"Cinema in its purest form could be put into the service of propaganda." - Francis Ford Coppola

The Propaganda of
DRACULA

INTRODUCTION: The concept of Dracula as a vampire is first popularly attributed to Bram Stoker. Most people are familiar with the historical figure of Vlad Tepes or "Vlad the Impaler" as Dracula.

But did you know that Karl Marx put Vlad Tepes and vampirism in the same English text 12-13 years before Bram Stoker, and that Stoker was influenced by William Morris, who was an early English-language devotee of Karl Marx?

Did you know that Russia's first historical novel was probably about Dracula and that Tsar Ivan IV (a.k.a. "Ivan the Terrible") took on many of the Dracula legends to his own mythology, and this may have been a form of popular political messaging?

In the modern day, Dracula has been associated with filmmakers who have connections to nation-state propaganda.

Like the curse of the vampire, Dracula as propaganda is a contagion that has survived the ages growing stronger as it feeds on bad blood dividing humanity.

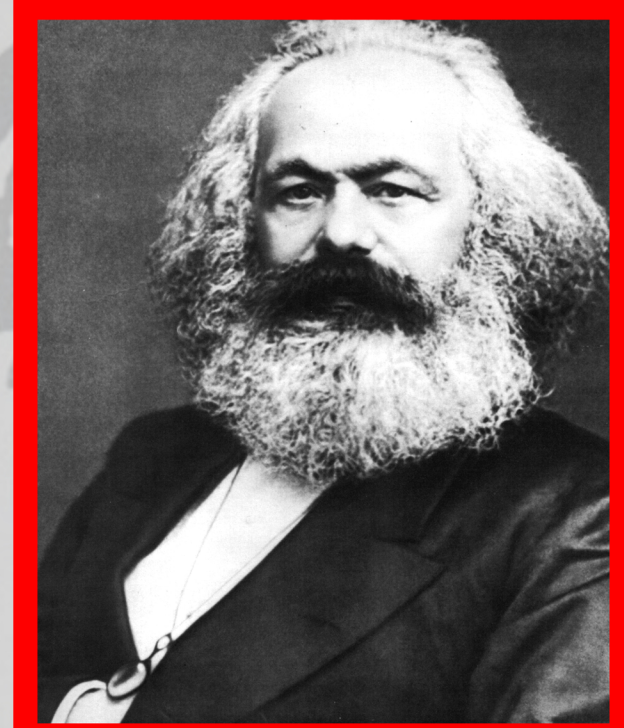# An all-star cast in a timeline of TERROR!

VLAD THE IMPALER — 1462

"Original Dracula"

Vlad Tepes (a.k.a. "Vlad the Impaler" or "Dracula", 1428/1431–1476/1477) was a Wallachian boyar known for 'psychological warfare', specifically for impaling his Turkish enemies on spikes in a fierce 1462 battle (1). 15th century German publicists spread darkly-humorous tales of Vlad Tepes' cruelty throughout Europe. A most famous example is of two Turkish diplomats who came before Tepes and refused to remove their hats for religious purposes. Vlad Tepes is said to have ordered the hats fatally nailed to their heads. These "Dracula" stories were brought to Russia and transcribed by the monk Efrosin (notably the original text from which he worked had been critical of Tepes' abandonment of Orthodoxy). Efrosin's manuscript became one of Russia's earliest "belletristic texts", and some Russian historians have called it "Russia's first historical novel", which circulated from the late 15th to 18th century (2).

IVAN THE TERRIBLE — 1547

"Tsar Dracula"

Ivan Vasilyevich (a.k.a. "Ivan IV" or "Ivan the Terrible", 1530-1584) became "Tsar of all the Russias" in 1547 and applied the Vlad Tepes stories to his own leadership via the "tsar-Dracula" literary convention (3). In these stories, Turkish ambassadors were replaced with Italian or French ambassadors for example. Ivan also became known as an impaler (4). Ivan was known negatively in Europe as "Ivan the Tyrant". Within Russia, however it was argued that Ivan IV's cruelty promoted order because of the terror, and there was a connection drawn between the Tsar's sadism and his divine privilege as a ruler ordained by God. The darkly-humorous Dracula tales where the Tsar humiliated nobles and traitors is hypothesized to have been a form of political impression management (4). Ivan IV was also tied to "third Rome" mythology which saw Moscow as the seat of Orthodoxy following the fall of Constantinople.

KARL MARX — 1886

"The Vampire of Capital"

Karl Marx (1818-1883) wrote Das Kapital in 1867 and it was translated to English in 1886. Some scholars have called it a 'gothic' novel (5). Marx was the first person to mention the historical character of Vlad Tepes (as a "Wallachian boyard"), a.k.a. Dracula, and the concept of vampirism in the same English novel. (The first person to mention Dracula in English was William Wilkinson in a book entitled: "An Account of the Principalities of Wallachia and Moldova" (1820). A footnote defines Dracula as the word for "devil" in the Wallachian language and was given as a surname to anyone who "rendered himself conspicuous either by courage, cruel actions, or cunning".) Marx made at least three references to vampirism in the context of blood and capitalism in Das Kapital, for example: "capital is dead labour which, vampire-like, lives only by sucking living labour, and lives the more, the more labour it sucks" (6).

BRAM STOKER — 1897

"Gothic Dracula"

Bram Stoker (1847-1912) published "Dracula" in 1897, and it is considered the epitome of gothic horror. Stoker was influenced by the gothic revivalist and socialist William Morris who had an early copy of Das Kapital (5). Stoker's "Dracula" was the first book to specifically make the character of Dracula into a vampire. It can also be seen to be an allegory of Marxism by some scholars (and is often used as a template for Marxist literary analysis) (7). Stoker's book may possess both anti-Semitic and "Russophobic" imagery (8, 9) which were also themes in Karl Marx' work. It has been argued that Stoker's experience in the post-Crimean war era influenced his views, as well as the attitudes of his brother who was a medical doctor for the Ottoman army. Stoker's "Dracula" can be seen as an attempt to use literary terror to protect the "cultural purity" of the English language, women, and blood (9).

ORSON WELLES — 1938

"Anti-fascist Dracula"

Orson Welles (1915-1985) produced a radio version of Stoker's "Dracula" in summer of 1938, little more than 3 months before his famous "War of the Worlds" broadcast. The Welles "Dracula" was notable for its sexualized tone (and perhaps feministic liberation?) (10). Around this time, Welles produced an adaptation of Joseph Conrad's gothic "Heart of Darkness" which is a critique of imperialism (and would have been Welles first movie, with a focus on anti-fascism). Welles had made Marxist and anti-fascist plays since 1936 (see "The Cradle Will Rock" and "Julius Caesar"), and had narrated the communist-inspired propaganda film "The Spanish Earth" in 1937. Within the next few years, Welles was connected closely to both British and Russian propagandists, figures like H.G. Wells, Louis Dolivet, and Sir Alexander Korda, and when he visited Dublin in 1951 he was regaled by protesters as "Stalin's Star".

FRANCIS COPPOLA — 1992

"Revanchist Dracula"

Francis Ford Coppola (1939-Present) made his film "Bram Stoker's Dracula" in 1992. Like Welles' version, it is notable for its sexuality. The film opens with Dracula impaling Turks and the fall of Constantinople in 1462 (which did not appear in Stoker's book). Inspired by Welles' failure, Coppola also adapted "Heart of Darkness" as "Apocalypse Now" in 1979. (The Kurtz character, who impales heads has parallels with Dracula.) "Apocalypse Now" is an anti-imperial film about America inspired by proven Russian "active measures" from the 1960's-1970's (11). Coppola's first film credit was for a redubbing of the 1959 Russian sci-fi film "The Heaven's Call". He was inspired to get into directing by the work of the Russian propagandist Sergei Eisenstein. In 2005, Coppola was presented with a Russian Golden Eagle film award directly by Vladimir Putin for his films "that so accurately tell of the horrors of war" (12).

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CONCLUSION: The most popular Dracula stories chart the character's evolution from a 15th century tyrant king to a late 20th century sex symbol. These narratives may be interpreted as strategic communications which convey(ed) contemporary political objectives relative to cultural identities of Wallachians, Russians, the British, and Jews. The repeated ''narrative hijacking'' of Dracula for purposes of strategic communication and propagandizing – first in the Russian language in the 16th century, then in English in the 19th century, and arguably in Russian (via English) once again in the 20th-- is a consistent theme from this analytical perspective. Dracula is propaganda.

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