DRACULA: THE COUNT AND THE HISTORIAN

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Abstract: *We live in an age when globalization leaves its mark on every aspect of our lives. Therefore, it should come as no surprise that literature itself underwent certain changes. In this paper, we will focus on two novels from different time periods: Bram Stoker's "Dracula" and Elizabeth Kostova's "The Historian". More precisely, we will speak about Dracula, the vampire who appears again and again in literature and in films, about the way in which he is represented in two different cultural spaces at the end of the nineteenth century and in 2005. What is it about him that fascinates the audience? How is he perceived by readers nowadays? We will see what changes this character faced in his journey from one culture to another, what this particular vampire brought forth from the Victorian Age and what was given to him. In other words, we will write about the part played by Dracula in this transition from tradition to modernity, where the two dimensions are intertwined in order to create something new. Placed next to "The Historian", we will see how the vampire myth was used and adapted to suit the requests of the readers. In a world where people have access to virtually any kind of writing, let us see what draws them towards the undead and what leads them to different interpretations.*

Keywords: *Bram Stoker, Dracula, Elizabeth Kostova, The Historian, Fantasy*

We cling to life. We can choose to look at any time period, at any cultural space that is or was, and we will notice that one aspect which links people throughout history is this impulse to fight and live. Everybody knows that they will face death at some point, yet there is a certain tendency to do anything we can to avoid that moment. And even when people must acknowledge their ephemerality, they still hope that death is just a threshold, that a new beginning awaits on the other side. People crave immortality, even if they do not always know what such a state will bring with it. The roots of the vampire myth could lead us to this idea, overcoming death. Up to a certain point, Dracula managed to turn death in just another step towards eternity.

We will speak about two novels from different cultural spaces: Bram Stoker's *Dracula* and Elizabeth Kostova's *The Historian.* The link which

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interests us the most is Dracula himself, the vampire found in the heart of these books. We will see how his image changed in this transition, what he took from Europe, from the past, and what elements were added in the twenty-first century. Tradition and modernity are brought together in the portrait of this character. The world changes and the myth must be adapted to the age in which it appears. Vampirism still fascinates readers and they are still drawn to Dracula. Why? Before we put our conclusions on paper, we will first write about the origins of the vampire, what he can and cannot do. Moving towards the novels mentioned before, we will go deeper in order to bring forth the idea behind the character.

Vampires can be found all over the world, in different cultures, bearing different names, but always seen as a threatening presence. They bring sickness and they rob people of their energy. These entities stand alone, neither here nor there, but somewhere on the border of two planes of existence. We are not told stories about merciful beings, but about creatures that have the power to destroy all that is held dear by a person. Families are torn apart, people are no longer safe and terror becomes a constant companion once an undead appears. This deep fear could also come from the fact that we recognize our own darkness in the vampire, but we will speak about this idea when we turn our attention to the novels.

It is said over and over again that blood is the source of life and this is the first aspect we link to vampires: they feed on human blood, bringing death or the danger of becoming a creature of the night upon the victim. Claude Lecouteux writes in *Histoire des Vampires. Autopsie d'un mythe* about creatures which can be found in various European cultures. He claims that readers are drawn to vampire stories because they still hold secrets waiting to be uncovered. Yet the emphasis is placed not on the question *why?*, but on certain features which define the undead. If funeral rituals were not performed properly, if people did not live according to the rules of the divinity and of the community, it was possible for the ones who passed away to return from the grave. They are never presented as kind, but as beings searching for victims (family members or strangers), using their abilities to torment the living. The fact that they look as they did when they were alive is seen as further proof of their unnatural state.

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Vampires and other creatures similar to them are not presented standing above humanity, but somewhere beneath it. They defy death, they are stronger than a human... yet they are bound by laws which make them ultimately weaker. Vampires rely on blood in order to exist and the price is paid by the one whose life source is taken. There was a time when the victims did not turn into vampires once bitten (a scenario we are all familiar with today), but they were in danger of dying if those around did not save them. In some cultures, the undead was also blamed when animals suddenly died or when the weather was not favorable for the crops. People were afraid of these creatures, especially since they are sometimes presented as more than legends. If they were real and dangerous, how could they be defeated?

Prayers and rituals passed down from generation to generation are considered to be the most efficient method of keeping the vampire away from humans. The sanctity of a place (for example, a church) keeps evil creatures at bay. Purity is mentioned as a means of protection, but it is relative. Vampires are drawn to purity because they will try to taint it. On the other hand, if we speak of purity of mind or of purity in a religious sense, it might also be inefficient since not many people can say that they are pure, regardless of the meaning we choose to accept. Holy water, crucifixes or just the sign of the cross can keep evil spirits and vampires away. We should also mention the use of garlic here. In *Encyclopedia of Vampire Mythology*, Theresa Bane writes that vampires will always put in danger what one culture or another values the most, but they will be repelled by something common. Prayers and rituals do not require money and garlic has always been accessible, offering people a sense of security.

Regardless of how frightening the creatures of the night were, they could be defeated in the end. As mentioned before, the undead are not above humanity and they are not free. Perhaps all the limitations find their roots in our need to feel safe from harm, although there are stories which show that it is more difficult to destroy a vampire than one might expect. It is known that the undead are bound to their graves. They are allowed to leave them during the night, but they must return before the rooster's first crow. Lecouteux presents various stories from different European countries, showing how vampires could be killed. The methods are similar and the act itself is seen as merciful: once the body turns to dust or is impaled, it is thought that the soul is free and allowed to step in the

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afterlife. First of all, these creatures can be sealed into their graves; people come to the cemetery during the day, open the tomb and impale the body with a wooden or metal stake. If impalement is not enough, the vampire can be destroyed by cutting off his head or carving out his heart[1]. From this point on, there are various versions, two of them being that the corpse would either turn to dust once the heart and/or head are separated from the body, or it had to be burnt and the ashes scattered at a crossroads. Finally, another way of killing vampires is by keeping them outside their tombs until sunrise or until the first rooster crow is heard. Away from the protection of darkness, the vampires remain powerless... they no longer belong in the land of the living. It is as if the sun itself (seen by some as a symbol for divinity) denies them the possibility to completely return to their former community.

The vampire has always instilled fear and horror in the human heart. And yet there is also a sort of strange fascination with such creatures, so much that the legend slipped easily into literature and took on a brand new life. Vampires defy the boundaries between life and death, fact and fiction, dream and reality. They are terrifying, but they are always defeated by humans, by the light. Let us look at Bram Stoker's novel, *Dracula*, and see how the protagonist is presented, how the author made use of stories and superstitions to create his vampire. What is it that makes the story so appealing even to this day? Why is it almost unforgettable? These are questions raised by Allan Johnson in his essay, *Modernity and Anxiety in Bram Stoker's Dracula*, but he does not offer clear answers. Two of the ideas he does mention are the interest in new technology and the rise of mass culture. We could say that *Dracula* proved to be a book which speaks to a large audience, tempting readers across the centuries. The quick development of technology helped books and films cross borders with little difficulty.

"Within, stood a tall old man, clean-shaven save for a long white moustache, and clad in black from head to foot. -...- "Welcome to my house! Enter freely and of your own free will!" He made no motion of stepping to meet me, but stood like a statue, as though his gesture of welcome had fixed him into stone. The instant, however, that I had

[1]In some cases, it is said that if the vampire left behind victims who have not died, his heart should be carved out of his body, burnt and the ashes turned into a sort of antidote which needed to be given to those attacked by the monster.

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stepped over the threshold, he moved impulsively forward, and holding out his hand grasped mine with a strength which made me wince, an effect which was not lessened by the fact that it seemed cold as ice, more like the hand of a dead than a living man"[2].

This is how Count Dracula greets Jonathan Harker, how we first see him without a disguise. There is something unsettling about this character, something Harker cannot define in the beginning. He looks like an older gentleman, yet his strength and his movements point towards his true nature. He is much stronger than a man, as various characters note as the story unfolds. Also, the way he moves makes us think of both his abilities and limits. The vampire can move in ways a mortal never will, faster, being able to change forms and entering seemingly inaccessible places. However, the vampire cannot step into a house unless he is invited inside. Dracula knows that he must adapt to the new world if he wishes to avoid true death, but at this point in the story the reader gets the feeling that he is still learning how to act like a man once again. When he leaves the castle wearing Harker's clothes or when he moves through London, he does not attract too much unwanted attention on himself, therefore we can assume that, given enough time, he could have played the part of an Englishman effortlessly. Certain features will remain in the minds of those who cross his path: the eyes (which turn red when he is angry) and the white, canine like teeth. If we describe a creature with cold, pale skin, red eyes and fangs, no reader today will fail to recognize the vampire, even if the portrait of the undead has changed over the past century.

Stoker does not tell us how Dracula became a creature of the night, although Van Helsing claims that it was because of the ties his family had with the devil[3]. When Harker is first greeted by the Count, we are only one step away from observing the physical proof that the Count is something more (or something less) than human:

"His face was a strong – a very strong – aquiline, with high bridge of the thin nose and peculiarly arched nostrils; with lofty domed forehead, and hair growing scantily round the temples but profusely elsewhere. His

[2]Stoker, Bram. *Dracula.* London: Wordsworth Classics, 1993, p 15.

[3]This idea is also present in *The Historian*. Like Bram Stoker, Elizabeth Kostova does not offer too much information on this topic, but we can fill in the blanks ourselves. For a few moments, we are allowed to see Dracula the human, a man fascinated with books and the occult, ready to make a deal with the dark forces if it will grant him immortality on earth.

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eyebrows were very massive, almost meeting over the nose, and with bushy hair that seemed to curl in its own profusion. The mouth, so far as I could see it under the heavy moustache, was fixed and rather cruel-looking, with peculiarly sharp white teeth. These protruded over the lips, whose remarkable ruddiness showed astonishing vitality in a man of his years. For the rest, his ears were pale, and at the tops extremely pointed. The chin was broad and strong, and the cheeks firm though thin. The general effect was one of extraordinary pallor. -…- Strange to say, there were hairs in the centre of the palm. The nails were long and fine, and cut to a sharp point. As the Count leaned over me and his hands touched me, I could not repress a shudder. It may have been that his breath was rank, but a horrible feeling of nausea came over me, which, do what I would, I could not conceal"[4].

His portrait becomes better-defined as we move towards the ending, when it is obvious that this is a creature which can hide in plain sight if he is careful enough. He does not lack patience and he knows how to make others do as he commands, whether through mind-control or through more common means (a large enough sum of money will guarantee a safe journey to and out of England and will silence any inquiries). Those around him see the fangs and the burning rage and cruelty in his eyes, yet they hardly pay attention to these details. Dracula can leave his coffin during the day, even if he is weaker while the sun is up, and he looks younger after feeding. This is where the real threat comes from, the fact that he cannot be stopped if the monster passes for a man.

The Count shows no sign of compassion or interest in humanity. He must survive and people are merely a source of fresh blood and potential new vampires. In *The Occidental Tourist: Dracula and the Anxiety of Reverse Colonization*, Stephen D. Arata identifies the motif of invading conquerors, the vampire being presented as a direct threat to England. It is an idea also supported by Allan Johnson, in *Modernity and Anxiety in Bram Stoker's Dracula*, who points towards the fact that the Count wanted to use Jonathan Harker to improve his spoken English. The vampire is intelligent, cunning and knows that he has to adapt and move on. Stephen D. Arata highlights the fact that the novel was published in a time when the British empire was in decline and the vampire is used as a

[4]Stoker, Bram. *Dracula.* London: Wordsworth Classics, 1993, p 17.

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symbol for the threat coming from the outside. We are told that Dracula was once a warrior who refused to give up... he did not lose his pride and stubbornness after becoming undead. Not being limited to a single lifetime, he could retreat to his motherland and plan a stronger attack. This very thought is what made Van Helsing's group go after him, they had to save Mina Harker and prevent the nosferatu from making more victims. According to Stephen D. Arata, the vampire we see here is not the Other and we agree with this statement. Dracula might come from a different culture, threatening the stability of the world as characters like Jonathan Harker or Arthur Holmwood know it... but is this situation truly so different from the conflicts of the past, wars where the villain left from the West towards other countries? Dracula brings to light aspects one might choose to hide.

Bram Stoker's vampire is a powerful being, one who is both feared and admired. Dracula is complex enough to allow various interpretations of his character and motivation, enough to prompt readers today – or viewers, if we are to speak of the films in which he appears – see him not only as a monster, but as a tragic figure. He can turn into a bat or into mist, weather bows to his will and animals – especially wolves – obey his command. He is charming enough to keep his prey unaware of the dangers lurking in the dark until it is too late to escape[5] and can control his victims from afar, turning them into his slaves. They are given a semblance of immortality, but they lose their identity and free will. As mentioned before, he possesses superhuman strength and grows younger as he feeds. Blood gives him life, but this state is presented as a curse by Van Helsing, especially when he is speaking of Lucy Westenra. We should note that vampires do not cast shadows and have no reflection in the mirror. Since the shadow is often used as a symbol for the soul, we can say that the undead lost theirs the moment they rose from the grave.

Doctor Van Helsing is the one who speaks the most about the Undead. He speaks of their strength, but also of their weaknesses. Despite the fact that they do not age and cannot die simply because they have been on

[5]Mina Harker is the only one who escaped his influence, a symbol for the victory of civilization and modernity over the wilderness and superstitions coming from Eastern Europe. We could say that Jonathan Harker is also a survivor, since he remained sane even after being a prisoner in Dracula's castle, but he was never bitten by the vampire, even if the danger had been hanging over his head during that time.

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earth for a long period of time, vampires are not free to do as they wish. Since faith and God are a constant presence in the story, we can assume that these limitations come as punishment for leaving the community and going against divinity. Dracula is forbidden to move freely and is weakened if he leaves his coffin during the day. He cannot enter a home unless he is invited in and can be kept away with garlic, a crucifix or a communion wafer (Van Helsing used one to cover the cracks in Lucy's tomb, showing thus that a vampire does need even the smallest of openings to move in and out of a closed space). The undead is bound to his tomb, this being the only place where he can rest. When he does leave his dominion, he takes with him boxes containing earth from Transylvania, the place of his birth and death, the place where his own family is buried. Finally, the vampire is unable to cross running water, except at the ebb and flow of the tide. It is not explained why vampires have to respect this interdiction, but it might be because running water could represent life or the way towards afterlife, a place where they cannot go. We see that the Count manages to get to and out of England, but not without difficulty, needing help from mortals.

Van Helsing is also the one who, when speaking about Dracula, makes it known that he considers the undead inferior. First of all, the doctor and the other characters are confident that God will help them win this confrontation. There is a strong emphasis on faith and purity throughout the text, although the latter tends to be rather superficial, an aspect needed to highlight the fact that vampires (male and female) were sexual beings and their sexuality was seen as a threat. In *Bram Stoker's Dracula: A Reflection and Rebuke of Victorian Society*[6], Amanda Podonsky highlights the fact that, during the Victorian Age, a woman who embraced her sexuality was seen as immoral. Homosexuality was also perceived as unnatural and immoral. A vampire's sexual impulses have always been regarded with terror, but it is obvious that fear and disgust go hand in hand with pleasure and fascination in this story. The men who are threatened to fall under the spell of the four female vampires (the brides and Lucy) are both repulsed and enticed by their advances. In the end,

[6]Podonsky, Amanda M. *Bram Stoker's Dracula: A Reflection and Rebuke of Victorian Society*. studentpulse.com. http://www.studentpulse.com/articles/184/bram-stokers-dracula-a-reflection-and-rebuke-of-victorian-society, accessed on September, 14th 2015.

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sexuality had to be "cured" in order to save Lucy's life[7]. The men knew she had been a flirtatious, but virtuous girl and they destroy both the vampire she had become and her "blatant" sexuality in order to restore her body and soul to their former state of purity. Mina Harker goes through a similar process, the only difference being that she is under Dracula's influence for some time, but the transformation is never completed. Once the vampire is destroyed, Mina returns to her normal personality, regains her free-will, and goes on living her life as a loving wife and mother... as a proper lady should, receiving her reward for being a brave, honourable woman.

The other issue is the fact that Van Helsing claims that the Count has a *child-brain.* His only argument is the way Dracula acts, the fact that it had taken him a long time before he decided to leave his country. However, his own words contradict him. It is true that the vampire's plan was not flawless, yet we could say that the reason it ultimately failed was because he underestimated his opponents, not because he was unprepared. There is nothing remotely childish or childlike about Dracula. He knows exactly what he is doing, he is extremely old and intelligent. While he might lack experience outside him motherland, he is able to find information quickly and use it to his advantage. Having been alive (in a state of undeath, to be more precise) for centuries, the Count sees the world from a different perspective. The simple fact that he is aware that he needs to adapt in order to survive in a new environment emphasises the fact that Van Helsing is wrong.

"Everything had been carefully thought out, and done systematically and with precision. He seemed to have been prepared for every obstacle which might be placed by accident in the way of his intentions being carried out"[8].

There is a sort of happy ending to this story. The monster is defeated, our heroes honour the memory of their fallen friends and can go on living their lives unafraid. Killing Dracula (and his brides before him) is seen as an act of kindness, the mortal helping the damned soul gain forgiveness and access to heaven. The vampire's death scene is rather similar to those

[7]Bram Stoker does not offer too much information on the three brides and nobody thinks about rescuing them. We know nothing about their lives before they became vampires and the other characters see them only as monsters that lack even the slightest trace of innocence.

[8]Stoker, Bram. *Dracula.* London: Wordsworth Classics, 1993, p 188.

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presented in stories recorded across Europe. Just before sunset, caught when he is weak, Jonathan Harker cuts Dracula's throat and Quincey Morris plunges a knife in his heart. The body turns to dust and "even in that moment of final dissolution, there was in the face a look of peace, such as I never could have imagined might have rested there"[9].

But what if Dracula is still alive and has access to the stories written about him? Elizabeth Kostova took this question and offered an answer through her 2005 novel, *The Historian.* The vampire myth, especially Dracula, still attracts readers and can still be reinterpreted. People loved mysteries a century ago, a decade ago and it is highly unlikely that this pull towards "the dark side" will disappear. There is still a certain anxiety noticeable in Europe and in the United States of America, the fear that people might lose their identity because of globalisation. Dracula re-emerges in a time when fear is still present, when people turn to fantasy because it is a safe way to touch upon delicate issues and readers want to uncover a different side of the story.

We recognize in Bram Stoker's Dracula elements from older tales, but we have not spoken about another important figure linked to this character: Vlad the Impaler. The connection is rather subtle in the nineteenth century novel, since we do not know much of the vampire's life as a man. He was cruel, brave, intelligent and it was said that his family held some dark secrets. The link between the vampire and the voivode is more obvious in *The Historian*, Kostova making it clear that the two men are one and the same, a creature who managed to defy time and death.

"Now I could see him better, although his face was still in shadow. 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. The jewel on his brow and the gold threads in his collar glittered in the firelight. A cape of white fur was drawn around his shoulders and pinned with the silver symbol of a dragon. His clothing was extraordinary; I felt almost as frightened of it as I did of his strange undead presence. It was real clothing, living, fresh clothing, not the faded pieces of a museum exhibition. He wore it with extraordinary richness and grace, too, standing silently before me, so that the cape fell down around him like the swirl of snow. The candlelight revealed a blunt-fingered, scarred

[9]*Ibidem*, p 314.

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hand on a dagger hilt, and farther down a powerful leg in green hose and a booted foot. He shifted a little, turning in the light, but still silent. I could see his face better now, and the cruel strength of it made me shrink back - the great dark eyes under knitted brows, the long straight nose, the broad bonelike cheeks. His mouth, I saw now, was closed in a hard smile, ruby and curving under his wiry, dark moustache. At one corner of his lips I saw a stain of drying blood - oh, God, how that made me recoil. The sight of it was terrible enough, but the immediate realization that it was probably mine, my own blood, made my head swim"[10].

Vlad the Impaler was feared even when he was alive. In *Povestiri medievale despre Vlad Țepeș-Draculea*, Ion Stăvăruș brings together German, Russian and Romanian tales in which the voivode's image can be found and it is easy for us to notice that certain themes and plot lines are repeated and the similarities among them are striking. Vlad the Impaler became the protagonist of what can be called horror stories long before Bram Stoker wrote his novel. However, he is not always presented as a monster, a man whose cruelty knows no limits. In some cultural spaces (for example, Russian or Romanian), he is seen as a hero and this idea is reflected in the tales we know today. There might be some truth in every story, yet, in the end, they remain stories. They influenced the way Vlad the Impaler was seen in and outside his country, but one has to wonder if they were not also a form of entertainment.

The quote above holds the physical description of Kostova's Dracula. His mere presence seems to demand attention. The blood on his lips betrays his vampiric nature, but this is not someone whose goal is to kill mindlessly. He looks like an aristocrat, he is handsome, calm and elegant. We know what the real Dracula looked like, his portrait is available to everyone and we have access to various descriptions and they are uncannily similar to this one, Kostova making no secret of the fact that she knew what she was talking about, that she had carefully researched the voivode's life, even for the physical elements. Like Dracula, Vlad the Impaler was a proud man, not very tall, rather handsome and elegant, with long hair, green eyes, thick eyebrows, an aquiline nose over a moustache, all supported by a strong neck and

[10]Kostova, Elizabeth. *The Historian*, chapter 73.

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broad shoulders[11]. In the dead of the night, in secret places, readers and characters come to face both a myth and a historical figure.

Elizabeth Kostova created a character which is more complex than his Victorian predecessor. The Count wishes to move to England because he must survive. He is the invader, yet, for one who poses such a serious threat, he is defeated quite easily. The Historian is more mature and more confident in his plans and movements. We see him in person for a short period of time, but his presence is felt throughout the novel. He is there, controlling people from the shadows, watching history unfold before his eyes and admiring his influence over a series of events. We do not know exactly how this Dracula travels, but the old restrictions have grown weaker. It is not easy for a mortal to find him, but the undead can find whoever he wishes without difficulty. Being able to change his form and walk in broad daylight unaffected... his story is more unsettling and frightening than that of the Count, despite the fact that blood and violence are merely details in a broader scheme. The Historian knows and sees everything, can kill and control without drawing too much attention on himself.

We mentioned the Count's goal... but what makes Kostova's Dracula different? He is ruthless and extremely careful with his plans and his choices. Because, as we will see, he will only offer immortality to specific people. This Dracula lived through history, he admires humanity, even if not for the beauty it can create, but for some of the most horrifying events which took place in the past centuries. He has always been a warrior, but also a learned man, a scholar, and his thirst for knowledge only grew in undeath. "Perhaps you know, Professor, that only about one one-thousandth of the literature ever published is still in existence? I have set myself the task of raising that fraction, over the centuries"[12]. It is a noble goal, especially in the eyes of someone who appreciates literature and wants to preserve information for the generations to come.

The main characters of the novel are intellectuals, their lives are dedicated to books and learning. We can ask: what price is one willing to pay in order to gain access to more knowledge than anyone could ever imagine? Vlad the Impaler offered his soul and, from a religious

[11]Matei Cazacu writes in his book, *Dracula*, about the voivode's appearance, highlighting the fact that it betrayed a certain cruelty, but also intelligence, strength and the ambition to protect his country and fight against its enemies.

[12]Kostova, Elizabeth. *The Historian*, chapter 73.

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perspective, the chance to enter heaven. His attitude (as we see in the last chapter and in the way he approached Bartholomew Rossi) suggests that he considers this a small sacrifice. However, Dracula is his own master, he acts according to his wishes. Unlike the European vampire, he does not seem to be too affected by the limitations mentioned in the beginning of this paper. The author does not emphasise the strong and weak points of the vampire, she focuses on his intentions, on how he perceives the changes which have taken place in the world. It would be impossible for the reader to forget that he is the embodiment of our own darkness, pointing towards the fact that too much power in the wrong hands leads to chaos and destruction. And as much as Dracula enjoys his books, he also enjoys watching people ruin themselves and the societies they live in.

The Historian is not kind and shows no compassion. If his fangs and eyes are not enough to convince us from the beginning that there is something unnatural about him, the way he speaks, the scent which can be felt around his body and in his tomb, the heavy atmosphere which announces his presence even when he cannot be seen... all of these elements are part of the characteristics that place the vampire beyond humanity. He is never underestimated by the other characters, never considered inferior or unable to understand the world in which he moves. Immortality is not a curse for him, it is what he had been seeking since before his first death.

"I have never made a full record of my holdings, of their origins and condition. This will be your first task, and you will accomplish it more swiftly and brilliantly than anyone else would be able to -…-. Your second task will be much larger. In fact, it will last forever. When you know my library and its purposes as intimately as I do, you will go out into the world, under my command, and search for new acquisitions - and old ones, too, for I shall never stop collecting from the works of the past. I will put many archivists at your disposal - the finest of them - and you shall bring more under our power"[13].

Bartholomew Rossi, Paul, his daughter (the unnamed narrator), even Helen Rossi... it is obvious why in a different situation it would be tempting for them to embrace immortality, to do more than read about the past. Yet the appeal fades away when the offer comes from a creature

[13] *Ibidem*

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that should have been long gone from this world. Stoker's Dracula controls the ones he bites and turns into vampires. We find the same ability with the Historian as well. The characters are aware of the danger, that they would have to obey the one who leads them to undeath, and they try their hardest to protect themselves and the ones they love. The most relevant examples of the fact that mortals lose at least part of their free-will are Rossi and Helen. We are told that it takes three bites to become a vampire, but we see the contamination spreading through their bodies from the first one. The second bite already causes the victims to long for something they cannot explain, thus bringing them closer to the master vampire against their will.

We do not actually know how many people Dracula turned into vampires over the years, just as we do not know how many accepted his offer willingly and how many were just victims. There is a book which appears when the *nosferatu* chooses someone to "work" for him. It bears the symbol of the dragon (a nod towards the Order of the Dragon and the root of the name "Drakulya") and it plays an important part in revealing long-buried secrets. Rossi recalls meeting a man when he found that book in Turkey. He is nothing but another one of Dracula's pawns, appearing to be both terrified and terrifying, with the visible bite-marks on his neck. Then we have the librarian who chases after Paul and Helen when they search for Rossi. Unlike the other man, we can say without a doubt that this person is more than willing to destroy any shred of humanity he might have had, all because he wants to be the one chosen by Dracula.

Kostova continues a well-known tradition and creates a vampire that is neither a weak opponent, nor an indestructible god-like figure. Like in *Dracula*, the undead can be destroyed. Silver is always efficient, a stake or a bullet through the creature's heart will turn the body to dust. For protection, one can use garlic, a cross or a crescent moon (a sacred symbol from a religion other than Christianity). Our characters are not religious, they do not believe in superstitions or cross themselves when hearing the name Drakulya. Rossi himself advises Paul to use as protection his mind, his knowledge and the moral principles guiding

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him through life, just like he did after being frightened away from continuing his research regarding the tomb of Vlad the Impaler[14].

Dracula, the character and the symbol, crossed the ocean and stepped into a new stage of his journey through eternity. In *The Historian*, Bram Stoker's novel is just another book (one also owned by the one who bears its name), as it is in our world. Elizabeth Kostova's story brings the vampire even closer to us. The readers are told that he is not just a figment of someone's imagination... even more, he is still out there. There is no happy ending here, just a moment of tranquillity before the chase must begin once more. Humans are still meant to be the ones who defeat monsters, yet victory is no longer guaranteed. We could say that this situation reflects what readers want: to learn more about the creatures lurking in the shadows, yet to see the embodiment of evilness defeated.

We might be tempted to say that a circle was closed in 2005, when *The Historian* was published, yet a new path opened with it as well. Kostova showed us that it is possible to follow closely the vampire myth and Stoker's story and still create something new. If Dracula is present in our age and he cannot be destroyed, what will the characters do? We have on our hands a truly unsettling story and one of the most dangerous vampires imaginable: powerful, cunning, intelligent, charming, one capable of making history obey his will even if he remains hidden. And as long as the vampire's image is reinvented, Dracula will not die. At one point or another, everyone returns to him. He might disappear for short periods of time from literature, but he will always return under different forms.

Dracula inspired the creation of vampires in American literature and the character appears in various films, all attempting to bring forth a new side of him. It is this diversity, this rich potential which attracts people and makes them want to see what hides under the surface. We seek complexity, we want more than a mere "good versus evil" story. Even when the message is clear, evil will always be defeated, as it is in Bram Stoker's book, there will still be questions waiting for their answers. As time went by, we were offered more, we were invited to see the events unfolding from a different perspective, to search for more information.

[14]"I don't wear garlic, or crucifixes, or cross myself at the sound of a step in the hall. I have a better protection than that - I have stopped digging at that dreadful crossroads of history." (*Ibidem*, chapter 13)

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