

# The Evolution of the Vampire in Popular Narrative from the Nineteenth Century to the Present

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## Abstract

The vampire is one of the most powerful and enduring archetypes handed down to us by nineteenth-century literature, and remains, arguably, the most popular manifestation of the undead in popular culture. Perhaps more than any other monster, the vampire is a reflection of humanity. As Nina Auerbach says in her seminal work, *Our Vampire, Ourselves*, every generation creates its own vampire. Vampires embody our deepest fears and wildest desires, they represent the past that refuses to remain buried, our anxieties in the face of unavoidable social change and our fear of social and ethnic Others. They are signifiers that expose what we wish to conceal. Some vampires seem to uphold the status quo and a rigid patriarchal system, others defy the social and moral orders by freeing repressed desires and latent sexualities and by embodying in their very being all that is hated and suppressed by socio-normativity.

This paper will examine the evolution of the vampire in popular narrative, discussing its function and the way the figure has changed with the changing political and social climates, according to the needs of each culture that created, recreated and reinvented it. It will analyse the diverse roles that the vampire has played through the best part of two centuries by looking at a diversity of literary texts, films and television series that have made significant contributions to the development and continuing relevance of the vampire, from John Polidori's *The Vampyre* to Bram Stoker's *Dracula* to the cinematic contributions of Murnau, Dreyer and the Hammer Studios up to the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries with the works of Anne Rice, Stephen King,

Joss Whedon's cult television series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Angel*, the Twilight saga, and more recent films such as *Only Lovers Left Alive* and *A Girl Walks Home Alone at Night*.

## Introduction

The vampire is, arguably, the most popular of all the literary monsters we have inherited from the nineteenth century, and the most intimately linked to us. A creature that is quite literally post human, it has been, and still is, our intimate associate. The relationship between a vampire and its victim is often ambiguous and complicated. Vampires in fictional narrative are lovers, friends, and maternal figures, or all of these at once to their victims, many of whom crave the intimacy that the vampire's deadly kiss brings with it. At other times, vampires embody our deepest and darkest fears - fear of the ethnic Other, fear of the sexual Other, fear of disease and contamination, fear of our unrepressed selves, male fear of the female. They hold up a mirror to our addictions, our fantasies, our needs but also to our violence, corruption and predatory nature, because, as Gregory Waller suggests:

Contrary to the old legends that tell us that vampires have no reflection, we do indeed see many diverse reflections - of ourselves - as the vampire stands before us cloaked in metaphor. (Waller 2010, 3)

The vampire is one of western culture's most powerful archetypes. William Patrick Day suggests that the power of the vampire myth lies in its metaphoric potential that provides us with a language to talk about the problems of our world (Day 2002, 4). In her seminal work *Our Vampires, Ourselves*, Nina Auerbach states that every generation creates its own vampires that reflect not just what we are, but also what the times have become (Auerbach 1995, 1). The vampire, therefore, is a shape-shifter, reflecting the social, political and cultural trends of any given period, while remaining firmly rooted in its origins and traditions.

From the very beginning of its literary existence in the nineteenth century, the vampire has assumed many guises: degenerate aristocrat, intimate friend, bestial predator, patriarch, lover, invader, outsider. In the twentieth century, it transitioned perfectly into the cinematic medium, becoming one of the most iconic movie monsters of all time. In literature, it continued to be invested with multiple, often contradictory roles: it has been portrayed as a supernatural being or a product of natural evolution, human or alien, physical being or metaphysical entity. It feeds on its victims' blood or on their psyche, draining life and giving it. It is a liberator or a tyrant, a villain, a hero or a victim, a being of superior moral and intellectual powers or a depraved, sadistic beast. Fictional vampires are, therefore, most potent and resilient creatures that mirror us and our fears, desires, traumas and contradictions. They are, in the words of Kim Newman, "ourselves expanded" (Newman 2012, 94).

### **The Beginnings of the Vampire in Literature**

The first rudimentary vampires found their way into literature through Gothic poetry. Vampiric figures and dead lovers returning from the grave were popular in eighteenth-century German poetry, such as Heinrich August Ossenfelder's *The Vampire* (1748), Gottfried August Bürger's *Lenore* (1773) or Goethe's *The Bride of Corinth* (1797) which was published in the same year as Robert Southey's *Thalaba the Destroyer*, the first English poem to deal with the vampire. The English Romantics could not fail to be fascinated by the idea of an undead outcast returning from the grave to drain the life of its nearest and dearest, of the young and beautiful. Lord Byron included the theme of vampirism in his 1813 poem *The Giaour* whose anti-hero is inflicted with the curse of vampirism for his heinous deeds in life, and condemned to return from the dead to "suck the blood of all [his] race". In 1816, Samuel Taylor Coleridge published his unfinished poem *Christabel* which features the vampiric demon Geraldine, one of the first female vampires in English literature. However, it was John Polidori who recognised the vampire's metaphoric potential, power and flexibility as well as its

psychological possibilities (Twitchell 1981, 122), and his short story *The Vampyre* (1819) is officially recognised as the first vampire story in English literature.

## The Nineteenth Century

*The Vampyre* was, in Christopher Frayling's words, "the first story successfully to fuse the disparate elements of vampirism into a coherent literary genre" (Frayling 1991, 108). Polidori's fascination with vampires stemmed from his professional interest, as a medical doctor, in the serious scientific study of vampirism that was carried out during the previous century (Beresford 2009, 99-114; Butler 2010, 27-45). Yet his vampire, Lord Ruthven, is not based on the medical reports written by his eighteenth-century forebears but is instead a vengeful portrayal of his previous employer, the Romantic poet Lord Byron, with whom he had a turbulent relationship. Drawing inspiration from an unfinished story written by the poet himself<sup>1</sup> and naming his vampire after the protagonist of *Glenarvon* (1816), another anti-Byron revenge novel written by the poet's ex-mistress Lady Caroline Lamb, Polidori created the first Byronic vampire - a creature eternally damned, bringing death and destruction to those who crossed his path.

The origins of the Byronic hero, and consequently also of his vampiric counterpart, can be traced back to the literature of the eighteenth century and its proliferation of charismatic anti-heroes like Lovelace in Samuel Richardson's epistolary novel *Clarissa* (1748), and of the villains of Gothic romances such as Manfred in *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) by Horace Walpole, Montoni in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) and Schedoni in *The Italian, or the Confessional of the Black Penitents* (1797), both by Ann Radcliffe, and Ambrosio in *The Monk: A Romance* (1796) by Matthew Lewis. Polidori transformed the unattractive, zombie-like revenant of superstition and folklore into a dangerous, sexually appealing and charismatic aristocrat (Baldick 1997, xix), a

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<sup>1</sup> Published as *A Fragment* in 1819.

mysterious being who exists on the fringes of society rather than in remote foreign countries, and encourages the profligate and the dissolute in their pursuit of vice. D.L. MacDonald argues that Polidori's profound impact on the vampire story lies in his reinvention of the figure as a seducer, an aristocrat and a traveller, a "real" person as opposed to the spirit or reanimated corpse in *The Bride of Corinth* or *Thalaba the Destroyer*, for example (MacDonald 1991, 192-198). No longer confined to his native land, nor to the rural and exotic, the vampire entered the civilised world of English drawing rooms, bringing the horror home into the heart of a society that is as vicious and predatory as the vampire himself. *The Vampyre* draws a parallel between the supernatural evil and masochistic allure of the vampire and the corruption, greed and malevolence of the elite members of society. The figure of the rakish undead aristocrat seducing and using women, instigating vice and leading vulnerable and innocent young men to desperation became a metaphor for the perceived decadence of the higher classes (McGinley 1996, 74).

*The Vampyre* effectively launched a vampire craze that has survived until modern times. Polidori's blueprint for the vampire story and the undead Byronic aristocrat persisted in popularity for decades, inspiring prose, poetry, operas and theatrical productions, principally in England and France. It was only in the 1840s, with the serialized publication of the penny dreadful *Varney the Vampire, or the Feast of Blood*, that new and influential elements were introduced into vampire fiction. Varney is a creature of the past preying on the present, combining the bestial vampire of folkloric tradition with the aristocrat of literature. He has fangs, possesses powers of hypnosis and superhuman strength, and enters his victims' houses through bedroom windows. Varney is also one of the first examples of the sympathetic vampire, a creature who abhors his predatory nature to which he feels he is enslaved. The sympathetic vampire would make its appearance sporadically but consistently throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries until it became a mainstream character in modern narrative.

Another significant addition to the genre was *Carmilla*, an 1872 novella written by the Irish author Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu, that is considered to be the prototype of the lesbian vampire story. In *Carmilla*, the eponymous vampire insinuates herself into a motherless household, befriending, seducing and preying on the lonely daughter of the house, Laura, thus undermining the patriarchy and its heteronormative values. Auerbach notes that a basic difference between male and female vampires of the nineteenth century is that male vampires preyed on women who were often marginal to the story while sparing their male friends with whom they nurtured close homosocial bonds, but female vampires typically preyed on those with whom they were intimate (Auerbach 1995, 13-18). *Carmilla* becomes a Terrible Mother figure as well as intimate friend and lover to Laura, filling the emotional void left by a dead mother and a distant father who entrusts his daughter's care to governesses and female servants.

The most significant milestone in the development of the vampire story and the popularisation of the vampire was indubitably the publication of *Dracula* in 1897, even though Stoker's undead Transylvanian Count would only achieve iconic status in the twentieth century thanks to the cinematic adaptations of the novel. The Victorian *fin-de-siècle* was a time of social and political unrest, not to mention great changes that elicited ambivalent responses and aroused considerable fears. Stoker's novel addresses many of the preoccupations that characterised England during the 1890s, most notably the fears of reverse colonisation, racial mixing and invasion by foreigners (Arata 1990), the threat of contagious diseases and the phenomenon of the New Woman, which is mentioned more than once in *Dracula*. *Dracula* embodies most of these fears: he is a foreign invader who travels to England with the intent to colonise it by spreading the disease of vampirism among English women, transforming them from the asexual models of virtue idealised by the Victorian patriarchy into lustful man-eaters who would act as his tools and proxies (Craft 1984, 109-110) by seducing and 'recruiting' their menfolk into the ranks of the undead.

Xenophobic fears in nineteenth-century England were fuelled by a general feeling that the moral order, the British patriarchy, and, indeed, the British Empire itself were under threat from the influence of foreigners who were arriving in great numbers and who brought with them strange and exotic ways. *Dracula* was not the only vampire narrative to express this concern, nor was England the only Western country to fear the consequences of unchecked immigration from regions considered to be less civilised. The fear of invasion is reiterated in H. G. Wells' *War of the Worlds* which was published the same year as *Dracula* and which locates the threat to humanity in the blood-drinking Martians who launch an attack against the Earth. Ten years earlier, Guy de Maupassant had published *Le Horla*, a story about a man who is persecuted by an invisible vampire that arrives in France on a steamship from Brazil and drives him insane. In these narratives, as in most others, the vampire is the foreign or alien Other (Maupassant's *hors là* or Outsider) whose chaotic being undermines order, bringing madness to a rational world, and subverting moral standards and the status quo. The fact that these threats might not always be easily detectable was another cause of anxiety. The Horla is an invisible, impalpable entity, while Dracula arrives in England quite legally, after having gone through appropriate channels to buy property in London and making the effort to learn the English language and English manners in order to blend into Victorian society.

The other great fear embodied by the vampire was the fear of contamination. The equivalence of vampirism with moral and physical disease is a recurrent theme in vampire literature that finds its source in folkloric beliefs about the undead. Sudden outbreaks of contagious diseases that spread rapidly in some rural communities were sometimes thought to be caused by the deceased who returned to feed on their surviving relatives. Such episodes of "vampirism" led to the exhumation and ritualistic staking and decapitation of those believed to have turned into vampires after their death.

At the end of the nineteenth century, the fear of contagion was centred primarily around sexually transmitted diseases, especially syphilis, that were spread mainly via prostitution. These fears were symptomatic of other resonant anxieties related to sex and gender at a time when Western nations were feeling threatened by ever-accelerating social changes. Efforts to contain syphilis through the forced medical inspection of prostitutes while ignoring and even protecting their male clients who passed the disease on to their wives (Ehrlich 2013) revealed an underlying misogyny that is reflected in vampire literature. The predominant characteristic of female vampires created by male authors is their rampant sexuality and, like prostitutes, they are typically described as “voluptuously wanton”, “carnal”, or “coquettish” creatures who transmit their contagion to their victims. *Dracula*, therefore, does not articulate only a fear of the foreign Other, but also of social Others, those who were considered to be a threat to society by virtue of their intellectual inferiority and looser morals. Lucy Westenra’s utterance of her polygamous wish to marry her three suitors is an indication of her promiscuous nature and creates a connection between her and Dracula, also a polygamist who lives with his three brides in his castle in Transylvania. The predominance of women vampires in *Dracula* reflects the novel’s preoccupation with female sexuality and gender roles. George Stade notes that the prevailing emotion in *Dracula* “is a screaming horror of female sexuality” (Stade 1985). However, Stade also suggests that the horror is accompanied by fascination and hate, as demonstrated by Jonathan’s response to the aggressive and predatory brides of Dracula who take on a masculine role by initiating sexual activity, while he assumes a supine and passive female position, feeling in his “heart a wicked, burning desire that they would kiss [him] with those red lips” (Stoker 2002, 61). Jonathan’s ambiguous responses of attraction and repulsion reflected real-life male responses to prostitutes.

The misogynistic fear of the sexual woman is evident in the fate suffered by many female vampires, whose destruction is often far more brutal and violent, and described in more graphic and gruesome detail, than that of their male counterparts. *Dracula* is a

case in point. While Dracula's death at the hands of the Crew of Light is rapid and quite unremarkable, the destruction of the vampire Lucy is one of the most horrific passages in the novel, the reason for this being that it comes across as a merciless and ferocious act of revenge inflicted upon Lucy for daring to become something other than the sweet and innocent lady her suitors had known. Many critics have interpreted Lucy's destruction as a punitive gang rape led by the patriarch of the Crew of Light, Abraham Van Helsing, and enacted by Lucy's fiancé Arthur Holmwood. At the end of the macabre scene, Lucy is effectively silenced when she is decapitated, her mouth stuffed with garlic, and she is locked up forever in the family vault.

Lucy's sinister fate is shared by numerous female vampires. Clarimonde in Théophile Gautier's *La Morte Amoureuse* (1836), for example, is destroyed in a similar manner by an old Roman Catholic priest after she seduces a young clergyman in her attempt to lure him away from the Church and from his mentor. The description of the old priest's laboured breathing as he drives the stake through Clarimonde's heart sexualises his act of penetration much in the same way as happens in *Dracula*. Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla* is also dispatched in an equally ghastly manner for seducing her female victims and undermining paternal authority and social norms by flouting established heteronormative gender roles.

The female vampire encoded rebellious, anti-patriarchal womanhood that reneged and undermined Victorian ideals of female submissiveness, obedience, high religious and moral standards, and motherhood. Portrayed as a deadly, unnatural virago who seduces and drains the energy of her young, chaste and beautiful victims, feeding on intimate friends of both sexes and on children, she was the demonized embodiment of the unconventional and sexually-liberated woman. In *Dracula*, the vampire Lucy also incarnated the contemporary fear of the New Woman movement that its conservative opponents portrayed not as the movement towards gender equality that it was, but as an attempt to undermine social order and the status quo by turning women into rampant nymphomaniacs intent on reversing gender roles and emasculating their

husbands (Showalter 1991, 180; Eltis, 2002) or abandoning their families in order to pursue their own ambitions. However, it is worth noting that, while he portrayed the sexual woman as a horrific monster, Stoker did not condemn the New Woman's endeavours towards economic freedom, education and equality with men, which, on the contrary, are depicted as positive attributes in Mina Harker who elicits Van Helsing's admiration for possessing a "man's brain - a brain that a man should have were he much gifted - and a woman's heart" (Stoker 2002, 240).

### The Vampire in the Twentieth Century

The twentieth century witnessed a great proliferation and diversification of vampires as the vampire story merged with other literary genres such as fantasy and science fiction. In science fiction, there was a tendency to transform the vampire from an undead supernatural being into a blood-drinking alien species, as occurs in *Le Prisonnier de la Planète Mars* and *La Guerre des Vampires* by Gustave Le Rouge, published in 1908 and 1909, respectively, or in C.L. Moore's *Shambleau* (1933) where the vampire is a lamia, part snake, part woman. Most vampire fiction, however, remained rooted in tradition. Stories such as *For the Blood is the Life* by F. Marion Crawford (1900), *The Tomb of Sarah* by F.G. Loring (1910), *An Episode in Cathedral History* by M.R. James (1914) and *Four Wooden Stakes* by Victor Roman (1925) continued in the tradition of the undead rising from their graves to wreak havoc among the living. Jan Neruda's *Vampire* (1927), like Edgar Allan Poe's 1842 short story *The Oval Portrait*, depicts the artist and his artistic obsession as vampiric and fatal to the subjects of his art. Stories such as *Doom of the House of Duryea* by Earl Pierce (1936) depicted vampirism as a family curse passed on from fathers to sons, a metaphor for genetically-transmitted illnesses. Fritz Leiber's *The Girl with the Hungry Eyes* (1949) symbolically links the vampire with the American advertising industry. Dysfunctional family relationships and relationships based on extreme neediness or possessiveness were also depicted as vampiric. Mary Wilkins-Freeman's 1902 short story *Luella Miller* portrays

the stereotypical idle lady of the upper middle classes as a psychic vampire whose need to be cared for literally drains the life out of her servants and her husband. *Seaton's Aunt* by Walter de la Mare (1923) revolves around the figure of the maiden aunt whose ego feeds on the sufferings of others and who finds sadistic pleasure in terrifying and emotionally torturing her nephew. In *The Antimacassar* by Greye La Spina (1949), the vampire is a little girl whose mother's denial of her death and refusal to let her go keeps the child in a state of undeath (Carter 1997, 184), while the mother feeds her voracious daughter on her own blood and on that of unsuspecting strangers.

It was cinema, however, that made the vampire an iconic figure. Tod Browning's 1931 film version of *Dracula*, the first talkie vampire movie, captured the public imagination, and Bela Lugosi's Count became the definitive and most recognisable vampire of popular culture, transforming Dracula into a cultural phenomenon even among people who had never read the novel. The Universal production was not the Count's first appearance in the cinematic world. *Nosferatu*, F. W. Murnau's adaptation of *Dracula*, was released in 1922, but was caught up in a bitter legal battle between Bram Stoker's widow and the German expressionist director over the rights of the novel. Florence Stoker won the lawsuit and Murnau had to remove the film from circulation and destroy it. Luckily for future generations, some copies survived, and the film is now considered to be one of the classics of horror cinema. Another seminal German vampire movie was released in 1932, namely, *Vampyr: Der Traum des Allan Gray* by Carl Theodor Dreyer, which is an adaptation of Le Fanu's *In a Glass Darkly* and more specifically of *Carmilla*. *Vampyr* is another milestone in vampire cinema worldwide. Although it has been criticized for its drastic changes to the original story and its avoidance of the intimacy which is at the heart of the vampire tale (Auerbach 1997, 13), it remains one of the most important vampire films, memorable for its surreal texture, its dream-like filmography and nightmarish scenarios.

In the meantime, Hollywood had not only adapted the Dracula story, but had appropriated the sexuality and allure endemic to the female vampire to promote its

own *femmes fatales*, such as Theda Bara, as exotic and dangerous “vamps”. In *Caligari’s Children*, S. S. Praver notes that “in the early days of the cinema, the metaphorical meaning of vampire narrowed down to denote a woman who used her sexual charm to attract and ruin men” (Praver 1980, 58). A note by story writer John L. Balderston about an early treatment of the script for *Dracula’s Daughter* (1936) demonstrates the prevalent mentality at the time when he asserts that

The use of a female vampire instead of a male gives us the chance to play up SEX and CRUELTY legitimately [...] I want to [...] establish the fact that *Dracula’s Daughter* enjoys torturing her male victims. (Balderston 1936)

The final version of the film, however, portrays the Countess Marya Zaleska not as a woman who tortures men, but more of a tragic heroine at their mercy, a sympathetic vampire vainly trying to fight her monstrous patriarchal legacy by resorting to psychoanalysis. The Countess’s predicament reflected that of the female vampire in the literary and cinematic spheres of the time – under the far-reaching influence of Stoker’s *Dracula*, the female vampire was portrayed predominantly as a “vamp” in the Hollywood sense of the term, a being defined and trapped by an inherited monstrosity from which there seemed to be no escape.

*Dracula’s Daughter* is a very rare case of an early film with intimations of lesbianism. The cinema would portray lesbianism more explicitly decades later in the Hammer *Karnstein Trilogy*<sup>2</sup> released in the early 1970s, which was based on *Carmilla* (Pirie 2009, 179). The Hammer Horror films of the late fifties and sixties had a huge impact on the future of the cinematic vampire which, by that time, had become stultified and rather a parody of itself. The release of *Horror of Dracula* in 1958, written by Jimmy Sangster, directed by Terence Fisher and starring Peter Cushing as Van Helsing and Christopher Lee as Dracula, launched another vampire craze among adolescents, and Lee, like Lugosi, became another of the iconic faces of Dracula (Holte 1997, 52). The

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<sup>2</sup> The *Trilogy* was made up of *The Vampire Lovers* (1970), *Lust for a Vampire* (1971) and *Twins of Evil* (1971).

Hammer productions were aimed at the younger generation, and revolutionised horror film with their use of Technicolor, period settings, overt violence and explicit sexuality. The 1958 *Dracula* was the first vampire movie to show the vampire's fangs (Hutchings 2003, 7), his red eyes and dripping blood. The vampire's kiss was eroticised with the use of close-ups that focused not only on the vampire's fangs closing in on his beautiful victim's neck, but also on the ecstatic expression on the lady's face. At a time when there was a concerted effort by authorities to inculcate the values of domesticity in women, Fisher's *Dracula* advocated women's empowerment (Skal 2004, 265) by focusing on the liberating power of the vampire's bite and on the women's complicity with the vampire and their yearning for him.

The 1950s were a critical decade in the evolution of the vampire genre also owing to the publication of Richard Matheson's 1954 science fiction horror novel *I Am Legend*, one of the most important and influential vampire stories of the twentieth century. It has been adapted for the cinema several times, most notably in *The Last Man on Earth* (1964) and *The Omega Man* (1971), and was also a source of inspiration for George A. Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* (1968). Apart from its contribution to the development of the zombie story, *I Am Legend* re-imagines the vampire myth in scientific terms as a pandemic caused by war and spread by insects and the elements, thereby expanding the traditional generic notion of vampirism as contagion. As a consequence of the transference of vampirism from the realm of the supernatural into the sphere of the natural and man-made, the vampire hunter became an even more ambiguous figure than he was before, since the protagonist Neville, who makes it his life's mission to destroy all the vampires created by the pandemic, is "no more an embodiment of Good than the undead are an embodiment of Evil" (Waller 2010, 258). In fact, towards the end of the story, Neville discovers that those who had been infected while they were still alive had managed to adapt to the germ that caused the contagion and were attempting to build a new society. When they capture him, he

finally sees himself through their eyes as the monster these people perceive him to be, the “black terror” (Matheson 1962, 140) killing them in their sleep during the day.

*I Am Legend* presents a bleak and devastating picture of a humanity that nearly manages to destroy itself, somehow survives, but still relishes violence and depravity. Neville is shocked by the zest with which members of the new society assault and kill the other strain of survivors, the “vampire-zombies” who had been dead when they were infected, and whom this society considers as less than human. Authors of the genre were increasingly using the vampire as a foil against which to offset human evil, exposing the latter as by far the more destructive and atrocious. This became one of the predominant themes of the genre in the 1970s, which were characterised by a marked disillusionment with the establishment and with humanity in general. David Drake’s *Something Had to Be Done* (1975) depicts the war zone as the ideal environment for the vampire to blend in and thrive (Senf 1988, 3). However, the vampire’s depredations are nothing when compared to the pain and suffering wrought by Agent Orange, a man-made poison released by the US military on the enemy and on its own soldiers alike. Steven Utley’s *Night Life* (1977) draws a parallel between the vampire and human night-time predators in large cities, revealing the latter to be more savage and less merciful than the former.

Stephen King’s *‘saalem’s Lot*, published in 1975, is one of the most famous vampire novels to juxtapose the evil of the undead and that of humanity, to the detriment of the latter. A rewriting and reimagining of *Dracula* within an American small-town setting, *‘saalem’s Lot* deconstructs the idyllic image of rural America to expose the corruption that King felt had become embedded in the heart of the country. Springing from the author’s disillusionment with politics and the government and his fear of the future, *‘saalem’s Lot*, unlike *Dracula*, does not depict mankind as capable of uniting against evil but, rather, as ready and willing to succumb completely to it. When the vampire, Barlow, arrives in town, he finds that evil has already penetrated the Lot, firmly residing in its citizens’ indifference, violence and brutality. Thus, the vampire becomes

merely the externalisation of a pre-existing evil, and the next logical step in mankind's devolution into monstrosity.

### **The Rise of the Sympathetic Vampire and the Dark Romantic Hero**

The 1970s were a milestone decade in the development of the vampire genre, marked by a generic bifurcation that, on the one hand, saw the continuing development of the time-honoured evil vampire, and, on the other, the rise of the sympathetic vampire from its hitherto peripheral existence into the mainstream. At a time when horror was assimilated into mainstream culture, there emerged, as Auerbach says, “a wealth of new vampires, creatures so varied and unprecedented that they decomposed the archetype of The Vampire ...” (Auerbach 1995, 131). This occurred at a time when the vampire seemed to have become once again stagnated in cliché and doomed to a marginalised existence at best. An unexpected paradigm shift, catalysed principally by Anne Rice's *Interview with a Vampire* (1976), gave new life to the genre by turning the narrative focus away from the human and onto the vampire, giving the undead a voice and endowing the sympathetic vampire with new levels of complexity and pathos that resonated with readers like never before (Ramsland 1996, 20).

Rice was not the first to make the sympathetic vampire the protagonist of the narrative, nor even the first to give the vampire the first-person narrative voice. The tendency to portray the undead as sympathetic characters had been building up very slowly but surely since *Varney*, with stories such as Florence Marryat's *The Blood of the Vampire* (1897), E. Everett Evans' *The Undead Die* (1948) or James S. Hart's *The Traitor* (1950). Just a year before the publication of *Interview with a Vampire*, Fred Saberhagen had published *The Dracula Tape*, a retelling of *Dracula* from the vampire's point of view, depicting the Count as a misunderstood individual persecuted by a maniacal and violent Van Helsing. Television, too, played a major role in the promotion of the sympathetic vampire. In the late sixties and early seventies, the

character of Barnabas Collins in the series *Dark Shadows* grew to be immensely popular with audiences and became the focus of the show as a heroic and selfless vampire. In 1974, *Bram Stoker's Dracula*, a television film scripted by Richard Matheson, directed by Dan Curtis and starring Jack Palance as the Count, focused on Dracula's love story with Lucy who is re-imagined as the reincarnation of his lost love (Fry and Craig 2002, 271). Some twenty years later, Francis Ford Coppola would adopt this same premise in his own adaptation of Stoker's novel which cast Mina as the reincarnation of Dracula's wife.

Yet it was *Interview with a Vampire* that undoubtedly had the greatest impact of all, garnering a cult following that continued to grow with the publication of the rest of *The Vampire Chronicles* in the years that followed. Rice created a long saga and her own mythology of vampires and vampirism (Ramsland 1992, 72; Badley 1996, 117-118) that she populated with numerous characters. The first-person narration humanised the vampire, fostering an intimacy with the reader that had not existed before. By making her vampires charismatic, beautiful and tormented beings, objects "of glamorous transcendence and desire" (Rice, quoted by Skal 2004, 274-275), Rice transformed the Otherness that had always inspired fear into the vampire's source of appeal, and the vampire into a powerful incarnation of our desires. The subtexts that had always been part of the vampire's mythology - the loneliness, marginalisation, ambiguous sexuality, and the meaning of evil - were brought to the surface so that Rice's vampires became an embodiment of the human predicament, mirroring our own inner conflicts, dilemmas and soul-searching. Rice returned to the vampire's generic origins and resuscitated the Byronic hero, with all his loneliness, melancholy and decadence (Stein 2009, 80), splitting the two aspects of the Byronic persona into the anguished and gentle Louis, and the rebellious, passionate and ruthless outlaw Lestat.

Anne Billson suggests that vampires became more sympathetic

perhaps as a result of an erosion in rigid moral standards as once dictated by organised religion, as well as the burgeoning appeal of the rebel outsider, the rise of the conflicted anti-hero and the enshrinement of the individual over the needs of society. (Billson 2013, 15)

Conservative ideologies could not fail to react to this glorification of the individual. Vampire films of the 1980s, such as the coming-of-age movies *Near Dark* and *The Lost Boys*, both released in 1987 at the height of the AIDS crisis, advocate family values and heteronormativity in young men. The protagonists' foray into vampirism - Caleb in *Near Dark* and Michael in *The Lost Boys* - spurred in both cases by the boys' interest in a vampire girl, is short-lived and, in the end, serves only to consolidate conservative family values. The vampire families, presented as rebellious, outlaw and monstrous alternatives to the wholesome American family, are ultimately destroyed and the prodigal sons return to their flock. In order for this to happen, these films portray vampirism as a reversible phenomenon, thus enabling the erring sons to return to their families of origin exactly as they were before. In both cases, the damage caused by the vampire is undone by the human father-figure - Caleb's father, who reclaims his son via a blood transfusion, and Michael's grandfather who kills the King Vampire - thereby restoring the authority of the conventional human patriarchy.

These American films sought to uphold the status quo by representing adolescent flirtation with vampirism as a transitory period of conflict that lures young people temporarily away from their families only to be ultimately rejected in favour of normalcy and the conservative family unit. Yet, on the literary front, many narratives portrayed vampirism as a means of consolidating one's own identity away from the stifling influence of parental authority and societal expectations. Robert Aickman's *Pages from a Young Girl's Journal* (1973), for example, also employs vampirism as a metaphor for the conflicts and rebelliousness of adolescence, with the difference that the vampire in this story is portrayed as the eponymous Girl's means of escape and

liberation from emotionally distant parents and from asphyxiating social norms (Lutz 2006, 33–34). Vampirism becomes a rite of passage to personal freedom and to an existence that is more consonant with the Girl's desires and her quintessential nature.

Far from portraying the vampire as an enemy to mankind, many stories portrayed him or her as a friend, a defender of the weak and oppressed, a creature nurturing ethical aspirations (Carter 1999, 167), more humane, merciful and noble than the greater part of humanity. Chelsea Quinn Yarbro's Saint-Germain, the gentlemanly protagonist of *Hotel Transylvania* (1978), is an erudite, wise and heroic upholder of justice who defends women against the corruption, tyranny and depravity of a debauched patriarchy. Sterling O'Blivion in Jody Scott's *I, Vampire* (1984) takes the human world to task for its senseless cruelty and intolerance, as do *The Gilda Stories* (1991) by Jewelle Gomez. For these vampires, blood-drinking gives rise to guilt and moral dilemmas, and many of them try to survive on blood-substitutes, on animal blood, or, like Rice's vampires, choose to feed only on criminals and wrong-doers, or to take as little blood as possible without killing their victim. The conflict between this new strain of good vampires with a conscience and the evil vampires of tradition who treat human beings like cattle became the narrative focus in novels such as *Fevre Dream* (1982) by George R. R. Martin, the *Vampirates* series (2005–2011) by Justin Somper and *The Southern Vampire Mysteries* (2001–2014) by Charlaine Harris that inspired the popular HBO television series *True Blood* (2008–2014).

By the 1990s, the cinema was finally catching up with the paradigm shift that had occurred nearly two decades before and the sympathetic, angst-ridden male vampire was romanticised and transformed into a heroic love interest. Francis Ford Coppola's *Bram Stoker's Dracula* (1992) played a pivotal role with its portrayal of Dracula as a dark romantic hero seeking redemption through love. However, it was television that played the most prominent role in the popularisation of the romantic vampire, one of the main driving forces behind this phenomenon being Joss Whedon's cult series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1996–2003). The love story between Buffy and Angel, the

dark, brooding vampire cursed with a soul, resonated so much with audiences that when Angel left the show, he was replaced by his rival Spike as Buffy's love interest and given his own spin-off series aimed at a more mature audience. *The Vampire Diaries* (2009–2017), another young adult horror series based on the books by L. J. Smith that were published in the nineties, revolves around the love story between a human girl, Elena, and a vampire, Stefan Salvatore. The series was a huge success, especially among teenage audiences who were enthralled by Stefan and by his brother and rival Damon, whose development from villain into another love interest for Elena created a love triangle that had teenage girls rooting for one brother or the other, or both.

A great part of the appeal of vampires like Angel and Spike or Stefan and Damon stems from their moral ambiguity and the precariously fine line they walk between good and evil. Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* saga (2005–2008), on the other hand, does away with this precariousness by minimising the demonic aspect of the vampire Edward and re-costuming him instead as a fairy-tale prince charming and as the traditional hero and protector of romance fiction (Murphy 2011, 58–59), forever on a quest to save his damsel-in-distress. The *Twilight* series has been criticised for its misogynistic and racist subtexts that glorify abusive relationships, women's subservience to men and the superiority of affluent white people over ethnic communities (Butler 2013, 13–17). Despite its problematic aspects, however, the series was another huge success for vampire literature and film, so much so that, in its wake, the young adult market was inundated with romances featuring not only amorous vampires but also werewolves, angels, aliens and other assorted supernatural creatures.

The transformation of the vampire into the ideal boyfriend or love interest draws on the sexual allure and magnetism that have always formed part of the figure's literary mythology, but it is also symptomatic of disillusionment with traditional notions of romance, and of a keener sense of mankind's failings. These romantic depictions highlight the glamour and superhuman prowess of the undead, whose immortality promises a love that is permanent and eternal, as suggested by the tagline to Coppola's

*Dracula* that reads “Love Never Dies”, but other less-conventional vampire narratives dig deeper and focus instead on the lack of human connection implied by these paradigms. The 2004 novel by John Ajvide Lindqvist *Let the Right One In*, and the films *Only Lovers Left Alive* (2013) and *A Girl Walks Home Alone at Night* (2014) present a very bleak outlook of the human condition, exposing and decrying humankind’s loneliness, misery, indifference and self-destructive impulses. By departing from the mainstream and from generic traditions while remaining true to the essence of the vampire, these narratives offer fresh perspectives by casting a critical eye on humanity and challenging definitions of monstrosity. Lindqvist’s *Let the Right One In* combines the vampire story with stark social realism and portrays the development of a friendship between a human child, Oskar, and a vampire child, Eli, both of whom have a history of abuse, loneliness and neglect. Although, as we have seen, motifs such as the vampire-mother connection, absent and/or neglectful parents, and the special, intimate relationship between the vampire and its victim, have been recurring generic motifs since the nineteenth century, never have they been as relevant as they are today. Oskar, one of society’s invisible children, who is physically and emotionally bullied by his classmates and neglected by his parents, finds in Eli his one and only friend, and his knowledge of the vampire’s true nature and of its ferocity is no obstacle to this friendship. Likewise, Arash in Ana Lily Amirpour’s *A Girl Walks Home Alone at Night* still chooses to leave Bad City with the girl vampire, even after he realises that she has killed his father. In both stories, vampire and human find in each other a means of escaping loneliness, isolation and the hostile environment they inhabit.

These stories also engage in a discourse about the burden and solitude of immortality and the decadence of the human race, which is a discourse they share with Jim Jarmusch’s *Only Lovers Left Alive*. The angst-ridden and potentially suicidal reclusive musician Adam refers to human beings as “zombies” who are afraid of their own imaginations, animated by nothing more than a desire for destruction. Like Bad City in Amirpour’s film which is peopled by drug addicts, gangsters and prostitutes, and where

the dead are thrown into an open pit like so much rubbish, Detroit and Tangier are desolate environmental and moral wastelands, ghost towns whose inhabitants are not truly living but rather existing in a state of living-death (Michaud-Lapointe 2015, 12-13). Driven by greed and vice, this diseased humanity has contaminated its own blood and now poses a threat not only to itself, but also to the vampires. To Adam, the “zombies” seem to be caught in an inescapable downward spiral that causes him to despair and to contemplate ending his own life. In the midst of all this human wreckage, Eve reminds him of the things worth living for, of their passion for beauty in all its forms, and their centuries-old love and friendship that is so intimate and close that it transcends death, time and even the devastation and contamination of humanity:

How can you have lived for so long and still not get it? This self-obsession, it's a waste of living. It could be spent on surviving things, appreciating nature, nurturing kindness and friendship. And dancing.

## Conclusion

The fictional vampire has developed from the monstrous embodiment of evil of the nineteenth century into the embodiment of an ideal for a toxic and sickened humanity to aspire to. Director Guillermo del Toro maintains that monsters are our friends, and, indeed, the vampire has always spoken to us about what it means to be human, showing us that the far greater danger to humanity lies in humanity itself. Its versatility and resilience has enabled the vampire to assume different forms at different times, expressing each generation's unconscious fears and desires while hiding them behind its monstrous form. It is very difficult to predict how the vampire will change in the future, what direction vampire narratives will take, and what questions they will ask, but what is certain is that these creatures that are so disturbingly close to us will continue to encourage analytical discourses about what it means to be truly human.

### Bibliographical note:

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## Abstrakti: Vampyyri-hahmon evoluutio populaarissa kerronnassa 1800-luvulta nykyaikaan

Vampyyri on yksi voimakkaimmista ja pysyvimmistä arkkityypeistä, joita 1800-luvun kirjallisuus on meille tuottanut, ja se on säilynyt luultavasti suosituimpana epäkuolleiden ilmentymänä populaarikulttuurissa. Vampyyri on ihmisyyden peilikuva ehkä enemmän kuin mikään muu hirviö. Kuten Nina Auerbach sanoo urauurtavassa teoksessaan *Our Vampire, Ourselves*: jokainen sukupolvi luo oman vampyyrinsa. Vampyyrit ovat syvimpien pelkojemme ja viltimpien halujemme ruumiillistumia, ne ilmentävät menneisyyttä, joka ei suostu pysymään haudattuna, ahdistustamme väistämättömän sosiaalisen muutoksen edessä ja pelkoamme sosiaalista ja etnistä toiseutta kohtaan. Ne ovat signifioijia, jotka paljastavat sen, mitä tahdomme kätkeä. Jotkut vampyyreista näyttävät ylläpitävän asioiden vallitsevaa tilaa ja jäykkää patriarkaalista järjestelmää, toiset uhmaavat sosiaalista ja moraalista järjestystä vapauttamalla tukahdutettuja intohimoja ja latenttia seksuaalisuutta ja olemalla itsessään kaiken sellaisen ruumiillistuma, mitä sosio-normatiivisuus vihaa ja tukahduttaa.

Tässä katsauksessa käsitellään vampyyri-hahmon evoluutiota populaarissa kerronnassa tarkastelemalla sen toimintaa sekä sitä, millä tapaa hahmo on muuttunut poliittisen ja sosiaalisen ilmaston muuttumisen myötä, kunkin hahmon luoneen, uudelleenluoneen ja uudelleenkeksineen kulttuurin tarpeiden mukaisesti. Tarkoituksena on analysoida niitä erilaisia rooleja, joita vampyyrilla on ollut kautta lähes koko kahden vuosisadan tarkastelemalla erinäisiä kirjallisia tekstejä, elokuvia ja televisiosarjoja, jotka ovat huomattavasti vaikuttaneet vampyyri-hahmon kehittymiseen ja sen säilymiseen merkittävänä: John Polidorin novellista *The Vampyre* Bram Stokerin *Dracula*an ja Murnaun, Dreyerin ja Hammer Studiosin elokuvateoksiin aina 1900-luvun loppuun ja 2000-luvun alkuun asti, sekä Anne Ricen ja Stephen Kingin teoksiin, Joss Whedonin kulttitelevisiosarjoihin *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (suom. *Buffy, vampyyrintappaja*) ja *Angel*, *Twilight*-saagaan ja sellaisiin tuoreisiin filmeihin kuin *Only Lovers Left Alive* ja *A Girl Walks Home Alone at Night* saakka.