The Historian Study Guide

The Historian by Elizabeth Kostova

BOOKRAGS

Contents

Introduction

The Historian (2005) is Elizabeth Kostova's debut novel. Inspired by a Dracula story her father told her as a child, the author began writing the 642-page historical thriller while working on her master of fine arts at the University of Michigan. It took ten years to complete the novel, but her hard work paid off. Just forty-eight hours after Kostova's agent sent *The Historian* to publishers, Kostova was offered an advance of $2 million for the book, followed by $2 million from Sony Pictures for the film rights. The book became an instant bestseller and has been compared to Dan Brown's *The DaVinci Code* for its content as well as the literary fanfare both books inspired.

The novel features an unnamed sixteen-year-old narrator, her mother, her father, her father's mentor, and each one's globetrotting search for Dracula's tomb. Interwoven storylines spanning centuries and continents are held together by the story's central focus on the life of Vlad Ţepeş Dracula, former brutal ruler of Wallachia and possible still-"living" vampire. History, travel, libraries, books, and scholarship serve as general themes in the book, exploring past versus present and the way that history does or does not inform the future to round things out. The story is richly detailed, romantic, suspenseful, and dense. Kostova brings each exotic location and historical footnote to life with precise and evocative language, making clear the extensive research that undergirds the book's artistry.

Author Biography

Elizabeth Kostova was born Elizabeth Johnson in New London, Connecticut, on August 4, 1964. According to Julie Wheelwright in the *Independent* (U.K.), Kostova's parents, Eleanor and David Johnson, were academics who taught at universities in New York, Indiana, Tennessee, and North Carolina. When she was seven, the author's father, an urban planning professor, was transferred to the Slovenian capital of Ljubljana. The Eastern European setting, as well as trips to Vienna and Venice, made quite an impression on her. "It was the formative experience of my childhood," Kostova told Wheelwright. She told Anne Sanow of *Publisher's Weekly*, "We traveled around and saw beautiful places, and at one point [my father] he began to tell me a wonderfully creepy Dracula story."

Her childhood travels to Eastern Europe informed Kostova's decision to study Slavonic music after graduating from Yale University in 1988. She went to Bulgaria in 1989 on a postgraduate fellowship to study the country's village music and soon met Gyorgi Kostov, her future husband. The two wed in 1990 and settled in Philadelphia. On a hiking trip through the Appalachians with her new husband, Kostova remembered her father's Dracula story. She told Sanow, "I had a vision of a father telling his daughter these tales, and I thought: what if the daughter realizes that Dracula is somehow listening? I think every novel has its moment of genesis, and that was it for me." Inspired, Kostova began making notes on the spot.

It took Kostova ten years to turn those notes into *The Historian*, her debut novel. According to the *Guardian* (U.K.), she wrote the novel while teaching fiction writing at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor where she was earning her masters in fine arts. "I wrote it in a very private and obsessive way," she told journalist Gary Younge. Her time and hard work paid off quickly, earning huge sums for the advance and the film rights. Kostova has won several awards since publishing *The Historian*, including the 2005 Quill Award for Debut Author. As of 2006, Kostova lives in Ann Arbor, Michigan, with her family, where she continues to write fiction.

Plot Summary

Part One

Part Two

Part Three

Epilogue

In the narrator's present day, she tells of her continuing Dracula scholarship after her father's death a decade before. She learns that, in 1476, Dracula had paid for a Wallachian monastery to be grandly adorned, on the condition that he may be entombed there, but that he did not intend to remain dead for very long. He had discovered the secret to immortality rests in a monastery in Gaul.

Characters

Selim Aksoy

Selim Aksoy is thoroughly devoted to the study of Istanbul. He is a learned man and shopkeeper who "knows more about books than anyone in Istanbul."

Stephen Barley

Barley is Master James's student assistant and the narrator's guide to Oxford. When Paul leaves Oxford suddenly, Barley is dispatched to accompany the narrator back home to Amsterdam. Feeling protective of his charge, he follows her to the Amsterdam train station the morning after her first night home and discovers her intent to travel to France to find her father. He becomes her traveling companion and love interest and is beside her when they stumble upon Dracula's tomb.

Johan Binnerts

Johan Binnerts is a friendly, elderly, Dutch librarian. He works in the medieval collection of the university library in Amsterdam and assists the narrator in her Dracula research.

The Historian was released on June 1, 2005, as an audio CD narrated by Joanne Whalley, Dennis Boutsikaris, Rosalyn Landor, and Martin Jarvis. It is available through Little, Brown Adult in an abridged edition.

Turgut Bora

Dr. Turgut Bora is an English literature professor at the University of Istanbul. He is also a member of the Crescent Guard of the Sultan, a secret guard whose purpose is to "hunt down and kill" members of the Order of the Dragon. He assists Helen and Paul's investigation. He funds their trip to Bulgaria and puts them in touch with several important people there and in Istanbul.

Bora

Mrs. Bora is Turgut Bora's wife. She is a small, smiling, beautiful nursery school teacher around forty years old. Her English is limited, but she is a very good host. She gives Helen her mother's embroidered silk scarf to wear when she and Paul are married.

Clay

Mrs. Clay is the English housekeeper Paul employs. He also relies on her to watch over the narrator when he is away. She is described as "skilled with a feather duster and clumsy with teenagers."

Vlad Ţepeş Dracula

Born in the fifteenth century, Vlad Ţepeş Dracula is discovered to be a "living" historian, vampire, and lover of books. Before becoming a vampire, Dracula was the brutal ruler of Wallachia (one of three provinces of Romania) who was given the name "Vlad the Impaler" (Ţepeş is Romanian for "impaler") after his favorite method for torturing his enemies. Dracula lures historians and scholars from around the world to his tomb by leaving mysterious books featuring woodcuts of a dragon in their centers. Dracula chooses his favorite scholar, Bartholomew Rossi, to catalog his enormous library of rare books after Rossi comes close to finding him. Helen Rossi shoots and kills Dracula, presumably ending his centuries-long reign of terror.

Erozan

Mr. Erozan is a dear friend of Turgut Bora and a librarian at the Sultan Mehmed collection in Istanbul. He becomes "polluted" when the grubby male librarian bites him at his library. Bora drives a stake through Erozan's heart to save his friend from eternal damnation after he is bitten the third time.

Giuliana

Giuliana is Massimo's wife and Paul's old friend. She is tall and elegant, a generous host, and wonderful cook. She and her gregarious husband call Paul "Paolo."

Grubby Male Librarian

The grubby male librarian is the vampire Dracula rejected when he he shoose to take Rossi. "I would have gone willingly to serve him, to help him," he says after "poisoning" Helen and demanding she hand over Rossi's map. The librarian flees Helen and Paul after following them around, only to be struck in the street by a car. This does not kill him, though, as Helen and Paul discover when they encounter him in the Sultan Mehmed collection in Istanbul where he attacks Mr. Erozan. He may be responsible for biting Helen a second time when she and Paul spend the night in the monastery in Bulgaria.

Hedges

Hedges is mentioned in one of Professor Rossi's letters written in 1930. He was a very close friend of Professor Rossi when he was at Oxford, "a don only ten years older than myself of whom I was extremely fond." To maintain his friend's privacy, Rossi gives him the *nom de guerre* "Hedges," but mentions in his letter that the man's real name could be easily discovered with a little digging. Hedges is attacked one evening by a vampire with a message for Rossi. Hedges was instructed to tell Rossi that the vampire "will brook no trespasses"—one of many clues offered throughout the novel. Hedges dies of a related stroke soon after and Rossi vows to avenge his friend's death.

Hugh James

In the narrative from the 1950s, Hugh James is a young University of London scholar who reads a paper on the "legacies the Ottoman Turks left in Central Europe as they withdrew from their failed siege of Vienna in 1685" at the conference in Budapest. Paul introduces himself after the reading and the two men discover they have much in common, primarily the fact that both are recipients of the dragon book. After comparing notes over dinner after the conference, James offers to help Paul "eradicate" Dracula if the demon is ever found to be alive, because he blames Dracula for an accident his fiancée had before they could marry. In the narrative from the 1970s, Master James hosts Paul and the narrator on their trip to Oxford. Unbeknownst to the narrator, Paul, Helen, and Barley, Master James had also been on Dracula's trail and is killed in front of them when Dracula knocks him to the ground in his tomb.

Géza József

Professor Géza József is an attractive, self-possessed, and charming colleague of Helen Rossi and Professor Sándor. When Paul meets him at the reception in Budapest, he is immediately taken by the man, but Helen warns that József is "a flesh-eating vulture." She later admits that she once had feelings for him and that he helped her obtain a fellowship and passport to leave Hungary. József is also searching for Dracula's tomb and ends up bursting in on Helen and Paul there after they find and kill Professor Rossi.

Howard Martin

Howard Martin is the Smithsonian bibliophile who conducts the chemical analysis of Professor Rossi's mysterious dragon book. Rossi describes the man and his analysis of the book in one of letters he wrote in 1930.

Massimo

Massimo is an old college friend of Paul. He is large, boisterous, warm, and generous. Paul and the narrator visit Massimo at his home in Monteperduto, Italy, where Massimo reveals that Professor Rossi considered Paul his best student.

The Narrator

The unnamed female narrator is the central character of the novel. In 1972, the year her tale begins, the sixteen-year-old attends the International School of Amsterdam and lives with her father in a seventeenth-century townhouse in the heart of the city. Happiest alone in her father's library, the narrator is a sheltered, highly intelligent, intellectually curious, well-traveled, and well-behaved young woman. Born in the United States, she has lived in Amsterdam so long she hardly remembers her native country. Her mother supposedly died when she was still an infant, so the narrator is cared for by her overprotective father and an amiable housekeeper.

The action of the story begins when the narrator discovers a strange book on one of the top shelves of her father's library. Blank except for a woodcut of a dragon holding a banner emblazoned with the word "Drakulya" in the very center, the book contains an envelope full of personal letters. Unable to help herself, the narrator reads the topmost letter, dated December 12, 1930. The letter begins, "My dear and unfortunate successor." Feeling guilty about her discovery, the narrator decides to keep it a secret until she can find an appropriate time and place to ask her father about it. For the first time, she insists on being taken with her father on his next business trip where she confesses her find and asks that he explain the mystery behind it. This seemingly benign request sets the stage for a tale involving three separate storylines that take place in 1930, the 1950s, and 1970s and lead the reader to such far-flung locales as France, Istanbul, and Eastern Europe.

Before her discovery of the strange book in her father's library, the narrator knew nothing about her parents' search for Dracula's tomb and how it affected their lives. After the discovery, her father's explanation of the book and her own growing curiosity turn her into something of a historian and Dracula-seeker, too. Over the course of the novel, the narrator learns much about herself and her family history, falls in love, and is reunited with her mother.

Éva Orbán

Aunt Éva is the sister of Helen Rossi's mother. She is very beautiful and bears a striking resemblance to Helen. She holds a powerful position in the Hungarian government and does not speak any English. She uses her bureaucratic power to help Helen's mother flee Romania when she is pregnant with Helen, and she later helps Helen and Paul whenever they need assistance with visas and other travel arrangements—especially to communist countries when it is politically dangerous or forbidden.

Paul

Paul is the narrator's father, a historian and diplomat. Founder of the Center for Peace and Democracy, Paul takes excellent care of his motherless daughter, providing her with a comfortable life, a stellar education, and as much protection as he can offer her. He is a serious, highly respected historian who travels widely, giving talks and attending conventions when he is not doing research.

Paul's career as a historian began in the 1950s as a graduate student at an unnamed American university. While studying one night, a strange book appears in his library carrel. Blank except for a woodcut of a dragon in its center, the book does not belong to the library. Paul does a little research but cannot figure out where the book came from. He decides to show it to his beloved graduate advisor, Bartholomew Rossi, knowing his mentor is fond of historical mysteries. Paul is shocked to discover that Rossi, too, was left a copy of the same curious book, in the same curious way, when he was a graduate student at Oxford many years before. After discussing the book and Rossi's own research into it in 1930, Rossi tells Paul, "Dracula—Vlad Ţepeş—is still alive." Rossi disappears soon after this discussion, which leads to Paul's globetrotting search for Dracula's tomb, where he believes he will find Rossi, "the kindest, warmest friend I'd ever had." Of the novel's three story-lines, Paul's tale of his search for Rossi and Dracula's tomb, told to his daughter in various locations throughout the novel, serves as the primary thread.

During his search, Paul meets the woman that will become his wife, fathers the narrator, finds Rossi and saves him from eternal damnation, loses his wife, helps kill Dracula, then finds his wife again. In the epilogue, the reader learns that Paul "had been killed by a land mine in Sarajevo more than ten years before, working to mediate Europe's worst conflagration in decades."

Krassimir Ranov

Krassimir Ranov is Helen and Paul's government-ordered guide to Bulgaria. Highly respected in the Bulgarian government and associated with the University of Sofia, Ranov is a communist spy who hinders Paul and Helen's research with Anton Stoichev. He leads Professor Géza József to Dracula's Bulgarian tomb.

Bartholomew Rossi

Professor Bartholomew Rossi is a British historian, professor of history, prolific and highly regarded author, graduate advisor to Paul, and father of Paul's wife, Helen. His encyclopedic knowledge and curiosity about the world's mysteries is widely recognized by authorities from a range of disciplines. Rossi's tale of his search for Dracula's tomb—as told to Paul or written in letters—is the center of one of the novel's three storylines.

In 1930, after receiving his copy of the strange blank book with the woodcut of the dragon in the center, Rossi becomes somewhat obsessed with learning more about Vlad Ţepeş, also known as Vlad the Impaler, Vlad Dracula, or Dracula. Although Rossi feels unable to publish anything about the legend of Dracula, because of Bram Stoker's novel *Dracula* and the legend's subsequent commercialization, he feels compelled to follow the leads he uncovers to Istanbul, where a small repository of late fifteenth-century documents related to Turk-slayer Vlad Dracula is located. While conducting his research there, Rossi is confronted by a mysterious man with half-healed puncture wounds on his throat—a man no else sees. After this man seizes one of the maps Rossi was studying, a frustrated and puzzled Rossi returns to his hotel to find his research notes and hand-drawn maps stolen from his room. Terrified, Rossi abandons his research and returns to the United States, vowing to never look into the mystery of Vlad Dracula again. Because he believes that "Scholarship must go on. For good or for evil, but inevitably, in every field," he hands whatever research documents he still possesses over to Paul, knowing his best student will surely carry on this "ghastly trail of scholarship." The reader discovers later that Rossi did not tell Paul all that he knows.

Professor Rossi disappears after giving Paul his research documents, reappearing toward the end of the book in a tomb in Bachkovo, Bulgaria. Before Dracula is able to make him his eternal slave, Rossi directs Paul and his wife, Rossi's daughter, to a rare book in which Rossi has placed several letters documenting his imprisonment by the monster Dracula. Paul saves his beloved mentor from eternal damnation by plunging a silver dagger into his heart.

Eléna Rossi

See Helen Rossi.

Helen Rossi

Helen Rossi is Professor Rossi's daughter, Paul's wife, and the narrator's mother. She is a beautiful, strong-willed, genius anthropologist and Romanian-born descendant of Vlad Dracula.

Paul discovers this dark-haired beauty in the university library where they are both researching the legend of Dracula. Paul is on the trail of Dracula's tomb in hopes of finding and saving Professor Rossi, while Helen hopes to outshine the illustrious professor father she has never met by publishing "the definitive work" on Dracula, a project she believes Professor Rossi is saving up as a scholarly grand finale of his own. Her hatred for Professor Rossi stems from the fact that when the young professor traveled to Romania to search for Dracula in 1930, he met, fell in love with, and impregnated Helen's young mother. He did not know of the child when he left, and he promised to come back as soon as he could. When Helen's mother does not hear from him for many months, she is forced to flee to Budapest to raise the child alone, although she presents herself as Mrs. Rossi.

Helen's search for Dracula is fueled by bitterness toward the man Paul hopes to save, but despite their differences, the two become traveling and research partners. From Istanbul to Budapest to Bulgaria, Helen and Paul follow clues and maps found or pointed out by supportive confidants they meet along the way. Helen is "poisoned" by a vampire who follows them from place to place, but she remains strong and healthy. They finally find—and kill—a near-dead Professor Rossi in Bulgaria. By this time, Helen has learned that her father had been drugged into forgetting about her mother. She regrets the hatred she previously felt for him.

Paul and Helen fall in love, marry, and settle in New York. Helen gives birth to their daughter, the narrator of the novel, and then disappears for most of her daughter's life, intent on finding Dracula's hiding place and avenging her father's death. She also feels incredible guilt over passing Dracula's evil blood to her daughter and believes that staying away from the two people she loves most is the right thing to do. The three are finally reunited in Dracula's tomb where Helen shoots the undead prince. The family lives together very happily until Helen dies of a "wasting illness" nine years later.

Sándor

Professor Sándor is chairman of the history department at the University of Budapest, a highly respected medievalist, and a colleague of Helen. Helen introduces Paul to Sándor at the reception for the conference they attend in Budapest.

Anton Stoichev

Anton Stoichev is the elderly, exiled Bulgarian scholar Helen and Paul visit while they are in Bulgaria. He "knows more about the medieval Balkans than anyone else alive." Professor Géza József forces Stoichev to lead him to Dracula's Bulgarian tomb where they burst in on Helen and Paul.

Themes

History's Connection to the Present

History's impact on the present serves as the central theme of *The Historian*. Most of the characters in the novel are historians seeking a past—sometimes their own—that holds clues to the present.

To make the leap from past to present, the characters must first understand that historical events are more than just stories unrelated to reality. The narrator realizes this when she begins researching the life of Vlad Dracula:

The thing that most haunted me that day, however, as I closed my notebook and put my coat on to go home, was not my ghostly image of Dracula, or the description of impalement, but the fact that these things had—apparently—actually occurred.

Paul reiterates his daughter's historical awareness later on: "This corner of history was as real as the tiled floor under our feet…. The people to whom it had happened had actually lived and breathed."

The reader learns that Vlad Ţepeş was something of a hero to Ivan the Terrible, who, in turn, was something of a hero to Joseph Stalin. Likewise, Dracula mentions that he had great admiration for Adolph Hitler. Just as terror attacks on Wallachia in the fifteenth century are described, so are the communist takeover of Hungary and a (future, fictional) terror attack on a Philadelphia federal building in 2008. The evils of history are laid out like one of the many maps that appear in the novel. The author's intent, it seems, is to make plain that historical events have their consequences and that people would be wise to remember that fact.

Treasure in Books

Because the pursuit of history's secrets so dominantes the story, it makes sense that books would play a leading role in *The Historian*. Without the knowledge each character finds, reads, and/or seeks, there would be no story. Without the dragon books, for instance, Professor Rossi and Paul might never have gone looking for Vlad Dracula in the first place.

The many scholars who populate the book pore over books, smell them, describe the way their pages feel, treat them almost like living things, revering them for the knowledge they hold. Books and the secrets they reveal propel the characters forward so that they might find what they seek. Sometimes books even bring characters together, as *Vampires de Moyen Age*, the book Paul leaves open in the Radcliffe Camera, did. Master James, the narrator, and Barley are drawn to the book after Paul is seen studying it. Had they not taken the time to read it, they may never have found Paul in Dracula's tomb at Saint-Matthieu.

In the novel, Dracula says, "History has taught us that the nature of man is evil, sublimely so," and uses his vast library to support his conclusion. He asks that Professor Rossi join him:

Together we will advance the historian's work beyond anything the world has ever seen. There is no purity like the purity of the sufferings of history. You will have what every historian wants: history will be reality to you.

Without his great store of books, Dracula would not be able to offer such a promise.

Mentors and Disciples

The mentor/disciple relationship is prominent throughout *The Historian*. This particular relationship finds its origins in various religious practices, but it strays from that path for the better part of the novel. The mentors and disciples found in *The Historian* are the academic sort, kneeling together at the altar of historical knowledge. The trusted mentor imparts his wisdom and guidance upon the admiring student and a special bond results. Professor Rossi and Paul share this relationship, as do Master James and Barley.

Dracula and the vampires that do his bidding share a similar, yet very different kind of mentor/disciple relationship. There is no special bond, beyond the fact that both are vampires. Dracula feels nothing for his disciples and shows them no special favor. For example, the grubby male librarian, in a disciple role to that of Dracula as mentor, shows unwavering loyalty and still gets passed over when Dracula chooses Professor Rossi to be his librarian.

Style

Epistolary Novel

Like Bram Stoker's *Dracula, The Historian* is an epistolary novel. This means that letters and journal entries and, in some cases, news reports or other documents are used to tell the story instead of a singular, linear narrative. This structural device works particularly well considering the scope and breadth of the novel. Kostova's characters travel from the United States to Istanbul to numerous locations in both eastern and western Europe and back again over the course of the novel. They also appear in various time periods, sometimes centuries apart, so the device helps make the story seem more realistic.

This device works on another level, too. Because letters and journal entries usually are a more intimate form of communication, they do more than simply relate pertinent information to the reader. Letter and journal writers reveal themselves through their words, which allows the reader to get to know them in a way that would not be possible otherwise.

Multiple Narratives

The epistolary form of *The Historian* is especially apt, considering the fact that Kostova also uses the narrative device of multiple storylines to tell her tale. No fewer than four characters speaking from at least three different time periods contribute storylines that make up the novel. While one thread is being spun, another acts as a framing device. By using letters and journal entries to tell her story, Kostova is able to keep the various storylines flowing. Because the letters and journal entries are usually dated, the reader is able to easily track the time period of the action, if not the setting, too. This allows Kostova to shift time periods and locations without unnecessarily bogging down the action.

Historical Context

Vampire Lore

Cultures from all over the world have adopted various mythologies and legends, stories real and imagined, that stem from the belief in the life-giving power of blood drinking. Before the practice was outlawed, vampire cults ran rampant in ancient Rome. Infertile Roman women supposedly drank the blood of fertile females believing it would help them conceive. Roman men, likewise, drank blood because they were convinced it would make them more potent. African civilizations and tribes used fetishes to protect against the vampires they believed came to their villages to drink blood, steal children, and kill livestock. Ancient Indian folklore had several figures associated with drinking blood or rising from death as an evil creature.

The ancient legends of vampires survived and evolved in Eastern Europe, where several puzzling deaths in the eighteenth century bolstered the monsters' reputation. Vampires appeared in western Gothic literature in the early nineteenth century, but it was Bram Stoker's 1897 novel *Dracula* that launched vampires into the general public consciousness. The book was an inspired blend of folktales, fact, and fiction. Stoker borrowed from Transylvanian legends about *strigoi*, the undead, as well as Romanian history. Infamous tyrant Vlad the Impaler, the despotic fifteenth-century ruler who had a penchant for killing his enemies by impaling them on stakes, was the inspiration for Stoker's main character. The book diluted original folk stories while creating a huge amount of interest in them. Stoker's Dracula could be warded off with garlic and crosses and put to rest with a wooden stake through the heart. Terrified readers, afraid that Dracula would fly into their rooms through their windows as they slept, puncture their throats with his fangs, and suck the life-blood from them, began placing crosses and strands of garlic around their doors and windows—just in case.

Inspired by Stoker's novel, the 1922 silent film *Nosferatu* was the first vampire tale in a motion picture. Hungarian-born actor Bela Lugosi made Count Dracula an icon, first on Broadway in 1927 and then on film in 1931. Since then, vampires have loomed large in popular culture, appearing in countless films, books, and television shows. Recent adaptations of the vampire legend have included novelist Anne Rice's *The Vampire Chronicles* and the wildly popular television show *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Vampires continue to be reinvented as modern menaces, tragic heroes, and even comic figures.

Istanbul

Istanbul is a city of more than ten million people in northwestern Turkey, close to Greece and Bulgaria. East and south of Turkey lie Syria, Iraq, Iran, Armenia, Georgia, and the Mediterranean Sea, with the Black Sea to the north. The city was settled in the seventh century B.C., when Greek King Byzas established Byzantium after consulting the oracle at Delphi, who instructed Byzas to settle across from the "land of the blind ones." Byzas

settled on the European side of the Bosphorus strait, concluding that the Chalcedonians, who inhabited the area on the Asiatic side of the strait, must have been "blind" settle across from the superior location. In the fourth century A.D., the first Christian emperor of Rome, Constantine the Great, moved his capital to Byzantium and renamed it Constantinople. Constantinople was the capital of the Eastern Roman Empire, also called the Byzantine Empire, for more than a thousand years. The cathedral Hagia Sophia was built in the sixth century on the site of an earlier Christian church, and it remained the world's largest cathedral until the middle ages. The city contended with attacks and by Persians, Muslim Arabs, European nomads, Turks, and Christian Crusaders, before falling to the Ottoman Turks in 1453, when Sultan Mehmet II conquered Byzantine Constantinople and changed its name to Istanbul. Hagia Sophia was converted to a mosque under Ottoman rule. By the mid-1500s, Istanbul had become a major political, cultural, and economic center. Ottoman rule continued until World War I, in which it allied with Germany. The Republic of Turkey was established in 1923. Although Istanbul is not Turkey's political capital, it is the country's center of commerce and culture, blending ancient and modern, as well as eastern and western, traditions.

Modern Romania and Bulgaria

Bulgaria, which lies north of Istanbul, was a part of the Ottoman Empire until it became an independent principality after the Russo-Turkish War in 1878. After World War II, as one of the countries behind the "Iron Curtain" of Soviet influence, Bulgaria became a communist People's Republic in 1946. For forty-two years, the country was recognized as being the most loyal to Moscow of all the Eastern bloc countries. Intellectual and personal freedoms were stifled under communist control until Todor Zhikov took power in the early 1960s. Zhikov relaxed controls on media and security and began reestablishing ties with western countries. After Zhikov resigned in 1989, his successor put an end to communist control of the country, held free elections in 1990, and was forced to resign when the Bulgarian Socialist Party won. In October 1991, Bulgaria's first non-communist government since World War II took over.

North of Bulgaria is Romania, a country that had been an independent principality loyal to the Ottoman Empire until it came under Hapsburg rule as part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire in the eighteenth century. Like Bulgaria, Romania gained its independence after the Russo-Turkish War in 1878 and became a communist People's Republic after World War II. Romanians suffered under harsh economic and political times until the mid-1960s, when Nicolae Ceausescu came to power and a short period of prosperity and openness emerged. Ceausescu developed into a Stalin-styled authoritarian despot who controlled all aspects of life in Romania, presiding over the accumulation of massive national debt. This led to severe shortages in electricity, food, and consumer products. Anti-government protests broke out in 1989, leading to a revolution that culminated in Ceausescu's execution. Today, Romania is a democratic parliamentary republic with a trade-based economy. Bulgaria and Romania due to join the European Union in 2007.

The Rise of Terrorism

Elizabeth Kostova was born in New London, Connecticut, during a year of great political upheaval. China exploded its first atomic weapon, the United States sent five thousand troops to Vietnam, and Lyndon Johnson became this country's thirty-sixth president. From her childhood years through young adulthood, Kostova was lived through the assassination of Martin Luther King, Richard Nixon's elections, his visit to China, the end of the Vietnam war, the resignation of Nixon, the murder of Israeli Olympic athletes in Munich, the oil crisis of 1973, and the taking of American hostages in the U.S. embassy in Tehran and their subsequent release 444 days later.

What is critical about these events is not the events themselves, but the global political climate these events presage. With the advent of technology and globalization, tensions escalating between Israel and Palestine, Iran and Iraq, and Pakistan and India are now televised and debated at all times of the day, all over the world. That the United States, a global superpower, maintains military bases in nearby is another reason for the heightened state of alert felt by citizens of these foreign countries.

After the tragic bombings of September 11, 2001, the United States government declared a war on terrorism, vowing to ferret out all terrorists and bring them to justice. Islamic fundamentalist militant Osama bin Laden, alleged organizer of the attacks, wrote in a letter dated November 24, 2002:

Your forces occupy our countries; you spread your military bases throughout them; you corrupt our lands, and you besiege our sanctities, to protect the security of the Jews and to ensure the continuity of your pillage of our treasures.

You have starved the Muslims of Iraq, where children die every day. It is a wonder that more than 1.5 million Iraqi children have died as a result of your sanctions, and you did not show concern. Yet when 3,000 of your people died, the entire world rises and has not yet sat down.

Acts of terrorism, sadly, have been on the rise since the late twentieth century. One reason was illustrated by Dracula speaking to Professor Rossi in the last pages of *The Historian*:

These are works of history about your century, the twentieth. A fine century—I look forward to the rest of it. In my day, a prince was able to eliminate troublesome elements only one person at a time. You do this with an infinitely greater sweep. Think, for example, of the improvement from the accursed cannon that broke the walls of Constantinople to the divine fire your adoptive country dropped onto the Japanese cities some years ago.

Kostova told *Publishers Weekly*,

If you think about it, the 20th century is a pretty awful accomplishment in a lot of ways. And I wanted to draw an implicit parallel between medieval history and the 20th century.

Some things that have happened make you wonder just how much progress we've really made over the past 500 years.

Critical Overview

Elizabeth Kostova did not expect the exuberant welcome she received from the publishing world when she started shopping *The Historian*, as she told Gary Younge in an interview for the *Guardian* (U.K.):

I knew it could be a long and sometimes helpless wait. I thought maybe in six months someone would write back and say, "Sorry, but this is such a strange book we don't know how we would market it but good luck in sending it somewhere else."

To her astonishment, the book sparked a bidding war that brought the author an advance of $2 million. The book then sold foreign publishing rights in twenty-eight languages before Sony bought the film rights for another $2 million. The book went straight to the top of the *New York Times* Bestsellers list, selling "more copies than *The Da Vinci Code* on its first day," according to Younge.

Comparisons to Dan Brown's novel dogged the 2005 summer release. *The Historian* was nicknamed, "The Dracula Code" and some tried to lump Kostova's novel in with the other myriad Da Vinci knockoffs being published at the time. It was widely agreed, though, that Kostova's was a far better product. Laura Miller wrote in her 2005 Salon.com review:

Two years ago, we got the phenomenally successful but historically bogus and literarily negligible *The Da Vinci Code*. Last year, it was the callow, garbled *The Rule of Four*. This year, the publishing business finally delivers on its promises: Elizabeth Kostova's *The Historian* is a hypnotic yarn, saturated in authentic history and eerie intrigue.

Kostova was praised for the historical authenticity of the book, as well as her ability to create tragic, three-dimensional characters readers care about. She was criticized, though, for "not having much talent for impersonation," as Jane Stevenson wrote in her *Observer* review. Stevenson went on:

That there is no distinction between the narrator's voice and exposition is legitimate, since the narrator is recounting the events of 1972 from the standpoint of 2008, but the father's voice is identical, which is bad, and so is the voice of an Oxonian Englishman in 1930, which is ludicrous.

Maureen Corrigan of National Public Radio found a different fault with the book, focusing on its message:

Better not to read or to see too deeply into the surface of things is the perverse anti-intellectual message of erudite light novels like *The Da Vinci Code, The Rule of Four*, and *The Historian*, where a little learning always turns out to be a dangerous thing and a lot of learning—or reading—is tantamount to a death sentence.

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2

Critical Essay #1

Ann Guidry is a freelance writer and editor. In this essay, she discusses the role of travel in The Historian

At its heart, *The Historian* is a quest tale. It is also a historical thriller, a romance, and a travelogue—all genres that tend to feature travel as an integral part of the action. But travel is used as more than a simple plot device in Kostova's novel. Travel acts as a metaphor for the quest for knowledge; it illustrates the significance of geographical history; it explains the origins of religious and political differences between characters; and it expands the scope of an already rich story. Kostova uses her characters' wanderings to explore vital connections between travel and history, history and truth, and truth and the act of seeking. These elements serve as both questions and answers and are inextricably linked to the time periods and exotic geographic locations that serve as the setting of the novel.

Traveling through a foreign country is, if nothing else, a learning experience. In a strange environment, one must navigate directions, an unfamiliar language, exotic food, native customs, and, sometimes, tricky political situations. Thus, travel acts as a conduit for the theme of learning throughout the novel. Travel and education are one and the same. Because scholarship is so highly regarded by the characters that fill the pages of *The Historian*, all are highly aware of how well their traveling companions, or they themselves, adapt to a foreign environment. Sometimes they go so far as to remark on it. On one of their trips together, Paul and the narrator navigate both Slovenian hotels and cafés, as well as the language. The narrator says, "My father taught me the new alphabet, and I amused myself trying to sound out the station signs, each of which looked to me like code words that could open a secret door."

The scholarly adventures are not limited to only learning new languages, though. As the characters travel, they also encounter hosts who do not always have their guests' best interests at heart. In Bulgaria, tailed by a nosy and suspicious guide, Helen and Paul begin to doubt the generosity they have been shown. Paul tells Helen, "It seems to me … that if they aren't stopping us from finding whatever we're looking for—which they could do so easily—it's because they *want* us to find it." Helen replies, "Good, Sherlock…. You are learning a great deal."

Quest tales, such as the *Odyssey, Don Quixote*, and *Faust* use travel as their primary plot device. In these tales, the author showcases exotic locations and, as we have learned, provides characters with myriad learning opportunities. Sometimes characters become privy to clues that assist them in finding what they seek. Sometimes knowledge gained is extraneous to a character's goal, but it serves to add depth and dimension to the story.

The Historian uses travel in many ways, most obviously as a means to gather important information. Because the novel features scholars and academics—instead of superheroes—as protagonists, their travels usually lead them to far-flung libraries or

monasteries that house obscure document collections. Used to traveling to where the information is, these characters rarely bat an eye at the prospect of picking up and moving on as research dictates. A clue in one place leads to another clue in a more remote, dangerous, or hard-to-reach place. Travel, then, becomes a metaphor for the quest for truth.

In the case of *The Historian*, the principal search for truth involves the search for Vlad Dracula's tomb. After Professor Rossi travels to Istanbul seeking the truth of the map he found in his dragon book, he becomes frightened and gives up his search. When Paul asks Professor Rossi if he ever "tried again to figure out what the map meant, or where it had come from," Rossi replies,

No. One of the few pieces of research I'm sure I'll never finish. I have a theory, however, that this ghastly trail of scholarship, like so many less awful ones, is merely something one person makes a little progress on, then another, each contributing a bit in his own lifetime. Perhaps three such people, centuries ago, did just that in drawing up those maps and adding to them…. Scholarship must go on. For good or for evil, but inevitably, in every field.

Rossi's assumption is truer—and more prescient—than he knows. After giving Paul his research documents, he unknowingly sets at least three more people on "this ghastly trail of scholarship." Helen's and Paul's paths soon cross and they become fast travel partners. Soon after, the narrator is in on the chase. Interestingly, each of these characters, in their travels, becomes aware of personal truths that have nothing to do with Vlad Dracula. Seeking her father, the narrator learns the truth of her mother. In Bulgaria, Helen learns the truth of her father. Paul's and Helen's travels to France toward the end of the novel mark the end of the "ghastly trail of scholarship" and the renewal of the their life together.

Traveling to foreign lands brings the characters of *The Historian* face to face with ancient history. The narrator realizes, in the first pages of the book, the heady thrill of touring a much-traveled place, the foot of the Slovenian Alps:

This is old country. Every autumn mellows it a little more, *in aeternum*, each beginning with the same three colors: a green landscape, two or three yellow leaves falling through a gray afternoon. I suppose the Romans—who left their walls here and their gargantuan arenas to the west, on the coast—saw the same autumn and gave the same shiver. When my father's car swung through the gates of the oldest of Julian cities, I hugged myself. For the first time, I had been struck by the excitement of the traveler who looks history in her subtle face.

In one of Rossi's letters describing his travels through Romania, he writes,

Skirting those beautiful old walls, I realized suddenly that for the first time I was actually walking in Dracula's footsteps. Until then, I had been following his trail through a maze of documents, but now I stood on ground that his feet—in what sort of shoes? Leather boots, with a cruel spur buckled to them?—had probably trodden.

The "subtle face" of history shows herself more boldly to travelers visiting countries recently damaged by war and/or political strife. This is made evident when Helen and Paul travel to Budapest in the 1950s. Helen says,

Budapest was very badly damaged in the war. One of our bridges has not even yet been fully repaired, and many buildings suffered. You can see that we are still rebuilding in every part of the city. But this bridge was repaired for its—how do you say it?—the centennial of its construction, in 1949, and we are very proud of that.

Though thoroughly steeped in historic knowledge, Paul is obviously affected by the damage the beautiful city incurred during World War II. Kostova makes plain the effect travel has on a historian's point of view once he leaves the library and visits actual historic landmarks. Similarly, during the conference in Budapest, Paul is thrown by a speech delivered by Hugh James, "a young scholar from the University of London":

To my great relief he spoke in English, while a Hungarian philology student read a translation of his lecture into German. (It was strange, I thought, to hear all this German here only a decade after the Germans had nearly destroyed Budapest, but I reminded myself that it had been the lingua franca of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.)

A learned, sensitive, scholarly man, Paul's travels from Istanbul affects his view of religious history as well:

There is something vastly mysterious for me about the shift one sees, along that route, from the Islamic world to the Christian, from the Ottoman to the Austro-Hungarian, from the Muslim to the Catholic and Protestant. It is a gradation of towns, of architecture, of gradually receding minarets blended with the advancing church domes, of the very look of forest and riverbank, so that little by little you begin to believe you can read in nature itself the saturation of history.

Travel, then, plays a prominent role in the telling of Kostova's historical thriller. Without the exotic backdrops, readers would glean less of the lessons of history, less of the quest for truth, less of the events leading up to the novel's climax. Taking the reader to the source of the historical events described throughout the novel adds intimacy and realism to the narrative and makes clear the motivations of the characters. The novel's historical accuracy is one of its strongest points, primarily due to the fact that the reader is taken to the historic sites described in the narrative. By including travelogue in the novel, Kostova grounds the familiar legend in concrete facts, breathing new life into the eternal existence of Vlad Dracula.

Source: Ann Guidry, Critical Essay on *The Historian*, in *Literary Newsmakers for Students*, Thomson Gale, 2007.

Critical Essay #2

In the following interview for Powells.com, Kostova talks to Welsh about the childhood stories, travel experiences and Gothic influences that led her to write The Historian, *as well as the reaction to the novel*.

Perhaps you've heard that Elizabeth Kostova's father told her Dracula stories when she was young. You know Dracula, of course, from Bram Stoker's novel, or from the movies, cartoons, and chocolate breakfast cereal it inspired. At the very least, several small children dressed as the infamous vampire have hit you up for candy on Halloween. Five centuries after his death, Dracula lives.

Dracula (1897) is Bram Stoker's classic horror thriller novel that lured Dracula into popular culture.

The Da Vinci Code (2003) is Dan Brown's blockbuster mystery detective novel about a Catholic conspiracy to cover up the truth of Jesus' life.

Interview With a Vampire (1976) is Anne Rice's cult favorite that focuses on the existential despair felt by vampires bored by immortality.

Stalinism for All Seasons: A Political History of Romanian Communism (Societies and Culture in East-Central Europe) (2003) was written by Vladimir Tismaneanu and provides an in-depth and sometimes thrilling history of the Romanian Communist Party.

What if, all this time, he's been paying attention? What if Dracula has been listening in?

Part mystery and part travelogue, *The Historian* sprawls across Europe, from Amsterdam to Istanbul. Feeding off Cold War tensions, epistolary intrigue, the supernatural, and a pair of budding romances besides, Kostova's debut satisfies on so many levels that a bidding war among publishers escalated well into seven figures. Already, translations are slated for twenty-eight languages; Sony has purchased the movie rights.

Which explains, really it does, why the author of the summer's breakout book wound up talking about lemon pound cake, good writing font, Pablo Casals's hands, steam whistles, false documents, Bulgarian antique stores, and happiness.

Dave: Let's start with the hard-hitting questions: Growing up, did you ever wear those plastic vampire teeth?

Elizabeth Kostova: I did. I remember having a pair and loving them. The problem is they fall apart really fast. And I was delighted, on my book tour—at the Harry Schwartz store in Milwaukee, they handed out those plastic vampire teeth at the door to everybody. They gave me all the extras.

Dave: So your father told you Dracula stories when you were young. What other kinds of stories did he tell?

Kostova: Those were certainly the most Gothic; they were pleasantly creepy, full of crypts and creaking doors. The other stories he told were much more along the lines of fairy tales—a king has a problem to solve, and he calls his ministers in …

The Dracula tales were the only ones based on a really specific tradition; he based them on the Dracula films he grew up watching during the Great Depression.

Dave: I didn't go back and count, but I wondered how many languages are described in the book, being read or spoken. How many languages do you speak?

Kostova: Probably half a dozen are referred to in different ways. The only language I speak really well is English. But I also speak Bulgarian pretty well. I used to speak French quite well, but that's gotten rusty.

Dave: But you did a bunch of traveling when you were younger, and then again recently, right?

Kostova: I did. A lot of my travel was in Eastern Europe, before I started writing the book. I've been back a few times since then, but the wider travel, in Western Europe and some parts of Eastern Europe, I did before I began composing it.

Dave: If you could spend time in any city's libraries, independent of specific research materials you might need, which would you choose?

Kostova: That's a hard question. I think Oxford. Those libraries are so beautiful, and not only are they full of treasures, but they're such a pleasure to sit in. And smell—they smell so good.

Dave: There's a lot of talk in your novel about the smell of certain books.

Kostova: That's true.

Dave: Do we need to go deeper here? What is it with you and the smell of books?

Kostova: I think everybody who loves books, especially old books and research, has a kind of fondness for the smell of old books. And I have to admit that when I go into a library, especially if I'm in the stacks by myself, I pull books off the shelf and smell them.

I should add that not all old books smell good. If they've been in a damp environment, they can smell pretty bad.

Dave: Have you always liked studying history?

Kostova: I really have. I grew up in the kind of family where questions about history come up at the dining table and somebody is sent to get the encyclopedia in the middle of the meal.

Dave: At one point in *The Historian*, Paul explains, "I felt the loneliness, suddenly, of standing outside my institution, my universe, a worker bee expelled from the hive."

When I think of the Gothic, I tend to think of a novel like *Wuthering Heights*, where the characters have been cut off from society. The horror comes from a kind of claustrophobia. In Paul's case, though, you've written a character that is thrown *into* society, into something like a vast, unidentifiable doom.

Kostova: That's true, and at the same time you can argue that at that moment Paul is thrown *out of* society—his society is the academic world, which has been very safe and sheltered. All of a sudden, he's propelled out of his cocoon by an artifact, propelled into history; within days, he's on the other side of the world.

But that's interesting what you said about the Gothic. I've never really thought about that as an essential element of Gothic fiction, but it's so true.

Dave: For some reason, *Wuthering Heights* has always stuck with me. When I read it, in college, I wouldn't have said I loved it—I enjoyed it—but I still think about it all the time.

Kostova: I thought about *Wuthering Heights*, and reread it, while I was writing *The Historian*, even though the stories are completely different. The reason I decided to reread it—I read it a long time ago, too—is that it is a long, long *told* story. The housekeeper sits down with her mending, and the guest says, "Tell me the story of Wuthering Heights." She says, "Oh, certainly," and begins darning a sock or something. Thirty-five chapters later, she says, "Well, I finished my sock, and that's the story of Wuthering Heights." It doesn't happen in real time.

That structure is so fascinating. There's something about storytelling, about a story that's actually told by a person, that goes well with the Gothic. The Gothic is always about things we never can quite believe, and hearing them told by an actual person sort of helps us believe.

Dave: In *The Polysyllabic Spree*, Nick Hornby holds up Charles Dickens—specifically, *David Copperfield*—as a foil to minimalism. There's something to be said for stuffing lots of story between front and back covers, he argues. A certain type of writer—and a certain type of reader—isn't particularly interested in getting to the end quickly.

It's hard to talk about your novel without addressing its length. You clearly weren't aiming for a quick, 250-page read.

Kostova: I don't know whether I'm just very long-winded, but Dickens is also one of my favorite writers. I very consciously had the long Victorian novel in mind when I was working on *The Historian*.

For one thing, I wanted to see if it would be possible to blend suspense with that sense of *We have all the time in the world for story*. Dickens does that. When you read *Great Expectations*, you really want to know what is going to happen in the next chapter. And yet it's so, so long. I was interested in tinkering with that.

Dave: *The Historian* being your debut, and being such a great success, does it feel at all odd that suddenly, and who knows for how long, you are known to millions as "the Dracula writer"?

Kostova: It does. I think of myself as a literary writer. I worked on this book for a long time, as well as several shorter works, in a very private, literary way. It is odd. Some of it is about Dracula, not me; Dracula has eternal cachet. I wasn't trying to cash in on that; I'm really fascinated by the Dracula legend—but it is kind of startling, you're right, to see my name linked up with Dracula now.

My next novel, which I started last summer, is very different. It's not Gothic. That's not in response to this; it's just that this was one experiment, and now I'd like to learn something completely different.

Dave: For some amount of time, at least, you'll continue writing fiction?

Kostova: For as long as I can put my fingers on a keyboard. I can't remember a time when I didn't want to be a fiction writer.

Dave: What about nonfiction?

Kostova: I'm very interested. I've actually written and published essays. I don't feel quite as comfortable in that form, but I'm fascinated by it.

Dave: What subjects interest you?

Kostova: I published a book ten years ago, in a small edition, that I co-authored with a North Carolina artist. It's called *1927*. It's an oral history and travel memoir about his travels in the nineteen twenties.

I'm very interested in travel, in oral history and documentary writing, and in art history, especially painting.

As a reader and a writer, I like essays that mingle some kind of learning or erudition with humorous or reflective writing about daily life. I know that sounds really vague, but you know it when you read an essay where the author pulls it off—reflective, personal essays that aren't *too* personal.

Dave: What magazines do you read?

Kostova: My favorite is *National Geographic*.

Dave: So far, what has been the most surprising response to your book?

Kostova: Most surprising? In a lovely independent bookstore where I read and signed, there was a long line, and about halfway through the line, a woman approached me with her book. She said, "I saw you on *Good Morning America* this morning. I thought you might be tired and hungry on your tour, so I made you a lemon pound cake." And she put this cake on the counter in front of me.

I was so surprised. For a minute, I thought I was going to burst into tears. It was just so touching. I didn't know what to say. Then of course I thanked her profusely. In her kitchen that morning, she had made me this cake from scratch! I thought it was so great, partly because it's so un-Gothic. She didn't come up and say, "I thought you'd like this rubber knife." No, a pound cake.

Dave: I'm assuming you write on a word processor. If that's the case, what font do you work in?

Kostova: Times. I used to work in New York, which is closely related to Times. It was sort of a watershed in my life when I moved over.

Dave: Why did you change?

Kostova: I was starting to feel that New York, although it's beautiful, looked very dated to me. That's usually not a problem with my aesthetic, but it had started to become somehow hard to read. I think it was because it looked like typewriter typing, but it wasn't on a typewriter and that looks kitschy. If it had really been a typewriter, that wouldn't have been a problem.

I moved over to Times about twelve years ago and I've been happier ever since.

Source: Dave Welsh, "In Elizabeth Kostova's Carrel," in *Powells.com*, July 15, 2005, p. 1.

Topics for Further Study

- Epistolary novels use documents like letters, news clippings, and legal papers to support, or even entirely present, the tale. In *The Historian*, many letters as well as some records to give the story authenticity. How would you present your life using the epistolary form? With diary entries? News articles? E-mail correspondence? Outline your epistolary autobiography, explaining which outside sources could be used to enhance the story of your life for a reader.
- The characters in *The Historian* are all-too-aware of Bram Stoker's Victorian vampire classic, *Dracula*. Read Stoker's novel and note the similarities and differences between it and *The Historian*. Compare and contrast the novels in a short essay or in a group discussion.
- Read a travel guide of Istanbul, Bulgaria, or Romania. Study the guide, including the maps, and see how well the place descriptions in the guide match Kostova's descriptions of the same sites in *The Historian*. Create a reader's tour guide and map of the places in *The Historian*.
- Children often appear in literature trying to unlock the mysteries of their parents. Have different group members consider other such novels, such as Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960), Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* (1989) or Philip Pullman's *The Golden Compass* (1995), and compare and contrast the protagonists of those stories with the narrator of *The Historian*. As a group, discuss how the children evolve as they seek and gain understanding.
- Vampires have played a big role in modern fiction in novels, comics, movies, and television. In a group, brainstorm to come up with as many representations of vampires as you can, from the scary to the silly, the classic to the campy. How are these vampires alike, and how are they different? Try to develop a profile of the vampire character that is as true as possible to as many as of those representations of vampires in popular culture as possible.

Further Study

Augustyn, Michael, *Vlad Dracula: The Dragon Prince*, Iuniverse, 2004.

Augustyn traces the life of Vlad Dracula, fifteenth-century historical prince, fugitive, and statesman.

Finkel, Caroline, *Osman's Dream: The History of the Ottoman Empire*, Basic Books, 2006.

Finkel, an Ottoman scholar, traces the rich complexity of the Ottoman state over seven centuries.

Freely, John, *Istanbul: The Imperial City*, Penguin (Non-Classics), New Edition, 1998.

Istanbul has existed for over twenty-six centuries. This book explores this fascinating city's history from its founding to the present.

Kokker, Steve, and Kemp, Cathryn, *Lonely Planet Romania and Moldova*, Lonely Planet Publications, 3d Edition, 2004.

This travel guide features the castles of Dracula's homeland, views of the Carpathian mountains, sixty detailed maps, and a wealth of information for tourists on their way to Romania and Moldova.

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Younge, Gary, "Bigger than Dan Brown," in the *Guardian Unlimited* (U.K.), July 18, 2005, books.guardian.co.uk/departments/generalfiction/story/0,6000,1530568,00.html (July 14, 2006).

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Novels for Students (NfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's"For Students" Literature line, NfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on "classic" novels frequently

studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of NfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of NfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of "classic" novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members—educational professionals— helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in NfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed—for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man–the character is listed as "The Narrator" and alphabetized as "Narrator." If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. • Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name "Jean Louise Finch" would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname "Scout Finch."
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by NfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an “at-a-glance” comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author’s time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

NfS includes “The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,” a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children’s Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Novels for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Novels for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Novels for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from NfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

"Night." Novels for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234–35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from NfS (usually the first piece under the "Criticism" subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on "Winesburg, Ohio." Novels for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335–39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of NfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. "Margaret Atwood's "The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition," Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9–16; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133–36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of NfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. "Richard Wright: "Wearing the Mask," in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69–83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59–61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Novels for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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