

THE ORIGIN IS ALREADY HAUNTED: GREECE AS THE UNCANNY OF MODERNITY¹

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In (Western) modernity “Greece” has always been associated with the concepts of repetition and return. Greece’s appearance in modern times is always already a re-appearance, problematizing the very ideas of originality, continuity and metaphysical presence it had come to reinforce in the lineage of the West. From this perspective, its appearance can rather be said to represent an apparition haunting the process of European self-definition.

The construction of the new Greek nation, first in theoretical Philhellenism and then in political practice, is directly related to this logic of spectrality. As an implicit reverse of the beneficial re-generation it was intended to bring to European culture, this restoration also evoked the disturbing notion of resurrection and “undeadness”. In this sense, Greece embodied the (displaced) return of the same as other inherent in the Freudian theory of the uncanny.

This paper explores such unsettling connections by analyzing the mutually constitutive and reciprocal haunting between Europe and Greece through some narrative and discursive structures that allegorize repetition and uncanniness in figures and forms of revenance.

HAUNTING (THE) SELF: THE PROBLEMATIC INSTITUTION OF ORIGINS

What we call somewhat loosely “theory” today has primarily devoted its existence to investigate, or rather to problematize, the question about origins: Can an origin ever be just an origin? Can an origin ever just *be*? At the present, after several decades, this issue might seem outmoded, a hackneyed and long-ago elucidated question with no potential to yield any new meaningful considerations. However, to this day such a subject remains to be tackled in a more basic level that could allow for a productive historicization; namely, the genealogical examination of the framework where the origin as an ontological category becomes thinkable. This framework was historically instituted through the

1. This research was supported by a Marie Curie International Outgoing Fellowship within the 7th European Community Framework Programme.

axiomatic inscription of Greece² as the precursor of Western modern culture and of the epistemology that underpins it. To pinpoint this phenomenon in history – more specifically in Europe through the eighteenth century – implies to undermine the possibility of any pure origin and to recognize that this notion can only be a discursive effect produced in the operation of the consequences it claims to have generated.

Nicholas Royle begins his study on the uncanny with this sentence: “The uncanny entails another thinking of beginning: the beginning is already haunted” (Royle 2003: 1). Greece made its appearance in modernity with the pretension of upholding its opposite: that of the pure originarity of being present to itself, and thus easily graspable. Nevertheless, the conditions of its (new) emergence undermined this pretension and unsettled the very concepts it had come to stand for, giving rise to variants of haunting that destabilized the values of ontological solidity and epistemological clarity in the self-same process of their institution. Arriving as a guarantor of origin, what it achieved instead was to demonstrate the impossibility of the origin. My aim in this article is to explore what, in this sense, I consider substantial connections between the Freudian concept of the uncanny and the idea of Greece as the discursive space of modernity. To do this, I shall focus on two groups of discourse, the limits of which are “undecidable” precisely due to the uncanniness elicited by Greekness at this point: the external discourse of western Philhellenism on the one hand, and the internal discourse of Greek nation-building on the other. I will attempt to argue that there has been a mutually constitutive, reciprocal haunting at work between Europe and Greece from the outset of modernity, and that it manifests itself in diverse narrative and rhetorical structures.

From the eighteenth and maybe even from the sixteenth century, Greece, the original and absolute precursor, has only been conceivable in the West in terms of repetition and return. “Regeneration”, “rebirth” or “revival” are some of the notions invoked for both the self-definition of

2. Across the whole paper, I am using the term “Greece” not as the name of a geographically, historically or culturally uncontested, fixed entity, but as a transhistorical, highly idealised notion constructed by normative discourses in the West from the beginning of modernity (but especially 18th and the first quarter of the 19th century), in order to underpin themselves and the nascent concept of “European civilization”. This notion, of course, not only encompassed as well the contemporary territories and peoples finally gathered under the Modern Greek state, but was instrumental to the latter’s theoretical and effective production.

European modernity grounded on a Hellenic genealogy and for the building of a new Greek nation at the southern edge of the Balkans, then under Ottoman rule.³ Greece's appearance in modern times is always a re-appearance, thus problematizing the notions of originality, continuity and metaphysical presence it was intended to buttress. Philhellenism itself was basically dominated by compulsive repetition: imitating the classic, re-producing the origins, remaining invariably at the same point of ahistoric essentialism that, nonetheless, characterizes precisely that displacement underlying all historicity. In the attempt to bring the classic closer to the modern, every repetition emphasizes and widens the gap between the two. Greece is therefore the figure and the name of a return. But every return implies a difference, a ghostly doubling impossible to reduce through the logic of identity, generating an unavoidable residuum that unhinges the whole operation. Hence, the imagery of regeneration, revivification or recovery is haunted from the outset by its already implicit, disturbing reverse side: a rhetoric of resurrection, undeadness and revenge.

DEATH BEFORE LIFE: GREECE, BUT LIVING GREECE NO MORE

This residual presence is emblemized in the figure of the abject⁴, un-symbolizable body: the (usually undecomposed) corpse. Metaphors of death can often be found in the narratives of Philhellenic travellers disappointed at not finding living remains of Antiquity in the territory of Hellas. John Galt, in his 1813 *Letters from the Levant*, writes:

The sentiment, indeed, with which I feel myself most constantly affected, since I came within sight of Greece, and particularly since I landed, has a

3. The Greek term *palingenesia*, rebirth or resurrection, was generally employed during the late eighteenth and the first half of the nineteenth centuries to qualify the process of creation of the new Greek nation. "Revival" appears frequently in a number of texts about Modern Greece, especially in travel accounts by Philhellenes (see for example Galt 1813: 126, or Douglas 1813: 80-94, who alternates it with "restoration" and "regeneration"). "Rebirth" appears, among others, in the *History of Classical Scholarship* by Wilamowitz-Möllendorf (1982: 10). Many scholars use those terms profusely at the present in their studies on Modern Greece or Classical Studies. Noteworthy, in this sense, is the title of John Koliopoulos and Thanos Veremis' book: *Greece: The Modern Sequel* (London, 2002).

4. I rely here on Julia Kristeva's notion of the abject (1980). In my use of this concept across the paper, however, is implicit a rather unnoticed dimension of the abject: its inherent connection with the uncanny, mostly through Lacan's reformulation of this term as "the lack of the lack", the un-symbolizable Real that appears where it was already not expected (2014: 41-42).

strong resemblance to that which I experienced in walking over a country churchyard. Everything reminds me of the departed. The works of the living serve only to inform us of the virtues and excellence of the dead (1813: 63).

Edward Dodwell, around the same time, states that “[In Greece] almost every rock, every promontory, every river, is haunted by the shadows of the mighty dead” (1819: iv). The French Alphonse de Lamartine, visiting the country between 1832 and 1833, declares: “This land of Greece is now but the winding-sheet of a people; it resembles an old sepulchre robbed of its bones, and the very stones of which are scattered and embrowned by the lapse of ages”. (1850: 72). Consequently, Greeks cannot help be but living dead, devoid of content and agency, like mechanical automatons located in the intermediate position between death and life.

Nowhere is this logic clearer than in Byron’s *The Giaour*, also dated 1813. The poem advocates Greek liberation from the Ottomans by presenting a *giaour*, a Christian of mixed origins, who fights for independence and avenges the killing of his lover, Greek Leila, at the hands of the Turkish pasha Hassan. The initial description of the idyllic beauty of the country, marred by the Oriental presence of the Turks – according to a Romantic topos in Hellenism – at once becomes unsettling, uncannily foreshadowing, in the very landscape, the vampirism that will constitute one of the themes of the poem. The Greek shore is depicted as a dead body that retains its beauty and vigor, but not its life, as though waiting for insufflation in order to revive and return from the dead:

He who hath bent him o’er the dead
 Ere the first day of death is fled,
 The first dark day of nothingness,
 The last of danger and distress,
 (Before Decay’s effacing fingers
 Have swept the lines where beauty lingers,) [...]
 So fair, so calm, so softly sealed,
 Such is the aspect of this shore;
 Tis Greece, but living Greece no more!
 So coldly sweet, So deadly fair,
 We start, for soul is wanting there.
 Hers is the loveliness in death,
 That parts not quite with parting breath;
 But beauty with that fearful bloom,
 That hue which haunts it to the tomb,
 Expression’s last receding ray,

A gilded Halo hovering round decay,
 The farewell beam of Feeling past away!
 Spark of that flame, perchance of heavenly birth,
 Which gleams, but warms no more its cherished earth!

(Byron 1900: 70-71).⁵

If Greece is to be the origin, it already contains a remainder: an irreducible element in supplement to its purity that splits it into two by reference to a phantom precedent. Such an origin cannot but be a repetition, a return from death that has to include the repressed body unaccounted for in the equation linking Ancient Hellas to the contemporary West. In the genealogy of European civilization, Greece represents precisely that possibility of a disembodied mind and transcendental subject as against the threat of the corporeal, but at the same time it problematizes these notions by bringing back the undead corpse of the modern Greeks in the very act of its institution. Byron unfolds a constant play of revenances in the poem to allegorize this process. He not only suggests the vampirism of the Ancients in referring to their tombs as “the graves of those that cannot die” (1900:71), but also explicitly features the native vampire traditions in one of the first appearances of that monster in English literature. The vampirism of the Ancients is replicated in the moderns: the Turk Hassan curses the *giaour* to return on earth as an undead and prey upon his kin, while Leila, who, according to some critics, stands for Greece itself, visits the *giaour* after being murdered:

then, I saw her; yes, she lived again;
 [...] I saw her – friar! and I rose
 Forgetful of our former woes;
 And rushing from my couch, I dart,
 And clasp her to my desperate heart;
 I clasp—what is it that I clasp?
 No breathing form within my grasp,
 No heart that beats reply to mine—
 Yet, Leila! yet the form is thine!
 And art thou, dearest, changed so much
 As meet my eye, yet mock my touch? [...]
 I knew ’twas false—she could not die! (1900: 92)

These corpses thus haunt the scene of Greece’s reappearance in the modern world, awakened in part by the Philhellenes and embodied by the

5. For a further analysis of this fragment in similar terms, see Gibson 2006: 26-27.

modern Greeks in a repetition that seems unending. Their coarse materiality perturbs the attainment of the ideal and epitomizes the uncanny remainder that repeatedly resists all attempts at voiding the tomb of the "cenotaphic logic" proposed by Vangelis Calotychos for the Greek case (Calotychos 2003: 47).⁶ As a process essential to the construction and legitimation of Western modernity, the formalization of Greekness or, in Lacanian terms, its symbolization is resisted here by the Real of the abject corpse tinged with undeadness.

UNCANNY GREECE

These considerations lead necessarily to a historical examination of the uncanny and its intertwining with the ambiguous position of Greece in Western modernity. In fact, both of them are inseparable from modernity and its reconfiguration of the self. In his 1919 groundbreaking essay about *The Uncanny*, Freud theorized this affect as a primitive and universal phenomenon, although he suggested the possibility of historicizing it by emphasizing the relevance of the ontogenetic and phylogenetic diachrony in its structure. However, he formulated this historicity as the mere subsistence or eruption in the present of a layer predating the development of consciousness or of the species; in particular, the re-appearance of animistic thought within a framework of rational thinking (1953a: 249). Some scholars have nonetheless refined this vision, ascribing the uncanny not to a persistence of, or return to, the pre-modern in modernity, but to the profoundly ambiguous nature of modernity itself (Royle 2003: 8). Mladen Dolar understands that the experience of the uncanny emerges with the involuntary and displaced reinscription at the core of culture of the supernatural removed by the Enlightenment, which loses its discrete space on the margins of epistemic normativity (1991: 7). Terry Castle considers that it arises in the 18th century as a kind of toxic side effect of the establishment of compulsive rationalism, systematization and regulation (1995: 8-9). Ruth Johnson relates it to the nostalgia of modernity for a lost unity that, as the modern subject knows well, never existed (2010: 13-14). What is interesting about these historicizations is that the uncanny seems think-

6. Relevant for this argument is as well Calotychos' connection of this "cenotaphic logic" originally proposed by Benedict Anderson in his studies on the nation, with what he terms a "logic of ab-sense" specific to modern Greece (Calotychos 2003: 47; 53). I try to underscore here the fact that the modern Greeks, and the disturbing corporeality associated with them in the imagery of early modernity, make it impossible for the West to close this circle of semantic evacuation.

able only within the epistemological model that claims Ancient Greece as its foundation. It is when “we are all Greeks” – namely, when we (Westerners) find our real self in a displacement of our own identity – that the uncanny becomes accessible to experience for the first time and starts haunting modern culture. Philhellenism and the uncanny were born at around the same time. It is necessary to investigate whether there is any inherent connection between them.

It has often been said that the uncanny is characterized by its eluding definition. Freud’s essay itself, according to numerous authorities, is no more than the chronicle of a fruitless pursuit of the concept’s meaning (see Cixous 1976). Some consider that the circulation of the signs mobilized by that search is the only possible substance for the uncanny, which, rather than any content, represents a form or structure (Weber 1973: 1114-1115). Freud contributes various definitions, none of which, alone, seem sufficient to encapsulate its meaning. Borrowing from Schelling, he initially affirms that the uncanny is “what ought to have remained secret and hidden but has come to light” (1953a: 222). Shortly afterwards, he emphasizes the identity of meaning in some uses of the opposites *heimlich/unheimlich* (literally, homely/unhomely) to focus on theories of repression and the return of the repressed (223-24). From this viewpoint, the uncanny would be what has undergone repression and what subsequently returns in a different context and time to disturb us with a sense of strange familiarity. The prefix “un-” is the token of repression (244). A certain splitting of the subject is suggested here, whereby the notions of self and other are disturbingly undecided, and the autonomy of the Cartesian subject is revealed as an unsustainable construct (Weber 2000: 20-21). Still, Freud contributes additional dimensions to the uncanny: we can track it in compulsive and involuntary repetition (linking the uncanny to the theory of the death drive formulated the following year in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*); in instances where thought or language seem to demonstrate a performative omnipotence that, in civilized adults, has been ruled out by logic; in the impossibility of establishing clear, exact boundaries between life and death (namely, inanimate objects that come alive, the dead who return, or animate beings lacking subjectivity, such as automatons); and even in isolated motifs such as the double or the disembodied organ (1953a: *passim*). In summary, the uncanny has to do with “a strangeness of framing and borders, an experience of liminality” (Royle 2003: 2). However, the works of an infinity of scholars during the last decades of the 20th century show us that it is much more: it is a crisis of the proper (the proper

name, propriety and property); the experience of a foreign body within oneself, or of oneself as a foreign body, as Nicholas Royle has put it (2); a term that holds connotation but not denotation (Masschelein 2011: 114-116), dwelling in the gap between signifier and signified and imposing the logic of the empty signifier on all reality. According to Susan Bernstein,

the uncanny comes into being as a violation of the law of non-contradiction. Like a ghost, it "is" and "is not". The opposition between subject and object also falls away with the erosion of the structure of identity; subject and predicate can no longer keep their boundaries intact. (2003: 1113-1114)

Moreover, due to the identity between the opposites *heimlich/unheimlich*, it destabilizes all binary oppositions, the clear delimitation of which sustain the edifice of Enlightenment epistemology, undeciding the conflicting categories of presence and absence, sameness and difference, real and unreal, and dismantling the very foundations of "truth". It is also, of course, a displaced return that implies a temporal gap. The uncanny does not pertain to the content of the returned, but to the formal process of returning itself.

How could Greece, in its modern reconstitution both as the genealogical origin of the West and as a new nation, fit in some or all of these aspects of the uncanny? In the first place, as I have said before, it is essentially the figure or the name of a return. In the interplay between the imagined Greece of Antiquity and the contemporary *Rum Millet* under Ottoman rule, only a signifier remained, with no *proper* recognizable content. All kinds of emptying, erasure and adjustment operations were put into play to build up the meaning of the term in the course of its own performativity. The very inscription of the Ancient in modernity, according to Maria Koundoura, contains the cleansing of the monstrous, irrational components associated with barbarism and the Orient (Koundoura 2007: 20). There is thus an original schism in the presumed unity of what is Greek, reiterated in its dual placement at both the beginning and the endpoint of Western culture, which demonstrates, as Koundoura has said, "that that subject is not unified at all" (28-29). This fact necessarily entails important consequences, provided that we are dealing here with the institution of the very notion of origin as uniqueness. Such uniqueness is rendered impossible by the series of overlays haunting its articulation: Greece's emergence is already a re-appearance. It starts, as Derrida has said about spectres, by coming back (2006: 11); at the same time, it cannot be reduced to

fit the cultural scheme it comes to enhance – both Ancient and Modern Greece undermine the stable boundaries of the pairs civilization / barbarism, East / West, logos / myth, we / them. The temporality of its inscription is thus the paradoxical temporality of the ghost, as occurs with its spatiality: neither present nor absent, visible nor invisible, simultaneously an original and its repetition, it seems to elicit a *hauntology* through the same act by which it attempts to institute ontology. The temporal gap that marks the discontinuity of modernity while it marks continuity with the classic predecessors seems to be epitomized in the Greek idea, since it is the Greeks who, from a spectral position split between past and present, between death and life, pronounce the injunction to re-embody them by founding an order based on what they, from the outset, begin by destabilizing: the possibility of a teleology, of closure of meaning, of a perfect fit between language and the world. The project of the Enlightenment, symbolized by the Encyclopaedia, principally consists of the faith in the capacity of human subjectivity to summarize, classify and describe reality through signs, without remainders. The signifier “Greece”, however, embodies this remainder when trying to expunge it. The paradoxes of its contemporary denomination, as Philhellenism soon discovered, unsettled any conceptual delimitation or semantic transparency. The region known by the name of the spiritual core of European civilization was at this moment at the margins of Europe, inhabited by Orientals under Muslim rule who practised a schismatic Christianity and awakened a sense of strange familiarity in the Westerners who came to visit them. To render it familiar and restore the boundaries between Asia and Europe, modernity and antiquity, the self and the other, it needed to be de-familiarized, in the same way that the occidental subject, in order to find himself, needed to search in a Hellenism still foreign to Europe at that time. In the results of these operations, there is always an irreducible remainder that compulsively returns to provoke the uncanny mechanism of repetition in successive waves of appropriation and estrangement.

In 1809, Hegel wrote an essay “On Classical Studies” purporting to defend and establish the idea that the West had the obligation to study the Greeks if it wanted to achieve fullness of self. On the reverse side of what represents an expression of optimistic confidence in the need for a return to the Greeks, we might paradigmatically read the uncanny motifs of displaced repetition, decentering of the subject and disjointed temporality. The aim, for Hegel, was to rediscover who we are by establishing a distance with respect to ourselves, and to take up the path of the Greeks,

who converted the natural into the spiritual, in the opposite direction. This, by the way, is probably the process opposite to what modern Greeks have done, converting the disembodied spirituality of the classical legacy into the abject materiality of an undecomposing corpse, as we have seen in Byron's example, and as we will see later. The study of antiquity, for Hegel, thus provides a kind of productive self-alienation for the modern mind. He says:

This world [of classical antiquity] separates us from ourselves, but at the same time it grants us the cardinal means of returning to ourselves: we reconcile ourselves with it and thereby find ourselves again in it, but the self which we then find is the one which accords with the tone and universal essence of mind. (Quoted in Armstrong 2005: 15-16)

Later on, in his *Philosophy of History* Hegel, evoking the notions of "unhomely home" implicit in the *Un-heimliche*, states: "Among the Greeks we feel ourselves immediately at home [*heimatlich*], for we are in the region of Spirit" (Hegel 2007: 223). The modern European *Geist* both colonizes, or haunts, ancient (and not only ancient) Greece, and is colonized by it, destabilizing all the historical and ontological boundaries between antiquity and modernity, continuity and discontinuity, presence and absence, that underlie Western civilization (Armstrong 2005: 18-19). At the same time, we cannot forget that the German word *Geist*, the Hegelian Spirit, suggests as well the notion of "spectre", introducing thus the Greek world into a ghostly or phantasmatic realm in its association with modernity.

The relationship between modern Europe and Greece may thus be formulated in terms of derealization. This derealization may very well be the gesture instituting the modern subject, but it is at the same time a source of uncanniness. The text that underscores this aspect of the process is, of course, Freud's *A Disturbance of Memory on the Acropolis*. Conceived as an open letter to Romain Rolland and composed in 1936, it consists of the recollection of his experiences during his only visit to Athens, thirty-two years earlier. Freud begins by narrating the inexplicably low spirits that beset his brother and himself during a summer trip to Trieste, faced by the mere possibility of visiting Athens for a few days. Despite this disquieting prologue, however, the derealization and disturbance of memory take place the very moment they look upon the Acropolis for the first time. All the classical learning advocated by Hegel and extended throughout the Europe of the 19th century comes to his mind, producing in him a feeling of estrangement (*Entfremdungsgefühl*), for which he seeks

psychoanalytical explanations. As Ruth Johnson has pointed out, instead of feeling overwhelmed by the contemplation of something new, which would make this a sublime experience, Freud at the Acropolis is astonished by a sense of uncanny repetition (Johnson 2010: 22). He has never done this before, and yet he remembers it. He feels a strange familiarity before the symbol of the origins of Western civilization that he has so many times heard about at school. His astonishment has to do with the fact that the Acropolis, after all, exists: "So all this really does exist, just as we learned at school!" (Freud 1953b: 241). He immediately accounts for this reaction by resorting to the notion of "schism", clearly reminiscent of the motif of the double we have seen as a central occurrence of the uncanny. Two personalities emerge in him: one who is surprised at seeing something that, up to that moment, he had not believed existed, and another, surprised because he had never thought that the existence of Athens and the surrounding landscape could ever be doubted. The disturbance of memory thus consists of having wanted to be free from the estrangement (having wanted to obliterate the remainder that emerged in relation to Greece) by making a false affirmation about the past; i.e., that he did not believe in the existence of the place. This estrangement, Freud continues, has two versions: it either shows us a part of reality as estranged, or it shows us our own estrangement. This second case entails a phenomenon of depersonalization, namely, the blurring of the boundaries between the self and the other and the fragmentation of the modern dogma of unity in subjectivity, as we have seen in Hegel. In psychological terms, Freud affirms that the estrangement serves the purpose of self-defence, such that it could be comparable to repression. And, according to psychoanalytic theory, it is the return of the repressed, the basic feature of the uncanny, that establishes the repression in a displaced temporality.

The final reduction of the feeling experienced in the Acropolis to a personal sphere in relation to guilt – given that he had surpassed his father, who could never have dreamed of visiting Athens – nonetheless does not exhaust the dimensions of the uncanny reflected in the text. In his 1919 essay, another of the stimuli for the feeling was accounted for by "the appearance before us in reality of something that we have hitherto regarded as imaginary", given that, by this, "the distinction between imagination and reality is effaced" (1953a: 244). This may suggest another dimension of derealization associated with antiquity, since, was not the Acropolis contemplated by Freud a product of derealization itself, standing "on a much-disturbed site of memory"? (Armstrong 2005: 2). As a

result of the colonialist intervention of Philhellenism in Greece and the assumption of such conceptual intervention by the Greeks themselves, the post-classical reality of the country had been voided as far as possible in order to make it conform to the ancient past. The surroundings of the Acropolis had thus been cleansed of Turkish and Byzantine remains and the monument had been reconstructed as an official ruin according to the ideal and rather fictitious model of Philhellenism (Armstrong 2005: 2). Was not Freud thus correct in experiencing, in this place, an effacement of the boundaries between fiction and reality, to be surprised by the effective existence of the classical Acropolis? Is not the Acropolis he contemplated a purified and fictitious creation, an uncanny re-invention both haunted by the Byzantine and Ottoman memories extirpated from it, and haunting the present with a displaced, that is, modern image of antiquity? The spectres of post-classical remains disturb the monochord narrative of a continuity between the classical Acropolis and the modern model in two ways: on the one hand, by demonstrating the unattended factors of temporal discontinuity undermining the narrative of Hellenism and Philhellenism and, on the other, by revealing that the supposedly ancient Acropolis is already a displaced, deferred element rebuilt in the image that Modernity holds of Antiquity.

Freud's estrangement thus tried to repress these ghostly presences adhering to the monument itself. In a sense, he was symbolically evacuating the real Acropolis to replace it with the ideal, scholarly one. As in Byron's fragment, it is the return of the coarse materiality of the real thing that elicits uncanniness.

Exploring this idea, we might still read the uncanny associations of Greece in another way through this text. To do this, we must turn to a Lacanian view of the uncanny. The castration anxiety underlying this affect according to Freud, is, in Lacan's psychoanalysis, what constitutes the symbolic realm, instituting a gap caused by lacking the Real at the mirror stage as a fundamental difference that initiates the conventional circulation of signs. The uncanny emerges precisely when this lack of the Real is found to be lacking, when the Real emerges on the side of the symbolic filling in this gap and collapsing the signifying structure of reality (Lacan 2014: 41-42). In Freud's essay, as in Byron's fragment, we can, in effect, read the reappearance of the body of Greece or of the Acropolis in such a way. It is the realization that there, where the void of Hellenic culture was perceived as a constitutive stimulus, to be filled with the resuscitated culture of the West, a living corpse was already staring back at our side of the

mirror, dissociated from the image projected. Contemporary Greece, the actual existence of the Acropolis in a displaced context, was thus found to stand for the Real, the uncategorizable abjection unsettling European culture exactly at that point where its semiotic place in the imaginary realm had been voided and was expected to lack forever. This conflation of exteriority and interiority also points back to “extimacy”, a related notion in Lacanian psychoanalysis. In the same way Lacan considers that the centre of the subject is outside and that the subject is ex-centric, these phenomena of unexpected returns that mutually fracture the symbolic reality of the West and of Greece indicate that both are condemned to uncannily encounter the centre of their selves in the other, thus “undeciding” these two spheres, the delimitation of which is indispensable to the constitution of modernity. Whereas Europe has to institute Greece, an Oriental and alien territory at the moment, at the core of its configuration as a historical subject, Greece can only situate the notion of an occidental Hellenism that it also feels foreign at the centre of its modern redefinition. Such disrupted distinctions between outside and inside connoted by extimacy deconstruct Enlightenment thought. Modern Greece thus emerges as the irreducible surplus that haunts modernity and is haunted by it.

OUR VAMPIRES, (NOT) OURSELVES: THE UNDEAD ARE GREEKS (AND VICE VERSA)

At this point, uncannily enough, we have to resuscitate the vampire we met at the beginning, in Byron’s poem, and set a revenance and a repetition into play. To continue exploring the position of Greece as both an unsymbolizable excess and an implicit instance of western epistemology, we will now turn to Slavoj Žižek’s theory of the monster as the unsettling double of the modern subject. Like Greece and the uncanny, for him, the monster is not a remainder of the past, but a product of the Enlightenment itself. Even further, he properly considers it the subject of the Enlightenment, to the extent that this new subject represents the voiding of all symbolic substance:

The subject is the nonsubstance; he exists only as a nonsubstantial self-relating subject that maintains its distance toward inner-worldly objects. Only in monsters does this subject encounter the Thing that is his impossible equivalent —the monster is the subject himself, conceived as Thing. [...] The subject and the Thing are not two entities but rather the two sides, the two “slopes,” of one and the same entity. [...] Hegel radicalized Kant by conceiving the void of the Thing (its inaccessibility) as equivalent to the

very negativity that defines the subject; the place where phantasmagorical monsters emerge is thus identified as the void of the pure self. (Zizek 1991: 66-7)

Despite critical attempts to ascribe them ideological content, Zizek understands that the different monsters arising from this age do not have a prefigured and specific content, but rather form a screen capable of absorbing and organizing the existing anxieties by binding them to the same signifier. Before signifying anything, monsters embody “nonmeaning as such” (64).

From this point of view, vampires may be considered the epitome of the category “monsters of the Enlightenment”. As a perverse counterpart of the Kantian subject, a vampire is an individual devoid of specific content, detached from the human community of the living and reduced to the pure form of compulsive, repetitive activity. Besides, they emerged historically in the consciousness of the West during the eighteenth century. It is well known that in the 1730s, a series of vampirism cases in the Serbian territories that Austria had recently conquered from the Ottomans was investigated by imperial authorities.⁷ The dissemination of the reports sent by Austrian officials throughout the continent mobilized a great part of new scientific discourses, which were put to the test to reduce the phenomenon to the bounds of Enlightenment epistemology. Only in 1733, more than thirty medical, legal, physical or philosophical treatises dealing with the possibility that such an event could be authentic were published. The interest that the topic of the vampire held for rationalist discourse did not reside in its specific meaning, but rather precisely in the fact that it embodied a non-meaningful surplus haunting its whole epistemological edifice. Thus, it became the blank screen on which every discipline attempted to resolve the obstacles to its totalizing power. The vampire disrupted ontology by blurring the limits between some elementary binary pairs: life and death, subject and object, body and spirit. It was the figure of a compulsive return disjoining the notion that words, things and persons fit into a balanced symbolic order. At the same time, it was the excess unaccounted for, and even produced, in this semiotic operation.

It is thus not strange that, before the appearance of Slavic vampires in Europe, the first undead known in the West was the Greek *vrykolakas*.

7. For an account of these incidents at the border of Western and Eastern Europe, see Butler 2010: 27-50, and Hamberger 1992.

Since the run-up to modernity and the classic revival implicit in the Renaissance, the appearance of Hellenism has been accompanied by the return of this repressed abject body that seems to emblemize the uncanny revenance of Greece. During the first decade of the sixteenth century, Antonio de Ferraris already orientalized the Greeks, alluding to the "oriental tradition of the *vrykolakas*". (Ferraris 1558: 620-621). Philhellenism itself was born haunted by this figure, which, in Martin Kraus's *Turco-graecia* – the first work advocating the need for the Greeks, as the sources of western culture, to free themselves from the Ottoman yoke – came to raise issues about Greek cultural affiliation by blurring the boundaries between the barbaric Turks and the civilized Hellenes (1584: 490). From that time up to the beginnings of the twentieth century, the vampire would become the signifier binding together all the dimensions of the disturbing difference of Greece and its paradoxical position in European modernity. Backwardness, Balkanism, orientalism, and religious schismatism come together in this monster, who embodies the historical and ontological discontinuity between Ancient and Modern Greeks and the irreducible remainder of their uncanny persistence in the present.

During the seventeenth century, western references to the *vrykolakas* increased, mostly in theological treatises or European travellers' tales from the Levant, mainly aimed at allegorizing the otherness of Orthodox Christianity, thus orientalizing the Greeks (see García 2014: 118). Hence, when the Serbian cases of vampirism saw the light in the 1730s, the European public had been inculcated with the entire connection between the vampire and Greece. Even after the popularization of the Slavic specimens, the greater part of the most important treatise-writers on the subject, such as Augustine Calmet, Gerhard van Swieten, Danielle Huet or Voltaire, attributed the origin of this unworthy 18th-century superstition to the Greeks (García 2014: 121). Some of them even highlighted the unsettling paradox that it was among the Greeks, the fathers of rationalism and philosophy, that the oriental fable of vampires was born and from whence it infected Europe. Joseph Pitton de Tournefort, a French botanist who documented an epidemic of vampirism in Mykonos in 1700 in great detail, concluded his long report articulating the difference between a *proper* and *improper* Greece around the figure of the vampire. He thus inscribed a historical displacement in the core of Greekness governed by revenance itself: "After such an instance of folly, can we refuse to own that the present Greeks are no great Greeks and that there is nothing but ignorance and superstition among them?" (Tournefort 1717: 136). Voltaire expressed

a similar bewilderment. Disappointed by the fact that, after the impressive episodes in the 1730s, vampires had become a matter of controversy and debate in the *âge des Lumières*, he included an entry on this subject in his *Philosophical Dictionary*. He felt compelled to distinguish between a good Ancient Greece and a deviant contemporary one, on the sole basis of the presence or absence of the *vrykolakas*: “Who would believe that we derive the idea of vampires from Greece? Not from the Greece of Alexander, Aristotle, Plato, Epicurus and Demosthenes; but from Christian Greece, unfortunately schismatic” (Voltaire 1824: 305).

Although the first fictional vampires in European literature at the end of the 18th century were not marked by affiliation to a specific ethnic group, this fact changed from the beginning of the nineteenth century. As early as his *Bride of Corinth*, Goethe presented a case of vampirism in an Ancient Hellenic context (1859: 24-34), while it was English Philhellenes Byron and Polidori who began to configure the modern myth of the vampire by resorting to Greek traditions. The knowledge of the stories recounted by Tournefort and other travellers is evident in the majority of early narratives about this monster, often even including scholarly notes with specific quotations. It is probably no coincidence that the meeting in the summer of 1816 in Geneva, where the Gothic genre was reformulated, was attended by Philhellenes, and that it was from there that the prototype of modern vampire that would culminate in *Dracula* emerged. Expanding upon his allusion in *The Giaour*, Byron improvised a vampiric narrative that night set in Greece, subsequently entitled *Fragment of a Novel*, which was to remain unfinished. Polidori, in turn, took up the fragment and, on that basis, constructed what was to be the first milestone in the English literature on vampires, *The Vampyre*, published in 1819 under the name of Byron.⁸ The narrative represents very well the mutual haunting between Greece and Europe articulated by Philhellenism. The hero, a mysterious English aristocrat named Lord Ruthven – probably a reflection of Byron the Philhellene – becomes a vampire for the first time in Greece in the middle of Ancient ruins, following native traditions about the *vrykolakas* earlier despised in the novel as oriental fables denoting the decadence of modern Greeks. His first victim is a Greek girl, and his first resurrection takes place in the territory of Hellas, from where he returns to

8. Although the first editions were published under the name of Byron, the latter's rejection of the authorship of the novel led to the following editions being published as anonymous.

England to continue preying upon his compatriots. In this sense, at a time when Greece is presented as the authentic self of the West, this narrative problematizes such a Philhellenic affirmation and introduces the uncanny in the diffusion or blurring of the borders between Greece and Europe. To the extent that the being who shares both worlds is monstrous and predatory upon Europe, a European preoccupation for this mutual permeation is expressed. If, on the one hand, Ruthven devours Greek Ianthé from the viewpoint of an occidental Philhellene who drains the vitality of the current inhabitants of Hellas, he also devours the English sister of Aubrey from the viewpoint of a westerner contaminated by the orientalism that introduces disquieting barbaric customs into the civilized world, personified in vampirism.

Polidori's novel met with immediate success all over Europe, inaugurating the modern vampire narrative, and gave rise to a long series of sequels in novels and in theatre. It might not be a coincidence that, during the decade that saw Greece rise up against Ottoman power to achieve its modern resurrection, the theatres and bookshops of half the continent were inundated by Ruthven, that half-Greek vampire allegorizing the mutual haunting between both spaces (see Stuart 1994: 41-129). The Hellenic origins and setting of the monster were nonetheless progressively cleansed, either interiorized in intra-European spaces of Romantic connotation, like Scotland, or relegated to the alien margins of the Slavic Orient, its Greekness almost completely forgotten by the time Stoker published *Dracula*. The in-betweenness of Greece seemed to be too disturbing for the West as the source of such a discursive otherness.

That the vampire was still a signifier articulating the discussions on Modern Greek identity during the nineteenth century becomes clear, for example, from the fact that historian Jules Michelet appears to make a marginal comment on the polemics of Fallmerayer⁹ in a footnote to Goethe's *Bride of Corinth*, where he writes that "Goethe, so noble in the form, is not as noble in the spirit. He spoils the wonderful story soiling Greekness with a horrible Slavic idea" (Michelet 1966: 23). Travel ac-

9. In his *Geschichte der Halbinsel Morea während des Mittelalters (History of the Morea in the Middle Ages, 1830)*, Jakob Philipp Fallmerayer maintained that the Hellenic population of the Southern Balkans had been replaced during the early Middle Ages by Slavic peoples, and had therefore ethnically nothing in common with the Ancient Greeks. This argument was understood in the newly *constituted* Modern Greek nation as a direct attack on its legitimacy, and subsequently contested through diverse discursive operations for a few decades. For a history and analysis of this controversy, see Gourgouris 1996: 140-152.

counts, narratives and ethnographic studies in Europe and America continued to turn the *vrykolakas* into the token of Greece's difference and impurity until well into the twentieth century. The only horror film dedicated to the Greek vampire, as far as I know, Mark Robson's *Isle of the Dead* (1945), shows this sign at the beginning, once more allegorizing the degeneration, backwardness, orientalism and historic discontinuity of modern Hellenism in his figure:

Under conquest and oppression the people of Greece allowed their legends to degenerate into superstition: the Goddess Aphrodite giving way to the Vorvolaka. This nightmare figure was very much alive in the minds of the peasants when Greece fought the victorious war of 1912. (Robson, 1945)

In the internal discourse of Greek nation building, the vampire and the general scheme of revenance have also operated as symptoms. One of the objectives of the founding fathers of the nation was precisely to obliterate the dimensions of uncanniness associated with modern Hellenism and to try to conform to the ideal projected by Western Philhellenism. Proving that Greece was no revenant spelled out one of its most dogged efforts; hence, the insistence on cultural continuity and the exclusion of everything that could denote historic break. The first few years also sought to purge the vampire, an emblem of discontinuity *par excellence* as well as a symbol of the uncanniest aspects of continuity. In the work *Atakta*, a seminal dictionary of Modern Greek by Adamantios Korais, one of the founding fathers of the new state, the author included the entry "vrykolakas" but tried to endow the phenomenon with continuity, attributing a classic etymology to the term and retracing the tradition to Homeric times (Korais 1832: 85). Both false etymology and genealogy were subsequently adopted by many Greek and foreign ethnographers to sustain the doctrine of survivalism. But the vampire, who continued to return time and again in epidemics throughout Greece, provoked shame above all and embodied the obstacle of ancestral superstition that differentiated Greece from the West in the national discourse, and hence, its incapacity to achieve modernity. Thus, its existence was silenced while the process of building an identity modelled on Antiquity advanced, as though this entailed burying it again. Nevertheless, the need to revindicate the intermediate strata of Hellenism soon arose following the Fallmerayer controversy and the demoticist revival, giving new impulse to ethnographic studies and allowing it to resuscitate anew. Starting from the 1870s, the term *vrykolakas* began to reappear with relative frequency in all kinds of Greek publications; not

only in folkloric texts seeking to unearth contemporary traditions of Hellenism, but also in literature. Between the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, we find a series of short stories dedicated to vampires and general phenomena of revenance in Greek literature (see García 2014: 128-9). Cultural continuity is of course a source of comfort and national identity, but it can also be a source of anxiety. In the Greek case, it not only includes Antiquity and Byzantium, but also that challenging interval that is the principal emblem of the historical gap dissociating Hellenism: the Ottoman past. It thus entails a haunting and haunted continuity, the uncanniness of which is embodied in the abject body of the undead. The compulsive, undesired return of such spurious corpses breaks the ideal mirror of the self that it is sought to build. The vampires in those fictions perfectly represent the return of the repressed, since they almost always bring with them strata of Greek identity denied in the process of unifying the national narrative. None of them is a pure Greek conforming to the ideal of Hellenicity projected from the West: they bear a mark of disturbing otherness that betrays an anxiety, not of difference, but of sameness. The vampires are usually ottomanized or slaviced Greeks, traitors to the national cause who conspire or deal with Turks, who rest on the Sabbath like Jews and, in general, exteriorize some trait of impure Greekness, or are incapable of functioning within the moral and epistemological universe of the community. Unlike what occurs in European literature, in this setting they do not erupt into the collective space from the outside, but rather emerge from inside the group to prey upon their friends and relatives. Often, they provoke terror, not only because of their unexpected appearance, but also due to their efforts to maintain sexual relations and prolong a lineage impure for Hellenism, showing up to what point they emblemize the uncanniness of fluid identities in a national project inherently haunted from its inception (García 129-30).

CONCLUSION: GOTHIC GREECE, OR THE ECONOMY OF REVENANCE

The *vrykolakes* disappeared again after this fleeting revival, and today their long history is practically unknown in Greece. Perhaps they have been excluded from the national discourse not only because they represent superstition and backwardness, but also because they embody the unsettling structure of Greek uncanniness itself and display the constructed nature of the nation. What is sure is that a certain economy of revenance, if not in the form of the vampire, may be traced in certain aspects of Greek culture up to the present, not only in the alternating suc-

cession of layers of disemia that will never cease to be haunted by their opposites,¹⁰ but also in some narrative structures repeated in cinema or in literature.¹¹

Summarizing, the Gothic and the uncanny reveal themselves to be an effective mode for re-reading Greekness and, especially, for exposing the coextensive and inextricable character of its two dimensions, both of them central in the construction of Western modernity: on the one hand, the formal configuration and negotiations of Modern Greek nation- and identity-building during the last two hundred years and, on the other, the centrality of a phantasmatic image of (Ancient) Greece in the modern conceptualization of European culture. Haunting and revenance as the intrinsic but unconscious structures governing the historical institution of Greekness disclose the fissures and the rifts inherent from the outset in the thinking – even in the thinkability itself – of the origin.

10. For the notion of ‘disemia’ regarding Modern Greece, see Herzfeld 1987: 111-122.

11. Further research could easily trace those structures in some major achievements of Modern Greek literature and cinema, and re-read those texts as much more profound national allegories in the light of the uncanny: for example, the poem *Lambras* (1829) by the national poet Dionysios Solomos, which thematizes revenance; the inaugural Greek short story “My Mother’s Sin” (Georgios Vizyinos, 1881), where a structure of repetition compulsion and successive revenants is at play; the Nobel Prize Yorgos Seferis’ poem “The Marble Head’ (1935), a national allegory about the weight of the Classical burden for Modern Greece that could be reclassified in the Gothic genre of hauntings, uncanny corporality and disembodied organs; or, more recently, the film *Alps* (Yorgos Lanthimos, 2011), a surrogate story of vampires, undeadness and displaced repetitions.

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