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Vampire in Transition: Tracing the Genealogy of Vampire Films with Reference to *Dracula*, *Lestat* and *Edward Cullen*

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Bram Stoker published *Dracula* (originally titled as *Undead*), his demonic Count, in 1897, whose creation and portrayal was inspired by obscure stories about Vlad V, called the Empaler, who ruled in the fifteenth century as Prince of Walachia (southern Rumania). As conceived and defined by Stoker, Dracula entered western culture as the first and only historically grounded literary vampire and within decades shaped the image and identity of vampire species for the whole century. Dracula was an archetype, a standard, a scriptural patriarch of all vampires. Raised from the fertile soil of Eastern-European folklore, the home of the vampire lore, Stoker's Dracula went on to live as the most famous undead, outliving his creator and transcending his original life through a steady succession of cinematic and literary adaptations and incarnations that made him the most pervasive icon of western (Anglo-American) cinema and forever marked Transylvania as the land of the vampires. Stoker, through the text, intended to focus on revealing the dominant issues surrounding identities and boundaries during the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century. By constructing this marked "other," the genre of Vampire fiction worked as a tool in divulging preconceived stereotypes of non-British peoples, which likewise helped in honing British society's perception of itself and corroborated their desire of keeping itself placed on a pedestal. Over the years, Dracula's monolithic rule has been overthrown by a new generation of morally ambiguous, sympathetic vampires who can be traced from Anne Rice's Lestat and Louis in *The Vampire Chronicles* (*Interview with the Vampire* being its most famous book which was published in 1976) to the much recent Stephenie Meyer's Edward Cullen in the *Twilight* series. The ideologies which the vampire fiction previously upheld have been neutralised by globalization and multiculturalism. Also, the vampire is no longer hideous with distorted features, razor-sharp fangs and extended fingers. But he is portrayed as the best-dressed man in the room, suave, sophisticated, charming, and with an interest in women that implied more than merely opening a vein. The vampire fiction, today, arguably conforms to the formulas of romantic tradition guaranteeing huge sales of books and transformation of the books into high-grossing movies. The *Twilight* series, rather than conforming to the genre of horror, instead, surprisingly corroborates the sub-genre of teen romance. And these teen romances are being adapted into successful films with the faces to "kill for".

There has long been a Gothic and Romantic strand within vampire fiction where the depiction of the vampire is sympathetic, precisely because it is not solitary and isolated from humanity, but is intimately connected. For instance, Byron's vampire, August Duvall, and Polidori's Lord Ruthven are, as Nina Auerbach puts it, "creatures who flourished, not in their difference from their human prey, but through their intimate

intercourse with mortals, to whom they were dangerously close” (*Our Vampires, Ourselves*, p.19). This theme is again reworked by the popular fiction writers today but when Bram Stoker wrote *Dracula* in the nineteenth century then he made a clear departure from the theme and adopted a more ideological position. With *Dracula* he established the genre of vampire fiction. Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* revealed the anxieties underlying Victorian England of the period when strict divisions between the separate races became blurry. As a vampire extremely alien to humanity who thirsted to possess and dominate humans, *Dracula* became a particularly frightening figure within the narrative context, as well as within the British mindset. Designating Transylvania as *Dracula*’s place of origin, a country on the border dividing Europe from the East, Stoker suggested the vampire’s remote and enigmatic nature from the beginning. David Glover articulates the predominant Victorian fear produced in the novel *Dracula*, claiming, “it is matter out of place that matters, the contamination and dissolution of the pure and sacred that counts, the transgression of boundaries and borders that is the ultimate horror” (*Our Vampires, Ourselves*, p. 205).

Auerbach generally classifies the vampire as “an alien invader from occult order of being” (*Our Vampires, Ourselves*, p. 23). Stoker used this literary structure to reveal the homeland anxieties regarding the exposure of them to different races by imperialism. Such concerns included the fear of the colonized people gaining power through means of infiltration, coerciveness or race expansion. In addition, vampire literature exposed the simultaneous attraction and repulsion one felt towards an “other,” and the widespread concern of becoming tainted through interaction, either social or sexual, with non-British people. Catherine Hall wrote, “British anxiety arises from the British people’s construction of social, racial and gender standards, which they feel the pressure to abide by, restricting their behavior to fit into these roles” (*White, Male and Middle-Class: Explorations in Feminism and History*, p.209). The most central characteristic of the vampire is his “otherness,” which threatened societies with his embodied danger of “disease, violent criminality, and sexual contamination” (Fredrickson, *Racism: A Short History*, p. 90). *Dracula*’s inner hunger for domination, and his ability to personally contaminate the British blood through coercive attacks on London’s women, represented the realization of British anxieties. The vampire held the obsessive desire to expand and uplift his race, weakening British blood through his infiltration, as well as fortifying his own bloodline through each transfusion. “In addition, the vampire embodies qualities that racist theories assigned to members of non-British ethnicity; he is animalistic, sexually aggressive, irrational and heathenistic”, wrote Jordon Winthrop (*The White Man’s Burden: Historical Origins of Racism in the United States*, p. 53). The ability of a vampire to pass as human demonstrates the fluidity of his nature, which created an unclear identity that rendered him a greater danger to the carefully demarcated British culture.

Following the publication of Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* in 1897, vampire narratives proliferated in Britain and the United States. While many twentieth century short stories, novels, plays, and films and its various other derivatives depart from *Dracula* in various ways. Anne Rice adapted the vampire myth for the modern times. This was also the period of globalization. The “otherness” of the Other was getting assimilated into the western culture. The East was no longer a place to fear or abhor rather it pronounced itself as enigmatic or exotic waiting to be explored. And if the “exotic” nature of the East

was propagated it was only to turn its attraction into profits. Rice published *Interview with the Vampire* in 1976 – a year that witnessed, as Ann Snitow notes, a “boom in romantic market for women” one with a subsequent “growth of 400 percent” in the following years (*The Gothic World of Anne Rice*, p. 99). Rice’s male vampires were young, handsome, passionate figures, who lived in luxury and – except for Louis – delighted in their immortality. Most important, Rice told the story from the vampire’s point of view, making her vampires not only sympathetic but also glamorous and exciting. Hollywood soon approached Rice with the intention of adapting the text into a film. Director Neil Jordon commented that Rice’s vampires had to be played by the “best Hollywood actors because vampires have glamour, indestructibility, and eternal youth” (*The Gothic World of Anne Rice*, p. 146). And so Lestat and Louis were played by Hollywood heartthrobs Tom Cruise and Brad Pitt respectively.

Nina Auerbach, in her introduction to *Our Vampires, Ourselves*, writes that “what other creature is simultaneously frightening and attractive, austere and sexy?” She further writes that they are “disturbingly like us and that they can be everything we are, while at the same time, they are fearful reminders of the infinite things we are not.” Perhaps this is what accounts for their timelessness and the strength of their legend. They have managed to make the transitions necessary to span generations. A number of theorists have pointed out a shift in genre conventions in the late twentieth century. For instance, in the late 1980s Margaret Carter suggested that “[t]oday, creators of fictional vampires often choose the Romantic path of identification with the “alien” supernatural being, rather than with the superstitious majority bent on excluding and destroying him or her” She argues that “late twentieth century America finds itself in a mood to see the vampire’s traditional outsider status very appealing” (*Dracula: The Vampire and the Critics*, p. 23). Carol Senf similarly suggests that “the changing attitudes towards authority and toward rebellion against authority have...led to a more sympathetic treatment of the vampire” (*Dracula: The Vampire and the Critics*, p. 45). The popularity of the sympathetic vampire has not deterred some theorists from bemoaning the demise of Dracula, or complaining that today’s vampire is ordinary and mundane. Jules Zanger laments the emergence of the “new” vampire because it demotes the vampire from a “magical, metaphysical ‘other’, towards the metonymic vampire as social deviant...eroding in the process of transformation many of the qualities that generated its original appeal.” According to him the vampire has moved from the “magical to mundane” (“Metaphor into Metonymy: The Vampire Next Door,” p. 12). Where once Dracula occupied the role of cosmic evil – an unambiguously Satanic figure in the universe of good and evil – the “new” vampire has become humanised, destroying its original mythic status. Zanger identifies two central shifts in the genre which effect the vampire’s deposition from metaphysical status to a mere outsider. First, the new vampire “tends to be communal, rather than solitary as was Dracula.” Thus, instead of the appropriately narrow range of emotions displayed by Dracula - “hunger, hate, bitterness, contempt” – the new vampires’ “communal condition permits them to love, to regret, to doubt, to question themselves, to experience interior conflicts and cross-impulses – to lose, in other words, that monolithic force possessed by Dracula, his unalterable volition” (p.13-14). The second change ruded by Zanger is the domesticating and individualising of vampiric motivation. The vampire’s acts are now “expressions of individual personality and

condition” rather than “cosmic conflict between God and Satan.” As far as Zanger is concerned, “[t]his new, demystified vampire might as well be our next door neighbour.”

In other words, the “new” vampire has ties of family and friendship, which locate it problematically in the realm of the emotions. This is a humanised terrain, which is more ambiguous in its depiction of good and evil. It is interesting to note that Zanger regrets those changes in the genre which shift it into areas that are conventionally associated with women’s fiction and with feminine (and therefore devalued) reading pleasures; the depiction of emotional states and the expression of the experience of interior conflicts. Zanger’s criticisms sound remarkably like those regretting the move from what are considered to be traditional masculine pleasures (although these need to be tested, particularly in relation to the large contemporary male readership of the new vampire) to feminine ones. While these genre shifts contaminate the true essence of the myth for Zanger, but it is precisely this “humanity” that makes them so popular. For Auerbach, the lure of the vampire is not found in a depiction of cosmic evil, but in its “intimacy and friendship” (*Our Vampires, Ourselves*, p. 14). Like many other late twentieth-century vampires, rather than embodying “otherness” as evil, these vampires inhabit an “otherness” that is familiar to many. Because the two central characters of the early *Vampire Chronicles*, (Louis and Lestat), had vampirism unwillingly thrust upon them, they are depicted in ways that seem to blend the melodramatic characteristics of the Gothic heroine (being locked in circumstances outside of her control), with those characteristics of what Maggie Kilgour terms the “Gothic hero-villain,” rebel and rogue; a fatal man operating outside the limits of social norms (*The Rise of the Gothic Novel*, p.54). Crucially, these vampires are seen as innocent because they did not invite vampirism, and the persecution they suffer is that of one caught tragically in circumstances outside of their control. For many fans it is the vampires’ unwillingness to be a vampire that strikes a sympathetic chord.

Stephenie Meyer’s recent books, *Twilight* series, its film adaptations and fan-world are nothing less than a cultural phenomenon. The first novel in the series, *Twilight*, appeared in 2005, with three following quickly on its heels: *New Moon* (2006), *Eclipse* (2007) and *Breaking Dawn* (2008).

By early 2010, these novels had sold a staggering eighty-five million copies and translation rights for fifty countries; the first *Twilight* film had debuted to the highest opening day profits for any film directed by a woman, graphic novels based on the series were set to debut, and *Twilight* merchandise, from action figures to underwear, abounded. The internet, in the meantime, hosted hundreds of *Twilight*-inspired multimedia websites from around the world, replete with fan-made videos and illustrations, spin-off fiction, and endless commentary from series vocal acolytes. While readers were initially teen and pre-teen girls, their mothers were soon sharing their dog-eared copies; eventually even some reluctant boyfriends and grown men fell under the glamour of the series. (*The Twilight Mystique: Critical Essays on the Novels and Films*, p.3)

Writer Sarah Langan, whose novel *The Missing* won Bram Stoker Award in 2008 said “Vampirism is sexy” and that “it’s inherently arousing” (“Love and Pain and the Teenage Vampire Thing”). *Twilight* series adhere to the tradition of romance literature and presents the vampire, Edward Cullen, in all his glory. Robert Pattinson portrayed the character of Edward Cullen in the film adaptations and fans reacted hysterically to his

flawless beauty. Marijane Osborn wrote in *The Twilight Mystique* that when she asked her thirteen year old niece what she liked about the films, she immediately said, "Edward's face!" She further writes that "one on-line fan wrote that Rob is an excellent Edward and that he is simply delicious" (p.209). He is strikingly handsome, with an immaculate dressing sense and manners and, contrary to expectations, glitters like diamonds in the sun. He refutes the old lifestyle and customs of vampires and in fact shines forth like a demigod. He doesn't spend nights in coffins, can't be defeated by the alchemy of garlic and isn't overcome by a stake through the heart.

Dracula provided us with clear views of a Manichean moral universe - cosmic evil vs. cosmic good. He was considered to be a figure of unambiguous evil, introduced to perpetuate certain ideologies privileging the British. The contemporary new vampires are products of globalization and multiculturalism wherein everything is accepted and made beautiful. The vampire-horror genre now exudes more romantic charms. Lestat and Edward Cullen are almost human in their physical appearances and habits and display a broad range of emotions from hatred to love. Tom Cruise and Brad Pitt as Lestat and Louis have been the youth icons of their times and still enjoy huge popularity. Robert Pattinson turned into a star overnight and has hundreds of fan pages and fan clubs to his name. Their breathless beauty is admired and sworn by teenagers and they guarantee colossal sum of money to the filmmakers. The vampire films today, largely conforms to the genre of romantic fiction and has created a niche for themselves as it is mass consumed by the youth thereby becoming one of the most popular genres in cinema.

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