

Modern Monsters / Death and Life of Fiction

THE  
BLOODY  
LATTE:  
VAMPIRISM  
AS A  
MASS  
MOVEMENT



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The penchant for a culture to imbibe drinks and drugs en masse, in a collective ritual-orgy, is a phenomenon transcending mere fashion.

This, in itself, is unworthy of remark; the quest for transcendence through intoxication is as old as history itself. The cultural particularity of the proclivity is what is striking: the strange uniformity of every epoch's beverage cult.

Personal taste amounts to little; instead, for each era, there's a distinctive mass hysteria for the imbibing of a particular beverage or substance.

The favored drinks at this juncture in American history are indisputably coffee from Starbucks and the vodka of Absolut. The popularity of these drinks stems from their value as symbolic war booty from recent conquests. A culture's adopted beverage represents the blood of their vanquished foe.

Drink is transubstantiation à la the Catholic cannibalism of Christ's blood and body. The smell of coffee is the odor of the Sandinista hospital maimed by Contra bombs. Ice-cold vodka is the blood of the Russians, raped and murdered by capitalism.

And so it has been throughout history. Each imperial culture imports a liquid memento from their vanquished foe to serve as a totem of their power and glory. Tea, the Englishman's beverage, is falling out of favor as their neocolonial hold on the Sub-continent wavers. For two centuries the English supped on their well-steeped leaves and tasted the sweat of the slaves of the Empire. Now, tea is for old mums, while beer swilling "lads" form the visible majority. The British love their beer; a cold pint brings fond memories of dead Germans, falling out of the sky in The Battle of Britain.

Beer first attained great popularity in America immediately after the First World War, when the US had tipped the scales against the Kaiser in the last days of the conflict. That war had been highly unpopular to a then-isolationist nation, with American involvement cynically contrived by Anglophiles in government. The war transformed the country profoundly, much to the consternation of the activists who opposed it.

The women who had raged for abolition and suffrage now turned their eyes to alcohol, successfully banishing it in 1920. Prohibition, then, was unconsciously a moral crusade against imperialism and the blood sucking and chest beating that followed the Treaty of Versailles. Of course, beer made a comeback, especially after the depression hit and veterans needed to boost self-esteem by slurping the entrails of the wretched Kraut. A cold beer in a bar with one's buddies brought one's thoughts to the bread lines in Berlin, with all their one-legged soldiers.

Beer was big in Germany one thousand years earlier, when King Otto pushed back the Slavic Wend and Magyar interlopers from the East. For the German, it is essentially the blood of the Slav. Its popularity was reinforced when Frederick the Great struck into the breadbasket of Poland, expanding Prussia, a conquest that led to German domination of the continent under Bismarck.

Years later, to invoke the German's bloodlust, an Austrian man named Hitler held meetings in Munich beer halls, and cited the loss of those wheat fields, now occupied by Slavs.

When Hitler rose to power, after the "Beer Hall Putsch," he allied himself with the Italian dictator Mussolini, who dreamed of imperial glory in Africa. The Italian conquest of Ethiopia, the birthplace of coffee, resulted in the espresso craze in Italy. During the Second World War, every Italian soldier carried an espresso maker in his mess kit. The Starbucks aesthetic—garish, fascistic murals combined with Futurist mechanization of the workforce and absurdist shouting—can be traced to Mussolini.

America's love of coffee has always been tied to its affection for conquest. Coffee fueled the "winning of the West" and the usurpation of the former colonies of Spain at the turn of the century. Guatemala, Salvador, Nicaragua, Colombia, etc., have all been virtual colonies since then, with frequent US-armed interventions to ensure servitude.

These nations constitute the mainstay of our coffee supply, and much blood has been spilled to maintain it. Coffee was the blood of the Indian, and gave one the adrenal rush needed to achieve "manifest destiny." Coffee was "Joe," as in Joe Nobody or John Doe,

as the racist dehumanization of the native peoples refuted any necessity for their identification.

This name was changed to “Java” in the ‘60s, when the US helped install the dictator Suharto in Indonesia, who murdered so many of his subjects at the behest of anxious multinationals. Although this was a proxy war, not directly fought by the US, coffee’s taste still reflects the power imparted by the struggle. Its flavor was enriched and it grew in popularity. Whether from Indian or Indonesian, coffee was the blood of the vanquished and it tasted good.

Now, in the global economy, coffee is grown across the entire subjugated Third World. When Starbucks sells a bag of beans, it’s always marked with the region from whence it sprang, making the consumer an imperial cannibal connoisseur.

Coca-Cola is another toast of imperial conquest; it initially drew its flavor from the coca plant from Central America, but switched to another regional flavor (Tamarind root) when this was outlawed. Coca-Cola’s ascendancy coincided with the Spanish-American War and the annexation of Puerto Rico, Cuba, etc. It was often mixed with rum, the sugar-based flavor of those very islands.

Coke was provided to all American soldiers during the Second World War as a way to “blood” the army. Coke plants in Germany changed their trade name to FANTA, so as to deflect charges of corporate two-timing in the war effort. FANTA was orange, a flavor homage to the smashed Republican army in Spain, where the German army first honed their killing skills. When a German drank an orange pop, he was gnawing the jugular of an anarcho-syndicalist in Valencia.

Vodka is the refined fruit of the peasant’s potato. Under the Tsars, Russia’s border relentlessly expanded, from the Baltic to the Black Sea, and then on to the Pacific. Conquered people, pressed into serfdom, were manifest in the vodka favored by the Russian ruling class, both before the execution of the Tsar and then later with Stalin.

Vodka can actually be made from a variety of grains and fruits, appropriate to the vast and varied lands of Muscovite conquest.

For the Russians, this drink, the blood of Swedes, Finns, Lithuanians, Ukrainians, Uzbeks, and Khazars, became suddenly,

under the creed of Communist internationalism, the celebration of fratricide. This accounts for the existential mania and depression that famously accompanies modern Russian drunkenness.

With the Cold War concluded, and Russia under the yoke of exploitive capitalism, vodka is more and more beloved by Americans, who gulp it smugly as proof positive of their power to sculpt the earth. Sweden, the traditional nemesis of Tsarist Russia, is the producer par excellence of this trophy drink.

As we can see, the cultural specificity of the blood represented by a drink is contingent on the race or nationality of the person drinking it. So, while a German drinking a beer would be enjoying the life force of the Slav, an American popping a Bud would be eating the guts of that same German man. Similarly, a toast using expatriate brand Bacardi rum is a celebration of the assassination of Che in Bolivia, while a splash of Habana Club, the Cuban national brand, is the bloody froth from the surf at the Bay of Pigs.

And so it goes: tequila's worm is the dead Yankee at the Alamo, as "gusano" or "worm" is the Latin revolutionaries' name for the *Yanqui* imperialist. Even the introduction of Perrier to America coincided with the death of the nationalist de Gaulle and the subsequent compliance of France with NATO. (The boycott of an intransigent and undefeated foe's imported foodstuffs follows a similar repressed logic, as with Cuban rum or French wine during the Iraq War). Wine was championed by the Gauls upon the disintegration of its drinkers, the imperial Roman occupiers. The Romans snatched it from their Greek competitor, whose empire they had eclipsed, while the Greek slave states begat their wine from the stamping feet of their war captives, and so on, ad infinitum to the prehistoric dawn of life on the planet.

Food rituals have always been centered on hierarchy and power. The cow is ingested because it is essentially defenseless against us. We assert our primacy over nature by ingesting it in a gory ceremony of flesh chewing. The animals we admire are felines and canines, bears and eagles: predators like us. This is an ancient warrior's ethic, echoed in the American craze for Nazi memorabilia. The milk of the breast is the first liquid imbibed by the newborn child.

The baby learns that his mewling automatically summons the mother, whereupon she administers the juice of subjugation from her teat. Therefore the taste of liquid is psychically paralleled with subjugation and enslavement even in the semiconscious baby state.

Once again, while Stoker's *Dracula* ostensibly addresses the genetic concerns of the European upper classes, vampirism—an ancient legend shared by many different cultures—is also a mass movement, enjoyed by every conquering race.

From Ian Svenonius, *The Psychic Soviet* (Drag City Press, 2006)