

Nation and Vampiric Narration in Aleksey Tolstoy's “The Family of the Vourdalak”

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“I sometimes wonder if you Boyars do not first think in French before writing in Russian? Is there any book written in Russian before French was known?”

Prosper Mérimée, letter to Sergei Sobolevskii (1849)

The first lines of Lev Tolstoy's *War and Peace* are famously spoken in French instead of Russian, when the novel opens in an aristocratic Petersburg salon. The novel's beginning thus points to the state of dissociation and cultural crisis experienced by the country's upper classes in 1805 as they attempted to discuss Russia's first conflict with Napoleon in the language of the invader. While *War and Peace*, originally titled *1805*, matches the importance of this historical moment with its own epic scale, this article focuses on a considerably shorter (but not entirely unrelated) meditation on the encounter between the French and the Slavs. Almost two decades before Lev Tolstoy (1828–1910) started his novel about that bloody epoch, his distant cousin Aleksey Konstantinovich Tolstoy (1817–75) wrote a short story, “La Famille du Vourdalak: Fragment inédit des mémoires d'un inconnu,” in French. Aleksey Tolstoy's story centers on a French aristocrat who encounters many horrors in a Slavic village before finally being chased out by a horde of bloodthirsty peasants. While Lev Tolstoy's beginnings are particularly memorable, his cousin's ending can certainly compete. The shocking final chase scene includes a vampire mother who flings her own children at the fleeing Frenchman. The narrator, the Marquis D'Urfé, reports that one of the little creatures thus propelled “sunk his teeth into my horse's neck, and I had some difficulty tearing him away.”¹ The Marquis soon loses consciousness

¹Aleksey Tolstoy, “The Family of the Vourdalak,” in *Vampyres: Lord Byron to Count Dracula*, ed. and trans. Christopher Frayling (Boston, 1992), 278. I will continue to use Frayling's translation with some exceptions, which will be noted. For the original French, see André Lirondelle, “Alexis Tolstoï: ‘La Famille du Vourdalak’: Texte Français Inédit” *Revue des études slaves* 26:1/4 (1950): 14–33. The two Russian translations can be found in A. K. Tolstoi, “Sem'ia Vurdalaka: Iz vospominanii neizvestnogo,” trans. B. Markevich, *Russkii vestnik* 169 (January–February 1884): 5–31; and A. K. Tolstoi, “Sem'ia Vurdalaka,” in his *Sobranie sochinenii v chetyrekh tomakh* (Moscow, 1964), 3:69–93.

and only wakes up at daybreak next to his dead horse. D'Urfé has apparently escaped. But Tolstoy's stunning image of this monstrous mother and her thirsty babes ensures that the impression left by "The Family of the Vourdalak" is rather hard to shake off.² Indeed, it has continued to captivate readers, inspired several film adaptations, and, according to one major critic, "remains one of the most impressive vampire stories ever written."³

Influential studies by Nina Auerbach and many others have firmly established the scholarly value of vampire literature for its ability to reflect—and to reflect on—the historical and cultural circumstances of its rise.⁴ As this article aims to show, A. K. Tolstoy's text insists precisely on such a reading. "The Family of the Vourdalak" emphatically invokes a specific historical context, which brings with it a set of thematics and preoccupations the analysis of which is essential for a fuller appreciation of Tolstoy's remarkable story. In "The Family of the Vourdalak," Tolstoy frames a narrative, which recounts fantastic events that transpired in 1759, within a storytelling session that takes place during the Congress of Vienna in 1815. The first date indicates that the Marquis D'Urfé traveled to Eastern Europe during France's first vampiromania epidemic, which saw the construction of Europe's "East" as its Orientalized, subaltern double.⁵ No less significantly, the second date alludes to the reverse journey made by the Russian army in pursuit of Napoleon's Grande Armée, and the Russian Empire's arrival as a major power on the European stage at the Congress of Vienna. In combination with its vampiric thematic, the story's chronological specificity and geographic scope invite interpretation via the lenses of empire and nation, "the historical relevance" of which to this time period in Russian literature "cannot be gainsaid."⁶

The frame narrative that takes place in 1815 Vienna sets up D'Urfé's vampire tale, which climaxes on the Frenchman's inglorious retreat from a Slavic village. Since the story is written by a Russian author, we could easily read this finale as the expression of triumphant patriotism after Napoleon's disastrous invasion of Russia. Indeed, the loss of

²Tolstoy's is a striking, early example of the vampiric mother figure, which will become much more common toward the end of the nineteenth century, appearing, for example, in Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla* (1872) and Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897) in the figures of Dracula's infanticidal brides, and in the famous scene in which Lucy Westenra feeds on a young child and then dashes it onto the ground when confronted by Van Helsing and his crew. Such scenarios are particularly disturbing because of the cultural associations between femininity and motherhood, which vampire literature perverts by turning the traditional nurturer into a bloodsucking vampire. For excellent discussions of the vampire mother and her importance see Carol Senf, *Dracula: Between Tradition and Modernism* (New York, 1998), 47–62; and Angelica Michelis, "'Dirty Mamma': Horror, Vampires, and the Maternal in Late Nineteenth-Century Gothic Fiction," *Critical Survey* 15:3 (2003): 5–22.

³Frayling, *Vampyres*, 254.

⁴Nina Auerbach, *Our Vampires, Ourselves* (Chicago, 1995).

⁵A number of critics follow Edward Said's model in *Orientalism* (1978) to analyze Western Europe's Orientalization of Eastern Europe and the Slavs. In these accounts, Western Europe's Enlightenment coalesces into a defined identity through its juxtaposition with the uncivilized, irrational regions that lie, as Peter Bräunlein terms it, at "The Frightening Borderlands of Enlightenment." See Milan Dimić, "Vampiromania in the Eighteenth Century: The Other Side of Enlightenment," *Man and Nature: Proceedings of the Canadian Society for Eighteenth Century Study* 3 (1984): 1–22; Tomislav Longinović, "Vampires Like Us: Gothic Imaginary and 'the serbs,'" in *Balkan as Metaphor: Between Globalization and Fragmentation*, ed. Dušan Bjelić and Obrad Savić (Cambridge, MA, 2002), 39–59; and Peter J. Bräunlein, "The Frightening Borderlands of Enlightenment: The Vampire Problem," *Studies in History and Philosophy of Biological and Biomedical Sciences* 43 (2012): 710–19.

⁶Monika Greenleaf and Stephen Moeller-Sally, eds., *Russian Subjects: Empire, Nation, and the Culture of the Golden Age* (Evanston, 1998), 1.

D'Urfé's horse and the menace of death on the road echo the grim realities of the Grande Armée's retreat. However, we have to account for the fact that the story is told from the point of view of the aristocratic French narrator who initially looks at the exotic peasants with condescending curiosity, and by the end describes them as a throng of undead monsters. Furthermore, the fact that "The Family of the Vourdalak" is written in French points to the phenomenon that Iurii Lotman and Boris Uspenskii have termed the post-Petrine "Europeanization" of the Russian nobility, and potentially signals the ambivalence of the Russian elites who discovered, to their horror, that they had more in common with the French officers they were fighting than with their own peasant soldiers.⁷ All of this is not to say that Aleksey Tolstoy is merely identifying with his aristocratic French narrator. In fact, as this article will show, the story brings both the narrator's identity and his viewpoint into question.

"The Family of the Vourdalak" actively interrogates issues of identity, representation, and imitation in the context of Russia's relationship with Western Europe. Tolstoy brings these issues to bear through a series of self-conscious borrowings and displacements. These displacements are both literal and literary in that D'Urfé's vampire tale is set in Serbia rather than in Russia, because that was the focal point of Western Europe's mid-eighteenth century vampiromania, and even more importantly because it subsequently became the locale featured in the literary sources with which Tolstoy's text engages. "The Family of the Vourdalak" is most closely related to Prosper Mérimée's *La Guzla* (1827) and Alexander Pushkin's reworking of Mérimée's text in his *Songs of the Western Slavs* (1835), both of which purport Serbian origins. Tolstoy further underscores his concerns by selectively highlighting literary antecedents that draw attention to themes of travel, translation, imitation, and imposture. John Polidori's "The Vampyre" (1819 in English, 1828 in Russian) is an almost unavoidable reference for a vampire tale written at this time, and it certainly makes an appearance. But the text also reveals a number of intriguing parallels to Mikhail Lermontov's relocation of the Byronic—and indeed vampiric—hero onto Russian soil in *Hero of Our Time* (1840). Like Lermontov, A. K. Tolstoy self-consciously invokes a European literary tradition. In fact, the very fact that this is neither a Russian genre nor a particularly Russian subject makes Tolstoy's utilization of the vampire story so intriguing and points to his interest in the topic of literary borrowing, which also appears as a significant concern for other Russian writers at this time.

This article argues that Tolstoy's interweaving of these specific texts and historical context asks to be read as a reflection on the anxiety over national identity, literary influence, and cultural appropriation that consumed Russian letters in the nineteenth century. First, I will examine the cultural and historical context the story evokes, exploring the way Tolstoy uses vampirism as a vehicle to interrogate issues of identity and imitation.⁸ Second, I will

⁷Iurii Lotman and Boris Uspenskii, "Binary Models in the Dynamics of Russian Culture (to the end of the Eighteenth Century)," in *The Semiotics of Russian Cultural History*, ed. Alexander Nakhimovsky and Alice Nakhimovsky (Ithaca, 1985), 57–65.

⁸Mine is certainly not the first analysis of A. K. Tolstoy's use of vampire thematics. Both Gutsche and Izmailov explore and contextualize his use of vampire imagery, although not within the framework offered here. See George Gutsche, "A. K. Tolstoi's Vampires," in *American Contributions to the 14th International Congress of Slavists, Volume 2: Literature*, ed. David Bethea (Bloomington, 2008), 69–84; and N. V. Izmailov,

analyze the details of the story with a focus on the narrator and his vampiric doubles, which mirror his own ravenous appetites. By putting forward the concept of vampiric narration to explain Tolstoy's mode of undermining D'Urfé's narrative control, I hope to demonstrate the way this story comments on, and ultimately subverts, the discourse about imitation and influence that infiltrated Russian letters from West European constructs about its East. In addition to prefiguring texts like *Dracula* (1897) by utilizing the vampire's otherness to explore anxieties of empire, Tolstoy's "The Family of the Vourdalak" offers a meditation on the power of parody and creative appropriation that anticipates important literary-philosophical concepts that emerge in Russia in the second half of the nineteenth century.

A. K. TOLSTOY did not publish "The Family of the Vourdalak" during his lifetime, possibly because he was discouraged by the reception of his 1841 vampire story "Upyr'."⁹ Although we do not know the exact date of its composition, "The Family of the Vourdalak" is normally dated to the late 1830s or early 1840s. The text was published in Russian translation posthumously in 1884 in the *Russian Messenger*. By this time, A. K. Tolstoy had already been long regarded as an outstanding poet and dramatist, but his early fantastic tales would have to wait for a much later wave of vampiromania to receive in-depth critical consideration. While they were previously dismissed as stylistically inferior to his lyrical and dramatic works, Tolstoy's early stories have started to draw critical attention in light of the rise of the Russian horror genre and global interest in vampire thematics.¹⁰ Recent studies by A. Poliakova and M. Odesskii contribute much to our understanding of "The Family of the Vourdalak" by situating it within its literary context. Both scholars conclude that Tolstoy's text constitutes a highly self-conscious play with its—in Poliakova's analysis Gothic, and in Odesskii's reading Romantic—literary antecedents.¹¹

At key points throughout the text, Tolstoy invokes a particular generic context or source text in order to depart from it. These departures are, in fact, more telling than the text's numerous intertextual appropriations in revealing Tolstoy's self-conscious play with literary conventions. The story opens with what seems to be a typical Romantic Gothic

"Tema 'Vampirizma' v literature pervykh desiatiletii XIX v.," in *Sravnitel'noe izuchenie literatur: Sbornik statei k 80-letiiu Akademika M. P. Alekseeva* (Leningrad, 1976), 510–19.

⁹Margaret Dalton, *A. K. Tolstoy* (New York, 1972), 21. Although much of the response to Tolstoy's "Upyr'" or "Vampire," which was published under the pen name of Krasnogorsky, was rather jeering, Vissarion Belinsky was quite generous to the young author. In his 1841 review of "Upyr'," Belinsky sees a youthful but promising talent, writing that "this tastefully and even elegantly designed little book demonstrates all of the signs of a still youthful, but a nonetheless remarkable talent, which promises much for the future." See Belinskii, "Upyr': Sochinenie Krasnogorskogo," in his *Sobranie sochinenii v devyati tomakh* (Moscow, 1979), 4:466.

¹⁰Prior to the recent rise of interest in vampire literature in Russia, Tolstoy's early fantastic stories tended to be dismissed as less artistically significant than the later lyrical and dramatic works. For an example of this stance see Dalton, *A. K. Tolstoy*, 39.

¹¹A. Poliakova, "Ot romana k novelle: 'Sem'ia vurdalaka,' 'Vstrecha cherez trista let,'" in *Goticheskaia traditsiia v russkoi literature*, ed. N. D. Tamarchenko (Moscow, 2008), 115–35; Mikhail Odesskii, "Vampiricheskaia topika v rannei proze A. K. Tolstogo," in his *Chetvertoe izmerenie literatury: Stat'i o poetike* (Moscow, 2011), 275–316.

frame narrative set in an aristocratic salon.¹² The unnamed frame narrator introduces a group of amusement seekers who gather twice a week at a château to tell stories, and at one of these gatherings the Marquis D'Urfé offers to satisfy their appetite for the fantastic. But the frame narrative becomes distinctly less conventional when we compare both the frame narrator and D'Urfé's insistence on precise dates and locations with the Gothic genre's preference for exotic antiquity or, at the very least, temporal ambiguity in its settings.¹³ Indeed, the first sentence of "The Family of the Vourdalak" reads: "The year 1815 had assembled in Vienna all the most distinguished European intellectuals, the fashion leaders of the day, and, of course, members of the highest diplomatic elite."¹⁴ In foregrounding specific, and rather recent, historical events and making them central to the storyline, "The Family of the Vourdalak" departs from its literary references and points to its matrix of contemporary concerns. In effect, instead of the initial conflict with Napoleon in 1805, Tolstoy's story invokes Napoleon's defeat and its aftermath. We are explicitly informed that the Congress of Vienna has just concluded and that the victorious "Russian soldiers were anxiously awaiting the time when they could return to their abandoned homes."¹⁵

The emphasis on the victors' homelessness and displacement also suggestively points to internal tensions related to the Europeanization of the Russian aristocracy, and its anxiety over what constitutes an "authentically" Russian culture. As Lotman explains, the schism between the Russian aristocracy and the *narod* manifested not merely as a class difference, but as a cultural one as well, since "during and after the Petrine period, the Russian nobleman was like a foreigner in his own country."¹⁶ The nineteenth-century philosopher Aleksey Khomiakov went so far as to compare the Russian upper class to "a colony of eclectic Europeans, thrown into a country of savages."¹⁷ Such sentiments lead Boris Groys to conclude that the Petrine reforms in Russia represent "a unique act of self-colonization," while Alexander Etkind argues that the Russian imperial project is best characterized as a process of internal colonization.¹⁸ As Etkind explains in his adaptation of Edward Said's model, the peasants came to be seen as an Other, but an "authentically" Russian, if Orientalized and exoticized, Other. Meanwhile, the aristocracy were at times represented as interlopers. "Instead of defining the serfs as the foreign enemy within their land, the

¹²Although she acknowledges that the location of the frame narrative is not quite exotic enough for the typical Gothic tale and the chronology is also not set far enough in the past, Poliakova argues that the frame narrative of "The Family of the Vourdalak" is conventionally Gothic and compares it to Lewis' *The Monk* and Maturin's *Melmouth the Wanderer*. See Poliakova, "Ot romana k novelle" 115–18.

¹³For instance, Polidori's "The Vampyre" is presumably set in late eighteenth- early nineteenth-century Europe, yet the narrative never allows for precise dating and, instead, refers to cyclical, or mythic time in its emphasis on the change of seasons. The inspiration for Polidori's tale, Lord Byron's "Fragment of a Story" is even more typical in its omission by identifying the date as "17—."

¹⁴I have modified Frayling's translation here, which begins with "Vienna. 1815." See Tolstoy, "Family of the Vourdalak," 254; and Lirondelle, "Alexis Tolstoï: 'La Famille du Vourdalak,'" 14.

¹⁵Tolstoy, "Family of the Vourdalak," 254.

¹⁶Lotman, "The Poetics of Everyday Behavior in Eighteenth-Century Russian Culture," in *Semiotics of Russian Cultural History*, 69.

¹⁷Aleksei Khomiakov, quoted in Alexander Etkind, *Internal Colonization: Russia's Imperial Experience* (Cambridge, England, 2011), 18.

¹⁸Boris Grois [Groys], "Imena Goroda," in his *Utopiia i obmen* (Moscow, 1993), 358; Etkind, *Internal Colonization*. See also Dragan Kujundžić, "'After ...': Russian Post-Colonial Identity," *MLN* 115:5 (December 2000): 892–908.

Russian serf-owner ‘chose the exactly opposite way in defining himself as the foreigner of noble ancestry.’”¹⁹

In “The Family of the Vourdalak,” both internal class tensions, as well as the unease of the culturally colonized, are powerfully refracted through the prism of the monstrous encounter.²⁰ This is a particularly useful prism through which to investigate cross-cultural interaction, since the grotesque and monstrous arouses fear and discomfort precisely due to its ambivalent “otherness” and transgression of boundaries. It is no wonder, then, that vampires first arose as a major threat in the European imagination at a time when postwar border realignments put Western Europe in close contact with its East in the first half of the eighteenth century.²¹ Indeed, since then “vampire outbreaks” have continued to track closely with large scale confrontations with the Other. For example, in his *Bram Stoker and Russophobia*, Jimmie Cain convincingly demonstrates that anti-Russian sentiment in Britain in the wake of the Crimean War was frequently expressed through vampiric associations and inspired a number of key references in *Dracula*.²² While I hesitate to use the term “Russophobia” since its cooptation by apologists for some of the Russian government’s more problematic policies, we can see from internet memes splicing Vladimir Putin’s face with portraits of Vlad Dracula that the phenomenon described by Cain persists to this day.

Since the eighteenth century, the Slavic vampire has haunted the imperial imagination and provided a locus for the projection of anxieties about national identity, invasion, and colonization.²³ Austria, France, and later Britain faced large scale literary vampire epidemics, which have fascinated scholars for what they could tell us about the fictions of empire. But one empire is conspicuously missing from this list. And indeed, neither Russian writers nor the Russian public showed the same rapt interest in the subject as their West European counterparts. Further, when it appears in Russian literature in the nineteenth century, the vampire is much more likely to take the form of a Western import, like Polidori’s “The Vampyre,” than that of the folkloric Slavic creature. This makes it all the more intriguing to consider a Russian writer’s use of vampirism to creatively examine issues of national identity and literary imitation. For Russia was haunted in a different way. While Western

¹⁹Etkind, *Internal Colonization*, 125 (inner quotation is from Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death* [Cambridge, MA, 1982], 43–44).

²⁰Indeed, the Westernizing tsar Peter the Great will himself come to be associated with the monstrous or demonic. After the sensation of *Dracula* and the *fin de siècle*’s fascination with the vampire, Dmitry Merezhkovsky will portray Peter the Great as a vampire in his *Antichrist (Peter and Aleksey)* (1905–7), and another Tolstoy—this time Aleksey Nikolaevich—will also use similar imagery in his story “The Day of Peter” (1918). For a discussion of these texts and their use of vampire imagery see Ol’ga Pleshkova, “‘Den’ Petra’ A. N. Tolstogo: Prelomlenie traditsii D. S. Merezhkovskogo,” *Kul’tura i tekst* 12 (2011): 320–28.

²¹In 1718 the Peace of Passarowitz put an end to the Turkish Wars. As a result of the treaty Austria came into possession of parts of Serbia and Wallachia, which had been under the control of the Ottoman Empire. The allegations of vampirism originated in these recently annexed Eastern European territories, but the epidemic of vampiromania quickly spread to all of Europe, and particularly to Austria and France, with the main concentration of the “outbreak” taking place between 1725 and 1760.

²²Jimmie Cain, *Bram Stoker and Russophobia: Evidence of the British Fear of Russia in Dracula and The Lady of the Shroud* (Jefferson, NC, 2006).

²³Laurence Rickels describes this projection thusly in his psychoanalytic study: “Even as I attack Eastern Europe, it is the East that threatens to attack the West; it is not we who are actively colonizing (and in effect actively cannibalizing) the East: it is the East that is packed with animals and subhumans whose drive Westward we must stop in our tracks back East.” See Rickels, *The Vampire Lectures* (Minneapolis, 1999), 12.

Europe distinguished itself from its East, which served as a sort of shadow double, Russia's self-conscious straddling of both East and West created a haunting division within. As Dragan Kujundžić points out in decidedly Gothic terms, "the fact that Russia was Europeanized introduced a spectral, ghostly differential apparatus in its very body, which made it impossible to say where Russian identity starts, and where it ends, a difference we could call, *pace* Freud, 'Unheimlich.'"²⁴

The late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries saw the rise of an acute anxiety over Russian identity and the lack of an authentically Russian literature amid what was perceived to be the slavish (one might even say vampiric) imitation of French and German literary models.²⁵ In many ways, this concern is the result of the internalization of the image of Russia created by West Europeans. This internalization is exemplified by Petr Chaadaev's famous *Philosophical Letters*, in which he bemoans Russia's historical backwardness, imitativeness, and the cultural colonization of its aristocracy, writing, of course, in French, and under the influence of French thinkers. The uncanny motifs of the "unhomely" residence and self-alienation play a fascinating role in Chaadaev's indictment of Peter the Great's legacy. In his "First Philosophical Letter" (published in Russian translation in 1836), Chaadaev writes, "In our homes we live as if we were garrisoned soldiers; in our families we have the look of foreigners; in our cities we resemble nomads."²⁶ Nancy Condee points out the internalization at work when she notes that "Chaadaev indicts Russia in terms that resemble those of a minor French Orientalist administrator omitted from Said's manuscript."²⁷

While Russia was not embroiled in the eighteenth-century vampire epidemic directly, its portrayal in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century travelogues ran the same course as that of its Slavic neighbors. West Europeans depicted a primitive, pristine land, which had not yet joined in the progress of history. For example, in his influential *Russia in 1839*, the Marquis de Custine writes that Russians are "Asiatics, drilled, but uncivilized."²⁸ Custine goes on to say that "their only primitive faculty is an aptitude to reproduce the inventions of foreigners. ... Russia is a community of imitations."²⁹ Even Alexander Pushkin, Russia's national poet *par excellence*, does not escape from Custine's condescension. After reading Pushkin in French translation, Custine declares that the poet "has borrowed much of his coloring from the new poetical school of western Europe."³⁰ It is thus not hard to see how Russian men of letters may have expressed some anxiety about the state of the nation's cultural capital vis-à-vis the West. Of course, such expressions were not entirely devoid of self-conscious irony; Pushkin, for instance, laments that "we as of yet have no literature" while composing *Eugene Onegin*.³¹

²⁴Kujundžić, "After ...: Russian Post-Colonial Identity," 896.

²⁵For an interesting analysis that parallels vampirism with imitation see Patricia L. Skarda, "Vampirism and Plagiarism: Byron's Influence and Polidori's Practice," *Studies in Romanticism* 28:2 (Summer 1989): 249–69.

²⁶Petr Chaadaev, "Pervoe filosofskoe pis'mo," in his *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii i izbrannye pis'ma* (Moscow, 1991), 1:324.

²⁷Nancy Condee, *The Imperial Trace: Recent Russian Cinema* (Oxford, 2009), 27.

²⁸Adolphe de Custine, *Letters from Russia*, ed. Anka Muhlstein (New York, 2002), 567.

²⁹*Ibid.*, 630–31.

³⁰*Ibid.*, 292.

³¹Aleksandr Pushkin, "O prichinakh, zamedlivshikh khod nashei slovesnosti," in his *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v desiati tomakh* (Leningrad, 1978), 7:14.

After his untimely death, Pushkin himself becomes the focus of the desire for a national literary tradition. During this mythmaking process, Pushkin acquires characteristics that were previously ascribed to Russian culture, such as its elemental emptiness that is able to fill itself with the words of others. In his famous 1880 “Pushkin” speech, Fyodor Dostoevsky points to Pushkin’s “universal receptivity” as a quality he shares with the Russian *narod*.³² Pushkin’s unique gift, according to Dostoevsky, lies in his ability to take on other identities and to incarnate the genius of other nations. Dostoevsky challenges his audience to “Reread ‘Don Juan,’ and if Pushkin’s name weren’t on it, you would never know that a Spaniard did not write it.”³³ Almost one hundred years later, the literary scholar and dissident writer Abram Tertz insightfully reinscribes vampiric desire into Dostoevsky’s reevaluation of imitation. Tertz rereads Pushkin’s “Don Juan” and appends a playful warning to Dostoevsky’s challenge: “Don’t get too carried away: a vourdalak is before us.”³⁴ Tertz provocatively replaces Dostoevsky’s hagiographic image of the kenotic writer with the more sinister Gothic in saying that “something vampiric concealed itself in [Pushkin’s] extraordinary receptivity.”³⁵

Tertz astutely uses vampiric imagery to activate anxieties associated with national identity and imitation, but his effective “vampirization” of Pushkin is grounded in vocabulary Tolstoy encoded into “The Family of the Vourdalak.”³⁶ Tolstoy chooses to interrogate the internalized projection of Russia as a culturally colonized land of vampiric imitators by sending his very own French Marquis to the land of the vourdalaks. (Although the Marquis de Custine’s book was not published until 1843, his observations about Russia’s imitativeness and historical belatedness are hardly original, and Tolstoy would have been well aware of such concerns from Chaadaev and others.) As I previously noted, the frame narrative of “The Family of the Vourdalak” takes place in 1815 and alludes to the occupation of Paris by Russian troops. The subject of Russia’s conflicted encounter with France is thus initially raised in the frame narrative, but its in-depth interrogation is actually displaced to a border region that long played unwilling host to imperial struggles for dominance.³⁷ The tale narrated by the Marquis D’Urfé’s takes us back in time to the vampire epidemics of the mid-eighteenth century. According to D’Urfé, in 1759 an unsuccessful love affair prompts

³²Fedor Dostoevskii, “Pushkin,” in his *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii i pisem v tridsati tomakh* (Leningrad, 1984), 26:145.

³³Ibid., 146.

³⁴Abram Tertz, *Progulki s Pushkinym*, in his *Sobranie sochinenii v dvukh tomakh* (Moscow, 1992), 1:373.

³⁵Ibid. Tertz’s book was misunderstood and reviled in Russia for such a controversial depiction of “our all.” It caused a scandal in the émigré community in 1975, and then once again in Russia after the fragment in which Pushkin is described as a vourdalak was published in *Oktiabr’* in 1989. Meanwhile, his use of vampiric imagery needs to be viewed in the context of our present discussion in order to be properly appreciated. For an excellent discussion of the controversy caused by *Strolls with Pushkin* in relation to national identity see Stephanie Sandler, “Sex, Death and Nation in the *Strolls with Pushkin* Controversy” *Slavic Review* 51 (Summer 1992): 294–308.

³⁶And, we might also add feminization of Pushkin, since the second passage that so enraged Russian commentators was Tertz’s statement that Pushkin “ran into great poetry on erotic little legs” (Tertz, *Progulki s Pushkinym* 1:346)

³⁷Longinović reminds us of a twentieth-century construction of “the serbs” as surrogate for Russia by U.S.-led NATO: “‘The serbs’ were an excellent surrogate other for the larger Orthodox nation of Russia: They were small enough never to fight back, and dark enough to be effectively excluded from humanity based on the crimes for which they’d been tried in the media” (“Vampires Like Us,” 50).

him to seek a diplomatic posting in faraway lands. He is therefore dispatched to the hospodar of Moldavia, a principality next to Transylvania and Wallachia that was long subjected to the regional tug of war between the Hapsburg, Ottoman, and Russian empires. During his journey, D'Urfé stops in a Serbian village and is forced to remain there for some time, as shifting ice prevents him from making his way onward across the Danube. The series of vampire attacks that D'Urfé describes thus take place in a Serbian village during the time of Europe's vampire hysteria, when diplomats and travelers ravenously reported on the superstitious backwardness of Europe's constructed Orient.³⁸

Literary antecedents played an even bigger role in the choice of location, since Tolstoy chose to use the same setting featured in his two most prominent source texts: Pushkin's *Songs of the Western Slavs* and Mérimée's *La Guzla*. Pushkin's short collection of poetic folk tales and ballads is an intriguing point of reference, since it would seem to support Custine's charge of a lack of originality in Russian literature: most of the poems in *Songs of the Western Slavs* (1835) translate prose tales recorded in *La Guzla* (published anonymously in 1827).³⁹ Pushkin's "Marko Yakubovich," itself an adaptation of "Constantin Yacoubovich" from Mérimée's collection, provided much of the source material for "The Family of the Vourdalak." The basic plot outline is the same for both Pushkin and Mérimée's versions. A fatally wounded stranger arrives at Marko Yakubovich's house and asks to be buried in their familial cemetery. It is implied that the stranger has been fighting the Turks. After the stranger dies and Marko buries his body, Marko's young son becomes anemic, and the family discovers the mark of the vourdalak on his neck. With the help of a wise holy man, the stranger's body is disinterred and found to possess the tell-tale markers of vampirism. They are unable to stake him right then, since the vourdalak springs up and escapes into the woods. Only after surviving three more nights of the vourdalak's attempted invasions is the safety of Marko's family finally restored.

In his version, Pushkin makes one small, but ultimately significant change to the contents. In a note, Mérimée's narrator explains that the vourdalak is created through improper burial of an Orthodox man in a Catholic cemetery. Pushkin leaves Mérimée's explanation out, thus underscoring the parallel between the rise of the vampire and the arrival of the stranger. No longer the victim of an improper burial, the outsider is already a danger when he comes to the door. Tolstoy retains this parallel and adds an additional complication when he reworks this motif. "The Family of the Vourdalak" uses the same scenario found in the "Yakubovich" stories (and, indeed, in many of the eighteenth-century reports from that region, such as the case Arnold Paole recorded by Dom Augustin Calmet in his famous 1746 *Treatise on Vampires and Revenants*) in that a gravely wounded man

³⁸The year 1759 could be significant in another way as well. It was the year that the Seven Years' War (1754–63) took a bad turn for France. Ultimately, the 1763 Treaty of Paris would confirm the loss of France's North American and Asian possessions to the British. Thus, in situating the events of "The Family of the Vourdalak" in 1815 and 1759 respectively, Tolstoy could be referencing these two significant setbacks to French imperial ambitions.

³⁹For a discussion of Mérimée and Pushkin see David Baguley, "Pushkin and Mérimée, the French Connection: On Hoaxes and Impostors," in *Two Hundred Years of Pushkin*, Vol. 3, *Pushkin's Legacy*, ed. Joe Andrew and Robert Reid (Amsterdam, 2004), 177–91. See also the excellent compilation, Zoia Ivanovna Kirnoze, ed., *Mérimée – Pushkin: Sbornik* (Moscow, 1987).

returns from battling Turks, and his arrival initiates a string of vampiric attacks.⁴⁰ But in Tolstoy's version, the man is no stranger. His name is Gorcha, and he is the patriarch of the family at whose house the Marquis D'Urfé is lodging. D'Urfé himself appears in town only minutes before Gorcha returns home. "The Family of the Vourdalak" is thus greeted by a double arrival: that of the outsider and of the father. This initial doubling becomes an important structural motif and culminates in uncontrollable mimetic proliferation, as eventually all of the villagers become vampires.

In many ways D'Urfé is and remains an outsider looking in on the life of his host family and their culture. Yet ironically, D'Urfé is within the house when he wakes up to Gorcha's cadaverous face peering in through the window. It is unclear why Gorcha would be prowling for victims from outside the house, since—unlike D'Urfé—he actually lives there. The scene seems to be designed to highlight the dissolution of the boundary between inside and outside, as the threat of the vourdalak comes simultaneously from within the family unit and from outside the house. Their relationship with Gorcha prevents the other family members from seeing the threat he presents right away, but D'Urfé portrays himself as a more objective observer whose status as outsider equips him to better resist the vampire's influence. Gorcha is apparently able to put the entire household into a deep sleep, yet D'Urfé repeatedly wakes up to witness the old man preying on his own grandson.

In addition to presenting himself as a privileged witness, D'Urfé also plays a similar role to Mérimée's narrator in *La Guzla*, in that he claims knowledge of the language and local customs and provides explanations for the unusual beliefs and cultural practices he depicts. He is similarly potentially untrustworthy. For *La Guzla*, which is named after the musical instrument played by traveling Serbian bards, was not really the authentic compendium of East European ballads that it claimed to be. Mérimée's narrator clearly did his research on vampirism. He explicitly references Calmet's *Treatise* in the explanatory notes he intersperses throughout the text. But the tales themselves were the results of invention, rather than translation. Mérimée's text was a brilliant hoax, although one that took significantly less time to unravel than Gogol's mystifying assertion that his monster Vyi is "a colossal creation of the folk imagination."⁴¹ By the time Pushkin was preparing his *Songs of the Western Slavs* for publication, he had learned of the French author's deception and decided to publish the work with a prefatory disclosure taken from one of Mérimée's personal letters.

"The Family of the Vourdalak" thus rises on some shaky ground indeed. It revisits in French a Russian adaptation of a French fabrication, which had originally billed itself as a translation of Slavic folk tales. This closed circuit of creative misappropriation is enough

⁴⁰Translated and read all over Europe, Calmet's *Treatise* offered a survey of all of the major cases of vampirism, including the seminal story of Arnold Paole, a Serbian soldier who claimed that he had been attacked by a vampire in Turkish occupied territory. After Paole died in 1726, the men and women in his village said that Paole started to visit them at night. As those who saw the revenant quickly sickened and died, authorities were called in to investigate and eventually conduct an exhumation of Paole's corpse, which was reportedly found well preserved and with what looked like fresh blood still on its lips. Paole's case owes a lot of its notoriety to Calmet and to the detailed official report, *Visum et Repertum (Seen and Discovered)*, which described the exhumation and surrounding circumstances.

⁴¹Nikolai Gogol, "Vyi," in his *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v chetyrnadsati tomakh* (Moscow, 1937–52), 3:175.

to make one's head spin. Tolstoy completes the loop by turning back to French, and in doing so he inscribes the themes of appropriation and construction of alterity within the heart of his own text. The narrator of *La Guzla* claims to be a collector and translator, but neither the ballads nor the bard from whom he claims to have heard these tales existed before his narration. The exposure of Mérimée's narrator as the source of the vampire tales implicitly invokes the hunt for the vampire's identity that takes place within the stories. This association also implicates Tolstoy's D'Urfé in a poetics of narratorial imposture.

Tolstoy highlights the story's appropriation in the title of "The Family of the Vourdalak" by utilizing the word *vourdalak*, instead of the Russian *upyr'*, which serves as the title of his earlier vampire story. *Vourdalak* most likely came into Russian usage with Pushkin's reworking of Mérimée's text.⁴² Its novelty prompted Pushkin to add a footnote to "Marko Yakubovich," indicating that "The *vurdolak*, *vudkodlak*, *upyr'* are the dead who leave their graves and suck the blood of the living."⁴³ D'Urfé offers an identical definition in "The Family of the Vourdalak," saying that "vourdalaks (the name given to vampires by Slavic peoples) are, according to local folklore, dead bodies who rise from the grave to suck the blood of the living."⁴⁴

In addition to making use of the borrowed term "vourdalak," D'Urfé also follows the narrator of Mérimée's *La Guzla* in referencing Calmet's "strange book on apparitions."⁴⁵ In effect, he leaves us no doubt that we should view this vampire tale in the context of the eighteenth-century encounter between Europe's East and West that created the climate in which vampiromania flourished. D'Urfé also participates in this trend by showcasing his knowledge of published official reports, which served as Calmet's sources. The Marquis reports that:

Commissions have been appointed many times by German emperors to study alleged epidemics of vampirism. ... They exhumed bodies, which they found to be sated with blood, and ordered them to be burned in the public square after staking them through the heart. Magistrates who witnessed these executions have stated on oath that they heard blood-curdling shrieks coming from these corpses at the moment the executioner hammered his sharpened stake into their hearts.⁴⁶

Analyses of such eighteenth-century reports have demonstrated how they highlighted the dichotomy between the modern, rational West and the superstitious, backward East and thus perpetuated imperial ideology. While it does not deal with vampirism *per se*,

⁴²The term is of somewhat obscure origin. Variations of *vourdalak* can be found in a number of Balkan languages, as well as in Greek. Calmet uses the term *broucolaca* and claims that it heralds from Greece, probably thinking back to Joseph Pitton de Tournefont's use of the term in his description of the *vrykolakas* panic on the Greek island of Myconos in his *Voyage to the Levant* (1702). For Pushkin's introduction of the term into Russian usage see Francis Butler, "Russian *vurdalak* 'vampire' and Related Forms in Slavic," *Journal of Slavic Linguistics* 13:2 (2005): 237–50.

⁴³Aleksandr Pushkin, "Pesni Zapadnykh Slavian," in his *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v desiati tomakh* (Moscow, 1957), 3:323.

⁴⁴Tolstoy, "Family of the Vourdalak," 257.

⁴⁵Ibid.

⁴⁶Ibid.

Peter Wolff's *Inventing Eastern Europe* brilliantly describes the uses of this constructed dichotomy between the rationality of the West and the mysticism of the East in his discussion of eighteenth-century travelogues written by West Europeans who traveled to the land of dead and lived to tell the tale.⁴⁷ As he describes his journey, D'Urfé also inscribes himself within the generic tradition of the travelogue, exposing his own ideological blindness, even as he seeks to demonstrate his expertise in the region.

To be fair, the Marquis does seem to be an impressively knowledgeable traveler, as well as a bit of a wunderkind when it comes to languages. He claims that, "having learned to speak a little Polish during my stay in Warsaw, I soon had a working knowledge of Serbian as well—for these two languages, like Russian and Bohemian, are ... only branches of one and the same root."⁴⁸ However, all of his self-proclaimed expertise does not prevent the same generalizations and stereotypes we might find in other travelogues of the period. For instance, D'Urfé describes the Hungarians and Serbs as "poor and ignorant people." He does have a certain respect for these noble savages, however, because they "were brave and honest enough not to have forgotten either their dignity or their time-honoured independence" despite years of violence and Turkish occupation.⁴⁹

But it appears that D'Urfé's hosts have forgotten some of that famous Slavic hospitality that he has come to expect from the region. D'Urfé is startled by the lukewarm welcome he receives. Georges, the eldest son in the family, explains that the visitor has caught them at an inopportune time. They are all anxiously awaiting the return of their father, Gorcha. The old man took off for the mountains ten days earlier to fight a Turkish bandit who had been marauding the countryside. Before he left, Gorcha instructed his family that if he returns after ten days have passed, then they must pierce his heart with a wooden stake, for then he "would be a cursed *vourdalak*, come to suck [their] blood."⁵⁰ Gorcha departed at eight in the evening exactly ten days before, and he returns at the same time, just as the monastery bells are ringing the hour. Gorcha's children face a quandary, which is summed up by Georges with the question: "How do we know if ten days have passed or not?"⁵¹

Gorcha comes back with the severed head of the Turkish enemy he sought in the mountains and a gaping wound near his heart. But, apparently, his now understandably bad mood is no different from the way he behaved before his departure, so the rest of the family still cannot tell whether Gorcha has joined the ranks of the undead. D'Urfé seems to be more sure, as his narration describes Gorcha's appearance in unequivocally sepulchral terms. D'Urfé notes that Gorcha's "pale, emaciated features ... could have been taken for those of

⁴⁷Larry Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment* (Stanford, 1994). We can also see this dichotomy at work in contemporary reactions to Calmet's *Treatise on Vampires and Revenants*. The fame of Calmet's text did not prevent numerous critics from decrying his credulity—they felt that he presented too neutral a record of the vampiric incidents and did not sufficiently mock the backwardness and irrationality of the stories' sources.

⁴⁸Tolstoy, "Family of the Vourdalak," 256. In his analysis of the story, Odesskii points out that this reference to the four branches of Slavic languages is a notion that is contemporaneous to the composition of the short story in the 1830s–1840s, rather than its 1815 or 1759 setting ("Vampiricheskaia topika v rannei proze A. K. Tolstogo," 300).

⁴⁹Tolstoy, "Family of the Vourdalak," 256.

⁵⁰Ibid., 257.

⁵¹Ibid., 260.

a corpse."⁵² Gorcha also seems to have a number of other traits that link him with the folkloric Slavic vampire. He is evidently a grouch—a fact which alone qualified some villagers for an unrestful afterlife. Like Arnold Paole from Calmet's *Treatise*, he has also returned after fighting with the Turks. Gorcha's newfound foreignness is highlighted by an allusion to the evil wizard in Gogol's "Terrible Vengeance" (1832), for he similarly refuses to eat or drink anything at dinner, possibly in anticipation of feasting on his own family members like the cursed descendants of the original sinner in Gogol's tale. Yet despite these suggestive signs, his family remains unsure of Gorcha's condition due to the ambiguous timing of his arrival. This initial uncertainty highlights the fundamental instability of the vourdalak's identity, which turns out to depend on where you are coming from and when you got there, rather than on a system of stable signs.

While the vampire ostensibly represents a monstrous alterity, it actually gnaws away at the notion of a clear-cut boundary between self and other. It exposes the fundamental instability of such dichotomies through the invasive violence of its bite and the subsequent epidemic of replication, in which victims quickly turn into the very thing that bit them. Thus, Tolstoy's title can be misleading, in that "The Family of the Vourdalak" seems to suggest that the vampiric threat is contained within one household. In fact, from the very beginning, the tale centers on the family's interaction with their foreign guest, the Marquis D'Urfé. And, insofar as it is told entirely from D'Urfé's perspective, the limits of his narration are shaped by the fraught interrelations between family and stranger, host and guest, insider and outsider. Vampire tales have long exposed constructed dichotomies that belie securely stable identities, for the concept of a revenant destabilizes boundaries, and the vampire—much like the uncanny double—fundamentally undermines the distinction between self and other.⁵³

Their subversive power to unsettle epistemological certainties (which ensures that most early vampire literature stays within the mode of detection and pursuit) leads, first of all, to the difficulty of identifying one of the dangerous undead. So even when nineteenth-century vampire literature raised the vampire's class from peasant to aristocrat, it merely relocated the search for the vampire's identity to aristocratic ballrooms and, eventually, bourgeois bedrooms. Lord Ruthven in Polidori's "The Vampyre" is noticed at a party only insofar as his mysterious ways interest his future victims. The aristocratic vampires of A. K. Tolstoy's own "Upyr'" manage to enjoy themselves at a ball entirely unnoticed, save for the attention of one vampire hunter, Rybarev, who claims to be able to identify them by their tendency to smack their lips as if they are always eating something delectable.⁵⁴ Of course, the young man with whom Rybarev shares this morsel of wisdom immediately judges him to be insane. This is a running refrain in vampire stories, for the fantastic inevitably raises questions about perspective and validity.

⁵²Ibid., 261.

⁵³For a fascinating discussion of the parallels between the vampire and the double see Greg Dolgoplov, "High Stakes: The Vampire and the Double in Russian Cinema," in *Transnational Horror across Visual Media: Fragmented Bodies*, ed. Dana Oeh and Kirsten Strayer (New York, 2014), 44–68.

⁵⁴A trait invented by Tolstoy that is then passed on to some subsequent vampires, most notably those featured in Mikhail Bulgakov's *Master and Margarita*.

Bram Stoker's 1897 *Dracula* culminates the nineteenth-century vampire literature tradition and foregrounds issues of perspective and narration, intensifying the tendencies we can observe in earlier works. One of Dracula's pursuers, the psychiatrist Dr. Seward, famously cannot help but "sometimes think we must be all mad and that we shall wake to sanity in strait-waistcoats."⁵⁵ And at least one scholar emphatically agrees with the psychiatrist's suspicion, arguing that the slaying of Count Dracula results from a case of group delusion and paranoia that transforms an odd foreigner into a deadly threat.⁵⁶ Although few have gone so far as to diagnose them, Carol Senf, among others, has likewise pointed out signs that Seward and the other narrators of *Dracula* may not be entirely reliable.⁵⁷ In other words, there is a possibility that Dracula may have been victimized, and twice at that: first, by becoming the prey of vampire hunters convinced of his status as monster; and, second, by being trapped within a narrative that is entirely under their control. For Dracula is one of the only characters to never narrate in a novel that is dominated by the self-described Band of Light, among whose final materials, by their own admission, "there is hardly one authentic document."⁵⁸

D'Urfé apparently holds no such doubts about the genuineness of the events to which he has been both "a witness ... and a participant." In fact, he twice emphatically insists on his story's authenticity, telling his listeners that "it is at once so strange, so horrible and so true that it will suffice to strike even the most jaded imaginations with terror."⁵⁹ Odesskii has insightfully noted that the basic plot outline of "The Family of the Vourdalak" resembles that of "Sur le vampirisme" from Mérimée's *La Guzla* in that "in both cases a 'civilized' French traveler becomes a witness and a participant in a vampiric 'event' ... involving a girl in a 'savage' Serbian village."⁶⁰ However, it is important to note that the French traveler in Mérimée's story is highly skeptical of the local beliefs and blames the girl's demise on her superstitions, rather than on an actual vampire. By contrast, Tolstoy's "The Family of the Vourdalak" presents its narrator in a very different light compared to the eighteenth-century reports and Mérimée's adaptation. From the beginning of his visit to the village, D'Urfé seems much more convinced that vampiric activity is taking place than even the Serbian family who is being victimized. He assures his salon audience that the story is authentic and also repeatedly insists to Gorcha's family that he has seen the old man prowling outside of the windows.

The contrast with Mérimée's account, as well as the Marquis' repeated assurances, should succeed primarily in making us consider his role as participant in these events and our only source of information about them. While D'Urfé demonstrates an impressive knowledge of the telltale signs of vampirism, his story nonetheless highlights the difficulty in being able to tell who the vampire is. Indeed, vampirism in "The Family of the Vourdalak"

⁵⁵Bram Stoker, *Dracula*, ed. Nina Auerbach and David Skal (New York, 1997), 240.

⁵⁶Andres Jodar, "Bram Stoker's *Dracula*: A Study on the Human Mind and Paranoid Behaviour," *Atlantis: Journal of the Spanish Association of Anglo-American Studies* 31:2 (December 2009): 23–39.

⁵⁷Carol Senf, "Dracula: The Unseen Face in the Mirror," *Journal of Narrative Technique* 9 (1979): 160–70.

⁵⁸Stoker, *Dracula*, 326.

⁵⁹I have modified Frayling's translation of *vraie* from "authentic" to "true" (Tolstoy, "Family of the Vourdalak," 255).

⁶⁰Odesskii, "Vampiricheskaja topika v rannei proze A. K. Tolstogo," 299.

is inseparable from the issue of "telling," both in the sense of identifying the monster and narrating the encounter. A close reading of the signs would suggest that the narrator may, in fact, be the source of the vampire epidemic. As a way of furthering some of the insights offered in previous analyses of unreliable narrators in *Dracula* and other vampire tales, I propose the term *vampiric narration* to describe D'Urfé's function in the story. Vampiric narration features not merely an unreliable, or epistemologically compromised narrator, who attempts and fails at total control of the text, but a narrator who assigns his own desires, predilections, and even his words to the subjects of his negative portrayal. In this case, the vampiric narrator also doubles as a vampire.

D'Urfé appears in the village on the very evening that the vampiric activity first starts to occur. He is also somehow the only one to witness the vourdalak's early intrusions into the house. D'Urfé's subsequent behavior, his impressive knowledge of vampire mythology, and his miraculous escape from a horde of hungry vampires all contribute to the mound of circumstantial evidence that indicates his role in the events may be different from what he claims. My suspicion toward D'Urfé is partly inspired by Franco Moretti's radical rereading of *Dracula*, in which Moretti implicates the Band of Light's American member, Quincey Morris, in vampiric activity.⁶¹ However, Morris never narrates in Stoker's novel. In fact, his lack of textual contribution is one of the major traits he shares with Count Dracula. In contrast, "The Family of the Vourdalak" is dominated by D'Urfé's perspective. The power that he possesses as a narrator reinforces the class and language distinctions between D'Urfé and his peasant subjects. But D'Urfé's privileged status as the narrator does not, of course, guarantee total control. The historical context that frames the tale signals for a need to reflect on narratorial perspective. In turn, the mode of vampiric narration exposes concerns over cultural invasion and epidemic imitation that make this Russian vampire tale such a fascinating study of nation and narration.

The beginning of "The Family of the Vourdalak" first raises the specter of an aristocratic vampire hiding in plain sight. The frame narrator compares the conclusion of the Congress of Vienna to "a masked ball ... coming to an end."⁶² Tolstoy's "Upyr'" likewise begins with a waning ball and this autocitation brings up the claims put forward by Rybarev in "Upyr'," when he recognizes two aged aristocrats, a young woman's grandmother and her male acquaintance, as vampires. D'Urfé inadvertently plays up this parallel when he tells his group of young female listeners that their grandmothers could tell them some tall tales about his *affaires de coeur*.⁶³

D'Urfé thus spins his tale of undead Slavic peasants in a setting that is much more closely associated with aristocratic vampirism. By the early nineteenth century it is hard to

⁶¹Franco Moretti, "The Dialectic of Fear," in his *Signs Taken for Wonders: Essays in the Sociology of Literary Forms* (New York, 1983), 83–108.

⁶²Tolstoy, "Family of the Vourdalak," 254.

⁶³In another fascinating hint about D'Urfé's vampiric associations, the salon in the frame narrative is hosted by the dowager Princess of Schwarzenberg. It is unclear whether the name is a remarkable coincidence, or whether Tolstoy could have heard these rumors during his time in Europe, but Princess Eleonore von Schwarzenberg (1682–1741) was suspected of being a vampire. Her strange burial seems to corroborate, if not the rumors themselves, then the extent to which her contemporaries believed in them. See Peter J. Bräunlein, "The Frightening Borderlands of Enlightenment: The Vampire Problem," *Studies in History and Philosophy of Biological and Biomedical Sciences* 43 (2012): 715.

ignore the use of vampirism as a metaphor for parasitic human interactions, and particularly for the economic and political predation on the lower classes by the moneyed and powerful.⁶⁴ The rise of the Byronic vampire after Polidori's "The Vampyre" further solidifies the monster's aristocratic status and gives him desires for possession and control that go beyond bloodsucking. The famous Russian spawn of Polidori's Ruthven, Pechorin in Lermontov's *Hero of Our Time*, admits that "there are moments when I understand the Vampyre."⁶⁵ Pechorin references Ruthven in the context of his need to feed on the emotions of others. He derives sustenance by causing suffering and describes his need in expressly vampiric terms as a "thirst."⁶⁶ Like Ruthven, Pechorin slakes his thirst through homosocial competition and the sexual conquest of women. Thus, considering the path of destruction sown by his nineteenth-century contemporaries, it should by all rights be the aristocratic invader who infects the village in "The Family of the Vourdalak."

Like Ruthven and Pechorin, D'Urfé is also a sexual tourist whose travel to liminal lands is motivated by romantic conquest and self-actualization. D'Urfé is not nearly as successful as his kin in his *affaires de coeur*, however. In fact, the combination of his ridiculous braggadocio about his listener's grandmothers in the frame narrative with the outcomes of his attempted seductions in the main story recalls Pechorin's pathetic failure in "Taman" more so than his successful manipulations in "Princess Mary." D'Urfé admits that he requested a diplomatic mission to Moldavia because of his lack of progress in seducing the beautiful Duchess de Gramont.⁶⁷ Upon stopping at Gorcha's on the way to his post, D'Urfé decides to stay despite the family's troubles, which he attributes to Gorcha's nighttime prowling. All of this is so that D'Urfé can do some prowling of his own, for he finds himself immediately smitten with Gorcha's daughter, Sdenka. D'Urfé remains with the beleaguered family until Georges, the eldest son, detects that he intends to cross the line with Sdenka and drives him out. On the same night that D'Urfé leaves, Georges allegedly stakes Gorcha through the heart. Thus, it is hard to dissociate D'Urfé's arrival and departure from the vourdalak's movements.

D'Urfé's sexual predation and his verbal contagiousness further mark him as a vampiric figure. The bloated corpses of eighteenth-century vampire reports and early Slavic folklore had little to recommend them as prospective lovers, and thus the addition of deadly lover to the vampire's catalogue of sins came fairly late in its evolution. Often considered the first literary vampire tale, Goethe's "Bride of Corinth" (1797) features a succubus-like vampire

⁶⁴This tendency begins in the second half of the eighteenth century and becomes particularly prevalent in the early nineteenth. For instance, Voltaire jokes about capitalist bloodsucking in his entry on "Vampires" in the *Philosophical Dictionary* (1764), and Marx capitalizes on these metaphors in Volume 1 of *Capital* (1867) when he famously proclaims that "capital is dead labour which, vampire-like, lives only by sucking living labour." For an enlightening discussion of Marx's use of language borrowed from the horror genre see Mark Neocleous, *The Monstrous and the Dead: Burke, Marx, Fascism* (Cardiff, 2005).

⁶⁵Mikhail Lermontov, "Kniazhna Meri," in his *Sobranie sochinenii v chetyrekh tomakh* (Moscow-Leningrad, 1962), 4:423.

⁶⁶Ibid., 401.

⁶⁷The Duchess apparently also had a story to tell. She narrates another one of Tolstoy's early fantastic tales, "Vstrecha cherez 300 let," in which D'Urfé appears as a participant. Most notably, his attempt at a romantic abduction fails spectacularly when he is caught by her gallant and zealous older guardian while trying to climb up to her balcony. Her tale is more self-consciously parodic than D'Urfé's in the way it plays with Romantic cliché and utilizes misplaced applications of the chivalric code for humorous effect.

bride who returns from the grave to kill her intended while consummating their ill-fated marriage. (Incidentally, Aleksey Tolstoy translated Goethe's "Bride of Corinth" into Russian in 1867.⁶⁸) But the lecherous aristocratic vampire truly triumphed on the European stage in the 1820s as a result of Polidori's "The Vampyre," its capitalization on Byron's fame and its reification of the Byronic hero.⁶⁹ In fact, the prototype for D'Urfé's designs on Sdenka can be found in Ruthven's attack on the peasant girl Ianthe in "The Vampyre." Like Ianthe in Polidori's story, Sdenka is introduced as the image of unspoiled nature herself—an untraveled land to be enjoyed for the first time. D'Urfé's narration packages the young woman with a "lively and charmingly simple disposition" for touristic consumption.⁷⁰ "In this remote setting," Sdenka becomes irresistible to D'Urfé in no small part because she is "dressed in a rustic costume and speaking in a musical foreign tongue."⁷¹ But he has little else to say about the object of his desire, save that she is "a genuine Slavic beauty."⁷² Sdenka's only defining feature appears to be a line that runs across her forehead. Yet this line reproduces an identical wrinkle on the forehead of the Duchess de Gramont and marks the two women as doubles. D'Urfé returns to it again and again, despite wondering how something that he does not consider conventionally attractive becomes such an erotic fixation for him. The answer lies beyond D'Urfé's self-analytical capabilities, for the line speaks to him because it presents an empty space that can be filled in with one's own wants. To that end, the prominent line on the Slavic beauty's forehead serves as a graphic representation of the Marquis' relationship with this land beyond Western Europe's borders as a blank slate onto which one can project one's own anxieties and desires through the act of vampiric narration.

While Ianthe's draining in Polidori's "The Vampyre" is potentially paralleled to the increasingly bourgeois mode of consumption that characterized the Grand Tour, Polidori's third-person narrator does not problematize Ianthe's stereotypical description or the melodramatic sacrifice of the picturesque virgin on the dying altar of the sentimental genre. With the shift to a first person narrator, Tolstoy's tale now insists that Sdenka's presentation as an object for touristic consumption reflects on D'Urfé's tastes. In fact, D'Urfé's interactions with Sdenka expose not only his predilections, but also the inconsistencies in his story that reveal him as a vampiric narrator.

The relationship between D'Urfé and Sdenka coalesces into two abortive seduction scenes, the second of which mirrors D'Urfé's first attempt, and in doing so serves as a parodic double that reflects his inauthenticity and vampirism. In the initial scene, D'Urfé makes his way to Sdenka's room at night and watches the young woman sing a haunting folk ballad. In the song, an old king is going off to war and his young wife promises to stay faithful and never forget him. If she betrays her promise, the woman tells the king that he

⁶⁸Tolstoy's translation of "The Bride of Corinth" was published in *Vestnik Evropy* in 1868.

⁶⁹While I use the word "stage" metaphorically, the vampire also dominated theatrical stages in the 1820s in France, Germany, and Britain. For a fascinating discussion of this phenomenon see Roxana Stuart, *Stage Blood: Vampires of the 19th Century Stage* (Bowling Green, 1994). Also note "The Vampyre" was originally attributed to Byron by Polidori's publisher, who released the story under the name of "Lord B."

⁷⁰Tolstoy, "Family of the Vourdalak," 258.

⁷¹*Ibid.*, 265.

⁷²*Ibid.*, 258.

should “come to me after your death and drink all my heart’s blood.”⁷³ Apparently not much for originality (and ignoring the fact that the wife promptly forgot the king before D’Urfé interrupted the song), the Marquis offers Sdenka his life’s blood in exchange for an hour in her company. While offering this strangely mercantile exchange, D’Urfé reports: “I was as alarmed as she was by my forwardness, not because such boldness failed me in the past—far from it—but because in spite of my passion, I could not help having a sincere respect for Sdenka’s innocence.”⁷⁴ D’Urfé contrasts Sdenka’s naiveté with the knowing smiles of his story’s aristocratic listeners, for it seems the “young girl was too naïve to comprehend fully what I meant . . . what you, mesdames, to judge by your suggestive smiles, have understood immediately.”⁷⁵ But his assumption is contradicted by his own narrative. In response to his request for an hour of her time, Sdenka calmly answers, “many things can happen in an hour.”⁷⁶ She seems only too aware of his intentions. D’Urfé thus comes across as a considerably less effective seducer than he would like to believe. While he gathers his thoughts for another offer, the two are caught by Sdenka’s brother Georges. It is clear that, for Georges, D’Urfé presents a threat to his family. And yet, according to D’Urfé’s narration, Gorcha’s “corpse-like face” appeared in the window just as Georges came in the room.⁷⁷ In what seems like the paradigm for his narrative practice, D’Urfé quickly tells Georges that he came to his sister’s room to warn her about Gorcha. He thus reveals his propensity to lie and, specifically, to displace attention from himself onto Gorcha, who functions as his double. The connection between the two men is underscored by parallels in their behavior, as Gorcha’s hungry stare reenacts the lecherous voyeurism D’Urfé displayed at the start of the scene.

Georges revokes the Marquis’ invitation to the house the next day. D’Urfé travels on to Moldavia and admits that he quickly forgets the promises he made to Sdenka in the arms of his new host’s wife. D’Urfé finally recalls the young beauty on his way back, and decides to stay at the same village again. But now he finds Sdenka much changed, alone in a dark and abandoned house. She looks more beautiful than ever, but it seems that “her former timidity had given way to a strange wantonness of manner.”⁷⁸ The shocked Marquis wonders, “Is it possible . . . that Sdenka was never the pure and innocent maiden that I imagined her to be?”⁷⁹ The sexually aggressive woman—a vamp ahead of her time—disturbs the lecherous aristocrat, and he must now be persuaded to spend an hour with her. To entice him to stay, Sdenka starts to recite the exact words that he once said to her, repeating his earlier platitudes in imitation of his plagiaristic attempt at seduction. “I love you more than my soul, more than my salvation,” she repeats, reminding him, “You once told me that your life’s blood belonged to me . . .!”⁸⁰ When he protests—like she did in the first scene—that her brother might discover them, Sdenka recites his words again, assuring

⁷³Ibid., 267.

⁷⁴Ibid., 268.

⁷⁵Ibid.

⁷⁶Ibid.

⁷⁷Ibid.

⁷⁸Ibid., 274.

⁷⁹Ibid., 274–75.

⁸⁰Ibid., 276.

D'Urfé that her "brother has been lulled to sleep by the wind rustling in the trees; heavy is his sleep, long is the night and I ask only to be granted one hour!"⁸¹ It seems that having turned into a vampire, Sdenka acts as D'Urfé's double. His earlier sexual aggressiveness is, in effect, quoted by her.

Their newfound interchangeability is highlighted by the function of the cross in the scene. Having consumed some of the red wine Sdenka offers him (and he is, in fact, the only one who drinks in this scene), D'Urfé says that he decided to give in to her charms and hungrily grabs Sdenka. But during the embrace, D'Urfé's chest is pricked by the cross that he had received as a gift from the Duchess de Gramont. Thus, while the Marquis points out that Sdenka is no longer wearing her cross, the scene's supposed vampire is nonetheless not the one harmed by the Christian symbol. This mock staking awakens D'Urfé's sense of self-preservation and prompts him to retreat from the house. He makes his escape on horseback, with what appears to be a vampire army at his heels. The scene parodically reenacts the French retreat from the "victorious Russian soldiers" referenced in the frame narrative, for the Marquis hears behind him "rhythmic stamping, like a troop of foot soldiers advancing in double-quick time."⁸² But the conflict that follows is hardly a martial one. Sdenka jumps on the back of D'Urfé's horse and continues to shout his words back at him, while he reports that a "terrible struggle" ensues. As well as Tolstoy is able to build up the suspense in this final, grotesque scene, which culminates in the invention of the child catapult, this is also a systematic subversion of D'Urfé's power as a narrator. The Marquis says: "For some time I had difficulty even defending myself, but eventually I managed to grab hold of Sdenka by curling one arm around her waist and knotting the other hand in her hair."⁸³ This description brings to mind the memorable scene narrated by Pechorin in *Hero of Our Time*, when he stages his fight with a young peasant girl in "Taman" as a desperate life-or-death struggle culminating in hair-pulling.

Lermontov's "Taman" appears in the center of *Hero of Our Time* and presents the first time that Pechorin narrates his own story after a series of frame narratives. It also highlights issues of perspective and narrative control like no other part of the novel, as the facts of the story undermine Pechorin's stylized narration. Similarly to D'Urfé, Pechorin paints all of the locals he encounters to "resemble demonic folkloric creatures."⁸⁴ He also uses his status as an "official" traveler to impose his presence on a poor peasant hut, where he is clearly not welcome, in search of a romantic adventure. But despite his attempts to present the ensuing conflict in "heroic" terms, Pechorin ultimately cannot hide the fact that he has merely disrupted the livelihood of some lowly smugglers, nor that he got beat up by a girl who took seriously his threat that he would tell on them. This "incident ... marks the climax of the ironical unmasking of the hero in 'Taman'."⁸⁵ Indeed, to be more precise, it marks

⁸¹Ibid.

⁸²Ibid., 278.

⁸³Ibid.

⁸⁴Valeria Sobol, "The Uncanny Frontier of Russian Identity: Travel, Ethnography, and Empire in Lermontov's 'Taman,'" *Russian Review* 70 (January 2011): 69.

⁸⁵Richard Peace, "The Role of 'Taman' in Lermontov's 'Geroi Nashogo Vremeni,'" *Slavonic and East European Review* 45 (January 1967): 22. See *ibid.*, 21–22, for a more detailed analysis of the scene between Pechorin and the young girl than I have been able to offer here.

the unmasking of a hero-narrator who turns out to be a poor hero and an untrustworthy narrator.⁸⁶

As Valeria Sobol explains in her examination of “Taman” through a post-colonial lens,

The Orientalist/colonial model that we find at work in “Bela”—the romantic conquest of an exotic local woman by a European man representing the colonizing imperial power—is subtly subverted in “Taman’.” While Pechorin’s initial encounter with the undine—a local “wild” beauty associated with folkloric characters and communicating in songs and riddles—sets up Orientalist expectations, they are soon to be undermined. The most active and independent female character in the entire novel ... the heroine of “Taman” proves both intellectually and physically superior to the male military official from the capital.⁸⁷

Indeed, both “Taman” and “The Family of the Vourdalak” add an important element which is missing from the vampire tales in *La Guzla* and *Songs of the Western Slavs*—a female heroine who is psychologically more self-aware and physically more powerful than the male narrator whose voice seeks to dominate the text. Of peasant origins and connected to the voice of the people through folklore, the female characters are exotic and alien to the European (in Tolstoy’s text) or Europeanized (in Lermontov’s) narrators, but—like Pushkin’s Tatiana in *Eugene Onegin*—all the more authentically Slavic for being so.

While the girl in “Taman” invokes Pechorin’s threat to “tell” about their activities, thus underlining his role as the story’s narrator, Sdenka in “Family of the Vourdalak” goes a step further by her emphatic repetition of D’Urfé’s words. Taken out of the bedroom, Sdenka’s quotation becomes a parody, as she continues to shout his words back at him while leading a peasant vampire army in pursuit of the escaping Marquis. In his earlier attempt at seduction, D’Urfé professed, “I see only you, I hear only you; I am no longer master of my own destiny; a superior strength commands my obedience. Forgive me, Sdenka!”⁸⁸ In the story’s finale, just before she jumps on the back of his horse, Sdenka screams, “I see only you, hear only you! I am not mistress of my own destiny—a superior force commands my obedience. Forgive me, dearest, forgive me!”⁸⁹ This ironic invocation of a superior force that guides her references both her vampiric thirst and his abuse of power as a narrator.

In their first encounter, the Marquis claimed that Sdenka was much too naïve to understand his statements. But rather than suggesting her simplicity and lack of comprehension, Sdenka’s repetition highlights the emptiness of D’Urfé’s plagiaristic seduction, borrowed as it was from her folk ballad and spliced with meaningless courtly pleasantries. The Frenchman’s attempt to circumscribe Sdenka within his narrow, Orientalist

⁸⁶It is impossible to rule out coincidence as the reason for the parallels between the scenes in Lermontov and Tolstoy’s texts. But the parallels are fascinating enough to suggest that even if it was started prior to the date, “Family of the Vourdalak” may have been completed after the 1840 publication of “Taman” in *Notes of the Fatherland*.

⁸⁷Sobol, “Uncanny Frontier of Russian Identity,” 77.

⁸⁸Tolstoy, “Family of the Vourdalak,” 268.

⁸⁹*Ibid.*, 278.

construct thus backfires in a spectacular way. The historical context so insistently emphasized by Tolstoy has already raised the need to read "The Family of the Vourdalak" as a creative response to West European constructions of the Slavs, which were partially internalized by the Russian aristocracy. Now, both D'Urfé's identity and his words are exposed through Sdenka's parodic repetition, which does not merely internalize his language but, in fact, turns it back on him to expose his lack of reflection.

Tolstoy's self-conscious intertextuality further underlines that his borrowed vampiric thematic in "The Family of the Vourdalak" functions to help explore the interplay of cultural identity and creative appropriation, rather than presenting a mere internalization of foreign constructions. In participating in a series of borrowings without authentic origin, Sdenka's parodic vampirism parallels Tolstoy's playful engagement with Pushkin and Mérimée, which actively reworks and revises Mérimée's fraudulent translation of Serbian folktales. In Tolstoy's revision, Sdenka's imitation emerges as a source of strength rather than weakness or emptiness in that it unmasks the narrator's vampiric desires and constitutes her own agency through citation. In offering this reconsideration of imitation from a source of anxiety to that of potential strength, Tolstoy's story also anticipates Dostoevsky's response to Chaadaev in his famous "Pushkin" speech. In the end of Tolstoy's "The Family of the Vourdalak," the toothy laugh of the vampire woman reflects the monstrous power of self-conscious parodic appropriation, which—while not always so blood-thirsty—nonetheless has bite.