

Dracula Domesticated: Transformation of the Literary Vampire

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Abstract

The following article aims at demonstrating how the distance has changed between the mythological vampire, a bloodsucking animalistic monster, to Stoker's image of Count Dracula, and Anne Rice's vampires. These portrayals of the vampire played a significant role in his transformation from a villain to a romantic outsider, and resulted in the modern approach to vampirism: the presentation of the secularized, demythologized, but strongly eroticized vampire. Although each culture's conception of the undead was different, the vampire managed to survive various cultural and political changes due to a range of transformations. The following work attempts to show the ways in which all the transformations that the literary vampire has undergone reflect the way people change as individuals and the way the humanity changes. Moreover, the work presents how the ever-changing human needs, desires, and fears have influenced the shape of the literary vampire. In the final section, the article focuses on explaining how all the metamorphoses discussed contributed to the shift from the metaphorical status of the vampire to a metonymical one as a result of making the monster closer to an actual human.

Keywords: vampire, transformation, demythologized, eroticized, metaphorical, metonymical, Dracula, Anne Rice

Abstrakt

Celem artykułu jest pokazanie zmian i różnic dzielących mitologicznego wampira – potwora krwiopijcę, Drakulę przedstawionego przez Bramę Stokera oraz wampiry opisane przez Anne Rice w *Kronikach Wampirów*, której to sposób ich ukazania odegrał kluczową rolę w transformacji wampira z nikczemnika w romantycznego outsidera. Skutkiem tych zmian jest demitologizacja, laicyzacja oraz silne nacechowanie erotyzmem tej postaci. Postać wampira ukazywana była różnie w różnych zakątkach świata, pomimo tego jednak, spośród wielu legend, to ta właśnie przetrwała wszelkie zmiany kulturowe i polityczne. Niniejsza praca ma na celu pokazania jak ewoluowała postać wampira w literaturze i jak te zmiany odzwierciedlają to, jak zmienia się człowiek jako jednostka i jak zmienia się całe społeczeństwo. Praca ukazuje też jak zmieniająca się psychika ludzka, ewoluujące ludzkie potrzeby, pragnienia i obawy znajdują odzwierciedlenie w sposobie opisywania wampirów we współczesnej literaturze. Końcowa część pracy poświęcona jest zmianie statusu wampira z metafory w metonimię, która to zmiana jest skutkiem semantycznego zbliżenia się wampira do człowieka oraz jego demitologizacji.

Słowa kluczowe: wampir, transformacja, demitologizacja, nasycenie erotyzmem, metafora, metonimia, Drakula, Anne Rice

Vampire myths, legends and folklore have existed throughout the ages all over the world. They have appeared in various forms in almost every culture and society. The vampire myth is the most universal and the most everlasting. As Matthew Beresford observes in *From Demons to Dracula. Creation of the Modern Vampire Myth*, the belief in vampires is documented not only in Ancient Greece and Rome, India, and Babylonia but also in Norse mythology (2008, 7). Although these myths have different manifestations, there is a similarity that they all share; in many cases a moralistic element such as birth out of wedlock, incest, non-baptism, insufficient burial rites explains the creation of vampires (19).

According to Bartlett and Idriceanu, “a vampire is usually the result of a transformation where the innocent become corrupted” (2005, 3). There are also non-religious reasons for the existence of bloodsucking creatures. Melton, for example, explains the appearance of vampires by problematic childbirth. Such was the case of The Malaysian vampire *Langsuyar*; a beautiful woman who gave birth to a stillborn child. After realizing

that the child was dead she “clapped her hands and flew away into the trees. Henceforth, she attacked children and sucked their blood” (Barber 1988, 274). Nigel Suckling in his book *Vampires* states that some common causes of becoming a vampire are being bitten by a vampire or drinking the blood of a vampire. According to a myth, both a vampire’s blood and their bite is venomous, and, allegedly, it is this venom that transforms human beings into vampires (2006, 9).

As the vampire myth has various places of origin and, as a result, it has so diverse manifestations, there is no pre-existent and commonly accepted definition of a vampire (Bane 2010, 2). All those manifestations, however, have one common feature, that is the fear they evoke. Therefore “the reason that there is no single definition of a vampire is because each culture of people, from their various time periods and from their various locations, has feared different things” (Bane 2010, 2–3). As man evolved, so did his fears, and thus the vampire. There are, however, certain characteristics that identify a vampire as a mythical figure. The most fundamental feature is the vampire’s necessity to bite people or animals so that they could drink blood in order to survive. Due to that reason they are compared to a virus that infects and controls the body of its victim sucking the life-giving liquid out of them (Bane 2010, 3).

During the 19th century vampires were made the subject of magazines as well as literature throughout Europe. Although stories about them existed long before that, as exemplified by the vampire episode in Lucius Apuleius’ *The Golden Ass*, a Latin work from the 2nd century AD, it was not, however, until the 19th century when the first vampire novel, *The Vampyre* (1821) by John Polidori, appeared (Wolf 1999, 4). The novel was highly influenced by the Romantic movement and authors such as Shelley, Southey, Byron, or Coleridge (Beresford 2008, 115). Polidori’s tale was in essence the first ‘vampire story’, drawing on elements that were present in folklore, to which other ideas, such as the vampire being an aristocratic member of society, were added and these would become crucial to all later vampire stories (Beresford 2008, 116).

The next major fictional vampire novel was *Varney the Vampyre* (1847) written by James Malcolm Rhymer, mistakenly attributed for a long time to Thomas Preskett (Woolf 1999, 5). In 1872 J. Sheridan Le Fanu wrote *Carmilla*, a novella often described as the earliest example of a vampire story to reflect signs of lesbianism. Probably the most recognized of all, however, is *Dracula* by Abraham (Bram) Stoker (Beresford 2008, 125). Dracula, whom Bram Stoker described as wholly villainous, the “Primal Dragon”, and a menial of Satan (Woolf 1999, 5–6), left a lasting impression that typified the genre for the next decades. In the 1800s and 1900s vampires, indeed, were presented as villains;

they were the personification of evil, often shown as animalistic and mindless killers (Beresford 2008, 116–117).

Since the publication of Anne Rice's *Vampire Chronicles* in the 1970s, the figure of the vampire has undergone various metamorphoses in response to ongoing cultural and political changes. It appears then, that vampires are able to adjust themselves to the needs of ever changing society, which is the main cause of their survival as they can also adapt to the changing urges, desires, and fears of humanity (Gordon and Hollinger 1997, 3).

Tony Thorne claims that the vampire figure endures in popular culture owing to its adaptability and ability to transform into “whatever our society shuns, but secretly demands” (Thorne 2000). By transforming into the reflection of the human psyche, the vampire, as a consequence, becomes closer to a human being than to an actual monster (Carter 1997, 31). Therefore, it can be stated that the vampire has become a cultural mirror in which the humanity can see its own reflection with its values, ideals, anxieties and fantasies. As Gordon and Hollinger state in *Blood Read. The Vampire as Metaphor in Contemporary Culture*, one of the most interesting transfigurations in the vampire character in literature and cinema is its gradual “domestication” (1997, 2). While Beresford claims that the vampire is not the terrifying creature that he used to be, he has become “the parody of what he once was” (2008, 140).

The change is so prominent that Jules Zanger, in his essay “Metaphor into Metonymy: the Vampire Next Door”, distinguishes between the “old” and the “new” vampire. Moreover, he claims that, with each modification, the vampire becomes more human and also that human role as a victim becomes lesser (1997, 17–20). The vampire has not only morphed into something civilized but also beautiful and romantic; dangerous and sexually promiscuous (Carter 1997, 27–28). More recently, vampire stories have become romantic tales depicting vampires as attractive men captivating the imagination of young women (Mukhereja 2011). In *Our Vampires, Ourselves*, Nina Auerbach claims that “Every age embraces the vampires it needs” (1995, 145) which implies not only that our view of vampires has changed but also that the figure of a vampire reflects, as Joan Gordon and Veronica Hollinger describe it, the changing times and collective psyche which results in the variety of innovations in the depiction of vampires in literature (1997, 4).

First of all, it should be noted that the image of the literary vampire has lost much of its monstrosity and religious connotations. The vampire has always been connected with religion and religious iconography. Beresford stresses the link between the story of Jesus' betrayal by Judas Iscariot (considered the most ultimate act against the Christian religion) and the modern vampire myth, i.e. Judas might be regarded as the first

vampire which explains the antagonism of the Church towards the figure of the vampire. The Church, however, was not afraid to use the vampire for its own purposes as “an additional power over the people” (Beresford 2008, 42–43). It is likely, for example, that the common fear of becoming a vampire after death was used to dissuade people from committing suicide, as it was widely known that a suicide cannot be buried within a consecrated ground and is ultimately condemned (Barber 1988, 24).

Christianity can also be credited with establishing the vampire as the manifestation of evil, therefore vampires were endowed with traits commonly associated with the devil; the ability to take a form of any living creature or control the mind of his victims (Beresford 2008, 32–41). In the modern world where God and Satan have become irrelevant not only in art but also in human lives, the vampire has undergone the process of secularization (Wolf 1999, 8). What Zanger describes as the “new” vampire, is said to be devoid of anti-Christian dimension. If the undead is an embodiment of evil, it is a choice dictated either by the conditions or personality and not a sign of an ultimate rebellion against God or aligning with Satan. Hence, the modern vampire’s nature has been largely compromised, which allows the existence of both bad and good vampires (Zanger 1997, 17–19). It has also been observed that, as there is a significant decrease of respect towards institutional religion, contemporary authors of vampire fiction abandon the diabolic image of the undead (Carter 1997, 29). Socio-cultural changes in the western world have resulted in the growing skepticism among the contemporary people; not only do they put in question the existence of God, but also are not afraid of Hell which is, therefore, reflected in the image of the vampire whose religious aspect and the odium of deterrence from sin is less appealing than the eroticism he radiates.

What follows the loss of the vampire’s religious status is the loss of the folkloric attributes. The “old” and “new” vampires do not possess many common features other than being undead, nocturnal and thirsty for blood. They do not change into bats or wolves, they are able to see their reflection in a mirror, and above all, crucifixes and garlic seem to have little effect on them (Zanger 1997, 19). Such a transformation is illustrated by Anne Rice in *Interview with a Vampire* when Louis, the vampire who narrates the story, when asked about his magical abilities, says: “That is, how you would say to-day ... bullshit?” (1993, 22). The extreme case of this alteration is exemplified in *Twilight* where Stephenie Meyer presents a new interpretation of the aversion to sunlight that fits the times and culture contemporary to the vampires she describes: they do not burn in the sun like their literary predecessors, but, being exposed to it makes them sparkle like diamonds (Michaud 2009, 39–45).

What is more, the dwelling place of the vampire has changed. Moving vampires away from places commonly associated with death and decay to more modern and urban settings is credited to Rice, whose vampires, Louis and Lestat, and also other vampires in *Vampire Chronicles*, live in “comfortable, well-furnished places generously appointed with art and cultural artifacts gathered through the centuries” (Wood 1999, 65–66). The fact that they live “next door” makes them more familiar and easier for the reader to identify with. What follows this change is that modern vampires are rather communal than solitary creatures. Although Stoker’s Count Dracula lives in something on the shape of a family or community, the characters that he is surrounded with are introduced only for technical reasons, and, as far as their influence on the course of the action is concerned, they are insignificant and functionless. It is Rice who introduces the vampire as living with and relating to other vampires in the full understanding of this concept (Zanger 1997, 18–26).

Charlaine Harris, the author of *Southern Vampire Mysteries*, goes even further in humanizing vampires in terms of their social relations. She created a universe in which the existence of vampires is public knowledge. Thanks to the invention of synthetic blood there is no need to feed on humans so vampires could “come out of coffins” and exist alongside with people as a new minority, next to the black and the homosexual and, what is more, have legal rights and be represented in the government. For society, the vampire is, however, still “the other” constituting both threat and attraction as all the alien qualities that vampires possess are at the same time perceived as alluring (Carter 1997, 29). The common way of depicting vampires as part of community while still making them appear different enough to be called a minority may relate to the need to understand the frightening, yet attractive, “other” sexes, races, species that share the world with us (Carter 1997, 27–44). Due to the fact that vampires mainstream with humans, they can be observed, their “otherness” can be explored, which, in a way, helps people to delve into their fear of otherness. According to Williamson, modern vampires are presented as those who are part of society but still “do not occupy the normative identity – white, middle class, male, able-bodied, heterosexual” and exist in multiple categories (living dead, tamed monster, socialized outcast) such as those who are mixed raced or bisexual as it resonates with the shape of modern society which defies borders and fixed identities (2005, 2).

The next change, which the “new” vampire owes to Rice, is the shift of the role of humans as victims and the vampire’s role as the oppressor. As it is implied by Zanger, the role of human beings as victims has been trivialized and can be even considered marginal. Zanger compares the amount of attention given to human characters such as Mina or

Lucy in Stoker's *Dracula* with the space devoted to analogical characters in Rice's *Interview with the Vampire*. The conclusion is that in the latter the only significant relationships are those between a vampire and a vampire while "the victims are as indistinguishable from each other as McDonald hamburgers – and serve much the same function" (Zanger 1997, 21). On the contrary, in *Dracula*, victims in such a vampire-human relationship were carefully selected, pursued, and never accidental. Zanger draws a parallel between the decline of the role of humans as victims and diminishment of the moral dimension of modern vampire fiction. There are no human characters opposing the evil normally associated with vampires, represented in *Dracula* by van Helsing, or no definite victims for whom to fear, therefore, as Zanger states, the modern audience must identify with the "lesser" of evils presented i.e. the "good" vampire, the self-doubting killer (1997, 18–20).

Due to the new place in the society provided for the vampire in modern fiction, the "new" vampire becomes more complex in terms of his communal condition. As Zanger notices, *Dracula*, the representative of the "old" vampire, was linked to human beings by means of a very narrow range of emotions: hunger, contempt, hatred, and bitterness. The "new" vampire, on the other hand, has undergone emotional evolution because he is fully and constantly exposed to the society he lives in and, in consequence, he experiences love with all its trials and tribulations, betrayal, disappointment, and mental states normally attributed to human beings. Moreover, such a vampire has the ability to express a desire to change, he is very often a self-loathing type.

The change presented is exemplified by one of the main characters of *Interview with a Vampire* by Rice, Lestat, whose code of morality enables him to kill only the wicked ones as he says "I save those innocents from their fate. And I like taking my killers to me because they are my brothers, and we belong together, and why shouldn't they die in my arms instead of some poor merciful mortal who has never done anyone any willful harm? These are the rules of my game" (1993, 12). In *Interview with a Vampire*, Louis, the narrator describes himself as torn between hunger for blood and sense of self-preservation and his conscience reminding him that killing people is wrong which, in consequence, makes him want to die as he does not want to live against his moral principles. He says, "Am I damned? Am I from the devil? Is my very nature that of a devil? I was asking myself over and over (...) What have I become in becoming a vampire? Where am I to go? And all the while, as the death wish caused me to neglect my thirst, my thirst grew hotter; my veins were veritable threads of pain in my flesh; my temples throbbed; and finally I could stand it no longer" (1993, 69). This sense of morality is common for most of the vampires in Rice's *Vampire Chronicles*.

Certain similarity between Rice's vampires and Stephenie Meyer's vampire universe in *The Twilight Saga* can be noticed, especially as far as ethical issues related to killing for sustenance is concerned. Edward, the main vampire character, does not want to be a monster and he explains: "just because we've been dealt a certain hand ... it doesn't mean that we can't choose to rise above – to conquer the boundaries of a destiny that none of us wanted" (Meyer 2005, 268). Additionally, as Michaud observes, Edward Cullen and his family describe themselves as "vegetarians" as they feed exclusively on the blood of animals because, as they say, it makes them more civilized. It means they are part of contemporary culture and not just prey on it. The virtue such as restraint and moderation are of key importance because they stand in opposition to the contemporary culture built on consumerism. Such vampires provide models to follow in a society which seems to be out of control in terms of its needs and desires. In this way "Edward Cullen may be not only a person but a person better than most humans" (Michaud 2009, 47).

Paradoxically, although vampires have become more secular, they have also become more divine or God-like, especially in terms of their appearance. In all the descriptions of Count Dracula, his monstrosity is constantly highlighted:

His face was strong—a very strong—aquiline, with high bridge of the thin nose and peculiarly arched nostrils; with lofty domed forehead, and hair growing scantily round the temples, but profusely elsewhere. His eyebrows were very massive, almost meeting over the nose, and with bushy hair that seemed to curl in its own profusion. The mouth, so far as I could see it under the heavy moustache, was fixed and rather cruel-looking, with peculiarly sharp white teeth; these protruded over the lips, whose remarkable rudeness showed astonishing vitality in the man of his years. For the rest, his ears were pale and at the tops extremely pointed; the chin was broad and strong, and the cheeks firm though thin. The general effect was one of extraordinary pallor (Stoker 2009, np.)

The extreme change in the way of depicting vampires in modern literature can be best exemplified by Meyer's portrayal of Edward whose appearance is not only remote from evoking animalistic connotations but makes him the image of human perfection and places closer to a Greek god or a catwalk model than a bloodthirsty monster. He and other vampires in Meyer's novel are presented as "so devastatingly, inhumanely beautiful. They were faces you never expect to see except perhaps on the airbrushed pages of a fashion magazine. Or painted by an old master as the face of an angel" (2005, 19). In contrast to Count Dracula, Edward in his appearance has little similarity to a beast. Instead, other features such as strength, speed, agility, mind reading make him a super-

hero or a higher being. Apart from being physically attractive, the “new” vampire often has other desirable characteristics; intelligence, wealth, and chivalrous manners.

Ananya Mukherja in her article “My Vampire Boyfriend: Postfeminism, ‘Perfect’ Masculinity and Contemporary Appeal of Paranormal Romance” focuses on the idea of a vampire boyfriend widespread in the latest vampire literature. She finds certain similarity between the appeal of romanticized vampires and “the contradictory and conflicted relationship that many women have to feminism and femininity and a perceived conflict between feeling protected and having the approval of visible femininity, on the one hand, and being self-determining and active, on the other” (2011, 3–8). As Mukherja implies, modern women want security and protection while still retaining freedom associated with feminism. Only a vampire can fulfill such conflicting needs as he represents the past and the present. She also claims that women are attracted to the figure of the undead God-like romantic as he represents a forever young but, at the same time, old-fashioned gentleman and offers security and stability while still being an attractive bad boy who can bolster a woman’s conviction that with the power of her love she can save even a monster (Mukherja 2011, 3).

As Leonard Wolf states in the introduction to *Blood Thirst*, in the late twentieth century vampires have undergone not only domestication and secularization but also they have become extremely eroticized. They are handsome, youthful, romantic, and sensuous. Wolf mentions the beauty with which a vampire embrace, previously associated with death and pain, is portrayed in the late 20th century. He implies that instead of suffering and damnation, it makes one think of the “dreamlike stillness of the vampire lovemaking. A vampire bends over his or her victim (...) and the victim’s face takes on a look of bliss” (1999, 4). As Margaret L. Carter’s observes, in modern vampire fiction the vampire is sexually attractive and magnetic “because he is a vampire and not *in spite of* being one” (1997, 27). Sexuality of the vampire has undergone transformation as nowadays he is not just a seductive monster but he is capable of love, passion, and lust.

Such a portrayal of the vampire, as both, a seducer and a romantic lover may result from the need to create a male protagonist who would compensate for the defects in conventional sexual behaviour of contemporary men. What the modern vampire can offer is not just sex but gentle eroticism which is nowadays considered anachronistic. As Gordon suggests, the creation of a sympathetic vampire is typical of female rather than male authors which may be explained by the fact that “it is a feminist vision to see power in the giver of nourishment as well as in the taker” and, therefore, the female author tends to find positive qualities in beings ordinarily considered monstrous (1988, 233).

Still, both “old” and “new” vampire embody sex outside norm and certain sexual deviancy. The difference is, however, that in the times contemporary to Stoker, sexual deviancy was to be suppressed while nowadays crossing sexual boundaries has ceased to be a taboo. The sexual revolution of the second half of the 20th century resulted in the increased openness towards different varieties of sexuality. This has led to a new approach to sex in vampire literature. In terms of sex the vampire used to embody what is sinful and forbidden; now he represents whatever people secretly crave (Gelder 2010, 20–35).

In his essay, “Metaphor into Metonymy: The Vampire Next Door”, Zanger states that all the transformations that the literary vampire has been subjected to have a very important outcome. Namely, the changes imply a shift from the metaphoric vampire to the metonymic one. Zanger quotes David Sapir to show the distinction between a metaphor and metonymy defining metaphor as “an equivalence between terms taken from separate semantic domains” (1997, 20) and metonymy as the replacement or juxtaposition of “contiguous terms that occupy a distinct or separate place within what is considered a single semantic or perceptual domain” (1997, 20). Zanger shows that the vampire as a mythical figure started out as completely distinct from humans, on the contrary, the “new” vampire has become more and more alike and, consequently, has moved from the separate semantic field, the “vampire” domain” to the direction of the “human” domain where the two terms “human” and “vampire” can be used as contiguous. It might be suggested in the light of this theory, the vampire seems to be even more ingrained into humanity. With each transformation, the distance between the vampire and the human is decreasing, and, as every change that the vampire has undergone is triggered by the changes in the human psyche, it might be stated that the vampire has evolved from the evil “Other” into a mirror-image of ourselves.

Since the publication of *Dracula* in the 19th century, the interest in the undead has not dwindled. Indeed, there is something remarkable in the society’s interest in vampires. They are often used as a mirror in which people can see themselves as reflected with their fears, needs, and desires. However, vampires show not only how people change as individuals – they also reflect how they change globally. For example, the vegetarian eco vampires of *Twilight* may represent the need to change the philosophy of life and attitude towards the environment. They may also embody the willingness to become more human in the world in which people have the tendency to turn their backs on humanity. The vampire can tell us about the contemporary concerns: the attitude towards love, family, illnesses, death, and faith (Gordon and Hollinger 1997, 1–4). As Beresford claims, there is no typical vampire. The vampire is a blend of all the vampires that ever

existed mixed with whatever attributes he reflects of the society contemporary to him. It is an ever-changing entity relevant to the culture that produced him so “the modern vampire is a being born of demons, burned as heretic and reviled as friend” (Beresford 2008, 201).

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