was extinct in Hungary though it lingered in neighbouring regions such as Bereg county, where Russians dug up a man's corpse as they believed he was coming back at night from his coffin to strangle cattle. The dead body was not only dug up, but also pierced with iron forks. To make sure the corpse could never harm again, it was reburied. The author's only comment is a Latin phrase: *Parce pias scelerare manus!* (Spare the wicked hands of the pious!). This article supported the view that, in

[483] *Magyar Kurir* 12, no. 49 (June 22, 1798): 756.
[484] *Hazai Tudósítások*, no. 27 (September 30, 1807): 213.

Hungary, ignorant, superstitious beliefs disappeared while on the borders of the country people still believed in such things.

In the nineteenth century it was commonly believed that Coloman had put to an end to beliefs in witchcraft and witch trials. This was not the case. Prosecutions of witchcraft continued in Hungary until the middle of the eighteenth century, and only Maria Theresa's law (1768) put an end to them. While Maria Theresa's law took place only 50 years before the article, it is interesting to note that the author -and many others later- attributed the end of witch trials to Coloman. Hungarians had a profound nostalgia for the medieval era when 'great Hungary' was led by a Hungarian king (Coloman), while Maria Theresa was considered to be Austrian. The historical accuracy of Coloman's involvement in ending witch trials was critiqued in the *Pesti Hirlap* in 1847:

> In addition to so many buried treasures of our law collection, one could rightly be annoyed, how historians always cited Kálmán's [Coloman's] law against witch-hunting to show that we had kings who were superior to their age.

The author believed that many Hungarian compatriots used this law to show Hungary's greatness in the face of Europe.[485] In the nineteenth century, the discovery and construction of Hungarian history gained central importance. Nostalgia for the past inspired the spirit of nationalism: looking backward, Hungarians could see the model for a successful future. At the time they were working out their modern national identity, Hungarians mostly wanted to distinguish themselves from Austrians.[486] A witchcraft case from 1846 states: 'We can be thankful to Coloman, that the poor old woman was not summoned as a witch'.[487]

The *Hasznos Mulatságok* newspaper (established in 1817) offers a picture of the construction of Hungarian identity in relation to debates about folklore and modern science. In an article titled *Folklore* from 1820, the author wrote of man finding his wife dead and torn apart in the kitchen (the author does not provide the name of the village). Everyone in the village knew that the man's wife was a witch, and they believed that her witch companions tore her to pieces in their anger. A priest, therefore, refused to give her corpse

[485] *Pesti Hírlap*, no. 875 (May 6, 1847): 291.
[486] Hofer, 'Construction of the 'Folk Cultural Heritage'', 159.
[487] *Budapesti Hiradó*, no. 488 (November 10, 1846): 310-11.

a Christian burial, instead placing her remains in ground beneath a crossroad. The story continues:

> But immediately from that place peace was lost for ever; because the witch was always up and doing her dirty sorcerer's crafts. The shepherds were often seen in the shape of a wolf or a bear, and over the city it often croaks like a black army of ravens. Many times, she also appeared in her human form and scared her acquaintances.

Due to this terror, the villagers dug up the corpse, which they found in a strange state: she had half swallowed the veil with which her head was covered, and when the veil was pulled from her throat, it was completely red with blood. The villagers staked the corpse through the heart, 'but at this she became even angrier and killed many people, and she carried their skinned corpses on a pile above her grave and danced on them in the shadow of the moon'. When the villagers dug up the corpse again, they found that the stake was not in her chest but in her hand. The corpse was burned and, despite the rotating winds that circled incessantly on the crossroad, the witch never came back again.[488] The author noted a similar story where the dead had come back after death to scare and murder people: 'Whose name he said once, they had to die in a week'. When the villagers staked the corpse it yelled: 'Good that you gave me a little stick, the better I can beat you in the head'. The killing continued, and the only way to stop it was to burn the corpse.[489] The author only aimed to report this case, without framing it with his own commentary or interpretation.

The *Jelenkor* newspaper reported a case from Körösbánya in Zaránd county (now in Romania) where in 1839 a mine collapsed and crushed two people under a stone pile. Other unfortunate events took place in the region that year. The author commented that:

> The common people still believe in the existence of superstitions and witches, because whatever common misfortune befalls us here, one or two dead

[488] *Hasznos Mulatságok*, no. 32 (1820): 254-55.
[489] Ibid. 255.

> bodies are dug up and burned, in the hope that the power of the witch can be broken.[490]

Only three years later, in 1841, an article entitled *A terrible example of blind faith* reported a story from the village of Alsó Porumbak in the Fogaras region (today's Romania) where Ilia Nini, declared on his deathbed to his wife that he could be restless in his grave because of the misfortunes he had suffered during his life. The villagers attributed a superstitious meaning to these words, especially as the great drought prevailing throughout the country also afflicted Porumbak. So, villagers explained the drought by asserting that Ilia Nini was a witch who had escaped from his grave at night to drink the water that was needed to feed the withering crops. The drunken villagers decided to dig up his corpse to break the curse; to be on the safe side, they dug up the corpses of 12 young women as well. The whole village attended the spectacle in the cemetery, even the pastors, and pointed wooden stakes were inserted throughout the coffins and holy water poured into all the graves until it reached ground level (this last step was taken to appease the thirst of the corpses). Later, the villagers returned and saw that the corpses and coffins were wet and mouldy, forgetting that the corpses were initially accused of holding the rain to themselves. A local madman named Györgye Urli rushed to dismember the corpses with an axe. After this grisly work, he reburied the remains. The author commented:

> A truly painful feeling occupies every good-feeling person, that even in this enlightened century, our people, in their superstition, ravage the cemetery, a place that finally promises peace after earthly suffering and is sacred and respected even among wild peoples. It can easily happen that the inhabitants neighbouring the place of the story will be encouraged to do the same, as there are unfortunate people everywhere whom the easily believing superstitions.[491]

[490] *Jelenk*or, no. 51 (Pest, Jun 26, 1839): 201-2.
[491] *Erdélyi Híradó*, no. 8 (Kolozsvár, July 27, 1841): 29-30.

This case can be read in *Erdélyi Híradó* and the author of the article, Mátéffi Sámuel, deplored that this horrific belief existed among what he called 'our people'.[492] While everyone involved in the case had Romanian surnames, it is not clear where the author thought they were from.

An interesting letter to the editor can be read in the *Pesti Napló* in March of 1862, complaining about a previous article, which reported an incident that happened in an *Olách* village of Starikör in Krassó County (today's Romania) where a girl was burned alive as the villagers believed she was a witch. The complaint framed the incident as an example of 'Hungarian barbarism', implying that it happened on Hungarian territory, although the original article specified that the unpleasant incident was carried out by *oláh* (Romanian) and not Hungarian residents. The author of the complaint found it offensive that the case was presented as Romanian. The letter argued that there was no evidence that the people who had committed the witch burnings were Romanians:

> I do not know why it was necessary to use this prejudicial crime to characterize a certain nationality (...) the culture stands on a very equal level among all nationalities; and in terms of common sense, the Romanian can compete with any of them.[493]

This letter alone demonstrates how Hungarians projected superstition onto others but also how the borderland minority felt about it.

In September of the same year *Pesti Napló* published another story about the superstition of the *oláh* people from Nagy Pestény. Here, the word *oláh* featured prominently:

> The oláh villagers (the dead man himself was oláh) whispered that Jován (that is what the man was called) was a witch, a *prikulich* (the Romanian term for vampire) who was destroying the cattle. The villagers agreed that his corpse should be dug up and examined.[494]

[492] Ibid. 29.
[493] *Pesti Napló*, no. 3626 (March 13, 1862).
[494] *Pesti Napló*, no. 3773 (September 10, 1862).

Another incident took place in Kis Pestény, where an accused witch was tortured and murdered by a Romanian priest with a hot iron. The same article included another story:

> Yesterday they buried an old oláh woman who was gored by an ox and died as a result. They drove an iron nail into her heart before the burial, because they thought she was a witch, and that if they did not pierce her heart, she would harm the cows even after her death.[495]

This article highlighted that the oláh were involved in all three cases, showing that the reporter not only ignored the previous complaint but emphasised his anti-Romanian bias. An article published in 1872 about the Romanian superstition stated:

> The Romanian people, painfully, still do not stand at the stage of culture to completely overcome the misconceptions derived from the old age, they still believe in the existence of secret beings, and attach great importance to them even today.[496]

The article detailed the supernatural beliefs the authors ascribed to Romanians: that dead witches left their resting place at night, and that little children who died unbaptised escaped their graves to return home. Interestingly, the author clearly stated that in spite of these superstitions, 'the vampire of Lord Byron is unknown to the Romanians of Transylvania'.[497] In pre-romantic times, vampires lived in the minds of people as frightening supernatural beings that could terrorize the real world. But when the vampire appeared in literature, it began to gain more and more human traits and even seemed to blend into aristocratic society. In the folklore heritage represented by these rural cases, the vampire was a figure of shocking alterity that only bore a superficial trace of humanity.

Even as late as 1911, a newspaper article discussed the 'terrible superstition, called vampire belief' and argued that it was the worst of all superstitions: 'Eternal human

[495] Ibid.
[496] 'A román hitregéből', *Magyar Polgár* 6, no. 76 (Kolozsvár, April 4, 1872).
[497] Ibid.

reconciliation with Death is the cause of all superstition, but there is no other that can compete with the vampire belief of the Romanian peasant.' It also contained a story that:

> In just two weeks — as all fantasies intensify into horror in the spring — news came from three places that Romanian peasants had exhumed the graves of the recently buried dead, mutilated the corpses, and (which is a constant act in the vampires' chronicles) drove a stake through their hearts. [498]

The article compared vampire belief to ancient superstition. The author notes that most peasants believed that vampires caused disease to farm animals, which he links to ancient Egypt, where the dead and the animal kingdom had a special connection. The author concludes that the vampire superstition was not only about the dead or the soul, but about the fascination arising from the corpse: 'And in the mountains of Romania, the peasant digs out a superstition that is darker than the darkness of the grave, even more cold than the coldness of the grave'.[499]

Very similar stories were spread about Bulgarians' beliefs:

> The greatest and most original superstition among the Bulgarians is the belief that the evil spirit in the form of a vampire always walks among the people and occupies their body. On the occasion of the great fast, a young Bulgarian man told us that he had been possessed by a vampire because of his father's evil, and that neither wine nor *pálinka* (Hungarian spirit) was drunk and he did not smoke throughout the fast, only to get rid of the evil spirit. […] At this time, the villagers told me, the countryside was so full of vampires that the residents gathered in two or three houses, burned wax candles all night, and barely dared to look out in the street where the fiery vampires walked around, roared, caused fire, went into the houses, everything was turned upside

[498] 'Vámpírok', *Pesti Napló* 113 (Budapest, May 13, 1911), 4-5.
[499] Ibid.

down, blood was spilled around the attic, and the sacred images were smeared with trash.[500]

This piece appeared in 1871 in the cheap weekly newspaper the *Vasárnapi Újság*. The richly illustrated, taste-shaping weekly paper reached a wide range of people between 1854 and 1921. The editors, authors, correspondents, and illustrators of the *Vasárnapi Újság* sought to educate people over several decades. This long article titled 'The superstitions of the Bulgarian people' reached a large audience across Hungary. Newspapers also reported about Serbian vampire beliefs; indeed, many records of the eighteenth-century Habsburg administration came from the territories of Serbia in the 1730s. Revenant reports from the Habsburg southern borderland showed a cultural and political conflict between the military administration and local communities.[501] The vampire belief in these places still existed in the nineteenth century: 'it is a very common superstition in Serbia that people who die suddenly like vampires rise again to torture their neighbours and relatives left behind'.[502]

Throughout the eighteenth century, as I discussed in chapter one, Greek Orthodoxy was often blamed for perpetuating popular vampire beliefs among the laity and tricking the masses into a state of ignorance and credulity. This criticism continued into the nineteenth century. At the same time, the Orthodox Church regarded revenant executions with seriousness, affirming the existence of revenants and using them as propaganda against the Catholic Church. According to the Habsburg administration of the southern borderland, the inhabitants also preferred the Turkish yoke over Christian governance.[503] The attitudes of the Orthodox clergy and the beliefs of the Orthodox population were frequently observed by Western travellers, who often depicted Orthodoxy as superstitious and ignorant. This notion became a recurring theme in Western imagination.[504]

Even as late as 1878, an article entitled *Bosnian superstition and folk customs*, mocked the Bosnian people's beliefs (Bosniaks, Serbs, or Croats). The article focused on the mostly Orthodox, Slavic population of the southern borderlands, which can roughly be equated with today's Serbs:

[500] 'A bolgár nép babonái', *Vasárnapi Ujság* 29 (Pest, July 9, 1871): 370.
[501] Vampires in Serbia see: Ádám Mézes, 'Vampire Contagion as a Forensic Fact'.
[502] 'A vámpír', *Pesti Hírlap* 10, no. 28 (Budapest, January 28, 1888): 7.
[503] Mézes, *Insecure Boundaries*, 131.
[504] Ibid. 132.

> In the Greek Church, when priest buys their parish from the bishop with money, they do not look to see if he has the slightest education, only to be able to sing prayers well and give more money for the parish he intends to buy. With such leadership, it is no wonder that the people are uneducated and superstitious to the greatest extent. […] The priests do not deny the existence of vampires, they even claim that it is compatible with religion.[505]

The language used is very similar to the one that was used in the eighteenth-century to criticise Orthodox priests. The author stated: 'In itself, such priesthood is the real vampire of the people'.[506] Orthodoxy was also used as a pretext to lambast other ethnic groups in the Habsburg-Ottoman region. In the territories of Banat, Transylvania or Wallachia, the Orthodox population spoke the equivalent of today's Romanian language. In the eighteenth century, the Catholic Church used belief in the undead as a propaganda against Orthodoxy and non-Hungarians.

This projection of revenant and witch beliefs onto border minorities also closely linked with the issue of education. By the end of the eighteenth century, the elite used the supernatural as an argument for the establishment of a national system of education, connecting the growing problem of poverty and vagrancy to the superstitious state of the masses.[507] The same argument was made throughout the nineteenth century, highlighting the lack of education and poverty in the border minorities. Educational reforms, such as the implementation of a national system of education, forwarded societal progress by challenging superstitious beliefs. Educational policy, therefore, became entangled with the condition of the poor, and poverty was blamed on the credulity of the lower classes in superstition and supernatural creatures.

In 1844 the newspaper *Mult és Jelen* suggested a pressing necessity to improve the education of ordinary people and elevate their level of understanding. It highlighted how ignorance, characterized by blind faith and superstitious beliefs, disrupted even the peace of the deceased. The author of the article reported events that had happened in the village of

[505] 'Bosnyák babona és népszokások', *Fővárosi Lapok,* no. 197 (Budapest, August 29, 1878): 958-59.
[506] Ibid. 959.
[507] See chapter one.

Zsákfalva (today's Romania): after the death of an old woman, the villagers believed that she was a witch who took people away from beyond the grave. The priest and authorities of the village exhumed the corpse. Although the body had already begun to rot, the villagers saw that she was only half dead and wanted to stab her through the heart with a stake and bury her again. This disgusting deed was allowed by the *ispán* (leader the district), who helped to stuff the ears, nose, and mouth of the corpse with garlic while they placed the body back into the grave.[508] More of the same can be found from that year in the *Társalkodó* newspaper:

> The more educated the people are, the fewer false doctors can be found; there are more quackery among the Slovaks than among the Hungarians, the least among the Germans; the Romanians do not even understand quackery; even there, apart from the expulsion of the vampire, to which all illnesses and all misfortunes are attributed, natural remedies are used only very sparingly. (In Romania, in part of Transylvania and the Banat, the vampire, or as they say, the *moroi*, who, with the help of his devilish power over nature, attacks his next of kin and takes his blood until he also dies; or until they use means to deprive the vampire of all further power). I do not intend to talk here about the means used to curb the vampire and which shows the most outrageous superstition. To judge, it is necessary to know more closely both the religion and the way of thinking and living of this morally neglected and ignorant people.[509]

While the author admits that quackery could still be found among Hungarians, he positions them high above the Romanians, who continued to believe in the silliest superstitious beliefs. *Társalkodó* was a political newspaper published in Pest from 1832 to 1848 that had a significant impact on public opinion by spreading the ideas of liberal progress. The newspaper published entertaining and informative articles that included topics such as economics, poetry, theatrical critiques, and recognisable political issues. In this case, the

[508] *Mult és Jelen*, no. 35 (April 30, 1844): 138.
[509] 'Kuruzsolás hazánkban'*, Társalkodó* 13, no. 43 (Pest, May 5, 1844): 173-74.

newspaper used the supernatural, especially the vampire, as a staging ground for celebrating Hungarian progress in relation to the backwardness of the Romanians.

In Metesd (today's Romania) in 1846, numerous corpses had been dug up due to the belief a witch was escaping from her grave to kill cattle. The author mentioned Coloman, questioning how that was possible, blaming ignorant peasants who were not educated enough to avoid committing such awful acts. The author blamed the education system, calling for the Transylvanian Economic Association to allocate a small sum to the publication of a popular cattle medicine book. He believed that if there was even just one such book in the village, these terrible events could have been avoided. The author's aim was to educate rather than entertain, and he believed that the newspaper served an important didactic function for society:

> Worthy of public awareness, parliament is currently working on improving the fate of our country and its people, and perhaps there will be people for whom, among other reasons, reading this will suggest that it is time to rise the people from the dust of this country through education.

He demanded education so common people would have the ability to judge the spurious nature of superstitious fictions that seeped through from the fairy-tale world.[510]

Even as late as 1897, an article titled *Cultural conditions at the border* discussed the poor conditions of the borderland counties and claimed that superstitions such as vampirism were due to the lack of education. It explained that in:

> The so-called Verkhovina of Bereg County (today's Ukraine) is extremely backward in terms of culture. The state of education of the people living there is so pathetic that the soul of the human feels sorry for them. Darkness and superstition flourish here and we can say that the common people live in a completely wild state.

[510] *Jelenkor* 15, no. 85 (October 25, 1846): 508.

The author explained that the reason for these deplorable conditions arose from the lack of qualified teachers due to the low pay and shabby accommodation: 'In the absence of trained teachers, therefore, the common people help themselves with quackery and prophets.' For the author, the lack of teachers directly contributed to the lingering belief in vampirism.[511] Bereg was an administrative county in the Kingdom of Hungary; its territory is now mostly in western Ukraine and a smaller part in northeastern Hungary. The newspaper was published in Beregszász which is still the cultural centre of the Hungarian minority in Ukraine today. There is likely a great deal of exaggeration coming from the Hungarian author about the conditions of the mostly Ukrainian village. The elite used the ignorance of the poor as an argument for the establishment of a national system of education and used the growing problem of poverty to explain the superstitious state of the masses.

While Western European Romantic and Gothic literature often utilized supernatural themes as central elements in storytelling, Magyar writers took a different approach. Instead of using the supernatural as a source of fear, mystery and the sublime, Magyar writers often employed these themes in their newspaper articles. Magyar journalists often critiqued the superstitious beliefs prevalent amongst the borderland population. Hungarian newspapers reflected a distinct cultural attitude towards the supernatural, where it was not necessarily seen as deeply mysterious or frightening but rather as fodder for social commentary and amusement. Hungarian Romantic and Gothic literature also intertwined themes of death, life, and nationalism in a different way than in Western Europe. While Western European Romanticism tended to focus on themes of individualism, love, and existential angst, Magyar writers approached these themes through the lens of nationalism. Discussions about life and death were not just philosophical musings but were often tied to broader questions of Hungarian identity, history, and political aspirations. In this way, Hungarian Romanticism and Gothic literature contributed to the development of a distinctive Hungarian national culture by incorporating local beliefs, traditions, and societal concerns into their storytelling. By intertwining supernatural elements with social critique and nationalist themes, Magyar writers created a literary tradition that reflected the cultural and historical context of Hungary, setting it apart from its Western European counterparts.

[511] 'Kultúrállapotok a határszélen', *Bereg* 24. no. 43 (Beregszász, October 24, 1897): 346.

The use of vampirism as a metaphor in political discourse

Discourse on the supernatural provided the Hungarian elite with an opportunity to demonstrate how progressive they were by contrasting their Enlightened beliefs to the superstitious ones held by the borderland minority. These revenant cases included harmful witches and the returning dead - but while the cases exhibited the same characteristics of the eighteenth-century German reports on vampires, they were not given the label of the vampire. When the Magyar elite used the word 'vampire', it was exclusively in a political sense, accusing Austria of vampirism when preventing Hungary from achieving social and economic goals. The vampires in Western society often represented the anxieties, concerns, power dynamics and culture of the time. By the middle of the nineteenth century, this anti-Austrian sentiment took the form of the threatening vampires who were draining the 'blood' of the Hungarians. The discourse of nationhood changed during the 1848 Revolution and the War of Independence, Balázs Trencsenyi pointed out that before 1848 the questions of nation building and nationalities were mostly of a theoretical nature, the conflicts and the ensuing civil war made the Hungarian political elite painfully aware of the importance of the nationality question.[512] The Magyar elite, therefore, viewed Austria as Hungary's bloodsucker before and after the Austro-Hungarian Compromise of 1867 (*Ausgleich, Kiegyezés*) established the dual monarchy of Austria-Hungary. The complex nature of Hungarian national consciousness was defined by the constant conflict between nationalist and imperial orientations. This internal struggle affected the interpretation of historical events such as the Compromise.[513] The author of an article addressed to the Hungarian Imperial Governor, Lajos Kossuth, in the *Pesti Hírlap* in 1849 compared the Habsburgs to a vampire:

> Like a bloodthirsty vampire, the tyrannical power sat in the heart of the country, our capital, waving lies and deceit on its wings to force us into servitude; but the eyes of the people were awake and horrified to see the

[512] See: Balázs Trencsényi and Michal Kopeček, (eds.), *Discourses of Collective Identity in Central and Southeast Europe (1775-1945): Texts and Commentaries*, Volume I: Late Enlightenment. Emergence of the Modern 'National Idea', (Budapest: CEU Press, 2006).
[513] Gyáni Gábor, 'Bibó István kiegyezés-kritikája', in *Nép, nemzet, zsidó*. (Kalligram: Budapest, 2013), 130.

> hideous figure of the monster, they saw its evil that violated human and divine rights and laws, they saw the murder of the nation and freedom that it wants to commit.

This rather dramatic tone runs throughout the whole article. Written two months after *The Hungarian Declaration of Independence* (April 14, 1849), the article discussed the ways that Hungarians struggled under the Habsburg rule and asked Kossuth to continue the great work to fight for Hungary's freedom.[514]

The blood sucking vampire often appeared in political discourse about the relationship between Hungary and Austria. For example:

> Hungary has been a milking cow for Austria for seventy-five years already, so it is about time for this situation to end. So far, the blood of the Hungarian people has been sucked by two vampires: the Hungarian exploitative army and Austria. It would be a great relief for us to be able to get rid of at least one of our leeches, Austria, for the time being. That is why we are glad to see that the ties that bind us together with the Austrians are becoming looser. It is in the interest of leading politicians to get rid of Austria's unpleasant love, so that the Hungarian working population can now sweat only under Hungarian capital. [515]

The author expressed his frustration and resentment towards Austria, identifying the Austrian drain of resources as the primary cause of Hungarian suffering and metaphorically referred to Austria and the Hungarian army as vampires, sucking the blood (resources) of the Hungarian people. The author advised Hungary to sever ties with Austria in order to alleviate this exploitation. He expressed satisfaction in seeing the weakening of the bonds between Hungary and Austria and advocated for Hungarian politicians to prioritize the interests of the Hungarian working population. The article was published in *Népszava*, a social-democratic Hungarian-language newspaper in 1897. The loosening relationship

[514] *Pesti Hírlap*, no. 311 (Jun 10, 1849): 134.
[515] *Népszava* 25, no. 11 (November 12, 1897): 3.

between the Habsburgs and Hungarians made the author hopeful, and he urged politicians to get rid of the blood-sucking monster, Austria's 'unpleasant love'.[516]

It was not unusual for the vampire to appear as a capitalist predator draining the blood from the working classes. In France, the threat of the vampire shifted from a real threat to the health of people and animals to its more metaphorical, social sense by the end of eighteenth century. Voltaire wrote:

> One cannot hear about vampires in London nowadays, I could however see merchants, speculators, tax-collectors who have sucked the blood out of the people by bright daylight, but these were absolutely dead, although they have been corrupted quite enough. There are real bloodsuckers who do not live in cemeteries but in very pleasant places. [517]

The English journal *The Gentleman's Magazine* published an article in 1732 connected vampirism with tax collection. The article, titled 'Political Vampires', outlined that people who sold or mortgaged their estates under a 'ravenous' tax collecting minister in Hungary would also become vampires after their death. It addressed the concerns of the aristocracy and tried to persuade the working classes that they would become vampires after death if they did not hold on to the authority of the tax collecting ministers.[518]

The association between the figure of the vampire and the aristocracy did not occur until John Polidori's story *The Vampyre* in 1819. Polidori's vampire was the first to have an aristocratic background, a resurrected corpse with the power to choose his victims intentionally. For the first time, the aristocratic vampire treated its human victims as a source of blood and sexual pleasure. By the 1820s, several Romantic versions of the vampire existed in popular culture, whereas the vampires of the oral tradition were associated with the simple desire for death and blood. The Romanticised vampire possessed many of today's known vampire attributes– aristocratic, pale, attractive, hypnotic, and seductive. Like Stoker's Count Dracula, Polidori's vampire used his rank and glamour to deceive his

[516] Ibid.
[517] Voltaire*, Les questions sur l'Encyclopédie* (1772) in: *Oeuvres complètes de Voltaire*, (ed.) Molland (Paris, 1879) XII, 550.
[518] 'Political Vampires', *The Gentleman's Magazine* (May 1732): 4.

victims. The Romanticised figure of the aristocratic vampire was recycled in various books, often taking the form of a tyrant that required the work of the lower classes to destroy it.

In *Das Kapital*, Karl Marx claimed that 'Capital is dead labour, which, vampire-like, lives only by sucking living labour, and lives the more, the more labour it sucks'. He also wrote 'the vampire thirsts for the living blood of labour' and explained that 'the vampire will not lose its hold . . . so long as there is a muscle, a nerve, a drop of blood to be exploited'.[519] Marxist theory often alludes to vampire folklore as a way of representing the insatiable parasitism of the blood/money-thirsty capitalist. Franco Moretti's 1983 *Signs Taken for Wonders*, for example, argues that the vampire is a capitalist predator who drains the blood from the working classes. Moretti cites the scene in *Dracula* where the heroes fight the monster in the church: when one of the characters stabs Dracula, coins flood out of his body instead of blood. Blood has been replaced with money: the stored-up capital, like Dracula's immortal corpse, sparks back into like life and embarks on the conquest of the world. [520] The figure of the vampire as a capitalist predator can also be found in a 1906 Hungarian article titled *The Vampires: Usury of Lords*:

> Usury in the capital is on the rise again. Sometimes they retreat into their nests like badgers when they manage to shoot one of them. Then, when the air is quieter again, they emerge to destroy their victims from underage magnates or gentry with richer parents. It would be best, of course, for a lawful manoeuvre to drop all their demands (and he who considers such a law inhuman is the greatest hypocrite of humanity); but the liars know very well that the gavellers are people who do not allow their names to be carried constantly. [..] It would indeed be very necessary to remove such figures from the country. [521]

[519] Karl Marx, *Das Kapital. Kritik der politischen Ökonomie* (Verlag von Otto Meisner, 1867) in: *Capital: Critique of Political Economy* v. 1, Introduction by Ernest Mandel, Translated by Ben Fowkes (Penguin Classics; New Edition, 1990), 163., 175., 195.
[520] Franco Moretti, *Signs Taken for Wonders on the Sociology of Literary Forms* (London, New York: Verso, 1988), 83.
[521] 'Vámpírok. A főurak uzsorásai', *Ellenzék* 27, no. 216 (Kolozsvár, September 24, 1906): 2.

In this case, the vampire applies to the aristocratic class, which became an increasingly popular association in Hungary at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Péter Vajda argued in 1844 that demons disappeared due to the advances of science, but the demons had been replaced with something even worse: money. He stated:

> And yet, my friends, our age has its own demons…That money is almost worse than the Devil…There is some magical power in money that draws people, and that is why many people sell their convictions, faith, and honour. [522]

For both Stoker and Vajda, the accumulation of capital is connected to demonic impulses. Being a count, Dracula is 'connected to the old money of a corrupt class'.[523] Stoker contested the imperialistic ambitions of the British Empire: Stoker was 'strongly predisposed to see the local capitalist (or 'gombeen man') as the real bloodsucker in rural Ireland'.[524]

The transition of the vampire figure from a symbol of primal fear to one of capitalist greed reflects broader societal and cultural shifts occurring during the nineteenth century. As industrialization and urbanization reshaped Europe, traditional agrarian societies gave way to burgeoning cities, where wealth and power became increasingly concentrated in the hands of a rising capitalist class. The vampire, once feared as a nocturnal predator preying on livestock and symbolizing the uncertainties of rural life, underwent a transformation into as metaphor for exploitative greed, unchecked capitalism, and economic instability. This shift in the meaning of the vampire highlights how folklore and myth often serve as a reflection of the collective fears and aspirations of a society undergoing profound change.

Conclusion

This chapter showed how the revenant, particularly the vampire, became a part of popular culture starting from the middle of the eighteenth century. While in Western Europe, vampire figures dominated plays, operas, and literature, in Hungary, the discourse

[522] *Életképek*, no. 4 (July 24, 1844): 97-104.
[523] Judith Halberstam, 'Technologies of Monstrosity: Bram Stoker's 'Dracula'', *Victorian Studies* 36, 3 (1993): 346.
[524] Bruce Stewart, 'Bram Stoker's Dracula: Possessed by the Spirit of a Nation?' *Irish University Review*, Edinburgh University Press 29, 2 (1999):239.

surrounding vampires evolved into a political issue. The Magyar elite attitudes were not only directed towards lands and peoples outside the territories of Hungary, but also applied internally to certain regions and social classes, reinforcing a broader pattern of viewing certain groups as the 'exotic other' in need of control and enlightenment. Certain minority groups were frequently labelled as superstitious and ignorant, especially during the period when defining national identity and determining who belonged to the Hungarian nation became important political issues, and these minorities were often negatively stereotyped in the process. The word 'vampire' was used in Hungary to describe the Austrians and to link their rule with the exploitive and parasitic aspects of capitalism. When they considered vampirism as a superstitious belief, however, they use the folkloric belief of revenants (the dead witch who harms from the grave) as a way of defining their national identity against the borderland territories they identified as backward and 'other'. The supernatural, therefore, was used to articulate a distinctively national Hungarian identity as Enlightened and free from Austrian influence. The importance of magic in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth-century Hungarian popular culture and folklore has never been in dispute, as belief in supernatural creatures, especially in harmful witches and revenants, remained strong in rural areas. These beliefs were not limited to the superstitious masses, as they still attracted the attention of the intellectual and artistic elite. The rich amount of source materials reveals that the nineteenth century Hungarian Kingdom remained 'enchanted' by the supernatural in its broadest sense. Yet the main themes arising from the representation of supernatural belief in popular culture were not so different from the themes of the Enlightenment, which included the irrational other, religious division, and for the reform of education and public health. Therefore, it would be incorrect to suggest that the Enlightenment made same impact in the Eastern regions of Europe as it did in the West.

Chapter 4.

Games of love and death

Introduction

The representation of vampires in films and other popular media attests to the significant role that the Eastern-European revenant played in 're-enchanting' the social and cultural world of Western nations like Germany and England during the late nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries.[525] This chapter argues that the fascination with these undead beings emerged as a reaction against capitalist modernity, as it provided an avenue of escapism into the enchanted world in Hungary. This escape, characterized by a blend of tension, horror, and desire, also manifested itself in the form of nostalgic and heroic past. Where throughout the eighteenth and much of the nineteenth century the 'backwardness' of Hungary signified its failure to participate in the Enlightenment narrative of societal progress, in the late nineteenth century this became an ambivalent—if not positive—trait that enabled Hungary to act as a symbol of primal affects that had become diluted through modernization. The escape represented by the Eastern European revenant drew upon the concept of the Freudian uncanny, which evoked the fear and unease of repressed anxieties. As both a part of Europe and its 'other', both familiar and unfamiliar, Eastern Europe provided a unique space for generating the uncanny sense of discomfort in Western readers, as they experienced a paradoxical mixture of fascination and repulsion.[526] The representation of vampires, along with the incorporation of their newly Romanticized characteristics, became a powerful cultural narrative that re-enchanted the practices of consumption within capitalist societies.

The chapter expands on the scholarship concerning the cultural representation of the undead during the *fin de siècle* and *art nouveau* periods in Central Eastern Europe. Carl Schorske's work has provided readers with insights into the intellectual and cultural world of

[525] On re-enchantment see: Michael Saler, 'Clap If You Believe in Sherlock Holmes: Mass Culture and the Re-enchantment of Modernity, c. 1890– c. 1940', *The Historical Journal* 46, no. 3 (2003): 599–622; Holloway, 'Legend-Tripping in Spooky Places', 618-37; Simon During, *Modern Enchantments: The Cultural Power of Secular Magic* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004); Christopher H. Partridge, *The Re-enchantment of the West: Alternative Spiritualities, Sacralization, Popular Culture, and Occulture* (Edinburgh: EUP, 2005); Bell, 'Breaking Modernity's Spell: Magic and Modern History', 115-122; Waters, 'Magic and the British Middle Classes, 1750-1900', 632-53.

[526] Sigmund Freud, 'Das Unheimliche' (1919), Translated in: *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. XVII. Trans. James Strachey, (London: The Hogarth Press, 1919), 119-252.

Vienna. Additionally, Péter Hanák shows how societies in Central and East Central Europe also experienced significant anxiety about life and death during the *fin de siècle* era.[527] The pervasive 'feeling of crisis' during this time also affected Hungary. This chapter will use the vampire phenomenon to analyse how death, as a universal and fundamental aspect of human existence, had become intricately woven into Hungarian culture. I will examine popular forms of entertainment to illustrate how Hungary's transformation into a modern society also entailed a radical reshaping of individual mentality and worldview. These existential changes, which were considered essential for the future of society, sought to reform individuals' way of life and drew upon similar movements in Austria, Germany, and France.[528] The chapter aims to illustrate how, in Hungarian modernity, traditional beliefs surrounding the return of the dead underwent a reconfiguration that influenced consumerism.

The first part of the chapter investigates the main themes of these cultural changes in Western and Central Europe. These societies, now considered modern, were profoundly influenced by Freud's psychoanalysis and his deep exploration of human psychology. The educated elite described their society as in a state of crisis and developed a morbid fascination with the intertwining of love and death (or, in Freud's terminology, Eros and Thanatos). New artistic themes began to take shape in the late-nineteenth century, which developed a new symbolic vocabulary for the exploration of dark and decadent subjects. According to the artists at the turn of the century, Europe had become obsolete, and the once-unified Christian worldview had disintegrated. Nietzsche famously proclaimed in Zarathustra, 'God is dead'.[529] Artists observed the rise of the more technical and modernised civilization with disdain, fearing that the materialized world would lead to the alienation of society and the eradication of high culture.

The second part of the chapter focuses on Hungary, which remained far from a disenchanted place in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. Not only did occultism, mesmerism, and spiritualism continue to flourish, but belief in witchcraft, vampirism, and fortune-tellers remained widespread. While Hungary experienced some of the rapid societal transformations arising from modernisation, the new urban world existed alongside a rural

[527] Péter Hanák, *The garden, and the workshop*, 98-109.
[528] András Németh, 'A századelő magyar életreform törekvései', *Iskolakultúra* 2 (2005): 38-9.
[529] The term both appears first in his *The Gay Science* (1882) and later on his *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1919).

one that seemed stuck in a pre-modern past. The folk culture of these excluded peasants survived in Hungary's cultural periphery. Some people, however, adapted their folklore, music, and decorative arts to align with changing cultural and aesthetic norms.[530] In Hungary, the process of modernisation was entwined with magical beliefs rather than opposed to it.

The shift into early-twentieth-century modernity had a significant impact on attitudes toward life and death. This boundary became even more problematic than during the nineteenth-century cholera epidemics that I discussed above in chapter two. Belief in the returning dead persisted and evolved: phenomena such as revenants, ghosts, and individuals on the brink of death, such as pale virgins suffering from tuberculosis, were woven into the fabric of everyday life. Furthermore, the emergence of mesmerism, occultism, and spiritualism played a pivotal role in fuelling the widespread belief in ghosts.[531] Spiritualism became an important tool in elite discourse: it was viewed as a rising new religious belief. The discourse surrounding spiritualism not only highlighted its spiritual aspects but also emphasized its potential as a transformative force in society.

Modernity and insecurity in the *fin de siècle*

Modernism and modernity, although often considered interchangeable, are distinct concepts. While modernity refers to the process of modernizing the economy and politics, modernism represents an artistic and cultural movement that responded to modernity. Modernism, therefore, can be understood as an intellectual attitude that emerged alongside modernization and responded to it in various ways.[532] The turn of the century captured specific concerns commonly found in the individual pursuit of modernity alongside an

[530] Németh, 'A századelő magyar életreform törekvései', 38-9.
[531] On ghost beliefs see: Shane McCorristine, *Spectres of the Self: Ghosts and Ghost-seeing in England, 1750-1920* (Cambridge: CUP, 2010); Roger Clarke, *A Natural History of Ghosts: 500 Years of Hunting for Proof* (London: Penguin, 2013); Owen Davies, *The Haunted: A Social History of Ghosts* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2006); Karolina Ćwiek-Rogalska, '"It's scary here". Haunted landscape as a research tool to look into post-expulsion landscapes', *Polish Journal of Landscape Studies* 3, no. 6 (2020): 27-47.
[532] Gábor Gyáni, 'Modernitás, modernizmus és identitásválság: a fin de siècle Budapest', *Aetas* - Történettudományi folyóirat 19, no. 1 (2004): 131.

ambivalent fear for the end.[533] This duality clarifies why the *fin de siècle* mindset is often associated with decadence and encompasses symbolism, aestheticism, and art nouveau.

Luckmann's sociological model challenged the idea that religion disappeared entirely with modernization. Instead, he argued that religion transformed into different, often less visible forms, integrating with various aspects of private life. His argument highlighted the complex relationship between religious change and broader societal shifts, emphasizing that religion underwent transformations that influenced different spheres of life. [534] Pericles Lewis argues that during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the belief in supernatural forces was not eradicated altogether, but instead, religious experiences transitioned from being publicly acknowledged to becoming more prevalent in private domains.[535] András Németh emphasises that individuals in the *fin de siècle*, influenced by Enlightenment rationalism, secularized traditional religious practices and concepts like sanctity, salvation, and redemption. These concepts were seen as achievable through one's own actions rather than solely relying on religious rituals or institutions. Additionally, spirituality and sanctity were viewed as part of individual self-realization, taking on intimately personalized forms. People, therefore, sought to reclaim lost cosmic dimensions of human existence through various means, including creative self-expression and sexual exploration. Furthermore, it indicated a shift in beliefs, with many embracing the utopian idea of salvation in a worldly paradise accessible to everyone, rather than in the traditional notion of heavenly bliss in the afterlife.[536]

The urban intelligentsia perceived the Habsburg Monarchy as being in a state of decline and decadence. There is a vast amount of cultural history that examines Vienna between 1890 and 1918, seeking to explain how so many modern, fundamentally new forms of science, literature, and art could have been born in the city filled with extraordinary talents in almost every field of culture. The work of extraordinary individuals such as Ernst Mach, Sigmund Freud, Otto Wagner, Josef Hoffmann, Arnold Schönberg, and many more substantially influenced elite culture across twentieth-century Europe. In

[533] See more in: John Jervis, 'The Modernity of the Fin de Siècle', in: *The Fin-de-Siècle World* (ed.) Michael Saler (London: Routledge, 2015), 59-73.
[534] See: Luckmann Thomas, *The Invisible Religion* (New York: MacMillan, 1967).
[535] Pericles Lewis, *Religious Experience and the Modernist Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 29.
[536] András Németh, 'Életreform törekvések az Osztrák-Magyar Monarchiában és hatásuk a korabeli művészeti, művelődési és pedagógiai reformokra', in: *Az Osztrák - Magyar Monarchia mint művészeti színtér*, (eds.) Ilona Sármány – Parsons and Szegő György (Budapest: Műcsarnok Nonprofit Kft., 2017), 58.

contrast to France, where French writers naturally assumed the role of intellectual leaders and cultural icons, the intellectuals of Vienna grappled with persistent uncertainty regarding their identity. Vienna endured the traumatic self- perception of being on the cultural and geographic periphery of German-speaking culture. Inspired by the pressures of modernization, Viennese artists and intellectuals provided unique artistic and scientific responses to the profound questions surrounding human fate, which were intricately tied to the formation of individual identities.[537]

Carl. E. Schorske, for example, argued that people looked for the key to a meaningful life through culture. Schorske highlighted the importance of Sigmund Freud, who, by revealing the unconscious layer of the human soul, destabilised and rewrote the rational image of man.[538] During the symbolist and decadent stylistic experiments, Viennese artists increasingly moved away from traditional realism and concentrated on their own emotional world. The artist's place and their relationship with art also rapidly changed. Most artistic elites believed that man was not rational and reformable, but an unpredictable and instinctive creature motivated by primal sexual instincts.[539] Sigmund Freud was decisive in showing the power of instincts over religious accounts of the 'human soul' or Enlightenment accounts of rational thinking.

Writing in *fin de siècle* Vienna, Freud stated that Eros (the will to live) and Thanatos (death instinct) were central forces of human life.[540] Many painters and writers explored the meaning of these forces. Freud believed the death drive to be in opposition to Eros, a theory which garnered a great deal of criticism, from both his contemporaries and writers later on. For example, Norman Brown suggested that life and death drives are not in opposition but more closely related.[541] In Nietzsche's view, the relationship between Eros and Thanatos is even closer. His contrary outlook towards death can be attributed to his philosophy

[537] Ilona Sármány-Parsons, 'Erósz és Thanatosz városa, Bécs', in: *Egon Schiele és kora. Remekművek a bécsi Leopold Múzeumból,* (ed.) Bodor Kata (Budapest: Szépművészeti Múzeum, 2013), 9–37.
[538] Carl. E. Schorske, *Fin-De-Siecle Vienna: Politics and Culture* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1980).
[539] See: Curtis Carter, 'Eros and Thanatos: Images of Life and Death in Contemporary Art', in: *Images of Death in Contemporary Art*, (ed.) Curtis L. Carter (Milwaukee: Patrick and Beatrice Haggerty Museum of Art, 1990).
[540] Sigmund Freud, *Jenseits des Lustprinzips* (1921), Translated in: *The Complete Psychological works of Sigmund Freud* Vol. XVII. trans. James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press, 1955), 7-64.
[541] Norman Brown, *Life Against Death: The Psychoanalytic Meaning of History* (Middletown, Conn: Wesleyan University Press, 1985).

regarding the unity of oppositions. In his influential book *The Gay Science* he warned his reader to 'beware of saying that death is opposed to life'.[542]

Freud's theories of Eros and Thanatos provide a valuable framework for understanding the psychological dynamics that shaped the mindset of people during the *fin de siècle*, and the intricate nature of human psychology during periods of cultural transition more broadly. The popular genre of vampire literature, for example, often drew upon the themes of Eros and Thanatos. Vampires were mythical, immortal creatures that existed by feeding on the life force or blood of others. In this context, vampirism can be seen as a metaphorical manifestation of the interplay between Eros and Thanatos: as Renfield repeats in Stoker's *Dracula*, 'The blood is the life'. Luckhurst has pointed out that Freudian term 'psychoanalysis' was created around the same time that Stoker was finishing his novel. He points out that 'Freudian theories have come to dominate readings of *Dracula*' and claims that 'it is a mistake to see psychoanalysis anywhere in the composition of the text itself'.[543] However, while psychoanalytic readings often look back on the vampire figure through twentieth and twenty-first century critical lenses, these modern approaches can help draw out the way the that love and death intersect in the figure of the vampire.

Ernest Jones investigated the vampire figure in his psychoanalytic study *On the Nightmare*, which presented the vampire as a projection of the limitless desire of death and living onto 'a dead person who will love for ever and will never be weary of giving and receiving caresses'.[544] The 'never dying love' theme became a very important motif in literature from the middle of the eighteenth century and continues today. The possibility for the vampire to extend passionate love into eternity has proven to be especially appealing for young adults in contemporary literature and movies. However, while Ernest Jones clearly connected vampirism with sexuality as early as 1912, scholars only became interested in the topic in 1970s.[545] Nick Groom has pointed out that vampires:

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[542] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science: With a Prelude in Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1974), 168.
[543] Luckhurst, '*Dracula and Psychology*', 67.
[544] Ernest Jones, *On the Nightmare* (London: Hogarth Press, 1931), 110.
[545] C. F. Bentley, 'The Monster in the Bedroom: Sexual Symbolism in Bram Stoker's Dracula', *Literature and Psychology* 22 (1972): 27-34; Carol Fry, 'Fictional Conventions and Sexuality in Dracula', *Victorian Newsletter* 42 (1972): 20-2; Christopher Craft, 'Kiss Me with Those Red Lips: Gender and Inversion in Bram Stoker's Dracula', *Representations* 8 (1984): 107-33; Nina Auerbach, *Our Vampires, Ourselves* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

> ... became a marketable aspect of the 1960's sexual revolution. Since then, vampires have tended to be lustful, depraved, and super-sexy: models of transgression, avatars of forbidden fantasies, and fallen angels of the death drive. But this is recent working, and there is little of it in Dracula.[546]

While it is evident that the sexual aspects have been overstated by recent literary critics, it cannot be denied that the vampire, as a new type of evil in literature, became attractive. In the *Mysterious Stranger*, published in 1860, the character of Franziska clearly stated why she became interested in the Carpathian vampire: 'The thin, corpse-like, dried-up, whimsical stranger is far more interesting to me than the rosy-cheeked, well dressed, polite, and prosy cousin.'[547] The vampire, therefore, slowly became an exotic, decadent, parasitic, sexual predator, who often seduced women whom they had never met before. According to Ernest Jones, the notion of a deceased lover returning from the grave manifested the sexual guilt felt by the living, which they projected onto the deceased.[548] Polidori's contribution to the vampire myth in the nineteenth century was not limited to their portrayal as aristocrats; he also depicted them as seducers and corruptors. This fascination with immortal love and the dangerous, seductive aristocrat can be linked to the evolving cultural dynamics of the era. The intertwining of these themes can be seen as a reflection of the shifting societal norms, values, and aspirations that influenced human relationships and desires at the time.[549]

While the Magyar attitudes toward *fin de siècle* Hungary will be explored in more detail later in the chapter, there are some interesting Hungarian sources that help to

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[546] Nick Groom, *The Vampire, A New History* (New Heaven: Yale University Press, 2020), 184.
[547] Anonymus, 'The Mysterious Stranger', in: *The Mysterious Stranger: And Other German Vampire Classics*, (Elektron Ebooks, 2013), 327.
[548] Ernest Jones, *On the Nightmare*, 102-3.
[549] Writings on Dracula see: Stephen D. Arata, 'The Occidental Tourist: Dracula and the Anxiety of Reverse Colonisation', in: *Dracula*, (ed.) Glennis Byron (New York: Macmillan, 1991), 119-44; Deanna K. Kreisel, 'Demand and Desire in Dracula', in: *Economic Women: Essays on Desire and Dispossession in Nineteenth-Century British Culture,* (eds.) Lana L. Dalley and Jill Rappoport (Ohio: The Ohio State University Press, 2013), 110-24; Athena Vrettos, *Somatic fictions: imagining illness in Victorian culture* (Stanford University Press: Stanford, 1995); Philip Holden, 'Castle, Coffin, Stomach: 'Dracula' and the Banality of the Occult', *Victorian Literature and Culture* 29, no. 2 (2001): 469-85; Talia Schaffer, '''A Wilde Desire Took Me'': The Homoerotic History of Dracula', *ELH* 61, no. 2 (1994): 381-425; Kathleen L. Spencer, 'Purity and Danger: Dracula, the Urban Gothic, and the Late Victorian Degeneracy Crisis', *ELH* 59, No. 1 (1992): 197-225; Alexandra Warwick, 'Vampires and the empire: fears and fictions of the 1890s', in: *Cultural Politics at the Fin de Siècle* (eds.) by Sally Ledger and Scott McCracken (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 202- 20.

demonstrate these changing attitudes. In 1893, four years before Stoker's *Dracula* was published, these transforming attitudes about death and love can be read in the *Budapesti Hírlap*:

> They [people] only found interest in what can be a source of excitement: money and love, and in this [love] they do not even consider the old, banal laws of honour. The more forbidden, the more piquant, the more exciting: moral insanity in love. And when they have already gone through all the excitement, when they are completely exhausted and nothing is new to them, then the thinker returns to faith as an inner instinct or ultimate need, and the uneducated turn to simpletons, superstition, mysticism and symbols...[550]

The author suggested that the majority of people were interested in two things: money and love. Because of this, they tended to ignore the traditional and mundane principles of honour. The more forbidden the love, the more exciting it becomes, leading to a state of 'moral insanity'. The author presents a critical perspective on the changing features of everyday life: after experiencing various forms of excitement, people eventually become completely exhausted and no longer find anything new or thrilling. At this point, educated people find comfort in faith while the uneducated retreat to superstition.

The perception and experience of love during and after the horrors of the First Word War contrasted sharply with the attitudes prevalent during the *fin de siècle*. The *Soproni Napló* from 1915 discussed how the terrors of the great war gave love a completely different meaning: in peace, people desired love to experience extreme emotions and excitement; during war, people desired love for the 'feeling of spiritual tenderness and softening the battle of longing'. The article also stated that war 'brought such emotional moments of honest understanding, serious, valuable, noble intimacy and self-sacrifice for each other' that contrasted with the experience at the time of the *fin de siècle*.[551] In the author's opinion, the war served as a catalyst for a re-valuation of love, highlighting its transformative power and its ability to inspire acts of selflessness and genuine connection.

[550] 'Fin de Siècle', *Budapesti Hírlap* 13, no. 71 (March 12, 1893): 9.
[551] 'A haboru csókja', *Soproni Napló* 19. no. 55 (March 8, 1915): 1.

In addition to love and sexuality, the turn of the nineteenth century displayed a macabre fascination with death that permeated various aspects of art and culture. This fascination found expression in depictions of skeletons, graveyard imagery, and the revitalisation of the medieval *danse macabre* (especially in the symbolist milieu). As I discussed in chapter three, Romantic artists displayed an increasing fascination with the afterlife, embracing themes like ghosts, skeletons, and other peculiar subjects.[552] Romantic literature increasingly depicted death, drawing on medieval and early-modern folklore for inspiration. Hans Holbein's series of forty-nine woodcuts published in 1538 illustrated the concept of death as an unwelcome presence that accompanied everyone throughout their lives. The collection, known as *The Dance of Death*, showed that death affected individuals from all social strata: kings or beggars were all doomed to receive the same fate. This artistic motif originated in the Middle Ages and experienced a revival during the nineteenth century. The purpose of the *danse macabre* was to remind viewers of the inevitability of death: it served as a *memento mori*, a visual representation of the transient nature of earthly existence.[553] The time of *fin de siècle* was marked by a sense of uncertainty, decadence, and a fascination with the darker aspects of human existence, so the *danse macabre*, with its contemplation of mortality, resonated deeply with the prevailing mood of the time.[554] If life was always haunted by death, then the dead could be haunted by life: modernists returned to the *danse macabre* for the way it challenged the binary between life and death, allowing contradiction to play a pivotal role in the construction of identity. Amidst political, social, and spiritual upheavals, this period yielded influential intellectual advancements and stunning artistic creations.

[552] Katalin Gellér, *The Image of Death in Hungarian Symbolism, With a Special Emphasis on the Painting of László Mednyánszky* (Budapest: Corvina, 2016), 12.
[553] Curtis Carter, 'Eros and Thanatos', 8.
[554] See: Beverley Dear, 'All in the Mind: Fin de Siècle Psychological Vampire Fiction, Powers of Mind Control and Mesmerism', (ed.) Andrea S. Dauber, *Monsters in Society: An Interdisciplinary Perspective* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 97-107; Victoria Margree and Bryony Randall, 'Fin-de-siècle Gothic', in: Andrew Smith and William Hughes (eds.), *The Victorian Gothic* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012): 217-33; Maria Beville, 'Gothic Literary Transformations: The Fin de Siecle and Modernism', in: *Gothic-postmodernism: Voicing the Terrors of Postmodernity* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 61-84; Márió Nemes and András Wirágh, 'A halottak globálisan lovagolnak, Bevezetés a kortárs gótikus diskurzusokba', *Helikon* 66, no. 2 (2020): 145-67; Norbert Béres, 'A 'gótikus irodalom' korai magyar fogadtatása (1796–1823)', *Irodalomismeret* 3 (2019): 4–18; Alica Ocsenás, ''Befelé tágított határok': A gótikus irodalmi hagyomány nyomainak vizsgálata 20. század eleji szövegekben', in: *Határátlépések*, (eds.) László Barna, Lilla Egerer, Angéla Kapusi and Ágnes Major (Miskolc: Könyvműhely, 2015), 61-7.

Jacques Le Rider delves into the intricate network of personal anxieties plaguing the Viennese cultural elite during a period of significant social and cultural transformation. Le Rider highlights the nuanced interplay of Judaism and gender within the *fin de siècle* cultural landscape, contending that amidst a turbulent sexual climate, Viennese artists and intellectuals grappled with uncertainty regarding their societal standing (particularly those of Jewish descent who faced ambivalence regarding their integration into mainstream society). This pervasive sense of sexual anxiety permeated various aspects of life, from Freud's introspective self-analysis to the Gustav Klimt's provocative imagery, leading to a retreat from overt political engagement.[555] Despite the opinion of critics such as Sarmany-Parsons, who claimed that Hungarian culture was not significant enough to compare with Austria, several researchers have drawn upon Schorske's thesis to successfully analyse Hungarian cultural history.[556] Péter Hanák, for example, draws out significant comparisons between Vienna and Budapest around topics ranging from embourgeoisement, urbanization, the history of the operetta, and death.

While there is a good amount of research on the cultural history of Budapest in the *Fin de Siècle*, research considering practices and attitudes regarding death is still very limited.[557] Judit Lakner's *Halál a századfordulón*, published in 1993, is an important volume that examines the theme of death at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth century.[558] The work of Balázs Devescovi focuses on the latter part of the nineteenth century in Hungary where the funerals of prominent individuals became politicized events. The bourgeois 'grand funerals' often emulated the Habsburg imperial funeral, occasionally even surpassing it in grandeur and spectacle.[559] Szilvia Polgári looks into the modern concept of cremating the deceased at the end of the nineteenth century, when the first crematorium was opened

[555] Jacques Le Rider, *Modernity and Crises of Identity: Culture and Society in Fin-de-Siecle Vienna* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993), 28.
[556] See for example: Mary Gluck, *Georg Lukács and His Generation, 1900–1918* (Harvard University Press, 1985); John Lukacs, *Budapest 1900- A Historical Portrait of a City and Its Culture* (New York: Grove, 1988); Gábor Gyáni, *Identity and Urban Experience – Fin de Siècle Budapest*, trans. Thomas J. DeKornfeld (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004); Thomas Bender and Carl E. Schorske, *Budapest and New York: Studies in Metropolitan Transformation, 1870-1930* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1994).
[557] On cultural history see for example: Mary Gluck, 'Jewish Humor and Popular Culture in Fin-de-Siècle Budapest', *Austrian History Yearbook* 39 (April 2008): 1-22; Eszter Balázs, 'Szexuális kultúra, színház, cenzúra a 19. századvégi Budapesten, Egy értelmiségi tiltakozás és a sajtó', *Médiakutató* 15, no. 2 (2014): 63-86; Mary Gluck, *The Invisible Jewish Budapest: Metropolitan Culture at the Fin de Siècle* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2016).
[558] See: Lakner, *Halál a századfordulón*
[559] Balázs Devescovi, 'Egy ''nagy ember' szinte 'egyszerű temetése'', *Könyv és Nevelés* 23, no. 2-3 (2021): 41-70.

in Debrecen. She analyses the objections formulated by the Catholic Church, as well as the Protestant and Jewish church.[560]

Hungary and the *fin de siècle*

Just like in the present day, a characteristic feature of Hungarian development at the turn of the twentieth century was the sharp divide between the capital city and the countryside. From the second half of the nineteenth century, Budapest experienced a significant intellectual and cultural transformation, establishing itself as the primary national cultural centre. Péter Hanák describes this process as the rise of intellectual life and the strong drive for advancement in literature, art, and science. Salons and coffee houses of the capital's nobility were important scenes for spreading the new intellectual movements of the turn of the century, comprising the key components of the emerging bourgeois lifestyle.[561] After the turn of the century, there were approximately six hundred coffee houses in Budapest. This period also gave rise to the creation of new intellectual associations and magazines. Alongside this intellectual and cultural development, the traditional moral codes of *fin de siècle* Hungary were being challenged, leading to a relaxation of social norms and the exploration of previously taboo subjects. In the vibrant café culture of Budapest, intellectuals and artists would gather to discuss politics, art, and philosophy. These establishments served as hubs for the exchange of ideas and the celebration of individual freedom, often challenging the prevailing societal conventions.[562]

The changes that took place in Hungarian society at the turn of the century, which included the spread of the bourgeois lifestyle, had an impact on the artistic scene, including the theatre. The proliferation of theatres sought to meet the demand of the increasingly influential bourgeoisie. From the establishment of the Nemzeti Színház in 1837 until the early years of the twentieth century, Hungary witnessed significant transformations in its theatrical landscape. The existing private theatres did not facilitate the trend-setting performances of international avant-garde theatres. The first significant effort to transform

[560] Szilvia Polgári, 'Hamvasztás Magyarországon, A debreceni krematórium rövid története', *AETAS - Történettudományi folyóirat* (2016): 83-103.
[561] Péter Hanák, *The garden and the workshop,* 135-46.
[562] Németh András, *A századelő magyar életreform törekvései*, 39-40.

the theatrical landscape in Budapest emerged in the early 1900s: the *Thália Society*, formed in 1903, introduced new ideas and aimed to make sophisticated theatre more accessible to the general public. The *Thália Society* included professional actors and directors who were inspired by modern theatre movements in Western Europe, following the example of the *Théatre Libre* in Paris and Berlin's *Freie Bühne*.[563] Its members included Béla Bartók and Zoltán Kodály, who revolutionized Hungarian folk music by incorporating it into classical compositions. Their efforts to collect and preserve traditional Hungarian melodies formed the basis for the ethnomusicological movement, ensuring the longevity of the Hungarian folk heritage.

The Hungarian aspiration to reach Western levels of cultural achievement can also be seen with the young generation of poets and intellectuals. The establishment of the prominent literary journal *Nyugat* in 1908 gave Hungarian authors a platform to showcase their modern works of literature, which were inspired by naturalism, impressionism, and art nouveau.[564] The *fin de siècle* period in Hungary also witnessed an intensification of the search for a distinct Hungarian identity, expanding beyond the 'othering' of superstitious borderland minorities that I discussed in chapter three. This quest was fuelled by the desire to preserve and revitalize the Hungarian language, culture, and traditions. Artists, writers, and intellectuals played a pivotal role in fostering a collective sense of national identity, celebrating Hungary's rich history and folklore (instead of comparing it unfavourably to the achievements of Western Europe).[565] The symbols and motifs in folklore appeared in various modern art forms, encapsulating the essence of Hungarian identity. The artists and writers of the period captured the complexity and contradictions of their society through their works.[566] Symbolist poets such as Endre Ady and Dezső Kosztolányi introduced a dreamlike and introspective quality to their verses, exploring themes of longing, despair, and the fragmented nature of existence. Their poetry often revolved around the perception of beauty, decay, and the longing for an unattainable ideal.

[563] Ádam Havas, 'A Thália Társaság tagjainak társadalmi beágyazottsága', *Színháztudományi Szemle* 43 (Budapest: Országos Színháztudományi Múzeum és Intézet 2015), https://oszmi.hu/hu/havas-adam-thalia-tarsasag-tagjainak-tarsadalmi-beagyazottsaga Accessed: November 2, 2023.
[564] Németh András, *A századelő magyar életreform törekvései*, 40.
[565] For more on this, see: chapter three.
[566] Németh András, *A századelő magyar életreform törekvései*, 40-1.

Influenced by Western trends, Hungarian intellectuals from the second half of the nineteenth century onwards engaged in spiritualism, black magic, theosophy and the doctrines of anthroposophy. These alternative approaches to the mysteries of existence and the nature of consciousness allowed individuals to explore the boundaries of knowledge, leaving an indelible mark on Hungarian intellectual history. Another response to the *fin de siècle* 'feeling of crisis' of modern industrial society took a more socio-political approach inspired by new utopian social theories. These theories laid the groundwork for various communal endeavours within the life reform movement: sanatoriums emerged, emphasizing the revitalizing powers of nature, such as light, air, water, and earth. Influenced by folk remedies and the principles of naturopathy, these sanatoriums proliferated across Europe. Central to their approach was the significance of proper nutrition (such as vegetarianism) in preventing and overcoming diseases. Moreover, the sanatoriums recognized the vital importance of a patient's own desire for healing, emphasizing not only physical hygiene and health, but also the well-being of the soul.[567]

Due to the popularity of coffee houses and salons in Budapest, the social life in the city was lively. But smaller towns and villages lacked this social vibrancy. In an article titled 'Small town social life' from 1896, the author observed:

> The situation is this: symptoms of social isolation are showing in every city, there are more and more sharp contrasts, and in many places even individuals of the same occupation do not stick together. This is a major social issue, the reasons for which are not a fruitless task since such decadence has never been seen in Hungary in any other area than in the field of social life. Think about it! The Hungarian people keeps aloof from each other. Many people blame the current political conditions for the unloving age, which has so upset the mood that friend against friend is filled with bitterness, that even the best acquaintances are almost afraid to meet each other, lest the tyranny of political passions should catch fire and destroy all the tender ties of the hearts.[568]

[567] András Németh and Beatrix Vincze (eds.), *Továbbélő utópiák – magyar életreform-törekvések és nemzetközi recepciós hatások* (Budapest: Gondolat Kiadó, 2017), 11.
[568] 'Kis városi társasélet', *Közérdek* 8. no. 40. (September 13): 2.

The author depicts a worrisome state of social affairs in the small towns, where social isolation, divisions, and a lack of unity were increasingly prevalent. He emphasizes that the cause of this social decay was ambiguous. However, the author affirms that this decline was limited to the realm of social interaction, and it did not apply to any other aspect of Hungarian culture. While the turn of the century marked a vital period of intellectual and cultural transformation, it also brought about numerous social challenges. An individual's place in society was fraught with new complexities and existential uncertainty that strained relationships, intensified social pressures, and contributed to heightened levels of stress and anxiety.

The spread of the bourgeois lifestyle had an impact on early Hungarian cinema, which was flourished during the *fin de siècle*, with significant productivity and influence. The infrastructure of the Hungarian cinema scene was established during the first decade of the twentieth century. By 1910, Hungary had 270 permanent movie theatres in operation.[569] As industrialization progressed, new economic opportunities arose, leading to the rise of a robust middle class with increased disposable income and leisure time. This newfound affluence allowed individuals to engage in a variety of leisure activities, including entertainment, sports, and cultural pursuits. Alongside the intellectual and artistic preoccupation with themes like death and aesthetics, there was a parallel emphasis on health, education, and recreation among the middle class. Sports became a popular pastime, with the rise of organized leagues, clubs, and competitions catering to the growing interest in physical fitness and recreation.[570]

Hungary and the 'end of century anxiety'

A great deal of contemporary European discourse around the *fin de siècle* was concerned with the forces of decadence and decline. Many cultural critics of the time view the great power and prosperous economy of Western Europe as providing the very conditions that made decadence and decline an acute threat. Some people, however, did not experience anxiety about the prospect of societal decline but a sense of pleasure or enjoyment arising

[569] Zsolt Kőháti, *Tovamozduló emeber tovamozduló világban* (Budapest: Magyar Filminzézet, 1996), 19-45.
[570] Németh András, *A századelő magyar életreform törekvései,* 45-6.

from decadence. In the Habsburg Monarchy, decadence was seen as more authentic due to its historical basis. This sense of impending doom was integrated into the culture of Hungarian modernism in the form of symbolism and decadence.[571] As the *Pesti Hírlap* reported in 1896: 'Symbolism and decadence grip humanity for a while. One half likes the fad, the other half is angry about it, but both are engaged with it'.[572]

Authors of newspaper articles expressed concern about the erosion of traditional values, the increasing materialism of society, and the growing divide between social classes. They argued that excessive consumption led to a loss of moral and spiritual grounding, obscuring deeper societal issues. In 'Fight against the dead', an article from 1890, the author described his era in a grim way:

> It is certain that despite all the great development of our knowledge, all the great perfection of our progress, and the over-sophistication of our civilization, the present age has begun to decline in a certain direction. The motive and purpose of all our toil, all our feverish striving, all work can be summed up in one word: pleasure. To enjoy more and more greedily, this became the watchword of the present, which marked the time of fatigue, exhaustion, and decline, which the French named *fin de siècle*. And according to many, the time is near when civilization turns man into a monster, not a human.[573]

The rise of *fin de siècle* decadence—which emphasized pleasure, aestheticism, and the pursuit of happiness—had a troubling effect on people's perception of mortality. As society embraced newfound pleasures and witnessed life becoming more comfortable, an intensification of the fear of death also emerged:

> A phenomenon that especially characterizes the people of our time: the belief in the emptiness of life and, in addition to this, the nervous fear of death.

[571] Ibid. 149.
[572] 'A bőgő bárdok', *Pesti Hírlap* 18. no. 209 (July 1896): 4.
[573] 'Harc a halál ellen', *Fővárosi Lapok* 27, no. 318 (November 19, 1890): 2352.

> Again, a contradiction, which in its entirety is new, and one might say: *fin de siècle.*

Where people in the past were able to alleviate their spiritual struggles about death, the author questioned why death caused such acute anxiety for people in the present. The writer described these anxious symptoms as the 'sad privilege of our time', attributing these issues to:

> The mania of rushing to live, the immodesty of ambition, the greedy desire for pleasure, the inability to enjoy, the weakness of love; not in the physical sense, but the disability of susceptibility, which modern moralists denote by the name of *impuissance d'aimer* (incapacity to love). One can find the cause for these traits in the general lack of conviction, looseness of principles, flexible, impressionistic way of thinking, eternal restlessness of the mind and capriciousness of the soul to doubt, to sneer, to indifference.[574]

The desire to indulge in life's pleasures undermined strong principles and contributed to gullibility, resulting in an unsettled population unable to fully appreciate or find happiness in the things around themselves.

Yet Hungarians found joy in comparing their country to others and a sense of pride for their progressive intellectual life, which can be seen in this 1891 article in *Fővárosi Lapok*:

> The only problem is that intellectual progress does not keep up with the city's [Vienna] monumental progress. There is no mention of an intellectual life such as that which prevails in our capital [Budapest]. Here [Vienna] most of the population does not strive for independent thinking, and the masses are lost in the nothingness of worn-out phrases and principles. Added to this is the abominable sectarian and ethnic persecution and the philandering of the

[574] *A Hét* 30, no. 485 (July 26, 1891).

> Czech brothers, who only envy the fate of Hungary and fan the flames of discontent in the countries of the Wenceslas crown.[575]

According to the author, the city of Vienna was making significant progress in terms of infrastructure, but it was not keeping up with progress in intellectual matters. Moreover, he acknowledged the terrible discrimination against certain groups and conflicts among the Czech people, who were envious of Hungary's success. The author also demonstrated the backwardness of Vienna with an example, citing the Hungarian writer Mór Jókai's experiences in Vienna: 'After 10pm, it is not possible to get a cigar in Vienna as all the shops are closed at the time'. Remarkably, the author also stated that it was not a problem for Jókai, as he does not use tobacco. Clearly, this comment was only used to criticise the city of Vienna. The author also criticised the use of the German language:

> Not considering the fact that even our beautiful Hungarian language is being tortured to death here, the thick air is filled with such an ear-splitting din that one feels as if one is in the depths of hell […] the common people of Vienna are content with even the sleaziest music, even though Beethoven, Mozart, Schubert ruled here - and rule in the noble halls with their spirit even today - who are certainly of no use to the common people here [Vienna].

The author expresses his disappointment that Austria's rich cultural heritage was not valued by the general population of Vienna. He complains that the language was mistreated, and the noisy and unpleasant environment made appreciating high-quality music impossible.

Hungary's aspiration to compete with other Western European countries had a dual nature. Throughout history, Hungarians consistently demonstrated a strong sense of pride in their culture, yet they maintained a critical mindset that prompted them to constantly analyse their cultural practices and institutions. According to an article from the *Pesti Napló* in 1892, the *fin de siècle* period marked a painful departure from traditional Hungarian values regarding truth and morality and a shift towards appearances, pretence, and rationality. The author also suggested that the advancements of this time had disrupted the

[575] 'Nagy-bécsi tárca', *Fővárosi Lapok* 28. no. 357 (December 29, 1891): 2676.

spiritual well-being of individuals by glorifying material possessions and consumer culture. For the author, the 'rebirth' of society could only be achieved by reconnecting with human nature.[576]

The author's concern about the relation between modern consumerism and the well-being of individuals has often been described as *századvégi idegesség* (end of century anxiety). This anxiety takes the form of nervous excitement and bleak boredom: in terms of love, modern girls 'tend to live their lives without daydreaming or passion. They might know about love from novels, but they may not have experienced it themselves. They may even enter marriages without love, prioritizing future security and comfort instead'.[577] The author urges those who defend harsh truths and absolute rationality to hold onto their faith, as he believed happiness relied on the comfort found in beliefs. The rejection of faith in favour of cool and calculating rationality leads to unhappiness and discontent: 'We want to be happy, and this obsessive sanity makes us unhappy'.[578] In the *fin de siècle*, the quest for happiness transcended the confines of science and rationality, leading individuals to seek solace and fulfilment in the fantastical realms offered by novels. Amidst the challenges posed by modernity, these literary havens evolved into sanctuaries of escapism, transporting readers away from the mundane and immersing them in enchanted landscapes and thrilling adventures.

The returning dead in Hungarian literature

In an article titled 'Audience' from 1891, Géza Kenedi writes about forms of literature that sought to fulfil the tastes and desires of the modern mass audience. He states that there were 'something undefined, strange, something new and interesting, -and that is what the audience want'. He highlights that there was not only a new understanding, a new morality, and a new taste, but also a completely new literature in the making. Kenedi emphasized the complex relationship between literature and its audience, highlighting the audience's desire for something new and the literary world's efforts to meet those desires. His article reflected the period of transition and experimentation in the literary sphere, which grappled

[576] Ibid. 2675.
[577] *Alkotmány* 4, no. 126 (May 26, 1899): 1
[578] *Budapesti Hírlap* 13, no. 91 (April 2, 1893): 34.

with the changing expectations of the mass audience. This is what 'the French call the *fin de siècle*, where something interesting mixes with each other, filth and good education, prudishness and delicacy, chivalry, and moral commiseration'. The article concludes with the observation that the compulsive desire for something new encouraged a form of literature that chases after its own tail to death to meet the needs of its voracious audience.[579]

Among the various literary genres that emerged during this time, the fantasy genre played a significant role in capturing the collective imagination of Hungarian writers. For example, János Arany and his work *Toldi* is a renowned epic poem based on the medieval legend of a heroic knight.[580] While not strictly a fantasy story, it contains elements of the supernatural. Mór Jókai also wrote in various genres, including historical novels and adventure tales. Some of his works, such as *Az arany ember* and the *Fekete gyémántok*, incorporated fantastical elements, often drawing on Hungarian folklore and legends.[581] However, while Hungarian fantasy literature emerged during this period, it was not as extensively developed as in some other European countries. The genre gained more prominence in Hungary, with the emergence of writers like László Arany in the middle of the twentieth century.[582] As discussed in chapter three, magical thinking and belief in vampires and witches remained strong in rural areas. Folklore and superstition were part of the lived reality of people in these regions, potentially contributing to the artists' apprehension in addressing such topics in literature by associating their work with the lower orders of society.

Newspapers and magazines continuously reported superstitious beliefs and magical practices from the rural areas of Hungary. The official magazine of the Hungarian Ethnological Society was launched in 1890 in Budapest under the name of *Ethnographia.* It published Hungarian and international scholarship on ethnographic and ethnological studies, commemorations, and association news. *Ethnographia* often published articles about vampires and superstitious beliefs: the front cover of an issue from 1890 included a 12-page article on a 'folk tale from Szepes'. Szepes was an administrative county of the

[579] *Pesti Hírlap* 13, no. 354 (December 25, 1891): 4.
[580] Arany János, *Toldi* (1846); *Toldi szerelme* (Toldi's Love) (1879); *Toldi estéje* (Toldi's Night) (1848).
[581] *Az arany ember* (The Golden Man) (1872); *Fekete gyémántok* (Black Diamonds) (1870).
[582] János Steklács, 'Arany László meseelmélete, A magyar tudományos igényű meseelméleti gondolkodás kibontakozása', *Ifjúsági Irodalom* 4 (2010) https://folyoiratok.oh.gov.hu/konyv-es-neveles/arany-laszlo-meseelmelete Accessed: May 25, 2023.

Kingdom of Hungary, called *Scepusium* before the late nineteenth century. Its territory today lies in northeastern Slovakia, with a very small area in southeastern Poland. The author, Bertalan Matirko, stated that, 'its people (Szepes county) generally have a vivid imagination, and like the Slavic peoples in particular, they are extremely fond of mystical and superstitious motifs in their tales'.[583] The author observed that these highlands were richer in folklore than the rest of Hungary, attributing the overactive imagination of the people to the natural conditions of the mountainous region. For the author, Szepes was 'a hidden valley, immune to the greatest enemy of folk poetry, progressive culture'.

The article discusses the most famous Slavic revenant, Michael Kasperek, who appeared to his servants after his death on 28 of February 1718 in Upper Hungarian Lubló (present-day Northern Slovakia). People claimed he came to visit them at night and sucked their blood while they were in bed. After opening his grave, the villagers found that his body had not started to decay: 'his body looked as if he had not even died and from the blood of sleeping people, he became more and more beautiful day by day'.[584] The Bishop of Krakow gave permission to the orthodox priests to execute the corpse. Even after the ritual, people claimed Kasperek visited the town, causing a series of fires in May and June 1718. The news of the town's misfortune spread far and wide in Hungary and Poland. The bishops of the two countries eventually gathered in Lubló and destroyed the evil spirit through exorcism.

The author emphasised that the legend was still widely known to the people of Lubló: 'The adjective 'strange' is quite appropriate. Those who came up with this tale must have had a strange imagination, the naïve, superstitious Polish people'.[585] Matriko lists the archival sources recounting the tale, including the first written version of it by a famous historian of the eighteenth century, Mátyás Bél, who recorded the story by hearsay in his *Prodomus* (1723).[586] Matriko showes how the tale changed over time, and believes that the Kaszperek story must have been created independently of the Slavic *vampyr* fable. While Mátyás Bél and others wanted to consign it to memory, they did not achieve their true goal: 'As a historical phenomenon, it was revived as a curiosity, but it only gained significance

[583] *Ethnographia* I, no. 6 (1890): 261.
[584] Ibid. 263.
[585] Ibid. 264.
[586] Mátyás Bél, *Hungarie antiquae et novae Podromus* (Nuremberg: 1723), 108.

when the people adapted it and shaped it into a whole story'.[587] To demonstrate the wide influence of the Kasperek myth, he recounted a personal story:

> My mother, in her childhood, at the end of the forties, already knew Kaszperek's fairy tale in its present form. School children loved it and told stories about it. His grandfather once read something about Kasper from an old book to ward off the boredom of winter evenings. He writes that, even in his time, the people claimed that whenever Kaszperek's name was mentioned, he appeared immediately. Mothers scared their children with it: Do not cry, because Kasperek will take you away![588]

The author's research allowed him to show the development of the Kasperek narrative: while the fundamental elements of the story remained the same, individual storytellers over the years added their own twists and turns to make it more interesting. Kasperek's crime was two-fold: stealing and lying under oath. Though he faced the consequences of his actions through the justice system, he continued to commit new wrongs; his insistence on evil in life carried over into his death, and so his corpse continued to harm the living. This interplay between guilt, consequences, and the infliction of harm gave the story a multi-layered approach that added depth and complexity to the narrative, engaging readers in the moral complexities of Kasperek's journey.

The Kaszperek tale inspired the Hungarian novelist Kálmán Mikszáth to write his famous story, *Kísértet Lublón,* first published in 1893. Mikszáth, in an article entitled 'Where did I get the idea of Kaszperek', wrote that he first read the story in *Ethnographia,* and told it to his children:

> And the horror and fear of the mighty Kaszperek took hold in their little hearts […] When the children were fighting among themselves or misbehaving, it was

[587] *Ethnographia* 1, 272.
[588] Ibid. 270.

> enough to say: 'Kaszperek is coming, Kaszperek is coming!' And there was a great silence. (...) Kaszperek always had an impact.[589]

According to Mikszáth, he owed Kaszperek a debt for helping to discipline his children for two years:

> It was this gratitude that matured the idea in me to write about him and give him his final peace, who (Kaszperek) did not find a place either on Earth or in Heaven, if not for immortality, but at least for a publisher—since you can be buried there too.[590]

However, the story did not get buried, but published in the *Pesti Hírlap* under the title *A Lublói ember- Kísérteties krónika* (The Ghostly Chronicle of the Man from Lublo) as a cover story in twelve instalments, from December 1892 to January 1893. Kasperek was resurrected for the *Vasárnapi Újság* under the title 'Ghostly Chronicle', also in published in 5 parts from April to May 1893. In 1976, an adaptation of his work appeared in cinemas under the title *Kísértet Lublón.*

The story gained huge popularity with the Hungarian audience.[591] It was soon translated into German and, according to the *Magyar Szemle* from 1899, it 'was very popular among the German readership'.[592] The impact of this writing on popular culture was evident in the way the strange story captured the attention and imagination of people, spawning the publication of similar narratives: According to *Pesti Hírlap*, in 1893, just as Mikszáth's Kasperek was at the height of its popularity, reports emerged of a dead person attending their own funeral in Budapest, 'watching with visible emotion as the brother weeps, the wife sobs, and the priest and cantor sings out'.[593] The strange tale of Kasperek circulated widely, not only inspiring artists to write similar revenant stories, but also

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[589] Kálmán Mikszáth, 'Honnan vettem Kaszpereket?' (1893), in: *Mikszáth összes műve, Regények és nagyobb elbeszélések* 5. https://www.arcanum.com/ro/online-kiadvanyok/Mikszath-mikszath-osszes-muve-2A85B/regenyek-es-nagyobb-elbeszelesek-123-kotet-2A85D/fuggelek-honnan-vettem-kaszpereket-1893-5-kotet-2DAD9/ Accessed: May 2, 2023.
[590] Ibid.
[591] *Kecskemét* 21, no. 13 (March 26, 1893): 51.
[592] 'Mikszáth Kálmán sikere', *Magyar Szemle* 11, no. 3 (January 15, 1899): 36.
[593] 'Részt vett a saját temetésén', *Pesti Hírlap* 15, no. 269 (September 9, 1893): 6.

influencing the way everyday people perceived the lived reality of intimate experience such as funerals.

The vampire phenomenon in Hungarian literature has never gained as much significance as, for example, in England. However, there was a market demand for spooky and horror stories, as evidenced by Hungarian responses to Stoker's *Dracula*. The novel was first published on May 26, 1897. In the same year, in December, the *Budapesti Hírlap* commented on Stoker's *Dracula*:

> Dracula is the most wonderful among many wonderful stories ever to come out of an English pen. It seems excitingly interesting, incredible, and incomprehensible, and one cannot put the book down. Moreover, there is a peculiar interest for us: the setting of the English author's novel is: Transylvania.[594]

The article announced the upcoming release of the first few pages of the translation of *Dracula* on New Year's Day, with completion scheduled by the end of March.[595] It described the novel as a major sensation at the English Christmas book market.[596]

The *Budapesti Hírlap*, launched in 1881, aimed to entertain the public and provide quick and accurate information. It did not embrace government partisanship and, although it was not affiliated with any party and explicitly emphasized its independence, it promoted 'political criticism without party affiliation'. The newspaper's readership predominantly included the nobility, intellectuals, employees, and bourgeoisie. The *Budapesti Hírlap* not only accepted but also supported the power ambitions of the middle class. In the 1880s, the newspaper had a circulation of 18,000–20,000 copies and was comprised of between 14 and 20 pages, which was an unusually large size for a daily.[597]The appearance of Dracula in this newspaper suggests that it aimed to entertain the public, particularly the middle class, and reached a wide range of readers.

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[594] 'Drakula', *Budapesti Hírlap* 17, no. 361 (December 1897): 7.
[595] See: *Budapesti Hírlap* 18, no. 1 (January 1, 1898): 12-13; *Budapesti Hírlap* 18, no. 88 (March 29, 1898): 13-4.
[596] 'Drakula', *Budapesti Hírlap* 17, 7.
[597] Miklós Szabolcsi (ed.), *A Magyar Sajtó Története*: 1867–1892, II. (Akadémiai Kiadó, 1985). https://mek.oszk.hu/04700/04727/html/529.html Accessed: April 12, 2024.

Dracula was met with mixed feelings by Hungarian readers, as it can be read in the *Budapesti Hírlap* in April 1898:

> Dracula! A novel has never been cursed as much as this one. People have never eagerly awaited a sequel as feverishly as they did for this one. Why? The reason is simple. In the age of the dirty, indecent realism, an extraordinary talented American writer immerses himself in the world of old horrors. And he processes his subject with all the artistry and virtuosity of modern novel writing. This book was one of the sensations of the American book market this year. It was read unbelievably, almost devoured. The most interesting thing for us, who regularly observe taste and interest in literary matters, is to see how the Hungarian readership reacts to it. This is a very interesting and instructive thing. We acquired it, published it, and understood that people criticized us in letters for the sake of good taste and women's nightly dreams, but, at the same time, they asked for the continuation over the phone.[598]

While Stoker was born and educated in Ireland, and lived in England, he made a series of tours of the United States in the 1880s and 1890s.[599] Perhaps due to his American connections, the author of the article mistakenly identified him as American. According to the article, during the era of 'dirty, indecent realism', the popularity of *Dracula* stemmed from readers seeking an escape from the gritty realities of everyday life. The novel delves into timeless themes of fear, desire, and the struggle between good and evil, offering readers a departure from the mundane and a journey into the supernatural. In this way, the novel provides a means of transcendence from the harshness of the era's realism, inviting readers into a world of mystery and suspense.
It was still being discussed in December 1900:

> This fantastic novel is one of those works that attracts the readers' attention and occupy the soul for a very long time. The novel transports the reader into a supernatural, mysterious world, yet it is precisely the author's immense,

[598] *Budapesti Hírlap* 18, no. 95 (April 5, 1898): 1.
[599] Carol A. Senf, 'Bram Stoker's Reflections on the American Character', *ELT Press* 59, no. 3 (2016): 303.

> almost demonic power that manages to captivate the interest of modern people, sometimes truly enchanting them.[600]

This author emphasises the enduring allure of the novel and Stoker's ability to entrance readers with their storytelling prowess. The Hungarian translation of the book was very popular; the second edition of the book came out in 1906, as the first edition sold out completely in a very short time.[601] The enthusiastic reception of *Dracula* in Hungary not only highlights a thriving market for such tales but also underscores the deep-seated fascination with the supernatural among audiences. Beyond the pages of literature, this fascination found expression in the cinematic domain. From the silent era onwards, filmmakers seized upon the allure of the unknown, bringing to life tales of ghosts, vampires, and otherworldly beings on the screen.

Fascination with the undead in films

As outlined earlier, the Kasperek story had a complex publication history that informed its reception in popular culture: it had its roots on folklore, was given an academic aura in *Ethnographia*, and was popularised in Mikszáth's narrativization. The Kasperek story blurred the boundaries between fiction and reality, the natural and the supernatural. The inclusion of superstition in literature and scholarly publications transformed the revenant into a serious form of entertainment that addressed cultural values, traditions, and societal norms. As I mentioned above, Hungarian authors deployed fantastical elements to validate cultural beliefs and attest to the enduring presence of magical thinking among the general population.

Paul Wells argues that horror films functioned in the same way as folktales and fairy tales. While magical narratives represented the fears of archaic societies, horror films depicted the phobias of the 'new' world.[602] As Freud's analysis of *The Sandman* showed, the themes of fantastic literature were closely related to psychoanalysis, which often placed romantic horror stories at the centre of their investigation. According to Todorov, the

[600] *Budapesti Hírlap* 20, no. 340 (December 11, 1900): 10.
[601] *Budapesti Hírlap* 26. no. 68 (March 10, 1906): 20.
[602] Paul Wells, *The Horror Genre – From Beelzebub to Blair Witch* (London: Wallflower Press, 2000), 3.

fantastic genre lost its social function in the twentieth century as it became the subject of psychoanalytic studies.[603] This change transformed the fantastic genre and a new type of modern fantasy emerged:

> There is no need today to resort to the Devil (or to posthumous reverie) in order to speak of excessive sexual desire, and none to resort to vampires in order to designate the attraction exerted by corpses: psychoanalysis, and the literature, which is directly or indirectly inspired by it, deal with these matters in undisguised terms.[604]

Friedrich Kittler, however, critiqued Todorov's theory that classical literary fantasy perished due to psychoanalysis as 'only half true'.[605] Fantasy was successfully revived in the medium of cinema. While Todorov's observation about the impact of psychoanalysis on classical literary fantasy holds merit, the subsequent evolution of fantasy in the twenty-first century demonstrates that the genre has not only endured but also flourished in response to changing cultural and technological landscapes.

Fascination with the vampire character migrated from the textual to the cinematic medium. Since the 1930s, there have been around 150 films made with Dracula's name in the title, and around 400 dealing with a vampire theme. Cinema, especially Béla Lugosi's 1931 portrayal of Dracula, established the vampire stereotype in popular culture. In the silent film era between 1912 and 1930, approximately 600 Hungarian films were made but only 45 complete films survive. Based on contemporary content descriptions and genre designations, Jenő Király identified 42 films out of the 600 to be fantastic films. Király also separated 'white fantasy' from 'black fantasy' films. In black fantasy, the unreal attacks while the real strives for dominance; in white fantasy, the unreal and real coexist. 25 of the films took place in the world of 'white' fantasy and can be analysed as the predecessors of today's fantasy and science fiction. The other 17 films fall into the category of 'black' fantasy

[603] See: Tzvetan Todrov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre,* transl. Richard Howard (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975).
[604] Ibid. 160-61.
[605] Friedrich A. Kittler, *The Truth of the Technological World Essays on the Genealogy of Presence,* With an Afterword by Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, transl. Erik Butler (Stanford: Stanford University Press: 2013), 78.

and, in most of them, we can discover the characteristics of different horror genres such as the monster film, ghost film, vampire film, and so on.[606]

F. W. Murnau's *Nosferatu– eine Symphonie des Grauens* (1922) is usually considered the first time Bram Stoker's *Dracula* was adapted to the screen. While *Nosferatu* is the first well known vampire film, film historians recently discovered that the first adaptation of *Dracula* was a Hungarian vampire movie, *Drakula halála* (1921), made by the Hungarian director Károly Lajthay who incorporated Stoker's vampire character into his movie.[607] Unfortunately, the movie was lost at the time of the Second World War. Lajthay had co-written the *Drakula* script with Mihály Kertész, a prominent film director in Budapest and who won an Oscar award (as Michael Curtiz) two decades later as the director of *Casablanca*.

Gary Rhodes states that *Drakula halála* premiered in Vienna in February 1921, though no evidence of this has yet surfaced in Austrian trade publications or Vienna newspapers. If such a premiere occurred, the film likely would have borne a German title, and even then, it might not have been a direct translation; the name 'Drakula' could have been removed and an altogether new title used. More primary research in Austria is needed to fully understand *Drakula halála*'s distribution.[608] According to Hungarian newspapers, *Drakula halála* was filmed between 1920-1921 and only seen in Hungary in 1923. *Nosferatu*, however, had been released in November and December of 1922. It is clear from the amount of press coverage that Murnau's movie was popular in Hungary and other European nations at the time. Unfortunately, the delay between the production and release of *Drakula halála* meant that while it was the first *Dracula* adaptation movie and was produced in Hungary, it was not the first to be released. The delay arose due to The Hungarian Royal National Motion Picture Inspection Committee, which decreed the film suitable for public presentation on March 23, 1923.[609] This delay between production and release was not uncommon in Vienna at the time: the same list reveals that films made in 1918 were only

[606] Király Jenő, *A film szimbolikája. A fantasztikus film formái* 2 (Kaposvár: Kaposvári Egyetem Művészeti Kar Mozgóképkultúra Tanszék, 2010), 233-35.
[607] Gary D. Rhodes,'Drakula halála (1921): The cinema's first Dracula', in: *Expressionism in the Cinema*, (eds.) Olaf Brill and Gary D. Rhodes (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), 190-91.
[608] Ibid. 194.
[609] *Belügyi Közlöny* 13 (March 25, 1923): 396.

released in 1923. While the film is now lost, the story is known thanks to Lajos Pánczél's novella adaption of *Drakula halála* (1924).

The characteristic elements of the horror genre first appeared in Germany in the 1910s, primarily in the thematization of central characters and their actions. Vampires had already appeared in Oskar Messter's 1916 film *Vampirette* and in Bruno Eichgrün's 1919 *Der Vampir von St. Louis*. Although Murnau's *Nosferatu* was not the first vampire film, it is undoubtedly considered the archetype of the genre, as this creation encompassed its defining aesthetic and stylistic features. Lotte Eisner considers the greatest achievement of the film to be the depiction of the supernatural, which transcended the artificial world of the studio and achieved a sense of the landscape, resulting in the perception of the afterlife from setting and style rather than plot alone.[610]

Nosferatu had a profound effect on future representations of the vampire in movies and literature and the public perception of vampires. For example, the film contained the first account of the vampire's destruction by sunlight, which became a common feature in later vampire fiction. In *Nosferatu*, the vampire was portrayed as more monstrous and corpse-like than the literary vampires that emerged around the turn of the twentieth century. Count Orlok appeared as a strange, grotesque, otherworldly creature with few humanlike features. He slept in a coffin shared with rats and his deformed appearance and repulsive presence gave a horrifying effect to his character. While the film represented Orlok's sexual attraction towards young girls, his perverse desire did not play as prominent a role in the film as it would in later representations of the vampire.

Murnau's portrayal of the vampire highlighted with the creature's non-human attributes, presenting the vampire as more monster than human. In doing so, Murnau pushed against the more genteel vampire such as Polidori's early-nineteenth-century text. Literary authors tended to graft human-like elements onto the vampire as a way of smoothing their transition from the remote East into modern Western society. Polidori's Lord Ruthven for instance, has a grey face and cold eyes, but he is also a polite nobleman who aroused the interest of women. Another key novel in vampire literature is Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla* (1872), which also grants the vampire more human-like traits. Le Fanu's vampire was capable of falling in love and had strong feelings, making its character unique

[610] Lotte H. Eisner, *Murnau*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973).

at the time, and a prototype for the popular vampire in literature and film of the present day.[611] Le Fanu's vampire is not simply a killer seeking life-giving blood, or an aristocratic seducer, but also a passionate woman. By contrast, Murnau's portrayal of the vampire Orlok emphasized his non-human qualities, giving its character a more frightening feature.

Specific historical events impacted the evolution of vampire representation in the twentieth century. For example, the historical association of the vampire with ethnic and religious difference can be seen in *Nosferatu*. By looking at *Nosferatu* in its historical context of 1920s Germany, it is evident that the vampire takes on an association with Judaism. Orlok's appearance is a recognisable caricature of the Jew: large, hooked nose, bushy eyebrows, and claw-like fingers, and he also a plague bearer whose victims are virtuous Aryan women.[612] Adolf Hitler in his *Mein Kampf* (1925), published 3 years after the first screening of *Nosferatu*, described the Jews as *Blutsauger*.[613] The association between Jews and blood originated from a popular superstition in medieval Europe, the 'blood libel' or 'blood accusation', where Jews were accused of ritually sacrificing Christian children to gain blood for unleavened bread.[614] This anti-Semitic view suggests that the Gothic cinema of Weimar Germany used the vampire figure as a platform to circulate Nazi propaganda against Jews.

German expressionism influenced filmmaking during the 1910s and 1920s, expressing emotion with extreme distortion and replacing realistic representation with exaggerated stylization. Due to this, most of the films during this era were made in studios. *Nosferatu*, however, was filmed on location, using images of nature to increase tension and conjure up an ominous mood. The use of light and shadow heightened Orlok's distorted features and deepened his characterization. The fear evoked in the audience stemmed from visualising the transgressing of boundaries, creating a kind of nightmare blurring between the normal and the abnormal, the known and the unknown.[615] The dreamlike sequences and eerie atmosphere of *Nosferatu* lent themselves to the dream analysis of Freudian

[611] Sheridan Le Fanu, *Carmilla*. It was first serialized in *The Dark Blue*, a London-based literary magazine published monthly from 1871 to 1873.
[612] Marie Mulvey-Roberts, *Dangerous Bodies: Historicising the gothic corporeal* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016), 129-78.
[613] Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, by Barbara Zehnpfennig (München: UTB GmbH, 2018), 141.
[614] Hannah R. Johnson, *Blood Libel: The Ritual Murder Accusation at the Limit of Jewish History* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2016), 30-58.
[615] See: Katharina Loew, *Special Effects and German Silent Film Techno-Romantic Cinema* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2021), 145-84.

psychoanalysis: the haunting landscape where nightmares come alive attested to the unconscious at work.

According to the *Pesti Hírlap*, when *Nosferatu* reached Hungarian cinemas by the end of September 1922 it gained a huge amount of popularity.[616] Hungarians referred to the film as *Dracula*, rather than *Nosferatu*, evidenced by an article titled 'Dracula is back in Helikon'. The author wrote about the interest of the people to see *Nosferatu* in the Helikon Cinema:

> A new direction has been taking hold in literature and theatre for a few years: drawing upon psychopathological experiences and bizarre, hidden figures […] this year also saw the birth of the first masterpiece of the genre, *Dracula*. The public's interest in the drama with a strange and fashionable theme, in which a mysterious vampire plays the main role, as we know, was increasing, but Helikon was forced to remove the play from its repertoire after a week due to scheduling other programs, and thus there are many thousands of people who could not get tickets to the performances of *Dracula*. The theatre is obeying the public's wish when it reschedules *Dracula* for a week starting today.[617]

Despite the increasing public interest and demand for the play, *Helikon* cinema was forced to remove it from their repertoire in advance. This unfortunate situation left thousands of eager people disappointed. *Helikon*, recognizing the public's fervour for the vampire story, rescheduled the film. This decision acknowledges the significance of embracing unconventional and popular themes in the arts.

A 1923 article titled 'The poetry of mysticism' referred to the cinematic showing of *Nosferatu*:

> It is a very strange phenomenon of our days that the mysterious sciences, occultism, spiritism, and theosophy show a greater and more feverish interest than ever before […] There are more and more people who promote the possibility of life above matter and who consider it a reality that the Evil takes

[616] *Pesti Hírlap* 44, no. 223 (Oktober 1, 1922): 7.
[617] 'Ujra a Drakula a Helikonban', *Világ* 13, no. 251 (November 4, 1922): 6.

> on human form and does his destructive work among earthly mortals. There is no doubt that the fear of the unknown world that surrounds us is present in the nervous minds of almost everyone today, and this explains the extraordinary success of the *Dracula* film.[618]

The surge in interest towards esoteric subjects could be explained by people seeking answers to profound questions about the boundaries of existence and death. This phenomenon reflected a collective yearning for a deeper understanding of unseen forces and hidden truths that operated beyond the visible realm. It also stated that the vampire's legend continued to inspire people even in the present day. Such films, with their chilling portrayals of supernatural entities and their uncanny blending of reality and the unreal, had an enormous effect on their audiences. The films provided an avenue for exploring the fantastic realms that contained a larger significance beyond the prosaic confines of everyday life: they offered a cathartic experience for viewers to confront their deepest fears in a controlled environment. The popularity of the vampire film arose from the fact that it delved into the uniquely modern articulation of the same profound question surrounding the boundary between life and death that occupied both the educated elite and superstitious peasants from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. *Nosferatu* challenged traditional thinking about death through its aesthetic, dream-like blurring of the conscious and unconscious, which resonated deeply with Freudian psychoanalysis.

Evidence of afterlife: spiritualism as the 'new superstition'

As I have argued thus far, the process of modernization brought about significant changes in the way people perceived the boundary between life and death. Vast urban centres and prolific new industries replaced traditional agricultural communities, leading to a shift in lifestyle, values, and attitudes toward death. As scientific knowledge and medical advancements progressed, there was a growing emphasis on ethology, extending life expectancy, and improving overall health conditions. This newfound understanding of the human body and its ailments challenged traditional beliefs and folkloric practices

[618] 'A misztikum költészete', *Színházi Élet* 12, no. 20 (May 13, 1923): 54.

surrounding death. The concept of mortality became more intertwined with scientific explanations rather than being solely attributed to religious factors. Spiritualism rose to prominence as a kind of bridge between the new scientific approach to death and the lingering and yet outmoded appeal of religious explanations.[619] However, spiritualism was not merely a reflection of the tensions of modernity, but rather a new form of self-knowledge. Julia Gyimesi highlights that in the earliest theories of spiritualism, one can detect a primitive psychological approach that placed the question of the personal search for happiness on partly spiritual and partly physiological foundations.[620]

An 1884 article from *Pesti Hírlap* ridiculed the mania for communicating with ghosts and fashionable seances that spread across the world from America to England. Moreover, the article stated that spiritualistic belief was a result of the 'un-excitement' of the time:

> Following the quiet and depressing times of the 1848 Revolution, these flabby minds borrowed some excitement from the dancing tables. Our whole part of the world has surrendered to this clownishness, and perhaps most of all, Hungary, because we had the greatest quietness at the time. . .[621]

As a nation that had endured a particularly prolonged period of calmness, Hungary was primed to embrace the uproarious energy arising from performative communication with the dead. According to the article, the people of Hungary craved a break from their prolonged quietude and embraced this form of entertainment with enthusiasm.

Seances first became fashionable in the larger cities, while table turning enjoyed popularity in the countryside. Spiritism and table turning were soon incorporated into folklore and became an integral part of folk beliefs, even today.[622] The history of spiritualism

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[619] On spiritualism and psychical research see: Janet Oppenheim, *The Other World: Spiritualism and Psychical Research in England, 1850-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); Alex Owen, *The Darkened Room: Women, Power and Spiritualism in Late Victorian England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004); Adam Crabtree, *From Mesmer to Freud: Magnetic Sleep and the Roots of Psychological Healing* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1993); Peter Lamont, *The First Psychic: The Peculiar Mystery of a Notorious Victorian Wizard* (London: Abacus, 2006); Luke Clossey, et al. 'The Unbelieved and the Historians, Part 1: A Challenge', *History Compass* 14 (2016), 594-602; 'The Unbelieved and Historians, Part 2: Proposals and Solutions', *History Compass* 15 (2017): 1-9.

[620] *Julia Gyimesi*, Pszichoanalízis és spiritizmus (Budapest: Typotex, 2011).

[621] 'A kelepcébe került kisértet', *Pesti Hírlap* 6, no. 44 (February 14, 1884): 1.

[622] See: Tünde Turai, 'A somlyóujlaki asztal és asztaltáncoltatás hiedelemköre', *Erdélyi Múzeum* 61, no. 3-4 (1999): 249-64.

in Hungary has only recently received academic attention. Eszter Tarjányi's work in terms of the Hungarian literary and cultural history, and Júlia Gyimesi's influential work on the occult and spiritualism in relation to psychoanalysis. [623] Jenő Szigeti's article gives us an overview of the history of Hungarian Spiritualism.[624] Vilmos Voigt recently worked on how spiritualist seances were conducted among the common people.[625]

The rise of science, advancements in technology, and the loss of traditional religious authority all contributed to a growing scepticism towards religious doctrines, exemplified in Friedrich Nietzsche's controversial assertion that 'God is dead'. Nietzsche recognized that the Enlightenment era had paved the way for a gradual decline in the influence of religion on society and the individual. Nietzsche warned that individuals would be left adrift, struggling to find meaning and purpose in life. During the nineteenth century, demand increased for communication with the dead, resulting in a growing number of seances in the circles of the court elite and, later, in the circles of the urban bourgeoisie. The Enlightenment confidence that supernatural and magical beliefs must decline was undermined by movements like spiritualism that grafted the aura of Enlightenment rigour onto the irrational practices it had intended to overcome. Occult revival aimed to reach a spiritual world that lay beyond the boundaries of scientific modernity and Church orthodoxy, where the dead continued to exist and could communicate with the living. Monica Blank states that 'for some, uniting spiritual and scientific forms of knowledge, or bring coherence to all forms of wisdom was a major goal'.[626] The occult and spiritualism, therefore, offered an appealing alternative form of Enlightenment at the time when both science and religion failed to give evidence for the afterlife. In this way, spiritualists posited a more permeable boundary between life and death.

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[623] Eszter Tarjányi, 'Madách Aladár és a magyarországi spiritizmus', *Palócföld* 26, no. 5 (1992): 423-432; Eszter Tarjányi, 'Madách Imre három orvosa', *Palócföld* 28, no 1 (1994): 55–66; Eszter Tarjányi, *A szellem ösvényén. A magyarországi mesmerizmus, szellemidézés, teozófia története és művészeti kapcsolatai* (Budapest: Universitas Kiadó, 2002); Eszter Tarjányi, 'A szellembúvárlat sodrában elveszve. Madách Aladár értekező prózája a századforduló légkörében', in: *Madách-symposium* XI. (Budapest: Madách Magyar Irodalmi Társaság, 2004), 271–80.

[624] Jenő Szigeti, 'Túlvilági kalandok. A magyarországi 19. századi spiritizmus története', *Egyháztörténeti Szemle* XV, no. 3 (2014): 101–13.

[625] Vilmos Voigt, 'Egy rejtélyes magyar vallástörténet bemutatása', 2000 XX, no. 11. (2008): 56–64; Vilmos Voigt, 'A magyar vallástörténet okkultista bemutatása', in: *Tanulmányok a Magyar vallástudomány történetéről* (eds.) Mihály Hoppál and Ábrahám Kovács (Budapest: L'Harmattan, 2009), 143–51.

[626] Monica Black*, Revisiting the Nazi Occult: Histories, Realities, Legacies*, (ed.) Monica Blank and Erik Kurlander (New York: Camden House, 2015), 9.

Thomas Luckmann argues that in modern times religion did not disappear, but slowly crossed over into different spheres of private life.[627] Belief in magic was not limited to the superstitious masses anymore, particularly in the *fin de siècle*. While corpse executions only occurred in the villages, spiritualism attracted the attention of the artistic and intellectual elite:

> Who saw in it a wellspring of new creative energies, a medium for the exploration of the invisible world beyond the reach of the senses, and a higher wisdom capable of reconciling the increasingly opposed forces of science and religion.[628]

This occult revival emerged in European society through the work of Freemasons, Mesmerists, Spiritualists and other leaders of alternative beliefs. Masonic lodges functioned as gathering places for an exclusive group of people interested in the cultivation of secret and occult knowledge.

Compared to other major European cities in the late nineteenth century, Vienna's occult scene developed slowly, with only a few Catholic theologians and journalists writing about occultism. Despite the increasing number of Protestants and Jews, Vienna's population remained mostly Catholic. While the freedom of religion was legally guaranteed, there was no real religious equality in practice, and the occult promoted views that were unacceptable to Catholicism.[629] The French teacher Constantin Delhez (1807–1879) introduced spiritualism in the second half of the century, and he founded the spiritist association *Nächstenliebe* in Vienna in 1870 (the earliest spiritualist association of the Habsburg Empire). The members held weekly meetings to study the occult and hold seances.[630] In several cities of the dual monarchy, especially in Vienna and Budapest, spiritualist associations and informal groups sprung up in the 1870s and 1880s.[631] At these

[627] Thomas Luckmann, *Die Unsichtbare Religion* (Frankfurt: Main, 1991), 78.
[628] David Allen Harvey, 'Elite Magic in the Nineteenth Century', in: *The Cambridge History of Magic and Witchcraft in the West From Antiquity to the Present*, (ed.) David J. Collins (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 549.
[629] Karl Baier, '*Occult Vienna: From the Beginnings until the First World War*', (eds.) Hans Gerald Hoedl, Astrid Mattes and Lukas Pokorny, *Religion in Austria* 5 (Vienna: Praesens, 2020), 3.
[630] Ibid. 12.
[631] Ibid. 17.

group meetings, members experimented with practices such as hypnosis and magnetism, which were classified as illegal healing methods.

The first traces of spiritualism in Hungary can be found at the beginning of the 1850s, when a German actor named Luis Berger held a spiritualist show in the German theatre in Pest in 1850.[632] Not long after, table turning became popular, and the newspapers reported many sensational stories about this new trend.[633] Similar entertainment featured in István Sándor's *Sokféle* magazine from 1796 to 1815, where the author introduced the most famous black magicians and dazzling stuntmen of Vienna and Buda, who thrilled the eager audience.[634] By 1853, similar to other European countries, spiritualism had spread to Hungary, especially amongst the followers of mesmerism, and these spiritualistic phenomena became a popular pastime. Several groups were founded to investigate mediumistic and related phenomena, such as *Szellemi Búvárok Pesti Egylete*, and journals were founded such as *Égi Világosság* from 1898 and *Rejtelmes Világ* from 1897. Many felt that traditional religions were no longer adequate for the needs of the complex modern society, and spiritualism offered compelling alternative methods for communing with the supernatural.[635] Unusual physical disturbances, such as rattling teacups and flickering lights, and the medium's thrilling performance were considered evidence for the afterlife. Voigt Vilmos argued that in Hungary, the spiritualist movement served an almost identical role to that of religion.[636]

Evangelical spiritualism also attacked by the representatives of the Catholic Church. In a book called *A szellemekben való újabb hit* published in 1889, Vilmos Schneider admitted the existence of the spirit world and believed modern spiritism:

> Seeks rather an unnatural, violent connection with the dead, forbidden contact with souls mediated by so-called mediums in a commercial and customary manner. Those who recognize the reality of medium apparitions,

[632] Szigeti, 'Túlvilági kalandok', 102.
[633] For example: *Magyar Hírlap,* no. 1214 (October 2, 1850); *Pesti Napló,* (March 12, 1854); *Pesti Napló* (April 25, 1857).
[634] István Csörsz Rumen, 'A Sokféle folyóirat (1791–1808) irodalmi programja', *Irodalomtörténeti Közlemények* 122 (2018), 757-67.
[635] Julia Gyimesi, 'Spiritualism, Telepathy and the Budapest School of Psychoanalysis', in: *Body, Soul, Spirits and Supernatural Communication*, (ed.) Éva Pócs (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2019), 450.
[636] Vilmos Voigt, 'Két világ összekapcsolása, B. K. Találkozása a Steineristákkal', *Vasi Szemle* 71, no. 6 (2017): 671-76.

> instead of considering them as supernatural phenomena, call themselves 'mediums' more recently.[637]

Throughout his book, the author refers to spiritism as a 'new superstition'.[638] He compares spiritism to witchcraft, as mediums who communicates with the deceased in spiritualistic practices are shockingly similar to the mediating role mentioned in witch trials.[639] This connection between spiritualism and witchcraft could be also read in the 1890 *Pesti Hírlap* article 'New Witchcraft', where the author argued that 'the basic idea of witchcraft fully meets the conditions of modern spiritism: to bring about supernatural things with human willpower'. The author emphasizes that in the past, they 'persecuted the medium as witches, while the spiritism of the modern age photographs the civilized spirit on rustling silk clothes and lavishly pays the mediating medium'. He concludes the article by saying: 'This is the age of giddiness in spiritualism. The madness is the same, only the perception is different'.[640] The author therefore believes that while specific beliefs and practices differed across time, the underlying human fascination with the inexplicable remains a constant driving force.

Several spiritualistic experiences emerged in connection with the practice of the mediums, such as table turning or the levitation of objects. These spiritualistic experiences became accessible regardless of gender, age, social class, or religious beliefs. Spiritualists also claimed they provided a link between science and religion, and they aimed to support the non-material existence of an individual after physical death. The supernatural experience was not based on traditional religious beliefs or faith but on hard evidence of the afterlife—phenomena that the audience could see or feel. Spirits and ghosts were no longer a part of 'real' world, but still had an influential psychological and cultural significance. Similar to vampire beliefs, spiritualism offered another form of fascination with death and the dead. Indeed, one of the primary appeals of spiritualism was its ability to bridge the gap between the living and the dead. Just as vampire legends allowed people to explore the

[637] Vilmos Schneider, *A szellemekben való újabb hit* 52 (Budapest: Buschmann F., 1889), 11.
[638] Ibid.
[639] Ibid. 33.
[640] Hock János, 'A spiritizmus a multban', *Pesti Hírlap* 12, no 189 (July 11, 1890): 1-3.

possibility of an existence beyond death—albeit with a stern moral lesson—spiritualism offered a more direct and personal connection with departed loved ones.

In an article published in the *Pesti Napló* in 1872, the author compared the way religion and spiritualism offered proof of the existence of the soul:

> While religions in general only believe in the life of the soul beyond the grave, Spiritism not only believes this, but knows it, because it can gain conviction about the eternal life of the soul through direct contact with souls and by wanting to replace faith with knowledge, he wants to unite and reconcile different religions.[641]

While a decree of the Holy Office of the Roman Catholic Church in 1898 condemned spiritualistic practices, it also approved legitimate scientific investigation of related supernatural phenomena. In the same way, in 1899, the Jesuit Father Tomcsányi condemned spiritualistic practises as the work of Satan that would lead to damnation. He believed the greatest danger of spiritualism arose from the way 'it eradicates the belief in heaven and hell in the believing soul, so it completely writes out the belief in God's infinite justice in the human heart'.[642]

The rejection of spiritualism by some Hungarians can be interpreted as their attempt to demonstrate that their enlightened mindset could not accept something as irrational as communication with the dead. The *Vasárnapi Újság* stated in 1862:

> The history of the epidemic of table dancing and necromancy from the most recent times and the fact that this epidemic raged in our country to a relatively small extent can be cited as a testimony to the natural common sense of our Hungarian race.[643]

[641] 'Spiritisták Pesten', *Pesti Napló* 23, no. 77 (April 3, 1872).
[642] 'A spiritizmus a szószéken', *Alkotmány* 4, no. 62 (March 12, 1899): 8.
[643] Dr József Brocken, 'Alvajárás', *Vasárnapi Ujság* no. 8 (February 23, 1862): 89.

As a result of this mindset, spiritism's popularity in Hungary was not established until a later date compared to Western Europe. The reason can be found in the first issue of the *Égi világosság* journal in 1898, which highlighted the patriotic spirit of the age:

> During the last three decades, the deep-hearted and receptive people of our country has devoted all its energy to cultural backwardness, which was the result of centuries of forced neglect, which it aims to make great efforts to correct it; to not only stand in line with the western civilized peoples but to compete with them in all fields of culture, and even take primacy in some of them, which, thank God, it succeeded. So, it is no wonder that Hungarians set aside and neglected the spiritualistic direction of the spiritual life for a while. And while in other aspects of culture has fought its way up to where Western civilization stands, it has lagged far behind foreign countries in spiritistic movements... now, wanting to correct this omission, it grasps spiritualism with greedy desire, and studies and researches this phenomenon with great diligence.[644]

Hungarians aspired to the same achievements that Western civilization had accomplished and sought to bridge the cultural, economic, and technological gap that separated them from the Western world. This pursuit was driven by an underlying sense of unease that they were inherently associated with the East.

Scholars recently have examined spiritualism as a reaction to materialism. An article in the 1891 issue of the *Magyar Szemle* stated that 'spiritualism was born directly by materialism', and the author lamented the penetration of materialism into every aspect of culture, which threatened to eliminate all traces of idealism from poetry and art.[645] The author complained that materialism mocked everything that brought joy to the human soul, and that its scientific approach rejected everything that the human soul held dear. According to the author, materialism not only interfered with art, but also replaced faith and belief with mere atheism. Due to the threat of materialism, the author gave spiritualism priority over disciplines such as science: 'We have seen that science is finite, the faith of

[644] Dr. Adolf Grünth, 'A mi programunk', *Égi Világosság* 1 (December 2, 1889).
[645] 'A legujabb divat', *Magyar Szemle* 3. No 45 (August 30, 1891): 410.

spiritualism is boundless: this is the reaction of materialism'.[646] The strength of spiritualism arose from its engagement with the boundless and infinite, which provided a more inspiring area of study than the scientific interest in finite and answerable questions.

Both supporters and sceptics of spiritualism recognized the need for rigorous scientific investigation into supernatural phenomena. For believers, the unusual occurrences and statements from mediums were seen as proof of an afterlife. They argued that scientific inquiry could validate spiritualism and promote its acceptance worldwide. Some spiritualists even positioned their beliefs as bridging the gap between religion and science, proposing a worldview where science would confirm the existence of an immaterial aspect of human existence that persists after death. Conversely, sceptics used scientific methods to either disprove mediums or to categorize phenomena as either fraudulent or yet unexplained by science.[647] Spiritualism, with its promise of communication with the deceased and the validation of an afterlife, offered solace to many who faced the uncertainties of modern life. The interest in spiritualism during this period can be seen as a response to the anxieties surrounding mortality and identity.

Conclusion

The problem of disenchantment remained an intriguing question in the context of modernity. As Weber suggested, the gradual abandonment of supernatural beliefs played a pivotal role in shaping contemporary life, impacting the interpretation of the world, the production of meaning, and the functioning of societal institutions. Through the incorporation of supernatural elements in literature and movies, individuals were able to temporarily detach from the constraints of their present circumstances by immersing themselves in novels infused with fantastical elements and indulging in thrills of horror cinema. Such immersion provided a temporary escape from reality through the powerful, if unpleasant, emotions arising from suspense, horror, and desire. In the face of modernity and scientific advancements, traditional beliefs in the supernatural did not disappear entirely but adapted and found new expressions and roles. The supernatural offered a

[646] 'Egy spiritiszta könyve', *Budapesti Hírlap* 17, no. 131 (May 11, 1897): 18.
[647] Julia Gyimesi, 'Between Religion and Science: Spiritualism, Science and Early Psychology in Hungary', *International Psychology, Practice and Research* 5 (2014): 3.

glimpse into the unknown and the extraordinary that existed beyond the prosaic reality of the physical world. Spiritualism also served as a powerful tool that enabled individuals to transcend the physical world and establish communication with departed souls, offering a deeper understanding of the mysteries beyond mortal existence.

Conclusion

This thesis has considered the undead belief amongst the educated Magyar elite during the eighteenth and nineteenth century, and the continuation of popular supernatural beliefs during the same period. Undead beliefs, including vampires, possessed corpses, dead witches and so on, remained a part of Hungarian popular culture long after the Enlightenment supposedly 'disenchanted' European society. By analysing the discourse of the educated elite across newspapers, medical treatises, and literature from the early 1700s to the early 1900s, the thesis has shown how forms of enchantment persisted alongside and informed advancements in science, government policy, and rational thought. This *longue durée* approach enabled the thesis to trace patterns in the use of supernatural belief in the discourse of the educated elite. Deploying an interdisciplinary methodology drawing on medical and cultural history, the thesis reveals the profound curiosity and engagement—rather than the dismissal—of the elite with undead belief. Superstitious beliefs not only persisted, but also resurged in response to crises of religious beliefs, plague and cholera epidemics, emerging Hungarian nationalism, and the *fin de siècle* anxiety about life and the afterlife.

The first half of the thesis focused on how science and medicine incorporated superstitious beliefs into their practice during and after the Enlightenment. The works of Catholic writers such as Gerard van Swieten and Sámuel Rácz, influential eighteenth-century medical practitioners, took undead belief seriously rather than dismissing it as mere superstition. For these writers, the possibility of revenants was required to support a fundamental tenet of the Christian faith, as evidenced by the resurrection of Jesus Christ. While other medical professionals attributed such phenomena to demonic possession, others sought to provide a scientific explanation within the realm of medicine. Thus, the efforts of physicians tended to reconcile medical knowledge with religious beliefs rather than separate them. Like doctors, local priests from various backgrounds did not deny the existence of revenants, such as vampires. They used superstitious beliefs to persuade their congregation about the need for better education and the construction of new schools. Both priests and doctors drew upon rational and superstitious examples to support their agendas; in this way, the Central and Eastern-European Enlightenment was defined by its mixture of the rational and irrational, the modern and traditional. The engagement of

educated elite discourse with superstitious beliefs contests the perceived revolutionary nature of Enlightenment ideas. Dan Edelstein proposes viewing the Enlightenment as a narrative constructed in hindsight, contextualizing events and ideas within their historical framework.[648] During the Enlightenment, beliefs in the supernatural were often challenged by the growing emphasis on reason, science, and empirical evidence; yet supernatural beliefs evolved in relation to the changing intellectual landscape. The Enlightenment's scepticism towards supernatural beliefs did not signify a complete rejection of such ideas but rather a re-valuation within a rationalist framework.

Diseases often served as catalysts for both the continuity and resurgence of superstitious beliefs, particularly at the local level. This thesis suggested that the lack of medical professionals and limited understanding of epidemics, such as cholera and the plague, persuaded people in rural villages and towns, to rely on local healers and traditional remedies passed down through generations. The reliance on age-old practices and beliefs persisted, even in the face of modern medicine and scientific advancements, highlighting the enduring influence of superstition in times of health crises. My case studies from the nineteenth century revealed that popular belief in the undead did not decline after the Enlightenment as was previously thought, but in my region, it was even stronger than before, as evidenced by János Vargas' book published in 1877. Furthermore, the reactions of the medical elite were not completely sceptical towards superstitious practices due to the continued use of natural remedies in nineteenth-century medicine and the persistent ambiguity surrounding the timing of death in medical understanding. Despite the strides made in medical science, healthcare professionals often relied on entrenched superstitions to navigate the enigmatic nature of mortality. The uncertainty surrounding the timing of death, particularly during outbreaks of disease when deceased bodies needed rapid burial, led to widespread speculation about individuals seemingly returning from the dead. Thus, medical professionals used discussions about the undead to draw attention to concerns regarding hygiene and burial practices, particularly emphasizing the implications of hastily conducted burials with insufficient time between death and internment. This demonstrates that the elite not only accepted the existence of the undead phenomenon, but also actively used it to advance their political and religious agendas.

[648] Dan Edelstein, *The Enlightenment: A Genealogy* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2010).

Popular supernatural beliefs were not only significant in the medical field but also served as entertainment, with newspapers frequently showcasing stories about 'strange' burials and debates over the timing of death, captivating readers with intriguing topics. The explosion of printing in nineteenth-century Hungary, therefore, provided a platform to criticise and analyse popular culture. The educated Magyars used the vampire phenomenon to highlight the unenlightened and ignorant state of the masses; for these writers, popular credulity in the undead served as a tool for their political and religious purposes. For example, popular superstitions were often invoked to evidence the need for a national system of education. However, the perception of cultural backwardness often varied depending on the observer's position along a gradient of the social hierarchy. As we have seen, from the vantage point of London, Central Europe was often stereotyped as less developed or less 'civilized' than the West. Similarly, Vienna perceived Hungary as culturally inferior or less sophisticated than itself. Further east, within Hungary itself, the elite regarded the minority of the Hungarian periphery as culturally backward. This perception stemmed from entrenched hierarchies from the global to the regional scale, where the elite maintained power over the rural populace. The emergence of a national identity for Magyars, and the consequent alignment of the Magyar elite with the West rather than the East, played a pivotal role in shaping the negative attitudes toward the inhabitants of the periphery.

By attending to the shifting cultural significance of vampire literature, the thesis revealed that the vampire phenomenon had very different meanings in Western Europe and Hungary. In Western Europe, particularly from the mid-eighteenth century onwards, vampires appeared consistently in literary works. This period saw the transformation of the vampire archetype from a fearsome, supernatural predator rooted in rural folklore into a sophisticated, aristocratic figure. In Hungary, however, the response to the vampire phenomenon was markedly different. The Magyar elite were concerned by the persistent belief in vampires and the numerous corpse executions carried out in the rural regions by the borderland minorities. As literacy rates began to grow and Hungarian print culture took shape, vampire narratives helped to police the boundaries between elite and popular, modern and backward, one who belongs and one who does not. The growing discourse on vampires served a dual purpose: it entertained a growing literate public while also embedding sharp political commentary. Vampires in Hungarian writing symbolized broader

social anxieties and political issues, embodying the perceived threat of rising nationalism, a corrupt aristocracy, or foreign invaders. This contrast between Western European and Hungarian attitudes towards the vampire showed the ways in which folklore about the returning dead adapted to meet the needs of the most urgent contemporary concerns.

From the latter half of the nineteenth century through the *fin de siècle* and the beginning of twentieth century, there was a significant change in attitudes towards both life and the afterlife. The 'end of century anxiety', characterized by the clash between progress and the limitations of understanding life and death, led to heightened anxiety, prompting individuals to seek refuge in spooky stories and films as a means of escaping reality. Spiritualism also emerged as a prominent phenomenon, and this trend highlighted a societal need for reassurance regarding the existence of an afterlife, a need that traditional religious institutions, such as the Christian Church, were perceived as unable to fulfil adequately. Spiritualism, beyond its role as a belief system, also functioned as a form of entertainment. Like the appeal of horror novels and films centred around the vampire, people were drawn to spiritualism for the thrill of being immersed in the unknown. The allure of the mysterious and the supernatural allowed individuals to explore the enigmatic aspects of existence beyond the mundane experience of everyday life.

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, diseases brought the precarity of life into sharp focus. For members of both the elite and popular classes, the revenant phenomenon allowed them to embody this biological horror into a recognizable shape informed by a familiar cultural narrative unique to the Eastern borderland of the Habsburg empire. In this region, as my research has shown, the revenant phenomenon had a cultural and social function that differed from other European nations. As epidemics such as the plague and cholera ravaged populations, the collective/cultural consciousness of mortality took shape alongside the superstitions about the undead that continued to influence the politics of village life and the medical practices of physicians. By the end of the nineteenth century, the crisis of epidemics was replaced by the ennui of the *fin de siècle*, a different kind of anxiety that, nonetheless, drew upon the figure of the revenant—especially the vampire—to imbue the banality of everyday existence with some hope of a beyond. From literature and popular culture to movements, people explored the boundaries between life and death, the natural and supernatural, and the known and unknown, by turning to the undead as a figure caught between these extremes. While the revenant is often represented

as inspiring terror, this terror, nevertheless, is more tangible and potentially solvable because it is embodied: vampires can be staked in the heart and burned while the cure for plague or ennui often appears impossible to achieve. Moreover, there is another surprising comfort that arises from the belief in enduring corpses that, however terrifying and malevolent they might seem, attest to forms of life that persist even after death. As a response to disease and *fin de siècle* anxiety, the undead ironically provide comfort about the precarity of life even as they embody the threat to destroy it.

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