

The Historian

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An "innovative" (The New Yorker) retelling of the story of Dracula. Told with the flourish and poise of a talented storyteller, Kostova turns the age-old tale into a compelling "late night page-turner" (San Francisco Chronicle)

When a young woman discovers a cache of ancient letters, she is thrown into the turbulent history of her parents' dark pasts. Uncovering a labyrinthine trail of clues, she begins to reconstruct a staggering history of deceit and violence.

Debut novelist Elizabeth Kostova creates an adventure of monumental proportions, a relentless tale that blends fact and fantasy, history and the present, with an assurance that is almost unbearably suspenseful and utterly unforgettable.

If your pulse flutters at the thought of castle ruins and descents into crypts by moonlight, you will savor every creepy page of Elizabeth Kostova's long but beautifully structured thriller *The Historian*. The story opens in Amsterdam in 1972, when a teenage girl discovers a medieval book and a cache of yellowed letters in her diplomat father's library. The pages of the book are empty except for a woodcut of a dragon. The letters are addressed to: "My dear and unfortunate successor." When the girl confronts her father, he reluctantly confesses an unsettling story: his involvement, twenty years earlier, in a search for his graduate school mentor, who disappeared from his office only moments after confiding to Paul his certainty that Dracula--Vlad the Impaler, an inventively cruel ruler of Wallachia in the mid-15th century--was still alive. The story turns out to concern our narrator directly because Paul's collaborator in the search was a fellow student named Helen Rossi (the unacknowledged daughter of his mentor) and our narrator's long-dead mother, about whom she knows almost nothing. And then her father, leaving just a note, disappears also.

As well as numerous settings, both in and out of the East Bloc, Kostova has three basic story lines to keep straight--one from 1930, when Professor Bartolomew Rossi begins his dangerous research into Dracula, one from 1950, when Professor Rossi's student Paul takes up the scent, and the main narrative from 1972. The criss-crossing story lines mirror the political advances, retreats, triumphs, and losses that shaped Dracula's beleaguered homeland--sometimes with the Byzantines on top, sometimes the Ottomans, sometimes the rag-tag local tribes, or the Orthodox church, and sometimes a fresh conqueror like the Soviet Union.

Although the book is appropriately suspenseful and a delight to read--even the minor characters are distinctive and vividly seen--its most powerful moments are those that describe real horrors. Our narrator recalls that after reading descriptions of Vlad burning young boys or impaling "a large family," she tried to forget the words: "For all his attention to my historical education, my father had neglected to tell me this: history's terrible moments were real. I understand now, decades later, that he could never have told me. Only history itself can convince you of such a truth." The reader, although given a satisfying ending, gets a strong enough dose of European history to temper the usual comforts of the closing words. --Regina Marler

Elizabeth Kostova graduated from Yale and holds an MFA from the University of Michigan, where she won the Hopwood Award for the Novel-in-Progress. Her second novel, *The Swan Thieves*, will be published in October 2009.

Other Books

Reminiscences of an Intercourse with Mr. Niebuhr, the Historian, During a Residence with Him in Rome, in the Years 1822 and 1823 (Classic Reprint), Excerpt from Reminiscences of an Intercourse With Mr. Niebuhr, the Historian, During a Residence With Him in Rome, in the Years 1822 and 1823 My Dear Madam, The contents of this small volume were gathered in Italy, and put together, to form a book, in America. In sending the manuscript across the Atlantic, I feel as if I should not allow it to appear in your country as an unbefriended stranger: and if I desire any friend in England for my book, whose good favours could I be more anxious to obtain than yours, Madam? You have become the interpreter of German literature to the English nation and their brethren in the Western hemisphere; and you revere with me the name of that man to whose memory the following pages are dedicated. Nor can I forget that I had the great good fortune of being instrumental in making you acquainted with him. Receive then, my dear Madam, this little work with kindness. About the Publisher Forgotten Books publishes hundreds of thousands of rare and classic books. Find more at www.forgottenbooks.com This book is a reproduction of an important historical work. Forgotten Books uses state-of-the-art technology to digitally reconstruct the work, preserving the original format whilst repairing imperfections present in the aged copy. In rare cases, an imperfection in the original, such as a blemish or missing page, may be replicated in our edition. We do, however, repair the vast majority of imperfections successfully; any imperfections that remain are intentionally left to preserve the state of such historical works.

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