



# Turkish Gothic, Universal Angst: The Impossibility of Non-Existence in Dracula(s)

Türkçe Gotik, Evrensel Kaygı:  
Dracula(lar)da Varolmamanın İmkânsızlığı

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## Abstract

The source of horror is mostly correlated with the horror of the final encounter, death. As the form of ceasing to exist, death has troubled humankind since the very beginning of history. Therefore, the question of death is immediately associated with “to be or not to be”, the most gothic of all questions. Being and Non-being, with the abyss of death tormenting human for ages, hold a prominent space as the uncanniest aspect of human condition, best exemplified by Gothic writings. Those who lack a proper death and who cannot cease to exist (i.e. the vampires) have been the staple tropes of Gothic fiction, globally. By converting the Heideggerian “angst”, Emmanuel Levinas suggests that horror is the fear of not being able to escape from Being. The present study focuses on Ali Rıza Seyfioğlu’s *Kazıklı Voyvoda*, which in 2017 saw its English translation as *Dracula in Istanbul*. The first

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part discusses the representations of evil and good in relation with the Heideggerian uncanny; instrumental for this is an overview of Levinas's suggestions about horror, death, and existence. The second part emphasizes the ethico-ontological reflections in Bram Stoker's *Dracula* in comparison with the adapted Turkish novel. This comparison, thus, argues for the global human conundrum regarding the question of death and non-being as the most universal cause of horror, terror, and anxiety.

**Keywords:** *Dracula in Istanbul, death, the uncanny, Levinas, gothic*

## Öz

Korkunun kaynağı çoğunlukla insanın son buluşması olan ölümün dehşetiyle bağdaştırılmıştır. Var olmayı bırakmanın, Varlıktan hiçe geçişin asıl biçimi olarak düşünülen ölüm, tarihin başlangıcından beri insanlığa dair en kafa karıştırıcı meselelerden biri olagelmıştır. Bu nedenle, ölüme ilişkin sorgulamalar doğrudan, gelmiş geçmiş en meşhur gotik sorulardan “olmak ya da olmamak” ile hemen ilişkilendirilir. Varlık ve hiç, çağlar boyunca insan düşüncesine adeta işkence eden ölüm uçurumuyla birlikte, Gotik yazında en açık şekilde örneklendirilen ve temsil edilen, ancak insanlık durumunun en belirsiz uğraklarından biri olmayı sürdürerek önemli bir yer tutar. Ölmüşlerin hayaletleri, düzgün, tam tekmil bir ölümden yoksun kalmışlar ve var olmaktan asla kurtulamayanlar (örneğin vampirler), küresel olarak Gotik kurgunun temel yapı taşları olmuştur. Emmanuel Levinas, ölüm korkusu ile sıkı sıkıya ilişkili olan Martin Heidegger'in ‘kaygı’sını dönüştürerek ve hatta eleştirerek, korkunun aslında Varlıktan kaçınmama, kurtulamama korkusu olduğunu öne sürer. Gotik tasarıma ve kurguya bu açılardan yaklaşan bu çalışma, Ali Rıza Seyfioğlu'nun 2017 yılında *Dracula in Istanbul: The Unauthorized Version of the Gothic Classic* başlığıyla İngilizce'ye çevrilen *Kazıklı Voyvoda* adlı romanını incelemektedir. Çalışmanın ilk bölümünde, kötülüğün ve iyiliğin felsefi temsilleri, Heidegger'in ‘tekinsizlik’ anlayışıyla ve varlık ve hiç ile ilişkili bir bağlamda tartışılacaktır. Bunun için kuramsal çerçeve, Levinas'ın korku, ölüm ve varoluş hakkındaki düşünceleri temelinde oluşturulmaktadır. İkinci bölümde ise, Bram Stoker'ın *Dracula* romanındaki etik-ontolojik temsiller, Seyfioğlu'nun uyarlaması ile karşılaştırmalı olarak ele alınmaktadır. Bu karşılaştırma, ölüm ve var olmama ya da varlık ve hiç sorununa ilişkin küresel insan ikilemini, bu ikilemin korku, terör ve endişenin en evrensel nedeni olarak süregelen varlığını tartışmayı amaçlamaktadır.

**Anahtar sözcükler:** *Kazıklı Voyvoda, ölüm, tekinsizlik, Levinas, gotik*

## Introduction

In 2017, a bizarre publication ‘event’ (to use Derrida’s terminology) took place when *Kazıklı Voyvoda (Vlad The Impaler)* (1928), Ali Rıza Seyfioğlu’s Turkish translation of Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* in Ottoman Script was translated back into English. In the ‘Afterword’ to this translation, Iain Robert Smith claimed that: “A close textual comparison shows that much of the novel was translated directly into Turkish and therefore the back translation into English produces quite an uncanny effect as we recognize anew these classic passages with

only minimal differences.” (Stoker & Seyfioğlu, 2017: 142). In critical terms, Seyfioğlu’s novel had already been assessed by Bıçakçı Syed as a “transcultural adaptation” via Linda Hutcheon’s theories on literary adaptations (2015: 57-59). Thus, Bıçakçı Syed’s categorization of the Turkish Dracula as a transcultural adaptation had already located Seyfioğlu’s *Kazıklı Voyvoda* in the sphere of globalgothic, through a discussion of the historical context with a special focus on on the nationalization policies of the young Republic of Turkey in the aftermath of the War of Independence (1919-1923).

The translational quest of Seyfioğlu’s novel starts when the initial work was reprinted in 1946 in the Latin alphabet. The novel’s fame has been overshadowed by Mehmet Muhtar’s movie, the film adaptation of the novel, *Drakula İstanbul’da* (1953), although the “credit titles of the film explicitly acknowledged Ali Rıza Seyfi as the author of the book” (Tahir Gürçağlar, 2017: viii). For this reason, the 1997 reprint of *Kazıklı Voyvoda* as *Dracula İstanbul’da* with a preface by Giovanni Scognamillo marks a significant turn in the global reception of the novel marked by its ironic loyalty to Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*. The uncanny translation back into English in 2017 is even more compelling, in that it not only reintroduces this cross-cultural gothic adaptation to the world, but also acknowledges the Turkish novelist’s unique contribution to the legend of Dracula.

The present paper firstly aims to explore the re-creation of this gothic novel in its transcultural adaptation; in this attempt I will take my cue from Bıçakçı Syed’s analysis and terminology, in order to argue for the global implications of the uncanny relocation of the novel. Secondly, via a careful perusal of the novel(s), I aim to reconsider gothic uncanny and horror, and argue for their ‘contamination’ by an altered idea of anxiety, derived not from the possibility of death, but from its opposite, i.e., the impossibility of annihilation. For this second part, I will be rereading Levinas’s reappraisal of anxiety in comparison with Heideggerian angst, with the aim of philosophizing horror.

### **1. The uncanny cosmopolitics of the vampire**

The oldest terminology for blood-sucking demonic figures in Old Turkish and Turkic languages are içgak, yek, içkek, hobur, ubır, uvar, veber, obur, and finally vampir (Sarpkaya & Yaltırık, 2018: 37-50).<sup>1</sup> Most of the words used to signify these monstrous beings are derived from verbs related to eating and drinking. Therefore, the importation of Dracula by Seyfioğlu in 1928 did not introduce something alien to the culture, which was already haunted by evil undead spirits such as the ‘hortlak’.<sup>2</sup> The pirated *Dracula*, or *Kazıklı Voyvoda* as Seyfioğlu has initially named it, not only revived the cultural figure of the hortlak in the newly founded Republic, but also added to the understanding of the heritage of the Ottoman Empire in that new Republic. Obviously, the nationalist or nation-building propaganda of the 1920s is carefully installed in the transcultural adaptation. In Bıçakçı Syed’s words: “In *Vlad the Impaler*, however, Dracula is the colonizer, the Western imperialist who tries to colonize the Turkish blood, and thereby, Turkish national identity” (2015: 61). The newly born Republic was very selective in terms of the Ottoman inheritance in the era and there were numerous attempts to rewrite Turkish history.

In *Kazıklı Voyvoda*, the emphasis on Güzin's (a Turkish Mina) interest in and knowledge of history is no coincidence. Azmi, for instance, explains: "Güzin knows better than I do the bloody, horrible, blood-curdling acts that Voivode Dracula committed during the reign of Mehmet II in the history of the Turkish Empire." (Stoker & Seyfioğlu, 2017: 6). Through this intentionality attributed to Güzin, Azmi's fiancée, Seyfioğlu historicizes and contextualizes the transformed content of Stoker's *Dracula*. In this way, the transcultural adaptation achieves two things at once. In the first place, Dracula is for the first time properly linked to the historical character Vlad III, as Smith explains:

Stoker's original novel contained two brief references to the "Voivode" Dracula and Muhtar's film makes this link to the historical Vlad III (Vlad the Impaler) somewhat more explicit but it is remarkable just how much further Seyfi's novel goes in developing that link between the historical Vlad Dracula and Stoker's fictional creation. (Smith, 2017: 144)

Next, by the reinstatement of the historical figure as the bloody Vampire, Seyfioğlu introduces a legacy of vengeance for the Young Republic, which has haunted its heroic Turkish character ever since the time of Mehmet the Conqueror, arguably the most heroic sultan of the Empire and widely acknowledged in the nation-building policies of Modern Turkey. Moreover, this historic haunting provides the novel with a mythic discourse of pay-back once the group of warriors decide to take Dracula down: "We shall prevent a monster, who centuries ago did not tire of drinking Turkish blood in Istanbul; and we shall destroy him who could not be destroyed by the armies of any nation." (Stoker & Seyfioğlu, 2017: 133).

Seyfioğlu's adaptation builds a bridge between past and the present of Turkey; yet this is not the whole story. The transcultural adaptation of one of the most famous Gothic novels is nonetheless another attempt to locate modernized Turkey on the cultural map of the West, aptly coinciding with the policies and patriotism of the time. Paradoxically, in spite of the overtly nationalist discourse, which challenges all other nations of the imperialist West while glorifying Turkishness, Seyfioğlu's narrative projects very Western ideals such as the power of reason and science.<sup>3</sup> The transcultural adaptation operates on several levels in terms of cultural hybridity,<sup>4</sup> bridging epochs and nations, in coherence with the twofold manoeuvre of global gothic that at first "scrutinizes the regional, the ethnic, and the national, and secondly it tests the resulting specificities and particularities for their universally Gothic value" (Raducanu, 2014: 16). Seyfioğlu's rewriting of Stoker's *Dracula*, from this perspective, creates a locus for itself in a globalised Gothic tradition whilst resurrecting the 'hortlak' in the literary text of the modern Republic. Bıçakçı Syed, accordingly, explains:

Although adapted before globalgothic term was established, *Vlad the Impaler* and *Dracula in Istanbul* are perfect examples of transcultural adaptations which initiated the inclusion of the Gothic in Turkish studies and offer a starting point for tracking down the Gothic genre in Turkey. (Bıçakçı Syed, 2015: 68)

Stoker's *Dracula* seems to be a natural-born traveller, a global subject with a penchant for artful multilingualism: "By situating Dracula's origins in the linguistic 'whirlpool' of Transylvania, Stoker deliberately exploits the potential of a disputed territory occupied by multiple national-linguistic groups during its turbulent history" (Brundan, 2015: 2). The

library of the Count is significant in the sense that it blurs the national borders for him. In the adaptation, too, the library is put under focus with detailed depictions and information on the books that are kept in the castle. The notations regarding the numerous Turkish books and newspapers on Dracula's shelves foreshadow Dracula's forthcoming journey to Istanbul while pointing to the possibility of previous visits (Stoker & Seyfioğlu, 2017: 27). Dracula's ability to speak Turkish creates an unearthly scene both for Azmi and the reader as it does in Stoker's original text when Jonathan Harker notices his English skills (Stoker, 2012: 22-23).

In the 'Introduction' to *Globalgothic*, Glennis Byron notes "The dead travel fast and, in our contemporary globalised world, so too does the gothic" (2013: 1). Retrospectively read, this diagnosis of Byron could be the most pertinent in situating the many Draculas of our (and their) age: the vampire, Vlad III, the novel, multiplied through Seyfioğlu's adaptation. In *Kazıklı Voyvoda*, the careful recording of Vlad Tepeş as an ancient enemy identified with the Vampire strengthens the uncanniness of the undying bloodsucker, starting with Azmi's first association: "I was aiding this unthinkable horrible monster to come to Istanbul and my beloved country! There this devil would drink Turkish blood and create a land of devastation like the cursed Impaler Voivode who lived centuries ago." (2017: 48).

Dracula, the vampire, had already been there as the Impaler and from the very beginning his status is that of a 'revenant' that will keep coming regardless of time and space, that is already there not for the first time.<sup>5</sup> The adaptation, translation, and retranslation processes of Stoker's *Dracula*, which contaminate different cultures in different eras is consistent with the uncanny tale the novel offers. *Kazıklı Voyvoda*'s fate is even more uncanny in its ipseity,<sup>6</sup> as stated before. Here, I would like to recall Fred Botting's brilliant remark "the uncanny is not where it used to be, nor are ghosts, doubles, monsters and vampires" (2007: 200).<sup>7</sup> It is beyond the scope of the present study, but a deep look at the numerous interpretations of the uncanny clearly shows that it no longer can be contained in the castles or mansions of the past. Varying subgenres, tropes, and appearances of gothic combined with globalisation testify to the difficulty of capturing the uncanny and the sources of horror or terror. Dracula's wandering character, therefore, can be read as the product of Stoker's almost prophetic imagination. The novel, as much as its eponymous character, has always been ready to travel and Seyfioğlu offered one of the earliest international tickets to this indisputably most famous literary vampire.

## 2. The itinerary of the undead

The idea of a globalised gothic, designating a universal umbrella for Gothicism, is relatively new and mostly associated with neoliberal globalisation.<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, exploring shared gothic tropes and images in these texts produced long before the idea of globalisation is still intriguing, especially after having globalgothic available as a conceptual tool. Even though I am, of course, focusing on a canonical masterpiece, *Dracula*, and its Turkish adaptation, which is still very Western, there is an opportunity here to trace cross-cultural gothic imaginations. As Raducanu explains: "...Gothic, although undoubtedly a Western genre, presents certain characteristics which can be found in literatures produced in historically and geographically remote territories." (2014: 14).

On this basis, it might also be the time to mention the distinction between globalised gothic and globalgothic as two new ‘gothic modes’ stemming from globalisation. Globalised gothic refers to “the circulation of gothic themes and styles in worldwide locations, through a range of media, and embedded in the capitalist structures of market and consumption” where globalgothic “offers a gothic critique of globalisation, exposing the anxieties and excesses that sift through the carefully laid out safety nets of international culture.” (van Elferen, 2013: 91). In my analysis here, I will venture to define a gothic mode based on a combination of the above definitions, and which thus conceives of the global gothic as exposing global anxieties and excesses through different examples of gothic themes in worldwide locations.

In the first part of this paper, I have already mentioned that Stoker’s vampire was no alien to the Turkish readership when Seyfioğlu adapted the novel. This recognition of presence raises a series of questions: “Why has *Dracula* sparked the imaginations of several generations of readers, academic and leisure readers alike? What has allowed it to withstand the test of time, transcend the anxieties specific to late-nineteenth-century Britain, and breed a thousand offspring?” (Clasen, 2012: 379). One possible answer to these questions could be a common anxiety, which is always already global, regardless of time, space, cultural and political systems, etc. In *Kazıklı Voyvoda*, the historical contextualization of Vlad the Impaler set aside, the affinity most probably arose from a shared interest and anxiety evoked by a phenomenon that is somehow foreign to human reasoning, that of the Vampire. The terror the vampire generates is not simply the fear of death at the hands of a bloodthirsty monster. The fear of and interest in vampires are not much different than those provoked by ghosts. The vampire is the ghost *in corpus*, with a more or less clear behavioural pattern, and yet undead: “Un-death is the vampire’s most salient characteristic” and the thought clearly confuses the human mind creating an “ontological disturbance,” violating “distinctions fundamental to human cognition” (Clasen, 2012: 384). Since gothic fundamentally construes a challenge for robust rationality and reasoning, the vampire with its inability to die (unless there is a specific ritualized killing) signifies such disturbance *par excellence*. Therefore, the disturbance created by the vampire is not only ontological, but also ethical, and solidly phenomenological. Gothic has always been a critical genre, from Horace Walpole to contemporary gothic.<sup>9</sup> Accordingly, it might be possible to claim that the gothic has always called for philosophy, as both touch on the commonest questions regarding the human condition.<sup>10</sup> In a recently published *The Gothic and Theory*, David Townshend offers an ethico-phenomenological consideration of gothic through Levinas’s prote-philosophia with a special emphasis on the ethical relationship with the other:

Consequently, it is through Levinas’s revisionist phenomenology, I claim, that we might begin to think through the ethics of the Gothic mode, particularly in its characteristic concern with the faces of ghostly, villainous or monstrous Others that, irrespective of their moral make-up, defy all attempts at rational decoding and assimilation, totalisation and control. (Levinas, 2019: 281)

Considering the impact of Levinas on Derridean thought, especially on his hauntology, which is already at work in gothic studies, the attempt to rethink gothic with Levinas’s ethical phenomenology is a fundamental requirement.

Therefore, through an exploration of the figure of Dracula in these novels, my aim is to investigate the possibility of explaining the uncanny in gothic as a global anxiety resulting from the impossibility of non-existence. The temptation to follow Townshend's brilliant suggestion for a Levinasian ethical reading of gothic works is overwhelming. Nevertheless, given the limitations of the current project, I will restrict my theoretical perspective to a Levinasian approach to anxiety; I will explore the way it reformulates Heideggerian angst and uncanny, followed by a closer look into the texts through the lens of Levinas's reflections on existence.

The most prominent aspect of Levinas's philosophy is the privilege he grants to ethics. Despite being relatively faithful to Husserlian phenomenology and having studied Heideggerian ontology intensely, Levinas criticizes his two most influential predecessors together with all their antecedents in Western philosophy, which "has most often been an ontology" (1979: 43). For Levinas, the other is reduced to a phenomenon in a substantially phenomenological approach as much as it is in the ontological. Ontology is a philosophy of power and injustice according to Levinas, by positing being before the existents (1979: 47). In Heideggerian ontology being is reduced to the comprehension of Being or a relation of knowledge. Additionally, it poses freedom before justice:

To affirm the priority of Being over *existents* is to already decide the essence of philosophy; it is to subordinate the relation with *someone*, who is an existent, (the ethical relation) to a relation with the *Being of existents*, which, impersonal, permits the apprehension, the domination of existents (a relationship of knowing), subordinates justice to freedom. (Levinas, 1979: 46- 46)

Correspondingly, Levinas argues for a face-to-face ethics, deriving from a revisionary phenomenology of the face and the other, and which should be embraced as first philosophy. The ethical-ontological conflict is not the only one between Levinas and Heidegger. The other prominent opposition by Levinas, targets Heidegger's understanding of angst, thus the uncanny.

In Heidegger's philosophy, angst is "a basic mode of our being in the world, our Dasein, characterized as a disturbance before an indefinite and unnamed presence" (Santili, 2007: 180). In another formulation "Dasein's essence is to be excluded from its essence—to be what it is only when it is not what it is" (Withy, 2015: 208). Therefore, the human being as Dasein, is the uncanniest being; Heidegger claims, reflecting on *Antigone*, in his *Introduction to Metaphysics*: "The human being is, in *one* word, *to deinotation*, the uncanniest" (2000: 159). For Heidegger, the human being's essence is uncanny, a feeling of unhomeliness even when at home (2000: 161).

Although Heidegger does not give any reference to Freud's *Uncanny* (1919), the parallelism is quite clear in terms of signifying the familiar in the unfamiliar or vice versa.<sup>11</sup> In *Kazıklı Voyvoda*, this Freudian conception of the uncanny as both *heimlich* and *unheimlich* is rendered via Azmi's confusion when he hears the Count speaking almost perfect Turkish. Nevertheless, Heidegger's thematization of Dasein as the uncanniest entity points at a different dimension of the uncanny, since it is also related to the determination of being-towards-death (*sein-zum-tode*) and the anxiety evoked by nothingness: "The "nothing" with which anxiety brings us face to face unveils the nullity by which Dasein, in its very basis, is defined; and this basis itself is as thrownness into death." (Heidegger, 1985: 356). The sudden remembrance of nothingness and death is represented, once again by Azmi in his diary on June 30<sup>th</sup>, "I trust to the grace of

the great God. Güzin, my precious Güzin, farewell... I am walking toward death..." (Stoker & Seyfioğlu, 2017: 49). The fear of death seems to have captured Azmi at this moment; however, in another record, this fear is replaced by the fear of being annihilated: "If I am dead and am lost, will you remember me?" (Stoker & Seyfioğlu, 2017: 45).

It could not be a mere coincidence that Azmi is concerned with being remembered, perhaps, seeing it as a way of escaping annihilation; indeed, he likens his diary to the most famous ghost of all times, who also insisted on remembrance: "(I have noticed that my diary looks a great deal like *A Thousand and One Nights* or the ghostly visits of Hamlet's father, always beginning in the evening. And ending when the rooster crows...)" (Stoker & Seyfioğlu, 2017: 36). This part, which constructs associations with the witching hour and *Hamlet* (along with *A Thousand and One Nights*) is translated by Seyfioğlu, very loyally, almost without changing a word, from Stoker's *Dracula*.<sup>12</sup> I am reading this as an indication for the redundancy of appropriation when it comes to the ghost. The ghost in *Hamlet* represents the same thing and evokes the same level of horror and uncanny no matter where and when he is invoked, primarily because, as Shakespearean gothicists have already argued, *The Castle of Otranto* is considered to be "a version of *Hamlet*," and the tragedy, in turn, can be claimed to be the most gothic among the Bard's plays (Drakakis, 2008: 4). *Hamlet* evokes layers of uncanniness with its disjointed time and space, revival of purgatory, the return of the dead, the undead, the ghost, and the idea of vengeance. Like Derrida, who published a whole book on ethics and politics inspired by the play, his predecessor Levinas was also very much influenced by Shakespeare's work, especially by the tragedies *Macbeth* and *Hamlet*.

As Sean Hand points out, "Levinas's references are to Shakespeare rather than to Plato or Hegel" (1989: 29). In *Time and The Other* he once again discusses being and death with allusions to *Macbeth* and *Hamlet* when he writes:

Hamlet is precisely a lengthy testimony to this impossibility of assuming death. Nothingness is impossible. It is nothingness that would have left humankind the possibility of assuming death and snatching a supreme mastery from out of the servitude of existence. "To be or not to be" is a sudden awareness of this impossibility of annihilating oneself. (Levinas, 1989: 42)

It is not, then, unexpected to observe Levinas's fascination with Shakespeare, and especially with the gothic tropes in *Macbeth* and *Hamlet*, since these elements distort some of the very fundamental presumptions of Western philosophy. Levinas's critique of the allegedly concrete methods and determinations of metaphysics and ontology finds its voice in the ambiguous dichotomy of being and non-being in Hamlet's most famous soliloquy, or in the murders carried out by Macbeth:

To kill, like to die, is to seek an escape from being, to go where freedom and negation operate. Horror is the event of being which returns in the heart of this negation, as though nothing has happened. "And that", says Macbeth, is more strange than the crime itself. (Levinas, 1989: 33)

For Levinas, "our being in the world" is identified "with the experience of the *il y a* or the "there is" and *il y a* is what remains once the existents are turned into nothingness (Santili, 2007: 180). Additionally, the nocturnal space and time is the "very experience of there is"

with “total exclusion of light,” which is not void, but “full of the nothingness of everything,” full of ‘darkness’ (Levinas, 1989: 30-31). Thus, horror is “the rustling of the there is” in nocturnal silence and it is “nowise an anxiety of death,” but “a participation in the there is, in the there is which returns in the heart of every negation, in there is that has no exits.” (Levinas, 1989: 32-33). In short, horror is the anxiety caused by “the impossibility of death, the universality of existence even in its annihilation” (Levinas, 1989: 33). The inevitability of existence is thus rendered as uncanny by Levinas’s reversal of the Heideggerian angst peculiar to Dasein’s fear of nothingness into the impossibility of nothingness.

Accordingly, I would argue, what universally posits Dracula (the vampire, the hortlak, the undead) as one of the most intriguing objects of horror is the uncanniness of his situation trapped in between life and death, as a monstrosity in existence. The uncanniness here refers to the very impossibility of dying or annihilation that operates as a double-edged sword. On the one hand, those who are the potential victims of Dracula are scared by his evil and the difficulty of killing the undying monster; on the other hand, the no-exit existence of Dracula is propagated as he keeps killing and infecting other corpses. Levinas suggests that the “corpse is horrible; it already bears in itself its own phantom, it presages its return’ and ‘the haunting spectre, the phantom, constitutes the very element of horror” (1989: 33).

After Şadan (the Turkish Lucy) is infected and her condition stops improving despite the immense efforts of Resuhi Bey (Van Helsing), the professor reaches the point where he needs to discuss with his friends, the potential necessity of ‘properly’ killing the young woman. Resuhi Bey is well aware of the coming calamity and explains, “If it would only end in death, by God’s will, I would leave this girl to the angel of death. But what might come next is horrible, very horrible” (Stoker & Seyfioğlu, 2017: 78). Here, death is depicted as a sort of salvation whereas the alternative is the prohibition of a ‘beautiful death.’<sup>13</sup> Beautiful death, in this sense, refers to a finalized life for the wholeness of Dasein, i.e., a death as the definite ending of being-in-the-world. Being infected by the vampire rules out a proper ending while functioning to spread the evil for the coming generations.

At this moment, I would like to mention another Dracula narrative, *Dracula Untold*, the 2014 Hollywood adaptation. One important aspect of Gary Shore’s movie is that it reverts the narrative Seyfioğlu builds in *Kazıklı Voyvoda*, providing a counter historical perspective. Seyfioğlu’s nationalism is replaced in the movie by an anti-Ottoman discourse, obviously inspired by Stoker’s *Dracula*. “It is as if all evil in the world, including vampirism, has a reason to justify itself except for the evil despot from the East who can best be embodied in the Ottoman Sultan and his conquest of Constantinople.” (Bıçakçı Syed, 2020: 201). Cross-cultural and historical discussions of the film set aside, the other significant aspect of the work is its specific emphasis on the impossibility of non-existence. When compared with Stoker’s *Dracula* and Seyfioğlu’s *Kazıklı Voyvoda*, *Dracula Untold* focuses on the ordeal of the Undead in an unusual manner. In the movie, “the conflict between the Prince of Transylvania Vlad III and the Ottoman Sultan Mehmed II” is the central plot and it portrays “the myth of becoming a vampire as a necessary price to pay in order to defeat the evil Turk.” (Bıçakçı Syed, 2020: 201-202). Vlad Tepes submits himself to the Master Vampire to

be infected so as to achieve superhuman powers and immortality. The pact is that Vlad will take over the watch of infinite existence, while the Master Vampire will be freed from his torturous immortality. In *Dracula Untold*, Vlad Tepes is the hero who sacrifices his right to a beautiful death in order to gain power and defeat the Turk to save his family and nation. In this version of the tale, the global uncanny as the anxiety of immortality becomes even more visible. Being deprived of the possibility of dying or an ending leads to suffering for both vampires. That is, the inescapability of existence and the anxiety it creates are embedded not only in the victim's perspective, but also in the Vampire's. In Levinas' words:

The horror of the night, as an experience of the there is, does not then reveal to us a danger of death, nor even a danger of pain. That is what is essential in this analysis. The pure nothingness revealed by anxiety in Heidegger's analysis does not constitute the there is. There is horror of being and not anxiety over nothingness, fear of being and not fear for being; there is being prey to, delivered over to something that is not a 'something'. When night is dissipated with the first rays of the sun, the horror of the night is no longer definable. The 'something' appears to be 'nothing'. Horror carries out the condemnation to perpetual reality, to existence with 'no exits'. (Levinas, 1989: 34)

In the novel, the anxiety evoked by the infinite postponement of annihilation and indeterminacy vanquishes the horror of death. The ordeal of being immortal is inhuman, it is what is alien to human cognition and so-called nature. That is why Dr. Afif (Dr. Seward) is tremendously relieved after the ritualized killing of Şadan is complete.

It is all over... She is dead!" When I opened the door, I saw Turan on his knees, sobbing. I hurried back into the room. Resuhi Bey was examining her face with a stern and grim expression. How strange! Death had returned this poor girl's beauty. Her face and lips became pink and almost rejuvenated. (Stoker & Seyfioğlu, 2017: 86)

In the first part of the present study, I have discussed the Turkish *Dracula* in Seyfioğlu's transcultural adaptation *Kazıklı Voyvoda*, with the aim of understanding the consequences of its inscription into the field of globalgothic. The image of the vampire, although changing slightly from one culture to another, nevertheless shares the same traits, one of its most defining being the inescapable vampiric existence.<sup>14</sup> The Turkish counterparts of the vampire, whether they are named 'obur,' 'içkek,' or 'vampir,' are commonly referred to as 'hortlak' which signifies a revenant. Despite this variety of representations in ancient Turkic cultures, all these vampire-like figures are ultimately undead corpses that might rise from their graves. Our ability to trace similar themes, motives, and tropes of gothic across cultures, thus, enables us to recognize common anxieties in different societies that attract people to the genre while perturbing them. Subsequently, I have argued for the traceability of globally shared uncanniness caused not by the anxiety of death, but by the absence of a proper ending. For this, I have examined the relevant ideas of Heidegger and Levinas on being, uncanny, and anxiety. The Levinasian explanation of horror in concordance with his revisionary philosophy provides us with an alternative perception of gothic horror and the uncanny by reversing Heideggerian angst. Lastly, this study has offered a Levinasian reading of Seyfioğlu's cross-cultural adaptation of Stoker's *Dracula*, which "did not only construct the literary role of the vampire figure for the first time by emphasising the discussions of national identity and race, but also introduced a new genre

to Turkish audiences: the Gothic” (Bıçakçı Syed, 2015: 57). In this context, the uncanny in the adaptation and its translational quest has been discussed along with the journey of the Vampire.

Conclusions are generally supposed to summarize the *already* there, the *already* done. Nevertheless, a study focused on the ubiquity of the most famous vampire of all times and his never-ending plight can also inspire a non-conclusion or, to put it differently, a conclusion that sets the premise for a future inquiry into the ongoing ‘commerce’ between life and death. Thus, before the conclusion, I would like to propose, *in lieu* of a conclusion, as well as a new beginning, a recent article by the very controversial Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben.<sup>15</sup> The piece reminds us that the world that human beings inhabit has not always been under the strict possession of the living and totally isolated from the world of the dead. With references to the relation between Gaia and Ctonia, and the Etruscans, Agamben interrogates the possibility of a world which does not radically separate the dead from the living.

...Etruscans built and watched over the homes of their dead with such diligence and not, as one might think, the other way around. They did not love death more than life, but life was inseparable for them from the depth of Ctonia, they could inhabit the valleys of Gaia and cultivate the countryside only if they never forgot their true, vertical home. (Agamben, 2020)<sup>16</sup>

For Agamben, this is a better life within an ‘uninterrupted community’ where the sphere of death is not excluded. He develops this idea further by referring to the work of the linguist Joseph Vendryes. “Vendryes showed that the original meaning of our term “world” is not, as has always been claimed, a translation of the Greek kosmos, but derives precisely from the circular threshold that opened the “world” of the dead.” (Agamben, 2020). Thus, Agamben re-imagines the Earth as a continuous space, as a threshold in between the celestial and the underground where the community does not lose all contact with the past and the future. He ends his article on a pessimistic tone, inspired by what he perceives to be the state of our world and culture in the present age:

Gaia, the earth without more depth, which has lost all memory of the underground abode of the dead, is now entirely at the mercy of fear and death. From this fear only those who will find the memory of their double abode will be able to heal, who will remember that human is only that life in which Gaia and Ctonia remain inseparable and united (Agamben, 2020)

## Conclusion

In the globe of gothic, it is always possible to discover an imaginary community, similar to that of the Etruscans. The Gothic imagination trespasses the rationalized cognition of the modern subjects, giving rise not only to the disturbance and the macabre, but also to curiosity and attraction. Accordingly, Dracula (or the vampire) is the chthonic figure par excellence, possessing non-dying among his other gothic characteristics. Dracula, as a gothic figure transgresses mainstream cognition and his fatal immortality travels around the world. The night gives a spectral allure to the objects that occupy it still. Looking at Dracula from a Levinasian glass, what one will see is the hour of crime, hour of vice, bearing the mark of

a supernatural reality which travels the world in different languages and tales. By this way, Dracula construes his own community; a community which belongs to the night, making all visible borders blurry. Among these borders is the one between existence and non-existence. Thus, the present study has attempted at a reading of *Dracula* and *Dracula in Istanbul* as examples of global gothic with the claim that the gothic angst does not always stem from being-towards-death. Specifically in the *Dracula(s)*, hence in other vampire stories, it is possible to trace the source of the angst and horror back to the impossibility of non-existence. The vampire figure is trapped in-between Gaia and Chthonia, spreading an immortal terror to the mortals who try to escape from an infectious non-existence.

### Endnotes

- 1 The authors provide a detailed survey of the etymological and historical journey of the image of the vampire, or at least vampire-like figures in Turkish culture.
- 2 According to the dictionary of Turkish Language Institution (TDK), 'hortlak' refers to the creature which is believed to come out of the grave and haunt the living persons. The term is used in the daily language to signify any horrifying thing or the undead.
- 3 This kind of intentionality that stands against the superstitious and the irrational is inherent not only in Seyfioğlu's *Kazıklı Voyvoda*, but also in another well-known Turkish Gothic novel, *Gulyabani* (1915) by Hüseyin Rahmi Gürpınar. Gürpınar's contribution in the genre takes place with a reserved resentment almost surreptitiously mentioned in the novel. Unlike Seyfioğlu, Gürpınar writes the ending of the novel in the way that Gothicism annihilates itself for the sake of rationality and positivism.
- 4 Here, I am not using Homi Bhabha's concept of hybridity (1994) in the strictly postcolonial sense, but to describe a more generic interaction among cultures, nations, etc.
- 5 Revenant is one among the many names Derrida chooses to signify the ghost in his eminent work *Specters of Marx*, where he also introduces "hauntology".
- 6 By ipseity, I refer to the translational and hermeneutical journey of *Kazıklı Voyvoda*, differentiating it from that of Stoker's *Dracula*.
- 7 Botting's intention in the quoted work is completely different. By pointing out the dislocation of uncanny, he is arguing for a shift in gothic modernity through the changing economy of media, in relation to postmodern condition. I am using the reference out of its original context.
- 8 The term globalgothic is coined by Glennis Byron in 2012 and the book titled *Globalgothic* was published in 2013.
- 9 Walpole has named his own work as Gothic in 1764. In effect, both globalgothic and contemporary gothic studies, today, allow us to trace gothic back into even earlier ages of literature. The developing Shakespearean Gothic studies should be mentioned here. Dale Townshend, in his *Gothic and the Ghost of Hamlet*, reminds us about Elizabeth Montagu's reading of Shakespeare as "our Gothic Bard" only five years after *The Castle of Otranto* was published (Townshend, 2008).
- 10 There are already a number of initiatives juxtaposing the topics of philosophy and gothic, especially in theorizing the genre. Apart from the psychoanalytic discussions on gothic, Heideggerian uncanny, Derridean hauntology, Kantian sublime are already among the most significant conceptual instruments used by gothic scholars. As Marshall Brown writes "we are inclined to take artificial hallucinations of the gothic too seriously, or else not seriously enough." (1987: 275).
- 11 In her book cited above, Withy offers a thorough exploration of Heidegger's uncanny, as explained in *Being and Time* and Introduction to Metaphysics. She also provides a comparative account starting with Jentsch' and Freud's writings, discussing all dimensions of Heidegger's conception of uncanny.
- 12 "(Mem., this diary seems horribly like the beginning of the 'Arabian Nights', for everything has to break off at cock-crow – or like the ghost of Hamlet's father)" (Stoker, *Dracula*, 2012: 34).
- 13 'Beautiful death' as a concept, is introduced by Jean François Lyotard in relation with the Nazi experience and concentration camps. He claims that 'Auschwitz is the forbiddance of the beautiful death', since the deportees are not a part of the universe which provided the SS the authority to order death, sharing a 'we' or a phrase regimen (Lyotard, 1988: 100).

- 14 Stoker, himself, locates his creation in the globe of vampires by enumerating names given to vampires in different parts of the World (Stoker, *Dracula*, 2012: 278). This gesture is also adopted by Seyfiöglü. (Stoker & Seyfiöglü, *Dracula in Istanbul*, 2017: 125).
- 15 Giorgio Agamben has become the target of criticism by different names such as Jean Luc Nancy, for he declared the pandemic non-existent in his critique of the governments' measures and attempts to prevent the spread. He argued that the gravity of the pandemic does not live up to the precautions implemented by states. Accordingly, he sees the official measures as an attempt to establish permanent state of exception. A number of selected essays and interviews covering his arguments on COVID-19 breakout have been translated into English and published in February 2021, under the title *Where Are We Now?*.
- 16 Agamben's *Gaia e Ctonia* originally published online in 2020. <https://featheryquartet.medium.com/giorgio-agamben-gaia-and-ctonia-dee1c60a4d99>

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