

**Images of Hungarians and Romanians in  
Modern American Media and Popular Culture**

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Research for this article was begun in 2004 and the bulk of the article was written during summer 2005. As a result, many of the web searches were performed at that time (2005) and reflect what was available then (it is amazing to see how, just in this short time, the information available on the wikipedia, for example, has exploded). For the most part, I have resisted the urge to reinvestigate everything, but as a consequence newer research and examples from the Internet may be missing from this article.

\*\*\*This paper may be cited when accompanied by a full, proper citation. Plagiarism may be the sincerest form of flattery, but it is also a sincere form of intellectual laziness and theft, and therefore a pretty damned low thing to do. Please do not engage in it. I welcome comments, questions, and new/overlooked examples, observations, and theoretical musings at [hallria@comcast.net](mailto:hallria@comcast.net). Thank you.\*\*\*

## **ROMANIANS...**

*JERRY SEINFELD: (trying desperately to make conversation) So, Ceausescu. He must've been some dictator.*

*KATYA [A guest character, she is supposed to be a Romanian gymnast who won a Silver medal in the 1984 Olympics] : Oh yes. He was not shy about dictating.*

*JERRY: He, uh, he must've been dictating first thing in the morning. "I want a cup of coffee and a muffin!"*

*KATYA: And you could not refuse.*

*JERRY: No, you'd have to be crazy.*

*KATYA: He was a very bad dictator.*

*JERRY: Yes. Very bad. Very, very bad.*

(from the American television comedy series, *Seinfeld*, episode entitled "The Gymnast," aired 3 November 1994, multiple sites, see for example, <http://www.seinology.com/scripts/script-92.shtml>)

## **HUNGARIANS...**

*TONY KORNHEISER: "Thank you, Julian...folks, Julian Rubinstein, author of 'The Ballad of the Whiskey Robber' [a Hungarian bankrobber of the 1990s whose cover was playing ice hockey], will be at the 'Hungarian-American Foundation' tonight...What'll they have there? [Laughing] Gulash, yes, they'll have popperkash [sic]..."*

*ANDY POLLIN: [Laughing] Maybe Zsa Zsa [Gabor] will be there...*

(author's gist of a conversation heard on the sports talk/comedy radio program "The Tony Kornheiser Show," 2 December 2004, 9 AM Hour, WTEM 980 AM, Washington, D.C.)

## Part I: Introduction

Larry Wolff, Maria Todorova, Vesna Goldsworthy and other scholars interested in the development and spread of Western images and stereotypes of the peoples of eastern Europe understandably have focused their research on travelogues, plays, novels, oper(ett)as, paintings, etc. This makes sense and is methodologically appropriate since these are the artifacts of the age in which these ethnonational images and stereotypes came to be specified, recorded, and communicated to audiences larger than the one in direct earshot. But the content and context of these images and stereotypes are not static, and neither are the means by which they are communicated. Over the last century, and particularly half century, technological and media innovations—primarily in the form of mass communications (films, animated cartoons, radio, television, the Internet)—have changed how ethnonational images come into being and are conveyed to others. This change has arguably decreased the role of traditional (especially intellectual) elites in shaping the content of ethnonational images, while simultaneously enhancing the role of the audience in determining which images “take” and which ones creative intellectuals, journalists, and others will use in their work.

Ironically, the very point that is at the center of the research of Wolff, Todorova, et. al.—that these ethnonational images were not always what they became later, or are today—has somehow gotten lost, including in their application of their own theories to the latter part of the twentieth century. This departure from their intellectual assumptions has happened despite the fact that conditions such as the technology revolution, marketization, globalization, and democratization clearly challenge and reshape—and have challenged and reshaped—individual and collective identities. It is one thing to say that ethnonational images evolved, but hardened over time, and continue to shape how peoples view themselves and others, despite such changes. It is quite another to say, as many in this constructionist literature seem to, at least implicitly, that somehow this evolution became frozen in time, that these images, after a long period of evolution, “consolidated” and now are essentially impervious to meaningful change—that is, that everything is merely déjà vu all over and over and over again and again.

The two excerpts I have invoked above suggest the arbitrary, idiosyncratic, and often personality-contingent and event-driven character of modern ethnonational images of Hungarians and Romanians in the United States. These images are set against a backdrop of, influenced by, and feed upon the broader preexisting images outlined by scholars of the “first generation” of image and stereotype creation (the constructionist literature described above), but they are neither a subset of, nor beholden to, those first order images. Moreover, the interplay between televised images and the audience who watches them (i.e. as consumers who can vote-with-the-remote so-to-speak)—as well as the Internet’s empowering capacity to encourage and facilitate individual expression and participation—means that power over the content and meaning of these ethnonational images has devolved more to non-traditional elites (journalists, producers, media executives, business people) and the mass audience in comparison with the situation that prevailed in the past.

Despite the “Eastern (European)” classification of Hungarians and Romanians, the negative Hun/Mongol/Asian/Oriental connotations of the Hungarians and the “Balkan” characteristics of Romanians, and the general “neo-orientalist” treatment of this “second/third world” or “semi-periphery/periphery,” the actual content of popular and media images of Hungarians and Romanians is far less foreseeable, and more internally and externally diverse, than such overarching, generalizable theories of externally-created and imposed cultural construction predict. (I shall employ Csaba Dupcsik’s term “Euro-Orientalism” here to capture collectively the ideas of Wolff, Todorova, Goldsworthy, Bakic-Hayden and others.)

Moreover, the constructs of this literature have a difficult time accounting for something that derives from the excerpts above and recurs throughout this paper: the difference between Romanian images, which I will argue tend to be more recent and political (from the *Seinfeld* episode, Nicolae Ceausescu and a Nadia Comaneci-like gymnast)—and, as a consequence, vulnerable to change in content and connotation—and Hungarian images, which tend to be older and more “cultural” (from the sports radio talk show: goulash and Zsa Zsa Gabor) and static. Although the cultural constructionist model of Western image-creation and imposition does not fully spell out its assumptions and expectations, based on its treatment of the concept of “Central Europe” its underlying logic would seem to suggest that the more “Eastern” a people, the more simplistic and pejorative the ethnonational images and stereotypes attributed to that people, the more indistinguishable that people is from the rest of the “unwashed” peoples of the non-West, and the more inflexible the images and stereotypes. At least in the comparison of Hungarian and Romanian images in the West, this does not appear to be the case, and that begs the question: why?

Overall, I conclude from an examination of representations of Hungarians and Romanians in modern American media and pop culture, that in comparison to one another, to other peoples from central and eastern Europe and to peoples from western Europe, the neo-orientalist (Todorova’s distinctions and caveats of her own model notwithstanding) bent of much of the work that studies images of “Eastern Europeans” oversimplifies and overstates the picture. As I have already hinted, part of this derives from the sources, medium, and time period selected by these scholars for study. Another part, however, I would argue derives from the reification and sclerosis of this academic vantage point—one that at times seems unable to overcome its elitist roots. All of this said, I do not completely conclude that the neo-orientalist perspective has nothing useful to contribute. For one of my conclusions is that images of Hungarians in the American imagination are older, more consolidated, less subject to modification, and more diverse than contrasting images of Romanians. The stockpile or archive of images of Romanians tends to be smaller, less differentiated, more political, and newer. Part of this I hypothesize is arbitrary, but deals with the timing of the incorporation of ethnic images—itsself a consequence of travel to the country, emigration from that country, and the timing of modern national consciousness and identity movements in that country—into western European/English-speaking/American consciousness. Like Gerschenkron’s late developing states, late developing nations face a different set of rules, or at least more limited options—a choice between irrelevance and ignorance, less-

than-desirable stereotypes, or the possibility of exploiting comparative advantage of that stereotype no matter how unsatisfying and patronizing it may be.

Here is a preview summary of my findings then:

- 1) The range or universe of ethnonational images of either Hungarians or Romanians in North American film and television is more diverse, more internally contradictory, and less predictable than neo-orientalist assumptions seem to allow for.
- 2) Neo-orientalist assumptions prove somewhat ahistorical. Accident and absence of intention are filtered out in retrospect, and intention and malice are assumed in their place in order to create a coherent narrative.
- 3) Concrete, individual, idiosyncratic images prove much more enduring and influential than the pale abstract assumptions associated with the neo-orientalist model. It is these that frequently differentiate peoples in the popular mind and that are more impervious/inflexible to change.
- 4) Partly because of the role of individual images, televised images/pictures prove more compelling and lasting.
- 5) This points us toward the influence of television, film, and the Internet—media largely ignored in the earlier constructionist, neo-orientalist research, research which, surprisingly, while emphasizing the role of new mass media such as novels and travelogues that brought new peoples and places into the Western consciousness, and while stressing that images have changed over time (i.e. were not what they were later to become), underestimates or ignores both the capacity for change and the role of new media in identity and image formation.
- 6) The issue of modern media, popular inclusion/consumption culture, etc. brings us to the question of audience and highlights the link between technology and broader market access in determining image selection, formation, and endurance. The neo-orientalist perspective focuses excessively on elite control and dissemination, suggesting audiences are labile and easily manipulable, and placing almost no importance on the role of audience in determining image formation and content. The greater role of masses in determining which images “stick” buffers the elitist focus of the neo-orientalist perspective and accounts in part for the more mixed, syncretic character of contemporary ethnonational images.
- 7) As with state formation, the late developing nation and its late incorporation into the Western consciousness has a lingering role in the content of ethnonational images. Being unknown and having no image, although beneficial in presenting a *tabula rasa* template upon which good images can be projected, often leaves a people vulnerable to being pigeonholed in the foreign imagination by a small

number of late developing images—images which inevitably seem to be more political than cultural, and as a whole, more negative. However, it is important to note that this is as much a product of mass audiences and visual media...as it is of elites and any imputed constructionist imperative.

As I believe befits this topic, the layout and content of this paper is eclectic. As a result, it is unlikely that the reader will find every section of this paper of interest. However, I do believe that a wide variety of different audiences should find something germane to their particular interest—including those interested in media and communications studies, Central and East Europeanists, pop culture trivia buffs, movie aficionados, and sports fans. This article has something for most people, but it is definitely not “for everyone.”

### **An Autobiographical Note as an Introduction to Hungarian and Romanian Images in American Culture**

Encounters with ethnonational images, of course, often predate one’s intellectual capacity to recognize ethnic and national distinctions and to link people and fictional characters with ethnic and national groups. It is only in retrospect that we can recognize the connection. Because of the subject of this section and the role of personal memories, the approach is somewhat stream-of-consciousness.

#### **“Knowing” Romanians (or at least, Tran-syl-va-ni-ahahaha-ns)**

As a child, when it came to Romanians, I knew of course of Dracula, or at least his pop-cultural/film (re-, and seemingly never ending)incarnation. After all, to the extent I knew where he was from it was some place called “Transylvania,” which was either its own country—in which case it must have some pretty cool-looking postage stamps, spooky castles on forbidding mountain tops and the like—or a made-up place. I suppose this should not have been surprising for a kid, since, of the myriad Dracula films, there were ones such as “Billy the Kid vs. Dracula (1966).” (Where does that take place, Dodge City?)

Dracula’s birthday, as we all know, is 31 October, which just happens to coincide with Halloween, thereby causing some confusion. Anyway, so when I went trick-or-treating as Cornelius from the “Planet of the Apes”—it was the ‘70s okay, and I was a kid, how was I to know?...I actually thought soylent green *was* people—in a costume that they probably use today to demonstrate the danger of fireworks—to say nothing of the mask, a cheap plastic mold with an elastic string that invariably broke, causing you to have to carry it with you and thereby destroying any capacity you might have had to surprise the people who came to their doors...unless of course they tried the “please, take just one” candy-in-the-bowl-out-front-with-the-lights-off-really-we’re-not-home-socialism-in-action method—more often than not, I would run into countless Draculas. They had the cape, the fake fangs, and that cool fake blood...and perhaps even some of those cool postage stamps. (Context is everything at Halloween. My youngest brother went sometime in the late ‘80s as “Jason” from the “Halloween” horror series. A little old lady

opened up the door at one house and said “Ooooooh, look at the cute little hockey player”! By the way, what happens when you go up to somebody’s house in a costume, ring the doorbell, and say trick-or-treat, on a day other than Halloween? I figure one of two things can happen: 1) they call the cops, or 2) they seek to regift the still-remaining popcorn balls and circus peanuts left over from last Halloween.)

If Dracula was only present in person on Halloween, he could be found the rest of the year on television—especially, perhaps ironically, for kids. There was Count von Count from Sesame Street. The count’s theme song included a line, “When I’m alone. I count myself. One, one count! Ahahahaha [to thunder in the background]!” Interestingly, according to the Internet’s Wikipedia (“Count von Count”) entry, there is some vampire folklore which suggests that vampires can become obsessed with counting things and that should you ever confront one, throwing sand or seeds may help to distract them (a helpful travel tip...).

The Count von Count skit is emblematic of the confused mix of Romanian, Hungarian, and sometimes inexplicably inserted slavic elements that make up the Dracula composite. For example, as in the *Seinfeld* scene excerpted in the introduction (whose characters actually speak a few words of Romanian in the scene!, but who are nevertheless named Katya (the gymnast) and Misha (the circus performing acrobat), names (diminutives) which are neither Hungarian, nor Romanian), the Count’s bats for some unknown reason have slavic names—Grisha, Misha, Sasha, etc. The Count’s characteristics are clearly inspired by Bela Lugosi’s (indeed, a real Transylvanian (from Lugoj), of Hungarian origin) 1931 portrayal of *Dracula* (down to Count von Count’s accent), and, it would appear, the Count’s cameo girlfriend “Countess Dahling von Dahling” is inspired by the Hungarian actress, Zsa Zsa Gabor, who is famous for being famous, as is said, and for calling people “dahling” (convenient, she has said, because then you never have to remember anyone’s name).

Finally, there was Count Chocula, a staple of Saturday morning television serials and the commercials in between which they were sandwiched (nothing in comparison to today, however, as commercial breaks took up much less time then). All I knew of him was that he presided over what looked like a really-tasty chocolate cereal that looked more like dessert than breakfast. That, of course, explains why our mother refused to buy it for us. Back in the in-retrospect-not-a-bad-time-to-be-a-kid, now much-maligned, hedonistic “have a nice day smiley-face,” “Me” decade of the 1970s, gluttony as one of the seven deadly sins was given temporary special dispensation. Gluttony was in...even if chocolate covered cereals with marshmallows were not in some households. (In those days, “nutrition correctness” had not yet taken over, as names such as Sugar Smacks (renamed Honey Smacks) or Sugar Pops would suggest.)

### **“Knowing” Hungarians**

My introduction to Hungarians was similarly obscure. To the extent I identified Dracula with any place at all, it was, as I noted, Transylvania; to the extent that it was a country, Romania—not yet having gotten the spiel countless times by the proprietors of private

rooms I was to stay in Hungary in later years, “ah, so you are going to Transylvania, you know that used to be part of Hungary—one, one dismembered kingdom, ahahahahaha—until *they* took it away (to the accompaniment of thunder in the background).” What did I know and when did I know it (well, it was the Watergate era, you know)? It was not, for example, until years later that I realized that I had once lived in the Hungarian-American mecca known as Cleveland, or that the Austrian family from whom we bought our house in a suburb of Toronto in the early ‘70s was named Feleky. (It was quite a street we lived on then (1970-1974); my parents, Irish immigrants just naturalized American citizens, the mother of a friend a Prague Spring Czech refugee, and many new Greek families, doubtless some having fled the right-wing military junta of 1967-1973.)

My mother used to make that staple of many an American household (at least at a time), “Hungarian goulash”...it sounds ghoulish, but it tastes delicious. (As is frequently noted, the American version is more similar to porkolt (stew-like) than to gulyas (a soup).) I loved it, even though I didn’t know what it was or where it came from. (It can only be said to be ironic too, although I did not realize it was ironic at a time: my father is a ‘56er, only he came from Dublin, a relative (a policeman!) stiffed him at the port, and so he wandered the streets of New York with his suitcase in heavy Irish tweed during Indian summer, only to duck into a bar to see a few pitches of Don Larsen’s Perfect Game in the World Series, an event whose importance was inscrutable to him; like many a Hungarian ‘56er, however, he felt like a Martian (see below for more on the theme of Hungarians as “aliens”). No, my father did not bump into Frank McCourt!)

“Goulash,” of course, already had a long history on television by that point, what with mad scientists in Warner Brothers cartoons, living in “Transylvania” among lightning storms and talking about making “spider goulash” and similar mad scientist specialties. (The other Hungarian touch used in a whole series of cartoons—including a classic Warner Brothers’ cartoon by Fritz Freleng with Bugs Bunny as a concert pianist (“Rhapsody Rabbit”) and a classic MGM cartoon by Hanna and Barbera of “Tom and Jerry” dueling it out at a piano (“The Cat Concerto”), both of which came out within weeks of each other in 1946 leading to mutual accusations that the competitor was guilty of plagiarism (see Wikipedia entry)—is the manic-depressive, mostly manic, frantic music Franz (Ferenc) Liszt’s “Hungarian Rhapsody No. 2”.) “Goulash” was also the plot-line of what from today’s optic was a clearly racist episode (“A Majority of Two,” 4/11/68) of the 1960s sitcom “Bewitched” in which, as usual, “Darrin” (alias “Darwood”) was to entertain an out-of-town business guest—would you like a high-ball, sir, make that a double; sorry they’ve slashed the expense account, dinner at Darrin’s again...—who on this occasion was Japanese. The whole episode, Darrin’s wife, a witch named Samantha (Elizabeth Montgomery), is trying to track down how to prepare the meal request the businessman’s secretary had relayed: Hun-gai-ran-gou-rash. She is worried, of course, about causing the Japanese businessman to lose face if she asks, which is indeed a concern since throughout the episode when this happens to someone his or her face will literally disappear, apparently leaving a blotch of white-out. Everyone, of course, has a good laugh at the end, however, after the businessman has romanced only a mildly Asian-looking (didn’t want to have her looking tooooo Asian) stewardess, and it

turns out all the businessman really wanted was “Hungarian Goulash,” but owing to his secretary’s accent...Everyone except that nosy next-door neighbor Mrs. Gladys Kravitz, who, we can deduce, must be spying on the Stevens’ household for “Dragnet” or “The FBI,” since “freak out” parties have been reported at that address...

Then, there was the show, “Green Acres,”...something was definitely up with that, but exactly what I didn’t know. Although I knew the character Lisa Douglas was eccentric, I didn’t know she was Hungarian, and I certainly did not know that she was Eva Gabor and not Zsa Zsa Gabor as is very frequently mistaken. As a kid, I thought I didn’t understand the show, precisely because I was a kid. Nope. Now, years later, I know: that wasn’t the problem.

How exactly does one describe “Green Acres?” The plot ostensibly was that Eddie Albert’s character wished to experience the “real livin’” of the countryside (today, this is known as a “r-e-a-l-i-t-y show,” starring a similarly famous-for-being-famous celebrity, Paris Hilton...who is actually related to the Gabors (see below), however, thereby causing us serious existential issues at this point in this sentence). Eddie Albert drags his reluctant Hungarian wife with him, and she is not very happy with the situation because, as we learn from the theme song, she would rather be shopping on Park Avenue. (The countryside theme was so common in CBS sitcoms during the 1960s, that some critics derisively referred to it as the “Country Broadcasting System”.) Anyway, they lived in some rural area, several hundred miles from Chicago, probably Illinois. Despite the small size of the town in which they lived, Hooterville was capable of hosting not one, but two sitcoms: Green Acres (1966-1971) and Petticoat Junction (1963-1970). (The town was apparently known best for the ample breasts of the young female stars of Petticoat Junction, since, as it turns out, the choice of name was not accidental). The two shows were united by the presence of Sam Drucker, apparently town grocer, postmaster, and banker, and the unforgettable character of George Jefferson (oh, sorry, no, too early, this was still the 1960s, strike that then). As the Wikipedia entry notes, Hooterville had Drucker’s grocery store and the hotel from Petticoat Junction...not exactly, Pixley material (to say nothing of Mount Pilot), and likely that giant sucking sound on the state’s budget. At least the town did not have Goober or Howard Sprague, clearly not local personalities the chamber of commerce wishes to advertise when trying to attract investment).

Moreover, I would venture to guess, this was one town where the locals did not “exceed the plan” or “break the harvest record,” despite Eva’s naturally collectivist tendencies. Instead, a lot of time was spent with fending off the vexing locals, including the featherheaded state bureaucrat, county farm agent Hank Kimball, a gender-ambiguous brother and sister painting team, and Arnold Ziffel, the “hilarious” TV-watching pig, apparently “Green Acres”’s answer to Mr. Ed (an insidious, but false, urban legend has it that the cast ate Arnold after the show was cancelled; the truth is just being on the set made him nostalgic for the sanity of the sty). The running joke of the series was that Mr. Douglas (Eddie Albert) wanted to be there, but nothing went right and the locals drove him crazy; while Mrs. Douglas, despite her love of fluffy negligees and diamonds, fit right in and understood the locals. Her Hungarianness in the show was alternatively

exotic, haughty, sexy/ditzy (as connoted by her accent) and seemingly oblivious to reason—yes, a veritable goulash of “otherness.”

One would like to assume that “Green Acres” could be explained by recourse to more complicated analysis: that it was somehow a) a reflection of the drug culture’s first penetration of the creative intelligentsia (according to Alice, the wind was whispering, not yet crying Mary... “Green Acres” an accidental choice of title?!), or that b) there was some deep allegory at work here, suggesting pursuit of a utopian rural life is a chimera, and that instead you get electrification and a TV-watching pig. (Appropriately enough, when it and other such country broadcasting system shows were cancelled in 1971, it was referred to as the “Rural Purge.”) It is more likely that the show was merely escapist, almost unintentionally absurd—although it did leave a score that lent itself well to translation into Hungarian for a skit at a summer language camp years later. (One of the best indictments of “America’s Cold War realism” of the era can be found in the movie “Forrest Gump,” in a recovery room for injured soldiers during the Vietnam War...in the background “Gomer Pyle, USMC” plays on a TV...In 5 years, Gomer somehow never made it out of basic training to Vietnam...)

### **Through the Eyes of an American Child of the Television Age: Identifying Hungarians and Romanians as Hungarians and Romanians...through the Wide World of Sports**

#### **Al “The Mad Hungarian” Hrabosky**

Speaking of Eva...I mean Zsa Zsa, no, I mean, for once this is right, Zsa Zsa Gabor...a guest spot on another rural-themed 1960s television show introduces us to our next theme: the Hungarians as “mad” or crazy (a la Lisa Douglas). In one episode (28 January 1962), Wilbur congratulates his talking horse, Mr. Ed, for having cured Zsa Zsa of her fear of horses, to which Mr. Ed responds: “She cured my fear of Hungarians” (“The Best of Mr. Ed,” multiple sites; Mister Ed aired from 1961-1966 on, you guessed it, CBS). In J.D. Salinger’s “Franny and Zooey” (published as a whole in 1961), Mrs. Glass tells Zooey: “You could use a haircut, young man...You’re getting to look like one of these crazy Hungarians or something getting out of a swimming pool” (the section also contains a reference to Zsa Zsa Gabor and use of the descriptor “Balkan”; I remember now reading this book beneath leafy trees below the Pannonhalma abbey in Hungary in June 1990) <http://www.freeweb.hu/tchl/salinger/frannyandzooey.doc>. (I would be curious to know here: this section first appeared in *The New Yorker* in May 1957, and the reference to a Hungarian “getting out of a swimming pool”—a rather strange comparison—inevitably brings to mind the famous bloody water polo match between the Soviets and the Hungarians on 6 December 1956 at the 1956 Summer Olympics (yes, that’s right, because the Summer Olympics were held in Melbourne, Australia that year). The Hungarians defeated the Soviets in a match with huge political overtones—angry Hungarian fans were reportedly ready to lynch a Soviet player for a punch to the eye of a Hungarian star—the match coming just a month after the Soviet crushing of the Hungarian uprising.)

My first personal realization of Hungarianness as Hungarianness, however, came around 1976, with the ascribed “mad” quality of Hungarians, specifically and appropriately enough, Al “The Mad Hungarian” Hrabosky. Hrabosky was a relief pitcher for several different teams in the 1970s and early 1980s, but his best years were with St. Louis and Kansas City, with 1975 being his cardinal year in the record books. The mid-1970s were the days of colorful characters in baseball, especially among pitchers: the cigar-chomping Cuban of the Boston Red Sox, Luis Tiant, who looked like we was throwing toward the outfield rather than the catcher because of his pitching motion; Sparky Lyle for the New York Yankees, his cheeks like a blow-fish filled with chewing tobacco; and Mark “The Bird” Fidrych of the Detroit Tigers, who talked to the ball as if it were alive and whose boyish enthusiasm unfortunately couldn’t overcome injuries that strangled his career in its infancy.

Then there was Hrabosky who despite the Slovak-sounding last name claims Hungarian descent. Contrasting the absence of colorful characters among pitchers in today’s baseball, Gordon Edes wrote in a wonderful—if he were Hungarian, we might even say “sweet”—article in 2003 about Hrabosky as follows:

But for sheer theatrics, one reliever remains in a league of his own: Al Hrabosky, known as the “Mad Hungarian” when he pitched for the Cardinals, Royals, and Braves from 1970-1982. With his Fu Manchu mustache, long hair, and a silver ring, the Gypsy Rose of Death (“I don’t even remember the stupid story I made up for that, it was so far-fetched—probably a family heirloom of Dracula”), Hrabosky would turn every outing into performance art. He’d stomp off the mound toward second base, eyes blazing, the fury practically seeping through his uniform as he turned back to the hitter who was left waiting at the plate until he was done working himself into an altered state he called his “controlled hate routine,” then whirled around, pounding his ball into the glove while the home crowd generally went nuts. (Gordon Edes, “Hrabosky had a flair about him,” “The Boston Globe,” 28 March 2003, F9, reprinted on the Internet)

How did Hrabosky get his nickname? Again, Edes recounts:

The nickname, he said, came from a team publicist. No one was sure of his nationality—[the American film star] “Burt Reynolds once called me ‘The Mad Russian’”—and only the spelling-bee champions got his name right. But then one day, a Cardinals publicist, Jerry Lovelace, said “Hey, M.H.,” to the young pitcher from Oakland, Calif., and a nickname was born...I said, “What does that mean?” He said, “Mad Hungarian.” I said, “I like it.” (Edes, 2003)

Hungarians, I concluded from watching his television appearances and from his nickname, must be associated with craziness. That is how, of course, many images are passed on, not with malice, but as descriptors for individuals, a way of awarding identity and for marketing purposes. Hrabosky’s “mad” behavior was established before his nationality (as Burt Reynolds’ calling him “The Mad Russian” indicates, in itself a negative and positive reflection of “East European” ethnicity in the United States at the

time—interchangeable, part of a melting pot, even if a separate one from those of West European ethnicity—although cultural constructionists would view such “everycountry” ascription more darkly (see below), rather than his Hungarianness being identified first, and his behavior seen as reflecting his Hungarianness. Once the two become intertwined, however, and given the propensity for collective associations to outweigh individual associations, it was difficult and almost irrelevant to know which came first—the two were married and interchangeable in the popular imagination, or at least sports fan’s imagination.

### **Nadia...**

It was also the Bicentennial Summer of 1976 when I was introduced to Romanians, also through sports. It was, of course, through Nadia Comaneci (“N.C. I”), an endearing young Romanian gymnast who scored seven perfect 10s, the perfection being driven home even more by the fact that the scoreboards only went up to 9.9, the perfect score of 10 being considered unattainable! (The scoreboard would show 1.0 because it could not go past 9.9....Spinal Tap’s invention of the 11 not having been invented yet.) Nadia spawned “Nadia-(Ro)mania” of a sort. ABC which carried the Montreal Olympics in the United States attached a musical theme to the gymnast’s performances; “Nadia’s theme” then climbed the pop charts! (It was actually the theme to an American soap opera, “The Young and the Restless,” but it was through its attachment to Nadia who used it for one of her floor performances that it became famous.)

Of course, I have asked myself since then: would the reaction, the outpouring of genuine warmth and admiration from Americans (Canadians, and Westerners in general) have been the same had Nadia been representing Bulgaria and not Romania—to say nothing of the Soviet Union? True, the USSR’s Olga Korbut generated enthusiasm four years earlier in Munich but nothing like Nadia. Was it Nadia’s comparative youth and “cuteness/sweetness/prepubescence?” Was it her coach, the charismatic, bear-like Hungarian, Bela Karolyi (their relationship presented as indicative of the “warm ethnic relations” fostered by “Ceausescu’s Romania”)? Perhaps, but I also think it was against the backdrop of Romania’s highly-crafted and the U.S. and West’s highly-courted image of Ceausescu’s Romania as the great thorn in the Soviets’ side, bravely standing up to Moscow and more Western in their culture and people (“a Latin people in a sea of Slavs”)—i.e. thus not Balkan or truly “Eastern,” somehow caught by accident “behind enemy lines.” It is simply difficult to believe that something approaching Nadia-mania could occur in the post-Cold War world; it was a reflection of the time in which it took place.

Certainly, the standing ovation for the Romanian delegation as it entered the Los Angeles Coliseum at the 1984 Summer Olympics—which unfortunately lent itself easily to continuous exploitation by Ceausescu thereafter, during the most-difficult years of his reign—and Nadia’s escape from Romania in November 1989, became metaphors for and barometers of Romania’s political situation and U.S.-Romanian relations. The appropriately surreal “1984” moment reflected the Chernenko, pre-Gorbachev nadir of Soviet-American relations in the 1980s—arms reductions talks’ were essentially put on

ice between late 1983 and 1985—and the continued greater importance attached to Romania’s foreign policy over Ceausescu’s “Golden Era” domestic policy (the 1984-1986 period being perhaps the worst and most hopeless according to some, in part owing to brutal weather, and the weakness of reform currents at that moment elsewhere in the bloc). By 1989, with the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe in full swing—and with “Gorbymania” having changed the image of the Soviet Union extensively in the United States—the image of a transmogrified Nadia—as if 1976 had never happened—involved in a “tawdry affair” with a married man (Constantin Panait), escaping from Romania, seemed to symbolize the ills of Ceausescu’s Romania and how it now stood in stark contrast to the rest of the Eastern bloc. As the Seinfeld episode demonstrates, and as I will discuss in more detail below, the gymnast frame stuck in the popular imagination, however. It was Nadia who set that mold.

(A Romanian-American scholar once told me how surprised he was to look up on the television screen one day in November-December 1989, only to see the married father of four, the Romanian émigré for whom a now aging and plumper Nadia had allegedly left Ceausescu’s Romania: the scholar had tended bar with the guy...and the guy still owed him money! My first encounter with “real, live” Romanians from Romania also had a sad sports theme in a sense. It was in Keleti pu., the eastern train station in Budapest in May 1985. Amid the clapping of rusting toilet flanges and intermittent torrents of urine falling to the tracks below, Romanian boys in dingy blue track suits with trim that had once been white chased each other around the unmistakable “CFR” railcars of the time...)

## Part II:

### Back to Theory: The Inventions of Eastern Europe, the Balkans, and Ruritania

Over the years, there has developed a growing subfield across many academic disciplines that examines the construction of identities in the “region formerly known (primarily during the Cold War) as ‘Eastern Europe.’” This reflects the intersection of two trends, one political/historical, one intellectual/ideological. Part of the timing of the birth of this subfield owes to the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe, the break-up of Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia as well as of regional groupings such as the Warsaw Pact and COMECON, and the question of where the future of the countries of the region lies in the face of extensive political and economic restructuring and the prospect (and now for many, reality) of NATO and, in particular, European Union membership. Part of it lies in broader academic and cultural trends that look at the role of white Christian male Americans and (Western) Europeans in creating and imposing identities upon “others” in their home countries, but especially abroad—i.e. the so-called “Orientalism,” identified by Edward Said. The bottom line of such analysis is that the American and West European views of East Europeans and others says more about the owner of the view than the object of the view, about elaborately rationalized, but unjustifiable and often immoral superiority complexes, and about how those making the characterizations do so wittingly and unwittingly to establish and maintain control over those they characterize and categorize.

As a result, we have learned important conclusions such as the shift from a north-south mental geography of Europe to a west-east one (i.e. “Eastern Europe”) weighted with far more political, cultural, and moral baggage (Wolff), the similarly, historically-recent evolution and accepted use of the pejorative regional classification of “the Balkans” (Todorova), and more broadly of non-western Europe as a mythical and allegedly genetically-backward “Ruritania” (Goldsworthy). The Hungarian scholar Csaba Dupcsik has dubbed this set of studies collectively as a critique of “Euro-Orientalism” (Dupcsik, 2001). Much, perhaps most, of the literature in this burgeoning subfield—it is part of the contemporary bread-and-butter of universities and colleges, both outside and inside the classrooms, that is “identity politics,” the behemoth of research agendas—bases its conclusions on the reading of travel narratives, novels, poems, plays, operas, paintings, etc. In other words, the historic province of narrow, if traditionally influential, elite populations, that mirror to some extent the intellectuals who now are examining their works.

In a review of Vesna Goldsworthy’s *Inventing Ruritania: The Imperialism of the Imagination* and Maria Todorova’s *Imagining the Balkans*, the journalist and historian Misha Glenny summarizes this body of literature for the lay-person as follows:

Both Goldsworthy and Maria Todorova, a Bulgarian historian who now teaches at the University of Florida, seek to explain the peculiar form of literary and ideological imperialism visited on the Balkans. While consciously drawing on Edward Said’s *Orientalism* for inspiration, Todorova makes clear distinctions

between Said's consideration of the Middle East and her own of what used to be called the Near East. Both authors draw on a third academic, Milica Bakic-Hayden, to describe the process of imagining the Balkans as one of 'nesting orientalisms'. On the one hand, the region is seen as 'irreparably oriental' because it spent nearly five centuries as part of the Ottoman Empire. On the other, it is indisputably part of Europe. The dichotomy is summed up by two further, now defunct names for the Balkans: Turkey-in-Europe and Ottoman Europe. Its inhabitants were in the main white and Christian, but in important contrast to the Middle East, the region was never colonised by Western powers, which allowed it to become the repository of any manner of fantastic imaginings. (Glenny, "Only in the Balkans," *London Review of Books*, 1999)

In other words, the utility and great advantage of the Balkans and Eastern Europe for those in Western Europe and North America is that they are foreign enough as settings to host an allegory or morality play unobtrusively and yet familiar enough to make that allegory or morality play credible and understandable to a Western audience.

It should be noted here that within this literature there is a, never thoroughly resolved, tension between foreigners and locals lumping the whole region together ("Eastern Europe") or making and placing emphasis upon distinctions between groupings of countries or parts of countries in the region. The larger, regional approach—the "everycountry" tendency discussed by Fleming below—is, not surprisingly, favored in the discourse of Westerners. Thus, the countries of "Eastern Europe" as a whole, or the "Balkans" as a whole, are viewed as virtually indistinguishable and interchangeable. Locals, understandably, or perhaps those who spend longer periods of time in the region, are likely to invoke the language of "nesting orientalisms" described by Milica Bakic-Hayden. That is, rank-ordering ethnonational groups within eastern Europe or the Balkans, or within the former Yugoslavia, or even among constituent ethnonational groups there (Serbs vs. Albanians as she suggests)—for Bakic-Hayden this is a reflection of the hegemony and internalization of the orientalist discourse among the region's peoples and its replication in their dealings with each other and even more "oriental" peoples (the Turks, etc.) (see Bakic-Hayden, 1994, or online at [http://www.zmag.org/balkanwatch/hayden\\_orientalisms.htm](http://www.zmag.org/balkanwatch/hayden_orientalisms.htm)). The Romanian academic Sorin Antohi demonstrates how even within a country such as Romania, and among Romanians themselves, the roughly northwest to southeast "nesting orientalist" discourse exists and shapes views of those who live in these areas (Antohi, *Transit* 21, 2002).

Goldsworthy, Todorova, and Bakic-Hayden clearly believe that the role of Westerners in defining and characterizing those from the eastern part of the continent, the "lesser Europe," or perhaps most appropriately "the Other Europe," has led to the creation of cultural hierarchies, often then internalized to their own detriment by those who are being categorized, of negative and pejorative images and stereotypes of the peoples of "Eastern Europe" and "The Balkans." In an interesting article entitled "*Dracula* and the Cultural Construction of Europe," Jason Dittmer elaborates specifically on the role of "travel literature and the Enlightenment" in fostering negative images of Eastern Europe:

Larry Wolff attributes the construction of an Eastern Europe that is separate from the “civilized” portions of Western Europe to Enlightenment philosophers (in particular, Voltaire and Rousseau) who perpetuated and mythologized each other's accounts of a backward and barbaric homogenous region (some of them despite never actually going there). For example, Voltaire's *History of Charles XII* (1731) was critical in mapping Eastern Europe in the popular imagination by describing Charles' march through Eastern Europe. This book was written in the first person and instilled a fantasy-filled image of Eastern Europe that later travelers would bring with them to Eastern Europe, inserting a lens of preconceptions in their imagination. We know that the book was extremely influential because it had several printings and translations, and its effect was far-reaching and long lasting. Later Voltaire would write a history of the Russian Empire under the rule of Peter the Great (1759) and he used the now popular image of Peter as a “modernizer” to paint Russia as innately backwards and in need of Europeanization (a representation of the Russian executive that was still dominant in the Western media during the more recent reign of Boris Yeltsin). Later correspondence between Voltaire and Catherine the Great (which was all published at the time) further established Russia as a “backward” land in the minds of readers. Rousseau played a similar role in the cultural construction of Poland, constructing Poland and its neighbors as chaotic, despotic, or both:

Poland is a large state surrounded by even more considerable states which, by reason of their despotism and military discipline, have great offensive power. Herself weakened by anarchy, she is, in spite of Polish valor, exposed to all their insults [...]. No economic organization; few or no troops; no military discipline, no order, no subordination; ever divided within, ever menaced from without, she has no intrinsic stability, and depends on the caprice of her neighbors. (2: 431)

In addition to this representation from philosophers who may or may not actually have been to Eastern Europe there were similar depictions available to the public from completely fictional travelers, such as those of Baron Munchausen (Wolff 100-06). While there was a real Baron Munchausen who did travel through Eastern Europe, the stories published about his namesake were tall tales written by Rudolf Raspe that portrayed Eastern Europe as a ridiculous and fantastic place. This representation became fashionable just as travel to the region increased, which is interesting as evidence supporting the cliché “familiarity breeds contempt” because Southwest Asia and East Asia received a much more romantic image, perhaps because of their inaccessibility for most Europeans at the time. Similarly, Goldsworthy notes: “the Gothic plot [as of *Dracula*] requires a setting which is sufficiently close to the reader to appear threatening, while nevertheless being alien enough to house all the exotic paraphernalia—the castles, the convents, the caverns, the dark forests at midnight, the mysterious villains and the howling specters” (75). Todorova outlines a similar process of “discovery” for the Balkans, where diplomats and other travelers to the region came back with stories and descriptions that were rich in detail and description, especially of the beauty

of the women and the “crudeness” of the men. Thus, Jonathan Harker's journal entries must be viewed as they would have been viewed at the time they were written—as a throwback to a not-so-distant literary era, when Eastern Europe came to be known as a magical, timeless place, and *Dracula* serves as a part of that same politico-geographic project whereby Eastern Europe was constructed as something entirely different than the West. (Jason Dittmer, “*Dracula* and the Cultural Construction of Europe,” © *Connotations* 12.2-3 (2002/2003): 233-48 found at <http://www.unituebingen.de/connotations/dittmer1223.html>)

The Enlightenment brought with it the belief that we can rationally explain and understand the environment in which we live. Unfortunately, it also brought with it the ability and desire to justify in intellectual terms our visceral reactions and prejudices and preconceived notions. “Just because” is not an acceptable answer in Enlightenment thinking. The overlapping or reinforcing of visceral reactions, prejudices, and preconceived notions with rational argument instantly made such beliefs all the more difficult to challenge and falsify. In other words, the capacity for protecting one’s beliefs from attack and for deceiving oneself became infinitely greater and more complicated. Post-Enlightenment “prisms/prisons of the mind” have become every bit as sophisticated and difficult to escape as its prisons.

One of the features alluded to by Dittmer as characteristic of Western images of Eastern Europe is the alleged homogeneity and interchangeability of the countries in the region. In the following passage, K.E. Fleming examines the cultural baggage of the fictional settings of Syldavia (Hergé [George Remi], “King Ottokar’s Sceptre”) and Herzoslovakia (Agatha Christie, “The Secret of Chimneys”), where politics is inscrutable, and violence, brigandry, mystery, assassination, and revolutions are said to be the fabric of everyday life:

Syldavia and Herzoslovakia, then, are sort of Balkan “everycountries,” composites (both in name and character) based on several assumptions: that Balkan countries are more or less interchangeable with and indistinguishable from one another, that there is a readily identifiable typology of politics and history common throughout the Balkans, that there is such a thing as a Balkan ethnic or racial “type.” Yet even as Hergé and Christie assume that they know something fundamental about the Balkans—indeed, that they know the Balkans so well that they can effortlessly construct fictional Balkan worlds—both Herzoslovakia and Syldavia point to an even more pervasive, and apparently contradictory, assumption about southeastern Europe. This is the belief that the Balkans are so hopelessly and intrinsically confused and impenetrable that there is scarcely any point in trying to distinguish between them; a novelistic or cartoon substitute is, in fact, eminently more manageable and presents less of an authorial problem than does the real thing. Anything vaguely East or South-East Europeanish will do. Syldavia, Moravia, Czechoslovakia, Herzoslovakia, Herzegovina, Bosnia, Borduria, Bohemia—what’s the difference, after all? Hermann Keyserling’s wry observation, “If the Balkans did not exist, it would be necessary to invent them,” was perhaps understated. Even though the Balkans do exist, they must be invented

anyway. Simultaneously and tautologically, then, the Balkans are both fully known and wholly unknowable. (K.E. Fleming, “*Orientalism, the Balkans, and Balkan Historiography*,” *The American Historical Review* vol. 105, no. 4 (October 2000) found at <http://www.historycooperative.org/journals/ahr/105.4/ah001218.html> )

There are many more recent examples through which to clarify Fleming’s point. There was the memorable 1984 Wendy’s fast-food commercial with generic East European frenetic fiddling and a communist bloc fashion show where the only thing that differentiates “dayvehr” from “eefningvehr” is the flashlight (spotlight) that accompanies a plump peasant woman in her drab, mass-consumption frock. In Mike Myers’ “Austin Powers” film series (spoofs of the Cold War era James Bond/In Like Flint spy thrillers), the fictional “everycountry,” the synonym for instability from the Balkans to Central Asia is the “breakaway Republic of” Kreplachistan (according to multiple websites, kreplach is in fact a Yiddish word for a type of fritter; similarly, Farbissina as in the series’ character Frau Farbissina, apparently means “embittered” in Yiddish). Their difference from the West is their alleged monotony and monochrome nature and yet it is their monotony and monochrome nature that makes them indistinguishable from one another.

### **“Molvania”: How a Guide Book to a Fictional Country Can Illustrate the Euro-Orientalist Debate in the Post-Modern Age of Virtual Reality**

It is telling and ironic in so many ways that a travel guide parody about a fictional East European country that has its own website and inspires not only imaginary travelers to swap stories about their trips there, but East Europeans themselves (!) to discuss what the country represents, can demonstrate for us what is at issue in the Euro-Orientalist debate. Moreover, it is a particularly good contemporary example of the “everycountry” phenomenon and shows us that the debate retains its relevance.

*The Jet Lag Travel Guide to Molvania: A Land Untouched by Modern Dentistry* (Overlook Press, 2003) is as much, if not more, a send-up and satire of the sometimes pretentious, trendy travel guide industry for young backpackers (e.g. Lonely Planet, Rough Guides, Let’s Go), than it is a companion to traveling this fictional East European country (in interviews, the authors have described it as “a practical joke gone awry”). In fact, the parody has far outsold many a travel guide to a real country: as of March 2005, it had sold 500,000 copies, including 50,000 in the US, while Lonely Planet’s most popular guide, its Guide to Australia, sells about 140,000 copies a year (*Wall Street Journal*, 3 March 2005). (I was introduced to it by two non-east Europeanists; my thanks to my work colleagues Matt and Chris for doing so). Nevertheless, the parody’s authors had to place their country somewhere, and although sequels to this initial offering now include tourist resorts in the Far East (“Phaic Tan”), the fact is they chose “Eastern Europe” as the setting for their first venture. Indeed, “Molvania”’s “East Europeanness” is on display in that post-modern locus for gaining “reality” status, an entry in the online encyclopedia, “Wikipedia”:

The Republic of Molvania is a composite of many stereotypes and clichés about Eastern Europe. Historically, the nation was a desolate wasteland, torn by civil war and ethnic unrest. Eventually Molvania's various warring factions were united as a single kingdom, ruled by a series of cruel despotic kings. In the late 19th Century the monarchy was overthrown, but the royal family remained popular in exile. During World War 2 the country was invaded by Nazi Germany, and then afterwards was occupied by the Soviet Union who set up a Communist puppet government. After the fall of European Communism in the 1990's the country became a run of the mill dictatorship run by a corrupt government with heavy ties to the Mafia. Molvania is a very poor and rural country, heavily polluted and geographically barren. The infrastructure is terrible, with necessities such as electricity, clean water, and indoor plumbing being rare finds, largely due to bureaucratic incompetence. Though the tour guide tries to explain otherwise, there is little to do in the country, as all hotels are tiny, filthy, and dilapidated, the ethnic cuisine is disgusting, and the "tourist attractions" are all boring and overpriced. The Molvanian people, in turn are generally rude, dirty, and at times a bit psychotic, with numerous bizarre and illogical beliefs and traditions. The Molvanian language is so complicated it is said to take an average of 15 years to learn. The Molvanian national flag, the "Molvanian Trikolor" is unique, in that it has only two colors. After the fall of the Iron Curtain, Molvania was the only ex-Soviet state to retain the hammer and sickle. So enamored were they with the symbols of workers' unity, they added a third tool – the trowel. (Wikipedia)

Ironically, perhaps, because *Molvania: A Land Untouched* is in the first place a satire of the youth-oriented travel guide industry, the location of the guidebook's subject in Eastern Europe is almost incidental. One of the authors, Tom Gleisner, told the BBC that he and his co-writers (Santo Cilauro and Rob Sitch) chose Eastern Europe because they felt "no-one, even those who live there, is even sure of the geography of the area" ("Molvania Spoof Mocks Travel Books," *BBC World Service Online*, 2 April 2004). (Of course, we could argue, as Fleming's passage above suggests, this latter statement—not even the locals know where they live, who they are, or where they came from...all is mystery, miscegenation, and confusion—indeed is itself reflective of the Euro-Orientalist mindset.)

The exact location of Molvania is, as can be imagined, never specified—that is, of course, a source of the power and allure of this traditional literary trope/stage device. We do know, according to its authors, Santo Cilauro, Tom Gleisner, and Rob Sitch, that it lies "somewhere north of Romania and a little downwind of Chernobyl." We learn from the country's website (<http://jetlagtravel.com/molvania>), that its most famous citizen, Szlonko "BuBu" Busjbusj (1891-1948), was responsible for tying the country's currency (the strubl) to the "Latvian lit," and attempted to bring the "Balkan 7" land-locked republics together in a loose regional confederation. We also learn that the official religion is Baltic Orthodox and that the country is the only ex-Soviet state to maintain the hammer and sickle in its flag—to which was added, in what I would call an East German-inspired touch (the old DDR flag with its engineering compass), a trowel. The language looks to be mainly slavic, heavily peppered by "j" s and "z" s, with a smattering of

German (the country's capital is Lutenblag; the national stadium, the Lutenstaad), although the spelling of the country could even have been influenced by the 1952-1964 slavized orthography of Romînia (see the diacritical over the "i" in Molvania). The descriptions of the country's environmental degradation can't help but bring to mind exposes from the early 1990s, such as the memorable "Where Night Falls All Day Long" in the June 1991 issue of *National Geographic*, about Copsa Mica, Romania, a town where even the sheep and geese eggs were covered by the carbon black used by a tire manufacturing factory.

Given the name and vague location of the country, one might expect that Moldova is the template for the country. In fact, according to the authors, who are not American or Canadian or British, but rather Australian—in itself indicative of the more genuinely "cross-Western" character of some contemporary stereotypes—Eastern Europe did not inspire the project; they first came up with the idea of the guide book in Portugal in the mid 1990s (Susan Spano, "Taking the Backpacker Guide Books for a Ride," *Los Angeles Times*, 2 May 2004). Moreover, certain factoids seem inspired by details from other parts of the world, such as in the case of Molvania's electrical current of 37 volts, a figure we are told was chosen with the help of numerology—which sounds more like the use of the numbers 15, 35, 45, 90, etc. in the Burmese monetary system, allegedly based on the numerological preferences of the leader Ne Win (1962-1988).

Whatever the intentions of the authors to spoof the guide book industry, the controversial part of *Molvania: A Land Untouched* is, of course, the features ascribed to Molvians and the characteristics of the land they inhabit. After reading the guide, a *Financial Times* reviewer summed up the country as follows: a land of criminals, bigots, and hairy women where garlic is sometimes accepted as legal tender and map keys include "chemical waste dump" and "unexplored due to landmines" (Naomi Mapstone, review, *Financial Times*, 19 April 2004). According to the guide, "Molvania prides itself on the fact [that]...most of its gypsies have been successfully driven abroad or incarcerated"—something which is hardly surprising when one reads the politically-incorrect, we are informed, now-infrequently-sung-because-it-clashes-with-EU standards, last line of the Molvanian national anthem, "We shall drive the gypsy curse from our land" (one wonders how much if at all the authors directly or indirectly were influenced by the British comedian Sasha Baron Cohen's "Borat" character on *Da Ali G. Show*). Pig, cabbage, and beets are fundamental components of the native cuisine, many desserts include parsnips, and elderly women spit in strangers' faces to ward off evil spirits. Molvania is in essence a decaying post-Soviet land, with lots of hulking cement monstrosities and over-officious bureaucrats, and a crude and rude populace benighted by ignorance and poor hygiene.

Some of the commentary on this mock travel guide to a fictional country might as well have been about a real country, given the implicit accusations of "Euro-Orientalism" against its Australian (!) authors. For example, Richard Trillo, a spokesman and author for the London-based *Rough Guides* series, said of the book,

“I found the Molvania book offensive, with no redeeming features. It’s not funny; it’s boring and repetitive, *with the same predictable jokes stereotyping Eastern Europe. And what stinks is the way local people have been derided through the unacknowledged use of their photos.*” (The cover shot of the Australian edition, and the website, shows a gap-toothed old man in a furry hat, unidentified and grinning broadly.) (Susan Spano, review, *LA Times*, 2 May 2004).

As Jerry V. Haines wrote in the *Washington Post*, “the line between what’s funny and what’s just mean is often breached. The country may be imaginary, but the condescension and xenophobia are real” (*Washington Post*, 10 October 2004). Former UK “Minister for Europe” Keith Vaz said the book was a little “cheeky” because “it does reflect some of the prejudices which are taking root [in Europe]” (“Molvania Spoof Mocks Travel Books,” *BBC World Service Online*, 2 April 2004). Indeed, here we find the insinuation that art, literature, and apparently even mock guide books, cannot be separated from politics. In the context of the post-“Haider shock” (2000 elections in Austria), EU enlargement (the addition of the 10 in 2004 and Romania and Bulgaria in 2007), and post-9/11 scrutinization and suspicion of immigrants in the collective West, this Australian parody becomes a tool of xenophobic, anti-immigrant forces aiming to maintain and construct new walls for Eastern Europe.

Finally, the fictional Molvania has encouraged central and eastern Europeans themselves to weigh in on the country, what it represents, and what they believe it says about the real “Eastern Europe.” An apparently Polish poster wrote the following trenchant critique, that from the optic of the outsider highlights what for lack of a better term could be termed the nested political correctness that prevails in the West (I would add, especially on elite college and university campuses):

**Why is it that the only people ‘liberals’ think it's OK to laugh at these days are the white working class and Central and Eastern Europeans?**

The best-selling spoof travel guide, *Molvania: a land untouched by modern dentistry*, has been described by the doyen of comedic travel writing, Bill Bryson, as, “brilliantly original and very, very funny.” But is the book a witty satire on the travel guide genre, or just a re-hash of some outdated stereotypes about Central and Eastern Europe?

### **Europe's 'white trash'**

The authors – three Australians – have not only invented a history and culture for Molvania, but they also include some very confusing maps and some grainy old photos; one of which looks suspiciously like Krakow. The humor of the book – which, as you can see, is sometimes funny in a kind of sniggering, schoolboy type way - is mostly pretty harmless stuff. But they do, on occasion, go a little too far. In the section ‘Advice for Women Travellers’ they advise that woman who are traveling on their own can expect few problems, “aside from the usual assault,

armed robbery and stalking that one usually sees in most eastern European countries.” Now wait a minute! That is not the experience of women travelers in this part of the world, at all. In fact, many feel much safer here than they do in most western-European or American cities.

*Molvania: a land untouched by modern dentistry* was brought to my attention by a Polish female friend of mine who had read the book and found it unfunny and ‘offensive’. She said the real butt of the joke was “Slavs in general.’ And she is right. The book is both a satire on Slavs and a satire on the sometimes toe-curlingly earnest travel writing so common to the Rough Guide and Lonely Planet. But mostly it just uses central and eastern Europeans as the butt end of some pretty nasty little jokes. Basically, on the receiving end of these jokes are the poor. For instance, the only people who I have seen around here with only one tooth in their heads are poor people from rural areas, who are untouched by modern dentistry because they simply can’t afford it.

There is something a bit strange happening in the West. If this sort of book had been written about, say, African people, then, quite rightly, there would have been uproar and outrage. Words like ‘racism’ would have been used by lefty-liberal reviewers. But it seems that Political Correctness extends to all groups these days except poor whites from urban, rural or semi-rural areas in America and Europe. Central Europeans are being presented as the Chavs of the continent. And that is just not funny at all. (see the post at “the beatroot: Politics and current affairs of Poland and Central Europe,” for Saturday, 21 January 2006 <http://beatroot.blogspot.com/2006/01/molvania-land-untouched-by-modern.html>)

On the Molvanian website’s forum (where you can also address questions to the Molvanian Ministry of Tourism!), a presumably ethnic Hungarian poster (“MocskosFurtoshajukisbogar,” which translates roughly into DirtyCulyHairedLittleBug(ger)) responded to the usual queries by some posters confused as to the reality of Molvania, as follows:

Molvania is the best place to leave.... Ezek a kretenek [author’s note: these cretins] :D

I know Molvania, I know it very well, actually we all know it here in Eastern Europe. Molvania is the concentrated Eastern world. We luckily have the chance to experience the human miserability every week, 24 hours a day. But thats not all. Westerners, you have to feel the historical pointlessness of our lives. You should understand this before you laugh at us. We know, we feel it in our veins that our future has nothing to do with great ideas, ideology or religious fate about our destiny. And no, poverty is not romantic, poverty is far from being cool. No it is a plague, that spreads in the body of society. Poor people are not just hardworking, they are burning their lives in these tunnels of ruthless work. they have to sacrafise their lives for their children or for tomorrow's meal. Hopeless people overcharged by work sooner or later became arrogant, impatient, cruel or worse. Soon we all become insane in some way, and this is not something that can

be saved by some idealistic aides or charity. This mentality kills us or eats us. We all turn against morality or be burned by the desperate attempts to break out or at least push out our children from this pit. Believe me, cruel we are, we need more than just Jhonny CASH, we need Steve WONDER.  
("MocskosFurtoshajukisbogar," 27 August 2005.)

The rumors of the Molvanians' nonexistence appear to have been greatly exaggerated....

### **The Gift that Can Keep Giving an Entire Scholarly Career or... How Imagining How Others "Invented" "the Other" "Jumped the Shark"**

The colorful and bitter intervention of our slightly pessimistic (!) Hungarian poster, "MockosFurtoshajukisbogar," brings us to one of the important misgivings about the constructionist school: is there no reality to these stereotypes of Eastern Europe? At what point do they themselves cross over into becoming merely rhetorical constructions and lose any basis in reality? In a review of Vesna Goldsworthy's *Inventing Ruritania*, Tony Judt highlights incisively some of the problems inherent in the constructionist literature of Eastern Europe as follows:

We used to study states, nations, classes. But for some time now, following a shift in fashion within the disciplines of anthropology and history especially, we study not the thing itself but the way it is represented—by the protagonists and by those who study them. Owing in large measure to the influence of the anthropologist Benedict Anderson, we investigate not nationalism but "imagined communities." And since the publication in 1983 of a seminal collection of essays by Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, it is not tradition but "the invention of tradition" that preoccupies historians of modern popular culture and political spectacle.

Eastern (or "Central") Europe is a ready-made, heaven-sent playground for such notions. After all, the states of Eastern Europe either did not exist until recently, or else had to be reconstructed in the modern era following their obliteration by greater powers in earlier times. From a Western perspective (though not necessarily in the eyes of the locals), Czechs, Slovaks, Croats, and Bosnians—to cite only the best known—are all invented nations. Poland, Serbia, Ukraine, the Baltic states, even Greece, whatever the real or imagined glories of their distant past, have all been constituted and reconstituted out of lands and peoples whose history was once submerged in someone else's story. Eastern Europe, in short, has been both present and absent, real and unreal, depending on your perspective and location.

Neither Anderson nor Hobsbawm and Ranger paid much attention to the region, but their approaches (or at least the titles of their books) have inspired a growing literature charting the ways in which the West has "imagined," "invented," or (borrowing from postmodern styles in literary criticism) "(mis)represented" its

Eastern Other. At its best—say in Larry Wolff’s *Inventing Eastern Europe*, which appeared in 1994—the result has been an illuminating contribution to Western intellectual history, a fine excursion into uncharted waters that helps to map the ways in which Western European writers have frozen into place a certain topography of civilization, and thereby condemned Eastern Europe to a moral as well as a spatial marginality in the Western story.

But the constructionist approach has its hazards. Between “invention,” “imagination,” “representation,” and the invocation of “Otherness,” the story of the West’s failure to see Eastern Europe as it was and as it is runs the risk of sinking under the weight of overtheorized scholarly suspicion. Add “Orientalism” to the mix—the charge that Western writers have deployed patronizing, distancing devices to romanticize Eastern or Southeastern Europe, to better control it—and the region gets lost all over again, this time in a marshland of well-intentioned compensatory subtlety....

*To pretend that the history of Eastern or Southeastern Europe would look like that of Western Europe if only Western observers didn’t “orientalize” the region is a grievous error. There are reasons for the sheer awfulness of Balkan conflicts, of course; but awful they are. There is nothing imagined, invented, represented, constructed, appropriated, or orientalized about such a claim. It is a fact.*

(Tony Judt, Book Reviews, *Inventing Ruritania: The Imperialism of the Imagination*. 21 September 1998, *New York Review of Books*; emphasis added)

A corollary to Judt’s critique of the constructionist literature as positing a rift between reality and Western representation, or better yet that Western representation has shunt aside Eastern reality or displaced it, is the argument that constructionist accounts often essentialize the West, assuming the “everycountry” timeless appraisal by the West of the East, that they so condemn in the (Euro-) Orientalist discourse. True, as a reaction by the weaker of the parties to this competition, essentializing the West is not quite the same as essentializing the East in its implications. Still, and here even in spite of the bow someone like Todorova takes to James D. Carrier on the issue of “Occidentalism” (Todorova, 1997, p. 10), scholars such as Todorova and Goldsworthy fall into the trap of essentializing the West, failing to make sufficient distinctions between governments and peoples, between policy debates among the political class in these countries, between the policies of different countries, and between one era and another.

Such views are no the less insulting, and more importantly, no less wrong than those leveled by the West against “Eastern Europe.” Moreover, and here is a major point made by Buruma and Margalit (Ian Buruma and Avishai Margalit, *Occidentalism: The West in the Eyes of Its Enemies*, Penguin, 2004), the defense of “local” autochthonous values in the face of the Western expansion is a misnomer, for the critique of “Westtoxification”—no matter what the contemporary period—is itself often directly or indirectly an import from the West, specifically the Romantic rejection of the real and imagined excesses of the Enlightenment. If for areas such as Japan, where lack of

contact with the West makes it harder to argue that occidentalism is in fact a Western import, this is not the case, because of the proximity and interaction during this period, of Eastern Europe. (Indeed, in general, the new New Left, the anti-globalization movement, with its glorification of and wistfulness for a lost mythic community living at peace with pristine nature, owes a—appropriately enough, spiritual—debt to the European right of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries that it undoubtedly does not wish to acknowledge.)

### **Deconstructing “Euro-Orientalism,” Source Selection, and Intellectual Biases**

It is perhaps a reflection of the condition and *zeitgeist* of research in the contemporary social sciences and humanities that authors desire and/or feel that purely historical accounts are not enough: history must “speak” to the modern condition and must tell us something important about the world in which we currently live. As a result, an account about the birth and the evolution of ethnonational images cannot stop sometime in the past: it has to be fast-forwarded to the present, where it must continue to have influence. (It is unclear exactly whom scholars are doing this for: for themselves, to demonstrate to their colleagues that what they are doing is relevant to today, to parents of undergraduates, to state legislators who hold the purse strings of higher education, to politicians and policymakers, to the broader non-academic market society (i.e. to include publishers)? At a certain level, much of this seems to “speak” to the perceived marginality, weak influence, and low social status of academics and intellectuals in American society, and their efforts to overcome this situation. The irony is that in seeking to be or become more “relevant,” they merely highlight and reinforce their isolation. It also perhaps leads to a “historicization” of the present, drawing far too much of the past into the present, something so many of the scholars themselves decry.)

In the literature on “Euro-Orientalism,” this situation has meant that scholars do not just examine works of the past, but they search for evidence to show that those older works continue to shape ethnonational images directly or indirectly today. The problem is that this leads them to take an almost exclusively “political” view of the phenomenon of contemporary ethnonational images. Thus, for example, in *Imagining the Balkans* Maria Todorova essentially abandons the comparative diversity of her source selection in examining the creation of Balkan images—say, plays by George Bernard Shaw—when she moves to examining contemporary portrayals of the region and invokes sources such as Robert Kaplan’s *Balkan Ghosts*, articles in *Foreign Affairs*, and op-ed pieces in the *New York Times*. I find it difficult to avoid the conclusion that this is very much an “intellectual complaint,” that because the topic is currently so serious, one turns to political (often academic/intellectual) writings to see the echo of these derogatory and dangerous ethnonational clichés. This is ironic, since the point of these same scholars about the past is that ethnonational images were conveyed through a diverse body of media and that if one seeks to look solely to the overtly political tract, one will miss the key conclusion that these ethnonational images entered the Western imagination by many routes, most of them not overtly political, and that in fact this is why they were so influential and have been so lasting. Such a realization and approach leads one to look beyond both the overtly political in today’s writings, but, even more so given the mass

communications revolution over the period we are discussing, to look to other forms of media, particularly film and television, as avenues for ethnonational image creation and dissemination.

Less explicitly, both Judt and Glenny in the aforementioned reviews have highlighted this methodological oversight in the selection of sources in the constructionist literature. Judt thus observes on Goldsworthy's *Inventing Ruritania*, that "...the other [non-Karl] Marxes receive no mention in this book, but their film ["Duck Soup," i.e. the mythical country of Freedonia] is by far the best-known 'exploitation' of Balkan images in Western popular culture..." Glenny uses a more recent media example to underscore the same point, the 1980s American prime time soap opera hit, "Dynasty." Although I never watched the show when it ran, in an appropriately post-modern touch, I did see a made-for-TV—predictably execrable—movie about it in recent years. (That such movies are marketed as "unauthorized" and "behind-the-scenes" accounts is ironic, not to mention hypocritical, since a unifying theme of such movies—conveniently they always peer behind the curtains of a show carried by a competing network—is moralizing about how the "tyranny" of commercialism and ratings ultimately destroyed the show and ruined the lives of its stars. Sensationalism and appealing to prurient interest are, of course, effective ways to decry sensationalism and prurient interest.) According to this made-for-TV movie, one phrase became a mantra for Dynasty's embarrassing and sudden plummet from popularity: "Blame it on Moldavia!" Let us pick up Glenny's description from here:

In the mid-Eighties, when we still lived in that stable bipolar world, two American friends of mine were hiking in a remote part of Montenegro [in the former Yugoslavia]. As they surveyed the beauty of the mountains around them, a smiling shepherd boy, ten years old at most, approached in an evident state of excitement and keen to talk. Taking out an imaginary machine-gun, he sprayed make-believe bullets in a semi-circle and delivered a message that echoed around the Dinaric peaks: 'Uh-uh-uh-uh-uh-uh-uh-uh-uh-uh-uh-uh-uh-uh-uh - Blake! Krystle! All dead!'

The boy bore news from distant Hollywood: the elders of the Carrington clan, the central characters in *Dynasty*, had met a sticky end. The crime that induced shock in audiences across the United States had not been perpetrated by a crazed Vietnam vet. If it had, perhaps Americans could have made some sense of the tragedy. But members and friends of Denver's richest family had been gunned down by terrorists in the distant Balkans. The heinous act was carried out (in a house of God!) as Blake and Alexis's long-lost daughter was marrying the Crown Prince of Moldavia. Most of the cast were brought back from the dead in the subsequent episode by the insatiable desire for network ratings. All this happened just a hundred miles from Dracula's castle. Only in the Balkans.

Although Vesna Goldsworthy does not investigate the *Dynasty* affair in *Inventing Ruritania*, it is a rich example of what she calls the 'imperialism of the imagination'. The television producer who had wanted to massacre the cream of

Colorado society was Camille Marchette. 'I'm responsible for Moldavia,' she told America's TV Guide in 1986. 'I sat down one day and said: "I'm only going to be on the show a year and I'm going to end it with a shoot-out in Moldavia.'" Did she know that Moldavia was a real place which would gain its independence just five years after the wedding was filmed? Did she dream up the name King Galen? Were the terrorists who imprisoned Krystle and Alexis Communists? Nationalists? Romanian-speaking Serbs, perhaps? (Glenny, "Only in the Balkans," *London Review of Books*, 1999)

### **The Power of Images and Images of Power**

Allow me to expand upon the themes that flow from the passages by Judt and Glenny cited above—1) that the constructionist literature imputes too much intent and not enough ambiguity to the formation of Western images of “Eastern Europe,” 2) that modern media such as a primetime soap opera can have as much if not greater influence in creating and shaping Western images than many a book by a journalist, intellectual, or academic, and 3) that, to use James Scott’s formulation in hyperbolic form, these images can be exploited as “weapons of the weak” to the commercial and intellectual advantage of those portrayed as “the weak.” This is important, because when scholars of this constructionist school write about current events, they often assume—or wish to argue—that these “constructed” images are a) influential and b) that the impact they have is almost automatically negative.

It is one thing to decry the negative content of images and stereotypes, and to highlight in the context of unequal power relationships; it is quite another to argue that the negative characterization is unidirectional—an outcome of power and control by one group of an object group, “the other.” Are these merely responsive?

### **Media-Created Stereotypes: Necessarily Intentional? Necessarily Negative?**

Let us turn to an example that suggests both the influence of modern media in reshaping previous, long-established associations, and the fact that this impact is not entirely or even primarily negative or intended. The 1959 Walt Disney film *Darby O’Gill and the Little People* has been credited with—and predictably assailed for—introducing a very different image of the leprechaun than exists in Celtic folklore. Leprechauns were only minor figures in Celtic folklore, who mended the shoes of other fairies, and were known for their trickery—used to protect their treasure—and were notorious for their crankiness (see the entry at <http://www.historychannel.com/exhibits/stpatricksday/index.jsp?page=history8> ). *Darby O’Gill and the Little People* converted them into joyous, well-meaning souls. The image of the joyous leprechaun in American popular culture was reinforced in 1964 with the birth of the “Lucky Charms” cereal, which introduced marshmallows to the breakfast table, and is a widely-known enough pop culture icon that it could serve as a punch line for a character in the first *Austin Powers* comedy film. (Apparently, out of either

marketing “wisdom” or concern over charges of ethnic stereotyping, a wizard briefly replaced the leprechaun as the character representing it in commercials, but audience reaction was such that they quickly conjured the leprechaun back (see wikipedia entry on “Lucky Charms”).)

(I can’t help but be reminded here in this context of the advertising campaign of the 1970s and 1980s for “Irish Spring”, that wonderful green soap. Now in elementary school I can remember for some kids this was the first thing that came to mind when they thought of Ireland. At the time it suggested to me the Irish must be an awfully clean race...complete with the Irish lass straight out of the pages of National Geographic or an ad by the Irish National Tourist board, and a rugged, jolly potato farmer or something. Little did I think of the subtext that the Irish were so dirty—all that lack of bathing thanks to the drinking and the roughhousing and the squalor—that they needed such a strong soap to kill or drown out the stench...)

Of course, if one is hyper-sensitive to any depiction of the Irish, it is not difficult to construct an argument that this revisionist image of the leprechaun as merry soul is scarcely better than the original in Irish folklore: i.e. 1) it is no longer authentic, 2) it was invented by outsiders for commercial purposes (hence, the inattention or disdain for authenticity), 3) the “happy-go-lucky” nature of the leprechaun masks and erases the memory of a history of oppression and misery at the hands of the English, 4) the leprechaun, like the Irish who see him, remains dominated by passion more than intellect, 5) the leprechaun remains obsessed with and hypnotized by gold and his good-naturedness may be the product of liquid assistance.

Indeed, one can even argue that the difference between the Disney portrayal and the anti-Irish newspaper cartoons of the 1800s is superficial—what remains unchanged are the qualities of superstition and delusion ascribed to the Irish for believing in and “seeing” leprechauns in the first place, qualities to which can easily be read in a subtext about a fondness for “The Drink” and the influence of an insinuated irrationality and superstition of Catholicism. Certainly an ill-fated, lamentable, and quickly-cancelled NBC sitcom of the early 2000s “The Fighting Fitzgeralds,” complete with brawling, drinking, unemployment, etc. unleashed a torrent of Internet frustration at the perpetuation and resentment of Irish stereotypes of this kind. Pat Friend opined: “... The other day I tripped over my shillelagh as I was watching a leprechaun swing at a fairy because he was drunk and fighting having had too much Guinness on his way to find his pot of gold at the end of the rainbow.” (Pat Friend, “Irish Stereotypes Just Won’t Die” at <http://allaboutirish.com/library/identity/stereotypes.shtml> )

Nevertheless, I think many would be inclined to see the Disney portrayal as a propitious improvement, one from which the Irish tourism industry in more economically-difficult years (1960s-early 1990s) no doubt profited handsomely. For all their resentment at being the object of a stereotype they did not produce and control—and understandably since it reduces them to a caricature that makes for a cereal box cover (painfully ironic perhaps in the context of the history of the potato famine)—it is difficult to argue that the Irish themselves have not been a financial beneficiary of this inauthentic innovation. (Moreover, the “fighting Irish” stereotype has been manipulated to good effect—drained

of its inebriated reputation somewhat—to mean steadfast, committed, and hardworking, whether that be in the context of University of Notre Dame sports, or as I recently saw on the road, the van of a plumbing company that promised a “fighting Irish” attitude to dealing with leaks.)

### **Idiosyncratic: The Unfolding of a Modern Tale/Meme**

Scottish (Presbyterians) were “on earlier boats” so-to-speak and thus probably have never faced the same experience of discrimination as Irish Catholic immigrants to the United States (all of which, of course, *pales* in comparison to later immigrants, to say nothing of involuntary immigrants (Africans) and “native Americans”). Nevertheless, despite their earlier arrival and pride of place in the elite, is the stereotype of the Scot in American culture any qualitatively better than that of the Irish—to say nothing of the Hungarian, Romanian, or others?

The content and contours of ethnonational images are less predictable than the constructionists would have us believe. Take the image of the Scottish in contemporary North America. The character “Scotty” in the science fiction television series “Star Trek” has become a template for the portrayal of Scots in film and television ever since the show’s original airing in the late 1960s—just as William Shatner’s Captain Kirk has become a paradigm for overacting in countless spoofs. The story goes that James Doohan, whose parents were Irish Catholics who emigrated from Belfast to Canada, auditioned several different accents—a talent of his—for the role of the Starship *Enterprise*’s first engineer. When asked by the series’ inventor and producer Gene Roddenberry which accent he preferred, Doohan reportedly replied “If you’re going to have an engineer, you’d better make him Scottish” (or “All the world’s best engineers have been Scottish”) (wikipedia entry for “Montgomery Scott”). Thus was born Montgomery Scott, his Scottishness incidental to the character and the series. Scotty was by turns merry, crotchety, and hard-working/industrious. His signature phrase was usually in reference to the Starship *Enterprise*’s engines, something along the lines of “I cunnugh doo it cap’n...I’m givin it all I’ve got, but she cannugh take it anymore.” This line has been spoofed often, including in seemingly unusual places such as Jim Carey’s “Ace Ventura, Pet Detective (1994).” The roots of “Groundskeeper Willy” on the long-running cartoon series, “The Simpsons,”—a fearsome character whose unpredictability and sharp temper scare the other characters—in James Doohan’s “Scotty” seem unambiguous.

Mike Myers, the Canadian comic—he brilliantly inserts an ice hockey pie-in-the-sky reference, “[Toronto] Maple Leafs win Stanley Cup” in a news ticker at the bottom of a fictional TV interview in one of the *Austin Powers*’ films (the Leafs last won the Cup in ’67)—who is of Scottish descent, has taken the modern Scottish template to a new level, with his “If iss no’t scu’ttish iss crrraapppp” shop skit on Saturday Night Live (SNL) and the bagpipe-playing, noxious character of “Fat Bastard” in the Austin Powers series.

The voice of the cartoon-character Shrek is also “accidentally” Scottish. The voice for Shrek was originally recorded by fellow Saturday Night Live cast member, Chris Farley, but after Farley’s death, Myers was brought on to replace him (see wikipedia entry for “Shrek”). After Myers had completed providing the voice for the character and the movie was well into production, he asked to be allowed to re-record all of his lines in a Scottish accent similar to the one his mother used when she told him bedtime stories (wikipedia entry for “Shrek”).

Even after Myers left SNL, the stereotype of the ornery Scot lived on in Darrell Hammond’s portrayal of Sean Connery in the recurring sketch, “Celebrity Jeopardy!”—Hammond’s Connery never missing the opportunity to insult the show’s host with some cheap sexual innuendo about the latter’s mother. Yes, this stereotype was dictated by Connery’s notorious personality, but it was presented as inseparable from his Scottishness. The crotchety stereotype throughout all of these television and film examples clearly has roots in older stereotypes, but as we can see the content and context of this stereotype has evolved in unforeseen and idiosyncratic ways that probably defy any linear analysis of the type found in much of the constructionist literature.

### **The Core West: Axiomatic Positive Images by Comparison?**

“Where you stand is... where you sit,” so the saying goes. So even if the Irish and Scots are part of the core West from a “Euro-orientalist” perspective when they write and talk about eastern Europeans, within the “British Isles” they are “nested” and on the lower rungs vis-à-vis the English/Anglo-Saxons. But are celluloid depictions of the English any better, any less demeaning than those of the Irish and Scots? In other words, in terms of content, are the stereotypes of the powerful any “nicer,” any more pleasant and defensible than those of others? In updating images of Eastern Europeans, we also have to update stereotypes of the West.

The English are continuously associated with or portrayed as stodgy, selfish, hypocritical (as a result of their politeness and their respect for rules, while turning a blind-eye to injustice), killjoys, and sexually-repressed (read anything the French have to say about them). In what appears to me as an excellent piece of film analysis, Martin McLoone highlights, for example, how a memorable sequence in the 1997 film *Titanic* has the live-life-to-the-fullest character of Leonardo DiCaprio whisking Kate Winslett’s Rose beneath the decks to a party filled with Irish, who drink, dance, and exude a raw sexuality that contrasts with the stultifying, and very English life, above. As McLoone points out, this is not merely a story about class, it is a story about ethnicity, a contrast of the Irish and the English. The politically-correct constructionist—complete with an explicit, but more likely implicit, internal hierarchy of collective historical victims and victimizers—is, of course, tempted to fixate on the portrayal of the Irish, as the typical stereotype of “the poor” or of “the Irish,” more animalistic and primitive, but is the portrayal of the English any less insulting, any less painful than the stereotypes we see of others? For such stereotypes arguably neuter and desexualize a people, while suggesting that they do not and are incapable of enjoying life, and despiritualizing them, suggesting they somehow lack a soul (and even God) because they place the material before all else.

Moreover, ethnonational stereotypes are often far more internally diverse, and even contradictory, than the constructionists suggest. Alongside the portrayal of the “emotionally-challenged” English, we have the image of “football hooliganism.” Whereas within England this may be treated as a problem of class—lower, working class, “yobbo” behavior—outside of England the class specification usually drops out, and they are referred to as “English football hooligans.” I remember back in May 1985—only a few weeks before the so-called Heysel disaster in Belgium which led to English soccer fans being banned from the Continent for a period—buying tickets to a soccer game in Innsbruck, Austria, and asking in English if I could take my small (day) backpack into the stadium. The woman looked at me as if I were from outer space asking such a naïve, stupid question and said: “Yes, why of course, we have no rowdies here!” It was very clear who she had in mind: the English. (Hard to believe in the old NASL, terrible acronym for the North American Soccer League, the team name of one of the most successful franchises, Tampa Bay, was “Rowdies.”)

Ironically, Goldsworthy herself, who negates the role of modern media in image creation and the accidental character of it, points to how as a young woman leaving Belgrade in 1986, her view of the English was decidedly negative!:

Goldsworthy reminisces at one point about how the British were seen in the run-up to her departure for Britain in 1986. The broadly held view was that they were “perfidious and treacherous” and “on the whole, ugly”. She writes: “For every British-born Cary Grant and every Vivien Leigh there were literally hundreds who looked downright weird. Belgrade television, with its endless repeats of programmes such as *The Benny Hill Show*, *Are You Being Served?* and *Hi-de-hi!*, did not help. Neither did the fact that members of the Royal Family were somehow thought of as typically English.” (Eve-Anne Prentice, “Life after meltdown,” *The Times*, 14 May 2005, <http://www.arlindo-rreia.com/140805.html>)

There is a great irony here, I believe. *Benny Hill*, *Are You Being Served?*—particularly the latter, a show whose surplus 1970s labor union mandatory employment at “Grace Brothers” is reminiscent of the Central in Cluj, Romania early 1990s or Unirea in Bucuresti—these were created at a time when, like footballers, crossing borders was rare, i.e. before today’s globalization, before as in 1990 when the overwhelming majority of the Irish national soccer team at the World Cup appeared to have emigrated from Africa. Yet, despite their “inside baseball” or I suppose “inside cricket (?)” production for the home market, their slapstick humor and especially in the case of *Benny Hill*, lack of verbal dialogue, made them great for export. (*Benny Hill*’s “do-do-do-do-doot do-do-do-doot...muhnunmunuhp muhnuhnuhmup” (“Yakety Sax” by Boots Randolph) might as well be a foundational element of any international language. The show’s absence of dialogue and ability to “travel,” probably explain the later international mobility of “Mr. Bean” and “Baldy Man.” *Benny Hill* once said that no matter where he went in the world, people were most interested in the fate of the bald little guy with glasses whose head he would always pat—an Irishman as it turns out, I believe) Exported, without regard to ethnostereotyping, they nevertheless became the means by which foreigners

formed their opinions of the English (as if to say: see, you thought no one was watching...now we know how you really are!)

Finally, just a brief foray into the amusement park of stereotypes that surround Americans and the United States—and emphasizing the role of visual media in shaping and disseminating those images. Marius Ursache writes in a Romanian daily of “Brand America”:

People are perceived as being wealthy and generous, outgoing and often loud, wasteful, boastful and impolite. They are often accused to be ignorant to other cultures and countries, and lacking skills out of their main area of interest. Hollywood has a huge role in portraying the stereotypical personalities, from government VIPs to mass-murderers, to red-necks, teenagers, promiscuous women and ordinary Americans involved in the daily rat race. (Marius Ursache, “Brandingul de na\_iune Brand America,” 6 July 2005, online edition.)

Not exactly the most flattering picture is it? And yet the source of these images are also ascribed to Hollywood—who apparently didn’t get the memo about the supposedly positive, romanticized vision of the West the orientalist monitors allege of them.

### **Dracula: Tourism and the Accidental East European?**

Even the much-maligned “Dracula” image of Transylvania, Romania, the Balkans, and Eastern Europe seems to owe more to serendipity and idiosyncrasy than many believe. The author of *Dracula* (1897), the Irishman Bram Stoker, had planned on writing a vampire novel before he ever came across the name “Dracula” (Miller, “Filing for Divorce: Count Dracula vs. Vlad Tepes,” <http://www.ucs.mun.ca/~emiller/Divorce.rtf> ). The villain of Stoker’s novel originally titled *The Undead* was to be “Count Wampyr.” Stoker’s use of the title “count” was in keeping with the Gothic convention of drawing villains from among the ranks of the aristocracy (Miller, “Filing for Divorce”). In fact, according to Miller, vampire counts in pre-*Dracula* fiction include Count Azzo von Klatka in *The Mysterious Stranger* and Countess Karnstein in Le Fanu's *Carmilla* (Miller, “Filing for Divorce”). In *The Mysterious Stranger*, the vampire count terrorizes a family in the Carpathians! (Miller, “Vampire Hunting in Transylvania,” <http://www.ucs.mun.ca/~emiller/Trans.htm> )

According to his notes for the novel, Stoker always had eastern Europe in mind as the setting for his story; but initially he placed the action in Styria, Austria and only later changed it to Transylvania (from Frayling as cited in Coundouritis <http://www.uni-tuebingen.de/connotations/coundour92.htm>). An article entitled “Transylvanian Superstitions” in the July 1885 edition of *The Nineteenth Century* by Emily de Laszowska Gerard, the Scottish wife of a Hungarian cavalryman (!), appears to have piqued his interest. As Miller recounts,

Gerard's article also provided Stoker with some of the folklore surrounding Dracula and his castle: St. George's Day, "the eve of which is still frequently kept by occult meetings taking place at night in lonely caverns or within ruined walls"; hidden treasures and "the light they give forth, described as a bluish flame"; and the wolf that "continues to haunt the Transylvanian forests." Also from Gerard came the term "nosferatu," as well as the use of garlic and the wooden stake. (Miller, "Vampire Hunting in Transylvania," <http://www.ucs.mun.ca/~emiller/Trans.htm> )

Stoker appears to have taken only the name of "Dracula" from his famous namesake in Romanian history—and then only because the source from which he took the name (William Wilkinson's *An Account of the Principalities of Wallachia and Moldavia* (1820)) suggested, as Stoker recorded in his notes, that "DRACULA in the Wallachian language means DEVIL" (Miller, "Filing for Divorce: Count Dracula vs. Vlad Tepes," <http://www.ucs.mun.ca/~emiller/Divorce.rtf>). Based on Stoker's notes, Wilkinson was the source from which he got the name "Dracula," and in Wilkinson's brief three mentions of the name and one footnote, he only refers to "Dracula" or "Voivode" and never "Vlad," "Vlad Tepes," or "the Impaler" (Miller, "Filing for Divorce: Count Dracula vs. Vlad Tepes," <http://www.ucs.mun.ca/~emiller/Divorce.rtf>).

Miller skillfully resolves the false contradictions created by believing that Stoker based his Count Dracula on the personage from Romanian history:

Another consequence of the insistence on connecting the two Draculas is the temptation to criticize Stoker for inaccurate "history." Why, some ask, did he make Dracula a Transylvanian Count rather than a Wallachian Voivode? Why was his castle situated in the Borgo Pass instead of at Poenari? Why is Count Dracula a "boyar," a member of the nobility which Vlad continuously struggled with? Why does Stoker make Dracula a "Szekely," descended from Attila the Hun, when the real Dracula was a Wallachian of the Basarab family? ***There is a very simple answer to these questions: Vlad Tepes is Vlad Tepes, while Count Dracula is Count Dracula*** [emphasis added]... We know that he read and took notes from a number of books and articles (for a complete list, see Leatherdale, *Origins* 237-9) and that some of this material found its way into his novel almost verbatim. But his research seems to have been haphazard (though at times fortuitous) rather than scholarly. What he used, he used "as is," errors and confusions included. That his rendering of historical and geographical data is fragmented and at times erroneous can be explained by the fact that Stoker seemed content to combine bits and pieces of information from his sources without any concern for accuracy. After all, Stoker was writing a Gothic novel, not a historical treatise. And he was writing *Dracula* in his spare time, of which I doubt he had much. (Miller, "Filing for Divorce: Count Dracula vs. Vlad Tepes," <http://www.ucs.mun.ca/~emiller/Divorce.rtf>.)

Again Hollywood and happenstance combined in creating perhaps the most enduring popular image of Dracula: Bela Lugosi's 1931 reprisal of the role. As Eric Harrison has

written: “Ever since Lugosi donned a cape and rhapsodized about the howling of wolves outside his crumbling castle (‘What music they make!’), the classic prototype of a movie vampire has been an Eastern European aristocrat with a heavy accent and hypnotic eyes” (Eric Harrison, L.A. Times, “A New Reason to Get out of Dodge,” 30 October 1998, p. F-2). Lugosi succeeded in “making the count more debonair, less beastly” (Harrison) and Dracula scholar David Skal terms his portrayal of the part as “smooth, elegant, and seductive” (“In Search of Dracula” at <http://www.abcnews.go.com/2020/Entertainment>). Ironically, as Skal notes, Dracula’s memorable intonation was the consequence of a Hungarian actor with little command of English, who learned his lines phonetically (“In Search of Dracula”)! Lugosi’s Dracula was faithful to neither Stoker’s creation, nor to the historical personage of Dracula, nor to much of the vampire folklore. Nevertheless, it is the image that has endured most.

### **Would the Real Dracula Please Kindly Now Remove His Plastic Vampire Teeth!**

*Dracula* is one of those rarities—an elite construct that has long since “gone public” and become a product of mass popular consumption—to the degree that its putative Transylvanian and even Romanian links have become routinized to the point of being mere background noise. The epitome of this phenomenon can be argued to have taken place in the film version of Anne Rice’s novel, “Interview with a Vampire: The Vampire Chronicles”—not to be confused, although understandably to be confused, with another film from 1994, “Reality Bites”—the angst-ridden tale of brooding, self-indulgent Generation X(Files) youth—harumph, was that whiff of teen spirit I just got....Bob Bankard’s review of “Interview with a Vampire” draws the appropriate pint of blood from this painful film:

The roots of modern Goth are all here; the narcissism, the romantization of death and times thereafter, all the boo-hoo loneliness. The fact of the matter is, these characters are better off dead, because if they were alive they’d be taking Zanax, listening to ‘Alien Sex Fiend’ and working at McDonalds during the swing shift.

Brad Pitt is the poor widdle vampire boy who just hates being all undead and stuff, so he only eats people he doesn’t like. Horribly guilt-ridden, he tells his whole sob story to some imbecile with a tape recorder, creating the most obvious framing device in the history of cinema. (Bob Bankard, “Interview with a Vampire,” PhillyBurbs Special Sections at <http://www.phillyburbs.com/vamp/interview.shtml>)

More recently, an American novelist married to a Bulgarian, Elizabeth (Johnson) Kostova, decided to dispense altogether with the traditional confusion of Bram Stoker’s Dracula and the historical figure Vlad Tepes, by spending ten years putting together a novel *The Historian*, that discusses the fictional and nonfictional personae separately and uses Cold War Eastern Europe (Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria) as a backdrop for a historical search for the “real” Dracula. Julie Wheelwright describes Kostova’s Dracula thus as follows:

Her Dracula emerges as a figure so obsessed with the past that he lures historians into his master plan to colonise his undead followers throughout the globe.—*author's note: My reaction: oh, just great, as if there weren't enough half-living, half-dead, living dead Ph.D.s floating around already, Dracula is out there trying to flood the market*—Paul and Helen, a Romanian exchange student, become embroiled in an attempt to rescue Paul's supervisor, an eminent historian, from Dracula's clutches. Their story, set in the late 1950s, takes them into the farthest-flung corners of Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria. (Julie Wheelwright with Elizabeth Kostova, "Elizabeth Kostova. The Vampire Chronicler," *The Independent*, 5 August 2005, online).

Kostova strenuously denies that her novel is opportunistic: "Some of it is about Dracula, not me; Dracula has eternal cachet. I wasn't trying to cash in on that; I'm really fascinated by the Dracula legend—but it is kind of startling, you're right, to see my name linked up with Dracula now" (<http://www.powells.com/authors/kostova.html> with Dave Weich). Kostova, who studied in Bulgaria in the late 1980s, seems to argue that Cold War Eastern Europe was the new fictional Transylvania in a sense because "the iron curtain preserved the mystery of eastern Europe for the rest of us" (Julie Wheelwright with Elizabeth Kostova, "Elizabeth Kostova. The Vampire Chronicler," *The Independent*, 5 August 2005, online). Nevertheless, it is clear that Dracula is by now such a pop culture, recycled and reappropriated product that it is almost impossible to separate the post and post-post modern from this discussion as we see in the following exchange:

**Interviewer:** Growing up, did you ever wear those plastic vampire teeth?

**Elizabeth Kostova:** I did. I remember having a pair and loving them. The problem is they fall apart really fast. And I was delighted, on my book tour—at the Harry Schwartz store in Milwaukee, they handed out those plastic vampire teeth at the door to everybody. They gave me all the extras.

The bottom line here is that as the evolution of the Dracula character, metaphor, and meme suggest: the monopolistic, hegemonic "western" ownership, intentionality, and negative connotations ascribed by the orientalism monitors to "western" cultural producers is simply overwrought.

## Recapitulation

Before moving on to the Hungarian and Romanian cases, let me pause here to reiterate some of my preliminary conclusions:

1. The "Euro-Orientalist" critique is helpful at explaining the origins of Western ethnonational stereotypes and images of the peoples of eastern Europe and the Balkans. But the closer we get to the present, the less useful and the more dogmatic the "Euro-Orientalist" critique appears. Ironically, a key insight of the literature of the critique of "Euro-Orientalism"—that ethnonational stereotypes and images were not always as they were to become, and that they can be subject

to change—is forgotten in the analysis of contemporary ethnonational stereotypes and images. In many ways, the “Euro-Orientalist” critique is thus locked in the past.

2. Precisely because the focus of the “Euro-Orientalist” critique is upon the origins of modern ethnonational stereotypes and images of the peoples of eastern Europe and the Balkans, it places itself primarily in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and first part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. As a result, the media this literature studies tends to be that of travelogues, plays, novels, oper(ett)as, paintings, etc. The authors of these images tend to be “elites”—those with the money, education, time, and opportunity to travel—and their audience tends to be “elites.” The “Euro-Orientalist” critique is thus elite-focused, and heavily supply-side, stressing the role of producers of images, and essentially assuming that consumers of those images are passive.
3. Because the “Euro-Orientalist” critique focuses on “origins,” this literature has tended to ignore newer media—film, television, and the Internet. This has a significant consequence because the mass market has given consumers a greater “voice” in determining which images “stick” and thus shape the universe and choice of image-makers to at least some extent. As could be expected, the expansion and diversification of both producers and consumers plants the seeds of change and mitigates predictability. Thus to ignore the newer media and to ignore the role of audience in image creation and survival is to ignore the prospects for and reality of change and idiosyncrasy in contemporary ethnonational images and stereotypes of peoples.
4. The “Euro-Orientalist” critique implicitly posits an overly-simplistic and one-dimensional portrayal of ethnonational stereotypes—essentially, the further east and south one goes on the Continent, the more negative, the more backward the stereotype. The issue is not the existence of negative stereotypes, however. It is instead to what degree there exist positive stereotypes that counter or balance the negative ones. It is in fact those without stereotypes, those whose inclusion into Western media and popular consciousness is comparatively “late” who seem to be at disadvantage—since they are more vulnerable to being reduced to contemporary political and politicized images.
5. Just as the role of the mass market is a double-edged sword for the peoples of eastern Europe and the Balkans, so too is politics. The portrayal of ethnonational stereotypes as suffering directly at the hands of “Great Power” politics is far too simplistic. Some of the enduring, positive images of east European and Balkan peoples are precisely a result of earlier geopolitical convenience. To condemn these ethnonational images because they were not autochthonously-created—in itself often not the case—is to ignore benefits of unintended consequences, to essentially look a gift-horse in the mouth.

### Part III: Images of Romanians

#### From “Gypsies, Tramps, and Thieves” to “Dictators, Gymnasts, and Orphans”: Modern Pop Culture Images of Romanians in the United States

One can easily sympathize with the exasperation of Alexandra Toma, described in 2005 by the Romanian daily *Jurnalul National* as “the single Romanian political advisor for foreign policy in the American Congress” (according to the article, as of early 2005 she was serving on the staff of House of Representatives member Stephen Lynch (Democrat, Massachusetts)):

In America, Romanian “orphans” are famous. Everyone asks me about them. That’s all they know. Just orphans, Ceausescu, and Dracula. Those are the three questions I always get asked. “The Romanian Orphans” are always on the TV. (Ana-Maria Luca, “O romanca la Capitol Hill [A Romanian Girl on Capitol Hill],” *Jurnalul National*, 25 February 2005, online edition).

Of course the problem here—and knowledge of it does not make the Romanian or any other foreigner feel any better or any less exasperated—is that most of those mentioning these topics and asking these questions mean no harm. This may indeed be all they know of the country; they don’t want to admit their ignorance and look foolish; they don’t want the foreigner to feel badly that they don’t know anything about the foreigner’s country (which would make them a rude host of sorts); they wish to start conversation, show interest, and learn something about the foreigner’s country, etc.

Alexandra Toma’s frustration is not unique. Alexandra Diaconu wrote an excellent article wittily entitled “Cum ne vindem tara (How we sell our country)” —the title possibly a play on the famous chant of the rampaging miners of June 1990, with whom the country became identified in the international consciousness, thanks to televised images of savage “Balkan” brutality and chaos. (The miners roamed the streets of Bucharest shouting “Nu ne vindem tara,” that is, “We aren’t selling [out] our country.”) Diaconu observed:

When you say France, a few words automatically come to mind: wines, perfumes, refinement, Paris, the Eiffel Tower, the Louvre, and the list goes on. When you say Italy: “la dolce vita [the good life],” Michelangelo, Da Vinci, Pavarotti, Milano, and fashion, the Colosseum, Venice or the [Leaning] Tower of Pisa. When others speak of Romania, however, assuming they have heard anything about us, they think in the first place of Dracula, Ceausescu, Nadia, street children, corruption, immigrants or, and even worse, the imaginary Romanian terrorists that still appear in post-1990 American films [I’d love to know exactly which films she is referring to here, because I am very familiar with the topic and don’t know what she is talking about: Call me Ahab! See my most recent publication on the topic, “Orwellian...Positively Orwellian” Prosecutor Voinea’s Campaign to Sanitize the Romanian Revolution of December 1989” at <http://homepage.mac.com/khallbobo/RichardHall/pubs/Voineaswar091706.html>].

...Without question, Romania has an image problem. In the past 15 years, it has become something of a national refrain repeated periodically by politicians in electoral campaigns, by cultural elites, when the foreign press judges us critically, when any foreigner confuses Bucharest with Budapest and when our sportspeople return from international competitions laden with medals. [Diaconu, *Evenimentul Zilei*, 5 June 2005, online edition]

A comment on Diaconu's characterization seems in order here before moving on. The Bucharest-Budapest confusion, one which frankly is at least understandable because of the similarity of the two capital names in English and many languages, is ceaselessly annoying to both Hungarians and Romanians—and regional specialists—who feel insulted and powerless to overcome foreign ignorance about what is for them a simple, but huge distinction. And it does matter...to the point of having the potential to contribute to wounded national pride and inter-state tensions. When US Team Captain Dennis Ralston was presented with the Davis Cup in 1972 in Bucharest, after what an English commentator termed “the noisiest, angriest, the most absorbing and most passionate contest in the history of Davis Cup competition,” Ralston thanked “the good people of Budapest’ for their kindness and spoke of the memories the US team would take back with them ‘of Budapest’s sportsmanship’...[that this] ‘famous victory means Budapest will forever be remembered by American tennis’” (Keating, *The Guardian*, 11/28/97). Of course, perhaps this mistake should not have been surprising, given that the English commentator recounted of one match that “the linesmen were as partisan as the crowd and with armed guards around the court the efforts of the referee to restore a semblance of fair play were negated by the intimidatory martial atmosphere,” while the American player Stan Smith opined, “I have never been more pleased to be off court. Every arena steward seems to be toting a sub-machinegun and by the look in their eyes the safety-catch is undoubtedly cocked and ready.”

Finally, there are the characterizations of Romanian émigrés who have settled in the U.S. and Americans who have spent extended time in Romania. “What do Americans see when they look at a Romanian?” asks Andrei Codrescu in *The Disappearance of the Outside*. “Three things: Dracula, Eugene Ionesco, and Nadia Comaneci. In other words, sex, the absurd, and gymnastic ability” (p. 42) (Ileana Florentina Popa, “Cultural Stereotypes: From Dracula's Myth to Contemporary Diasporic Productions,” VCU thesis, p. 77, May 2006 at [http://etd.vcu.edu/theses/available/etd-07212006-171925/unrestricted/popaif\\_thesis.pdf](http://etd.vcu.edu/theses/available/etd-07212006-171925/unrestricted/popaif_thesis.pdf)). In other words, essentially the plotline for the Seinfeld episode which introduced this paper! And Karen Schmidt, an environmental journalist, responded as follows when asked what she knew of Romania before visiting:

I knew very little. Like most Americans, I associated Romania with Ceausescu and totalitarian Communism, with Nadia Comaneci and wonderful gymnasts, with Dracula and Transylvania, and with gypsies, street dogs and abandoned children. Of course, these stereotypes came mostly from the American mass media. (Ad Astra, Volume 1, Issue 2, 2002, at [http://www.ad-astra.ro/journal/2/interview\\_schmidt.php?lang=en](http://www.ad-astra.ro/journal/2/interview_schmidt.php?lang=en))

## The Politics of “Romania’s Image”

In another example, which addresses the more directly political dimension of this issue: in April 1993 Romanian parliamentarians representing six political parties recounted their impressions after returning from a month long visit to the United States. Victor Bostinaru of the principal governing party, the Democratic National Salvation Front (FDSN), opined about “the perception of Romanian realities in the United States—often distorted and unilateral, or truncated, appearing to the Americans as a ‘half-exotic’ country especially known for the ‘coal miners, handicapped children, Funar [the then recently elected nationalist mayor of the main city of northern Transylvania, Cluj] and Dracula” (FBIS, 14 April 1993, “Parliamentarians Assess Country’s Image in U.S.”).

The discussion of the parliamentarians quickly devolved into one of improving Romania’s (unjustifiably degrading in their view) “image” in Western eyes. True, as Romania’s liberal intelligentsia at home and abroad ceaselessly pointed out at the time and ever since, this was a convenient mechanism of denial for Romanian politicians, who wished to avoid the role post-communist leaders had played in creating or feeding such a negative image (see, for example, Tismaneanu (1998) for an excellent, if partisan deconstruction of this). But that such discussion was aimed at “scapegoating” and denial does not negate the fact that government-linked politicians had a case, and that their frustration reflected their seeming inability to exercise any influence over the content of Western images. Indeed, Romania’s intellectuals at home and abroad realize that they are handicapped from the same Western images of Romania and that despite political change over the past 17 years and political alternation in power these images have proved fairly inflexible (without the televised images of rampaging miners in downtown Bucharest, the miners of 1990-1991 may have faded from American popular consciousness, and Funar may always have been too obscure to appear on the popular radar screen, but the rest have remained).

This is more than the question of just who was in power at a particular moment and how their intentional actions contributed to these images. And the dynamic is far more complex and less partisan than Tismaneanu or other leading Romanian intellectuals like to argue. If it is true that illiberal forces in Romania focus on negative Western images of the country because it confirms their preconceived notions and gives them a rationale for resenting the West and defending Romania in the face of any criticism—thereby demonstrating a preference for the conditions that they very well may be responsible for having put into place and maintaining—it is also true that this “image” debate has its uses for Romania’s liberal intelligentsia at home and abroad. Because the latter are doing most of the writing about the country—particularly that which appears in English—this dimension is, of course, rarely discussed—it is inconvenient.

A good example of this debate over image-making, and of its complexities and subtexts, was the flap over an article written by the aforementioned Tony Judt, entitled “Romania: Bottom of the Heap,” published in the 1 November 2001 edition of *The New York Review of Books*. In Romania, the publication and translation of the article into Romanian unleashed a wave of articles supportive and critical of Judt’s piece in the Romanian

cultural and political media. The magnitude of the incident and its fallout—at least among Romania’s intellectual class at home and abroad—was sufficient that Mircea Mihaies edited a book chronicling and analyzing the reactions (Tony Judt. *Romania la fundul gramezii. Polemici, controversa, pamflete*. Iasi: Polirom, 2002.) As the title suggests [although it is important to note, NYRB not Judt chose the title, see pp. 193-194], the article is a devastating portrayal of the country before, during, and after communism. Those who criticized the article tended to see it as a somewhat superficial stereotype or thumbnail sketch of Romania without necessary nuances; those who acclaimed it accused its critics of not wanting to face the truth and of having defensive, phobic reactions when confronted with the truth.

Even though in the introduction of this volume, Mihaies writes (page 7) that Judt travelled to Romania for the first time in 1998 and that Judt admitted to him that “Romania was the one country in Central Europe that he didn’t know,” Judt’s comments on the country were accorded great weight. Judt can be insightful, as demonstrated in the long quote invoked above, but the content of “Romania: Bottom of the Heap” is frankly, unremarkable. Clearly, it was Judt’s acclaim and renown, more than the content of the article, that prompted the interest and reaction of Romania’s intelligentsia. Indeed, therein lies the problem: the views are Judt’s, but they are derivative by virtue of his not being familiar with the country. In fact, that is why they are unremarkable: they have been repeated over and over again by Romania’s liberal intelligentsia at home and abroad since the fall of the Ceausescu regime. Thus, it is not surprising to read in this Mihaies volume the names of those who write articles supportive of Judt: their works and arguments are cited throughout the article (indeed, Judt’s article opens with a tidbit he admits Mihaies gave him.) The point here is about the circularity of such arguments. The Romanian intellectuals who inform Judt’s article promote it, in part because it is echoing their own sentiments and gives them further weight in debates outside and inside Romania. Those who criticize Judt’s and similar articles by foreigners do so in part because they see the content, or at least some of it, and sometimes accurately, as derivative of his named or unnamed Romanian intellectual sources.

[I personally got to encounter yet another face of the perils and subtext of criticizing such an article. I, of course, knew of Tony Judt, but I had did not know how to pronounce his last name: was the j silent, as in “yoot” or hard as in j “dgoot”? (Similar cases abound, JAT, the old Yugoslav airline, yaht or djaht?) In other words, had the name been “Americanized” for “easier” pronunciation? A senior East Europeanist (non-Romanianist) asked me shortly after the article’s publication, what I thought of the article, and I admitted that I was not very impressed. In discussing the article, I referred to it as being written “by Yudt or should I say Judt”? I could not understand at the time why he immediately declared that he thought it was a superb article and began giving me the third degree “What did I think about the [anti-Semitic wartime dictator] Antonescu?” Only later did I get it: he thought my question about pronouncing Judt was an anti-Semitic slur! But it was telling in a certain sense—and disturbing—that he couldn’t imagine criticism of such a seemingly enlightened Western perspective on Romania without the author of that criticism also being anti-Semitic.]

## **Brand-ing Romania: Beyond “The Bottom of the Heap”**

That Romania’s image or “brand,” is not merely a partisan political, and thus bounded, issue, has increasingly been realized by those for whom it is a matter of business, a reality of life, rather than a matter of an intellectual’s blame game. The “image of Romania” has even spawned a BRANDING website—<http://www.brandingromania.com>—to discuss the issues of constructing, deconstructing, and reconstructing stereotypes. On 24 June 2005 Corin Chiriac got the ball rolling by asking posters their perceptions of “stereotypes of Romanians and Romania.” The following example was given to spark debate:

People and Personalities: Ceausescu, Dracula, Nadia Comaneci, Hagi [famous soccer player], and folklorists.

Character and Behavior: sa moara capra vecinului [screw your neighbor], proasta organizare [poor organization] (lines and especially poorly formed lines, ignoring scheduled hours), lack of respect for rules (cut to the front of the line mentality)

Events: The Revolution of 1989, Cerbul de aur [annual Brasov-based talent show], mineriadele [referencing the five brutal journeys of the miners towards Bucharest in 1990, 1991, and 1999]

Places: Bucharest, the Danube Delta, Prahova Valley (Predeal, Sinaia), Sfinxul

Monuments or buildings: Casa Poporului [Ceausescu’s “House of the People” monstrosity], Hotel Intercontinental, the monasteries of Bucovina, Bran castle.

The website appears partly responsible for new reflection on the issue of “branding the Romanian image” in the Romanian press that goes less in search of scapegoats for the situation and more in search of solutions. On 25 October 2005, Mihai Ghyka wrote an article entitled “Branding Romania—a ship sunk at the dock” in the daily *Gandul* in which he opined:

Romania—the country of gypsies. Romania—the country of handicapped orphans. Romania—a corrupt and dirty country. Romania—a country lacking in civilization. Whether or not we like them, these are the most frequent associations that pop into the mind of foreigners when they are asked what they know about Romania. For better than 15 years, the image of Romania in the world has been left to accidental whimsy.

In recent years, Romania has spent an annual budget of approximately 20 million Euros, promoting at random tourism, Brancusi [famous sculptor], Romanian products, the Enescu Festival and diverse commercial fairs... Each minister promoted his activities as best he knew how, by himself. (Mihai Ghyka, “Branding Romania – vaporul scufundat in port,” *Gandul*, 25 October 2005.)

A truly fascinating and insightful reflection on all this was posted on the branding website on 3 February 2006 under the title “Permission to Brand”:

Starting from zero “Romania has so many problems in terms of perception that it becomes difficult to make an inventory,” says Valeriu Turcan, president of the Agency of Governmental Strategies, which is spearheading the branding Romania campaign. “*The difference between Romania and other countries is that its Communist past and its experiences right after 1989 have been much more negative and visible in Western media compared to the others.*” Turcan cites the ‘Mineriade’, where miners traveled to Bucharest to violently break-up an anti-Neocommunist demonstration, the orphanages and Romanians who break laws abroad as image wreckers. “This picture is incomplete, out of date and extremely difficult to change,” he adds.

Country branding expert Simon Anholt says that this problem exists in many transition economies. “Their brand is still strongly tainted with negative imagery acquired under Soviet influence,” he says, “and the majority of foreign publics have not yet updated their perceptions. The only reason why Bulgaria and Poland are doing better [than Romania] is because they are better organised and are doing something about it.” “Romania was a blank page after the Revolution and this was what was first communicated,” says Ioana Manea, managing partner at brand and communication firm Loco. “These things do not have the depth they used to have.”

Communism and its fall-out also exercise a powerful hold over the western imagination. Visitors to Romania still bring packet soups and Mars bars, to use as currency. They are also scared to venture out after nine o’clock at night. Anthropologist Vintila Mihailescu, director of the award-winning Romanian Peasant’s Museum, says that compared to other ex-Communist countries in the region Romania still has, for the outside eye, a still strongly visible label of Communist country. Something the authorities and people have failed to change. “*When a person, a group, a nation does not build itself an image, it is attributed one, the first one at hand,*” he adds.

Another problem is the vacuum of knowledge the west has of Romania. “Many free citizens of Europe are confused between Budapest and Bucharest and Romania and Bulgaria,” says Manea. “We deceive ourselves that Nadia Comaneci meant something to the world and that everyone knows Hagi,” says Naumovici. “Romanians are too optimistic and see Romania as the most beautiful place in the world. Education is partly to blame for this. “We [Romanians] were taught during primary school that we beat the Turks,” he adds, “that we can repair a car with a piece of wire, while the Germans had to wait for a spare part to come from the factory.” (Anca Pol, Ana-Maria Smadeanu and Michael Bird, “Permission to brand,” 3 February 2006, reprinted from the ‘The Diplomat - Bucharest’ at <http://www.brandingromania.com>, emphases added)

Wally Olins, one of the apparent gurus of country image-making, suggested recently that Romania may already be developing positive elements to counter the negative ones associated with its international “brand.” Part of Olins’ philosophy seems to be something of jiu-jitsu, making lemonade out of lemons, as he suggests with Nicolae Ceausescu’s “House of the People.” Like it or not, this interests foreigners about Romania. According to Olins: “If I tell people I am going to Bucharest, 20 % believe I am going to Hungary [the Bucharest-Budapest confusion], another 20% asks me what I am going there for, and 15 % ask me if I am going to see Ceausescu’s palace.” (Wally Olins, interview by Cosmin Popan, “Romania devine brand fara stirea ei,” *Cotidianul*, 15 February 2007, online edition). In other words, use what you have, allow the audience or market to determine comparative advantage/value...and go with the flow.

### **Nicolae Ceausescu = Dracula ?**

Some stereotypes are more insidious and difficult to combat than others though. The repopularization, or perhaps reinvigoration of the pop-culture Dracula myth, as a result of the modern political reincarnation of Dracula myth since the 1980s, neglects the fact that Nicolae Ceausescu was not associated with Dracula (or the subset of the wider syncretic Dracula myth, Vlad Tepes) abroad, much less at home, during the 1960s and 1970s. The political element, the cruel Vlad Tepes-like leader, and the cultural element, Ceausescu pictured with fangs as if out of a Bela Lugosi movie, were a phenomenon of the 1980s and particularly 1989 and the immediate post-Ceausescu years. This suggests that the association of Nicolae Ceausescu with Dracula derived from the increasingly difficult living conditions (this includes the ability to practice freedoms) of Romanians as his rule progressed—and increasing Western knowledge of those conditions—and of the gradual, if delayed, American and European (geopolitical) disassociation from the regime they had once lauded and presented to the world as heroic. Thus, the “Ceausescu as Dracula” myth in the West was contingent on the reality and knowledge of living circumstances in Romania and the broader geopolitical climate. Significantly, this means not that Ceausescu was plugged into the preexisting Dracula paradigm/frame/representation, but that the latter was superimposed over a changed perception of Ceausescu and Romania. This is a subtle, but important difference.

A separate, but no less important issue regarding this question is the degree to which the Dracula, whether as the historical figure of Vlad Tepes or the Bram Stoker and then Hollywood amalgam of Tepes, vampire, and werewolf, etc., was justified objectively from the start, even in light of the deteriorating living conditions of Romania. The smug and somewhat snide reference by Jerry Seinfeld of Ceausescu—very bad dictator, very very bad dictator...he used to start dictating in the morning, etc.—likely reflects unintentionally and even unknowingly the lack of seriousness and caricature nature of the dead communist “threat” that characterizes liberal creative intellectuals in the United States, to say nothing of left wing academics and students on America’s university campuses. It is as if Ceausescu had merely been a generic character in a bad made-for-TV movie of the 1980s and had never actually existed.

On the other hand, and it is important to point out as I do below in the discussion of an amazingly Ceausescu-like literary character in the best-selling evangelical Christian book series, the portrayal by the political right, especially religious right in the United States, and perhaps more general mass culture view of Ceausescu among Americans, is wholly disproportionate to the facts of the man's regime. This was a dictator, as I like to say, of "no statues" despite his extensive personality cult, and a slogan and generally adhered to policy of "no martyrs"—as means of provoking societal and stoking societal discontent among a population in which many came to bitterly resent and dislike him. On the one hand, it was partly Ceausescu's personality and character, and lack of true charisma, unique political ideas, and revolutionary vision, that prevented him from instituting a truly bloodthirsty reign—more along the lines of the historical Vlad Tepes' gruesome treatment of his enemies. On the other, it was structural and spoke to when he came to power on the timeline of a communist/still at that time totalitarian regime—that is, after the communist attempt at revolutionary policies and a broad assault on society. (In reality, of course, the regime strayed from strict adherence to a "no martyrs" principle—see, for example, the case of Gheorghe Ursu—and in making up for lost time, Ceausescu left many bodies in his wake in December 1989.)

Violence was neither the defining factor—surveillance and intimidation and fear as a weapon in and of itself were—of these "post-revolutionary" regimes from the 1960s onward in Eastern Europe, nor considered necessary or conducive to the goals and interests at hand, which were primarily about the maintenance of political power. (Despite his tendency toward over-generalization and thus a failure to be able to account for the wide differences in policy-choice, nationalism, economic reform, political liberalization, etc. among these "post-revolutionary phase" regimes—and these differences had real and meaningful political and social consequences—Jowitt's model of the "stages" and evolutionary elite delegitimation of communist regimes remains probably the best and most helpful analytical framework for understanding what changed and why over the history of these regimes, see the compendium of his essays over the years in Jowitt 1992). Peter Siani-Davies' caveat in a new book is probably in order, however, for, although Romanians clearly suffered in Ceausescu's Romania, people were "disappeared" and did die for political reasons and were murdered (witness December 1989): "Under Ceausescu, the loss of life and suffering cannot be equated with the horrors of the Soviet Union in the 1930s, China during the Cultural Revolution, or even Romania under Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej." (Siani-Davies, 2005, p. 11)

Nevertheless, if for those on the left, Ceausescu is a joke, a caricature of a communism that was made out to be a bogeyman (by the right, of course) but was really not so bad (especially with the passage of time, they add "after all"), for those on the right, Nicolae Ceausescu has become the template for evil, and combination of the worst form of tyranny mankind has ever witnessed—communism—and Balkan big man, a tin-pot dictator from a little known country that is haunted by the "ghosts" of a distant, long, but enduring past and that shows "the West" glimpses of a bygone, pre-modern era, stuck-in-time. As is frequently the case, as a (dead) historical figure, during the 1990s Ceausescu served as an appropriate model for fiction, rather than someone like Slobodan Milosevic, who was still too present, hence too non-fictional, to serve the purposes of fiction.

## Nicolae Carpathia

*What? You say you've never heard of Nicolae Carpathia? Look him up on the Internet. The last time I did [late summer 2005], Nicolae Ceausescu had 67,000 webpages, Nicolae Carpathia 14,500! (Of course, neither can hold a lit torch to Dracula, who weighs in at 2,270,000 google hits!)*

Well, if you haven't, don't feel so bad, neither did I until recently. Nicolae Carpathia is the Anti-Christ of the "Left Behind" evangelical Christian book-series that sketches out visions of the future based on a very specific reading of the Book of Revelation in the Bible's New Testament. Over the past decade, more than 60 million copies of the "Left Behind" series have been sold (Michael Standaert, L.A. Times, 25 May 2005)! A low-budget film based on the series came out several years back starring Kirk Cameron, a "teen-age heart throb" of the 1980s television sitcom "Growing Pains,"—Cameron is himself a fervent born-again Christian.

Dr. Stu Johnson described "Nicolae Carpathia in the Apocalypse Series" in an article on <http://www.Leftbehind.com> posted 20 May 2004:

*Fairly early in Apocalypse Dawn, we meet the charismatic Carpathia:*

*Not every politician was pushing for more and bigger weapons and more and bigger armies. Goose had heard of a United Nations representative from Romania named Nicolae Carpathia. Surprisingly, Carpathia was pushing for disarmament in his own country. At the time he'd heard that, Goose had never thought it would happen. Romania was part of Eastern Europe, left orphaned by the failed Soviet Communist government, and host to a series of bloodthirsty dictators who had only been driven from office by equally bloodthirsty military uprisings. Most military analysts had figured that the country would be awash in political unrest and military action for decades to come. Instead, Carpathia had begun to quiet Romania down, **almost as if by magic.** [emphasis mine] (Dawn, pp. 47-48)*

Johnson continues:

*Later, we learn more of Carpathia as Romanian satellites are leased to U.S. forces to fill in gaps in their system, sent into chaos by "the disappearances" [author's note: i.e. the Rapture whereby the "saved" are suddenly and inexplicably plucked from earth to heaven].*

*"I can give you access to another satellite system," [said Cody].*

*Remington curbed his frustration with the situation. "What satellites?"*

*"Satellites leased by the Romanian government," Cody said. "Other satellites that Nicolae Carpathia owns and has offered for your use."*

*Remington knew the name. Carpathia was an international figure, and part of the reason the U.N. peacekeeping forces and the United States Army Rangers were presently in-country. Carpathia had taken his own country by storm, becoming the darling of the population over the last few years after getting off to a less-than-sterling beginning. Yesterday, the president of Romania had stepped down and suggested that the legislature appoint Carpathia as their new president [author's note: i.e. a clear Hindenburg-Hitler analogy here]. In a surprising turn of events, both houses had unanimously done just that. Before becoming a member of the House of Deputies in Romania, Carpathia had been a shrewd businessman who had his fingers in many international business ventures. He'd gotten rich. Remington wasn't surprised to learn that Carpathia had invested heavily in communications, and satellites would have been one of the most natural investments. (Dawn, pp. 213-14)*

According to Michael Standaert in his review of the most recent book of the series, “In the Beginning; The Rising: Before They Were Left Behind” by Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins, “this prequel sets up Carpathia as embodying everything stereotypically liberal” (Standaert, 2005). Indeed, Carpathia is the creation of a conspiratorial group of “international bankers”—could there be a clearer code for “Jews”?—and, as if that were not enough, almost unsurprisingly given the radical right-wing leanings of the authors and many of the readers of the series, Carpathia is “a genetically engineered test-tube baby with the DNA of two homosexual fathers”[!, the trifecta...how prosaic]. And Satan’s forces predictably use the cherished institutions and policies the radical-right attributes to “liberals” (i.e. the left in the political parlance of the American right)—the U.N., disarmament, peacekeeping forces, and satellite television (somewhat ironic I would add given the use of this by evangelical fundraisers themselves!; clearly they have in mind here Ted Turner and not Rupert Murdoch)—to establish tyrannical “one world government.”

The hazy popular and media images of Romania shine through in the character of Nicolae Carpathia. It is a simplistic and, frankly, tacky amalgam. Nicolae Ceausescu, “Genius of the Carpathians”...and so we get “Nicolae Carpathia.” A brutal dictator who was initially perceived in positive terms: he presents himself as a man of peace, a proponent of “disarmament,” a supporter of Israel (when he really is not), a neutral arbiter of international relations in a difficult time. When the Ceausescus were executed on Christmas Day 1989, the Romanian media hyperbolically proclaimed “The Antichrist is Dead” (the deconstructivists among Romanian intellectuals at home and abroad ascribed intent of the former communists to cynically use religious language to cleanse their sins before the population and buy credibility—to me this is over-interpretation.) Romania is depicted as a place of chaos, military intervention, and mystical leaders and politics. And if that is not enough, Carpathia’s political assistant is named Stolojan—the last name, it just so happens, of the Romanian Prime Minister from September 1991 to November 1992. One interesting difference, however, that would be difficult for evangelicals to explain is that whereas Ceausescu banned abortions, Carpathia imposes them!

Predictably, and it would be interesting to see what Romanian evangelicals actually think of the series, Romanians have not been amused by the selection of a Romanian as the anti-Christ in the end of time! (Indeed, as Theodor Stolojan's political profile rose once again in Romanian politics in early 2007, the daily *Cotidianul* noted the influence of the "Left Behind" series was such that "when you look up the word 'Stolojan' on the Internet, the first five results refer to the character in the book," leading the author to opine "it is impossible to estimate for just how many people the Romania described in the book [is for them Romania]" (Barbu Mateescu, "Stolojan si presedintele sint eroi negativi in SUA," *Cotidianul*, 17 February 2007, online edition). Of course, the very fact that this paradigm [Nicolae Ceausescu] is used is because it exists—it says everything that Nicolae Carpathia is a Romanian, not say a Bulgarian, Albanian, or Hungarian.

### **Orphans, Abortions, and Adoptions**

With the execution of "the Anti-Christ" on Christmas Day 1989 began to come the stories of the Ceausescu family's excesses and of the harsh living conditions the run-of-the-mill Romanian citizen had experienced. I distinctly remember at the place where I was working at the time between undergraduate and graduate school—there was a book critical of President Bush the elder during his administration entitled *Sleepwalking through History*, an appropriate description for my ability not to be in the right place at the right time during the momentous events of 1989—my direct supervisor picking up the *Washington Post* and looking at a picture of Elena Ceausescu's shoe collection and saying, "What is it about dictators' wives and shoes?"

My supervisor was, of course, invoking the parallel which the media was tacitly making at the time: Elena Ceausescu = Imelda Marcos of the Philippines (untrue, based on Elena's collection she wasn't fit to tie Imelda's shoes, and as became well-known in the demonization phase immediately after the Revolution, Elena had "large peasant feet"...). We all know about how media frames emerge, often far more arbitrarily than observers recognize. But what is important is when they stick, and they often do, they are very difficult to dislodge, from the collective popular psyche or even from the journalist collective psyche. In the case of Elena's shoes, it was a good visual image that can sum up extravagance and hypocrisy against the backdrop of images and news about how normal citizens were living. Moreover, the stock of shoes was not invented. They were there, and even if not as extensive as Imelda's, it was likely a case of the reporters saying to themselves when they found them: "What is it about dictators' wives and shoes?"

The same is probably true about how the stories of the "orphans" got started. One can imagine Romanians who knew of the appalling and heartrending conditions of these orphanages, telling their Western interlocutors about them, the journalists asking to go there, and the journalists having the same gutwrenching reaction as the Romanians who had told them. The images were awful: clearly poorly-heated, decaying buildings, with impatient and apparently not-terribly-concerned "caregivers," children (not just infants) in rusting white metal cribs, rocking back and forth, starved for and unused to human attention and interaction. Here again, the pictures said so much more than any number of news commentaries ever could have—heck, a cheapskate who does not often send money

to charity, and probably in part because of my interest in Romania, I couldn't help but write a check to the Red Cross after seeing all these images. I doubt I was alone in such reactions.

Of course, the orphanages and the partly-related issue of HIV-transmission to infants through unscreened blood transfusions transmitted a political message that this was the inheritance of dictatorship, and at least for some, of a communist dictatorship. I do wonder, however, how these orphanages really compared to others, even within the region, at the time, or since the collapse of communism—there was no comparative context in these reports. Additionally, I wish to suggest here, something that many of my liberal colleagues are unlikely to agree with or appreciate: these stories were also related directly to the abortion issue and the overwhelming (well-documented) pro-choice orientation of those who report the news in the United States and Western Europe. Behind this reportage, knowingly or unknowingly, was a cautionary tale, in their view, of what happens when abortion is outlawed, as it was in Ceausescu's Romania after 1966. You get unwanted and hence, especially given the very difficult living conditions of the time, abandoned children, who wind up in understaffed orphanages that hide the political and public shame behind their doors. (One has to remember too that it was in the late 1980s and early 1990s that there was much media coverage, including leading national news broadcasts, about the protests of the anti-abortion "Operation Rescue" group, in Wichita and elsewhere.)

When it came to HIV/AIDS the tale was a broader and somewhat more abstruse one: see, this is what you get, "this is your society, this is your society in denial." The underlying message was that governmental shame and political denial about HIV/AIDS and its risk beyond high-risk groups leads to horrible outcomes, that actually make the problem worse. The analogue/allegory was clear in the Reagan-Bush years, since the suggestion was that shame and political denial—in the United States, on the basis of religious grounds—could threaten similar tragedies. Undoubtedly, there are truly cautionary tales here about what happens when abortion is banned and of political denial over stigmatizing national health crises, but it is important to recognize the factors, usually unacknowledgedly and unwittingly, that encouraged these reports to become a centerpiece of coverage of post-Ceausescu Romania.

An even more cynical view can be cast upon the issue of Western adoptions of Romanian children, including the orphans. As in the case of the physical and psychological trauma, particularly on women's lives, because of the abortion laws, and of the HIV children and their parents, so I do not mean to deny or denigrate here the tremendous pain and vexing choices that couples unable to conceive go through before, when, and after they adopt. But as has been pointed out, Romanian orphans are special, even important, to couples who wish to adopt a Caucasian child—they are part of a short international supply of Caucasian children up for adoption. Sixteen years after the Revolution, it is telling that in May 2006, the *New York Times* would have a (yet another) story on its front-page (!) about the situation of orphans and adoptees in Romania. Of course, it is nice to know about the situation of these people, especially those who were orphans and then adopted many years ago, but is it wrong to ask what, consciously or unconsciously, lies at the

foreground of these reports in the first place? It is hard not to be cynical about this, but is it too much to suggest that journalists write about such things because they live in a social milieu in which they know people who are, and their (advertising) targeted “front-page” readership includes, white upper-middle class professional couples, who despite their values and ideals, want to adopt a Caucasian child and Romania offers one of the last options (in addition, to the feeling and reality that they would probably be making a difference in the life of someone who might otherwise never get the chance in Romania)? (This said, it is their right to choose whom they wish to adopt, and whatever the gap between their ideals and their actions on this question, I do not think it is fair or right to accuse them of racism just because they would prefer to adopt a white child. Besides, in the final analysis, for the child, it scarcely matters...the situation puts parents in their lives where they did not exist before....)

### **Gymnasts, Acrobats, and Circus Performers...Oh My!**

Clearly, Nadia has been the template for all “gymnast”-based images of Romanians in American pop culture since the 1970s. In a 1989 romantic comedy, “Her Alibi,” the Czech model Paulina Porazskova plays a Romanian circus performer (acrobats are the afterlife, professional extension of gymnasts apparently) who defects and falls in love with a character played by Tom Selleck. The Securitate make a cameo in the film trying to prevent her defection, although if I remember correctly, as always there appears to be some political/cultural confusion/script simplification, with references to them as the “kgb” or the like.

Although it is no great insight, it is interesting to note in the context of “Her Alibi” how Hollywood was (is) a barometer, if a lagging one, in terms of geopolitical relations. The James Bond film series is, of course, the most famous of these, with the comparative role of the renegade Chinese revolutionary communists rising in the 1960s, with Barbara Bach as not just Russian love interest, but as professional partner in the détente-era “The Spy Who Loved Me (1977),” (the Soviets all-but-disappear from the 1979 “Moonraker”) and with a return to outright identification of the Soviets and associated East Europeans (East Germans, Czechs, etc.) as the enemy in the 1980s (at its apogee in film as in life with the 1983 “Octopussy”—fanatical Soviet general using faberge eggs to undermine the West, a showdown in East Berlin, etc.). With movies such as “Red Heat (1988),” the typical buddy-cop, fish-out-of-water, opposites-become-friends movie (see, for example, Beverly Hills Cop (1984)) showing Soviet (Arnold Schwarzeneger, Austrian descent) and American (Jim Belushi, Albanian descent) cops working against the politically-correct scourge of the 1980s—drug kingpins, a threat to both American and Soviet societies that they could agree on...after all, what about the children?, I believe the children are our future...), Hollywood chose to find more geopolitically-correct villains.

By 1989, Gorbachev’s Soviet Union was not a geopolitically-correct villain; Ceausescu’s Romania, on the other hand, was—it would be interesting to see how a similar script would have been written a decade before, when Romania was on the top of the West’s geopolitical world. Of course, if the creation of fictional enemy countries—satirized well in the Austin Power film series, Kreplakistan—can be annoying and is itself still an

amalgam stereotype of the former Soviet Union, from Ukraine to Central Asia, Hollywood's search for the most consensual-least box-office controversial enemy can have backlash, especially years later. See, for example, the substitution of generic Middle Eastern enemies for the Soviets and others as the 1980s progressed; the choice, for example, of "Libyan terrorists" in the 1985 "Back to the Future" may have seemed like a "safe" one—an official enemy of the US, that had targeted Americans in terrorist acts (such as the Berlin discotheque bombing), and that had a very small Libyan (as opposed to Arab) émigré community in the United States—but it is clear that in retrospect it was far from "safe." Clearly, as the Soviet Union waned, drug cartels became prosaic and boring, and the East bloc "mafiya" prototype ran its course, the xenophobic "Middle Eastern terrorists" became "useful." The United States, in part, probably reaps some of the anger directed against it from the happenstance, box office driven selection of real-world enemies for action-thrillers in a post-Cold War world.

The Seinfeld episode that introduced this paper—with its Romanian gymnast-cum-acrobat—"Her Alibi," etc. made me question whether there was any empirical reality that may have contributed to the birth and growth of this stereotype. I have not compared things systematically to the situation of defectors from other East bloc countries, but I did a brief search in the Washington Post and New York Times on the subject. Clearly, the most well-known, "gymnastics defections" from Romania were those of Nadia herself in November 1989 and in 1981 her controversial ethnic Hungarian coach Bela Karolyi, his wife Marta, and the Romanian team choreographer Geza Pozar (based on the name, apparently also likely Hungarian). In November 1985, an acrobat, Andi Georgescu, who performed for Ringling Brothers and Barnum and Bailey, defected (WP 11/22/85 A 30a; NYT 11/22/85 II 3:1). In April 1987, two 16 year olds, Carmen Georgescu and Julia Catrinoiu, both gymnasts and acrobats were granted political asylum (NYT 4/9/87 II 7:6; WP 2/24/87 A 14a). In August 1987, four acrobats in California with Ringling and Barnum and Bailey sought asylum (NYT 8/8/87). It is possible that coverage of such incidents, particularly in the media of major metropolitan areas could have, by osmosis, created this connection and image, particularly among America's creative intellectuals? Of course, once again, as occurs throughout many examples raised in this paper, there is the chicken-or-the-egg problem, since coverage and attention given to these particular types of defections—of gymnast/acrobats, from Romania—had already been conditioned by Nadia and Romanian gymnastics (in fact, in a sense perhaps, to the extent that was possible, made "easier," likely to garner more media coverage, and a greater blow to a country whose prestige had become tied to this issue).

### **The Magical and the Mystical**

As a repository for the occult, for evil, for the mysterious spiritual world, Romania became a good bet for American television shows during the early and mid-1990s. Thus, the 5 May 1993 episode of the drama "Law and Order" entitled bluntly "Securitate," has a lawyer pleading that his Romanian immigrant client charged with murder is "not guilty due to cultural insanity" claiming he had been "conditioned to violence in his homeland" [!]. There is, of course, the great irony here, that what in the American context may

appear to be “understanding”—sensitive to cultural differences, recognizing the societal influences on individual action—would no doubt beckon Todorova-like indignance over a classic “Balkan” stereotype. Moreover, given the timing of the episode (May 1993), a year into the Bosnian conflict, the argument of “cultural insanity” played well into the Kaplanesque “ancient hatreds” mentality so prevalent at the time. And to top it all off, three of the main characters in the episode have the last name Iliescu!

The magical-mystery tourism aspect of Romania is better explored in the 14 April 1995 episode of the “X-Files” where the traditional Romanian fertility folk dancers, the “Calusari,” become a trope for warding off evil. In this episode, Romanian language shows up again. A character in the episode comments on the Calusari: “In Romania, they are responsible for the correct observance of sacred rites.” An episode capsule expands on their role in the plot:

When Steve Holvey is later killed in a bizarre accident, ash from the scene is identified as a substance called Vibuti, holy ash produced during the presence of spiritual beings. The Grandmother later dies while performing a protective ritual on Charlie and when a social worker questions Charlie about the incident, he claims his still born twin brother Michael killed her. Which comes as a shock to Maggie Holvey, who claims she never told Charlie about his dead twin brother. It appears that the families only hope is a strange group of Romanian elderly chanters called The Calusari. (X-files episode guide on the Internet)

The exotic and superstitious are in full effect: Bram Stoker’s Romania meets FBI chasers of UFOs and the supernatural.

### **The “Romanian Quintuplets” South Park Episode: A Cornucopia of Modern Romanian Pop Culture Images in North America**

Comedy shows, often distastefully, have also used Romanian images to good effect. For example, the British comedy series of the 1990s, “Absolutely Fabulous” in which a layabout, alcoholic, high-maintenance fashion-designer threatens her straightlaced daughter that she will adopt Romanian orphans if her daughter won’t invite her to a school presentation. The threat backfires when her addle-minded assistant actually follows through on the idea and Romanian orphan babies begin arriving (“Iso Tank” episode broadcast 12/3/92 on BBC 1

<http://entertainment.msn.com/movies/movie.aspx?m=484619>.) However, the trifecta, the grand slam, of American (although the creator of the show is Canadian) images of Romanians—and one that is actually intended, it appears, to be just that—is the so-called “Romanian Quint(uplet)s” episode of the cartoon series “South Park.”

The “South Park” episode from 2000 (Original Air Date: 26 April 2000) is a satire of the Elian (aka Alien) Gonzalez saga from the spring of that year—an arguably absurd made-for-cable/satellite “twenty-four/seven” round-the-clock television news channel production, with Cuban émigrés in Florida attempting to prevent the return of a seven-

year old boy to his father in Cuba. In retrospect, given the whole Florida fiasco in the 2000 elections—and I am not aware of any studies that have specifically looked into the issue although they may exist—one has to wonder if the television coverage of the saga and interest in the Cuban and other communities in Florida may have contributed in some (though doubtfully decisive) measure to the election results. The South Park episode has orphan Romanian gymnasts/acrobats from the circus defecting from communist-like bureaucrats and a country described in the most negative terms.

The episode contains a number of the characteristics and stereotypes of (North) American images of Romanians. A Romanian woman is named “Mrs. Vladchick,” one can assume a sort of slang combination of Vlad (Tepes, aka Dracula) and “chick” (also, conveniently an ending for some (especially South) Slavic last names in English). Names and language are pseudo-slavic: although one girl is named Nadia (a clear descendent of the ’76 Olympics), another is named Baltania, while Mrs. Vladchick carries on a conversation in “Romanian” that centers around the following gibberish: “Nid kelmin da bushka.” It should also be noted that the idea of “quintuplets”-as-circus-show-for-viewing may be influenced by the story of five French Canadian sisters—the Dionne quintuplets—who were treated in this manner in the 1930s in Canada without much regard to their fate (the story was given wide play in the late 1990s and the creator of the show is Canadian, so this may be the link).

A television reporter summarizes the background and scene as the Mrs. Vladchick’s Quintuplets from the traveling “Cirque de Cheville” attempt to defect:

*Tom, I'm standing at the home in South Park where five precious little girls have been rescued from Romania. Their mother passes away some months ago, and then their grandmother died trying to bring them here. But all is well now, and people are coming from all over the country to view the little tykes. [someone takes a picture] If you'd like to come down and visit the quintuplets, admission is only \$5, and for a few dollars more ["FEED THE QUINTS! One Dollar" A man buys some fishsticks], you can feed them fishsticks.*

*A Quint: [hops up and down, then opens her mouth for a fishstick the man drops down to her] Mmm.*

*Reporter: Tom, it looks like these cute little girls have made it out of that armpit of a country they call Romania.*

*[Romania, day. Government officials watch the report in a run-down office]*

*Reporter: Yes, luckily for them, these quintuplets no longer have to live in Romania, the asshole of the world. [a last shot of the quint is seen] Back to you, Tom.*

*President: This is not good. It makes our country look poor and stupid.*

*Romanian Official: This could kill our tourism.*

*President: You know what to do. [they salute him and leave.]*

(author's note: from Episode 403 "The Quintuplets," script can be found online at many sites, for example, <http://www.southpark.dsl.pipex.com/scripts/scr403.shtml>, captions as found in script).

In a later scene, one of the South Park children, Cartman, tries to convince the quintes that they don't want to go back to Romania, by saying, "In Romania they just oppress you and try to bring you down." All is for naught, however, for, as with Elian Gonzalez, the Quintes' father comes forward, and (then Attorney General) Janet Reno descends on Easter Sunday in an Easter Bunny suit, seizing the girls at gunpoint with well-armed soldiers in the background.

"Vlad," orphans, gymnasts/acrobats, Romania as a poverty-stricken country dependent on tourist revenues and run by a mindless, oppressive bureaucracy and an aggressive president—the images/stereotypes are all here. Ironically, South Park and this episode are perhaps more bent on satirizing (North) American society and the hypocrisy, absurdity, and sanctimony of politicians, special interest groups, and the media. Yet, with Romania as prop, they succeed in creating a "perfect storm" of kitsch Romanian pop-culture iconography (although in truth, political correctness is always a target, never a shackle for the cartoon's creators).

## Part IV: Images of Hungarians

### “They’re heeeeerrrrreeeee...”: Alien-(n)ation

One of the most enduring and entertaining images of Hungarians during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is the idea of Hungarians as aliens or Martians. Much of this is tongue-in-cheek, is not intended to be pejorative, and has been exploited to good effect and with great enjoyment by Hungarians themselves—to the point of their likely having been behind its origination. There are multiple overlapping/competing descriptions of how all this started. Consensus suggests that it came out of the circles of émigré nuclear scientists, physicists, and mathematicians who came to the US during 1930s and 1940s, many of whom were collocated at Los Alamos, New Mexico for the Manhattan Project.

As George Marx, a Hungarian professor of atomic physics in Budapest, asks in his extremely engaging chapter entitled “The Martians’ Vision of the Future” (<http://www.mek.iif.hu/kiallit/tudtor/tudos1/martians.html>), how is it that there were groups of Austrians, Germans, and Italians involved in these scientific breakthroughs and yet it was Hungarians alone who seemed to gain the moniker and association of “alien?” Marx appears to prefer the account according to which one day the Italian Enrico Fermi was speculating about the universe and the possibility of life on other planets, and Leo Szilard, a Hungarian, ventured an answer to Fermi’s question:

“And so,” Fermi came to his overwhelming question, “if all this has been happening, they should have arrived here by now, so where are they?” It was Leo Szilard, a man with an impish sense of humor, who supplied the perfect reply to Fermi’s rhetoric: “They are among us,” he said, “but they call themselves Hungarians.” (according to Marx, this is Francis Crick’s version of the myth)

Marx elaborates on the “birth to a legend”:

The myth of the Martian origin of the Hungarian scientists who entered world history on American soil during World War II probably originated in Los Alamos. Leon Lederman, director of the Fermilab, reported possible hidden intentions. The production of scientists and mathematicians in the early 20th century was so prolific that many otherwise calm observers believe Budapest was settled by Martians in a plan to infiltrate and take over the planet Earth... According to myth, at a top secret meeting of the Manhattan Project, General Groves left for the gents’ room. Szilard then said: “Perhaps we may now continue in Hungarian!” Hungarian émigrés enjoyed speaking their mother tongue whenever a chance offered itself. This has made them look suspicious. Los Alamos was a place of top security. General Groves was annoyed that Neumann and Wigner had frequent telephone conversations in Hungarian. [Teller, talk in Budapest 1991.] The “thick Hungarian accent” was often heard even in the corridors of the Pentagon. (The Lugosi accent made the alien power of Dracula, the count from the faraway Transylvania even more realistic.)  
(<http://www.mek.iif.hu/kiallit/tudtor/tudos1/martians.html>)

Marx recounts the details of the arrival of the Martians-cum-Hungarians on planet Earth:

--Gabor, von Kármán, Kemeny, von Neumann, Szilard, Teller, and Wigner were born in the same quarter of Budapest [author's note—most were Jewish...it is interesting to note that some anti-Semitic Hungarian nationalists at the same time assiduously include these names in lists of famous Hungarians]. No wonder the scientists in Los Alamos accepted the idea that well over one thousand years ago a Martian spaceship crashlanded somewhere in the center of Europe. There are three firm proofs of the extraterrestrial origins of the Hungarians: they like to wander about (like gypsies radiating out from the same region). They speak an exceptionally simple and logical language which has not the slightest connection with the language of their neighbors. And they are so much smarter than the terrestrials. (In a slight Martian accent John G. Kemeny added an explanation, namely, that it is so much easier to learn reading and writing in Hungarian than in English or French, that Hungarian kids have much more time left to study mathematics.) [quoted by Marx from "Yankee" Magazine (?) 1980] (<http://www.mek.iif.hu/kiallit/tudtor/tudos1/martians.html>)

Finally, in a somewhat more serious vein, the alien connotation has been explained in analytical terms as follows:

If we understand SteeDee's theory correctly, the first Hungarians-are-aliens story arose from some minor human incident. The Hungarians may have stood out from the rest of the staff at Los Alamos, perhaps by maintaining their own cliques and speaking their own indecipherable tongue, and this made the English speakers uncomfortable. The Hungarians were like aliens to the rest, and since there were many reports of "flying saucers" in the popular press in the 50s and late 40s, the "Martian" label was a convenient way to sublimate the social tensions. To be called extraterrestrials, in a jocular, rib-poking way, might have helped reduce this social friction both inside and outside the Hungarian group. If there was a problem with communication, the recurring alien joke would provide a means to make light of it, thereby expressing frustrations that could not otherwise be spoken. (<http://www.ufomind.com/area51/desertrat/1995/dr29/> )

According to Marx, "as a matter of fact, these suspicious Hungarians—Theodore von Kármán, John von Neumann, Leo Szilard—enjoyed the myth. Edward Teller became especially happy of his E.T. initials, but he complained about indiscretion, 'Von Kármán must have been talking'." (<http://www.mek.iif.hu/kiallit/tudtor/tudos1/martians.html>)

## From Teller to Talleah...Zsa Zsa and Her Sisters

This brings us from *Teller to Talleah*, the difference being that Teller was a real Hungarian scientist who pretended to play the part of an alien...whereas Talleah is the name of an alien from the 1958 King of the B Sci-fi Movies, “Queen of Outer Space”...starring none other than perhaps the most well-known Hungarian among Americans, Zsa Zsa Gabor, who plays the role of an alien scientist! [More about this hysterical film and its hysterical reviews below.]

Of course, June 1989 put Hungarians on the map for many Americans. The reburial of Imre Nagy, the huge crowds, the solemn ceremony before hundreds of thousands and a live television audience, a landmark event in the history of Hungary...No, that was 16 June 1989...I am referring here to 14 June 1989, the day Zsa Zsa slapped a Beverly Hills police officer, an incident that immediately became fodder for every late night comedian and even two years later was the subject of a spoof starring the actress in the satirical film series, the Naked Gun. Such is the fate of Hungary and Hungarians in the United States.

There were actually three Gabor sisters: Zsa Zsa, Eva, and Magda. I am not sure whether to say marriage or divorce ran in the family. The three sisters had more marriages than they did important movie roles. To borrow a page from Dave Barry in another context (*Dave Barry Slept Here*, Random House 1989, p. 101), here are the final tallies of the three sisters in Marriages:

### *Final (?) Gabor Sister Marriage Standings*

Zsa Zsa	9* *** *****
Magda	6**
Eva	5

\*It is difficult to know how exactly to calculate Zsa Zsa’s total number of husbands...since as she once responded: “How many husbands have I had? You mean apart from my own?”

\*\*These numbers may be affected by the fact that both Zsa Zsa and Magda were married to the English actor George Sanders, if sixteen years apart. Not to make too much light of things, but Sanders eventually committed suicide. He played the part of Mr. Freeze in the Batman television series, that Zsa Zsa made guest appearances on (see below).

\*\*\*It seemed only fitting in early 2007 surrounding the macabre and absurd Anna Nicole Smith custody fight that Zsa Zsa’s most recent husband—Prinz von Anhalt—claimed that he had a ten year affair with Anna Nicole and was the father of her orphaned child. (Supposedly, Zsa Zsa was angered and hurt by this admission, but can one completely discount the possibility that it was yet another attempt for Zsa Zsa to get back in the limelight, and after all, hadn’t Anna Nicole Smith been famous for being famous.)

\*\*\*\*It may surprise almost no one in a certain sense, but Zsa Zsa's daughter by Conrad Hilton (the only child of all three Gabor sisters) is grand-aunt to Paris and Nicole Hilton (<http://www.webenetics.com/hungary/filmsartsandmedia1.html>)!

Zsa Zsa claims that she won the 1936 Hungarian beauty pageant (according to one Hungarian source, Sandor Incze who discovered Zsa Zsa, invented the idea of the beauty pageant...don't think so), although her mother Jolie ("pretty" in French), married only twice, and fond of "new math" long before we knew it was new—like her daughters she seemed genetically incapable of telling her true age; if she was telling the truth her first daughter, Magda, would have been born when Jolie was thirteen!—claimed it was she (the mother) and not Zsa Zsa who had won the beauty pageant. (To use the famous Casey Stengel line "You can look it up!"...these things should be verifiable, although I will leave that to others to investigate since it is beyond the intended scope of this paper.)

### **The "Queen of Outer Space" or "Damn it, Jim, I'm a Former Hungarian Beauty Queen, Not a(n) Alien Scientist"**

Zsa Zsa's film career is summarized by the online film critic "Jabootu" as follows:

Unfortunately, Ms. Gabor's Hollywood career proved much less epic [than her married life or run-ins with the law]. In John Huston's 1952 *Moulin Rouge*, Zsa Zsa played, in a bold move, a Euro-sexpot opposite Jose Ferrer's Toulouse-Lautrec. The following year she appeared in a supporting role in the musical *Lili*, which co-starred the unrelated but similarly monikered Mel Ferrer. From there, though, it was all downhill. Her few starring roles included playing twins (!! in the hilarious-sounding espionage meller *Girl in the Kremlin*. In case you're wondering, one of the twins [is] Stalin's mistress (!!), the other a spy working against the Soviets. Zsa Zsa also had a bit part in Orson Welles' *Touch of Evil*. (<http://www.jabootu.com/queen.htm>)

But perhaps "Jabootu" is being too hasty and superficial in judging Ms. Gabor's career. Maybe we have underestimated Zsa Zsa's roles in movie and television. For example, Zsa Zsa has recounted how she liked playing the role of "spy" when she guest-starred on the Batman serial as Minerva, a beauty parlor owner, whose hairdryers could read the minds of (male) clients (Batman classics, website, <http://www.geocities.com/Hollywood/Hills/7537/minerva.htm>). Was the episode perhaps a skillful allegory about how the totalitarian state uses the most banal and subversive means to pry into the lives of its citizens? (Was the "mullet" a communist plot to make Americans look stupid? Tune in next time, same Battime, same Batchannel...)

Evidence for such a, more enlightened, revisionist view comes from the 1958 movie "Queen of Outer Space," in which Zsa Zsa plays Talleah, an alien scientist, who leads the women of Venus against the sadistic, disfigured Queen Yllana, thereby saving a flight crew of men from Earth whom Yllana has cruelly imprisoned. I argue here that this film only *appears* to be a sexist, cheesy, and moronic vehicle for profit, when in fact that is part of its subterfuge and inner-brilliance. The movie is, in fact, a subtle and

sophisticated allegory of communist Hungary and the outbreak and crushing of the 1956 Hungarian uprising. Let us take another look at this film—although, unfortunately, we are forced to rely on the flippant and sometimes juvenile comments of “Jabootu” for a discussion of the plot (<http://www.jabootu.com/queen.htm>).

In this first extended excerpt, we find Zsa Zsa’s Talleah (symbolizing the Hungarian resistance) being informed that recently arrived Earthmen (“bourgeois” intellectuals, “men” had been banished from the planet, although “scientists and mathematicians” were retained because they were needed) have been imprisoned by the evil Yllana (the communists/Soviets). Talleah recounts for the men, the sad history of the planet, the destructive war, how Yllana went from well-meaning rebel to tyrant, etc. The astute reader will notice here that Zsa Zsa is in fact recounting the destruction of World War II in Hungary—she says “Ten Earth years ago”!—the coming to power of the communists, the initial “popular” image of the Soviets as liberators, and their construction of a people’s dictatorship.

***Talleah: Rebel Leader with a flare for fashion.***

*...Kael, the Cute Blonde that Turner was earlier checking out (and who’s attired in one of Anne Francis’ sparkly mini-dresses from Forbidden Planet), rushes off. She soon appears in what I at first assumed was a laboratory, as it was furnished with a Bunsen burner and the obligatory tabletop metal scaffolding arrayed with Conical Beakers Filled With Mysterious Colored Fluids™. Then I noticed that the room was staffed exclusively by a couple of women, so I decided it was instead a space kitchen of some sort. I know that’s not ‘P.C.’, but c’mon, one of the women there is a rather young and shapely Zsa Zsa Gabor, and if you’re going to try to tell me she’s a scientist...*

*Kael reports to Talleah (Zsa Zsa), who’s attired in a form-fitting chef’s coat – or, OK, maybe it’s a scientist’s smock – that the men have been imprisoned. Talleah asks what the men were like, exhibiting the only Hungarian accent to be found on the one city on the planet Venus. "They seem strong and brave," Kael coos, already falling under the evil Patriarchal spell of the virile Earthmen. She, unlike Yllana, believed Patterson’s statement that the men came in peace. "His eyes told me he spoke the truth," she avers. Well, that’s good enough for me.*

*Talleah soon appears outside the men’s quarters, wearing a very slinky red dress with a high leg slit. Men or no men, these chicks sure like dressing up. Intercepting a woman baring a food tray, she takes possession of it and enters the room. The guards don’t say ‘boo’ about this, so Talleah must be some sort of bigwig. The men all rouse themselves as she enters – not like that, you perverts – recognizing that as the film’s star she must be the most desirable woman on the planet. Patterson requests another audience with Yllana, hoping to make her understand their honorable intentions. (You might want to leave Turner back in the brig, then.) "But the Queen doesn’t wish to understand," Talleah thickly explains. "She has nothing but hatred in her heart!"*

*Patterson notes her seeming hostility to Yllana. Talleah explains that she's a member of the Queen's court. She then tells them that their lives are in danger – yeah, thanks for the newsflash – and offers her help. Turner smarmily thanks her, calling her "Baby." Somebody beat the living crap out of this guy, would ya? Patterson tries to refuse her aid, though, knowing that it would expose her to danger. Not to mention Turner. She replies that there's a resistance movement that would like to end Yllana's cruel reign. If the Earthmen will help them, they will help the Earthmen. Oh, and anyone expecting that Talleah and the stolid Captain Patterson would show an immediate attraction to each other, give yourself a cookie.*

*Talleah further explains that Yllana plans to destroy the Earth. (Well, she would, wouldn't she? I mean, you don't get to be an Evil Space Despot with a Giant Laser Cannon if you don't sit around thinking up things like that.) Then it's time for some exposition. "Ten Earth years ago," she begins, "our world became involved in war with the planet Mordo. It was a terrible war. We fought with weapons of great power, and we still were nearly defeated." I might be exaggerating the accent here a little bit, but not by much.*

*"Finally," she continues, "Mordo was destroyed. However the war was won at great cost. Most of our cities were [sic] destroyed, and now they were lost to the jungle." After the war, er, war, the women took over the planet. (Well, city.) The leader of the insurrection was a masked woman, Yllana. No one yet knows why she wears the mask, although she's said to be quite beautiful. "She said that men caused the ruin of this world, and it was time for women to take it over." When Konrad asks how the revolution managed to succeed, Talleah replies that the men didn't take it seriously. "She was only a woman," she archly points out.*

*All the men were killed, except for ones Yllana still needed. No, not for that. "Scientists, mathematicians..." Talleah explains. You know, guy stuff. She doesn't explicitly mention opening pickle jars, but I think that can be safely assumed. These men, we learn, are up on a prison satellite circling, as Talleah calls it, "Wenus." Now that Earth's technology is advancing, Yllana wants to knock the planet out before it becomes a problem....*

In a subsequent scene, we learn of Yllana's plans to destroy the Earth because she sees it as a threat to her control over her own planet.

*A couple of guards appear. They're friends, however, and take the men to Talleah's lab. There Our Heroine, naturally attired in an elaborate white silk gown (I mean, she is working), and Patterson immediately go into a clinch. Which, considering that they've spent less than ten minutes with each other, seems a bit odd. Still, they're the lead actress and actor, so why not just cut to the chases, eh?*

*Talleah has big news. "I've learned the Queen plans to destroy Earth in two days," she reports. "Maybe she wasn't bluffing," Patterson decides. (What a*

moron!) The men decide to travel to the Beta Disintegrator set, er, complex, and destroy it. [Earlier "Jabootu" has described the "Beta Disintegrator" as a "comically bad set whose sophistication fails to rival that of King Friday's realm from Mr. Roger's Neighborhood. Basically it contains a big white box with gold polka dots and being serviced by randomly strolling chicks in miniskirts and high-heeled boots."] Patterson tells the women they should stay behind for safety's sake. They want, I mean, want to come with, however. "We haf no life here without Love, or children," Talleah explains. Persuaded, Patterson gives his permission for them to come along. And so Talleah and Kael and their other hot associate Motiya join the party.

The women provide the men with Forbidden Planet sidearms. Then guards are heard outside the lab. Nice of them to announce themselves, anyway. Everyone but Talleah hides away in a small chamber that I'd assume was a priest's hole, except that the door to it is perfectly visible and opened with a big protruding knob-like device attached to the wall. As Talleah tries to bluff things out, Turner, who might be termed incorrigible (or an a\*\*hole), is seen taking advantage of the tight quarters to smooze up to the entirely receptive Kael.

The guys spend the night around a little fire, snuggling up with their respective chicks. Except for Konrad, but he doesn't really need one. He's a scientist. (Or maybe it's just that women-love-a-man-in-uniform thing.) Patterson and Talleah are spotlighted here, as we listen in on their mushy conversation. Unsurprisingly, this offers up a bounty of bad dialog, as well as some choice mispronunciations by Ms. Gabor. For instance, she asks her newfound beau if he was happy on his "plant." She also tells him she was thinking the "same sing." Meanwhile, the film's insights into the female psyche continue apace. For instance, at one point Patterson reveals that there's no girl waiting for him back home.

Talleah: "I'm glad you said that. I would be terribly jealous!"

Patterson: "Talleah, you're amazing! Why, you know on Earth a woman would rather die than show her real feelings?"

They starting making out, at which we cut over to Motiya and Cruze mooning at one another. Glancing aside, Motiya notes "I think the fire is going out." (What do you think Cruze's comeback is? Think hard.) "No it isn't," he replies. Then he realizes she actually means the fire is going out, probably from the shrill burst of 'comedy music' that blurts across the soundtrack....

Here we see Talleah confronting Yllana; the uprising begins. As usual Yllana (the communists/the Soviets) doesn't seem to get it, pointing out that the people love her and she has "kept the peace" (who liberated you guys from the Nazis anyway?...). She refuses all compromise (such as a revolutionary government of national inclusion and reconciliation).

Talleah speaks of the thousands who wish to be free of Yllana's rule. For her part, the Queen doesn't believe it. "My subjects are grateful to me," she exclaims,

*"I've kept peace." "Peace isn't enough," Konrad interjects. "They must also be content." Talleah agrees, adding "We can't be happy without men!" Upon which Turner gets the last word. "You're so right, baby!"*

*Patterson offers Yllana a chance to save her life. (Shouldn't that decision be up to the locals? You'd think.) First, she's to order the crew readying the Disintegrator to stand down. Second, to order the release of the Venusian men being held up on the satellite. Whereupon they can come back down and get back to running things, I assume.*

*An apparently chastened Yllana goes over and lies down on her divan. Once there, however, she surreptitiously reaches for a ray gun kept under her pillow. (Yeah, that's safe.) I'm not sure what she intends to do, since she's rather outnumbered and out armed. Presumably she just wants to reap her revenge on Patterson. Or maybe I'm thinking about this more than the filmmakers did. In any case, she proves a rather poor shot. With seven targets huddled together in a fairly small room, she manages to disintegrate a lamp.*

*They disarm her, but she promises to have the last laugh. The order to halt the preparation of the Beta Disintegrator can only come from her, she says. (Of course, if they just killed her...never mind.) The clever Talleah isn't easily thwarted, however. "And the orders are going to come from Yllana," she promises in a sly voice. I think you can see where this is going....*

In the midst of this heavy allegory, let us pause for a moment to appreciate Zsa Zsa's acting prowess, as "Jabootu" highlights in the next passage:

*Talleah reenters the room, clad in Yllana's mask and a tight and sparkly black dress. (The latter will no doubt aid in her deception, because nothing says 'authority' like a high leg slit and a hint of décolletage.) The disguise amazes Patterson. "You look like her twin sister!" he exclaims. Yes, it's amazing how one stacked blonde wearing a mask will eerily resemble another stacked blonde wearing a mask. The resemblance is so pristine, in fact, that Patterson believes they should try to bluff their way into the Beta Installation itself. That way the weapon can be permanently destroyed.*

*Kael and Motiya are sent ahead to announce the ersatz Queen's imminent arrival. This gives Patterson the chance to tell Talleah that he loves her. Zsa Zsa's acting here is worth noting. She leans back her head (Fleming is quite taller than she is), assumes a look of blank adoration and then pauses, as if playing freeze tag. "Love!" she replies. "I'd almost forgotten. But if it is that varm feeling that makes my heart sing...then I do love you!" OK, got it, Love is a warm feeling that makes the heart sing. But what's this nauseous feeling that's making my stomach lurch? Anyhoo, after fervid declarations of mutual devotion they embrace passionately and do that '50s thing where they turn their heads away from each other and press the sides of their faces together.*

*As they leave we get certain hints where this is going. Patterson arms the masked Talleah -- she's the Queen; they're her prisoners -- and tells the other men to leave their weapons behind. That's one problem with skintight space uniforms, I guess. Then the camera cuts significantly to Yllana, somewhat haphazardly bound and gagged behind a dressing screen.*

*Here the other members of the Council -- they all wear masks, so we know who they are -- enter the room. Why? Talleah orders them to leave. It's amazing. The film features mini-skirted space amazons and cheesy giant spiders and a planet Venus that sports a breathable atmosphere. And yet the silliest moment might be here, as we watch Talleah, thick Hungarian accent and all, attempt to vocally impersonate Yllana. You'd think the moment she opened her mouth the jig would be up, but no. While the women look vaguely confused, as if pondering whether there was something different about their Queen, Yllana kicks over the dressing screen she's none-too-cleverly been 'hidden' behind. At this point Talleah still has the drop on the mostly unarmed group, but apparently it would be too violent to just start blasting them down. (Besides, Talleah's a girl, and it's not in her nature.) So Our Protagonists find themselves captives again. One of Hollywood's legendary feuds: Betty Page and Zsa Zsa Gabor.*

*Needless to say, Yllana has the group executed on the spot, before they can again escape or gain the upper hand. Oh, wait, no she doesn't. She's still on that "You'll watch me destroy the Earth, then I'll kill you" kick. When are these Evil Despots going to learn? And speaking of making the same mistake more than once, Yllana cozies up to Patterson yet again. (Perhaps she got hot and bothered from being tied up. People in positions of authority often enjoy the kinkiness of being dominated.)...*

Of course, this is the 1950s fantasy world, and the evil Yllana is overthrown, Talleah's resistance triumphant...all of which leads to a predictable James Bond-like conclusion (or Star Trek's captain James T. Kirk, as the author suggests) in which the Earthmen are stranded with scantily clad women for the indefinite future.

*Cut to the Council Chamber. All the women who aren't hideously scarred freaks, including the bodyguards who just moments earlier appeared quite ferociously loyal to their Queen, are happily chatting away with the Earthmen and each other. This established, a curtain parts and Talleah, clad in a golden gown, enters the room. She is, big surprise, the new Queen, with Kaeel, Motiya and a few extras joining as council members.*

*Talleah sadly notes that the Earthmen's rocket has been repaired, and that they're soon to depart. Assuming that this took some time, I have to wonder why there are no Venusian men present. Shouldn't they have been released from the satellite by now? Anyhoo. Talleah runs over for a final almost-sorta embrace with Patterson. "I don't want to go," he explains. "I want to stay here with you."*

*Meanwhile, Turner's feeding an equivalent line to Kaeel. Eventually Patterson looks around for his junior officer and sees them smooching in a fashion that suggests he dropped his keys down Kaeel's throat and is now trying to extricate them with his tongue.*

*As the sad-faced crew prepares to depart, Talleah is told that a message has arrived from Earth. Activating the Televiewer, we cut first to a shot of Earth and then right to the desk of the guys' Base Commander. (That's some zoom mechanism.) He orders the crew to hang around Venus until a relief expedition arrives. The women all seem happy enough with the news, so I guess no one's going to point out that perhaps they should be consulted before the nations of Earth start sending ships over willy-nilly. Turner and Kaeel, meanwhile, have taken the opportunity to resume their public make-out session. Isn't this guy supposed to be on duty or something? Damn, Patterson, you sure are one poor-ass excuse for a commanding officer. On the other hand, the Base Commander can presumably see all this through his end of the Televiewer set-up, and he doesn't say anything, so apparently he doesn't care either. It's like an entire space fleet of especially nitwitted Jim Kirks. (<http://www.jabootu.com/queen.htm>)*

Commercialism and the need to sell theater seats, of course, required a happy-ending that did not occur in real life, but this should not detract from either Zsa Zsa's Oscar-worthy performance of Talleah or the caustic allegory beneath the movie's deceptive exterior. And you say you thought this was just a bad sci-fi movie with a Hungarian actress playing an alien scientist. And I take it you also think "I am the Walrus" is a bunch of intentional gibberish dreamt up by John Lennon to confound the press and the Beatles' critics!

### **"To Be Hungarian Is Not Enough...": Hollywood and Hungarians**

As is to be expected of space travelers, Hungarians claim to have founded certain places...one of them being Hollywood. Adolph Zukor of Paramount Pictures, one of the early Hungarians in Hollywood is said to have had on the wall of his office an inscription: "TO BE A HUNGARIAN IS NOT ENOUGH." To this George Marx adds, "in a low voice Adolph would add, 'but it may help'" (<http://www.mek.iif.hu/kiallit/tudtor/tudos1/martians.html>). He continues, "Non-Hungarians in Hollywood used to say, 'If you have a Hungarian friend, you don't need an enemy.'" The MGM commissary was said to have a sign which read, "Just because you're Hungarian, doesn't mean you're a genius!" (<http://www.webenetics.com/hungary/filmsartsandmedia.html>).

The influence of Hungarians on Hollywood is astounding. In 1996, the Associated Press reported that of the 136 Oscar nominations since 1929, Hungarians had won 30 of them (<http://www.webenetics.com/hungary/filmsartsandmedia.html>). Some of the names are more familiar than others. George Cukor—not to be confused with the aforementioned Adolph Zukor, "Mr. Motion Pictures," founder of Paramount Pictures, and producer of

perhaps the first film “Prisoner of Zenda”—captured five best director nominations, including for *My Fair Lady* (’Enry ’Iggins says of Zoltan Karpthy: “Every time we looked around there he was that hairy hound from Budapest. Never leaving us alone, never have I ever known a ruder pest.”). William Fox of “20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox” was born near Tokaj, Hungary, famous for its sweet wines. Among the better-known actors other than Bela Lugosi (born Bela Blasko) and the Gabor clan, we can name Leslie Howard, born Laszlo Steiner, and Tony Curtis, born Bernard Schwartz (born in Budapest, fluent in Hungarian), and Peter Lorre.  
(<http://www.mek.iif.hu/kiallit/tudtor/tudos1/martians.html>).

Speaking of Bela Lugosi...there is the following unforgettable exchange between Johnny Depp playing legendary B-moviemaker Ed Wood and Martin Landau (himself of interplanetary space travel frequently) in his Oscar-winning portrayal of aging, foul-mouthed, bitter, and morphine-addicted Bela Lugosi in Tim Burton’s “Ed Wood” (1994):

*[Ed and Bela are watching Vampira's TV show.]*  
*Ed Wood: Oh, I hate it when she interrupts the picture. She doesn't show 'em the proper respect.*  
*Bela Lugosi: I think she's a honey. Look at those jugs!*  
*[Bela Lugosi casts a love spell on Vampira who is on TV while moving his fingers like Dracula]*  
*Edward D. Wood, Jr.: My Gosh, Bela, how do you do that?*  
*Bela Lugosi: You must be double-jointed. And you must be Hungarian. [!]*

Some “Hungarians” famous in film and television will come as a surprise. Drew Barrymore’s mother was Ildiko Jaid Mako. Jerry Seinfeld might talk about Ceausescu above, but his father was named Kalman Seinfeld. Paul Newman’s mother was Hungarian. And half of the famed animator set behind “The Simpsons” and a series of other cartoons, Klasky Csupo—Gabor Csupo—is a Hungarian (he fled Hungary in 1975 hiking through a 2 \_ hours through a darkened railway tunnel to Austria).

The trivia of all these cases is to say the least entertaining. Other great finds on the <http://www.webenetics.com/hungary/famous.html> site are the following. Ilona Staller, aka Ciccolina, of blue movies and green politics, had a red father—a member of the early communist Interior Ministry. And Juan Epstein’s mother—whose signature concluded every excuse note Juan Epstein brought to class in the 1970s ABC sitcom “Welcome back, Kotter!”—is in fact Hungarian, Juan Epstein having been played by Robert Hegyes.

### **“What’s that? Hungarian roots?”: Budapest and Wanting the Other MTV**

Then there are the Hungarian roots of rock and pop stars. Appropriately enough, while Art Garfunkel is of Romanian Jewish ancestry, Paul Simon is of Hungarian Jewish ancestry. Tommy Ramone, drummer for “The Ramones,” was born with the more sedate name of Thomas Erdelyi. We can salute Gene Simmons of KISS (or should it have been KISz?) as half-Hungarian, and you might find it ironic, but you ought to know that Alanis Morissette is supposedly half Hungarian. It also turns out that the father of the Knopfler

brothers of the “Dire Straits” band was a Hungarian Jew who fled the Nazis to Glasgow in 1939.

The Hungarian tie of “Dire Straits” is interesting—even if probably entirely incidental—in light of the “video within a video” of the band’s most famous commercial/video success, “Money for Nothing (1985).” “Money for Nothing” is better known for its line “I want my MTV”—brilliant and somewhat satirical marketing, mention the video channel coming of age in an iconic way in your song/video and you will guarantee play there. (It was also the first video played when MTV Europe debuted on 1 August 1987—for those too young to remember, MTV, no not Magyar Televizio, was a brief experiment in playing something called “music videos” until reality shows killed the music video star). The premise, the inspiration of “Money for Nothing,” was a bunch of workers moving appliances and commenting while, as it turns out, watching Sting’s “The Russians” video on a wall of TV screens (<http://www.dsarc.com.br/page/stpent.htm>). (Ooohhhh, Sting mentioned the Russians, do they really love their children too? Oooooohhhh, how daring...because I’m sure the Russians do love their children too...1985, the eighties, ugh). I had always wondered about “the video within the video” since the bikini-clad “mama she got it stickin’ in the camera lens” model appears to be posing in the Halaszbastya (Fisherman’s Bastion on the Buda side of Budapest) which I had then just recently visited (May 1985, the video came out in September 1985). Turns out I wasn’t hallucinating for as Dennis O’Connell writes:

The video was produced by Steve Barron, who envisioned that the entire video be computer animated. The band wanted a live video. The final product was a mix: footage from Budapest enhanced by computers along with a computer generated character, Sal, which was inspired by Joe Pesci’s character in *Raging Bull*. (Dennis O’Connell, “Top ten music videos of the 1980s.” at [http://askmen.com/toys/top\\_10/34b\\_top\\_10\\_list.html](http://askmen.com/toys/top_10/34b_top_10_list.html))

Sting, the object of the workers’ derision that gave rise to the song, performs back up vocals on “Money for Nothing.” Bringing everything full circle, my Russian History professor in college decided to open his semester with “Money for Nothing” blaring as students entered the classroom.

### **Camp. La(s)zlo**

In keeping with the alien riff, Hungarians love their inside jokes. The crowd-favorite, sentimentalist Hollywood film, “Casablanca,” with Humphrey Bogart and Ingrid Bergman (nope, neither of them Hungarian), was directed by Michael Curtiz (Kertesz). S. Z. “Cuddles” Sakall, a Hungarian stage actor, played the role of Karl, the kindly Austrian waiter in Rick’s Café (<http://www.webenetics.com/hungary.filmsartsandmedia.html>). The famous historian John Lukacs (author of *Budapest 1900*) among others has argued that there is a typical Hungarian inside joke in this film—or at least the film bears the marks of its Hungarian director. Ingrid Bergman’s underground, Czech resistance leader husband in the film is

named Victor Laszlo. Now, of course, as Lukacs notes—personally, he describes the movie as “imbecile”—“Laszlo” is neither a first nor last name in Czech. It is, however a sometimes last name, but frequent first-name in Hungarian—and Curtiz was surrounded “by a slew of Hungarian scriptwriters in Hollywood, many of whose first names were Laszlo” (Lukacs, 1989, pp. 178-179). Hence, the name in the film. (There is also a popular contemporary cartoon named “Camp Lazlo,” but Lazlo is a Brazilian spider monkey, and as far as I can tell there is in no conscious Hungarian connection behind the name choice.)

But I would argue there are even better inside Hungarian jokes than that of “Victor Laszlo” woven into movies, as I will now demonstrate.

### **The Boy Named Wolf in Hungarian Who Made Ralphie Cry...**

It took over 30,000 feet, several time zone changes, and countless years to figure it out. A few years ago (2001) I was flying out west and scanning the music channels for the headphones. On the classical music channel I suddenly came upon a familiar tune. Yes, there it was: the tune that would repeat everytime the school bully would appear in the lovable, sentimental, nostalgia-fest for a life that few of us ever lived, that is “A Christmas Story (1983).” I thought I recognized the music: it was Sergei Prokofiev’s famous “Peter and the Wolf,” and the theme—that which Prokofiev used for the wolf—became the school bully’s signature in the film. Upon the first hearing of this tune, when the school bully makes his first frightening appearance, the reminiscing “Ralphie,” the little boy who is the main protagonist of the movie, exclaims, “it was Farkas, Scott Farkas, the school bully...he had yellow eyes, yellow eyes I tell you.” (Ralphie’s younger brother, Randy “lay there like a slug...it was his only defense”!)

*(Spoiler Warning!:* When I came to this personal epiphany in 2001, and even while I was writing this article in 2005, there was no indication on the Internet that anybody else had recorded this observation, which led me to question whether an overactive imagination had gotten the best of me yet again. What a great difference two years can be in the Internet age: now a google search for “farkas wolf ‘christmas story’ prokofiev” yields 123 hits, beginning with the wikipedia entry for the film!)

Why is this important you ask? Well, if you know Hungarian, you will know that “farkas” is the Hungarian word for “wolf.” Therefore, to play the theme of the “wolf” from Prokofiev’s work—a piece drafted, it would appear, for children to learn the various instruments of an orchestra—is to play an obscure “inside joke” on the viewers of the film. (Making it even better is the fact that the actor who plays the part of Ralphie is Peter! Billingsley.) Jean Shepherd, upon whose book the movie is based—and who also narrates the film from the perspective of an adult Ralphie looking back on his childhood—appears to have chosen the name of the bully, “Scott (Scut) Farkas,” himself. The story is set in 1940s northwestern Indiana—significantly, Prokofiev’s “Peter and the Wolf” debuted in 1936 and became the subject of a Disney cartoon—so the presence of people of Hungarian ancestry and last names is plausible.

It is always possible that the Prokofiev-wolf-farkas nexus is just an unintentional, if very witty happenstance. But the idea of it having been one of the ultimate Hungarian “inside jokes”—although Jean Shepherd does not appear to have been Hungarian himself—is enhanced by the comparatively unknown and definitely less memorable sequel to “A Christmas Story,” “It Runs in the Family (1994),” in which Ralphie’s father recounts the story of “the Hungarian barber’s cross-eyed daughter.” Shepherd died in 1999, but as with many common last names from other cultures—and farkas can perhaps be deemed one of those—growing up with Hungarian acquaintances it is conceivable that Shepherd would have known the meaning of the name in Hungarian.

### **“Honky”: The Hungarian Roots of a Racial Epithet**

Speaking of the Hungarian(-American) “working class” in the Chicago environs. According to the entry on the wikipedia: Honky, Honkey or Honkie is an American racial slur for a Caucasian, usually applied to males. The word “honky” as a pejorative for Caucasians comes from “bohunk” and “hunky”. In the early 1900’s, these were derogatory terms for Bohemian, Hungarian, and Polish immigrants. According to Robert Hendrickson, author of the Encyclopedia of Word and Phrase Origins, Black workers in Chicago meat-packing plants picked up the term from white workers and began applying it indiscriminately to all Caucasians.

Honky, was later adopted as a pejorative meaning white, in 1967 by black militants within SNCC seeking a rebuttal for the term nigger. They settled on a familiar word they felt was disparaging to certain Americans of European descent; hunkie meaning an American of Slavic or Hungarian descent.  
(<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Honky> )

In the Simpsons cartoon series, Homer Simpson is fond of saying when something goes wrong, particularly at the nuclear power plant where he works, “blame it on Tibor, the guy who doesn’t speak English.” One can imagine that this is something of an inside joke among the creators of the Simpsons, since the chief cartoonist Gabor Csupo is Hungarian (supposedly Hank Azaria’s character Dr. Nick Riviera, a quack physician, is supposed to be a parody of Ricky Ricardo on “I Love Lucy”—“Hi e-ver-y-bo-dy!”—but coworkers just assumed he was making fun of Gabor. Personally, I have always thought he sounds oddly like Andrei Codrescu on NPR...) According to the online urban dictionary of slang (<http://www.urbandictionary.com>), “blame it on...Tibor” has entered at least some marginal popular discourse as shorthand for blaming the foreigner—thus in keeping perhaps, unintentionally, with the roots of “Honky”:

A tiber is someone in your office whom you blame when you have done something stupid, illegal, or immoral. Typically the person is someone who cannot defend themselves. Especially effective when the Tiber cannot speak English. “You’ll have to jiggle the handle. That idiot, Tibor, lost the key.”  
(<http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=tiber>)

## Part V: Weapons of the “Weak” and When Images Don’t Travel Well through Space or Time

### The Uses of Images by Hungarians and Romanians: Who’s Exploiting Whom?

“Goulash cruises” on the not-so-blue Danube, “gypsies” fiddling Liszt and Brahms’ rhapsodies, wine and palinka flowing quicker than the river and the fingers of the fiddlers—“tipsy tourists,” that tune that is music to the ears of the restauranteur the world over—Zsa Zsa Gabor walking tours, communist theme pizza parlors and statue parks—who exactly is exploiting whom here? Yes, locals are boxed; yes, they prostrate and prostitute themselves for cash; yes, it is demeaning. But as we know, “the weapons of the weak,” knowing how to “flip the script,” blue collar justice...they are all here too. The locals sneer beneath their smiles and look down at the drunken, dumpy tourists emptying their wallets of bills and coins whose values they have quickly forgotten, if they ever knew them at all—although the Euro has put some end to the dimensions of this hijinks. Should the much ballyhooed (see Elizabeth B. Miller’s chronology of this saga) “Dracula-land” ever become a reality in Romania, and even if it never turns a profit, it is still a certainty that it will have drained a good sum of money out of backpackers there to say they experienced the tackiness in person, journalists in search of the pun to end all puns on the subject, and perhaps a goth here and there.

Individuals—especially émigrés who can play to an American audience reared on such images—can use these ethnonational images to good effect for their own benefit. We have already encountered Al “The Mad Hungarian” Hrabosky. As we saw, it didn’t matter that his Hungarianness was only an afterthought to his “mad” personality: the image was useful. Thus, did he wear the “Gypsy Rose of Death” ring of which he says: “I don’t even remember the stupid story I made up for that, it was so far-fetched—probably a family heirloom of Dracula.” Anything to get an edge, to distract and intimidate a competitor—but in this case that meant conjuring up an ethnonational image: the rationality and clever calculation of simulated madness.

Similarly, Romanians have used their “temperamental,” “emotional” “Latinness” to their advantage. The renowned “British” actor Sir Peter Ustinov, an avid tennis fan, shortly before his death, reminiscing about Wimbledon, contrasted “the volcanic Irish temper” of John “You can’t be serious...” McEnroe and even Jimmy Connors with the Romanian tennis star of the 1970s Ilie “Nasty” Nastase: “Ilie Nastase, however, became ‘nasty’ and premeditated. He became his own commercial, a caricature of himself. Gamesmanship became his game” (Brendan Gallagher, *The Daily Telegraph*, 24 June 2002). Another source termed Nastase and Connors as “calculated...If their opponent got on a roll and they felt the match slipping away, they would find something to scream about” (<http://www.geocities.com/vegasarchivist.players.html>). Simon Turnbull said of Nastase: “Nastase abused officials, mocked opponents and turned on any member of the paying public who dared to bait him” (*The Independent*, 22 June 1997). According to Robert Philip,

the Romanian was the first player to transcend the sport as entertainer, sex symbol, serial carouser and trouble-maker. At the height of his bad-boy image, “Nasty” could have started an argument on an empty court and even Muhammad Ali acknowledged him as the main rival in the art of making headlines [--Ali supposedly approached him at Caesars Palace in Las Vegas with the line “Hey, you the big mouth in tennis?...”] (*The Daily Telegraph*, 19 June 2004).

Nastase effectively used the image of his “Romanianness” to his advantage in much the way Hrabosky did his “Hungarianness.”

When it comes to using the images of the “old country” to one’s own benefit, however, it is difficult to surpass another Romanian “bad-boy,” the brilliant and highly entertaining poet and commentator, Andrei Codrescu. His deep, gravelly voice seems to emerge from the mists “beyond the forest”—which is, of course, exactly the atmosphere he wishes to create for his listeners. Many, especially white, upper-middle class Americans, probably know him from his periodic commentaries on National Public Radio, and he may be one of the better known Romanian-Americans or Romanians in general.

It is amazing the authority and credibility—or lack thereof—that can come from voice and use of language alone. For a long time after I first heard Codrescu, I was convinced that this was someone “just off the boat.” His voice, use of language, and his clear power of observation instantly seemed to signal deep understanding and insight into Romanian politics. I was shocked then to find out—as many people are after hearing him talk about the Ceausescu era as though he lived through it—that Codrescu was 19 when he left the country in 1966 and did not return, understandably, until after the Revolution broke out in December 1989. True, Codrescu does not attempt to hide that he has not lived in Romania for almost four decades; but he also clearly believes, and wants his audience to believe, that his being Romanian infuses his claims about Romanian politics and history with super-size authority. Codrescu’s *uberconfidence* about all things Romanian political and historical comes through nowhere more clearly than when he talks about the Romanian Revolution of December 1989—with, I would argue, tragically misguided consequences for his, and thus his readers’, understanding of those seminal events. (The joke is ultimately on Codrescu, who combines that most dangerous mix of glibness, arrogance, belief in what was told to him *personally* by word of mouth, and history by intuition and impression...although sadly it is doubtful he will ever get the joke. He has, however, provided us with some of the best, most involuntary humor in the historiography of the events: “tourists are terrorists and terrorists are tourists with guns” (for a discussion see Hall 2002 and Hall 2005).)

Beyond Codrescu’s voice in his NPR commentaries, he fully exploits the gamut of Romanian images in the U.S. For example, he has written a novel about the Blood Countess, Elizabeth de Bathory, which, thankfully, is considered fiction and not history. Before he returned to Romania for public broadcasting’s FRONTLINE in 2002, he told an interviewer: “For an American audience, Romania is quickly becoming some kind of dark cloud whence descend, in order, Dracula, orphans, crazed gymnasts and absurdist writers [I am unclear of the “crazed” descriptor of gymnasts, although it could be a

reference to Nadia Comaneci's ill-fated dalliance with the Romanian-American father of four back in 1989]" (<http://www.pbs.org/frontlineworld/stories/romania/interview.html>). Yet it is interesting to note one of the reviews of his "Romania: My Old Haunts" on the PBS homepage:

The problem with Codrescu's story is the fact that he has followed too closely the typical Western press approach to Romania: Dracula, gypsies, women working abroad as exotic dancers, etc. **Only the orphans were missing.** Romania has so many other things to offer, besides those mentioned above [a reference to other postings] and good pretzels. Why not show those also? How about a story on the country's brilliant students or rich cultural heritage? Codrescu's approach only reinforces Western images of Romania. (posted by Sebastian Burca - Chicago, Illinois; emphasis added) [Mr. Burca is indeed correct in reference to the observation on the country's brilliant students; it is amazing the presence and impact they have made in the social sciences (what I am familiar with) in the U.S., and from what I can tell, in computer science and mathematics, among other disciplines. Not surprisingly, behind Indians, Romanians are said to be the second largest foreign ethnic group represented on the Microsoft campus in Redmond, Washington (300 according to the Microsoft website, "Bill Gates in Romania," 1 February 2007, <http://www.microsoft.com/romania/comunicate/2007/pres0201.msp> ).]

On the one hand, it seems somewhat unfair to criticize Codrescu for his focus on images that he did not create and in which American audiences continue to exhibit interest. He is merely using what is available to him, and satirizing America's obsession with them, as well as the kitschy, absurd character of some of the images themselves. But it is also, perhaps, a window to the fact that Codrescu is as much, if not more, an American than a Romanian, and that Romania has become merely a stage for his literary skills, almost incidental to the plot [just as it was for Bram Stoker and the others constructionists focus upon]. In the final analysis, Codrescu exploits to good measure many of the images he deplors, and smugly seems to attribute to the unwashed, ignorant American masses—in this he would probably be joined by a good number of his NPR listeners. "Romania," the idea, has been "very, very good" (business) to Codrescu.

### **Of, For, and By the Elite—and thus of Limited Impact**

The cultural cognoscenti of Hungarians and Romanians are likely to have been disappointed and perhaps surprised by my discussion so far. Where is the discussion of famous Hungarians and Romanians in literature, classical music and opera, and the arts in general? Like it or not, these high culture forms rarely penetrate the broader popular consciousness outside of their home countries and thus although the names below may be famous they are not necessarily associated with their ethnicity.

Focusing on music and art alone, many Hungarians and Romanians will be known by the reader. Bartok, Kodaly, and Ligeti are likely familiar to those interested in classical music—and even if they are not, they are likely familiar with their music, for example,

the brilliant use of the second movement of Bartok's Orchestra for Strings, Percussion, and Celestra in the eeriest scenes of "The Shining (1980)." George S(z)ell, Sir George Solti, Eugene Ormandy, Christian von Dohnanyi are just a few to have made their mark as conductors. In more modern terms, many people may know Carol Sebestyen and Muzsikas (the music of which appears in *The English Patient*, complete with its Hungarian character, Count Almásy). But to the extent that the broader popular culture is aware of "Hungarian music," I venture to guess the older, aforementioned dueling Liszt Rhapsody-laden Bugs Bunny and Tom and Jerry cartoons of the late 1940s has played a greater direct role.

Among Romanians, in music, one can mention the composer George Enescu, the conductor Sergiu Celibidache, or the pianist Radu Lupu. In letters and the arts, there are Eugen(e) Ionesco, Mircea Eliade, and Constantin Brancusi. Even the title of the "dada" movement is sometimes ascribed to its foundational Romanian members, Tristan Tzara and Marcel Iancu—"da da" being Romanian for "yes yes." It is true, however, and bears further study, that noted Romanian personalities such as Ionesco or Brancusi, are known often not as Romanians, because of their time spent abroad and in the case of authors such as Ionesco, because they chose to write in French. This may owe something to the insularity and difference of the Hungarian language and pentatonic music scale and its impact on Hungarian identity, and to the extreme obsession of Romania's intelligentsia—more muted, particularly among the younger generation, but still pronounced—with all things French.

### **Different Strokes...for Different Folks**

Related to the issue of elite vs. popular images and the fact that the twain may never meet between the two, is the temporal nature of these associations and that they are often generationally-bound. For example, on tourist websites, do people mention Dvorak or Smetana or Kafka or Kundera or Forman or Havel, or even Svejek, when they think of the Czechs they are going to visit. Apparently not: "My perceptions were distorted because I could not shake the comedy influence of a 70's American TV show (Saturday Night Live) featuring 'Two Wild and Crazy Czech Guys!'" (posted by "Richmond" at [http://www.virtualtourist.com/travel/Europe/Czech\\_Republic/Nightlife-Czech\\_Republic-BR-1.html](http://www.virtualtourist.com/travel/Europe/Czech_Republic/Nightlife-Czech_Republic-BR-1.html))

Dan Akroyd describes here how this comedy skit about two "Czech brothers"—despite their omnipresent references to life back home in Bratislava—was in fact like Stoker's Dracula a somewhat accidental hodgepodge invention. Akroyd played Georg Festrunk and Steve Martin, Yortuk Festrunk (not exactly Czech-sounding names!):

"I had no idea the 'Czech Brothers' would be as popular as they are," says Akroyd. "Steve had a character called the 'Continental Suave Guy'; I saw him do in his act one night and I really enjoyed it. I went backstage afterward and I said 'Listen, I do this Czech architect'...I'd noticed a tremendous similarity in the rhythms of Steve's character and I said, 'Let's put them together as Czechs who wear polyester shirts and everything!'" It didn't work that well with the studio

audience the first time we did it on the show, but then we got so much feedback from people who watched it on TV. Phew! Really blew me away!

<http://www.geocities.com/Hollywood/Lot/2976/RS.html>

Clearly, though, the Festrunk brothers' erroneous association as "Czechs" is generational. Younger people with little memory of early Saturday Night Live or Czechoslovakia probably have never heard of them.

### **Generation...Next!**

If foreigners are to know "Romanian music," one would hope perhaps that it would be the scalp- and spine-tingling melodies of Maria Tanase. But that is unlikely and only for a certain generation. For those over 30 or so, the Romanian musician they are perhaps most likely to know is that of (Gheorghe) Zamfir, the pan flute artist. Back in the days of K-tel records, Ron Popeil (aka Bob Woodward), and the amazing Bassomatic '76—perhaps even before Andean bands at metro stops playing Simon and Garfunkel's "I'd rather be a hammer than a nail"...or commuter trapped to hear this song yet again—there was Zamfir, Master of the Pan Flute. As Steve Huey recalls, "In the United States, ubiquitous TV commercials for his albums made Zamfir a household name (<http://shopping.yahoo.com/p:Zamfir:1927117326:page=biography>)." Back in 1986, Michael Small of *People Magazine* wrote:

Fans who hear it on their record players claim it soothes the soul like a sweet birdcall. Critics, who often hear it in elevators or the dentist's office, say it sounds like somebody blowing into a Coke bottle. Either way, the man who creates the odd musical noises in question has become a most unlikely celebrity to millions of Americans who have been subjected to a three-year barrage of TV ads for his album, "The Magic of Zamfir." He is the undisputed king of the pan flute. (<http://panflute.net/zamfir/zamfir.html>)

Timothy Borden details more specifically the centrality—but also the campy, disingenuous quality—of the commercials:

Entering into a contract with Heartland Records, he agreed to record some popular and traditional standards for release by the label, which was owned by Lawrence Welk, Jr., son of the famous bandleader. The connection to the easylistening Welks did not do much for Zamfir's musical credibility; nor did the manner in which the records were marketed. On commercials that typically aired in late-night slots on cable television, the ads showed Zamfir playing his pan pipes while an announcer intoned, "Relax, as Zamfir sweeps you away to a world of haunting, tranquil beauty." The ads also claimed that Zamfir had sold tens of millions of records around the world, a statement that the record company was unable to substantiate. Estimates of the number of records that Zamfir sold in the American market ranged from 750,000 to one million albums in the 1980s. (<http://arts.enotes.com/contemporary-musicians/zamfir-gheorghe-biography>)

If many know Zamfir for his music, far fewer probably know of his more recent, unwanted publicity. Despite apparently having a Jewish wife, Zamfir, “occasionally publishes ultranationalist articles in the Greater Romania Party's weekly *Romania Mare*” and was reportedly denied entry to Israel in November 2002, because Romanian Jews in Israel had protested his alleged anti-Semitic views and denial of the Holocaust in Romania (Michael Shafir, “Israel Refuses Entry to Pan-Flute Virtuoso Zamfir,” 25 November 2002, <http://www.hri.org/news/balkans/rferl/2002/02-11-25.rferl.html>).

But even Zamfir and Nadia are unknowns to a younger generation. A better point of reference of something Romanian, at least in the UK, might be the teenage twin sister pop duet, “Cheeky Girls” (the fact that their mother is an ethnic Hungarian, that they studied Hungarian dance, and that they performed for the Hungarian national opera (conveniently) being muted in discussions of them; they do appear to consider themselves Romanian, however, and in the final analysis, this is what matters). How far we have come then: from Neville Chamberlain stating “a quarrel in a far off country between people of whom we know nothing”—a reference to Czechoslovakia—to a Romanian teenage girl duet exhorting Britons to “Touch me bum” in their 2004 hit. But in globalization we are all, in a sense, the butt of the joke.

### **25.11.53 or...6 to 3**

We have already touched upon here the tendency toward “occidentalism”—toward essentializing and homogenizing “the West”—in the constructionist literature on image formation of eastern Europeans, despite their attempts and protestations that they avoid this. Frame of reference, of course, can make a hell of a difference, however.

Let us take sports once again. Present an American sports fan with the names of Hungarian sports stars and coaches and even if they did not know these people were Hungarian, they are likely to know something about the people in question: from American football alone, famous Chicago Bears coach George “Papa Bear” Halas, Miami Dolphins player and coach respectively Larry Csonka and Don Shula, and New York Jets quarterback (dating him, his nickname in early post-WW II America, in high school, “the Hungarian howitzer”) Joe Namath. But these are meaningless in western Europe and elsewhere.

Years ago when I was first becoming infatuated with Eastern Europe—and before the age of the Internet, where “the search engine” referred to yourself tracking down book, articles, films, and people in person—I had the pleasure of finding a Hungarian film “Meg all az Ido (Time Stands Still) (1981, directed by Peter Gothar).” It is a “coming of age” movie that recounts the events of November 1963 among a circle of teenagers. If I remember correctly (I apologize here, I have not seen the film in years and my memory may be a bit hazy on certain elements) there is no direct mention of the year, but at one point, as one of the boys is getting treated by his mother after having burned himself on the bathroom water heater (an incident that I am sure all too many people in a Hungarian audience could relate to), in the background of their apartment the radio announces the

assassination of President Kennedy. Even without that reference, we know from the beginning of the movie with its flashbacks to 1956 and the return of people who had been imprisoned that we are in the amnesty period, the first fruits of Kadar's so-called "Alliance Policy" inaugurated in 1962 (first announced in his famous "he who is not against us, is with us" Party speech in December 1961...perhaps the best succinct characterization of the apoliticism an authoritarian regime is willing to live with and even embrace, but that a totalitarian regime cannot abide) (The 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the film in October 2006 was marked by the weekly HVG "Huszonöt éves a Megáll az id\_ Emlékszel Szukics Magdára?" 2006. október 17. <http://hvg.hu/awan2megmondja/20061017megallwan2.aspx>).

There was also a memorable school scene in which a teacher-mentor confronts one of the teenagers, expressing his disappointment in the boy's behavior, while both are in line holding candles. At the time, I could not figure out what the event was. I thought to myself, it had to be some kind of event, anomalous or even Party-sponsored that, given its timing in November, must have offered a great opportunity as a subversive, allegorical platform for November 1956, when the Soviets crushed the short-lived uprising. Only later did I realize that, of course, it was All Saints Day, 1 November, a religious (Catholic) holiday on which, at least in Europe, people bring lighted candles to the cemeteries in memory of the dead. I still wonder to this day, but have never read anything specifically on it, if the timing—which as we know well is everything—in between the dates of the Revolution, and when the Soviets were crossing into Hungary, to enter Budapest on 4 November (1956), was used in later years to turn the event into just what I had thought it was—a well-timed proxy for honoring the 1956 rebellion and those who had fallen in it. (Other events, such as 16 June or 23 October, in the Hungarian historical lexicon of significant anniversaries during the communist era, did not offer the same type of opportunity for dissidence because of where they fell on the calendar).

But the event that should have clarified the setting of the film, even in the absence of the aforementioned details, was one that baffled me at the time. In the high school, one of the teenagers essentially hijacks the reading of the school's morning announcements over the public address system, shouting into the microphone, every pop-cultural, dissident reference he could utter before he is dragged out—an event that has of course universal appeal in terms of the teenager-authority/school relationship. One of the things he shouted with great glee, as if the crescendo of his heroic act, was "Hungary 6 England 3...Hungary 6 England 3." What did it mean? Why would someone use such an incident—even in a fictional account—to give a sports score update?!

"Long live the morons! Let there be nothing! *C'mon Let's Twist Again!*  
*Blueberry Hill!* Down with the babies! Long live chicks! Hungary 6 England  
3!"

(See, for example, Imre Barna, "Csalamade," *Mozgo Vilag*, at <http://www.mozgovilag.hu/2001/11/nov13.htm>. There seems to be some debate over the exact line; a closer remembrance seems to be found at <http://www.radiocafe.hu/forum>.)

A European or even international reader—particularly of a certain age—needs no explanation here. The boy was marking the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of perhaps the greatest victory in Hungarian soccer history, and a match of international fame—the first loss ever by the English national team on English soil in regular (non-Olympic) international play. It happened at Wembley Stadium in London on 25 November 1953. For the Hungarians, the victory could have been eclipsed a year later in the 1954 World Cup held in Switzerland, but the heavily-favored Hungarians blew a lead, losing to the West Germans, and for any Hungarian soccer fan, apparently ushering in a steady downward spiral to today’s national soccer oblivion (“hat, Richard, olyan gyenge a magyar foci...”) (for Hungarian soccer, 1954 is the equivalent of the defeat at Mohacs in 1526). (For a wonderful recounting of how Hungary stood still for the game, see the childhood reminiscences of Laszlo Hovanyecz, “Ketszer isadtunk nekik,” *Nepszabadsag*, 22 November 2003).

The numbers, the event, have no meaning to most Americans, but they are not nearly so obscure to other English-speaking peoples. When Hungary entered the European Union on 1 May 2004, Ireland held the EU Presidency. A journalist for the Hungarian daily, *Nepszabadsag*, went to Sligo (my mother’s home town as it turns out) in the west of Ireland to find out what people knew of and thought about Hungary (Laszlo Szocs, “Ahern: Majus 1., a remeny napja,” *Nepszabadsag*, 3 May 2004). “Puskas, Bozsik, Hidegkuti”—not Zsa Zsa or goulash or even the 1956 Revolution—is what they responded. (When Ferenc Puskas died in November 2006, Hungarian PM Ferenc Gyurcsany described him as “the best-known Hungarian of the 20<sup>th</sup> century”!). A civil servant from the town told another Hungarian reporter: “We have been feeling as one for 51 years now: when the legendary “Golden Team” beat the English side 6:3” (Laszlo Szocs, “Az ir Sligon atlepunk az unioba. Az unnepi keszulodes mar tart, hangol a Cedrus es az Ifju Muzsikasok egyuttas,” *Nepszabadsag*, 17 April 2004). As the journalist wrote, “this town of 20,000 inhabitants already sympathized with us once before at the time of the 1953 England-Hungary 6:3 [match].” Of course, unexamined in the article is why the memory was so particularly well-ingrained—one cannot help but speculate that it was less the Hungarians winning than the English losing that make the event so memorable for the Irish. [“For centuries on end all we have had to see was the back of the English...” declares one resident, and thereby explaining the synergy felt in de Valera’s Ireland for Hungary in the famous match against England.]

Still, the point here, is the cultural frame of reference: that although Ireland may indeed just be “across the pond” from the US, it may be an ocean away in terms of the images of these continental Europeans.

### **Bloomsday...Bloody Bloomsday!**

Let me attempt to bring things full-circle here. 16 June, of course, became a seminal day on the Hungarian calendar, following the execution of Imre Nagy on 16 June 1958. Thereafter, particularly at plot 301 in Rakoskeresztur cemetery where Nagy had been anonymously buried, the date became a focal point for anti-regime demonstrators in the communist era, and if there were one day that marked the turning point of the communist

regime and the transition it was clearly 16 June 1989, when Nagy's body was reinterred (for the spirit of that day, see Timothy Garton Ash's recounting in *The Magic Lantern*).

Ireland was already somehow linked to Hungary via 16 June, for it was 16 June 1904 during which James Joyce's tome *Ulysses* transpires:

Leopold Bloom, a fictional thirty-eight year old advertising canvasser, is the protagonist of James Joyce's novel *Ulysses*, assuming the role of the 'Odysseus' character. Born in 1866, Bloom is the only son of Rudolf Virág (a Hungarian from Szombathely who emigrated to Ireland, converted from Judaism to Protestantism, changed his name to Rudolph Bloom and, later, committed suicide) and of Ellen Higgins, an Irish Protestant. He married Marion (Molly) Tweedy on 8 October 1888. The couple have one daughter, Millicent (Milly), born in 1889; their son Rudolph (Rudy), born in December 1893, died after eleven days. The family live at 7 Eccles Street in Dublin. *Ulysses* focuses primarily on Bloom and on the contemporary odyssey he embarks upon through Dublin over the course of the single day of June 16, 1904, and the various types of people and themes he encounters. Joyce aficionados celebrate June 16 as 'Bloomsday' [from wikipedia entry on Leopold Bloom]. [author's note: virag means flower in Hungarian]

I actually have a personal connection—albeit a most tenuous and remote one—to Joyce's *Ulysses*. The passage in question appears in Chapter 7 *Aeolus*:

#### A STREET CORTEGE

Both smiled over the crossblind at the file of capering newsboys in Mr Bloom's wake, the last zigzagging white on the breeze a mocking kite, a tail of white bowknots.

--Look at the young guttersnipe behind him hue and cry, Lenihan said, and you'll kick. O, my rib risible! Taking off his flat spaug and the walk. Small nines. Steal upon larks.

He began to mazurka in swift caricature across the floor on sliding feet past the fireplace to J. J. O'Molloy who placed the tissues in his receiving hands.

--What's that? Myles Crawford said with a start. Where are the other two gone?

--Who? the professor said, turning. They're gone round to the Oval for a drink. Paddy Hooper is there with Jack Hall. Came over last night.

--Come on then, Myles Crawford said. Where's my hat?

He walked jerkily into the office behind, parting the vent of his jacket, jingling his keys in his back pocket. They jingled then in the air and against the wood as he locked his desk drawer.

--He's pretty well on, professor MacHugh said in a low voice.

As Don Gifford and Robert J. Seidman note in their *Ulysses Annotated Notes for James Joyce's Ulysses* 7.456 (130:7) "J.B. Hall. A Dublin journalist with a considerable local reputation as a raconteur." Indeed, he appears again in Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake* with a quote from his *Random Records of A Reporter* "Yielding to no man in my absolute ignorance of the subject" (198, Roland McHugh, *Annotations to Finnegans Wake*) [For an online excerpt from *Random Records*, see for example "The Phoenix Park Murders" <http://indigo.ie/~kfinlay/General/phoenixmurders.htm>].

Arra, by now then, he—and we—are indeed "pretty well on." And thus it is time to turn to our conclusions...

## Part VI:

### Conclusions

I have argued here that the ethnonational images North Americans and western Europeans have formed of eastern (and central) Europeans over much of the past century, but particularly the past 50 years, are far more idiosyncratic than the existing constructionist literature on image formation about the region suggests. About the 1700s, 1800s, and early 1900s, one can argue that those who came into contact with eastern Europeans or wrote about them were an elite stratum: western emissaries or travelers to the region, intellectuals or political advocates looking for an allegorical setting in which to place their stories or argue the need for reform. From this came the view of the region as benighted, hopelessly backward and primitive, lacking in the cultural influence and behaviors of west European Christianity, “civilization,” and/or the world view and values of the Enlightenment. Alternatively, one could assert the superiority of western Europe and of the elite of which those crafting these images were members or a send-up of the stodginess and emptiness of aristocratic west European elites—and later, capitalist commercialism and materialism. Simple, (R)omantic, backward, exotic, mysterious, mystical, eastern Europe was a movable feast, a field of dreams for those in western Europe who inserted them into the west European imagination.

But the entry of a broader public—as much a product of economic as of political inclusion—into the forum of identity and image formation has changed the process and the content of those images. Before the early twentieth century, publics learned their information in an almost entirely derivative fashion: most of them couldn’t or didn’t travel to the region. They had little basis for comparison or alternative information by which to verify or challenge the images created by elites, and thus were dependent on those elites to a greater extent than today for the images of “others.” (The control of elites in image formation was reinforced for Eastern Europe from the 1950s to the 1970s in particular, when travel, contact, and information were highly rationed, on both sides of Iron Curtain). What was fictional, what was allegorical, about eastern Europe and their peoples in those days was easily lost in this chain of communication down from creative intellectuals and politicians—what they wrote and said shaped the ethnonational images of the broader public precisely because the latter had little against which they could compare or test such images. (It seems plausible to argue, however, that in countries premised on immigration, such as the US, Canada, and Australia, there may have been greater opportunity for publics to form their own independent images based on personal encounters with east European immigrants. Still, de facto socio-economic and ethnic “ghettoization” inevitably limited such contacts and the diversity of images that could result from them.)

Even if the shift to film, cartoons, and television shifted control of those images to a different sort of creative intellectual and to corporate elites attempting to market to a broader audience of people willing and able to pay for a product, a public that was able to vote with its feet economically had a comparatively greater say in image formation than in the past. The crafting of ethnonational images could, of course, still be achieved by

politicians, as for example arguably occurred with Romania during the 1970s and early 1980s, when Romania's Latinness and westernness in comparison to its neighbors were heavily marketed (the Romanians were assiduously marketing this image, Western elites were eager to buy and repackage it for domestic consumption, and populations weary of the Cold War often hungrily consumed it—i.e. a perfect alignment of common interests). But ethnonational images increasingly became the epiphenomena of celebrity and individual personality and characteristics—in essence a post-modern condition—rather than the other way around, as it can be argued was more apt to happen before the communications revolution and when the written word and artistic performance, rather than something like sports or sitcoms, ruled the day. Thus, the association of “Hungarianness” with Zsa Zsa or “Romanianness” with Nadia.

Perhaps because the study of image formation—the unwieldy “imagology”—of eastern Europe in “the West” has been the province primarily of historians and literary scholars analyzing older sources, and not of social scientists and/or those analyzing more recent sources, almost inevitably there has been a tendency to project the past onto the present—an academic version of “Groundhog Day,” where every new day is just a thinly-disguised version of yesterday—or to assume that the collective weight of whatever has been formed prevents meaningful change. This is, to say the least, problematic, and runs into some real road blocks when it tries to argue that these images have a profound effect on western foreign policy toward the region. Hence, as many have noted, the Wilsonian-inspired Czechoslovakia, the closest thing to a western democracy in the region at the time, was sacrificed, while the west European allies went to war over Poland. Romania, that reservoir of the mysterious, mist-ical emotional, cruel, and pristine, has gone over the past century from a valued member of the Little Entente, to an almost forgotten “slavicized” state in the Eastern bloc, to a Latin island in a sea of Slavs and home of famous adorable gymnasts who under the “enlightened” and courageous leadership of Nicolae Ceausescu defied the Soviet Union, to a benighted corner of Europe, home to orphans, miners, corrupt and repressive leaders and bureaucrats, and even the Anti-Christ. (What happened?) Or Hungary, from the hordes of the Puszta to that irredentist, troublemaking ally of the Germans intent on reinstating cultural oppression of their neighbors, to home of a communist leadership much favored by Stalin, to site of a heroic, tragic uprising against Soviet tyranny, to the happiest-barracks-in-the-Soviet-camp and tourist haven with a reformist leadership, to, once-again depending upon whom you ask, stable member of the European Union or constant irredentist troublemaker in a community of democratic states. (For an excellent discussion of the whipsaw-like toing and froing of ethnonational stereotype usage in foreign policy, and ultimately its ambiguous impact, see in particular, Piotr Wandycz on Poland, “Western Images and Stereotypes of Central and Eastern Europe,” and Laszlo Maracz, “Western Images and Stereotypes of Hungarians,” in Gerrits and Adler, 1994, *Vampires Unstaked: National Images, Stereotypes, and Myths in East Central Europe*).

This is what happens, all-too-often, in constructionist circles: their identification of the images and analysis of how they came into being are likely accurate, but their assumption that these negative images are somehow inflexible, and strongly influence foreign policies and their justifications assumes far too much. Thus, perhaps in its supposedly

most prominent recent manifestation, Robert Kaplan's neo/nested-orientalist redux "Balkan Ghosts" becomes responsible for shaping (or at least justifying) the image of the Balkans as a place of "ancient [and thus unsolvable] ethnic hatreds" and for fostering a preference in the West and particularly in the US for the west of Yugoslavia and for fueling anti-Serb (hence, "Balkan") animus (see for example, Todorova, 1997, p. 158; she also scores former Secretaries of State Lawrence Eagleburger and Henry Kissinger for such alleged bias). Of course, such a view ignores the cries of Bosnia-Herzegovina as the new "Abyssinia" from which the western allies turned their eyes in the face of an expansionist dictatorship or the well-chronicled differences among and within west European (principally French, German, and English) foreign policy circles. Moreover, it is difficult to explain the shifts in American foreign policy over the course of a decade, from the "Chicken Kiev" doctrine of the Bush administration applied to Yugoslavia (appropriate enough since Yugoslavia was seemingly viewed through the prism of what precedent it would set for the nuclear Soviet Union) and discouraging separatism, to the arms embargo against all former Yugoslav republics (widely interpreted as penalizing Bosnia-Herzegovina), to a belated Bosnia intervention and at the very least tacit acceptance of Croatia war gains versus Serbia, to a belated intervention over Kosovo that ended up with bombing Belgrade, to a return to a doctrine of maintaining territorial integrity in the region, particularly in the post 11 September 2001 world. Nested orientalisms and pejorative, demeaning views of the Balkans don't go far in explaining how such changes occurred. Changes and perceptions in domestic politics and in geopolitics—situational politics and leadership—would seem far more helpful. (It should be noted here, too, that the broader anti-"orientalist" view outside of the Balkans and eastern Europe, that is among some Muslims and certainly among global jihadists, is that the failure of the US and western Europe to respond at all or early on when it mattered, in Bosnia, Kosovo, and Chechnya, was precisely because there were Muslim populations involved. Where you stand, would indeed appear to be, where you sit...)

### **What Have We Learned Then?**

- 1) *Technological innovations in media and their impact on the content of images and the popular role in determining which images endure.* The role of visual images (now frequently live and color) and the internal and external sources of market competition in television and film have shifted the power in stereotype creation to editors, directors, and business executives in these domains, while indirectly increasing the influence of their viewers and, hence, consumers over which images survive and flourish. In other words, the locus of opinion making has shifted somewhat from self-selecting, frequently unrepresentative, well-educated intellectuals, concerned to a lesser extent with profit and mass popularity, to mass culture. As with everything else, the Internet, which allows and empowers individual participation (vis-à-vis the traditional passive reader or viewership), further recrafts and reinforces images and the manner in which they are disseminated. Whereas it can be argued that in the past, mass images of other peoples were largely derivative, since the bulk of populations were unable to travel to these countries and were dependent upon a narrow elite that wrote about other peoples for their understandings, and, immigration was far more infrequent

and segmented in comparison to today, today masses and individuals play a greater role in stereotype creation and maintenance.

- 2) *The larger, regional entities that have been the subject of much of the recent literature—“Eastern Europe,” “the Balkans,” “Central Europe,” “the Black Sea,” “the Near East,” etc.—ignore the often fuzzy, idiosyncratic, arbitrary, and often sharply distinctive images of peoples and states within and across these regions, suggesting the frequent elite, political, and academic overemphasis inherent in many of these studies.* This literature fails to examine, particularly at the mass culture level, what the relationship is between national images and these regional images. My sense is that national images play at least an equal and perhaps greater role in determining mass attitudes in North America. And even among politicians and academics themselves, I suspect that these national images, although frequently subsumed and not formerly addressed when discussing such regional classifications and “(regional) collective identities” for policy, administrative, and intellectual purposes, influence their views to a greater extent than is often acknowledged. Still, even these ethnonational images as we have seen, are poor predictors of foreign policy choices and outcomes when dealing with the peoples of these regions.
  
- 3) *To abuse a well-worn construct yet again: “All peoples have images attached to them, some have more, better-developed, and more widely-known images attached to them than others.”* The question of course is why? Some of this, as I have attempted to demonstrate, is linked to the roles of media and prominent events covered by those media, some of it happenstance. For example, one of the difficult topics to explain is why some peoples have well-developed and well-known images, and are well-known or have prominent personalities associated with them, while others simply do not. The reader cannot help be struck when comparing on the Internet the lists of famous Hungarians and Romanians with the lists of famous Bulgarians or Albanians. Although the first might be explained partly in terms of immigrant population numbers (the ‘56ers having a great impact in this regard), it is difficult to contrast the last three “Balkan” populations. Look up the many names on the Lists of Famous Albanians on the Wikipedia, and I would venture to guess most Americans probably would recognize the Belushi brothers (John and Jim) as the most famous Albanians they know. Regarding Bulgarians, the situation is perhaps even worse: perhaps because the World Cup was played in the U.S. in 1994 and the Bulgarians did particularly well, upsetting the heavily-favored Germans at the Meadowlands, some might recognize the name of Stoichkov, but that is about it. Sad to say many Americans may think of the film “Casablanca” and Rick’s decision not to take advantage of a pretty young Bulgarian woman seeking to escape the clutch of the Nazis. In the American comedy film, “National Lampoon’s European Vacation (1985),” one of the main characters says to another on a TV Game Show to choose the category of ‘The History of Early Hungarian Cabinet-making’ “...because nobody knows anything about the Hungarians.” The joke upon what is a comic device used to good effect is that the observation, comparatively-speaking to other peoples of “Eastern

Europe” is not true: people do know about Hungarians...and so the question then becomes why?

### **Images of Hungarians and Romanians in the “Western” Consciousness: Tentative Explanations of the Difference**

The past, and the accretion of events and their interpretations through the years, matters. Compared to the image of the Hungarian, the image of the Romanian seems far more variable, to the distinct disadvantage of the latter. How to explain the differences in images of Hungarians and Romanians in the North American imagination? The Hungarian image somehow so much more social and cultural, the Romanian so much more political.

In an earlier research project, I focused on the comparative role of diaspora politics in Hungary and Serbia during the late communist era (Hall, 2003). Both peoples faced the issues of how to protect and defend ethnic kin in neighboring regions/states over which they had little or no direct control (Transylvania during the Ceausescu era; Kosovo after the 1974 Constitution). Yet the outcome during the communist era was much different in the two cases, as we well know. Ethnic politics became a mere part of the political landscape in the Hungarian transition, whereas it came to dominate the transition in Serbia—despite the fact that Transylvania and Kosovo are comparable analogues in terms of their cultural, literary, and historical importance for both peoples. The similar structural circumstances of the diaspora *problematique* have easily been forgotten in the wake of the very different outcomes of the two cases (at least in the short to medium term, i.e. first 10-15 years since 1987), yet they pose an interesting and significant challenge for the social scientist to explain.

Back in 2003, I tentatively located the answer in the level of underlying societal/cultural diversification, particularly among intellectuals. The conclusion: that earlier patterns of political culture, which were as much happenstance and the product of unique political and economic conditions in the past, had enduring, lingering impact when new cleavages or issues came up. The more differentiated and internally diverse those patterns (and the more committed constituent (proto-)interest groups were to the inherent value of group autonomy and pluralism), the better able they were to weather the storm unleashed by the transition from communism upon national politics. Otherwise, the potential of “capture,” of reinforcing vs. crosscutting cleavages, of counterproductive, if self-reassuring majorities and intellectual hegemonies, prevailed.

In the comparison between images of Romanians and Hungarians in the North American imagination, I see a similar distinction in terms of preexisting structural conditions, *timing* (as anyone knows in their personal lives: *critical and crucial beyond measure!*), and the integration of new socio-economic and cultural cleavages into the existing political dynamic (for a classic statement along these lines, see Lipset and Rokkan 1967). I am tempted here to suggest that timing of statehood formation, modern popular national consciousness and identity, and “discovery” by the West has played a long-term role in

setting the frame of reference/discourse/perception. It is not that those geographically closer and more well-known peoples have uniformly or even predominantly positive ethnonational images abroad, but the quantity of those images, and the fact that social and cultural images are well-developed and thereby able to withstand the whimsical character of images deriving from geopolitics and political events. What is striking about Romania by comparison to Hungary is the comparative recentness and political character of the associations. Bulgaria and Albania, even less known and central to the geopolitics of the communist era—because Bulgaria was seen as solidly in the Soviet camp and Albania strove to be completely out of it—still have relatively underdeveloped ethnonational images in the West (US/UK).

Many of the enduring stereotypes of Hungarians seem to have their roots in the period of national awakening from the 1820s-1920s (Trianon 1920 to be more exact). For what is this stereotype based in, but a view of Hungarians as arrogant, rude, haughty, insular, and inscrutable (“I never met a ruder pest...”). On the one hand, one can almost see this an outgrowth of the embrace and use of Hungarian language and music, the very things that gave the Hungarians the appearance of being the “odd man out” in this part of Europe, a people who had come from Asia, whose language was different and almost inscrutable, whose core musical scale was even different. Such things of course suggest isolation, distance, insularity, inscrutability, beyond understanding. Inevitably, rightly or wrongly, and more likely, rightly and wrongly, this linguistic distance fed behaviors and perceptions of arrogance and rudeness. Connected to this, and yet discrete, is that the aristocratic, “stuck-up” behavior, and “madness” is associated with the gentry and petty nobility that swelled Hungary’s ranks in a parasitic style, particularly as the 19<sup>th</sup> century progressed. Interestingly, the lumpen, working-class association of Hungarians in the US, as apparently immortalized in the epithet “honkie,” has long since lost its original ethnonational component: it is Zsa Zsa Gabor’s comically-(in)appropriate, suggesting the alien, aristocratic-bearing in “Green Acres” that is instead associated with Hungarianness. National awakening, socioeconomic status, and linguistic difference thus may have been reinforcing to some extent in creating and perpetuating these stereotypes.

The point, however, is that these stereotypes, the stereotype of a Hungarian, appeared to be planted in and exist in the west European and north American collective conscience earlier than the comparatively-late nationhood and statehood of neighboring Romania—in part of course, because of Hungarian domination and subjugation of the Romanians. Joseph Rothschild’s classic discussion of nationalizing elites in *East Central Europe between the World Wars* indirectly would appear to offer confirmation for such a hypothesis. Of the Hungarians, the caustic Rothschild wrote:

The subsequent internal political and social history of this Hungarian state consisted of a tenacious and—until well into the twentieth century—a successful struggle by the mettlesome Magyar nobility to assert and maintain its dominant position against royal authority, against the non-Magyar nationalities residing in the kingdom, and against other social classes, including the dispossessed Magyar peasantry that had virtually no rights....The nobility, in short, was “the political

nation” of the Kingdom of Hungary...The rhetoric of “national survival” was thus used as a figleaf for social and political privilege (pp. 137-138).

...while of the Romanians, Rothschild acidly recounts:

The oligarchic, bureaucratic ruling elite behaved simultaneously as nationalistic modernizers and as prospective emigrants, salting away in foreign banks the wealth squeezed out of the peasantry under the device of jingoistic banners...In no other European country of the interwar era was the moral and psychological chasm between the oligarchic, bureaucratic elite and the lower classes as wide and deep; even its cultural infatuation with France and its fetishistic fascination with foreign affairs and foreign politico-legal models was a kind of flight from its own people on the part of that elite. (Rothschild, 1974, p. 321)

I cannot help but believe that the fact that so many of Romania’s leading intellectuals—Ionescu, Cioran, etc.—wrote in French or produced their works abroad—Brancusi—such that people are unsure of their ethnicity (see museum placards accompanying Brancusi’s works) or surprised to learn that they were Romanians, reinforced the absence of a Romanian image associated with its elite. Instead, Romania as a movable feast, entered the popular western imagination at a later date.

It will be interesting to see if the cultural image of the Hungarian can endure more recent political developments. The geopolitical peripherality of Hungary today and the extreme market segmentation that characterizes contemporary media of all stripes probably ensures that the “Arpad stripes” (associated with one of the darkest chapters of recent Hungarian history, the Arrow Cross and the Hungarian Holocaust) and the unprecedented (for Hungary) post-communist violence of last fall (2006) and this spring (2007) are seen and remembered by a very small audience (without the hijacking of a Soviet era tank by extremists during a commemoration of the 1956 uprising, perhaps even fewer would have learned of them). In this sense, the more recent public, media-covered violence is Hungary’s and not Romania’s and yet I would be surprised if the latter is not the one in the western imagination that is more associated with violence. The geopolitical imprint and influence of ethnic image association probably is not and will never be again what it was during the Cold War. Romania’s best hope then is that with new images—some of which some Romanians won’t be terribly proud, the Cheeky Girls or the Dacia Logan—it will see an increase in the overall number of images and the internal diversity of those images. Ironically, Romania’s way out of this cul-de-sac of negative imagery also appears to be through focusing on the darker aspects of recent history: a ramshackle health care system, the tragedy of forced abortions, Ceausescu, totalitarianism, violence, confusion, and moral compromises. Romania has gone in a decade from being the setting for *My Giant* and being the film location for *Cold Mountain* to producing films of increasing international renown despite shoestring budgets: Cristi Puiu’s *The Death of Mr. Lazarescu*, Corneliu Porumboiu’s *12:08 East of Bucharest*, and, of course, this year’s winner of the Palme D’Or at Cannes, Cristian Mungiu’s *4 months, 3 weeks, and 2 days*. Romania’s lamentable recent past may paradoxically have given Romanian film and young Romanians the prospect of a better future.

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