

EVOLUTION OF THE VAMPIRE ACROSS BORDERS AND TIMES

Elżbieta Pieniążek-Niemczuk

Abstract: The article is a literary and cultural review on evolution of a vampire motif. The vampire has proven to be a rich subject for the movie industry – from German Nosferatu to vampiric series Twilight Saga. Also literature is full of poets and fiction writers who make their work vampire oriented. The recent decade has shown a significant shift in the stereotypical image that perpetuated through the past three centuries – from a sucking blood, dark-natured creature to what is now, inhumanly beautiful superhuman with endurance, mentality and agility. They can read minds, like playing piano and even collect cars. Modern day vampires still need blood to live, but have no distinctive 18th century fangs and conversely to their predecessors, do not rest in coffins.

Key words: vampires, gothic fiction, good vampire, lesbian vampirism, half-vampire, folklore legends

Introduction

“A vampire according to popular legend is a bloodsucking creature that rises from its burial place at night, sometimes in the form of a bat, to drink the blood of humans” (Encyclopædia Britannica, 2012).

Folklore legends about the living dead and connected with them many superstitions led in the past to mass hysteria. Some people were accused of vampirism and their corpses were actually staked. Vampires mesmerize cause, often represented by all the things humanity is afraid of: death, sexual desires and power. People tend to fear the unknown but on the other hand inexplicable attractions draw them in, especially as far as mortality is concerned. This simple mechanism has served well to the entire vampire industry as it “represents those areas of the world and of consciousness which are, for one reason or another, not available to the normal processes of representation” (Punter, 1980, p. 18). In other words, vampires may be perceived as an inverted representation of reality. Freud explained people’s drive to the uncanny as an attraction to something which is familiar and foreign at the same time. Thus vampires may be perceived a primordial representation of what resides in the unconsciousness.

18th century vampires

Contrary to its name, the Age of Enlightenment was in fact the age of unjustified and backed up with no scientific evidence, the time of vampire craze. These entities of darkness and death have been recorded in many cultures, but it was only under the influence of numerous records from southern Hungary, that early 18th century Europe was acquainted with the term “vampire”. Numerous folk legends and individual reports concerning the living dead presented vampires as repulsive creatures returning from the grave to drink the blood of innocent victims. The Age of Reason was also the time when the literary vampire was first introduced to European poetry. The leading theme of contemporary poems was the idea that vampires rise from the grave to stalk beloved ones and to bring them death. Authors were already at that time emphasizing the vampires’ erotic nature.

One of the first to deal with the subject were German authors: Heinrich August Ossenfelder, the author of *The Vampire*, Gottfried August Bürger who wrote *Leonore*, and probably one of the most notable for the development of vampire literature of that time – Goethe who in 1797 wrote *The Bride of Corinth*. The author introduced for the first time the female vampire predator character to poetry. The poem presents a girl engaged to a man whose family has remained faithful to the old gods. The marriage promise was exchanged under the old religion, though the girl was a Christian. She leaves her grave to find that her love had denied her but refuses to turn her back on the promise made. Before she leaves, she tells the young man that he would soon join her in death.

The most important for the development of the vampire fiction was the British author, Samuel Taylor Coleridge who between 1797 and 1801 wrote *Christabel*. The poem introduces for the first time the idea of lesbian vampirism and mind control in an unrealistic, fantasy setting. The main character has never been identified outspokenly a vampire, yet the author shows many inclinations for the vampire characteristics. Christabel is inhumanly strong, unable to enter a home without being invited and has a strange effect on animals.

It is impossible to make a definitive description of the folkloric 18th century vampire. Yet, there are several elements common to majority of the European legends. Vampires were usually reported as dark in color and bloated in appearance. They were often portrayed with blood seeping from their mouth and clad in tattered funeral clothing. Unlike overgrown nails and protruding teeth, fangs were not a general feature. Vampires could be fended off with

traditional symbols of Christian faith like holy water, crucifix as well as garlic. Methods of destroying alleged vampires were different according to the country of their origin. Staking was the most common method in southern Slavic cultures. Russians preferred ash wood, Serbians hawthorn, while in Silesia it was oak. Vampires were most frequently targeted at the heart, though other parts like mouth were also staked, depending on the country.

19th century vampires

A significant step in the development of a vampire character began along with the publication in 1819 John William Polidori's novel *The Vampyre*. The story tells of Lord Ruthven, an English misanthropist who was killed in Greece but returns, seduces a friend's sister and then marries her. On the wedding night, however, she is found dead, drained of blood. The protagonist of the novel is an elegant, noble vampire man based on the real-life Lord Byron.

He was handsome, frank, and rich: for these reasons, upon his entering into the gay circles, many mothers surrounded him, striving which should describe with least truth their languishing or romping favourites: the daughters at the same time, by their brightening Countenances when he approached, and by their sparkling eyes, when he opened his lips, soon led him into false notions of his talents and his merit (Polidori: *The Vampyre*).

The Polidori's short story is significant as it marks the beginning of the literature's obsession with the charming, sophisticated vampire as opposed to the repulsive creatures of myth. The male vampire acquired the traits of an amoral and lonely man who loathes the world as well as people. Though, the Polidori's short story was not an immediate popular success, still the author was the first one to transform the vampire from a folklore demon into an aristocrat who preys among high society.

Carmilla is another notable work for 19th century vampire literature. This Gothic novella was written by Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu. First published in 1872, it tells the story of a young woman's susceptibility to the attentions of a female vampire. Carmilla, the vampire and the title character, is the original prototype for the following female and lesbian vampires.

She was slender, and wonderfully graceful. Except that her movements were languid—very languid—indeed, there was nothing in her appearance to indicate an invalid. Her complexion was

rich and brilliant; her features were small and beautifully formed; her eyes large, dark, and lustrous; her hair was quite wonderful, I never saw hair so magnificently thick and long when it was down about her shoulders (La Fanu: Carmilla).

Though Le Fanu was cautious and not explicit in portraying his vampire's sexuality, yet it is evident that lesbian attraction is the main inducement between Carmilla and the narrator of the story. Carmilla chooses only female victims, though becomes emotionally involved with a few. She has nocturnal habits, but is not confined to the darkness. She is unearthly beautiful and able to change her shape at will into an odious black cat. She is also able to pass through walls and rests in a coffin.

Dracula versus Nosferatu

Acknowledged to be a masterpiece of the Gothic horror novels – *Dracula* by Bram Stoker continues and develops the concept of a vampire aristocrat which had been first initiated by Polidori. The book introduces the vampire Count Dracula and describes his attempt to move from Transylvania to England. It was in this novel that Bram Stoker made famous a lot of the traits that are still associated with and ascribed to vampires.

There, in one of the great boxes, of which there were fifty in all, on a pile of newly dug earth, lay the Count! He was either dead or asleep. I could not say which, for eyes were open and stony, but without the glassiness of death, and the cheeks had the warmth of life through all their pallor. The lips were as red as ever. But there was no sign of movement, no pulse, no breath, no beating of the heart (Stoker: Dracula).

Some of the traits, however, like inability to be seen in mirrors was his genuine development and were not rooted in any traditional legend nor justified by records.

In 1897 i.e. when the book was first published some Victorian enthusiasts described it as "the most blood-curdling novel of the paralyzed century" (Dalby, 1986, p. 405). Yet despite many favorable reviews, it appeared not to be an immediate bestseller. Literary historians emphasize that the Stoker's masterpiece became more significant for the 20th century modern readers than it actually was for those contemporary ones.

The 19th century literary vampires share some traits in common: they are unhealthy - looking, oddly intriguing, have hypnotic eyes, possess their animal alter egos, have fangs and though being nocturnal creatures are not vulnerable to sunlight. They, however, must return to their coffins and often place there some native soil, especially if they have relocated. All of these qualities have dominated the later vampire depiction and *Dracula* has become the inspiration for numerous movie versions ever since.

One of the first vampire movies was *Nosferatu* directed by F. W. Murnau. The released in 1922 film was an unauthorized adaptation of Bram Stoker's book and this is why it shows many deviations from the masterpiece. The studio could not obtain the rights to the novel thus the names and other details were changed. For instance, the word "vampire" became "Nosferatu" and "Count Dracula" became "Count Orlok". The setting was no longer Britain but 19th century Germany. What is more, the main film character differs from his book prototype substantially. Unlike Dracula, Orlok does not create other vampires, he sleeps by day as sunlight would kill him. Stoker's vampire can walk in the daylight though in discomfort and without the ability to use most of his powers. Also the ending is different. Count Orlok is ultimately destroyed at sunrise.

20th century vampire fiction

Among the vampire works that gained on a great popularity in 20th century literature is Ann Rice's *The Vampire Chronicles*. Second in the series, *The Vampire Lestat* was published in 1985. The novel continues the gothic tradition. The scenes are still set in medieval castles, crypts and graveyards but also in full of people places and cities. In the first person account Lestat de Lioncourt presents his story from the present day. The vampire announces that he attempts at writing his biography in order to reveal to the world the existence of real vampires. The moment Lestat becomes a vampire marks his converting to the prototypical night-prone, Gothic monster. His world is now closed and focuses on his relationships with other vampires. In this prevailing darkness, Lestat with his unnatural lusts and passions suffers the torments of the damned what additionally intensifies the atmosphere of mystery and unknown.

However, the 20th century brought also many changes to the traditional, literary portrayal of vampires. Fiction went beyond Gothic horror and was written into the science-fiction genre. The vampires were appearing on other planets, often portrayed as genetic mutants.

An early example of such approach towards vampirism is Gustave Le Rougeand his *Le prisonnier de la planète Mars (The Vampires of Mars)* in which a race of bat-winged, blood-drinking humanoids is found on Mars. In 1920 J.-H. Rosnyainé's novella *La Jeune Vampire (The Young Vampire)* provided a biological explanation for vampirism by describing it as a genetic mutation.

But it was Richard Matheson's book *I am Legend* published in 1954 that signaled a huge leap for the vampire motif. Robert Neville, the main character, seems to be the only survivor of an epidemic, to which he is immune. The disease was caused by a war, later spread by dust storms and an explosion in the mosquito population. Its symptoms resemble vampirism. The book describes Neville's daily life in Los Angeles and his attempts to understand and find the cure for the disease. The author introduces in his book the idea of different cultures among vampires. The assumption made was that what you were in life influences your vampire form. In this way, if you were a Christian in life, a cross would fend off a vampire in you, but if you were a Jew, a Torah would repel you. At the end of the book, unlike in the film version, the vampires are shown as compassionate and conscious.

The 20th century brought also the development of so called half-vampire.

In 1981 Whitley Strieber brought to life a coldly calculating vampire in *The Hunger*. The book tells the story of Miriam Blaylock, a bloodsucking alien race representative. Having lived for thousands of years she develops a habit of turning human lovers into lifelong companions. Although Miriam has the power to change humans into vampires, she lacks the talent to make them immortal and only manages to increase their lifespan to a few centuries. *The Hunger* examined the theme of the biology of vampires. It was suggested that their unusual abilities were in fact the result of physical properties of their blood and that not all vampires were once humans, but rather a separate species that had evolved along with the human race. This interpretation has been incorporated into a number of science-fiction stories. All of them dealing with the half-vampire motif.

One of the most popular representatives of this genre is *Blade* movie series. Being pregnant, Tara Brooks, gets to the hospital after being bitten by a vampire. The doctors take

the wound for an animal bite. They try to revive her, but she dies soon after they deliver her baby. Blade inherits vampiric abilities, including a greatly prolonged lifespan, regenerative healing factor, blood lust, and enhanced senses characteristic of all vampires, but what is more important he is immune to their weaknesses like garlic or sunlight. He becomes a vampire hunter.

Unlike 20th century, present day movie industry releases a number of comedy horror films per year. In 1967 Roman Polański directed the film *The Fearless Vampire Killers, or Pardon Me, But Your Teeth Are in My Neck*. Although it was not the first of the comedy horror genre, still notable for its contribution to a new trend popularization. The film is set in the heart of Transylvania. The story takes place most probably during the mid-19th century. Professor Abronsius, along with his student Alfred are on the hunt for vampires. The two come to a small Eastern European town and stay at a local inn, full of horrified inhabitants who perform bizarre rituals to repel evil.

Modern romantic trend

The end of 20th century marks the beginning of modern romantic trend that has dominated 21st century literature as well as movie industry. The American authors have become the leaders in exploring the idea of good vampires. One of the most popular authors whose book has been made into a movie is Stephanie Meyer and her series *Twilight Saga*. The author portrays the idea of love between a vampire and a human.

Edward: And so the lion fell in love with the lamb.

Bella: What a stupid lamb.

Edward: What a sick, masochistic lion (Meyer, 2005, p. 274).

The human is not, however, shown as equal to the vampire, but rather at the disposal of his wishes. In this respect, the similarity to early 18th century poems is obvious. The main character – the vampire Edward is haunted by his own immortality and therefore stuck between two worlds. His image proves the modern tendency to portray romantic, good vampires.

The traditional vampires differ substantially from the modern ones. In the *Twilight Saga* they are still very difficult to destroy but also not harmed or deterred in any way by sunlight,

holy water, garlic, stakes, crosses, or human weapons. They are much stronger than other vampires in fiction

A low oath made me aware that someone was with me, and the voice was impossible not to recognize. Two long, white hands shot out protectively in front of me, and the van shuddered to a stop a foot from my face, the large hands fitting providentially into a deep dent in the side of the van's body (Meyer, p. 56).

The modern day vampires sparkle like diamonds in the sunlight, they are reflected by mirrors and show up in photographs, have no need for coffins as they do not sleep, cannot change shapes like their predecessors, have no fangs but their teeth are unbreakable, incredibly sharp and their skin is hard like diamond. Also the vampire society has developed. Nowadays they form allies and create families as it provides them with a greater chance of survival. Some of these beings have also dietary requirements akin to diabetes. It can be perceived as an evolutionary advancement as far as vampires in literature go.

Conclusion

Whether for the better or worse, vampires have changed a lot since writers and directors started to be intrigued by the concept. The early Gothic conventions of setting, plot, tormented villains have evolved into a wide range of characters that nevertheless must conform to the stereotypical, external or internal representation of evil. Vampires functioned in public consciousness first as horrifying monsters, nowadays romantic undead and judging by the pace of vampire motif development and major shifts which have taken place, it can be assumed many changes are yet to come.

Though humans do not live long, yet, as history shows, the immortal vampires most probably will.

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Author

Elżbieta Pieniążek-Niemczuk MA (PhD student at University of Pavol Jozef Šafárik in Košice); Institute of English Studies, Faculty of Philology, The East European State Higher School in Przemyśl, e.pieniazek@poczta.fm

Time to Slay Vampire Burials? The Archaeological and Historical Evidence for Vampires in Europe. The identification of deviant burials as those of "vampires" is a feature of excavated skeletons from sites across Eastern, Central and Southern Europe as well as the Balkans. Based on a close reading of historic and folkloric sources more. The identification of deviant burials as those of "vampires" is a feature of excavated skeletons from sites across Eastern, Central and Southern Europe as well as the Balkans. Based on a close reading of historic and folkloric sources researchers have sought 3 pa/trolling the borders of the federal vampire and zombie agency website: realism, gender, authenticity 1. Chapter. Full-text available.Â The premise of the website and comic is that of an alternate reality where vampires might exist in a world with similar laws of physics to our own. The chapter examines how the integrity of the FVZA vampire can be rendered, regulated and reinforced through fragmentary narratives in convergence culture over a number of media such as comics, role playing games, alternate reality games and internet forums. The realistic construction of the FVZA vampire is examined through three tropes: pollution, otherness and war. The idea that vampires exist across the globe has been a subject of folk tale, superstition, and myth throughout the history of man. 1. (Noll 37).Â that a psychic counterpart necessary for projection of the vampire into myth has existed since earliest times, and that it may be among the most archaic images known, states Noll (37-38). According to Noll, "The vampire theme may have reached Western Europe through Turkey and the Balkans, having come from India" (38). Brown concurs, "The blood-sucking vampire best known to Westerners has its origins in ancient Assyria and goes back to at least Babylonian times" (96). These Middle-Eastern undead survived on the blood and flesh of the living.