

Blood Ties: The Intertwined First Mention of Vampires in Poetry and Fiction

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The common understanding of how vampires entered fiction was by way of poetry; the poems romanticized the vampire which fiction later picked up on. However, this is a limited view of how vampires entered stories. An earlier mention of vampires in fiction led to the first vampire poetry, over 275 years ago. This paper investigates the first poetry to mention vampires, and how the earlier fiction directly influenced it.

Keywords: *vampires, 18th century, literary history, poetry, horror*

1. Introduction

The narrative of the vampire timeline typically progresses as such: first there was folklore, then reports and scholarship, then university debates, then vampire poetry, then vampire fiction, followed by vampire theater, films, radio, comics, television, etc. However, the middle part of the equation is in error. The topic of vampires was addressed in fiction before poetry, albeit not in the manner we might expect.

The question of the first use of vampires in creative writing seemed to be largely settled as of 2023, as critics and scholars agreed—sometimes cautiously—that the 1748 poem “Der Vampir” by Heinrich August Ossenfelder was the first instance of a vampire being referenced in creative works.

However, the earlier mention of vampires in fiction is not an unknown or terribly obscure work: *Lettres Juives* by Jean-Baptiste de Boyer, Marquis d’Argens. For reasons I haven’t quite come to understand, it has yet to be held up as the first creative work to explicitly mention vampires. That it is so closely tied to Ossenfelder’s poem makes its exclusion from the conversation all the more perplexing. Indeed, “Der Vampir” would not have been written without *Lettres Juives*, as will be discussed.

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Over the following pages, I will give a brief history of “Der Vampir” and its author, and trace back how it was influenced by an earlier novel that brings up vampires again and again between its covers.

But we must start at the end and work backwards...

2. God Held, Christ’s Praise, and Easter Fields: Gotthold, Christlob, and Ossenfelder

In 2023, the vampire world celebrated—and often ignored—the 275th anniversary of the first poem to mention vampires. Preceding Burger’s “Lenore” and Goethe’s “Bride of Corinth” by 26 and 49 years, respectively, Heinrich August Ossenfelder’s “Der Vampir” (“The Vampire”) appeared in the short-lived journal *Der Naturforscher* (“The Naturalist”) in May of 1748.

Mein liebes Mägdchen glaubet
Beständig steif und feste,
An die gegebenen Lehren
Der immer frommen Mutter;

Als Völker an der Theyse
An tödtliche Vampiere
Heyduckisch feste glauben.
Nun warte nur Christianchen,
Du willst mich gar nicht lieben;
Ich will mich an dir rächen,

Und heute in Tockayer
Zu einem Vampir trinken.
Und wenn du sanfte schlummerst,
Von deinen schönen Wangen
Den frischen Purpur saugen.
Alsdenn wirst du erschrecken,
Wenn ich dich werde küssen
Und als ein Vampir küssen:
Wenn du dann recht erzitterst
Und matt in meine Arme,
Gleich einer Todten sinkest
Alsdenn will ich dich fragen,

My dear young maiden clingeth
Unbending, fast and firm
To all the long-held teaching
Of a mother ever true;
As in vampires unmortal
Folk on the Theyse’s portal
Heyduck-like do believe.

But my Christine thou dost dally,
And wilt my loving parry
Till I myself avenging
To a vampire’s health a-drinking
Him toast in pale Tokay.

And as softly thou art sleeping
To thee shall I come creeping
And thy life’s blood drain away.
And so shalt thou be trembling
For thus shall I be kissing
And death’s threshold thou’ it be crossing
With fear, in my cold arms.
And last shall I thee question
Compared to such instruction

Sind meine Lehren besser,
Als deiner guten Mutter?

What are a mother's charms?

It was not uncommon for the journal, published by the raconteur and insect-obsessed nonconformist Christlob Mylius, to end its longer, more serious articles with something lighter yet related. In this case, Mylius ended a two-issue run discussing the many reported vampire scares in Eastern Europe with Ossenfelder's poem. The path from Ossenfelder to Mylius leads directly through Germany's beloved poet and dramaturg Gotthold Ephraim Lessing. While Lessing is not as well known in the English-speaking world, he is a central character in the history of German drama and literature, and it is fortuitous that he was active and on the scene when "Der Vampir" was published, because the wealth of information about Lessing allows us a small window into the life of Ossenfelder, who stood in Lessing's shadow throughout his writing career.

When it comes to Lessing and Mylius, their closeness is well documented, if inconsistent. While some sources have it that Mylius and Lessing were lifelong friends and leave it there², other sources call them cousins. Hugh Nisbet (2013, 50) traces evidence that Mylius and Lessing had had some sort of family ties, though not blood-related³. However, the family tree branched, their bond over interests was strengthened by some sort of kinship. This kinship was bolstered by the fact that Mylius was a tutor to Lessing in their younger years (Nisbet 2013, 51), though Mylius was only six years Lessing's senior.

When it comes to Lessing and Ossenfelder, there is less documentation but we are not totally bereft of information. German historian Erich Schmidt notes Lessing and Ossenfelder as childhood friends (Schmidt 1887, 498-499), though I can only prove that they would have known each other from teen years onward, as it can be documented that they were they were classmates at the princely St. Afra school (Kreyssig 1876, 280-281). Before St. Afra they attended different schools in different cities (Lessing attended Latin school in Meissen while Ossenfelder attended The Protestant Council School in Bautzen⁴). High school friendships can create strong bonds, however; we don't have to document friendship from the cradle onward to conclude that Lessing and Ossenfelder were close.

² In addition to retitling one of his works "From a Poem To Mr. M" in dedication to Mylius, Lessing also published a collection of Mylius' work in *Vermischte Schriften des Hrn. Christlob Mylius* in 1754 after Mylius' death.

³ Nisbet states that the first wife of Mylius' father (not Mylius' mother) was the half-sister of Lessing's father.

⁴ 1740 Student directory of the Bautzen Gymnasium, provided by Thomas Schubert.

Ossenfelder, Lessing and Mylius appear to have all been in a circle of friends (Nisbet 2013, 50). Mylius even dedicated a poem to Lessing and Ossenfelder as “To Mr. L*** and Mr. O****”, writing:

I want to drink as fresh as my L**
And, like my O****, I am a hero in Venus's realm. (Mylius 1747, 632)

Evidence exists that the three palled around Leipzig after their schoolboy days had come to an end, though their penchant for schoolboy humor remained intact, as Lessing’s nickname for Ossenfelder was “Knochenacker”⁵, and they seemed to have maintained a youthful enthusiasm for bawdy poetry (Lessing and Barner 1990).

Such poetry is found in the Greek poet Anacreon. Writing verse full of innuendo and double entendre, his work must have been appealing to teenage boys studying in a private school⁶. One can imagine discovering the ancient Anacreon in the 1740s akin to modern teens finding old bathroom walls full of dirty limericks. Except that it’s likely that the young men learned of Anacreon under the sanction of their schoolmasters—Lessing himself credited his St. Afra⁷ schooling as immersing him in a world of Greek classics (Guthke 2018, 205-236). And if Lessing learned of Anacreon at St. Afra, it’s reasonable to think his classmate Ossenfelder did as well. That they both demonstrated a fondness for writing in the Anacreontic style early in their careers supports this. Lessing’s Anacreontic poems are well-cataloged; Ossenfelder’s can be found only in a posthumous collection, and of course, in “Der Vampir”, itself written in the Anacreontic style.

According to Zimmern (1878) by the time “Der Vampir” appeared in its pages, Lessing had already contributed to *Der Naturforscher*—his first published poem, according to some sources⁸. Even if it wasn’t his first poem, Lessing (1887) contributed well over a dozen poems to *Der Naturforscher* between 1747 and 1748.

⁵ Nisbet, 50. “Ossenfelder” translates to roughly to “East field” or “Easter field” while “Knochenacker” becomes “Bone field”, though may also be a play on words becoming “Naked bone”.

⁶ For a spicy example of Anacreon’s work, see Walter Headlam’s translation of an untitled poem usually referred to as “The Thracian Filly”: <https://allpoetry.com/8560043>

⁷ in German, “Sächsisches Landesgymnasium Sankt Afra zu Meißen”. The school, opened in 1543 as a one of many Holy Roman “Princely” schools for gifted students, has no official English title, but “Saint Afra” is commonly accepted.

⁸ Zeno. “Mylius, Christlob, Biographie.” Mylius, Christlob, Biographie - Zeno.org. Accessed December 22, 2023. <http://www.zeno.org/Literatur/M/Mylius,+Christlob/Biographie>. It’s possible that there’s confusion here between Mylius’ journal *Der Naturforscher* and a concurrent journal he published called *Ermunterungen zum Vergnügen des Gemüths* [Encouragements for the Pleasures of The Mind] which Lessing also contributed to in 1747. His first work credited in *Der Naturforscher* was “Die drey Reiche der Natur” [The Three Kingdoms of Nature] in the August 26th, 1747, issue. Lessing of course was writing poetry in his younger years as well, though little of that has survived.

3. What else do we know about Heinrich August Ossenfelder?

Much of Ossenfelder's biography must be inferred by studying vague footprints, but a few specifics are available to us. He was born August 8, 1725, in Dresden. Though his mother and siblings' names have yet to be uncovered, his father, Johann Joachim Ossenfelder, is noted as the leaseholder of the Weiss Beerhaus in baptism documents held in Dresden, while another document notes (Weiz 1780, 181)⁹ him as being an "Oberlandbauschreiber", which roughly translates to a "head building inspector" or "head building clerk" in his home town of Dresden. Regardless of whether the elder Ossenfelder held one or both of these positions, this suggests that Heinrich August Ossenfelder did not have humble beginnings, but rather he was at least upper-middle class.

After attending Protestant Council School in Bautzen and St. Afra in Meissen, Ossenfelder studied law at the University of Leipzig (Haymann 189, 283), which would serve him well later in life. It seems he spent his fair share of youth in Leipzig with Mylius, Lessing, Christian Nikolaus Naumann, Christian Felix Weisse, and others; where they spent their wild youth drinking, experimenting with poetry and drama, and attempting to create some sort of space for themselves. As Hugh Nisbet (2008, 49-50) noted "There is no doubt that these young men... enjoyed the pleasures of student life, as far as their means allowed, and often beyond." The poems written back and forth between them indicate their closeness. "How joyfully we lived," begins one poem Ossenfelder (1748) wrote to Lessing upon Lessing's temporary departure from Leipzig, before ending with:

*Well, collect bravely, so you will reach your goal.
Bring them into character for a play of joy and sorrow.
Only make sure that you soon return to us.*

After his days as an aspiring poet in Leipzig, Ossenfelder made a life for himself as a clerk of the court in several cities throughout Germany. He appears to have spent some time as a tutor as well. He passed away in 1801; though in contrast to most sources that have his death as May 6, the official *Totenbücher* in Frankfurt has his passing on May 7, of a stroke¹⁰. Notably, the hand-written death record gets his age wrong—68 instead of the correct 76—and also misspells his name. These simple

⁹ The eight lines found in this volume, along with baptism documents, are the only biographical sources I've found on Ossenfelder that were written during his lifetime, though I continue to follow other leads.

¹⁰ Institut für Stadtgeschichte Frankfurt Bestand. 1747. *Totenbücher* H.13.53 (Books of the Dead) No. 38. 105.

errors, of course, call into question the rest of the details in the death record; but the record otherwise comports with other sources. I'm disposed to believe that the record's most important job—recording the date and cause of death—is more reliable than other sources, while I'm more flexible on the death record getting its facts straight on other biographical details.

At this time, information on descendants is unavailable, as is the location of his grave, if any exists. Officials in Frankfurt have suggested to me that if Ossenfelder was buried in their city, his grave was very likely moved in the intervening years.

Ossenfelder, like Lessing, appears to owe a debt to Mylius for jump-starting his poetry career, as both his best-known poem, "Der Vampir" and his first poems appear in the pages of Mylius' journal¹¹. He continued to publish poetry, plays, and non-fiction throughout his life, leaving behind several books of verse such as *Lieder vor eines Freundes Hochzeitgäste* ("Songs for a Friend's Wedding Guests") and *Oden und Lieder von Heinrich August Ossenfelder der deutschen Gesellschaft in Jena Mitglied (Anakreontische Vignette)*, both of which received favorable reviews while not being well-studied today (Bodmer 1755, 12). Well-regarded but now lost is the satirical *Die Frau Magisterin*, but his songs can still be found in works like *Neue Lieder zum Singen beym Clavier*¹² and two books on the history of men's boots and women's shoes¹³. Given Ossenfelder's relative obscurity, it's plausible there were far more publications that have been lost to the record. It seems that the nickname Lessing dubbed Ossenfelder with-- "Knochenacker" or "Bonefield" -- wasn't just a good starting point for the world's first vampire-themed poet; it was also prescient of the skeletal traces Ossenfelder would leave behind.

Ossenfelder and Lessing seem to have soured on each other as time went on (Schmidt 1884, 178 and 218), though the reasons are unclear. The few sneers Lessing makes toward Ossenfelder in later writings don't give us much insight as to what caused a rift, but Lessing had little good to say about Ossenfelder as time went on. Ossenfelder largely left the literary scene in his middle age; being ostracized by Lessing may have encouraged this departure.

¹¹ Although *Der Naturforscher* carries many poems, they are signed only with initials, and even those do not consistently use the same initials for the same author, leading to some uncertainty.

One possible earliest work of Ossenfelder's is "Un Die Anakreontische Dichten" ("To The Anacreontic Poets") in the October 14, 1747, issue. "Un Herr M****", very likely by Ossenfelder but signed differently than "Der Vampir", appeared later that year in the journal.

Erich Schmidt posits that the anonymous poem "Das Bildnis der Liebe" from 1747 might be by Ossenfelder, though he allows that it might also be by Lessing. These inconsistencies cause me to hesitate in declaring which published work is Ossenfelder's first.

¹² Ossenfelder contributed several songs to the collaboration with Marburg.

¹³ For scans of both, see <https://www.deutsche-digitale-bibliothek.de/person/gnd/136016456>

For his part, Ossenfelder seems to have come to terms with the fact that Lessing would always eclipse him. In an untitled poem Ossenfelder penned to Lessing, dated 1752, he wrote:

O friend, if only fortune had shown us equal favor,
That once upon a time our games praised reason and nobility!
Your art will receive such rewards,
But mine will never attain the same share.
However, it does not frighten me. You will become like Molière,
And if only I can hope, one day, to be your baron. (Lessing 1886, 7)

4. *Der Naturforscher*, naturally

A few words on *Der Naturforscher* are appropriate here. An exhaustive reading of the journal was not possible as of this writing, as the old German block script requires a skilled transcriber before translation is even possible. However, several scans provided by Harvard's Ernst Mayr Library and a resource located by Thomas Schubert served to confirm a few claims: the journal published for roughly a year, it is separate from a later journal with the same name that ran for substantially longer, and it did indeed carry poems from both Lessing and Ossenfelder.

Because the journal is so hard to come by, it is notable that the version of Ossenfelder's poem widely read in Montague Summers' (2011, 274) *The Vampire: His Kith and Kin* is an accurate transcription of the original. Without the original document, there might have been some question as to the accuracy of Summers' reprinting some 180 years later. Getting my hands on the original also laid to rest a couple of persistent questions regarding the exact date of the publication and the exact title of the poem. Some sources had the publication date as 1747¹⁴, and many sources name the poem as "Mein liebes Mädchen glaubet"¹⁵ (roughly "My Dear Maiden Believes").

Reading the original confirms that the issue holding Ossenfelder's poem is dated May 25, 1748, and that the title is most certainly "Der Vampir". Given the avalanche of works titled "The Vampire" to emerge in later years, critics can perhaps

¹⁴ For example, Crawford, Heide. 2007. "Review of Vampires: Myths and Metaphors of Enduring Evil". *Comparative Literature Studies* 44, no. 3: 518. <https://doi.org/10.1353/cls.2007.0079>

¹⁵ For example, Ruthner, Clemens. 1998. "Dämon Des Geschlechts: VampirInnen in Der Österreichischen Literatur Nach 1955 (Bachmann, Artmann, Jelinek, Neuwirth)." *Modern Austrian Literature* 31, no. 3/4: 65–88.

be forgiven for attempting to distinguish Ossenfelder's poem with a more unique name.

Why was this poem included in the 48th issue of *Der Naturforscher*? Issues 47 and 48 of *Der Naturforscher* both dealt with the vampire scares of Eastern Europe, taking a sober, skeptical approach and largely dismissing the scares as being not much to get worked up about. None of this was novel—it was in line with similar commentary that had come years earlier. Mylius was in the habit of including some short diversion to act as a bow on whatever larger topic the journal might be dealing with at the moment, and the case of issues 47 and 48, it was Ossenfelder who was asked to provide the content. Hans de Roos (2023) noted that the content of “Der Vampir” echoes the topics discussed in the rest of the two-issue run of *Der Naturforscher*, especially the topics found in the first installment, issue 47. There is more discussion on this point later in this paper.

In retrospect, the fact that the first poem to include a vampire image was published in *Der Naturforscher* seems like fate. It was in the universities and scholarly journals of the time where vampires were being debated and discussed, and nowhere was the discussion more intense than in Leipzig, where Mylius was publishing his journal. As Heidi Crawford (2005) put it so well:

The vampire phenomenon as it was investigated in the eighteenth century was initially a scientific phenomenon, which in turn explains why debates on this subject were conducted at universities and why the first poem with a vampire theme was published in a scientific journal.

So of course, the vampire would cross over into the rich world of German verse not in a poetry magazine, but in a scientific journal where vampires were already the hot topic.

5. If a vampire falls in the crypt and no one sees it...

It's fair to say that the first vampire-themed poem did not cause a stir upon publication. No contemporaries reviewed it and it did not get republished for nearly two centuries. Collections of Ossenfelder's work failed to include the poem. Even a collection of Anacreontic poems (Hünich 1911) including a number of Ossenfelder's verses passed over “Der Vampir”. If a reprinting of the poem before the 20th century exists, it has eluded the world's catalogs.

The lack of early reprints or translations of the poem cause one to ask how much of an influence “Der Vampir” could possibly have had on later vampire works. There's a lack of evidence that fellow German speakers Goethe or Burger read the

poem. Not even the leading experts on Goethe such as Nicholas Boyle and David Wellberry could tell me whether that renowned poet had read Ossenfelder. Unfortunately for Ossenfelder's legacy, being the first vampire poem doesn't automatically make for an influential vampire poem.

But if it's the case that "Der Vampir" is a false start on the road to vampire pop culture, how is it that Ossenfelder—without any point of reference from earlier vampire poetry-- incorporated so many of the elements that would come to define later vampire works? The sexual charge lacking consent, the enraptured damsel who risks death, even the Tokay wine that shows up later in both Stoker and Rice. How did Ossenfelder take this theoretical monster, who had only been written about as a walking corpse or spirit that infected others, and turn it into a sexualized being? Was it inevitable that the vampire be portrayed this way? Although authors experimented with the form vampires should take throughout the 19th century, and even into today, it seems that Ossenfelder instinctively hit upon the most successful formula for how vampires should be portrayed.

There's no evidence that the poem made it outside of Germany in the 18th or 19th century. The poem was transcribed only in its original language in Summers' otherwise-English *Kith and Kin*. Summers offered little comment on its form or content, trusting that anyone who needed to read the poem in English would find a way. And while some reader, somewhere, surely scratched out a rough translation in the margin, no published version in any language other than German surfaced until Steven Moore (1985) asked Aloysius Gibson to translate the poem to English, some 236 years later.

This first English printing of the poem, in 1985, has been widely circulated and is the version most people will encounter when searching up the poem online, and it's the translation included above. Gibson himself noted that his translation was the first in English that he knew of¹⁶.

Two more widely-read and very useful translations were published by Roxanna Stuart (1994, 31) and Heidi Crawford (p.4), both of whom found the Gibson translation wanting in one way or another. Hans Corneel de Roos (p. 1), a trained German speaker, offered a strong English translation more recently. All of these translations are useful to an English speaker when analyzing the poem, even when they disagree with each other on some finer points.

¹⁶ Though I made an effort to track down Aloysius Gibson, the trail went cold after making contact with Steven Moore. Moore could only tell me that Gibson lived in Canada and was very interested in Montague Summers, hoping to publish a book on Summers. It should be noted that the Gibson who translated "Der Vampir" is not the same Aloysius James Gibson who was a published psychotherapist and professor at SUNY.

Those commenting on the poem have to a large degree credited it as being the first employment of a vampire image in creative writing. While some have named it the first vampire-related creative writing ever (Hirst 2022), others have cautiously offered that it's the first that is known (Melton 2011).

However, the only correct credit for "Der Vampir" is that it is the first *poem* to engage with vampire imagery, as far as the record can show. A piece of fiction preceded it; a story closely tied to "Der Vampir". We can now turn to that first fiction.

6. Life and undeath before "Der Vampir"

Issue 47 of *Der Naturforscher* begins with an introductory statement about strange goings-on in the East. The introductory statement tantalizes the reader by dangling the possibility that what follows will illuminate them on the living dead, and teasing that such a horror may be nearer than we think with its final line "I hope you will listen to this story and not be moved to believe such a thing is only at Turkey's borders."¹⁷

The journal then shifts narrative voice. A letter addressed to "Isaac" takes up the bulk of the rest of the issue.

Who is Isaac? It's certainly not a nickname for Christlob Mylius, the journal's editor. And to the best of knowledge, there was no one working for the journal by that name.

A short parenthetical in the text is the only clue toward Isaac's identity: "Der 125. Brief aus den jüdischen Briefen." This points us to the source of the text for issues 47 and 48 of the journal: *Lettres Juives*, an earlier book by the author and church critic, Jean-Baptiste de Boyer, Marquis d'Argens¹⁸, who was himself nicknamed "Brother Isaac" by Voltaire.

Although Boyer d'Argens is not credited in the text of *Der Naturforscher*, the entirety of the vampire content spanning two issues (excepting, of course, the short introduction and the poem "Der Vampir") is lifted from *Lettres Juives*. It comes specifically from letter 125, addressed to "Isaac Onis" from "Aaron Monceca".

When we look into the contents of Letter 125 of *Lettres Juives*, we find that it borrows heavily from an earlier source, namely the *Mercure Historique et Politique*

¹⁷ Mylius

¹⁸ Previously, myself and others have credited Stefan Hock with identifying the source of the letter in his work *Die Vampirsagen und ihre Verwertung in der deutschen Litteratur*. However, upon seeing scans of the actual issues of *Der Naturforscher*, it's clear that Mylius acknowledged the source of his "borrowed" content, though he does not identify d'Argens by name. I maintain that this was a deliberate effort to obscure that the transcribed content was a work of fiction.

of October 1736, the same year that *Lettres Juives* began publication. Boyer d'Argens, however, cites his source quite a bit more clearly than does Mylius, and puts into quotation marks the large section of *Mercure* that he is lifting. Following the quoted section, Aaron gives a long commentary on the vampire reports found in *Mercure*, along with his own independent take on the vampire phenomenon of Eastern Europe.

None of this would be terribly remarkable were it not for the fact that both Aaron Monceca and Isaac Onis are fictional characters, created entirely by Boyer d'Argens.

Like he would in his later *Lettres Chinoises* (1739–40) and *Lettres Cabalistiques* (1741), d'Argens created characters who would discuss and exchange thoughts via letter on topics that ranged from the talk of the day to broader philosophical discussions.

Lettres Juives is then, by definition, an epistolary novel. Beating “Der Vampir” by twelve years (and the also-epistolary *Dracula* by some 161 years), it should be considered the first creative writing to regard vampires.

Shortly after the word “vampirism” makes its first appearance in d'Argens book, we get the first appearance of the word “vampire” in a work of fiction:

*They opened in the first place the graves of all who had been buried in six weeks. When they came to that of the old man, they found his eyes open, his colour fresh, his respiration quick and strong, yet he appeared to be stiff and insensible. From these signs they concluded him to be a notorious Vampire. The executioner thereupon, by the command of the commissioners, struck a stake into his heart.*¹⁹

In the above passage, one of d'Argens' characters is quoting *Mercure Historique et Politique*, but shortly after that, he pens his own words:

I thought it proper, my dear Isaac, to lay before you all the strange stories that have been related of Vampires, that you might the better judge of the matter... There are two different methods whereby the falsity of this opinion, that dead persons can return and suck the living may be demonstrated;

It's a historical curiosity worth remarking on-- the first vampire themed poem shared a page with an excerpt from the first vampire-themed fiction. But that is not the full extent of the influence one had on the other.

¹⁹ From the 1740 edition of *The Jewish Spy*, which renumbers the chapters, making this Letter 137 in that edition, though it is Letter 125 in the original French *Lettres Juives*. See below footnote regarding the title *The Jewish Spy* vs *The Jewish Letters*.

Recall the specific mentions in “Der Vampir”: the river Theyse, the heyduck soldiers, Tokay. These aren’t items found in other Ossenfelder poems, neither are they hallmarks of Anacreontic poetry (wine certainly is, but not specifically Tokay). It is almost certain that Ossenfelder gathered these bits of flavor from d’Argens’ chapter on vampires.

In a certain Canton of Hungary... on the other side of the “Tibiscus”, vulgarly called the “Teyse”; that is to say, the River which washes the celebrated Territory of Tokay, as also a Part of “Transilvania”. (D’Argens 1744)

And elsewhere:

The people known by the Name of “Heydukes”²⁰ believe that certain dead Persons, whom they call Vampires, suck the Blood of the Living...

This demonstrates a direct influence from d’Argens’ work on Ossenfelder’s. Ossenfelder took the dry, sober discussion of vampires that d’Argens engaged in, and added danger, threats, and intrigue while pulling bits and pieces that best painted the picture of a land where vampires were believed to exist. D’Argens’ “The people known by the Name of Heydukes believe that certain dead Persons, whom they call Vampires” becomes “As in vampires immortal / Folk on the Theyse’s portal / Heyduck-like do believe” when filtered through Ossenfelder’s pen.

Ossenfelder seems to have added the sexual, consent-ignoring trait to his vampire-like narrator before any other writer had the idea to associate such traits with vampires. Did he do this to make his poem more in line with the Anacreontic style he enjoyed emulating? Perhaps he had heard of some cases of vampire rape from Dalmatia (Čoralić et al. 2013) or Dubrovnik (Benyovsky) that would have been recorded before or around the time he was writing? Both of these are possibilities, but since Ossenfelder clearly gathered inspiration from d’Argens, it’s entirely reasonable that one passage in d’Argens’ work resonated with him:

Mark the Story of the Heyduke’s Daughter; she went to Bed well, awakened in the middle of the Night, cry’d out that she had been attack’d by a Vampire.

D’Argens here is referring to the story of Stanoska, the daughter of a heyduck soldier who feared the attacks of a vampire and eventually succumbed to death. The story

²⁰ Heyduke, or heyduck or hajduck variously, was a type of soldier on border between Christendom and the Ottoman Empire.

will be familiar to those who study vampire folklore, as it had appeared a number of times before d'Argens mentioned it. Earlier in the letter, d'Argens quotes from *Mecure*:

Amongst others there was one Stanoska, the Daughter of a "Heyduke", whose Name was "Jovitzo", who going to Bed in perfect Health, waked in the middle of the Night, and making a terrible Outcry, affirmed that the Son of a certain "Heyduke" whose Name was "Millo", and who had been dead about three Weeks, had attempted to strangle her in her Sleep. She continued from that time in that languishing Condition, and in the Space of three Days died. What this Girl had said, discovered the Son of "Millo" to be a Vampire.

Could this son of Millo, a heyduck, be who Ossenfelder was channeling when his narrator threatened:

*And as softly thou art sleeping
To thee shall I come creeping
And thy life's blood drain away.
And so shalt thou be trembling
For thus shall I be kissing
And death's threshold thou' it be crossing*

If we view the Christine of Ossenfelder's poem as a stand-in for Stanoska, the poem reads like a dramatized version of the accounts of Stanoska's death. It's not far-fetched to posit that these were the direct influences on Ossenfelder's first vampire-themed poem.

An additional point here: it is possible that Ossenfelder gathered influence directly from reading the relevant passages in *Lettre Juives*, and not from reading Mylius' translation of d'Argens work. This is a small distinction, since Ossenfelder certainly drew inspiration from d'Argens work—it's just a question of whether he got his material directly by reading it in *Lettres Juives*, or whether he got it by reading Mylius' translation of *Lettres Juives*²¹.

²¹ Schmidt, Erich, p. 498-499, suggests that Ossenfelder translated works from French into German. If this reading of Schmidt is correct, then Ossenfelder surely could have read *Lettres* in its original form. It even opens the possibility that he was the translator of *Lettres Juives* for Mylius, though proof is lacking.

7. The Marquis Boyer d'Argens

Information on Jean-Baptiste de Boyer, Marquis d'Argens is much more readily available than information on Heinrich August Ossenfelder²². A few general notes about him should suffice for this paper:

Boyer d'Argens (1704-1771) was a French enlightenment thinker and writer, remembered mostly for his challenges to authoritarian religion. His work was credited with “sowing the first seeds of free thought in Austria and Bavaria” (Brav 1960, 133-141). He found influence from Montesquieu, resulting in the several epistolary novels mentioned above where characters meditated on the issues d'Argens was most concerned with.

Lettres Juives, or “The Jewish Letters”²³, was printed initially in periodical form in The Hague beginning in 1736 before being first bound in 1737. d'Argens used the characters of his book—three learned Jewish men—to criticize European customs, laws, systems of government, and particularly any belief in a spiritual and supernatural world. Whether he was having his characters take aim at Christian doctrine and practices, Jewish or Muslim traditions, or even pagan ideas, the characters remained largely dismissive of anything defying scientific, rational explanation. It will come as little surprise that the book was condemned by the Catholic Church and was banned in Catholic countries, including d'Argens own France, for four decades after publication (Gasper 2013, 91).

As is so often the case, the censorship of the book didn't work out as intended. As a first book, one could hardly hope for a bigger splash as some of its high sales made their way into the hands of influential people, notably Frederick the Great who invited d'Argens to Germany in 1742, where he wrote for a quarter century in Frederick's court.²⁴

According to Gasper (2013, 2) notably for the topic at hand, during his long stay in Germany, d'Argens was known personally to Gotthold Lessing and Christlob Mylius. We shouldn't assume this means that Mylius had d'Argens blessing to reprint a section of *Lettres Juives* in his journal—d'Argens didn't arrive in Berlin until 1749—

²² For an extensive biography, see Gasper, Julia. 2013. *The Marquis D'Argens: A Philosophical Life*. United States: Lexington Books.

²³ Early English translations renamed the book “The Jewish Spy”, which sounds problematic today. But the content of the book does not bear out any interpretation of the book as being anti-Semitic. Indeed, later works by d'Argens devote a lot of space toward criticizing Jewish persecution. Further, Gasper notes that a later novel by d'Argens “may be the only novel of the 18th century in which a (Christian) hero” marries a Jew.

²⁴ For an image of d'Argens at a table with the king and Voltaire, see Von Menzel, Adolph. 1850. *King Frederick II's Roundtable at Sanssouci*. Painting.

a year after Mylius “borrowed” content from *Lettres Juives*. But it is clear that all three met (Gasper 2013, 136) through d’Argens’ protégé Aaron Solomon Gumpertz.

Was Mylius’ printing of a chapter of *Lettres Juives* blessed, after the fact, by d’Argens? We don’t have evidence one way or the other; or even that d’Argens was aware of his work being appropriated, though it’s hard to imagine that it didn’t come up. As it would be many years before *Lettres Juives* would have a sanctioned full printing in German, d’Argens may well have been happy for Mylius’ to introduce his work to a German reading public for the first time with a bit of a preview in his journal. Or perhaps Mylius had to eat some crow for his transgression—though at that time there weren’t copyright laws as we’d recognize them today to run afoul of.

Presently, we don’t have evidence that Heinrich Ossenfelder knew Boyer d’Argens personally, but their social and professional circles certainly overlapped enough that it’s a fair speculation. As d’Argens was something of a celebrity in Germany at the time, Ossenfelder may have been eager to share that he penned the poem that tied up Mylius’ translation of the *Lettres Juives*. If, somewhere in an archive, a collection of letters by or to Ossenfelder exists, examining them could shed light on whether these first two authors of vampire-themed creative work ever had a chance to talk shop.

8. Conclusion

For fans of vampire fiction, it’s understandably disappointing that the first mention of the vampire in literature wasn’t a walking, talking, stalking revenant; but rather a subject matter discussed by fictional characters.

However, there is something elegant about this new timeline. Instead of feeling slighted that an author didn’t take non-fiction reports of vampires and immediately turn it into a thrilling horror-romance-mystery; we should see the logic in Boyer d’Argens taking inspiration from a scientific article and having his fictional characters discuss its content, yet ultimately dismiss the belief in vampires. Heinrich Ossenfelder, running in the same circles as Boyer d’Argens, would mirror this approach in his poem: Ossenfelder’s narrator acknowledges vampire beliefs and also dismisses them, but takes a small step forward by having his narrator threaten to behave like a vampire-- all while resisting employing an actual vampire as a character. In both the first novel and the first poem, we can observe vampires being cautiously invited into literature, rather than leaping into it fully caped and fanged.

The world wouldn’t need to wait long before vampires were not simply dismissed by characters, but rather became characters themselves. At that point

there would be no turning back—any fictional character today that dares to flippantly dismiss the existence of vampires does so at their own risk.²⁵

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