

Devouring Books: Vampires as Literary Consumers

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How does one pass the time when you have centuries at hand? Well, read, of course! Vampires love books, and the references to them reading books *in* books abound, as does their appearances as historical or literary figures, also in books. This includes vampire novels with historic authors appearing anachronistically, or otherwise the refashioning of beloved characters, for instance: Michael Thomas Ford's *Jane Bites Back* (2009), now part of the Jane Fairfax series, featuring Jane Austen; Matt Haig's *The Radleys* (2011), with Lord Byron as a vampire; and Amanda Grange's *Mr. Darcy, Vampyre* (2009) with a reworking of that character from Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (1813). In addition to these few, specific examples, we have other opportunities to witness the vampire as a longstanding voracious reader and producer of text. These range from Anne Rice's *Vampire Chronicles*, beginning with *Interview With the Vampire* (1976), to Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight Saga*, beginning with the first novel *Twilight* (2005). These examples, however, are foregrounded with the origins of their respective vampires, his/her/their subsequent development over the centuries, and their intrinsic ties to literature, storytelling and literary production.

To refine this further, we can take a closer look at two specific contemporary texts that incorporate vampires consuming literature for literal and metaphorical sustenance to a degree worth exploring. This examination expands the tradition of the readerly or reading vampire, or of vampiric literature. From this analysis, we have an alternative avenue to consider what it means to feed and stay undead. One of these texts, Elizabeth Kostova's *The Historian* (2005), is very adult. As a counterpoint, we shall look at an early reader series by Éric Sanvoisin, *The Ink*

Drinker/Le Buveur d'Encre, beginning with the first book, *The Ink Drinker/Le Buveur d'Encre*, published in the original French in 1996. Juxtaposing these we see in stark relief vampires as not only lovers of literature, but as creatures whose very existence is sustained by books. This both harms and heals them, along the lines of the Derridean *pharmakon*, and opens up a new way of appreciating the undead. Further, we can see these vampires as addicted to words, specifically the printed word.

Seeing vampires as addicts and drug pushers is an important and established observation in criticism. Recently, scholars such as Kristina Aikens (2009), Thomas Fahy (2018), Ross G. Forman (2016), and Roy Parkhurst (2011) have argued that the vampire is in fact such a figure, with Forman and Parkhurst even utilizing the word 'parasite', all to be discussed in this essay. For a more complete history of the vampire's connection to not only parasitic behavior but to infection and disease, one can turn both to Aikens's 'Battling Addictions in *Dracula*' (2009) and Nick Groom's in-depth study, *The Vampire: A New History* (2018). Groom argues that the vampire is associated with plague and disease as he traces the figure over centuries. He notes with regard to the vampire that 'fears of tainted blood were heightened with the dread of contagion' (2018: 20). The vampire's predatory nature is further signified by his/her/their territorial predilection, which Groom also discusses in his book. Further nuances emerge when Stephen D. Arata (1990) points out the invasion of England by Count Dracula in Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), a point taken up later in this essay. To date, *Dracula* has frequently occupied this addiction and disease critical space, with excellent analyses of the Count as a disease-carrying invader, paying particular attention to blood contagion and the role of gender.¹ Much criticism, such as those noted above, has been framed around the novel, which serves as an invaluable impetus for thinking about the texts under consideration in this article.

Kostova's *The Historian* allows us to access this critical backdrop quite specifically as the novel exists in a parallel space to *Dracula*. Reviews of the novel pinpoint this connection, and the reader is aware of it almost immediately upon opening the book, with the epigraph from *Dracula* appearing in Part One.² However, it is through focusing on literary consumption in *The Historian* that the theme of devouring ink emerges in a different light. Much of *Dracula* criticism focuses on the different types of text that constitute the novel and astutely engages with the various narrative voices that betray the narrators' predilections and gender roles.³ However, in Kostova's novel we see a vampire who himself consumes his identity and absorbs himself with texts in a concerted effort to curate his legacy.

An appropriate and intriguing linking from Kostova's adult vampire who loves to read is the more light-hearted juvenile vampire tale, *The Ink Drinker*. Here we meet vampires who literally drink ink to stay alive, but at the same time take intense pleasure from consuming it. In this juxtaposition of adult novel and early reader book the idea of vampire as consumer leaps out, allowing us to further explore the theme of addiction via a devouring of ink. This emerges in sharp contrast to the longstanding grim image of the vampire as a drug addict who consumes blood to attain a 'high', as explicitly argued by Thomas Fahy (2018) who intriguingly notices vampiric addiction to food in 1980s texts and films. While *Dracula* in *The Historian* unquestionably feeds on human blood in the traditional manner of the vampire and eschews human food, *The Ink Drinker* provides us with a unique way of approaching 'addiction': ink.

It proves useful to first contextualize *The Historian* and *The Ink Drinker* series against the backdrop of vampire and Gothic literary tradition. The very origins of the vampire, in the form of oral stories and government and military letters from Central and Eastern Europe, underscores the interplay between vampires and text. Ironically, as Erik Butler notes, the 'vampire in its first

recorded form [is] a dead member of an illiterate, rural community' (2010: 5). These early stories of revenants were documented in German and Latin, and one can detect the switching between written languages and spoken dialects. It is due to these early commissions, such as Dom Augustin Calmet's 1746 treatise, that the 'reality' of vampires perpetuated further sightings and reports that proved difficult to debunk (Miller 2005: 15-16). From its origins as an illiterate revenant, the vampire swiftly moved to a coveted place in European literature whilst continuing its role as a 'political' trope, according to Nick Groom in '*Dracula's* Pre-History: The Advent of the Vampire' (2018: 22). This privileged spot was significantly shaped by John Polidori's *The Vampyre* (1819). Its depiction of the vampire, Lord Ruthven, as remarkably similar to Lord Byron, Polidori's employer, inaugurates a rich tradition of the vampire as not only literate, but educated, sophisticated and well-versed in culture and history, not to mention literature. Texts, in other words, become part of the vampire's ensemble, and vampires even masquerade as literary figures.

The eighteenth- and nineteenth-century vampire tales — inclusive of French, English and German texts — emerge tied to 'subterfuge', as with Polidori's story. Butler's point is well-taken in this regard: 'whenever mention is made of vampires, traffic in deception is already taking place on a linguistic level, which amplifies accompanying themes of subterfuge and ruse in the fiction' (2010: 5). As Butler later argues, even in their very appearances as literary figures vampires are elusive due to their 'facelessness', which accounts for their cultural longevity (2010: 54). Certainly, the early literary vampire is inextricably tied to the rise of the Gothic novel in the eighteenth century. As Fred Botting notes, the Gothic begins with 'fiction as fabricated history' with Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* in 1764 (2001: 4). Here we see a bridge to the oral (and later, written) vampire reports where the opposite takes place: 'fabricated history'

(notwithstanding the purported conviction of the observers) then segues to ‘fiction’. Despite this inverted point of origin with the vampires compared to Botting’s model, the overtures of the Gothic novel are absolutely in keeping with the literary vampire’s development. Botting further observes the appeal of romance novels in this era (2001: 8-9) as well as the mirroring of society with the bourgeois and aristocracy (2001: 5-6). Still, the vampire as evolutionary figure is marked by ‘metamorphoses’, according to Sam George, as ‘vampire narratives too are infected...and mutate and cross-breed between genres’ (2013: 5). Here we can acknowledge the vampire’s flexibility between poetry, prose and drama over the course of the centuries.

While the vampire’s early origins are inextricably tied to the production of fiction out of ‘reality’, one must turn to the interweaving of vampires with literary production in later centuries. Returning to *The Vampyre* (1819) and its oft-cited inspiration, Lord Byron, we see here fiction and reality blurring, author and vampire. It is this combination that proves to be so persuasive to the reader, as observed by Conrad Aquilina: ‘[the] Byronic vampire contemplates his presence as outsider in the fleeting world of mortal time, and finds solace in autobiography and parody’ (2013: 33). With a compelling figure such as this, so grounded in literary fiction and reality, not to mention other genres as Aquilina notes, it is small wonder that the reader is beckoned to see vampires as literary consumers and inherently connected to reading.

Of course, key to understanding the trajectory of vampire literature is the ur-vampire text, *Dracula*. Bram Stoker’s epistolary novel has at its core myriad forms and layers of text. The novel itself is an amalgamation of diary entries, newspaper clippings, phonograph recordings, telegrams and other types of correspondence. Rebecca A. Pope’s essay, ‘Writing and Biting in *Dracula*’ (1990), aptly notes the richness of these layers and their masterful interplay with gender, (re)writing and sexuality. Harriet Hustis further notes that the novel is a ‘textual matrix’

(2001: 21). In addition, one can see in analyses of the novel by Hustis (2001) and Sunggyung Jo (2019) that the reader is themselves incorporated in the novel's textual network. Hustis notes that Mina's role is collapsed with that of the reader, and takes as a point of development Wolfgang Iser's theories of reading (2001: 27).⁴ Jo intriguingly puts forth the concept of 'vampiric reading' as 'an obsessive (even excessive) love of reading texts, a love of books that may appear constructive at the beginning but, precisely because it is exciting, proves dangerous and destructive in the end' (2019: 226). Jo's analysis couples this with a focus on the reader's desire, particularly pertaining to *Dracula*. We see that the role of reader — and as a 'vampiric reader', to use Jo's term — is linked to the production of the novel's story. Garrett Stewart goes even further, writing that 'read through once, *Dracula* is about the writing-to-death of the vampiric. Read through once again, even if simultaneously, it is about the reading-to-death of the vampiric, in a calculated reversal of the nosferatu's own territorializing techniques' (1994: 15). Here we see with even more clarity how invested the reader can be with *Dracula* and perhaps, by extension, other vampiric texts.

With *Dracula*'s structure thus acknowledged, as well as theories of readership of the novel, one can observe Count Dracula himself as a literary consumer. Dracula is introduced as a reader almost immediately: Jonathan Harker notices in Dracula's study volumes of books, many linked directly to London, an observation that we quickly learn is integral to the plot. As Johan Höglund argues, Dracula's castle is a 'contact zone' of cultures (2012: 5). Jonathan describes, 'in the library I found, to my great delight, a vast number of English books, whole shelves full of them, and bound volumes of magazines and newspapers' (Stoker [1897] 2011: 26). Dracula is an avid reader, learning about his future city vicariously through books, as well as teaching himself English:

“these friends” — and he laid his hands on some of the books — “have been good friends to me, and for some years past, ever since I had the idea of going to London, have given me many, many hours of pleasure [. . .] But alas! as yet I only know your tongue through books. To you, my friend, I look that I know it to speak”. (27)

As the reader well knows, Dracula, armed with the English language and deeds to London properties, is keen to embark upon his travels, leaving his books behind in his castle. Jo notes that Dracula’s love of books is in fact ‘fetishistic’ as he urges Jonathan Harker to read the books available in his study (2019: 228).

Subsequent vampire novels continue the theme of vampire as reader, bringing us to the primary texts under discussion here. Anne Rice’s *Vampire Chronicles* and Stephenie Meyer’s *Twilight Saga*, two recent ‘classics’, illustrate this and form a bridge from the nineteenth century and the Gothic novel. Beginning with the oft-criticized yet wildly popular latter novel, protagonist Bella Swan is an avid reader who becomes transfixed by the vampire Cullen family. Once she is herself a vampire, she observes that they do not sleep — here breaking with the idea of vampires resting in coffins during the daylight — so they have ample time to read their vast collection of literature. In *Twilight*, the first novel in the *Saga*, she visits Carlisle Cullen’s study in the family’s home:

Edward opened the door to a high-ceilinged room with tall, west-facing windows. The walls were paneled again, in a darker wood — where they were visible. Most of the wall space was taken up by towering bookshelves that reached high above my head and held more books than I’d ever seen outside a library. (Meyer 2005: 334)

Bella herself enjoys reading nineteenth-century novels, with repeated references throughout the *Saga* to Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847).

While the *Saga* does not dwell on literature and vampires more explicitly beyond this, it is evident that these very modern vegetarian vampires love to read. We can further reflect on the fan of the vampire as a consumer insofar as the *Saga* emerged as a franchise, stoked by and fed on by fans. As Kristine Moffat and Gareth Schott point out in their introduction to their edited collection, *Fanpires: Audience Consumption of the Modern Vampire*, such a 'plethora' of vampire products 'is indicative of fan demands, a heightened audience appetite for all things vampiric' (2011: 5). Indeed, the *Saga* and other such franchises, like *True Blood* (2008-14) and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003), are examples of this other type of 'consuming' behavior.

In one of the most significant contemporary vampire series, Anne Rice's *Vampire Chronicles*, we see characters dedicated to books to a degree arguably not achieved by the Cullens. Vampires Louis de Pointe Du Lac and Lestat de Lioncourt love to read. Let us turn to the core original three novels of the *Chronicles* as a point of discussion. Lestat, who had a falling out with his father over books, is a collector. For instance, in *The Queen of the Damned* (1988), Daniel, the interviewer from *Interview with the Vampire*, is on the search for Lestat, now a modern day rockstar. Daniel tracks down one of the now decrepit houses Lestat owned and occupied in New Orleans. He observes:

the moon had been high, shining its full white light here and there through the oak branches. He had seen clearly the rows and rows of books stacked to the ceiling, making up the very walls of every room. No human could or would have done such a mad and methodical thing. (Rice 1988: 84)

It is Louis, though, the sensitive vampire in the tradition of the mid-nineteenth-century British vampire, Varney, as crafted by James Malcolm Rymer, who marks his existence with books in a less manic way. Louis even sees way of connecting with Claudia, his vampire daughter, through books. In *Interview with the Vampire*, Louis reminisces his domestic life with Lestat and Claudia in New Orleans: ‘we kept to ourselves. We had our adjustments. Books filled our long flat from floor to ceiling in row after row of gleaming leather volumes, as Claudia and I pursued our natural tastes and Lestat went about his lavish acquisitions’ (Rice 1976: 105).

Despite their shared love of books, Lestat and Louis maintain sharp degrees of difference between them. Significantly, Louis prefers to narrate his story in *Interview with the Vampire* and have Daniel transcribe it, whereas Lestat writes his own autobiography in *The Vampire Lestat* (1985). In other words, both vampires not only treasure books, but take an active role in creating them as an avenue to share their life stories. Louis and Lestat have different motives, but nevertheless both seek to preserve their histories in print. Of course, there is the risk that they will not be believed. As Ildikó Limpár observes, ‘the vampire Louis, however, does not give any further testimony to support his story; his words will either be believed as true or rejected as a hoax by the reading public, while only the interviewer will have the opportunity to ascertain the validity of the interview’ (2018: 279). Here we the reader are asked to believe these stories, in keeping with the idea of the reader’s role outlined earlier by Stewart (1994) and Hustis (2001). Going one step further, we can connect the engaged reader with the early reports of vampires that were seen variously as ‘true’ or as ‘hoaxes’, thus tracing Rice’s work to a centuries-old trajectory of vampire literature.

In the abovementioned texts, books surround vampires in their homes: Dracula’s study, the Cullens’ mansion, Louis and Lestat’s New Orleans townhouse. Books serve as a means of

passing time, provide a vicarious look at human life and preserve identity, especially so with the *Vampire Chronicles*. These vampire novels are the descendants of the eighteenth-century Gothic, and within this influential genre we can access the significance of the printed word. As Alan S. Ambrisco observes, trauma and repetition form the ‘kernel’ of the Gothic novel (2015: 24); Ambrisco situates *The Historian* within this tradition. Suzanne Keen similarly describes *The Historian* as a Gothic novel (2014: 126). Trauma — seen or unseen, spoken or unspoken — thematically pairs the Gothic novel with the vampire tale. In other ‘words’, books are critical not only to the development of the Gothic (and in turn, the vampire novel), but they are also essential to some of these vampires themselves.

The Ink Drinker/Le Buveur d’Encre series by Éric Sanvoisin are illustrated chapter books designed for early readers (ages 7-11 and cycle 3, according to the publisher) and originally written in French.⁵ Their premise is as follows: Draculink is a centuries-old vampire who becomes allergic to blood, the consumption of which results in a stomachache. Fortunately, he discovers that he can drink ink via a straw as sustenance in lieu of blood. So, what better place to dine than a bookstore? This is where he meets a central character in the series, Odilon, whose father owns a bookshop. Odilon is of an indeterminate age in the first book where we meet him, but we can situate him approximately between 7 and 11 given his degree of independence and likely appeal to that age group of readers. Odilon has not inherited his father’s love of books. In fact, he despises them: ‘I hate them [. . .] Dad won’t let me tidy up or even touch anything. He says paper doesn’t last long in my hands. I guess I do like the sound of paper being torn. It’s like music to my ears’ (Sanvoisin 1998: 2-3). Regrettably, for this book-hating boy whose job is to remain vigilant for shoplifters, Draculink has targeted the shop. The plot unfolds when Odilon, in pursuing this mysterious stranger from the bookshop to his ink bottle-shaped burial vault, is

marked by the vampire's bite. The vampire does not take his blood, of course, but instead transmits his love of ink by means of his name, 'Draculink', appearing on Odilon's arm. The ensuing three books, which form the focus of this paper, cover plot elements anchored by the introduction of Carmilla, Draculink's niece, a girl the same age as Odilon. Her name is a clear allusion to the eponymous female vampire in J. Sheridan Le Fanu's novella, *Carmilla* (1872). In *The Ink Drinker* series, the sincere relationship between Carmilla and Odilon provides a touching undertone.

As the series is ongoing, with a new book by Sanvoisin appearing approximately every year, I will focus on the first four books in which we meet the primary characters. These are also the only four books translated into English by Georges Moroz, hence the English — and not French — quotes in this article and English translation publication dates. Suffice to say, as the series unfolds the ink drinkers' experiences multiply in entertaining new ways. They drink everything from dictionaries, to orthographic errors, coloured ink and Chinese ink — not to mention e-books. Martin Matje's colourful illustrations in the first four books underscore their whimsical nature. As of 2022 there are twelve *The Ink Drinker* early reader books, with hopefully more to come from Sanvoisin's pen. Sanvoisin engages with his young readers; in his blog, he answers questions such as why he is a writer, how old he is, and what his favorite book is (the answer: *The Ink Drinker*). The question 'Aimez-vous les vampires?' (Do you like vampires?) elicits this response: 'Oui, mais seulement en plein jour' (Yes, but only in the daylight) (Blog: np).⁶ This same playfulness appears in the stories themselves, notwithstanding the double meanings of the 'ink'.

In *The Ink Drinker* series, the very consumption of ink serves several purposes. One, in keeping with vampire children's books, the intake of blood is glossed over or it is turned into a

substitute. Other examples include picture books like Ross Collins' *Dear Vampa* (2009), which avoid any mention of the Pire vampire family consuming blood as they cope with their new werewolf neighbors, the Wolfsons. Anne Marie Pace's picture book *Vampirina Ballerina* (2012) narrates the story of Vampirina's desire to be, you guessed it, a ballerina. As part of the story, we see Vampirina drinking a red substance out of a bowl, with the message that this is a healthy meal for a fledgling dancer. The plethora of children's vampire-themed picture books is too voluminous to mention. Notable is that this non-threatening blood consumption has extended to young adult franchises, including the aforementioned *Twilight Saga* as well as *The Vampire Diaries* books and television series. While the vampires in these texts can drink human blood from the vein, animal blood or blood obtained from blood banks are presented as acceptable substitutes. In their introduction to *Growing Up with Vampires* (2018), Simon Bacon and Katarzyna Bronk observe that there are reasons why vampires in children's literature deserve critical attention. They write that in 'narratives meant for children', vampires 'equally embody the notion of being trapped in a world they have no control over and yet are not of that world; something that children trying to find their own place in the world can often experience' (2018: 3). As the wide-ranging and insightful essays in the collection attest, not only do vampires appear in fascinating iterations in children's literature and films, but these vampires continue to evolve. What many of these vampires have in common is a much gentler 'scare' than the vampires who appear in literature intended for adults. Notable examples of such frightening texts include Stephen King's *Salem's Lot* (1975), with the vampire Kurt Barlow menacing the town of Salem's Lot, and Justin Cronin's *The Passage* trilogy (2007-16), with its insect-like — and deadly — vampires.

Important to underscore here is that while *The Ink Drinker* series has a potentially scary theme, which is that Odilon no longer primarily lives with his biological family, he does have an adopted family who look after him. He also shifts between the two families, although we never meet his biological relatives in the first quartet of books, save in references. We do not meet Carmilla's family either, yet she has their permission to live with Draculink and attend school. These points are consistent with the aforementioned picture books and others of their ilk, and Sanvoisin continues to develop this plot point in the series.

Further, in the accompanying illustrations Draculink is not scary. Intimidating, yes: in the first book Martin Matje has drawn a tall, bald man wearing a dark-coloured coat and red scarf. He has heavy, dark eyebrows and a long nose, as well as a mouth with widely spaced sharp teeth (but no fangs). In fact, his teeth 'looked like razor-sharp pen nibs' (Sanvoisin 1998: 25) and his tongue is 'the texture of an ink blotter' (22). His skin is, predictably, pale. And upon his skin, letters appear: 'I noticed that small freckle-like letters seemed to be engraved on his papier-mâché skin' (18). Further, Draculink's eyes are 'dark with ink' (18). Draculink obviously embodies a book, and this is appropriate and central to the argument. 'Draculink' is the English rendition of Sanvoisin's character. In the original French, 'Draculink' is 'Draculivre': the character Dracula and *livre* ('book' in French). This vampire literally is a book, a subtlety masked in the English translation.

Whereas the book-like Draculink is physically intimidating, Carmilla is lovely, and in Odilon's view, perfect: 'Carmilla was prettier than the prettiest girl in school. Her smile was like sunshine' (Sanvoisin 1999: 16). Further underscoring this is Odilon and Carmilla's deep friendship, which borders on adolescent love. At least, Odilon is hoping it will come to fruition in the first few books, when he moves into the ink bottle-shaped crypt with Draculink and

Carmilla. Their relationship blossoms as the series continues. Reviews of *The Ink Drinker* acknowledge the illustrations and interplay of humor, highlighting the above observations. For instance, J. Patrick Lewis in his *New York Times* review of the first book writes,

Martin Matje's art, like some whacked-out William Joyce and Lane Smith collaboration, casts just the right shadows over this happily dark adventure, invitingly translated from the French of Éric Sanvoisin by Georges Moroz; its salutary message seems to be: Drink (words) till you drop. (Lewis 1999: np)

The ink-drinking vampires' habitat enshrouds them with literature so they can, as Lewis notes above, drink 'till [they] drop'. This is literally so in *The City of Ink Drinkers/La Cité des Buveurs d'Encre* (2002). In this book, the ink drinkers must relocate their crypt to a cemetery. Odilon observes after a visit to the new cemetery, 'sadly the place was too small and without vaults. In addition to the three of us, thousands of books were sitting in storage. We needed some truly spacious quarters' (Sanvoisin 2002: 10). Their original vault is a safe space, marked with their beds/coffins and a pantry of books. One can 'read' this almost like a nest or den, reinforcing other depictions in *Dracula*, *Twilight* and the *Vampire Chronicles*, where walls are lined with books. The ink drinkers eventually move to the Library of the World, which they learn is actually called Dracuville, and contains (as required for their survival and in keeping with other vampire lore) dirt from their previous cemetery. It is even located only one mile away. In this very modern space, the vampires infuse their cherished love of literature into a new home shared with neighbors in the form of fellow relocated ink drinkers.

While we see the trio's unity — the familial bond between Carmilla, Draculink and their inclusion of Odilon — what fundamentally ties them is their addiction to ink. While technically

the ink is their means of subsistence, it also provides a rush or a drug-induced high. Take, for instance, Odilon's divulgence of his addiction in *A Straw for Two/Une Paille Pour Deux*:

Chapter after chapter I suck in the stories. They're absolutely delicious! As soon as the ink from the books makes its way into my mouth, I feel a tickle on the tip of my tongue. Instantly I get a taste of all kinds of adventures. Sometimes I'm a pirate on a proud three-masted ship. Sometimes I'm an astronaut rocketing into space. Sometimes I'm an ordinary human being. Sometimes I'm a cat. With my straw, I live a thousand lives. Each of them different. Each of them thrilling. The only problem is that no one must know. So I consume the books in secret, sucking the ink and swallowing the words when no one is watching. (Sanvoisin 1999: 1-2)

Ink drinking is even something to partake in with another person, as Carmilla invents a straw with two ends 'so that we could drink the same book simultaneously. When she swallowed the beginning of a sentence, I relished the end. When she ran through fields with bison, I felt out of breath. When she fell, I stood up' (37-8). And it is this type of shared adventure that will lead them being 'sucked' into a story, *Little Red Riding Hood*, as characters in the plot in the subsequent book.

We see the vampires here as addicts — they do not drink ink just to survive. By extension, we can situate Draculink as an enabler because he contaminates Odilon by introducing him to his first 'high'. Further, the ink drinkers are physically marked with ink, as names appear on their bodies; this is seen when Draculink first bites Odilon, but then Carmilla claims Odilon for her own and 'Carmilla' replaces 'Draculink' on Odilon's arm. Even their eyes become marked with ink, as stated above. This insinuation is not lost on critics. A review from *Publishers Weekly* acknowledges: 'the boy, bitten by "Draculink", rationalizes his thirst like a

stricken Victorian hero. Matje provides evocative images of the fiend, whose bruised skin and jet-black eyes are the product of his habit' (*Publishers Weekly*).⁷ Indeed, Odilon takes on the characteristics of not only the vampire, but of a tormented adult figure. This development parallels other addicted vampires, such as the teen fledgling vampire, Michael, from director Joel Schumacher's film *The Lost Boys* (1987). While Michael eventually returns to his human form, Thomas Fahy notes that Michael as a vampire explicitly resembles a drug addict, specifically his inability to eat human food, his pallid complexion, sensitivity to light and his bloodshot eyes (2018: 252).

Fortunately for the child reader, *The Ink Drinker* does not contain such graphic imagery. However, Odilon's experience is magnified in *Little Red Ink Drinker/Le Petit Buveur d'Encre Rouge* (2003) when his and Carmilla's ink consumption causes their reality to blur with fiction. And, for these story-loving characters, they are actually in a story which leads to an exhilarating (yet terrifying) rush. Their relationship is put to the test when Odilon becomes a hungry wolf to Carmilla's Little Red Riding Hood, but Draculink saves them just in time. Here, as in the other books in the series, we have a happy ending. *Kirkus Reviews* observes that the first book in *The Ink Drinker* series (and, I would argue, the ensuing ones) 'is funny and hip, written with gathering suspense; it's a cut above most fare for emerging readers, and plays mildly to their sense of the macabre' (8).⁸ While I am certain *The Ink Drinker* series is not meant to convert early readers into ink drinkers, it does encourage them to get lost in a story, much like the characters, macabre or not. This not-so-subtle manner of enticing children to read is humorous and effective, given the longevity of the series.

Kostova's *The Historian* offers this same literary beckoning for the adult reader. The approximately 600-page novel has at its core a love of literature. As the (human) reader of *The*

Historian quickly learns, the historic Vlad Dracula lures scholars to assist him in his efforts to preserve his identity. The overture for this relationship is the appearance of an ink-like mark of a dragon that mars the blank pages of a leather-bound volume, on its spine appearing ‘an elegant little dragon, green on pale leather’ (Kostova 2005: 10). Paul, our unnamed female narrator’s father, is the destined recipient of this book that silently and mysteriously appeared in his library carrel when he was a young man. The image of the dragon inside the book is described as follows:

across those two pages I saw a great woodcut of a dragon with spread wings and a long looped tail, a beast unfurled and raging, claws outstretched. In the dragon’s claws hung a banner on which ran a single word in Gothic lettering:

DRAKULYA’. (10)

Paul learns that his mentor, Bartholomew Rossi, was similarly targeted. The novel focuses on Paul’s pursuit of the kidnapped Rossi, as recounted to his daughter. *The Historian* is itself grounded in documents: it opens with a note from the narrator to the reader, thereby framing the narrative. Joseph Ceccio notes that the novel’s ‘boxed narrative’ ‘allows the characters to discover the evil of the past even as that evil springs forward to endanger them’ (2008: 57). This certainly occurs over the course of the narrative as the characters pursue Dracula.

Reviews of the novel are mixed but tilt towards the positive, with several, such as Janet Maslin in *The New York Times*, noting the ‘wearyingly’ length of the novel. Maslin notes that *The Historian* would have been challenging to ‘compress’, however, and acknowledges Kostova’s ‘marketable knowledge of horror lore’ (2005: np).⁹ Others highlight the lack of differentiation in the narrative voices; in a review for *The Guardian*, Jane Stevenson observes ‘it is a spirited update of Bram Stoker’s classic, with a vastly ingenious plot’ yet also that that the

female teenage narrator's voice is indistinct from that of her father (2005: np).¹⁰ Regardless, *The Historian* emerged as a bestseller, as it was the first debut novel to appear as number one on *The New York Times* bestseller list and has increasingly been discussed in academic criticism.

In a nod to Stoker's seminal novel, Kostova not only marks each section with quotes from *Dracula*, but also layers of text, from a map to letters to portions narrated in translation from the various participants in the quest. Elizabeth Miller aptly notes that *Dracula* is a 'patchwork of narratives' within the novel itself (2005: 37). Ambrisco echoes this with *The Historian*, observing that the novel is a true amalgamation of texts, much like *Dracula* (2015: 21). Further, Keen argues that the novel is a nod to *Dracula* insofar as it 're-centers this lore in its historical sources and actual locations, in a romance of the archive emphasizing travel as research' (2014: 125). The book the reader holds was carefully curated by the narrator, who thoughtfully bound its diverse pieces together via English. *The Historian* concludes with the narrator in The Rosenbach, a museum and library located in Philadelphia. The Rosenbach includes among its holdings Stoker's working notes for *Dracula* and early printed pamphlets related to Vlad Dracula from his lifetime. It is here that the narrator unexpectedly receives her own copy of the volume, that which her father and others encountered. She describes how 'the cover was a rubbed old velvet, very, very old, and that it was both familiar and unfamiliar under my hand. [. . .] [T]he ferocious single image at the center was open in my hand before I could stop myself' (Kostova 2005: 637). Since Vlad was dispatched by a bullet and disintegrated into dust near the conclusion of the novel, he has not sent the narrator this latest copy. However, the quest clearly continues as the narrator has, like her father and others before her, been marked via the presentation of the book.

Vlad Dracula haunts the pages of *The Historian*, only appearing in the latter third of it. Much like Stoker's Count Dracula, this Vlad derives comfort from books, and in Kostova's novel he gains metaphoric sustenance as well. Vlad 'drinks' or 'consumes' his identity and is addicted to it. The reader becomes immersed, imprisoned like Rossi as he recounts his state of captivity under Vlad's power. This vault under the church Sveti Petko the Martyr in a rural Bulgarian village is, Vlad states, his favorite place (Kostova 2005: 572). As Rossi describes, 'there were great folios and quartos bound in smooth leather, and rows of more modern volumes on long shelves. In fact, we were surrounded; every wall seemed to be lined with books' (573). As argued by Keen, it is not just the archive of texts that appeals to the researcher, but an 'emphasis falls on the physical container of the library' (2014: 125). Rossi thirsted to discover this library, but unwittingly fell into a role designed by Vlad specifically for Rossi. This is specifically for Rossi to catalogue Vlad's extensive collection of the ancient and modern tomes and scrolls. Further, Rossi's assignment will expand to acquisitions, as he will — ideally, in Vlad's eyes — continue to supplement this treasure trove of books, feeding the library. Building on his central argument of 'contact zones' and 'catastrophic transculturation', Höglund observes that in *The Historian* libraries — including Vlad's archive — are 'contact zones' and are 'typically places of epistemological storage and contention' (2012: 8). Much like other vampire libraries discussed here, the books and the role of the librarian or historian in maintaining them is a rich site of intersection.

Books are central to Vlad, and he calmly tells Rossi, "I have told you, I am a scholar at heart, as well as a warrior, and these books have kept me company through my long years" (Kostova 2005: 576). In *The Historian*, Vlad is 'not devoid of historical validity', as Adriana Bulz notes; Kostova has crafted him in keeping with the historical Vlad Dracul (2014: 112).

Significant is that Vlad is as preserved as his books; like them, he retains a metaphorical dust jacket in the guise of clothing from his own medieval human lifetime. He closely resembles the existing woodcut images of the historic Vlad, as well as the oil portrait, purportedly painted from life. This famous portrait, in which Vlad is draped in a fur and adorned with lavish clothing, is in the Austrian Schloss Ambras. In Kostova's novel, Vlad is a creature from centuries past, as evidenced by his looks:

He wore a peaked cap of gold and green with a heavy jewelled brooch pinned above his brow, and a massive-shouldered tunic of gold velvet with a green collar laced high under his large chin. [. . .] A cape of white fur was drawn around his shoulders and pinned with the silver symbol of a dragon. His clothing was extraordinary [. . .] it was real clothing, living, fresh clothing, not the faded pieces of a museum exhibition. (Kostova 2005: 570)

In other words, Vlad has deliberately styled himself in keeping with the sole extant portrait to preserve his image. Rossi elsewhere observes that Vlad has changed outfits, though he retains this same vintage style.

This reveals Vlad's concerted effort to shape his identity. He documents his experiences and depictions of himself through books, and he himself comes to life as the book and image become the person, and vice versa; they reinforce each other. He is an 'original combination of scholar and demon', as Bulz points out (2014: 109). Vlad is inseparable from his literary legacy by his own design. Keen refines this by observing that 'curiosity itself invites Dracula to re-embody himself whenever a historian reopens the case' (2014: 126). The vampire undertakes a metamorphosis time and again over the centuries. Further, as Ambrisco observes, the blank pages of the dragon book are not really vacant, but haunted by revenants:

The real danger in this narrative, then, is not the blood-sucking vampire, per se, but the revenants of the past that can neither stay buried nor be fully believed, accessed or understood. In this sense the “nearly blank” books circulated by *Dracula* are the novel’s most ghostly images, and they mark both a desire for amnesia and its impossibilities. (2015: 25-6)

Considering Ambrisco’s observation, one can see the books as echoes of the past. In this respect, the books haunt Vlad as ghosts would, despite his continued acts of metamorphosis.

Vlad seeks to infect others with his addiction to books, as we see over the course of the novel, right up through the end. This idea of a ‘contaminant’ or ‘infection’ in turn guides the reader who ‘perpetuates the infection by succumbing to a narrative that cannot be stopped from repeating itself’ (Keen 2014: 126). This same rhetoric of ‘infection’ permeates *Dracula*. As discussed earlier, blood in *Dracula* is widely seen as a contaminant and, as Ross G. Forman observes, the linking between malaria and parasitic infection in Stoker’s day gives the reader some historic context for the novel. Moreover, *Dracula* itself draws from textual sources such as penny dreadfuls and Le Fanu’s *Carmilla*; in other words, like a parasite (Forman 2016: 928). Roy Parkhurst similarly utilizes the descriptor ‘parasite’ and emphasizes that ‘the figure of the vampire is a particularly good case of a parasite that feeds on human life but gives little back’ (2011: 300). Adding in yet another dimension, Kristina Aikens notes that the characters in *Dracula* themselves are writing addicts, with a ‘compulsion’ toward recording and transcription, which lends to her overall thesis, of a metaphorical deployment of unauthorized drug use (2009: 49). Finally, key to the role *Dracula* plays in the lineage of vampire texts, Groom observes in *The Vampire: A New History* that ‘the novel gives voice to folk memories regarding the dread of plague and the standard operation of bloodletting, [and] it is also a reflection of contemporary

medical practice concerning patients, diagnosis, treatment and invasive surgery' (2018: 179). In short, the vampire is inextricable from the metaphor of the parasite and embedded in our cultural narrative of medicine and disease.

While the characters in *The Historian* are similarly 'addicted' to the printed word, we do not so much see the vampire as a parasite as we do an apex predator. Vlad lures scholars with paper, and none of them can resist. Even at the close, the narrator opens the book before she can stop herself. Here too, like in *The Ink Drinker* series, we see books as enticing and addictive. *The Historian* ends with the aforementioned scene at The Rosenbach, the home of the literal literary bones of *Dracula*. If the novel *Dracula* is the whole body and soul, then The Rosenbach contains its origins and structure, and we can see the raw sinews of the text. In contrast to the incendiary nature of the notes given what they produce, the Rosenbach is a quiet shelter to preserve them. However, even that peaceful repository will not contain the infection, as the narrator finds herself with one of the dragon-printed books.

In *The Historian*, as in *The Ink Drinker*, literature literally and metaphorically sustains the vampire. This is a deep commentary on the weight of the printed word. One way of grasping the significance of this is to look to Jacques Derrida's concept of the substance *pharmakon*, that which heals and harms, and is poison and antidote. Derrida's theory of the *pharmakon* emerges in 'Plato's Pharmacy' from *Dissemination* (1972), where he recounts Plato's play *The Phaedrus* (360 BCE). The plot of *The Phaedrus* is as follows: the youth Phaedrus lures the philosopher Socrates outside the city of Athens with the promise of a scroll of text by Lysias. It is important to note that it is the written text that appeals to Socrates. Once outside the city, Phaedrus references the myth of Orithyia, who was swept away by Boreas and forced to marry him. However, Socrates clarifies that Pharmacia, who was playing with Orithyia at the time, was

culpable in the latter's fall and subsequent abduction/marriage. Pharmacia, or the *pharmakon*, preserves such as she protects Orithyia. Still, Pharmacia and the *pharmakon* are also responsible for Orithyia's abduction. To clarify: the 'dangerous' text is neatly contained in the scroll promised by Phaedrus, but its very existence threatens to disrupt the course of Socrates's day. He cannot stop thinking of the text, and in that regard it embodies two halves, much as Pharmacia is responsible for Orithyia's abduction and her marriage, the negative and the positive. This certainly speaks to Derridean theory and its general privileging of writing over speech. This same privilege is clarified in his theory of *différance* and acknowledged by Aikens, as applied to addiction in *Dracula*, although she does not go so far as to include the *pharmakon* in her analysis of that novel. Extending the argument here, we should observe that at the core in 'Plato's Pharmacy' is the substance *pharmakon*: writing that heals and wounds.

Applying the *pharmakon* theory to *The Ink Drinker* series and *The Historian*, we see how the written word nourishes and weakens the vampires. It is the appeal of the written word — not the spoken word — that keeps Vlad transfixed by his own legend. Yet this is so much the case that he remains trapped in the past, presented to Rossi and the reader in his antique raiment. Draculink and the other ink drinkers literally consume the *pharmakon*. They ingest the written word and it heals them, insofar as it gives them nourishment, but it also wounds them, as they are the undead. In this way they are all addicted to ink and language; they are not solely sustenance. Like Derrida, these vampires privilege writing over speech; spoken words are meaningless and, for the undead, transient. The humans who speak these words die over the centuries. However, their manuscripts and histories endure, along with the body of the vampire.

Returning to Stoker's Count Dracula, we see how language — spoken language — is the key to conquering London. It is not the written language, although that teaches him. Dracula's

collection of English books, magazines and newspapers entices him understand England — much like Lysias' text intrigued Socrates. Stephen D. Arata, in his seminal work on *Dracula* and reverse colonization, astutely observes that Count Dracula is 'an Occidentalist travelling West' who can mimic an Englishman's behavior and habits (1990: 638). Arata further observes that the Count 'invades the spaces of [the English people's] knowledge' (1990: 634). In other words, Dracula undertakes a foray into a foreign land, and does so with keen strategy, hence Arata's significant analysis of reverse colonization. With the Count deliberately veiling himself in other cultures, it is no wonder that language and writing prove to be doubly slippery in *Dracula*, as the reader navigates the aforementioned layers of text, seeking to find the core. Intriguingly, Höglund points out that in *The Historian*, which has a more disparate collection of settings, 'coming into contact with this vampire is not necessarily to confront the East as such, as is the case in Stoker's novel' (8). In this sense, then, Kostova's Vlad is not the same invader as Arata observes in *Dracula*.

We can put this to the test and see where the tradition of vampires as literary consumers continues. In addition to the works discussed here, Royce Prouty's novel, *Stoker's Manuscript* (2013) similarly features a book-collecting narrator/protagonist and vampires who are 'addicted' to literature. While not as nuanced as *The Historian*, *Stoker's Manuscript* shares the theme of vampires obsessed with their own legends and anxious to preserve their life stories. The focus of this article is on vampires in texts, but one noteworthy recent cinematic example of vampires and books comes to mind: Eve (Tilda Swinton) in director Jim Jarmusch's *Only Lovers Left Alive* (2014) adores books. When Eve packs her suitcase for a transatlantic flight, she takes time to carefully select the many vintage volumes that will make the trip with her. Christopher 'Kit'

Marlowe also appears as a fellow vampire, one who we learn authored Shakespeare's plays and sonnets according to the plot of the film.

Significant for us to note is that the vampires discussed in this paper are all male, with the exception of Eve and Carmilla in the first four books of *The Ink Drinker* series. They are obsessed with writing their existence and consuming — again, literally and metaphorically — ink. This ink sharply emerges, from the green dragon in the pages of the destined books in *The Historian* to Draculink's name on Odilon's arm and Draculink's hoarding of books in his ink bottle-shaped crypt. These masculine acts of inscription and marking, barring Carmilla's own writing of her name, signify their predilection for preserving their identities. Female vampires can theoretically be just as addicted to story-telling and ink, but in this case perhaps they read and write in white ink, to borrow Hélène Cixous' theory from 'The Laugh of the Medusa/Le Rire de la Méduse' (1976). Perhaps we need to find a way to read this 'invisible' ink as we reflect on vampire literature as a whole.

In conclusion, *The Ink Drinker* series and *The Historian* illustrate a recurrent theme of vampires as both literal consumers of their legends and lore and as active readers. In *The Ink Drinker*, a light-hearted early reader series, we see a clever and non-threatening (i.e., not blood-related) alternative means of existing as a vampire. However, it cuts to the core of vampires-as-readers, as consumers who vicariously experience other people's stories and who are themselves addicted to ink. As in *The Ink Drinker* series, *The Historian* emphasizes the act of consuming literature through Vlad Dracula, who is enmeshed in his own literary legacy. In a nod to *Dracula*, *The Historian* provides the reader with an immersive experience, allowing that reader to gently feel their way through layers of text. As we reflect on vampires as consumers, it is evident that the ones who exist for centuries are experts at 'reading' people. They can ferret out a

victim, or someone who will serve as helper, much as the unfortunate Renfield assists the Count in *Dracula*. In this way, vampires transcend the printed page by ‘reading’ bodies and behavior. However, as discussed here, literature is consumed by vampires *and* consumes vampires in a (literally) eternal push-and-pull game. The rules may become more complex when considering the ephemeral nature of electronic texts, but that is an enigma for another story.

Notes

¹ See, for instance, critical scholarship from Ross G. Forman, (2016) Roy Parkhurst (2011), and Kristina Aikens (2009), to be discussed in this essay.

² This includes reviews from *The New York Times* (1999) and *The Guardian* (2005), which will be discussed later in this essay.

³ Rebecca A. Pope’s ‘Writing and Biting in *Dracula*’ (1990) directly connects to this, which will be discussed later in this essay.

⁴ Hustis early on outlines the salient pieces of Iser’s theories as they pertain to her reading of the novel. She specifically cites the ‘emphasis on the performativity of representation’ in Iser’s work (2001:19).

⁵ <https://www.nathan.fr/catalogue/fiche-produit.asp?ean13=9782092556603>

⁶ http://www.eric-sanvoisin.com/pages/Linterview_du_BUVEUR_DENCRE-1152708.html

⁷ <https://www.publishersweekly.com/978-0-385-32591-2>

⁸ <https://www.kirkusreviews.com/book-reviews/eric-sanvoisin/the-ink-drinker/>

⁹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2005/06/13/books/scholarship-trumps-the-stake-in-pursuit-of-dracula.html>

¹⁰ <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2005/jul/24/fiction.features>

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