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From Folklore to Fantasy: Romanticizing Vampires in Literature

Master's Thesis

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Zásady pro vypracování

Závěrečná diplomová práce se bude věnovat postavě upíra a proměnám jejího literárního ztvárnění od folklórních kořenů k současné romantizaci. V úvodu práce studentka s využitím relevantní sekundární literatury charakterizuje postavu upíra, vysvětlí jeho folklórní původ, symboliku a archetypy, s nimiž je v literatuře spojován. Objasní rovněž pojem ”romantizace”. Dále se bude zabývat žánrem tzv. vampire fiction. Jádrem práce bude analýza a komparace vybraného klasického a současného díla tohoto žánru, v níž se diplomantka zaměří především na proměnu upíra z postavy vedlejší a záporné v protagonistu. Bude sledovat, jak proměna postavy souvisí s tematickou rovinou textu, např. s romantizací násilí, nezdravých či mravně pochybných vztahů.

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ANNOTATION

This diploma thesis explores the literary transformation of the vampire figure, focusing on the contrast between its folkloric roots and its modern, romanticized portrayals. The theoretical part introduces key concepts used to analyze this transformation, including the uncanny, abjection, the Other, posthumanism, queer and feminist theory, and the archetype of the Byronic hero. The analysis focuses on two significant works of vampire literature: *Dracula* by Bram Stoker and *Interview with the Vampire* by Anne Rice. The first analytical chapter examines *Dracula* as a work that reinforces the vampire's role as a monstrous, culturally Othered antagonist, while the second chapter investigates how *Interview with the Vampire* repositions the vampire as an emotionally introspective protagonist capable of guilt, love, and existential suffering. The thesis focuses on themes such as violence, eroticism, and gender roles, ultimately arguing that the romanticization of the vampire reflects broader cultural shifts in the perception of monstrosity, morality, and desire.

KEYWORDS

Dracula, *Interview with the Vampire*, vampire, romanticization, anti-hero, violence, monstrosity, gender

TITLE

From Folklore to Fantasy: Romanticizing Vampires in Literature

ANOTACE

Tato diplomová práce se zabývá literární proměnou postavy upíra, a to kontrastem mezi jejími folklorními kořeny a moderní romantizovanou podobou. Teoretická část představuje klíčové pojmy použité k analýze této proměny, jako jsou koncepty jinakosti (the Other), abjekce, koncept Něco Tísnivého (uncanny), posthumanismu, queer a feministické teorie a archetypu byronského hrdiny. Analytická část se zaměřuje na dvě zásadní díla upírské literatury: Drákulu od Brama Stokera a *Interview s upírem* od Anne Rice. První analytická kapitola zkoumá, jak Drákula zachovává zobrazení upíra jako monstrózního a kulturně odcizeného antagonisty, zatímco druhá kapitola analyzuje, jak *Interview s upírem* přetváří upíra v introspektivní hlavní postavu s emocionální hloubkou, schopnou pocitu viny, lásky a existenciální úzkosti. Práce se

zaměřuje na témata násilí, erotiky, genderových rolí, a dochází k závěru, že romantizace upíra odráží širší kulturní posun v chápání monstrozity, morálky a touhy.

KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA

Drákula, Interview s upírem, upír, romantizace, antihrdina, násilí, monstróznost, gender

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INTRODUCTION

> "You must come with me, loving me, to death; or else hate me, and still come with me, and *hating* me through death and after."
>
> — Sheridan Le Fanu, *Carmilla*

Vampires have captivated readers with their mysterious, bloodthirsty allure for centuries. The vampire figure originated as a grotesque revenant rooted in folklore, an animated corpse associated with disease and death. Such creatures were feared for violating the laws of nature and bodily, social, and religious boundaries. However, this figure underwent a profound literary transformation in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The vampire character increasingly appeared as a complex, sympathetic being characterized by beauty and moral ambiguity, not merely a monstrous predator. This shift represents more than a change in narrative style; it signals a broader cultural reconfiguration of what it means to be a monster.

The romanticization of the vampire and its repositioning from antagonist to protagonist, from feared entity to tragic antihero, is the central focus of this thesis. The vampire serves not only as a supernatural threat but as a mirror of cultural unease, a creature onto which societies project their deepest fears and taboos. As literary and popular culture increasingly embrace the vampire as a desirable, emotionally complex character, questions arise about the implications of rendering the monstrous sympathetic, seductive, and even heroic.

This thesis investigates this evolution, focusing on two significant works in vampire fiction: Bram Stoker's *Dracula* from 1897 and Anne Rice's *Interview with the Vampire* from 1976. Not even a hundred years apart, these novels mark distinct points in the literary portrayal of the vampire archetype. *Dracula* embodies the vampire's folkloric roots, portraying the titular character as an emotionally impenetrable and culturally Othered unromanticized antagonist. Count Dracula is not given voice or interiority; he exists on the margins of the narrative, constructed through the fearful perceptions of his victims. By contrast, *Interview with the Vampire* allows its central vampire, Louis de Pointe du Lac, to speak for himself. His confessional narrative presents the vampire as a tortured soul burdened with guilt, longing, and existential despair. In Rice's text, the vampire becomes not merely human-like but profoundly human, embodying both monstrosity and vulnerability.

This thesis aims to analyze how each text constructs the vampire characters and, through a close reading of both novels, explore how literary techniques, such as point of view, characterization, and imagery, support or subvert traditional Gothic tropes. It examines how *Dracula* upholds an apparent dichotomy between good and evil, civilization and savagery, remaining thoroughly unromanticized. In contrast, *Interview with the Vampire* blurs these boundaries, inviting identification with a morally complex entity, romanticizing its vampire. The analysis seeks to understand what it means to sympathize with a monster and what such sympathy reveals about shifting notions of morality, identity, and desire.

To support this analysis, the thesis employs a multidisciplinary theoretical framework. It draws on psychoanalytic theory to illuminate the vampire's function as an uncanny figure destabilizing boundaries between life and death, self and other. The concept of abjection, especially as it relates to the grotesque and bodily transgression connected with vampiric nature, provides a means to understand the vampire's visceral horror in early representations. Feminist theory and queer theory are also essential to this project. The vampire's erotic charge, its frequent associations with non-normative desire, and its subversive gender performances are explored in connection with cultural constructions of sexuality, power, and violence. The analysis further considers the symbolic and cultural functions of vampirism, particularly how violence, sexuality, and otherness are represented and reinterpreted in each text.

While grounded in literary analysis, this thesis also acknowledges the broader cultural impact of vampire fiction. In recent decades, romanticized vampires have become central to genres consumed by predominantly female audiences, raising questions about the social and psychological function of these narratives. Vampires are increasingly depicted as lovers, protectors, or tragic figures whose violence is rationalized by tortured pasts or existential struggles. Such portrayals often romanticize relationships marked by control, obsession, or dependency. At the same time, the vampire can function as a figure of resistance, a symbol of deviant sexuality, outsider identity, and posthuman longing. The romanticized vampire, therefore, embodies a contradictory set of meanings: dangerous and desirable, villainous and victimized, intimate and alien.

The structure of the thesis reflects this thematic and theoretical development. The first chapter offers a theoretical foundation, outlining the historical evolution of the vampire myth and defining the key concepts used throughout the analysis. It addresses the vampire's folkloric roots, its emergence in literature, and its transformation through archetypes from a folkloric

revenant into a romantic contemporary antihero. The second chapter provides a detailed analysis of *Dracula*, focusing on the novel's portrayal of the vampire as a monstrous, unromanticized Other and its use of narrative distance to prevent reader empathy. The third chapter focuses on *Interview with the Vampire*, examining how Rice repositions the vampire as a protagonist, narrator, and subject of emotional depth. The themes explored are romanticized violence, toxic intimacy, and the ethical ambiguity of the vampire as the protagonist.

In summary, this thesis aims to explore how the romanticization of the vampire is not a superficial literary trend but a significant cultural phenomenon. This development challenges boundaries between human and monster, good and evil, and transforms horror into beauty and cruelty into seduction. In doing so, vampire fiction offers a powerful medium for readers to confront or embrace their fears, fantasies, and desires.

Historical and Literary Background of the Vampire Archetype

The dead are supposed to remain in their graves, be mourned, and left at peace for eternity. However, according to Nick Groom, centuries-old myths and legends have recounted the tales of the dead returning to haunt, taunt, and seek vengeance upon the living. Among these malevolent entities are vampires, the eternally undead, whose origins set them apart from ghosts and other folkloric monsters.[1]

The vampire myth does not arise from literature but from historical sightings, witnesses, and written records. However fictional vampires may seem now, vampires were once widely believed to be real threats, creatures one might encounter or need protection from. Groom notes that vampires were studied not only through witnesses' recounts, as other supernatural occurrences were, but also through empirical investigations viewing them as tangible beings, examining physical evidence primarily consisting of their victims and the deceased perpetrators' bodies.[2] This makes vampires not merely an ancient entity that has returned to haunt the living, but a direct consequence and byproduct of a scientific investigation approach. Groom mentions that the Age of Enlightenment brought rationality, investigative science, and empirical methodology. East European folklore was viewed through Enlightenment rationality, conferring upon it a semblance of reality because the sightings were considered credible.[3] This gave rise to the field of "vampirology," a scholarly field dedicated to studying, hunting, and eradicating vampires. As commented on by Daniel Cohen, real vampire hunts took place, with a given example of Dr. Johannes von Lobel participating in them in Siberia, supposedly having felt the beating heart of a deceased vampire.[4]

Moreover, the discovery of an animal during the 17th century, the vampire bat, created a precedent for vampires being viewed as real. As Greg Cox and Daryl Mallett said, this created a "wave of vampire epidemics," which subsequently caused the undead to become a subject matter in nonfiction literature.[5] It is no wonder this phenomenon has grown into a worldwide

[1] Nick Groom, *The Vampire: A New History* (New Haven, Ct Yale University Press, 2018), 44-45.
[2] Groom, *The Vampire*, 45-46.
[3] Groom, *The Vampire*, 45.
[4] Daniel Cohen, *The Encyclopedia of Monsters* (Hippocrene Books, 1990), 274.
[5] Greg Cox and Daryl Furumi Mallett, *The Transylvanian Library* (Millefleurs, 1993), 11.

sensation that is still popular in today's age. Just like the vampire's existence, its concept is timeless.

The vampire is a creature belonging to the monsters of folklore, blood-drinking entities who must be destroyed through various rituals. As stated by Kathryn Morris, they can be "[d]estroyed by impaling them or cutting off their heads, or by removing and burning their hearts."[6] The methods vary based on every reimagining of the vampire, however.

Blood is a liquid almost synonymous with the word vampire. However, the vampire is not the only demon or monster that drinks the life's essence. Groom mentions numerous demons from history, characterised by drinking blood from humans. In ancient Greece, a serpent-like female monster, "Lamia," fed herself by drinking children's blood. Grendel also consumes blood in *Beowulf*, the oldest work of Old English literature. Even Shakespeare portrayed blood-drinking characters in *Macbeth*, such as the witches.[7] These creatures are present not only in European culture but in Asia as well. Particularly interesting is the "Penanggalan," a female vampire from Malaysia, which is truly one of a kind. Matthew Bunson describes this type of vampire as "[m]ost unique in the world because it flies about at night with only a head and neck, its intestines dangling beneath them." Interestingly, it targets children, women in labor, and seldom men. This myth caused women to start protecting themselves when delivering a child, using leaves with thorns from the "jeruju*"* plant. The thorns were supposed to injure the Penanggalan and keep her in place until the safety of sunlight returned.[8] The sheer amount of variation when it comes to vampires is endless. As Laviniu Lapadat mentions, the "strigoi*"* from Romanian folklore speaks of a troubled spirit or walking corpse that feeds on the life of relatives and neighbors. Bram Stoker drew inspiration from such accounts in *Dracula,* interweaving the legend of the *strigoi* into his vampire Count.[9] Another term, recently repopularized by the 2024 movie *Nosferatu,*[10] was introduced to English readers by Emily Gerard's 1885 essay on Transylvanian superstitions. Gerard reported "nosferatu" as a local term for "vampire."[11] Countless cultures have a particular type of monster, which could be an

[6] Kathryn Morris, "Superstition, Testimony, and the Eighteenth-Century Vampire Debates," *Preternature: Critical and Historical Studies on the Preternatural* 4, no. 2 (2015): 181, https://doi.org/10.5325/preternature.4.2.0181.
[7] Groom, *The Vampire*, 46-49.
[8] Matthew Bunson, *The Vampire Encyclopedia* (Gramercy, 2000), 205.
[9] Laviniu Costinel Lapadat, "From Folklore to Literature: Utilising Bram Stoker's Dracula as a Teaching Resource for Romanian Cultural Education," *Analele Universitatii Din Craiova, Seria Ştiinţe Filologice, Limbi Străine Aplicate* 2024, no. 1 (July 19, 2024): 310–24, https://doi.org/10.52744/aucsflsa.2024.01.34.
[10] *Nosferatu,* directed by Robert Eggers (Universal Pictures International, 2024).
[11] Emily Gerard, *Transylvanian Superstitions* (Center for Romanian Studies, 2024).

equivalent to a vampire, establishing their place not only in literature but also in human history, be it factual or fictional.

The timeless allure of vampires has captivated both skeptics and believers for centuries and continues to spark a yearning for stories about these creatures of the night. As society tends to do, the vampire is not only a character but a representation of meanings, symbols, and fears. As Groom points out, vampire literature is not only about vampires as central characters or themes. It is a lens that explores the depth of the vampire trope from various perspectives, be it cultural or literary. Since its emergence in the eighteenth century, the literary vampire has mirrored shifting attitudes toward science, power, and identity.[12] What began as folklore rooted in Eastern Europe has become a global phenomenon, leaving an unforgettable mark on literature, cinema, and popular consciousness.

Though often associated with imaginative horror fiction, vampire literature demonstrates notable intellectual depth. J. Gordon Melton emphasizes its connection with themes of immortality, desire, and the darker aspects of humanity. Vampires, though fictional, can also appear in non-fiction literary works. These works are not mere entertainment but rigorous historical analyses, studies, and psychological perspectives on the vampire phenomenon. Researchers delve into vampires' psychological and social function, examining how vampire myths and beliefs may shape an individual's or collective consciousness.[13] This intellectual depth adds a layer of complexity and richness to the genre, making it more than just a source of entertainment. According to Cox and Mallett, although vampire literature tends to have similar features, each author reinterprets and emphasizes different aspects of the vampire legend, making the vampire a fluid character. Some works stick to the traditional characteristics, such as immortality and the need for blood, but others diverge from these conventions and give their vampires unique abilities or traits.[14] This diversity in interpretation and portrayal showcases the versatility and adaptability of the vampire character, making it a fascinating subject of analysis.

As previously noted, the vampire's literary portrayal is fluid and adaptable. It is worth examining key literary vampire archetypes throughout history to understand how this evolution

[12] Groom, *The Vampire*, 14-16.
[13] J. Gordon Melton, *The Vampire Book: The Encyclopedia of the Undead* (Canton, Mi: Visible Ink Press, 2011), 30-33.
[14] Cox and Mallett, *The Transylvanian Library*, 7-9.

reflects social anxieties and shifting values. These archetypes, ranging from grotesque revenants to contemporary anti-heroes, mark stylistic shifts and reveal more profound cultural and ideological transformations. As Nina Auberbach famously asserts, "every age embraces the vampire it needs,"[15] emphasizing the genre's responsiveness to historical, cultural, and ideological shifts.

While Polidori's *The Vampyre* from 1819 is often credited as the first English vampire story, Heide Crawford notes that the literary vampire originated much earlier in German literature. For example, Heinrich August Ossenfelder's 1748 poem *Der Vampir* is a cautionary tale about the danger of mindlessly following Christian teachings, noting that "the vampire equates her strict old-fashioned beliefs, taught by Christianity, with the superstition of vampires." While this poem encapsulates "[t]he divide between religion and science" during Germany's era of Enlightenment,[16] it frames the vampire as a temptation to stray from Christian values. Vampires have been a metaphorical figure since their literary inception, which helped shape the archetypes that would dominate subsequent vampire literature.

The earliest vampire archetype is rooted in folklore, as previously discussed, as a mindless, bloated corpse returning from the grave to torment the living. Far from the alluring aristocrats of later fiction, these folkloric vampires were often described as decaying, ruddy-faced peasants or shrouded corpses, strained with blood from their nocturnal feasts, hiding in the shadows. These creatures tend to be nicknamed as the *revenant*, or "one that returns after death,"[17] and as listed by Bunson, reflect the anxieties about improper death and plague.[18][19] Augustus Summers illustrates the sheer terror these creatures evoke: "In all the darkest pages of the malign supernatural, there is no more terrible tradition than that of the Vampire, a pariah even among demons."[20] Groom further elaborates with the notion that the folkloric vampire is a cultural residue of pre-modern fears often associated with disease, sex, and the taboo.[21] This figure lacks nuance, existing only to terrify and disrupt, making it a foundation to the genre's origins. Yet its inhumanity serves as a background for later developments of other archetypes.

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[15] Nina Auerbach, *Our Vampires, Ourselves* (Chicago; London: The University of Chicago Press, 2006), 145.
[16] Heide Crawford, *The Origins of the Literary Vampire* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2016), 41-47.
[17] Merriam-Webster.com, "Revenant," in *Merriam-Webster.com*, accessed May 28, 2025, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/revenant.
[18] Bunson, *The Vampire Encyclopedia,* 20.
[19] Bunson, *The Vampire Encyclopedia,* 222.
[20] Augustus Montague Summers, *The Vampire, His Kith and Kin* (Iap - Information Age Pub. Incorporated, 2009), 2.
[21] Groom, *The Vampire,* 210-213.

The grotesque description of the folkloric vampire, a corpse neither fully alive nor truly dead, falls into an archetype of what Julia Kristeva defines as "abjection." Kristeva describes: "The corpse, seen without God and outside of science, is the utmost of abjection. It is death infecting life. Abject." As a body between life and death, the vampire embodies the "imaginary uncanniness" and "a real threat"[22] in the most visceral way. Kristeva further notes that encountering such a creature elicits horror and revulsion because it "disturbs identity, system, order" and does not "respect borders, positions, rules." It confronts us with the "in-between, the ambiguous, the composite."[23] Witnessing a dead body, which moves, kills, and violates, is the embodiment of abjection, making it a key concept for the folkloric revenant and the early vampire figure. In traditional vampire narratives, abjection is visually and symbolically represented through decaying corpses, blood consumption, and bodily corruption, all of which heighten the sense of horror. The vampire thus emerges as a monster and a destabilizing force that exposes the fragility of personal and societal boundaries.

Sigmund Freud's concept of *The Uncanny*, or so-called *Unheimlich,*[24] further illuminates the dread the folkloric vampire provokes, highlighting the contrast to the romanticized, alluring vampire figure of later archetypes. In Freud's essay, the uncanny arises when something familiar is rendered strange, often through the return of something long repressed historically and culturally.[25] Freud explains in a section on encountering something the society has stopped accepting as plausible, such as "the return of the dead": "As soon as something happens in our lives which seems to support the old, discarded beliefs, we get a feeling of the uncanny. […] 'Then the dead do continue to live and appear before our eyes on the scene of their former activities!'"[26] A reanimated corpse, a beloved family member or neighbor rising from the grave, encapsulates such a scenario. It materializes ancient superstitions long gone in the contemporary, scientific world, producing the unsettling sense that the boundary between life and death is not secure. The folkloric vampire is uncanny in its very essence, as it is, quite literally, "the return of the dead,"[27] blurring the line between person and cadaver, self and other. It is no coincidence that in many cultures, the suspected vampire is

[22] Julia Kristeva, "Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection," *SubStance* 13, no. 3/4 (1982), 4, https://doi.org/10.2307/3684782.
[23] Kristeva, "Powers of Horror," 4.
[24] Sigmund Freud, *The Uncanny* (1919; repr., New York: Penguin Books, 1919), 2.
[25] Freud, *The Uncanny*.
[26] Freud, *The Uncanny*, 17.
[27] Freud, *The Uncanny*, 16-17.

often a recently deceased neighbor or relative whose return from the other side becomes a source of eerie fear.

The vampiric figure is both intimately familiar, as it bears the face of one's community, and terrifyingly alien in its undead transformation. In that sense, the vampire functions as the Other in a profound psychological and cultural understanding, a deceased person who has crossed into an unnatural state of being. The community often projects fears and anxieties onto this figure of the Other, making the vampire a repository for what is culturally abjected or denied, personifying what each community, culture, or time rejects and fears.

As articulated in philosophy and critical theory, the concept of *the Other* refers to a constructed identity perceived in opposition to the Self. Alan Bullock and Stephen Trombley explain that the Other is "a constituting factor in the self-image that a subject builds up,"[28] meaning that the Self defines itself, at least in part, through contrast with an external figure. This contrast is often reinforced through exclusion and marginalization, especially when the Other fails to conform to dominant social norms. This framework is beneficial for understanding how the vampire operates not merely as a monster but as a culturally constructed embodiment of difference, threat, and anxiety. In *Orientalism,* Edward Said explores how societies construct threatening outsiders to stabilize their identity. He notes: "The Orient is not only adjacent to Europe; it is also the place of Europe's most significant and richest and oldest colonies, the source of its civilizations and languages, its cultural contestant, and one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other."[29] Similarly, the vampire arises from a symbolic elsewhere: a marginal figure onto which the community can project fears of illness, disorder, and death.

Within Europe, remote regions like Transylvania, which are unmistakably connected to vampires in vampire fiction, were long depicted as Gothic, superstitious hinterlands. As Ken Gelder explains, the place name of Transylvania means "beyond the forest," evoking a "peculiar 'otherness' […] as a remote, mysterious and self-enclosed place."[30] This symbolizes an exotic elsewhere, similar to the Orient, from which the vampire Other could emerge, echoing Said's notion of how alterity is geographically and ideologically constructed. Expanding on this,

[28] Alan Bullock and Stephen Trombley, "Other, The," in *The New Fontana Dictionary of Modern Thought* (London: HarperCollinsPublishers, 1999), 620.
[29] Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Random House, 1979), 10.
[30] Ken Gelder, *Reading the Vampire* (London: Routledge, 1994), 14-15.

folkloric accounts of vampirism frequently coincide with times of plague, death, or social upheaval. The vampire legend provides a convenient scapegoat for these threats by blaming an external malevolent force for misfortunes affecting the community. The vampire thus becomes an embodiment of the community's outsider, the monstrous Other in its midst, who must be found and destroyed to re-establish symbolic and social order. This primitive, almost zombie-like, archetype continues to influence contemporary texts like Richard Matheson's I Am Legend,[31] in which vampirism is rationalized as a virus. Nevertheless, the archetype's core fear of abjection and otherness remains intact.

Where the folkloric vampire reflects communal fears and abjection, the literary vampire evolves into a more interiorized figure, seductive, tormented, and morally ambiguous. This transformation matches the rise of the Byronic hero in Romantic literature, whose traits shape the eventual emergence of the contemporary vampire as a complex antihero. The *Byronic hero* emerged during the Romantic era as an unconventional archetype inspired by the persona and character of the English poet Lord Byron. Writers recognized this new kind of hero's defining traits, as the Victorian critic Lord Macaulay characterized Byron's prototypical hero as "[…] [a] man proud, moody, cynical, with defiance on his brow, and misery in his heart, a scorner of his kind, implacable in revenge, yet capable of deep and strong affection."[32] This striking portrait, drawn from Byron's own life and his poetic heroes mentioned by Ourania Chatsiou, such as Childe Harold, the Giaour, and Manfred,[33] captures the Byronic figure's blend of arrogant rebellion, melancholic angst, and capacity for passionate emotion. Byron's contemporaries even turned his real-life notoriety into a myth. Novelist Lady Caroline Lamb famously labeled him after having an affair with him as "mad, bad, and dangerous to know,"[34] a moniker that clings to the Byronic hero's outlaw-like allure in literature.

Peter Thorslev further elaborates that the Byronic figure occupies a space between various Romantic heroic types of characters, such as the "child of nature," "Gothic villai[n] turned sympathetic," the "English Faust," "Cain," and "Prometheus,"[35] making him both a successor and a radical departure from older folkloric and literary traditions. This hybrid

[31] Richard Matheson, *I Am Legend* (London: The Folio Society, 2018).
[32] Thomas Babington Macaulay, *Critical, Historical and Miscellaneous Essays* (New York: Sheldon and Company, 1860), 359.
[33] Ourania Chatsiou, "Lord Byron: Paratexts and Poetics," *The Modern Language Review* 109, no. 3 (2014): 640, https://doi.org/10.5699/modelangrevi.109.3.0640.
[34] Paul Douglass, *Lady Caroline Lamb* (Springer, 2004), 104.
[35] Peter L. Thorslev, *The Byronic Hero: Types and Prototypes* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1962), 15.

identity renders the Byronic hero uniquely unstable and complex. Neither fully tragic nor entirely demonic, but a paradoxical blend of introspection and aggression, guilt and grandeur. As Conrad Aquilina notes, Byron's poetic heroes and his celebrity persona together establish a character of "[m]ythic proportions akin to Milton's Satan or Marlowe's Faustus," indicating a return to grand, archetypal storytelling, yet reimagined through the lens of Romantic subjectivity and personal alienation. Unlike the virtuous and balanced figures of neoclassical tradition, the Byronic hero is a flawed, self-contradictory, and simultaneously villainous and sympathetic. Aquilina describes: "The Byronic hero bears the dual markings of both villain and victim. He is a fallen creature in his own right; a dark angel bringing both love and death, yearning for redemption and ultimately finding none."[36] He often violates social and moral norms with impunity, but a deeper, more private suffering shadows his defiant pride. As Aquilina further adds: "Transgressing all social and ethical boundaries, the Byronic hero is therefore always an outcast, living in perpetual exile on the fringes of society, on the run from persecution and persecuting others in turn."[37] Crucially, he is haunted by inner torment such as remorse, existential crisis, or guilt, which tempers his arrogance with an air of tragic nobility, making him both the victim and the sufferer.

This archetype has proven enormously influential, and its legacy can be traced forward through Victorian and modern literature. The Byronic hero's moral ambiguity, brooding introspection, and rebellious charisma have inspired contemporary anti-heroes in fiction, making it a subject of scholarly interest and interpretation. The image of the vampire underwent a dramatic transformation in the early 19th century, evolving from the grotesque peasant revenant into a seductive, aristocratic antihero by acquiring Byronic attributes. John William Polidori's *The Vampyre* is widely acknowledged as the first to fuse the Gothic vampire myth with the Byronic hero archetype. Aquilina notes that Polidori, as Lord Byron's physician and associate, drew inspiration directly from Byron's notorious persona to create Lord Ruthven, the vampiric protagonist of his tale.[3839] Interestingly, Polidori's story was initially published under the wrong name, *The Vampyre: A Tale by Lord Byron*, which caused a literary sensation. While

[36] Conrad Aquilina, "Open Graves, Open Minds," in *Open Graves, Open Minds: Representations of Vampires and the Undead from the Enlightenment to the Present Day*, ed. Sam George and William Hughes (New York: Manchester University Press, 2013), 28.
[37] Aquilina, "Open Graves, Open Minds," 28.
[38] Aquilina, "Open Graves, Open Minds," 29.
[39] John William Polidori, *The Vampyre* (1819; repr., Portland: Mint Editions, 2021).

the false attribution was soon corrected, the association of this story with Lord Byron had already taken hold.[40]

Polidori's Lord Ruthven is a seductive aristocrat with mysterious origins, immense charisma, and a predatory amorality,[41] exhibiting Byronic characteristics. As William McKelvy explains, Polidori reimagined the vampire through the lens of the Byronic hero, "[a] seductive aristocrat exercising unhallowed powers over both women and men — largely explains why his blood-sucking monster, Lord Ruthven, became the primary template for the modern vampire."[42] This transformation marked a decisive shift in literary representations of the undead from grotesque, folkloric revenants into psychologically rich figures of melancholy and charisma. Aquilina adds that in Polidori's story, Ruthven's "[i]rresistible powers of seduction [rendering] his licentious habits more dangerous to society,"[43] make him a menace even as he captivates his victims. Polidori thus "[d]etached the vampire from his folkloric roots and render[ed] him solely Byronic,"[44] inventing the Byronic vampire archetype that would dominate literary vampire tradition thereafter. This transformation established the male vampire as a brooding, seductive predator, a figure of existential melancholy and social transgression. From this archetypal foundation, the vampire figure would evolve in startling directions, primarily through the emergence of the female vampire.

The female vampire has long embodied the *femme fatale* archetype: a pale seductress whose beauty conceals deadly intent. Emerging prominently in late 19th-century art and literature, this figure encapsulates cultural anxieties around female sexuality. From Le Fanu's *Carmilla*[45] to Stoker's vampiric sisters, the female vampire is irresistibly alluring and mortally dangerous. As Mary Doane describes, *femme fatale,* meaning "fatal woman," is a sensual woman whose beauty and charm ensnare men, typically leading them into danger or ruin. Her seductive power is frequently likened to that of an enchantress or witch, with a power that overwhelms all reason. Though not always villainous, the *femme fatale* is usually morally ambiguous just as much as the usual male vampire, but also surrounded by an aura of intrigue, danger, and unease.[46] In vampire fiction, this archetype becomes a projection of cultural tension,

[40] William McKelvy, "200 Years On, 'the Vampyre' Still Thrills," Arts & Sciences, March 27, 2019, https://artsci.washu.edu/ampersand/200-years-%E2%80%98-vampyre%E2%80%99-still-thrills.
[41] Polidori, *The Vampyre*.
[42] McKelvy, "200 Years On."
[43] Aquilina, "Open Graves, Open Minds," 29.
[44] Aquilina, "Open Graves, Open Minds," 35.
[45] Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu, *Carmilla* (1872; repr., Cambridge, Mass.: Circlet, 1872).
[46] Mary Ann Doane, *Femmes Fatales* (Taylor & Francis, 2013).

embodying both the allure and the perceived threat of female empowerment in an age increasingly unsettled by shifting gender roles.

Barbara Creed's concept of the *monstrous-feminine* offers a feminist lens through which to interpret and understand this archetype. Creed argues that when horror texts represent women as a monster, in this case a vampire, it is frequently in connection to biological and sexual functions. These monsters tend to be "[t]he archaic mother; the monstrous womb; the witch; the vampire; and the possessed woman."[47] Creed builds on Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection, which describes the human reaction of horror and revulsion to that which disturbingly blurs boundaries or defies our categorical distinctions. The female vampire is a quintessentially abject figure. She exists amidst categories as neither alive nor dead, human nor animal, maternal nor demure, and she transgresses taboos of the "clean and proper"[48] body by drinking blood, mixing life and death, and blending eroticism with violence. Her very being "disrupts order," violating societal boundaries of gender and sexuality, driven by her lust for blood,[49] and thus she induces both fear and morbid fascination. Through this lens, she is not inherently evil but culturally constructed as a threat to patriarchal order, her monstrosity a mirror once again, born of anxieties about female autonomy, sexuality, and reproductive power.

Kristeva notes that among the strongest taboos in many cultures are those surrounding bodily fluids and the maternal body, for example, the mixing of blood and mother's milk.[50] Vampirism exploits such taboos, as the vampire's sustenance is blood, a substance symbolically linked to both life and menstruation, already situated in the realm of the abject. In the case of the female vampire, this abjection is often heightened by a perversion of maternal imagery. She is a "monstrous mother"[51] as much as a *femme fatale*. For instance, Le Fanu's *Carmilla* preys upon young women in a twisted mockery of nurturing.[52] Such images induce what Creed calls the archaic fear of the "monstrous womb," in which the female power of creating life is rendered grotesque.[53] The female vampire often figuratively gives birth to more vampires by infecting victims with her bite, but in a way that corrupts the life-giving role of motherhood, for she breeds death, not life. In this way, the female vampire becomes a dark inversion of maternal

[47] Barbara Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* (London: Routledge, 1993), 46-49.
[48] Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine*, 67.
[49] Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine*, 232-233.
[50] Kristeva, "Powers of Horror," 105.
[51] Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine*, 3.
[52] Le Fanu, *Carmilla*.
[53] Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine*, 205.

power: a parody of motherhood whose function is not to nourish but to consume, not to protect but to destroy.

Creed emphasizes that the feminine monstrousness is deeply rooted in male anxieties about female sexuality. She illustrates this with a Freudian theory about a woman terrifying a male child because of her lack of male genitals. This notion claims that the sight of the mother's genitals is similar to witnessing castration, producing a Medusa-like horror[54] that "turns [the male spectator] to stone."[55] However, Creed flips this formulation; she contends that it is not "women's lack" that men fear so much as the perceived excess of sexual power and the possibility that women might not be the castrated victim but the castrator instead.[56] Thus, the *monstrous-feminine* frequently appears as a figure who threatens to mutilate or consume the male. The female vampire perfectly fits this role, as she is often portrayed as a deadly sexual predator, or what Creed calls a "femme castratrice,"[57] one who lures men to a doom that is both erotic and lethal. She destabilizes the patriarchal fantasy of male control by weaponizing sexuality itself by turning the passive object of desire into the active agent of destruction. As such, the female vampire projects deep unease surrounding women's sexual autonomy.

Beyond heterosexual dynamics, the female vampire has been a crucial figure in exploring queer desire. Notably, the first female vampire in English fiction, Le Fanu's *Carmilla*, is a lesbian predator. Carmilla's passion for her female victim, Laura, is overtly romantic and erotic, far exceeding the era's norms for depicting affection between women. As David Skal comments, *Carmilla* is "one of the most influential vampire stories of all time,"[58] a character who established the template of vampirism as a coded expression of same-sex desire. Published in 1872, *Carmilla* predates *Dracula* by 25 years and ventures into territory that the Victorian mainstream found highly taboo, female homosexual desire, by cloaking it in the supernatural of a horror tale. As Elliot Smith adds, the lesbian vampire became a recurring archetype in literature and film, precisely because it allowed artists to explore forbidden desire under the cover of monstrosity.[59] This use of metaphor not only offered a way to circumvent censorship

[54] Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine*, 31-32.
[55] Sigmund Freud, *Writings on Art and Literature* (California: Stanford University Press, 1997), 264.
[56] Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine*, 38.
[57] Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine*, 461.
[58] David J. Skal, "The Lady Who Munched: How Carmilla Stormed the Stage," *The Green Book: Writings on Irish Gothic, Supernatural and Fantastic Literature*, no. 4 (2014): 57–68, https://www.jstor.org/stable/48536059.
[59] Elliot D. Smith, "The Homosexual Vampire as a Metaphor For…the Homosexual Vampire?': True Blood, Homonormativity and Assimilation.," in *True Blood: Investigating Vampires and Southern Gothic*, ed. Brigid Cherry (Hatfield: I.B. Tauris, 2012), 144-145.

and moral criticism, but also subtly challenged the boundaries of heteronormative representation. As Creed remarks, vampiric women are "frequently represented as lesbian" across horror media, reflecting how the vampire's lust was reflected onto fears of deviant sexuality.[60] As mentioned by Ellis Hanson, the implication, especially in earlier works, was often that queer desire is itself deadly or monstrous, linking "gay sex and death."[61] This idea is reinforced by the fate of characters like Carmilla, who is vanquished by righteous male authorities in the novella, ostensibly to restore heteronormative order.

Queer theorists have shown how Gothic monstrosity often encodes hidden or forbidden sexualities, and the female vampire is one of the clearest instances. Her very existence disregards heteronormative expectations of female behavior as chaste, maternal, oriented toward marriage and childbearing. Instead, the vampiress is typically independent, erotically aggressive, and frequently oriented toward other women or toward no reproductive goal at all, with her encounters being sterile, yielding only death or undeath. Christopher Craft analyzes the "vampire mouth" as the focal image of this inversion. The female vampire's mouth, at once an invitingly soft, feminine orifice and a cruel phallic instrument with sharp fangs, "fuses and confuses […] the gender-based categories of the penetrating and the receptive," luring with the promise of soft skin but delivering a "piercing bone." This imagery creates disturbing questions: "Are we male or are we female? Do we have penetrators or orifices? And if both, what does that mean?"[62] The female vampire thus queerly collapses binary distinctions of gender. She is anatomically female yet performs a sexually masculine act. She is a woman who behaves like a man, embodying an androgynous or liminal sexuality that Victorian culture strictly outlawed in life but perversely explored in art.

Recognizing the meshing of abjection, the *monstrous-feminine*, queer desire, and *femme fatale* concepts deepens understanding of why the female vampire remains such a compelling figure. It allows the imagery of voluptuous lips and sharp teeth of the vampiress not just a gothic trope, but a mirror of societal desires and dreads, a *fatal woman* who, in her defiance of norms, reflects the changing face of female agency.

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[60] Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine*, 225.
[61] Ellis Hanson, "Undead," in *Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories*, ed. Diana Fuss (New York: Routledge, 1991),
[62] Christopher Craft, "'Kiss Me with Those Red Lips': Gender and Inversion in Bram Stoker's Dracula," *Representations* 8, no. 8 (October 1984): 109, https://doi.org/10.2307/2928560.

The contemporary vampire has increasingly become a postmodern hybrid, shaped by scientific rationalization, abjection, and the erosion of boundaries between human and inhuman. The vampire, as a walking corpse, is abject, a being that fascinates and sickens in equal measure, collapsing the boundary between the living and the dead. This situates the vampire as a posthuman figure, forcing us to question what it means to be human when a once-human body returns to eternal life. The posthuman vampire also reflects the postmodern fascination with hybrid identities and blurred genres.

As Stacey Abbott explains, late-twentieth-century and twenty-first-century narratives have reframed vampirism through the lens of science and reason, rationalizing the supernatural. In place of the purely folkloric curse, vampirism is now frequently explained as a biological condition or pathogen.[63] Matheson's *I Am Legend* was a significant work in this regard, which departed from Gothic tradition by attributing vampirism to a microbiological plague.[64] This idea proved profoundly influential on later depictions. As Abbott adds, whereas earlier literature often used vampirism metaphorically, many contemporary vampire films, such as *Blade*, *Underworld,* or *Daybreakers,* and novels explicitly describe vampirism as a virus or genetic mutation.[65] The underlying premise is rationalization. The vampire transforms from an occult fiend to a scientifically explicable organism, subject to empirical study and medical intervention. Modern storytellers both demystify and refresh the archetype by explaining vampirism in scientific terms, and the vampire is reborn as a posthuman viral entity in horror and science fiction. One prominent example Abbott mentions is Guillermo del Toro's *The Strain*. This story equates vampirism with a viral pandemic where vampiric infection is spread by parasitic bloodworms carrying a mutagenic virus. In *The Strain*, the vampire becomes a hybrid of science and folklore, a monster understood through modern medicine and ancient legend. Stacey Abbott observes that the series *"*embeds vampirism within discourses surrounding science, folklore, mythology, technology, and pest control."[66] In other words, it juxtaposes the clinical gaze of treating vampires as infectious vermin with the mythic, folkloric perspective of perceiving vampires as folkloric revenants. This postmodern hybridization is further reflected in the visual and narrative style of *The Strain*. Its vampires are grotesquely abject, hairless, noseless Others with stinger-tongues and parasitic physiology, even as they are

[63] Stacey Abbott, *Undead Apocalypse : Vampires and Zombies in the 21st Century* (Edinburgh Univ Pr, 2016), 44-46.
[64] Matheson, *I Am Legend*.
[65] Abbott, *Undead Apocalypse*, 120-124.
[66] Abbott, *Undead Apocalypse*, 50.

analyzed via microscopes and fought with UV lamps and inoculation attempts.[67] By introducing a scientific rationale for vampirism, the tale amplifies the horror. The vampire is terrifying not because it is unearthly, but because it is all too plausible. This approach grounds the vampires in reality and evokes fears of contamination. The result is a posthuman vampire who is uncanny and eerie precisely because it blurs the line between a human pathogen and a folkloric demon. Modern outbreak narratives such as *The Strain* consciously evoke twenty-first-century fears of global pandemics. Abbott notes that their narratives "evoke the twentieth-century apocalyptic discourses surrounding the threat of global pandemic."[68] The vampire's infection thus mirrors contemporary fears of viral apocalypse, an "unavoidable global threat"[69] frequently reflected in news headlines and horror fiction. In this way, the postmodern hybrid vampire serves as a measure of public anxiety, reflecting dread of pandemics onto the age-old framework of vampirism.

Just as importantly, the scientific rationalization of the vampire forces a reconsideration of the creature's supernatural status and an ethical dilemma. If vampirism is a disease, then the vampire is situated somewhere between monster and victim. This tension is explored in many hybrid narratives. For example, *I Am Legend* ultimately inverts the traditional roles: the hero, Neville, discovers that the infected vampires have built a new society and regard him as a murderous abnormality.[70] This twist shows the uncertainty introduced by the postmodern approach, as who is human and who is a monster depends on perspective.

As Rosi Braidotti mentions, such themes align with posthumanist theory, which questions anthropocentric hierarchy and embraces the idea that the human is not a fixed essence but can be transcended or transformed.[71] The viral vampire narrative echoes this by showing humanity evolving or devolving into a new species. The posthuman vampire is not merely a terrifying Other to be destroyed, but a possible successor or mirror to humankind. This perspective raises questions about whether an infection can strip away one's humanity, what then separates humans from monsters, and whether vampires are simply Kristeva's *"*partially formed subjects,"[72] cast out to define what we are not. Works like *The Strain* and *I Am Legend* invite such questions by covering their monsters with a scientific legitimacy. In doing so, they

[67] *The Strain* (FX, 2014).
[68] Abbott, *Undead Apocalypse*, 50-52.
[69] Abbott, *Undead Apocalypse*, 51.
[70] Matheson, *I Am Legend*.
[71] Rosi Braidotti, *The Posthuman* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013), 36-39.
[72] Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine*, 51.

transform the vampire from a Gothic villain into a complex posthuman figure that embodies scientific understanding and abjection, blurring boundaries between the rational and the irrational, the human and the monstrous.

Parallel to the rise of the viral undead, the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries have seen the evolution of a different vampire archetype, the romanticized contemporary vampire. If the postmodern hybrid vampire reflects fear of contagion and loss of control, the romantic vampire reflects desires and shifting social values. As reflected in previous archetypes, vampires in fiction are never only vampires; they personify societal fears and fantasies, representing what each age fears and craves. In past eras, the vampire largely stood as an avatar of evil and temptation, a sinister invader to be destroyed by righteous heroes. However, as society's attitudes toward otherness, sexuality, and morality have evolved, so has the vampire. Contemporary audiences have adopted a new archetype of vampire, one recast as a sympathetic antihero or romantic interest, in line with contemporary tastes.

The roots of the romantic vampire go back to earlier literature with Lord Byron's darkly charismatic Giaour and Polidori's Lord Ruthven as early models of the Byronic vampire. Still, the archetype reached new heights with late-twentieth-century authors like Anne Rice. Rice's *Interview with the Vampire* fundamentally shifted the genre by telling the story from the vampire's point of view and eliciting the reader's empathy for monstrous characters. In Rice's novel, vampires are not faceless predators but brooding, elegant antiheroes consumed by existential angst and loneliness. The protagonist Louis de Pointe du Lac is tormented by guilt and moral conflict, and his maker and companion Lestat is rebellious, seductive, and vain, in many ways a Byronic hero in vampiric form, as proud, defiant, yet haunted.[73] This marked the emergence of what Joan Gordon termed the "sympathetic vampire" in modern fiction, a figure that invites identification with the otherness once feared.[74] Rather than recoiling from the vampire's alien nature, the audience is asked to share the vampire's perspective. The novel made readers root for the vampire to win and survive, rather than for the human heroes to vanquish him, making the novel an intriguing subject for analysis.

This sympathetic turn also opened the door for explicitly queer and feminist interpretations. Rice's vampires, for example, famously blur traditional gender and sexual

[73] Anne Rice, *Interview with the Vampire* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2014).
[74] Joan Gordon, "Rehabilitating Revenants, or Sympathetic Vampires in Recent Fiction," *Extrapolation* 29, no. 3 (October 1988): 227–34, https://doi.org/10.3828/extr.1988.29.3.227.

categories. *The Vampire Chronicles* present vampires as sensual beings attracted to beauty and personality rather than a specific gender, going beyond human norms. Ian Clark notes that *Interview with the Vampire* effectively "[c]onstructs its vampires as distinctly queer 'Others'", mirroring the outsider status of gay men, especially in the context of the AIDS crisis era.[75] Rather than framing queerness as villainous, as *Dracula* and other earlier works did, framing the vampire's sensual transgressions as deviant, Rice's sympathetic vampires ask for understanding and acceptance. This queering of the vampire set a precedent that later works would amplify.

For instance, the movie *Let the Right One In* presents a child vampire, Eli, whose gender is ambiguous, and even in the novel, Eli is effectively agender or a castrated boy who lives as a girl.[76] Eli's bond with a human boy, Oskar, subverts heteronormative romance and childhood innocence.[77] Their relationship is transgressive, blending first love, queer undertones, and the vampiric threat and yet the film elicits profound sympathy for both. The vampire in this work is a protector and friend, not a monster to be slain. Similarly, the HBO series *True Blood* used vampires as a clear allegory for LGBTQ+ minorities. Vampires in *True Blood* fight for civil rights, face televangelist hate groups, and navigate interspecies romance, in storylines that consciously parallel queer experiences and other marginalized identities.[78] The vampire, once an unambiguously evil invader, is now often a mirror for the oppressed outsider, a vehicle to explore themes of tolerance, identity, and otherness in modern society.

Perhaps the most globally influential instance of the romanticized vampire is Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* saga. *Twilight* took the idea of the Byronic vampire lover to an extreme, reimagining the folkloric revenant as a handsome, morally virtuous hero. Meyer's vampire protagonist, Edward Cullen, is described as beautiful, sensitive, chivalrous, yet dangerous. This combination of predator and protector shows the modern romantic vampire's allure: Edward is the deadly predator and the gallant knight at once.[79] The saga shifts almost entirely away from horror, recasting vampirism as an alluring condition that grants beauty, immortality, and superpowers, at a price. Notably, the Cullen family of vampires practices vegetarianism by abstaining from human blood out of a moral code, showing that vampires can choose to be

[75] Ian Clark, "Infectious Queers: HIV/AIDS and the Vampiric Body in Interview with the Vampire (1994)," *Journal of Dracula Studies.* 24, no. 1 (January 1, 2022), 28-30. https://doi.org/10.70013/n1p5h7g4.
[76] John Ajvide Lindqvist and Ebba Segerberg, *Let the Right One In* (London: Riverrun, 2017).
[77] *Let the Right One In* (Sandrew Metronome Distribution, 2008).
[78] *True Blood* (Fries Entertainment, 2008).
[79] Stephenie Meyer, *Twilight* (Hachette UK, 2009).

ethical and good. Here, the vampire is not alien but compatible with human society; the Cullens, albeit covertly, integrate into a small-town community, attend high school, and form loving family bonds. Bella Swan's journey is not to destroy the monster but to marry him and even become a vampire herself. The traditional narrative has been completely inverted; the predator and prey become husband and wife. By the end of *Twilight*, the abject vampire has been redeemed as an idealized being, and Bella herself is reborn as a beautiful, immortal vampire, securing both eternal love and youth. The abject has become the ideal.

Despite its popularity, *Twilight* has sparked debate, particularly among feminist critics. Some view Bella's choices about marriage, sex, and motherhood as expressions of agency and see the Cullen women as symbols of empowerment.[80] Others argue the series reinforces traditional gender roles: Bella is often passive and defined by her relationship with Edward, who is protective to the point of being controlling, and independent female choices are frequently punished, framing the saga as anti-feminist.[81] The dynamic of a powerful male vampire and a mortal heroine echoes the Byronic hero tradition. However, the dark lover might empower female desire or uphold patriarchal ideals where women must redeem dangerous men through submission and love. The Twilight controversy highlights how vampire fiction continues to reflect and challenge contemporary gender norms.

The contemporary romanticized vampire marks a notable inversion of the figure's earlier cultural associations. Once framed primarily as a cautionary symbol of monstrosity or transgressive sin, the modern vampire has emerged as a multifaceted figure through which writers and audiences explore evolving conceptions of morality, desire, and identity. Many of today's vampires bear the hallmarks of the Byronic hero as charismatic, emotionally tormented, and oppositional to normative morality. These traits now define characters from Anne Rice's refined outsiders to the brooding protagonists of young adult fiction. Queer theorists have frequently interpreted the vampire's liminal status and fluid eroticism as subversions of heteronormativity and as affirmations of queer subjectivity. Feminist criticism, meanwhile, remains divided on the figure's gender politics. Some view the romantic vampire as a site of female empowerment through narratives of mutual devotion and erotic agency, while others

[80] Christine Jarvis, "The Twilight of Feminism? Stephenie Meyer's Saga and the Contradictions of Contemporary Girlhood," *Children's Literature in Education* 45, no. 2 (September 26, 2013): 101–15, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10583-013-9212-9.
[81] Lauren Rocha, "Wife, Mother, Vampire: The Female Role in the Twilight Series," *Journal of International Women's Studies* 15, no. 2 (July 1, 2014): 286–98.

argue that it reinscribes patriarchal power under the guise of romantic idealism. The vampire's cultural function has thus expanded beyond that of the monstrous antagonist. It now serves simultaneously as an object of fear and desire, symbolizing marginalization and artistic aspiration. As it moves from Gothic margins into the mainstream of popular culture, the vampire becomes increasingly hybridized as part monster, part antihero, part romantic partner, part cultural icon. In this process, the figure is frequently sanitized and idealized yet retains its capacity as a potent metaphor for various anxieties and longings.

Romanticization in Literature

Romanticization in literature refers to reframing traditionally negative or dangerous traits to make them appealing, desirable, or sympathetic.[82] This phenomenon is particularly evident in portrayals of monsters and villains, who shift from feared entities to tragic or alluring figures. Vampires exemplify this transition, evolving from monstrous predators into icons of beauty, existential suffering, and tragic love.

According to Frye, literature functions within mythic and symbolic structures that shape how readers perceive certain archetypes. Figures once feared in folklore often transition into heroic or sympathetic roles over time. This transformation follows specific literary patterns that move characters between *demonic*, *tragic*, and *romantic* archetypes.[83] However, other scholars argue that romanticization is not simply a natural literary process but an active cultural reconfiguration influenced by audience reception and social trends. Franiuk and Scherr discuss how modern readers' fascination with the dangerous yet desirable vampire reflects contemporary anxieties about power, relationships, and control.[84] This notion explains the popularity of vampires throughout history, from *Der Vampir* to contemporary works like *Twilight*[85] or *Interview with the Vampire*.

Frye's theory of myths categorizes literature into four seasonal archetypes, each corresponding to a different literary mode. The winter mode, often associated with irony and satire, portrays a world of darkness, monsters, and decay,[86] which aligns with Dracula's early representations as a demonic force. The autumn mode, linked to tragedy,[87] focuses on the decline of a hero, which can be observed in characters such as Louis in *Interview with the Vampire*.[88] The summer mode represents romance and idealized heroism,[89] which is evident in the portrayal of Edward Cullen in *Twilight*, partially inspired by *Interview with the Vampire*.[90]

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[82] "Romanticization." *Oxford English Dictionary*. Accessed February 2, 2025. https://www.oed.com/dictionary/romanticization_n.
[83] Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (S.L.: Princeton University Press, 1957), 131-168.
[84] Renae Franiuk and Samantha Scherr, "'The Lion Fell in Love with the Lamb,'" *Feminist Media Studies* 13, no. 1 (January 31, 2013): 14–28, https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2011.647966.
[85] Meyer, *Twilight*.
[86] Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, 223-226.
[87] Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, 206.
[88] Kathleen Rout, "Who Do You Love? Anne Rice's Vampires and Their Moral Transition," *The Journal of Popular Culture* 36, no. 3 (January 2003): 473, https://doi.org/10.1111/1540-5931.00017.
[89] Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, 186.
[90] Angela Tenga and Elizabeth Zimmerman, "Vampire Gentlemen and Zombie Beasts: A Rendering of True Monstrosity," *Gothic Studies* 15, no. 1 (May 2013): 79, https://doi.org/10.7227/gs.15.1.8.

Finally, the spring mode, tied to comedy and rebirth,[91] is less commonly associated with vampires but can be seen in parody works like *What We Do in the Shadows*.[92] This demonstrates the sheer variety in which vampires can be read, viewed, and interpreted.

Frye notes that characters evolve between these modes. Dracula embodies "the world that desire totally rejects: the nightmare and the grotesque."[93] However, as literature humanizes its monsters, vampires transition toward tragedy and romance, integrating emotional depth, moral conflict, and existential suffering. In *Interview with the Vampire*, Anne Rice employs what Frye calls analogical imagery, blending realism and myth to position the vampire between monstrosity and humanity. Unlike Dracula, Lestat and Louis experience introspection and emotional struggle, making them more relatable and, consequently, romanticized. Kathleen Rout expands on this idea, arguing that Rice's vampires reflect the characteristics of the Byronic hero,[94] emphasizing their emotional depth, moral ambiguity, and departure from traditional portrayals of pure evil.[95] This makes *Dracula* and *Interview with the Vampire* not only the opposite according to Frye's seasons, but also complete opposites on the scale of romanticization, making their distinctive characters worth analysing.

Frye's chapter, *Theory of Symbols,* explains why readers sympathize with once-feared figures. He categorizes symbolism into four levels: literal (descriptive) symbolism, in which the monster is purely evil as seen in early depictions of Dracula; formal symbolism, in which narrative structure affects perception, such as how *Interview with the Vampire* uses first-person narration to invite reader empathy; mythical symbolism, in which the monster becomes an archetype, leading to the emergence of the Byronic vampire trope; and anagogic symbolism, in which the vampire transcends fear and represents desire, rebellion, and immortality, as exemplified in Edward Cullen's portrayal in *Twilight*.[96]

As literature progresses, vampires move from demonic (winter) to romantic (summer) archetypes, making them idealized, tragic figures rather than monsters. Angela Tenga supports this idea, noting that modern vampire fiction rebrands the vampire as a misunderstood noble being, softening their monstrous traits to make them alluring.[97] However, this transition is not

[91] Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, 163.
[92] Jemaine Clement*, "What We Do in the Shadows,"* TV *series (FX, 2019).*
[93] Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, 147.
[94] Thorslev, *The Byronic Hero*.
[95] Rout, "Who Do You Love," 473–479.
[96] Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, 71-115.
[97] Tenga et al., "Vampire Gentlemen and Zombie Beasts, 76.

always a neutral process, as Franiuk and Scherr remind readers that romanticized vampires reinforce problematic power dynamics, presenting predatory behaviors as desirable within certain narratives.[98] Such portrayals blur the lines between coercion and consent, danger and desire, ultimately inviting readers to sympathize with figures who would traditionally be condemned.

While Frye presents literary evolution as a structured transformation, other scholars argue that romanticization is not inevitable but actively shaped by cultural perception. Franiuk and Scherr critique the portrayal of romanticized vampires, particularly in works like *Twilight*, for normalizing unhealthy relationship dynamics. They argue that contemporary vampire fiction reinforces traditional gender roles by framing the vampire as both a dangerous and ideal romantic partner, a dominant patriarch. Through narratives emphasizing possessiveness and dominance as signs of love, these works contribute to cultural perceptions of power and control in relationships.[99] This challenges Frye's idea that romanticization follows an archetypal cycle, instead suggesting that the reader's desire dictates the evolution of vampires in fiction.

Similarly, Morris opposes Frye's structured theory of mythic evolution, arguing that monsters like vampires have always contained elements of both horror and allure. Rather than transitioning from demonic to romantic, Morris suggests that vampires were never purely monstrous; they have always been liminal figures positioned between fear and fascination.[100] This contradicts Frye's claim that monsters begin as terrifying figures and later gain sympathetic qualities, which makes vampires a polarizing figure among literary critics and readers alike.

The romanticization of vampires in literature reflects a dynamic interplay between literary tradition, cultural perception, and audience reception. While Northrop Frye's theory of mythic evolution suggests that monsters transition from fearsome figures to tragic or romantic archetypes, scholars like Morris challenge this linear progression, arguing that vampires have always occupied a liminal space between horror and allure. Anne Rice and Stephenie Meyer exemplify how narrative techniques, such as first-person perspective and moral introspection, encourage reader empathy, reinforcing the vampires' shift toward romance and existential tragedy. However, as Franiuk and Scherr contend, this transformation is not merely a natural

[98] Franiuk and Scherr, "'The Lion Fell in Love," 14–28.
[99] Franiuk and Scherr, "'The Lion Fell in Love," 14–25.
[100] Morris, "Superstition," 184–199.

literary evolution but a reflection of societal anxieties, often reinforcing problematic power dynamics by framing possessiveness and dominance as desirable traits. Rather than following an inevitable archetypal cycle, the portrayal of vampires is actively shaped by cultural desires, demonstrating how monstrous figures are continuously reimagined to reflect contemporary fears, fantasies, and social constructs.

Dracula: The Inescapable Other and Limits Of Romanticization

To illustrate the shift in perception of vampires in literature from hideous, monstrous antagonists to shiny, mesmerising protagonists, it is essential to analyse how they are described and perceived. The very definition of a vampire is a reawakened corpse that preys on the living for their blood during the night.[101] The exact words, such as "corpse," "dead person," or "a demon," signify the very disgust the reader should feel when imagining such a character. A cadaver that, through a curse, tears its casket open and sneaks into the homes of the living to sustain itself with its very life source.[102] Such a creature would have a foul stench of death, deathly cold to the touch, and would not be appealing to look at in the slightest. The question, then, is not merely how the vampire changed, but how readers were persuaded to desire what they once feared. To examine this shift, Bram Stoker's *Dracula* serves as a critical point of departure, a novel in which the vampire still resists all efforts at romanticization, echoing Frye's claims, maintaining its role as a monstrous antagonist rather than a tragic subject.

Bram Stoker's *Dracula* firmly positions its titular vampire not as a sympathetic anti-hero but as an antagonistic Other, kept at a narrative and emotional distance. The novel's epistolary form of diaries, letters, and newspaper clippings belongs solely to Dracula's victims. The readers never gain access to Dracula's perspective, his insights, thoughts, or feelings; instead, he is only observed through the fearful eyes of Jonathan Harker, Mina Murray, Dr. Seward, and others. As Nick Groom observes, "Dracula is a mass of papers – a scrapbook of textual proofs," a figure pieced together from external testimony rather than direct narration.[103] His motives are inferred, never confessed, and the puzzle of his presence is solved by those he threatens. This structural choice denies Dracula the narrative interiority, ensuring he remains a mysterious, threatening presence rather than a relatable protagonist. As Northrop Frye describes, Dracula belongs to "the world that desire totally rejects," appearing only as "the nightmare and the grotesque."[104]Alexia Ainsworth also notes of Stoker's technique, "there are […] characters that never have a voice. Dracula […] [is] isolated by the mixed-epistolary form,"[105] resulting in heightening suspense and keeping the Count uninterpretable. Dracula

[101]"Vampire," in *Cambridge Dictionary*, accessed August 25, 2024, https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/vampire.
[102] Summers, *The Vampire*, 78.
[103] Groom, *The Vampire,* 202.
[104] Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, 147.
[105] Alexia Mandla Ainsworth, "Constructing Evil through the Epistolary in Bram Stoker's Dracula," *The Macksey Journal* 1, no. 1 (September 2020), 6.

slips in and out of the narrative as an object of letters and memories, becoming a spectral absence, a ghost, central to the story but a voiceless 'thing' to be found and destroyed, never afforded the direct voice that might invite readerly sympathy, only highlighting his monstrousness.

Crucially, Dracula is also characterized as irredeemably foreign and culturally Other, amplifying his role as an invasive antagonist rather than a familiar character. Groom describes him as exhibiting "a malign Gothic hybridity" and being "shrouded under a swarm of strange and baffling names," reinforcing his estrangement from any stable, familiar identity.[106] Harker's journal is full of orientalist unease. He traverses through "one of the wildest and least known portions of Europe"[107] toward the Count's castle in Transylvania. He encounters superstitious peasants, hears strange words like *vrolok* and *vlkoslák,* meaning vampire, and feels a sense of crossing into a world apart from modern, civilized England. Dracula himself is linked to a lineage of "Szekely" warriors and "voivodes," a proud ancestry he boasts of at length, marking him as a relic of a barbarous past, one who "received the `bloody sword,' [...] at its warlike call" in contrast to the "dishonourable peace"[108] of Victorian modernity. He is the Other ethnically, as a Transylvanian count among the English population, temporally, as a medieval warlord in a modern age, and theologically, as an undead blasphemy against Christian beliefs. Such othering prevents romantic identification, far from a brooding Byronic gentleman with whom a reader or character might fall in love, Stoker's Count is an anachronistic intruder to be repelled instead. As Stephen Arata observes, *Dracula* exploits a "reverse colonization"[109] panic, the notion of a devouring foreigner infiltrating the heart of the British Empire. Ken Gelder likewise frames this as an imperial anxiety, noting that "vampirisation is colonisation – or rather, from the British perspective, reverse colonisation."[110] Count Dracula arrives in England as a shadowy conqueror rather than a potential lover, reinforcing his role as a threat to order, not a dark reflection of the self.

Moreover, Dracula's motives remain unreadable and seemingly devoid of personal passion, as he exhibits no emotional ambiguity that might invite romanticized interpretation. His goals are communicated and decoded through actions, such as a secret shipment of his

[106] Groom, *The Vampire*, 201.
[107] Bram Stoker, *Dracula* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1897), 2.
[108] Stoker, *Dracula*, 32-33.
[109] Stephen D. Arata, "The Occidental Tourist: 'Dracula' and the Anxiety of Reverse Colonization," *Victorian Studies* 33, no. 4 (1990): 621–45, https://www.jstor.org/stable/3827794.
[110] Gelder, *Reading the Vampire*, 12.

boxes filled with earth to England and his predation on Lucy and Mina, rather than monologues and confessions. Unlike later vampire protagonists who often brood over their condition or seek love and acceptance, Dracula never articulates why he aims to expand his vampiric reach. The suggested motivation for his action is that, being evil, he simply must. Van Helsing describes the Count as a malign force of nature, a "monster" to be hunted to extinction: "We must either capture or kill this monster in his lair; or we must, so to speak, sterilize the earth," he insists. Such language illustrates that Dracula is viewed purely as a menace, a supernatural contagion to be eliminated, not a tormented soul to be understood. The protagonists, his victims, do not attempt to reason with or redeem Dracula; they form an alliance to destroy him with a crucifix, blades, and guns. In a confrontation, Dracula boasts of his utter dominance and lack of human sentiment. Confronted by the characters, he declares triumphantly: "Your girls that you all love are mine already; and through them you and others shall yet be mine—my creatures, to do my bidding and to be my jackals when I want to feed."[111] In this chilling taunt, Dracula refers to Lucy and Mina not as beloved individuals but as "creatures" under his thrall and envisions the men themselves reduced to animals. The Count's words thus deny any pretense of affection or intimacy; he views relationships only in terms of domination and consumption. His so-called "friendship"[112] with Harker at the castle, too, is a polite charade that barely conceals his intent to imprison and eventually kill his guest. The over-frequent use of the term "friend" in Dracula's conversations with Harker and in a letter saying "I trust that your journey from London has been a happy one, and that you will enjoy your stay in my beautiful land.—Your friend, 'Dracula'"[113] is a fragile mask hiding harmful intentions, a fact Harker soon realizes as he finds himself a captive in a vampire ridden lair. In short, Dracula is never allowed to become a subject with whom the audience might sympathize; he remains the object of horror, an adversary defined by what he does to others, not any inner life of his own.

Accordingly, it is not unexpected that any attempt to romanticize Dracula collapses against the novel's portrayal of him as implacably evil and emotionally barren. Dracula is a being with no heart, a point proven early on by one of his vampiric companions. When Dracula pulls Harker away from the vampiric sisters who hunger for him, one of them laughs and taunts the Count with a cutting accusation: "You yourself never loved; you never love!"[114] This retort, along with "mirthless, hard, soulless laughter," is Stoker's verdict on his titular character as

[111] Stoker, *Dracula*, 333.
[112] Stoker, *Dracula*, 46.
[113]Stoker, *Dracula*, 4.
[114] Stoker, *Dracula*, 43.

much as the brides' mockery. The Count cannot love and therefore cannot be loved by either readers or characters in a romantically heroic light. Dracula's only response is a half-snarled, perhaps facetious, claim that "Yes, I too can love; you yourselves can tell it from the past. Is it not so?"[115] before he turns the subject back to violence. In *Dracula*, love is a language the vampire does not speak or understand, except as an affectation to manipulate others or as a grotesque parody, distancing him from humanlike qualities in every aspect of his life. This fundamental absence of emotional ambiguity or romantic vulnerability in Count Dracula precludes any modern interpretation of the vampire as a brooding, misunderstood loner. Therefore, Dracula remains fixed within the realm of horror, a figure of pure predation and otherness, rather than a dark mirror to the human yearning.

If later vampire fiction often eroticizes the vampire's bite as a sensual kiss or reframes violence as a thrilling spectacle, Dracula pointedly resists such aestheticization. Stoker's depictions of vampiric violence are grotesque, visceral, and clinical, stripping away any trace of romantic or erotic embellishment from scenes of bloodshed. Two scenes, particularly the staking of Lucy Westenra and the various encounters with Dracula's three female companions, illustrate how thoroughly the novel casts vampire violence as abhorrent rather than alluring. Stoker's depiction of violence in *Dracula* aligns with what Barbara Creed identifies as the horror genre's fascination with abjection, particularly "the corpse, whole and mutilated," as well as bodily substances like "blood, vomit, saliva, sweat, tears, and putrefying flesh."[116] These elements serve not merely as narrative shock tactics but as a means of ritualistically pushing the vampire figure away from erotic appeal and into the realm of physical and moral revulsion.

The death of Lucy at the hands of her former fiancé and friends constitutes one of the most graphic and shocking scenes in the novel, described with the precision of a surgical procedure and the horror of a demonic exorcism. Far from a dignified vanquishing of evil, the act of staking Lucy's undead body is rendered in explicit, gory detail. Dr. Seward's diary recounts how Arthur Holmwood, grief-stricken but resolute, drives a sharpened wooden stake through the heart of the woman he once loved: "The body shook and quivered and twisted in wild contortions; […] Arthur never faltered […] driving deeper and deeper the mercy-bearing stake, whilst the blood from the pierced heart welled and spurted up around it."[117] The language in this passage leave no room for romanticization: spurted blood, a writhing body, and the men's

[115] Stoker, *Dracula*, 43.
[116] Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine*, 58-59.
[117] Stoker, *Dracula*, 232.

voices rising in a prayerful chorus to mask the grisly "screech[ing]"[118] of the victim. Stoker compels the reader to confront the visceral brutality of violence: "It made me shudder to think of so mutilating the body of the woman whom I had loved,"[119] as Seward notes in his diary. The narrators emphasize the monstrous deformity of the act: not only does Lucy's once-beautiful body convulse in a grotesque parody of life, but her destroyers are also acutely aware of the ghastly defilement they carry out. As Creed writes, horror "saturate[s] [the audience] with scenes of blood and gore," exposing the fragility of bodily and symbolic boundaries."[120] In *Dracula*, this excess is not thrilling but cleansing; the vampire's body is rendered abject and must be destroyed.

There is no lingering on beauty or pleasure; the scene mirrors a grim sacrifice, necessary but sickening. Arthur's face is described as "set, and high duty seemed to shine through it"[121] during the act: he is motivated by obligation, not desire, and when the task is complete, he nearly collapses in anguish and exhaustion. Afterward, the men take further steps to strip the corpse of any romantic associations: Seward notes that they "cut off the head and filled the mouth with garlic"[122] before sealing Lucy's coffin. This almost clinical post-mortem procedure, decapitation and ritual purification, shows that what has taken place is not an act of liberation or mourning, but a necessary eradication of a contaminated body. As Creed explains, the horror genre stages such confrontations "in order finally to eject the abject and redraw the boundaries between the human and non-human."[123] In *Dracula*, Lucy's staking and dismemberment are not only physical corrections, but symbolic ones, as acts meant to restore order by violently removing what has become monstrous. The scene's conclusion offers not a darkly cathartic thrill, but a sense of solemn relief that Lucy's soul has been granted peace. Once the "foul Thing"[124] is destroyed, her features soften from the grotesque vampiric mask into the serene beauty of "sweetness and purity,"[125] affirming that all traces of erotic evil have been eradicated and that no aspect of it was intended to be desirable.

In Stoker's portrayal, the violence of the staking deliberately lacks any aesthetic triumph beyond religious deliverance; it is depicted as a grim, gruesome task. Whereas later novels or

[118] Stoker, *Dracula*, 232.
[119] Stoker, *Dracula*, 216.
[120] Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine*, 70.
[121] Stoker, *Dracula*, 232.
[122] Stoker, *Dracula*, 233.
[123] Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine*, 73.
[124] Stoker, *Dracula*, 229.
[125] Stoker, *Dracula*, 232.

films may linger on the erotic charge associated with penetrating the heart of a beautiful vampire woman, a metaphor saturated with sexual undertones, *Dracula* emphasizes the act's physical brutality and moral righteousness, rather than any form of appeal. The scene's graphic focus on blood and horror ensures that Lucy's second "true de[ath]"[126] is framed not as sensual, but as a grotesque and final eradication of perversion.

The encounters with Dracula's three brides, or "weird sisters," likewise resist any attempt to romanticize vampiric violence. When Jonathan Harker first encounters these female vampires, the scene shows daring eroticism by Victorian standards, framing the female vampires as *femme fatales*. However, this eroticism is constructed to collapse, switching to predatory horror at the very moment of its most heightened allure. Half-dreaming in the Count's castle, Harker is approached by the three spectral women and experiences a disorienting combination of desire and revulsion. He records that one of them, with calculated sensuality, bends to kiss his throat: "There was a deliberate voluptuousness which was both thrilling and repulsive, and as she arched her neck she actually licked her lips like an animal."[127] Stoker's wording here is significant: although the woman is described as "voluptuous,"[128] Harker's reaction is inseparable from disgust. Her beauty is not merely seductive but explicitly predatory; she "licked her lips like an animal"[129] at the scent of his blood. The imagery that might otherwise be interpreted as sensual, such as lips, neck, and sensuous movement, is deliberately undermined by its bestial context. Harker is simultaneously aroused, admitting that he felt "a wicked, burning desire that they would kiss me," and horrified, feeling "a deadly fear"[130] in the exact moment. This overlap of desire and repulsion functions as a deliberate narrative strategy by Stoker to ensure that the impending violence cannot be mistaken for consensual seduction. The scene is abruptly interrupted by Dracula's furious intervention. The Count materializes "as if lapped in a storm of fury,"[131] his eyes blazing red with infernal rage. He violently hurls the woman away from Harker while scolding the three women with the possessive declaration, "[t]his man belongs to me."[132] The women's reaction is telling. Far from expressing romantic longing, they break into cold, joyless laughter as one scornfully claims that Dracula is incapable of love. The scene's atmosphere shifts from near-sensual indulgence to a display of malevolent

[126] Stoker, *Dracula*, 233.
[127] Stoker, *Dracula*, 42.
[128]Stoker, *Dracula*, 41.
[129]Stoker, *Dracula*, 42.
[130]Stoker, *Dracula*, 41.
[131]Stoker, *Dracula*, 42.
[132]Stoker, *Dracula*, 43.

glee and predatory hunger. Dracula responds not with tenderness but by offering the women a living child to consume. “When I am done with him, you shall kiss him at your will,”[133] the Count says of Harker, but in the meantime, he presents them with a crying infant he kidnapped, effectively reducing the moment to a grotesque feeding ritual.

The subsequent events are not directly depicted, left undescribed, but their horror is unmistakable. Harker later hears the anguished cries of the mother whose child was taken. She screams at the castle gates, “Monster, give me my child,”[134] and Harker realizes that the vampires have devoured the infant. This moment constitutes a shocking inversion of maternal and erotic imagery. The brides, who moments earlier appeared as voluptuous seductresses, are now rendered as child-killers, and Dracula himself is not a romantic figure but a provider and enabler of predation. Harker’s response is not titillation but existential despair. “I could not pity her, for I knew now what had become of her child, and she was better dead,”[135] he writes, horrified by the depth of evil he has witnessed. The brutal reality of this act of cannibalistic violence extinguishes any trace of romantic or sexual tension. Stoker ensures that even the most sexually charged vampire encounter in the novel doubles as a scene of unspeakable atrocity.

Throughout *Dracula*, this pattern persists: what later adaptations or works of fiction might present through an eroticized and stylized lens is, in the novel, depicted as grim and unsettling, which makes the violence viscerally disturbing rather than seductive. The vampire’s attack is more often associated with animalistic or pathological behavior than with any form of intimacy. When Dracula ultimately assaults Mina Murray during a pivotal nocturnal episode, the imagery is framed explicitly as a grotesque parody of intimacy. The scene that greets Dr. Seward upon entering the Harkers’ bedroom constitutes one of the novel’s most disturbing representations of vampiric assault:

> With his left hand, he held both Mrs Harker’s hands, keeping them away with her arms at full tension; his right hand gripped her by the back of the neck, forcing her face down on his bosom. Her white nightdress was smeared with blood, and a thin stream trickled down the man's bare breast, which was shown by his torn-open dress. The attitude of the two had a terrible resemblance to a child forcing a kitten's nose into a saucer of milk to compel it to drink.[136]

[133]Stoker, *Dracula*, 43.
[134]Stoker, *Dracula*, 50.
[135]Stoker, *Dracula*, 50.
[136] Stoker, *Dracula*, 305.

The narrative prompts the reader to recoil from this scene. The classical image of a man cradling a woman to his chest is distorted into a grotesque act of feeding. Dracula opens a vein in his breast and forces Mina to ingest his blood. The simile, in which a child forces a kitten's face into a saucer of milk, underscores both the unnatural coercion of the scene and the pathetic vulnerability of the victim. Mina is not depicted as a swooning romantic figure but as a helpless, innocent creature subjected to ritualized torment, a violation. The overwhelming brutality of the image subsumes any potential erotic subtext in the act of forced blood-drinking. Seward and the others interpret the scene unequivocally as a form of assault, an act of contamination and profound violation. The immediate concern of both her husband and the doctor is to rescue and purify Mina, rather than to linger on any suggestion of morbid fascination. Whether it is Lucy's staking, the brides' predation, or Mina's so-called "baptism of blood,"[137] acts of violence in *Dracula* are stripped of aesthetic or romantic appeal. They are represented in the language of disease and savagery. The grotesque embrace is horrifying precisely because it mimics the forms of intimacy, resulting in an uncanny display. In Stoker's text, bloodletting is aligned with assault or butchery, not seduction; the vampire's kiss signifies death, not desire.

Stoker's novel explores Victorian sexual morality through female characters who embody tensions between desire, transgression, and punishment. As Carol Senf argues, Stoker uses vampirism as a symbolic vehicle for expressing his ambivalence about the *New Woman* and the perceived dangers of female sexual agency.[138] Women who exhibit erotic autonomy, like Lucy, Mina, and Dracula's three brides, are portrayed as abject and must be either redeemed or destroyed. The concept of abjection, or the grotesque that must be expelled to preserve social boundaries, is central to *Dracula*. Stoker repeatedly equates female sexual liberty with abjection: undead, defiled, or grotesquely maternal. As Senf notes, characters like Lucy and the brides are rendered monstrous and annihilated to restore patriarchal stability.[139] There is no empowered or liberated female vampire in *Dracula*, only women flattened into extremes of demonic lust or angelic virtue.

Lucy Westenra's narrative arc exemplifies the Victorian association of female sexual desire with monstrosity. Initially portrayed as a lively, respectable young woman, Lucy briefly

[137] Stoker, *Dracula*, 372.
[138] Carol A. Senf, "'Dracula': Stoker's Response to the New Woman," *Victorian Studies* 26, no. 1 (1982): 39-40, https://www.jstor.org/stable/3827492.
[139] Senf, "'Dracula': Stoker's Response," 39-41.

expresses a provocative wish after receiving three marriage proposals in one day: "Why can't they let a girl marry three men, or as many as want her, and save all this trouble?" Although she immediately refers to the thought as "heresy,"[140] Lucy's brief fantasy of polyandry represents a clear departure from societal norms. As mentioned by Senf, for Victorian readers, this seemingly frivolous remark would have carried the subversive implications of *New Woman* ideology, namely, a woman envisioning a life beyond the constraints of monogamous marriage.[141] Rather than fulfilling this fantasy, Lucy becomes a cautionary example. Her transformation into a "voluptuous" predator after Dracula's assaults embodies Victorian fears of unregulated female sexuality. In her undead state, Lucy's culturally valued feminine virtues are inverted into their grotesque opposites. Dr. Seward's narrative emphasizes the extremity of this change: "Lucy Westenra, but yet how changed. The sweetness was turned to adamantine, heartless cruelty, and the purity to voluptuous wantonness."[142] The terms "voluptuous" and "wanton" were heavily charged in Victorian discourse, signifying a woman governed by sexual appetite and lacking in chastity or moral restraint, not to mention that the same vocabulary was used to describe the three vampire sisters.

Stoker underscores that Lucy's physical beauty remains after her transformation. However, it now conceals a heart described as grown cruel and a soul marked by pleasure in violence and death. When Van Helsing and the others observe Lucy as a vampire in the graveyard, she appears in a scene of profound horror: a "dark-haired woman" in burial clothes crouched over a child, her lips and face "crimson with fresh blood,"[143] the stain seeping into her funeral shroud and staining her face. Once a maiden and prospective mother, Lucy now embodies an inversion of maternity: a predator who feeds on children. The narration emphasizes this grotesque transformation as she "flung to the ground, callous as a devil, the child that up to now she had clutched strenuously to her breast, growling over it as a dog growls over a bone."[144] The maternal breast, usually a symbol of nurture, is transformed into an instrument of predatory consumption. Lucy does not express sorrow or shame when she sees her fiancé, Arthur, in this moment. Instead, with "a wanton smile," she addresses him seductively: "Come to me, Arthur. Leave these others and come to me. My arms are hungry for you. Come, and we can rest together. Come, my husband, come!" Her description and actions function as a perverse

[140] Stoker, *Dracula*, 65.
[141] Senf, "'Dracula': Stoker's Response," 42.
[142] Stoker, *Dracula*, 226.
[143] Stoker, *Dracula*, 226.
[144] Stoker, *Dracula*, 227.

distortion of both marital and maternal love, presenting desire as a lure toward destruction rather than intimacy. The novel notes "something diabolically sweet in her tones"[145] as she attempts to entice Arthur. Lucy's transformation encapsulates Victorian anxieties surrounding female sexuality: she is both a temptress and a child murderer, a direct inversion of the ideal wife and mother. The novel explicitly frames Lucy's transformation as a form of disease or possession that befalls her after she unwittingly strays and comes under the vampire's influence. Carol Senf observes that Lucy's "voluptuous wantonness" and her body in undeath turns into a "moral battlefield" in which "her awakened sexuality and her attempt to reverse the traditional sexual roles are threats to them all"[146] Stoker thereby invokes cultural fears that once a virtuous woman's sexuality is awakened outside sanctioned social structures she is at risk of losing her moral compass and becoming a threat to the very society that once protected her.

The novel treats this transgression as incurable and unforgivable. As previously discussed, Lucy is subjected to a ritualized destruction at the hands of the male protagonists, who destroy her vampiric body to liberate her soul. The restoration of her pure, angelic appearance following the staking functions as a clear moral resolution: only through death can Lucy be returned to the ideal of feminine virtue, her purity restored. Her erotic autonomy, once awakened, must be physically eradicated through instruments of stake and blade to reestablish patriarchal control, turning her back to her angelic passivity. Notably, Arthur's act of driving a stake into his fiancée's heart functions as a symbolic inversion of a marriage consummation, where penetration becomes an act of destruction rather than union. Stoker's narrative framing clarifies that this violent ritual is necessary to counter Lucy's perceived wantonness. The staking restores her beauty and peace, reinforcing the message: female desire must be eradicated once awakened outside patriarchal norms to restore social order.

Mina Harker, by contrast, is constructed as a moral counterpoint to Lucy, a woman whose virtue, intelligence, and selfless nature narrowly spare her from the same fate. She is consistently depicted as pious, capable, and devoted, though not in terms of sexual autonomy. Her symbolic violation, being forced to drink Dracula's blood, suggests that even the most virtuous women are vulnerable to corruption, and that purity offers no guaranteed protection from patriarchal domination. The crucial distinction lies in the narrative trajectory afforded to Mina, whose innate virtue and the swift intervention of the male protagonists enable her

[145] Stoker, *Dracula*, 227.
[146] Senf, "'Dracula': Stoker's Response," 44.

salvation. Following her encounter with Dracula, Mina expresses profound spiritual anguish and a sense of defilement, exclaiming, "Unclean, unclean!"[147] This phrase, echoing the biblical language of the leper's cry in Leviticus,[148] underscores the depth of her perceived moral contamination. The communion wafer that burns a scar into her forehead, marking her as both victim and potential threat. However, unlike Lucy, Mina retains her composure, moral clarity, and concern for others even under Dracula's influence. Her sexuality remains uncorrupted by the assault; the narrative frames her experience as one of involuntary violation, not moral collapse. Consequently, Mina's punishment is partial: she is marked by the vampire but never fully claimed.

The male characters unite to rescue and purify Mina, treating her as the victim of a sexual violation rather than as a transgressor. Van Helsing explicitly praises her as "one of God's women, fashioned by His hand,"[149] elevating her to a near-angelic status. This underscores that Mina exemplifies the Victorian feminine ideal: pious, loyal, and morally unwavering. Nevertheless, the trauma Mina experiences is not aestheticized or romanticized; the narrative maintains the horror of her ordeal without softening it through sentimental framing. The language surrounding Mina's violation draws upon themes of sexual assault and abject subjugation. She is positioned as Dracula's semi-conscious bride, an unwilling participant in a desecration of holy matrimony. Dracula's symbolic union with Mina is marked not by love but by blood, compulsion, and defilement. The absence of sensuality in Dracula's relationship with Mina further underscores the novel's construction of vampiric intimacy as predatory and possessive. His declaration that "[y]our girls that you love are mine already"[150] reveals his perception of women not as partners but as property to be claimed and consumed. Mina's eventual restoration at the moment of Dracula's destruction brings back moral and social order. By the novel's end, she fully reintegrates into her roles as wife and mother, naming her son after the men who saved her. Any trace of her encounter is symbolically erased, except for the fading scar. Through Mina's arc, the novel suggests that even a virtuous woman may be defiled, but if she maintains spiritual integrity and submits to male protection, she can be redeemed. Her suffering is not punishment, but a trial of virtue that she ultimately survives.

[147] Stoker, *Dracula*, 307.
[148] Leviticus 13:45, *New American Standard Bible* (New York: World Pub, 1972).
[149] Stoker, *Dracula*, 202.
[150] Stoker, *Dracula*, 333.

Dracula's brides represent hypersexuality without autonomy. Unlike Lucy or Mina, they have no identities or psychological depth. They seduce, prey, and laugh soullessly, but never express their own will. Despite their seductive allure, they are depicted as subordinate, passively residing in Dracula's castle and obeying his commands without resistance. In this regard, the brides mirror the position of Victorian women within a patriarchal structure, albeit in a grotesque, supernatural form. While they exhibit sexual assertiveness by attempting to seduce Harker and later preying on children, this desire is always shown to be compulsive rather than autonomous. Stoker does not provide them with individual identities or psychological depth; they are nearly indistinguishable, differentiated only by superficial features such as hair color. Their destruction, carried out by Van Helsing with clinical detachment, reinforces the novel's framework in which female sexuality that exists outside patriarchal control must be violently suppressed. His reflection following the staking, "the poor souls, I can pity them now,"[151] suggests a post-mortem recuperation of their humanity, but only after they have been stripped of sexual threat.

The novel offers no attempt to humanize the vampire brides or to present them as possessing individual subjectivities. Unlike later works of vampire fiction, which may grant female vampire characters emotional complexity or tragic interiority, Dracula depicts the brides as ornamental figures, as phantoms of erotic excess destined for eradication. Their characterization reinforces the notion that female sexuality, when expressed outside patriarchal constraints, is not only threatening but ultimately hollow. Their behavior, marked by what the narrative describes as "soulless laughter"[152] and predatory hunger, is presented as mechanical and devoid of emotional depth or reason. Their hypersexualization, unaccompanied by agency, marks them as threats to be neutralized. The narrative does not invite sympathy; their eradication is framed as necessary and unambiguous. In contrast to *Carmilla*, where female desire may contain pathos or ambiguity, Stoker's brides are punished without hesitation or moral conflict.

In summary, *Dracula* portrays female sexuality outside marriage as a destabilizing force. Lucy is punished, Mina is redeemed, and the brides are eliminated. Erotic desire, particularly female, is consistently shown as corruptive, transforming idealized femininity into monstrosity. This punitive framework clashes with the modern trope of the romanticized

[151] Stoker, *Dracula*, 403.
[152] Stoker, *Dracula*, 43.

vampire. In Stoker's novel, vampirism symbolizes sexual transgression, closely tied to moral decay and spiritual ruin. There is no space for consensual or redemptive intimacy, only coercion and corruption. While modern fiction often presents vampirism as tragic or empowering, *Dracula* rejects such views. Its vampires are not alluring anti-heroes but agents of contamination, and its women are either passive victims or monstrous embodiments of desire. Vampirism is treated as a contagious threat to be eradicated through the reassertion of monogamy, maternal virtue, and patriarchal control. Ultimately, the novel asserts that unregulated female sexuality is unnatural, unsalvageable, and inherently threatening to social order.

Another important aspect of the modern romanticized vampire is emotional depth, characterized by inner conflict, remorse, or a longing for connection. From Rice's tormented Louis to Meyer's morally conflicted Edward, the vampire is often burdened by the psychological toll of immortality, evoking empathy. Count Dracula, by contrast, displays no such interiority. Stoker presents him as a one-dimensional embodiment of evil and domination, devoid of psychological nuance. While later vampires are often depicted as beautiful but cursed figures, Stoker's Dracula is not damned in a tragic or redemptive sense, but simply damnable. He suffers no curse; he inflicts it.

This distinction is crucial to understanding why Dracula resists romanticization. He remains a force of horror rather than a subject of identification or pathos. Stoker gives the Count no sympathetic backstory. The limited historical glimpses depict him as a voivode, a scholar of the dark arts, and a ruthless nobleman, a figure of pride and violence rather than loss or sacrifice. Notably, there is no suggestion of a lost love, moral hesitation, or tragic fall. Even Van Helsing describes him as possessing a "child-brain"[153] in ethical and emotional development: cunning but emotionally stagnant, incapable of growth or reflection.

Dracula is a deliberately flat character. His emotional simplicity heightens his monstrosity, positioning him outside the spectrum of human experience. As Raines observes, he "lacks the capacity to experience guilt or concern for others" and "all the 'Undead' exploit their victims without remorse,"[154] effectively lacking empathy. Dracula never expresses

[153] Stoker, *Dracula*, 328.
[154] Jonathan M. Raines, Lisa C. Raines, and Melvin Singer, "Disorders of the Self and Borderline Personality Organization," *Psychiatric Clinics of North America* 17, no. 4 (December 1994): 820, https://doi.org/10.1016/s0193-953x(18)30087-x.

remorse, tenderness, or existential doubt. He does not weep for his victims or offer any monologue reflecting on his state. Even at the moment of his destruction, he is silent. The faint suggestion that his face takes on a look of peace is offered not as his emotional resolution, but as an external reassurance to the reader that the threat has ended. Moreover, Dracula's relationships throughout the novel lack redeeming emotional qualities. Empathy for the vampire figure can be cultivated through depictions of affection, whether romantic love, friendship, or loyalty. Stoker's Count, however, demonstrates no such capacities. He expresses no love or genuine emotional connection to any character, including his three female companions, victims, or remnants of past kinship or camaraderie. The closest semblance of an ongoing relationship is his vampiric women, yet even this bond is marked by control and subjugation rather than intimacy. Dracula regulates their feeding, treating them more as minions or pets than as romantic partners or family. When they attempt to feed on Jonathan Harker against his will, Dracula responds not with reproach but with violent fury, asserting his dominance. Their relationship structure, whether construed as a twisted family or a vampiric harem, is ultimately defined by authority, not affection.

This pattern is further exemplified in Dracula's treatment of Renfield. Renfield regards the Count with reverence and serves him with the expectation of reward. Still, Dracula discards him with brutal efficiency once he ceases to be useful, breaking his neck without hesitation. Similarly, Dracula's pursuit of Lucy is entirely predatory. He repeatedly invades her bedroom in animal form, often as a bat or mist, rendering her a passive victim of repeated assault rather than an object of romantic desire. There is no courtship, no mutual attraction, only violation.

With Mina Harker, the narrative momentarily suggests a more profound connection, as she later recalls sensing Dracula's presence and hearing his voice before the discovery of her assault. Nevertheless, this interaction is framed as hypnotic manipulation rather than genuine dialogue. When confronted, Dracula shows no remorse. Instead, he asserts dominion over Mina in the presence of her husband and companions: "Your girls that you love are mine."[155] His tone is possessive and gloating, erasing Mina's subjectivity. This is not a declaration of love but a proclamation of ownership.

Dracula's relationships are consistently parasitic and hierarchical. He engages with others solely as tools, victims, or subordinates. No confidant, object of longing, or principle is

[155] Stoker, *Dracula*, 333.

higher than his will to dominate. As Van Helsing suggests, Dracula possesses the cunning of a brilliant mind but a heart that has long since been emptied of emotion. His solitude is not the romantic loneliness of the Byronic figure, but the moral and emotional void of a predator incapable of human connection or integration. The emotional monotony of Count Dracula's characterization appears to be a deliberate artistic strategy to emphasize his fundamental inhumanity. Dracula is portrayed as lacking the emotional complexity that constitutes the essence of humanity. Instead of exhibiting a broad emotional range, he displays only select traits: calculated cunning, violent anger, and a disquieting, often grotesque amusement. When he escapes detection or induces terror, his moments of triumph are marked by unsettling smiles or laughter, which the narrative consistently frames as cold or uncanny. When his plans are disrupted, he reacts with explosive rage, as seen when he discovers Harker's attempt to communicate with the outside world or when the vampire hunters desecrate his boxes of earth.

While Dracula expresses desire, it is rooted in conquest and consumption rather than affection or mutuality. In a rare moment of introspection, when his brides accuse him of emotional detachment, Dracula responds, "[y]es, I too can love," referencing "the past" as evidence. However, this assertion is immediately undermined by his remark that the brides may have Harker "when I am done with him."[156] Such a declaration conflates love with possession and use, suggesting that Dracula's concept of affection is transactional and predatory. The women's mocking response, described as "soulless laughter," implies disbelief and reinforces the hollowness of his claim. The narrative offers no further insight into any prior emotional attachments that Dracula may have had. His pronouncement remains isolated and unsubstantiated, more likely a manipulative gesture than a sincere confession. In stark contrast, the human characters in the novel are consistently depicted as emotionally expressive. Arthur, Quincey, and Seward each express love for Lucy; Jonathan and Mina share a devoted marital bond; the male protagonists form close, affectionate alliances. Their emotional richness serves to highlight Dracula's alien emotional void. He is portrayed as a tyrant without a companion, revered by Renfield and obeyed by the brides, yet incapable of reciprocation. Metaphorically, Dracula is not only undead but spiritually hollow. As Raines et al. argue, Stoker's vampire is not a figure of tragic beauty but one of spiritual and psychological emptiness. Devoid of remorse, humanity, or even a stable self, Dracula becomes "nonhuman, not alive, foul, and degraded," his vampirism reflecting not erotic allure but abject monstrosity.[157] The internal

[156] Stoker, *Dracula*, 43.
[157] Raines et al., "Disorders of the Self," 818.

struggle or moral ambivalence that defines the romantic anti-hero is absent from Dracula's characterization. He inspires neither pity nor admiration, only fear and revulsion.

In later portrayals, the destruction of a vampire is frequently framed with emotional weight, suggesting the loss of a companion, a moment of moral epiphany, or even a redemptive self-sacrifice. In *Dracula*, by contrast, the Count's death is rendered as a pragmatic act of extermination, likened more to the slaying of a dangerous beast than the conclusion of a tragic arc. During the climactic pursuit, Jonathan and Quincey intercept Dracula at sunset and dispatch him by stabbing his throat and heart. His body disintegrates into dust, and the narrative swiftly redirects attention to Mina's liberation from the vampire's influence and Quincey's noble death from sustained wounds. The emotional closure belongs exclusively to the human characters, Mina's restoration and Quincey's sacrifice. The Count's destruction is not mourned but welcomed, and the wind's symbolic dispersal of his remains reinforces his erasure from the moral and social order. While the text does remark that Dracula's face bears a "look of peace"[158] in his final moment, potentially suggesting an ambiguous moment of release, this observation is not developed. There is no narrative reflection on the possibility of Dracula's redemption; Van Helsing offers no meditative commentary, and none of the protagonists regard the Count's death as anything other than a necessary conclusion.

This absence of introspection underscores the novel's moral stance: Dracula's annihilation represents a restoration of order, not a loss to be lamented. The tragedy lies not in the vampire's destruction but in the loss of the heroic Quincey. Stoker's vampire is not a sympathetic figure doomed by his condition, but a catalyst of horror. Lucy, Renfield, and Mina command the reader's sympathy; Dracula, by contrast, remains the author of others' suffering rather than the subject of any. This narrative positioning ultimately forecloses the possibility of romanticization. By denying Dracula any interiority or affective resonance, the novel excludes him from the redemptive arc that characterizes later portrayals of the vampire figure.

Count Dracula's lack of emotional complexity is a central reason the novel resists romanticized interpretation. Instead, Stoker reserves psychological complexity for the human characters, who grapple with grief, duty, ethical ambiguity, and interpersonal loyalty. Dracula, by contrast, serves as the fixed catalyst of their suffering and growth, not a subject of development himself. Accordingly, the novel positions Dracula as an unreformable Other, a

[158] Stoker, *Dracula*, 409.

static figure whose monstrosity cannot be negotiated or redeemed. He is not a tragic prince yearning for salvation, but a being of the coldest heart who must be decisively destroyed. Any attempt to frame Dracula as a romantic or sympathetic figure thus contradicts the novel's design. Rather than a tale of love, *Dracula* offers only the aftermath of a predator's assault: bloodshed, loss, and the desperate reassertion of human boundaries.

Dracula consistently resists any invitation to humanize or interiorize its titular antagonist. The novel portrays vampirism as a metaphysical contagion, a blight upon both body and soul, devoid of redemptive or transformative potential. Love does not civilize the Count; reason does not reform him. Rather, the narrative positions collective, morally sanctioned violence as the only viable means of purging this threat. The absence of a romantic subplot or emotional redemption underscores Dracula's status as the "Un-Dead,"[159] antithetical to life, affection, and spiritual salvation. Mina Harker's lament that the vampire's forced blood bond has filthied her flesh and endangered her soul exemplifies the novel's construction of vampirism as spiritual defilement rather than dark enlightenment. Similarly, Van Helsing consistently interprets the struggle against Dracula in religious terms: not as a tragic misunderstanding or a contest of ideologies, but as a holy war against a desecrating force. Dracula does not serve as a mirror to the protagonists but as a negative image, the inversion of their Christian virtue, human love, and moral agency. Consequently, characters and readers are encouraged to reject, rather than identify with, Dracula. Unlike the romantic anti-hero, Dracula is not granted reflective depth or tragic longing. As Nina Auerbach notes, he remains the quintessential "alien" vampire of the Victorian era: compelling, perhaps, but irrevocably unassimilable.[160]

In conclusion, *Dracula* is not a romantic or tragic text, but a foundational Gothic novel that positions the vampire as the inescapable Other of its cultural moment. The Count embodies fears that Victorian society could not fully articulate or resolve, fears of sexual deviance, foreign contamination, and spiritual decay, and thus had to be symbolically vanquished through extraordinary narrative means. He is the Other in the truest sense: a being defined entirely in opposition to the human, an inversion of love, reason, and divine order. While later vampire narratives may invite the reader to empathize with the monster, *Dracula* demands that he be expelled. Within its pages, the Count is neither beautifully damned nor tragically misunderstood. Stoker's novel thus delineates the outermost boundary of vampire fiction: it

[159] Stoker, *Dracula*, 215.
[160] Auerbach, *Our Vampires, Ourselves*, 6-64.

reveals that some monsters are not meant to be redeemed but destroyed. Count Dracula is such a monster, one who reflects humanity's darkest fears, but never its hopes, and who offers terror, not love, in his immortal embrace.

Interview with the Vampire: The Monster That Hurts and Feels

Interview with the Vampire fundamentally reshapes the image of the literary vampire, transforming the Gothic predator into a romantic antihero endowed with conscience and interiority. Anne Rice's novel dares to let its monster speak for itself, inviting readers to empathize with an immortal killer's emotional pain and moral conflict. In doing so, Rice romanticizes the vampire figure, not by sanitizing its violence, but by infusing it with beauty, introspection, and pathos. Her protagonist, Louis de Pointe du Lac, is a vampire who harms others and himself, yet feels deeply. Through Louis's perspective, vampirism is reimagined as a condition of existential anguish as much as one of predation. This stands in sharp contrast to *Dracula*, where the vampire never speaks and is rendered instead through journal entries that emphasize his bestial nature: "[h]is eyes blazed with a sort of demoniac fury," Harker records in terror, making the perspective of victims the only interpretation for the Count's actions. Rather than presenting the vampire as an unredeemable monster, Rice aligns with what Joan Gordon describes as a shift in the genre: "We do not sympathize with them despite their evil ways, but because they aren't really evil."[161] This analysis explores how Rice reframes violence, desire, monstrosity, and identity through the lens of romanticization. Far from a one-dimensional villain, Rice's vampire emerges as an elegant confessor of human truths and terrors: a creature of darkness rendered in empathetic light.

Anne Rice fully positions the vampire as the protagonist in a novel-length narrative centered around his internal struggle. In *Interview with the Vampire*, the conventional hunter versus monster structure is inverted. The vampire becomes the narrator of his own life story, directly addressing a human interviewer who functions as a modern-day confessor. This narrative strategy, the vampire's first-person confession, marked a significant shift in the genre. Earlier literary works offered glimpses of sympathetic or Byronic vampires, such as Polidori's Lord Ruthven or the melancholic Varney of Victorian penny dreadfuls. However, their stories were mediated through external narrators or mortal observers. By contrast, Rice's protagonist, Louis de Pointe du Lac, offers his perspective throughout the novel, articulating his remorse, longing, and existential anxiety with eloquence. The result is what Abbott has termed the emergence of the "sympathetic vampire," a figure who invites us to identify with the otherness

[161] Gordon, "Rehabilitating Revenants," 231.

we once feared, rather than to recoil from it.[162] As with the interviewer within the novel, the reader becomes a witness to the vampire's side of the story.

From the opening scene, Rice establishes Louis's uncanny duality as both monstrous Other and relatable self. The young journalist, referred to only as "the boy," who records Louis's story, is initially unsettled by the vampire's inhuman presence. Louis's face is described as unnaturally still and flawless, "inanimate as a statue,"[163] evoking the Freudian notion of the uncanny as something familiar yet profoundly alien. The boy senses a terrifying familiarity in Louis: a human-like figure with a corpse-like stillness, a predator who nevertheless carries himself as a civilized gentleman. However, as soon as Louis begins to speak, the atmosphere of fear gives way to recognition and empathy. He is not an inarticulate revenant but a cultured, introspective being burdened with guilt. In a kind of sacramental inversion, the vampire assumes the role of the penitent. At the same time, the mortal boy becomes his unintended priest, listening in silence as Louis unburdens his soul. The very title, *Interview with the Vampire*, suggests a parody of a confessional interview, one that lacks absolution. Louis seeks, if not forgiveness, at least understanding of what he is and what he has done.

Louis's narrative voice is shaped by his Catholic background and persistent moral self-awareness. In contrast to Dracula, who never engages in introspection on the page, Louis is consumed by anxiety over his vampiric nature and the state of his soul. Where Dracula is rendered entirely through the frightened observations of others, Louis speaks for himself, with a voice steeped in remorse or theological dread. He describes his transformation into a vampire as a fall from grace and recounts his subsequent killings in the language of sin and despair. "Evil is a point of view,"[164] Lestat tells him early in the novel, dismissing Louis's moral concerns. However, Louis cannot embrace Lestat's callous creed of predatory survival. Instead, he wrestles with a degree of moral ambivalence unprecedented in vampire literature. As Rout observes, Rice's novel was the first to seriously explore "the moral ambivalence a fledgling vampire might feel" and "[t]he moral agony of Louis, the young […] vampire […] who experiences typical vampiric blood lust, but cannot bear to take human life."[165] This moral complexity represents a departure from Stoker's vision, where the vampire's evil is absolute and requires no psychological explanation. As Senf notes, Dracula is not "any single variety of

[162] Abbott, *Undead Apocalypse*, 143-144.
[163] Anne Rice, *Interview with the Vampire* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2014), 6.
[164] Rice, *Interview with the Vampire*, 77.
[165] Rout, "Who Do You Love," 473.

evil" but the "supreme bogeyman - a creature who means different things to different people," such as "death" and the "Antichrist."[166] This dehumanized portrayal positions Dracula as a symbolic antagonist rather than a morally conflicted character. Rice's interiority lends the novel a distinctly philosophical tone. Louis reflects on the nature of evil, the existence of God, and the possibility of redemption for a creature who must kill to live. In one pivotal scene, he attempts to pray and confess to a Catholic priest after his transformation, but the encounter ends tragically when his mere presence provokes the priest's horror. By entering a literal confessional only to be condemned as a demon, Louis enacts the failure of traditional religious absolution for the posthuman sinner. He is left in spiritual turmoil, turning to storytelling as his sole form of catharsis. The interview becomes a secular confession, a narrative through which he seeks meaning and release.

Crucially, positioning the vampire as a protagonist does not mean the removal of his monstrosity. Instead, it means that horror is now mediated through the monster's perspective. Louis does not seek exoneration for his crimes; instead, he asks the interviewer and reader to witness his internal struggle. This narrative intimacy is foreign to Dracula, where the Count remains at a symbolic and emotional distance, never confessing, humanized, never heard, or asking to be. Rice's strategy aligns with the Byronic hero, the defiant outlaw or fallen figure whose inner torment evokes fascination and sympathy. Rice's vampires emerge from this lineage, drawing on figures such as Byron's brooding protagonists and Polidori's aristocratic vampire. Rout describes Lestat, Louis's maker, as the charismatic Byronic antihero with his "his flamboyance, cynicism, and egocentrism" and "is defiant of conventional morality"[167] Louis, in contrast, is more pensive and morally anguished, representing a modern variation of the Byronic figure: a sensitive soul in thrall to a dominant and darker companion. Together, Louis and Lestat reinvent the role of the vampire in modern fiction. As Aquilina notes, while Polidori's tale was the first to "detach the vampire from his folkloric roots and render him solely Byronic," Rice further develops the Byronic vampire by intensifying his psychological depth and moral introspection.[168] Louis is proud, haunted, and openly expressive: he weeps, wonders, and condemns himself. By giving the vampire a conscience and a voice, Rice shifts the reader's alignment away from the mortal heroes who seek to destroy the monster and toward the vampire as a figure worthy of empathy and writing their own story. This contrasts with *Dracula*, where

[166] Senf, "'Dracula': Stoker's Response," 47.
[167] Rout, "Who Do You Love," 474.
[168] Aquilina, "Open Graves, Open Minds," 35-36.

the narrative centers on a group of humans actively resisting and hunting the vampire. He is rendered as an external threat to be destroyed, not understood, a supernatural "thing" whose demise is met with relief, not mourning.[169] The contemporary sympathetic turn reflects a broader cultural shift. By the late twentieth century, popular culture had become increasingly receptive to representations of vampires as tragic, conflicted, and relatable rather than solely fearsome. Rice's Louis epitomizes this shift: a creature of the night who evokes pity and terror. In casting the vampire as both protagonist and confessor, Rice fundamentally romanticizes the figure, transforming the Gothic villain into a soul-bearing antihero without erasing the underlying horror of his condition.

One of the most striking aspects of *Interview with the Vampire* is its fusion of beauty and horror, a deliberate aestheticization of death and violence. Rice's prose lingers on the sensual details of vampiric acts, presenting the act of killing not as gratuitous gore but as an intimate and, at times, erotic experience. In the novel, the quintessential act of vampirism, drinking blood, is transformed into a form of dark communion that is simultaneously destructive and voluptuous. The result is a spectacle of beautiful death, in which violence and eroticism are so intricately intertwined that the boundaries between pain and pleasure, predator and lover, become blurred.

Although Rice was not the first to explore the sexual undertones of the vampire's bite, the novel amplifies this aspect to an unprecedented level of metaphorical explicitness. When Lestat turns Louis into a vampire, the scene is rendered in the language of seduction and illicit rapture. As Deidre Byrne notes, the act of blood drinking functions as a ritual carried out with "strongly erotic overtones."[170] The exchange of blood carries a dual symbolic function. It begins with an act of violent penetration with Lestat's fangs entering Louis's neck, a phallic image suggestive of homosexual intimacy. It concludes with a gesture of nourishment, as Lestat offers Louis his vampire blood in an almost maternal act. Further illustrated by Byrne, Rice's transformation scene intertwines "male sexual penetration of the victim […] followed by the more archetypal female nurturing,"[171] thereby collapsing traditional gender roles into a single homoerotic, quasi-parental act of creation. Louis's account of his transformation emphasizes its overwhelming ecstasy: the rush of warmth, the sting of pain, and the seduction of surrendering

[169] Stoker, *Dracula*.
[170] Deirdre Byrne, "The Lure of the Unspeakable: Why Vampires Don't Have Sex," *AUETSA 96, I-II: Southern African Studies* 2 (1996): 178.
[171] Byrne, "The Lure of the Unspeakable," 178-179.

to death to be reborn. The vampire's bite functions as a symbolic merging of sexual intimacy and infantile feeding, as Louis appears to drink like a child, but from a lover's wound. This imagery closely parallels Kristeva's theory of the abject, simultaneously repellent and seductive. The scene in which Louis drinks blood from Lestat's wrist is grotesque in substance yet aesthetically framed, evoking both the tenderness of breastfeeding and the transgressive intimacy of a lover's embrace. This uneasy combination of love and death lies at the heart of Rice's romanticization of vampiric violence.

Throughout the novel, murder is presented with a deliberate, almost choreographed sensuality. Louis, as a reluctant predator, often describes the act of feeding with conflicted reverence. He is drawn to the aesthetic element of the act: the warmth of blood, the heightened emotional state of the victim, and the moment when life fades into death like a "swoon."[172] Even as he hates himself for taking life, he cannot deny himself the pleasure and sense of intimacy he experiences at the throats of his victims. Lestat, in contrast, displays little remorse and instead embraces the theatricality and artistry of murder. Louis recalls that Lestat would "make friends with [his victims], seduce them into trusting and liking him, even loving him, before he killed," treating the act not merely as predation but as a form of game. This perverse courtship of prey underscores the erotic charge behind Lestat's violence. He turns killing into a seduction that relies on emotional manipulation and betrayal, extending the moment of death to intensify both terror and desire. Lestat's treatment of murder as a form of foreplay followed by lethal consummation exemplifies how Rice blurs the boundaries between predator and lover. The victim's emotional investment and, at times, physical arousal, becomes part of the ritual. Notably, in a scene set in Paris, a young mortal boy consensually offers himself to Louis in a scene replete with sexual suggestion. The boy bears bruises from previous vampire bites and is described as displaying "yielding of a conscious mortal,"[173] even exhibiting signs of arousal as Louis feeds on him. This disturbing episode, orchestrated by the vampire Armand to tempt Louis, renders explicit what is often implied elsewhere: that within Rice's universe, the vampire's attack may elicit pleasure in the victim as well, transforming the act of violent consumption into a dark simulation of erotic intimacy. The horror lies not only in the inevitability of death, but in the unsettling possibility that both predator and victim may find the experience desirable.

[172] Rice, *Interview with the Vampire*, 34.
[173] Rice, *Interview with the Vampire*, 192.

Perhaps the most striking example of the aestheticization of violence occurs in the Théâtre des Vampires. At this macabre theatre, Armand's coven of vampires stages a performance for a mortal audience, theatrically killing an actual human victim onstage. The scene serves as a commentary on vampirism as performance art. A beautiful young woman is introduced as a "bride,"[174] dressed in a gown, then bled and drained in a highly stylized pantomime that evokes both sexual assault and ritual sacrifice. The entire sequence is performed under the pretense of illusion, and the mortal spectators interpret it as a sophisticated theatrical act. The victim's nudity, fear, and the predatory sensuality of the vampire performers produce a spectacle that is simultaneously erotic and horrific. Louis watches in dread, but also with an awe for the aesthetic spectacle of the scene, in which death is presented with the elegance of a dark ballet. Here, Rice literalizes the metaphor of murder as theater, presenting the vampire as both artist and executioner. The woman's death is authentic yet rendered with such visual artistry that the audience responds with applause as she dies. As Benefiel notes, Rice "broadens" the vampire mythos by introducing scenes in which violence is not only visceral but also theatrical and sensual, eliciting fascination rather than revulsion.[175] The scene implicates the audience, both within and outside the novel, in the pleasure of witnessing atrocity. Louis's reaction fluctuates between horror and a mesmerized admiration of the act before him. This theatricalization of violence contrasts with the portrayal of violence in *Dracula*, where violent scenes are either not explicitly written, only the aftermath is observed, or used to deceive, not delight. Dracula's predation occurs in secret, cloaked in shadows and silence as an act of non-consensual invasion rather than spectacle. In contrast, Rice stages violence as a performance, even as a theatre play applauded by mortals. As Gelder notes, this marks a turn toward postmodern vampire fiction, where "[t]o be a vampire is, in other words, to act like a vampire. This is vampirism at its most disillusioned, a rejection of all the European traditions and superstitions."[176] Such portrayals highlight a central element of Rice's romanticization of the vampire: the conversion of violence into art. Blood functions as a symbol of both life-force and sensual excess, while killing is reframed as an intimate exchange, an act in which the giver yields life and the taker receives it, forming a distorted analogue to romantic union. As Craft notes about earlier vampire narratives such as *Dracula*, vampirism often encodes taboo sexual

[174] Rice, *Interview with the Vampire*, 186.
[175] Candace R. Benefiel, "Blood Relations: The Gothic Perversion of the Nuclear Family in Anne Rice's Interview with the Vampire," *The Journal of Popular Culture* 38, no. 2 (November 2004): 263-264, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0022-3840.2004.00111.x.
[176] Gelder, *Reading the Vampire*, 112.

desires, particularly homoerotic ones, beneath the surface of horror.[177] *Interview with the Vampire* brings these subtexts to the foreground. Rather than using horror to repress or punish the erotic, eroticism is used to amplify the horror, creating a structure in which desire and violence reinforce one another. The result is what Deborah Wills terms "eroticized violence," in which "the killer eroticizes rather than justifies or hides his acts of murder," experiencing it as a moment of intense sensory and emotional gratification.[178] Rice's lush descriptive style invites the reader to share in this experience, though it is always tempered by the consequences that follow. Every instance of pleasure is closely shadowed by guilt or grief. Louis's rare moments of murder, whether driven by hunger or anger, are inevitably followed by profound remorse. In this way, the aesthetic allure of vampiric violence is consistently counterbalanced by its moral and emotional consequences, preserving the tension between attraction and repulsion. Rice's romanticization does not deny the horror of the vampire's condition, but rather entwines it with beauty, longing, and emotional intimacy. Death becomes beautiful because of its decadence: alluring, symbolic, and stained with inevitable decay.

If *Interview with the Vampire* offers a love story, it is one characterized by unhealthy love: a story about co-dependent relationships that both comfort and hurt. At its center lies a dysfunctional family consisting of Louis, Lestat, and the child-vampire Claudia. Their entangled dynamics, marked by love, hatred, and desperate need for companionship, demonstrate how Rice reimagines the vampire not as an isolated predator but as an emotional figure, capable of both profound attachment and significant harm to those he claims to love. This romanticization is ominous; affection is expressed through possession, mentorship devolves into manipulation, and intimacy becomes the mechanism of psychological and emotional decay. In this portrayal, the vampiric family functions as a subversive reflection of the human family structure, exposing its concealed violence and dependencies. In *Dracula*, by contrast, relationships are either idealized, illustrated by Jonathan and Mina's marriage built on trust, love, and sacrifice, or destroyed, as seen with Lucy and Arthur, ending tragically with Lucy's death at the hands of her beloved. Dracula himself does not form, nor seems to wish to, attachments of his own, but instead severs them. Turning Lucy into a vampire severs her engagement, her family ties, and ultimately, her humanity. He exists outside the family, never within. Dracula is not emotionally entangled with others but functions as an agent of corruption,

[177] Craft, "'Kiss Me," 107-108.
[178] Deborah Wills, "Fatal Attractions: 'Snuff Fiction' and the Homicidal Romance," *Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal* 47, no. 2 (2014): 68, https://www.jstor.org/stable/44030142.

only capable of destruction. This starkly contrasts with Rice's model of the vampire as enveloped in desire, obligation, and emotional ruin. As Benefiel observes, Rice introduces the concept of the "nuclear family of vampires as a major theme," a structure only suggested in earlier vampire fiction. Louis and Lestat assume the roles of two fathers to the child-vampire Claudia, forming an incestuous and ambiguous family unit that exists entirely outside conventional human norms.[179] This family is not formed through biological ties but through the ritualized blood exchange of vampirism, a process that immediately destabilizes traditional roles and hierarchies. Lestat, who transforms a small child into a vampire to prevent her death from the plague, positions himself as a paternal figure, primarily to secure Louis's emotional attachment.

Louis, in turn, develops an obsessive devotion to Claudia, occupying the role of father while also functioning ambiguously as a companion or lover figure as her mind matures, though her body remains unchanged. Claudia refers to both men as her "fathers,"[180] yet her relationships with them are fluid: she often treats Louis as her beloved and Lestat as an antagonistic spouse. The boundaries between parent and partner blur in unsettling ways. Gelder observes that Louis and Lestat come to resemble "a kind of demonic (but not demonised) gay couple, queer male parents competing with each other for 'our daughter' Claudia." At the same time, Louis and Lestat are positioned as Claudia's lovers, as she matures emotionally beyond her childlike physical form.[181]

This development places the three characters within a complex triangle of intimacy that challenges conventional relationships. Gelder further identifies the disturbing nature of this, noting that "the queerness of their relationship lies partly in the folding together of gay love with heterosexual incest/paedophilia."[182] Rice thereby collapses multiple forbidden relational modes, same-sex partnership, quasi-marital co-parenting, and pseudo-incestuous love, into a single, disturbing family structure. This narrative strategy simultaneously humanizes the vampires by granting them a form of domestic life and alienates the reader through its deeply unsettling implications. Stoker's vampires never attain such relational complexity, as they remain figures of solitude or parasitic existence. Dracula's female victims are infantilized or possessed; his brides exist as interchangeable sirens under his dominion. As Auerbach argues,

[179] Benefiel, "Blood Relations," 263-264.
[180] Rice, *Interview with the Vampire*, 218.
[181] Gelder, *Reading the Vampire*, 113.
[182] Gelder, *Reading the Vampire*, 113.

Dracula is "the most solitary vampire we have met."[183] His existence is rooted in isolation, not domesticity. Rice's innovation lies in horror, not just in solitude, but also in suffocating, entangled, unhealthy connection to others.

The co-dependency within Rice's triad is apparent. Louis and Lestat begin as maker and thrall, a dynamic already marked by exploitable power imbalance: Lestat selects Louis primarily for his wealth and to secure companionship, yet subsequently exerts sadistic control over him. Louis, although repelled by Lestat's cruelty, remains unable to leave, driven partly by fear and ignorance of how to survive alone, and partly by a toxic emotional dependency. Their early years are marked by guilt and entrapment. Louis cannot reconcile his loathing for Lestat with his dependency on him: "I hated him and wanted to leave him; yet could I leave him?"[184] Lestat mocks Louis's moral hesitation as weakness, while Louis harbors resentment and shame, each psychologically imprisoned by the other's presence. Into this enters Claudia, whose role is to be as if a child introduced to repair a failing marriage. Lestat's decision to transform Claudia into a vampire is an act of calculated desperation; sensing Louis's increasing detachment, he seeks to bind him more closely by giving him a daughter. For a time, this appears effective. Claudia becomes the stabilizing presence in their otherwise volatile relationship, reshaping them into a semblance of a family. However, the conditions of Claudia's creation also sow the seeds of eventual destruction. Transformed as a young child, she is condemned to eternal childhood, a condition that becomes intolerable as her intellect and self-awareness mature. The act intended to secure affection ultimately brings resentment. Claudia despises Lestat, referring to him as "father of lies,"[185] and eventually directs her accumulated rage toward him. In a climactic confrontation, she declares, "I hate you both,"[186] accusing Lestat and Louis of condemning her to an existence devoid of agency or growth. Their intimacy is, therefore, fundamentally corrupted: Lestat and Louis have, in effect, destroyed Claudia's humanity in the name of love, and she responds by seeking to destroy the parental figures who have created her.

The depiction of their relationships reveals patterns consistent with abusive family dynamics. Lestat functions as the controlling patriarch, at once charismatic and cruel, who demands control and punishes opposition. Louis assumes the role of the conflicted partner who shields Claudia from harm, yet ultimately enables the abuse by remaining in the relationship.

[183] Auerbach, *Our Vampires, Ourselves*, 81.
[184] Rice, *Interview with the Vampire*, 55.
[185] Rice, *Interview with the Vampire*, 113.
[186] Rice, *Interview with the Vampire*, 100.

Claudia, though initially a victim of their familial experiment, is far from passive; she becomes an active agent of violence in her pursuit of autonomy. The triad is marked by mutual dependence: Lestat clings to Louis and Claudia out of an existential fear of loneliness; Louis depends on Claudia for emotional support; and Claudia, despite her resentment, continues to rely on Louis for protection as she schemes to eliminate Lestat. Their emotional bonds are fraught with jealousy and power struggles. Louis and Claudia's private conversations establish a secret alliance against Lestat. Psychological entanglement is alien to Dracula, as a solitary invader. His transformation of Lucy introduces themes of dominance; there is no negotiation of roles, no power dynamics change, and most importantly, no intimacy between the predator and prey. The lack of nuance in Dracula's relationships, as Auerbach notes, is part of what makes them terrifying. Dracula is "as far as we see, the only male vampire in the world […], he can anticipate no companionship, for Stoker's rules allow only humans to unite."[187] Rice, by contrast, crafts characters whose monstrosity emerges from their longing to be loved and incapacity to love without harm.

Lestat and Claudia compete for Louis's exclusive loyalty, leaving him torn between the two. As Benefiel argues, Rice's vampire family represents "a subversive alternative model to the nuclear family," one that is "incestuous and blurred." It lacks a maternal figure, features two paternal ones, and includes a child who is simultaneously an immortal adult woman.[188] Untethered from traditional societal structures, such as marriage, law, and mortality, the family exists in a closed, self-reinforcing system. The result is both longevity and decay. Louis, Lestat, and Claudia live together for sixty-five years, "far exceeding the length of most mortal marriages," yet their unnatural stasis eventually becomes a source of destruction. "Granted, this family destroys itself at length from within," writes Benefiel, observing that the traits that allow for its endurance, immortality, and unchanging roles also ensure its destruction.[189] Unlike a human family, governed by biology, enabling growth and eventual separation, the vampire family offers no such release. Claudia cannot mature or depart; the only possible end is violence.

The climax of this toxic co-dependence occurs when Claudia attempts to kill Lestat, committing an act of parricide. She poisons him and, with Louis's assistance, disposes of his body in a swamp. This violent act marks the end of the vampiric family. The surrogate daughter destroys the father figure, and she and Louis escape to Europe, forming a quasi-romantic

[187] Auerbach, *Our Vampires, Ourselves*, 81.
[188] Benefiel, "Blood Relations," 263.
[189] Benefiel, "Blood Relations," 264.

partnership. However, this flight does not free Louis or Claudia. They remain entangled in a claustrophobic partnership, wandering the Old World for other vampires and a sense of purpose. Upon finding others of their kin, the hopeful discovery of Armand's coven at the Théâtre des Vampires in Paris proves fatal for Claudia. Perceived as an abomination due to her childlike form, Claudia is executed by the coven alongside Madeleine, a woman Louis creates to serve as her protector. This punishment is set in motion by Armand, a vampire who becomes enamoured of Louis. Armand assumes the role of a manipulative interloper, subtly dismantling Louis's ties to Claudia to secure Louis for himself. His refusal to intervene functions as a form of calculated seduction, what might be described as a courtship enacted through silence and complicity in violence. In this, Armand mirrors Lestat's earlier methods of control, suggesting that the cycle of toxic intimacy is repeating itself. Devastated by Claudia's death, Louis turns to Armand not out of love but despair, while Armand, centuries old and longing for connection, seeks in Louis a replacement for his loneliness. However, their relationship is haunted by loss and guilt: Louis cannot forgive Armand or himself for Claudia's fate, and Armand's mentorship is ultimately incapable of healing the emotional void left behind. What remains is a hollow companionship with two immortals bound together not by love, but by mutual need, trauma, and emotional absence.

Rice explores the paradox of vampiric love through these entangled relationships: while her undead characters are capable of love and loyalty, their immortality and predatory nature ultimately corrupt these bonds. Love becomes indistinguishable from obsession, and parenting is distorted into possessive control. The relationship between Lestat and Louis reflects psychological patterns with what Dutton and Painter described as "traumatic bonding" and coercive "dependency" from "intermittent abuse,"[190] while Louis and Claudia exhibit signs of emotional enmeshment, in which "both persons […] become welded together to maintain the psychological subsystem which fulfills the needs created."[191] Vampire's endless lifespan poses as a magnifying lens for human dysfunction, highlighting the destructive potential of romantic or familial ties that cannot evolve or end. The ideal of eternal companionship, suggested when Lestat offers Louis a vision of immortal camaraderie, is subverted by the realization that permanence may lead not to fulfillment, but to perpetual psychological imprisonment. Louis reflects that he remained with Lestat long past the point of affection, driven by inertia and an

[190] Donald G. Dutton and Susan Painter, "Emotional Attachments in Abusive Relationships: A Test of Traumatic Bonding Theory," *Violence and Victims* 8, no. 2 (January 1993): 106-108, https://doi.org/10.1891/0886-6708.8.2.105.
[191] Dutton and Painter, "Emotional Attachments," 107.

existential fear of loneliness. This insight resonates with the emotional dynamics of abusive relationships. Even after years of betrayal and emotional rupture, Lestat reappears at the novel's conclusion in a weakened state, seeking out Louis again. His return reveals not merely a desire for reconciliation but an enduring emotional dependency. In this final gesture, Rice suggests that the bond between them, however fractured and destructive, remains intact, an echo of what Abbott names "dark romance"[192] that threads through the novel, twisted but persistent.

Rice's depiction of a vampiric family has frequently been interpreted as a commentary on late twentieth-century social structures. Benefiel argues that Rice's vampire family "constitute[s] a parody" of the American nuclear family: superficially similar in its assigned roles, yet uncanny.[193] She further describes it as "a subversive alternative model to the nuclear family," one that violates both heteronormative and biological conventions, while still functioning, for a time, as a loving domestic unit. [194] Viewed through the lens of queer theory, this configuration is exceptionally provocative: Rice's vampires establish kinship through vampiric blood rather than genetic lineage, thereby challenging the cultural primacy of heterosexual reproduction and normative familial roles. The deaths of Claudia and Madeleine, in contrast to the survival of the male vampires Louis, Armand, and Lestat, can be interpreted as reinforcing patriarchal narrative patterns. The text simultaneously romanticizes the emotional intensity of these transgressive bonds while condemning them to failure, implying that deviations from normative intimacy are ultimately unsustainable. Rice's depiction of toxic vampiric relationships complicates the romanticized vampire archetype. Her vampires are not solitary monsters but emotionally entangled beings, whose desires for connection are fraught with control, grief, and violence. In this formulation, the vampire possesses a heart, but it is capable of profound love and unbearable harm.

Beneath its Gothic surface, *Interview with the Vampire* mediates immortality as an existential burden. In Rice's depiction, the vampire embodies a posthuman ideal as ageless, robust, and immune to death, yet this ideal collapses into emotional stasis and loss of meaning. Louis's narrative becomes a parable of existential alienation: in transcending human limits, he loses the traits that define humanity and give it meaning, such as mortality, transformation, and emotional connection. The romanticized vampire figure thus emerges not merely as a supernatural being, but as a tragic philosopher burdened by an excess of time and

[192] Abbott, *Undead Apocalypse*, 61.
[193] Benefiel, "Blood Relations," 264.
[194] Benefiel, "Blood Relations," 263.

consciousness. This sharply diverges from Stoker's Dracula, in which immortality is portrayed not as a contemplative crisis but as a source of menace. Dracula is a creature of survival and repetition, not reflection; he does not suffer alienation but enacts it upon others. Aquilina notes that Dracula "throws no shadow and casts no reflection; he has no soul, as physical existence and appetite are all that concern him." Where Dracula's soulless immortality functions as a narrative of horror rooted in external threat, Louis's eternal life unfolds as an interior descent.

Louis is thrust into an existential crisis from the moment of his transformation. Time loses its meaning; he remains unchanged as the world moves on. The thrill of heightened senses, power, and immortality is soon replaced by isolation. Louis remains unchanged while the world evolves around him, resulting in a profound temporal and psychological dislocation. In nineteenth-century Paris, he regards the bustling crowds with estrangement, comparing them to insects, an image of his growing detachment from human society. After Claudia's death, this alienation intensifies: Louis wanders the world as a passive, eternal witness in a world where he can only look but not touch or interact. His perspective is no longer shaped by love or moral conviction but by emotional numbness and existential despair. In *Dracula*, by contrast, there is no visible interiority: the Count moves from London to Transylvania without recorded thought, never reflecting on what eternity has cost him. Dracula's immortality is a backdrop for invasion, not introspection. Where Louis broods over his disconnection, Dracula acts as a catalyst for the disconnection of others.

In philosophical terms, Louis exemplifies how Braidotti explains the posthuman subject: alienated from humanity, severed from time, and haunted by the eternity he once imagined as a second chance and salvation.[195][196] To Louis, the "restless boulevard crowd"[197] becomes a blur of motion, humanity rendered as shapes without substance. This detachment signifies his final break with humanity: no longer animated by love, guilt, or moral struggle, he inhabits a posthuman perspective in which the world appears fundamentally absurd, distant, other, and devoid of personal meaning.

Louis's existential despair culminates in his nocturnal visit to the Louvre, where he seeks solace in art following Claudia's death. Once a source of spiritual and aesthetic comfort, art now fails to reach him. He confesses that although he was initially "upheld" by the beauty

[195] Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, 13.
[196] Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, 49.
[197] Rice, *Interview with the Vampire*, 268.

of the paintings, the experience ultimately leaves him hollow: "Before, all art had held for me the promise of a deeper understanding of the human heart. Now the human heart meant nothing."[198] This realization marks a turning point: Louis no longer connects with the emotional or cultural expressions of humanity because he no longer considers himself part of it. He accepts human meaning in anger, but in the absence: "I did not denigrate it. I simply forgot it."[199] Rice's imagery reinforces this detachment. The things Louis has held onto to keep his humanity, art, and human ideals are now meaningless to him. Louis reflects that the paintings "were not for me intimately connected with the hands that had painted them. They were cut loose and dead like children turned to stone." The simile evokes Claudia, his lost companion frozen in childhood, and the broader petrification of emotion and meaning in his posthuman condition. Art, once tied to mortal struggle and affective depth, becomes for him a static artifact.

Louis's condition aligns closely with existentialist philosophy. Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus describe the human struggle as confronting an indifferent universe without inherent meaning or moral order.[200] Louis can be read as a figure enacting a vampiric *Myth of Sisyphus*: condemned to unending existence without hope of redemption, sustained only by self-awareness and despair.[201] His longing for divine judgment, punishment, or forgiveness is met with silence, reinforcing the absurdity of his condition. He is, in effect, trapped: unable to die, forget, or escape the weight of reflection. Rice's romanticized vampire is thus not a folkloric predator but a tragic philosopher burdened with time, guilt, and epistemological fatigue. By contrast, Dracula is almost entirely untouched by time, static in purpose, untroubled by memory, and free from remorse. He never once reflects on his condition, nor does he suffer from philosophical doubt. Unlike earlier depictions of the undead, Rice's vampires carry the psychological depth of figures like Byron's *Manfred,*[202] world-weary immortals alienated from divinity and humanity.

Ultimately, Rice uses Louis's trajectory to illustrate that immortality exacts a profound psychological toll: the gradual erosion of everything that once grounded identity. Over two centuries, Louis witnesses the dissolution of both his mortal and vampiric family and the collapse of his religious and moral convictions. His Catholic faith offers no solace; the very

[198] Rice, *Interview with the Vampire*, 268.
[199] Rice, *Interview with the Vampire*, 268.
[200] Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*, trans. Justin O'Brien (1942; repr., New York: Vintage Books, 1991), 1.
[201] Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*.
[202] Thorslev, *The Byronic Hero*, 6.

existence of vampires raises theological anxieties, suggesting divine indifference or absence. His early resolve to abstain from killing deteriorates, and he becomes, despite himself, a predator. By the novel's end, set in the twentieth century, Louis inhabits a state of apathetic detachment. He confesses to the interviewer that little matters to him; he continues not out of hope or desire, but inertia. Louis embodies the beautiful but broken contemporary vampire. Externally, he retains the aesthetic grace of the vampire as unchanging, elegant, and timeless, yet internally, he is fractured by sorrow and existential fatigue. Rice presents an immortal and deeply philosophical figure, imbued with tragic dignity, yet she does not obscure the bleakness of such grandeur. In doing so, Rice also reflects on the Romantic ideal itself. The nineteenth-century Romantics often celebrated the Byronic wanderer, the isolated genius burdened with excessive feeling. Rice realizes that archetype to its extreme: her romantic vampire roams through time bearing the full weight of immortality's apathy. As Louis remarks, when the interviewer naïvely requests to be turned into a vampire, immortality offers no revelation or redemption, only the certainty of witnessing the decay of all that one once loved. In this sense, Rice's romanticization is double-edged: the vampire's godlike perspective, acquired through time, reveals not a higher meaning but the futility of a life without closure or purpose.

As a final reflection, Rice's novel implicitly questions whether the posthuman perspective offers any consolation. Armand, the oldest vampire in the narrative, proposes one: detachment. He endures by accepting the world's transience and withdrawing emotionally. After Claudia's death, Louis attempts this approach, remaining with Armand in a state of numb routine, sustained only by feeding and observation. However, Louis proves too fundamentally human, or soulful, to maintain such detachment. By the twentieth century, he confesses to yearning for the sun, a metaphor for death, though he lacks the will to end his existence.

This inability to fully re-engage with life or to end it constitutes a kind of existential purgatory. In portraying this condition, Rice deconstructs the traditional fantasy of the immortal vampire. The ideal: eternal youth, beauty, and power is revealed as an endless and empty. *Interview with the Vampire* thus suggests that to become posthuman is to forfeit much of what gives life meaning. Through Louis's romanticized yet tormented inner life, Rice offers a poignant critique: the immortal monster becomes not a superhuman ideal, but a perpetual mourner of the humanity he has lost.

Anne Rice's *Interview with the Vampire* presents a romanticized vampire whose queerness is integral to his allure. This queerness is not limited to sexual orientation but rather

encompasses a blurring of gender roles, erotic boundaries, and kinship structures. Rice's novel, published in 1976, was groundbreaking in its empathetic portrayal of same-sex desire, non-traditional family formations, and fluid identity. As George Haggerty observes, Rice's work helped "queering of culture" by normalizing intimate bonds that defied heterosexual norms, placing queer-coded characters at the emotional center of a Gothic narrative.[203] Crucially, unlike earlier horror literature that stigmatized queer subtext as something to fear or punish, *Interview* invites readers to empathize and even identify with its queer-coded characters.

Louis and Lestat's relationship exemplifies homoerotic intensity framed through the metaphor of vampirism. Though Rice's vampires do not engage in penetrative sex, the act of blood-drinking is presented as deeply sensual, and their companionship carries unmistakable romantic connotations. Louis describes his fascination with Lestat as reminiscent of seduction, and the two share coffins, hunt together, and argue like spouses. Their co-parenting of Claudia further queers the family unit, with Gelder describing them as "queer male parents"[204] By contrast, in *Dracula*, kinship and intimacy remain strictly heteronormative or perverse and monstrous when deviating. The three vampire brides are depicted as hypersexual and interchangeable, with no genuine emotional bond to Dracula or each other. Their destruction is clinical, reinforcing the idea that non-normative female desire must be eradicated.

Rice's depiction of two male vampires adopting a child reads as a radical reimagining of kinship in an era when gay parenting had no visible cultural precedent. Claudia's position within this dynamic further destabilizes conventional categories. She is both child and eternal woman, daughter and, in Lestat's taunts, a doll-like wife. When Armand asks Louis if Claudia is his lover, Louis replies, "I love her, yet I am not close to her,"[205] underscoring the ambiguity of their bond. This disturbing fluidity challenges fixed identities such as father, daughter, and partner, compelling the reader to view the vampires' relationships on their terms. Claudia's role becomes a concentrated site of gender and age ambiguity, rendered uncanny by her adult intellect within a child's body. The uncanny is relevant here, as Claudia is familiar as a young girl and terrifying as an ageless predator. This figure is unsettled because she cannot be easily categorized.

[203] George E. Haggerty, "Anne Rice and the Queering of Culture," *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* 32, no. 1 (1998): 5-7, https://doi.org/10.2307/1346054.
[204] Gelder, *Reading the Vampire*, 113.
[205] Rice, *Interview with the Vampire*, 239.

This subversion of human identity extends to the vampires' physical and emotional characteristics. Rice's characters are often androgynous: Louis is delicate and melancholic, Lestat flamboyant and theatrical, Armand cherubic, and Claudia is described in childlike yet sensuous terms. Their desires are not bound by gender; attraction is based on beauty, vulnerability, and blood. Louis loves the mortal woman, Babette, and male vampires like Lestat and Armand. Clark notes, Rice's vampires function as "distinctly queer 'Others'," mirroring the marginalization of gay men during the AIDS era.[206] Stoker's vampires are also Others, but their queerness is implied only to be condemned. Smith, drawing on Ellis Hanson, argues that *Dracula* uses the homoerotic as a site of fear, tying unnatural appetites to bodily invasion and disease. He identifies *Dracula*'s queer subtext as a form of "homosexual panic," in which the vampire represents contamination, seduction, and a threat to bodily and social integrity. Renfield, for instance, is read as a "homosexual hysteric," transfixed by Dracula's gaze, which renders same-sex desire monstrous and destabilizing. Rice, by contrast, rewrites that fear as longing.[207]

Whether read as a celebration of queer love or a cautionary tale about the limits of transgressive intimacy, *Interview with the Vampire* undeniably centers queerness as part of the vampire's romantic and tragic appeal. The novel's impact lies in its refusal to pathologize or punish these ambiguities. Instead, it foregrounds them as central to the emotional resonance of its characters. Rice's romanticized vampire is a queer figure not only in who he loves, but in how he lives: beyond binary roles, outside societal norms, and within a web of passionate, destructive, and beautiful relationships. As Louis reflects on his outsider status: "What does it mean to die when you can live until the end of the world?"[208]but it is in that marginal space that Rice reimagines the vampire as a queer hero of heartbreaking humanity. While *Dracula* ends with the vampire's annihilation and the reaffirmation of heterosexual marriage, *Interview* leaves us with ambiguity: Louis survives, burdened by memory, loss, and identity without closure. This shift from destruction to introspection is central to Rice's transformation of the vampire into a figure of queer melancholy and philosophical depth. The beautiful vampire is queer and heartbreakingly human in his yearning.

Anne Rice's *Interview with the Vampire* transformed the vampire from a folkloric revenant into a romanticized figure of profound psychological and existential complexity.

[206] Clark, "Infectious Queers," 29.
[207] Smith, "The Homosexual Vampire," 140.
[208] Rice, *Interview with the Vampire*, 121.

Through Louis's introspective narrative, Rice reimagines the vampire as both monstrous and deeply human, capable of love, guilt, and self-reflection. The novel intertwines Gothic and Romantic motifs with postmodern concerns, creating a vampire who is not merely feared but pitied and even admired.

Throughout the text, Rice romanticizes the vampire not by erasing its horror, but by framing it through moral anguish, emotional depth, and tragic beauty. Louis is not absolved of his violence, but his suffering makes him relatable; he is a killer with a conscience, a figure whose immortality becomes a metaphor for alienation and loss. His emotional journey through faith, grief, and disillusionment mirrors existentialist despair. As Rice herself suggests through the narrative's structure, even the reader, like the interviewer, is seduced by the allure of eternal life despite the pain it entails. However, Rice does not exonerate her vampires from their inherent monstrosity. Instead, she compels readers to confront the tension between their capacity to harm and suffer. This duality lies at the heart of their romantic appeal: monstrous beings endowed with moral awareness, killers burdened with conscience, and immortal souls searching for meaning or redemption. In foregrounding this paradox, Rice reimagines the vampire as a profound metaphor for the human condition, a figure through whom contemporary anxieties and desires are refracted in seductive and unsettling ways.

Throughout the novel, violence and horror are reframed through aesthetic and emotional lenses, inviting the reader into a space of uneasy sympathy. Much like the interviewer within the narrative, readers are drawn into Louis's confessional mode, compelled by his eloquence and introspection even as he recounts acts of predation and death. This narrative seduction culminates in a moment of self-reflexive irony. After listening to Louis's tale of suffering and disillusionment, the interviewer pleads to be made a vampire, imploring him to "[…] give me that power! The power to see and feel and live forever!"[209] Louis's outraged and sorrowful refusal underscores the novel's central tension, that the vampire's romantic appeal persists despite, or perhaps because of, its intrinsic tragedy. Rice's novel ultimately denies its protagonists any form of triumph or catharsis. The novel ends in tragedy: Louis remains, but in isolation, Lestat is diminished, Claudia is dead, and Armand is left behind. Louis's continued existence is an ambiguous victory: he survives, but as a spiritually fractured figure. The allure of immortality, which captivates the interviewer, is revealed through Louis's account as a curse

[209] Rice, *Interview with the Vampire*, 285.

defined by grief and detachment. In the final scene, the interviewer seeks out Lestat despite all he has heard, suggesting that the cycle will persist and that the seduction of darkness continues to overpower caution. Rice thus underscores the central irony of her romantic vampire: the beauty and power that fascinate also conceal profound horror and sorrow.

CONCLUSION

This thesis has explored the literary transformation of the vampire figure, focusing on its evolution from a monstrous Other into a romanticized and emotionally complex protagonist, a hero of his tale, by analyzing Bram Stoker's *Dracula* and Anne Rice's *Interview with the Vampire*, the thesis aimed to discover how narration, cultural context, and literary techniques shape the vampire in fiction. This transformation is not only a matter of character design or stylistic choice. It reflects changing perspectives toward violence, power, identity, and desire and invites a closer examination of how literary works frame monstrous figures as sympathetic, morally complex, or even desirable.

The first analytical chapter focused on *Dracula*, where the vampire remains a figure of fear rooted in Gothic horror and folkloric tradition. Count Dracula is denied a voice of his own and is presented exclusively through the eyes of his victims. He is associated with disease, invasion, and bodily corruption, and his predatory nature is emphasized through dehumanizing imagery, positioning him as the ultimate Other. His violence is portrayed as grotesque and horrifying, with little opportunity for emotional or moral ambiguity. The narrative deliberately prevents any possibility of identification with the vampire, excusing or supporting his actions. He is framed as an external threat, a foreign invasion, to eradicate, not to understand or redeem him. His monstrosity is reinforced through opposition to Christian values, and he functions as a repository for xenophobic, sexual, and moral anxieties of the time. In Stoker's vision, the vampire is something to be feared and cleansed, not sympathized with or saved.

In contrast, *Interview with the Vampire* reframes the vampire characters as protagonists full of introspection and moral dilemmas. Anne Rice's novel allows the vampire Louis to narrate his own story through a confessional interview. Through this narrative, the reader can gain insight into his thoughts, doubts, regrets, and motivations behind his actions. His immortality is framed not as a source of power but as a curse of detachment, loneliness, and existential despair, rendering the vampire a figure, a passive, eternal witness to a world he is unable to touch. The violent acts associated with vampiric nature are not erased or excused, but they are given new context through Louis's guilt, grief, and longing for meaning. His relationship with Lestat and later with Claudia further complicates the framing of his actions by blending care, control, intimacy, and trauma. The novel reframes vampirism as a metaphor for emotional and moral ambiguity, allowing the vampire to symbolize humanlike suffering rather than a monster

to be slain. Rice does not present her vampires as innocent, but she makes them vulnerable and emotionally accessible, inviting readers to contemplate the ethical consequences of identifying with morally ambiguous characters.

The contrast between these two literary works demonstrates a significant cultural and literary change in the construction of monstrosity. While *Dracula* preserves a fixed boundary between good and evil, self and other, *Interview with the Vampire* blurs those boundaries, creating a space in which horror and empathy may coexist. This transformation reflects societal and ideological changes, including the growing interest in psychological depth, questioning right and wrong, and the desire to explore taboo or transgressive subjects through the lens of fiction. The romanticized vampire embodies these tensions. It is a figure that incites both fascination and discomfort, allowing the reader to engage with darkness not as a force to be rejected outright but as a part of the human experience worth understanding.

The theoretical frameworks employed in this thesis have provided valuable insight into the complexity of this transformation. Concepts such as the uncanny and abjection have helped illuminate how the vampire unsettles conventional boundaries between life and death, human and nonhuman. The Byronic hero has offered a model for understanding the seductive and emotionally tormented aspects of the romanticized vampire. At the same time, feminist and queer theory has provided tools for analyzing how the vampire challenges or reinforces traditional norms of gender, sexuality, and power dynamics. These perspectives have shown that the vampire is not only a literary figure but also a cultural symbol capable of reflecting and shaping contemporary anxieties and desires.

This thesis contributes to literary and cultural studies by demonstrating how horror fiction, particularly vampire literature, can be used to explore the ethics of identification, the aesthetics of violence, and the representation of complex emotional states. The romanticization of the vampire raises important questions about the line between fascination and normalization and about the cultural impact of framing dangerous or violent figures in sympathetic terms. It also reveals the potential for horror fiction to speak to marginalized experiences and to create space for alternative forms of identity, desire, and intimacy.

Although this study has focused on two central texts within Anglo-American literature, it opens several possibilities for future research. Further work might examine how the romanticization of the vampire unfolds in other cultural contexts or how gender and sexuality

are represented in vampire narratives centered on exclusively female or nonbinary characters. Additional studies could also explore how contemporary media, such as television, graphic novels, video games, and fanfiction, continue to reshape the vampire character. These investigations might consider how the vampire operates in young adult fiction, intersects with discourses on race and colonialism, or engages with posthuman and transhuman themes in twenty-first-century narratives.

In conclusion, the vampire's evolution from a folkloric revenant into a tragic, romantic figure illustrates literary monsters' flexibility and cultural significance. From Stoker's terrifying Count to Rice's grieving Louis, the vampire reflects changing ideas about what it means to be a monster and, by extension, what it means to be human. The romanticized vampire does not erase horror but reframes it through intimacy, reflection, and emotional depth. It challenges readers to confront the complex relationship between fear and fascination, morality and empathy. It invites them to see the monster not simply as an enemy but also as a mirror.

RESUMÉ

Tato diplomová práce se zaměřuje na literární proměnu postavy upíra od její původní monstrózní podoby založené na folkloru až po moderní romantizované hlavní postavy v současné populární literatuře. Upír, původně vnímaný jako zosobnění smrti, nemoci a zla se v průběhu staletí transformoval do podoby emocionálně komplexní a často i citlivé postavy, jejíž existence reflektuje názory týkající se lidské identity, touhy a strachů, a posouvaní hranic mezi dobrem a zlem. Cílem této práce je sledovat a popsat tuto proměnu prostřednictvím analýzy dvou zásadních literárních děl o upírech, klasického románu *Drákula* (1897) od Brama Stokera a postmoderního díla *Interview s upírem* (1976) od autorky Anne Rice. Práce se zaměřuje na to, jak jsou tyto dvě postavy upíra literárně zobrazeny, jaké motivy a vyprávěcí strategie jsou užity k jejich zobrazení, a jak tato proměna souvisí s širšími kulturními a společenskými proměnami.

V teoretické části je nejprve vysvětlen folklórní původ postavy upíra. Tento popis čerpá z evropských lidových pověstí, především z balkánského a východoevropského folkloru, kde byl upír zobrazen jako mrtvola, která se navrátí k životu a sužuje živé tím, že z nich vysává životní sílu, nejčastěji krev. Tyto příběhy byly často spojeny s obavami z nemocí, nedokončených pohřebních rituálů a sexuální deviace. Práce sleduje, jak byly tyto folklórní představy přeneseny do literárních žánrů, především gotického románu 18. a 19. století, a jak se proměňovaly s měnícími se kulturními hodnotami a ideologiemi.

Následně jsou definovány teoretické koncepty, které tvoří interpretační rámec této práce. Klíčovou roli hraje pojem romantizace, který je chápán jako proces, při němž je původně záporná postava literárně přeformulována tak, aby vyvolávala soucit nebo obdiv ze strany čtenáře. Tento pojem je dále rozvíjen ve spojení s dalšími klíčovými koncepty, jako je jinakost (the Other), abjekce, uncanny (něco tísnivého), posthumanismus, feminismus a queer teorie. Všechny tyto rámce slouží k porozumění tomu, jak literární zobrazení postavy upíra zpochybňuje ustálené binární opozice jako člověk/monstrum, dobro/zlo, nebo normální/deviantní. Pojem byronského hrdiny pak nabízí možnost interpretace romantizovaného upíra jako postavy zmítané vnitřním konfliktem, která kombinuje přitažlivost, nebezpečí a bolest.

Analytická část práce je rozdělena do dvou hlavních kapitol, přičemž každá se zaměřuje na jedno z klíčových děl literatury o upírech. První kapitola se věnuje románu *Drákula* od

Brama Stokera, který je považován za jeden z pilířů gotické a hororové literatury. V tomto díle je postava upíra představena jako zcela nelidská, cizí a morálně odpudivá entita. Stoker využívá různé vyprávěcí techniky, které brání čtenáři ve vcítění se do postavy upíra. Drákula není vypravěčem vlastního příběhu, nýbrž je pouze zobrazován a interpretován skrze pohledy jiných postav. Práce analyzuje, jak Stokerova stylizace vampýra jako archaického vetřelce reflektuje obavy tehdejší společnosti z kolonialismu, sexuální deviace a ženské emancipace. Drákula zde není psychologicky komplexní postavou, ale spíše katalyzátorem děje a pouze zlem, které musí být zničeno.

Druhá kapitola se zaměřuje na román *Interview s upírem* od Anne Rice, který zásadně pozměnil tradiční zobrazení upíra v literatuře. V tomto díle se upír stává introspektivním vypravěčem, který sám reflektuje a popisuje svou existenci i své emocionální dilema. Hlavní postava Louis je představena jako hluboce trpící postava, neschopná se smířit s vlastní nesmrtelností, krví zpečetěnou minulostí a nemožností smysluplné existence. Rice využívá prvky gotické estetiky a queer symboliky k vytvoření upíří postavy, která je současně zlá i zranitelná. Práce analyzuje, jak Riceová využívá romantizaci jako nástroj literární subverze. Násilí je estetizováno, vztahy mezi postavami jsou komplikované, pochybné, někdy i toxické, ale zároveň emočně intenzivní a zobrazené jako upřímný projev touhy po lidském spojení. Skrze postavy Louise, Lestata a Claudie je zkoumán rozklad tradičních heteronormativních vztahů, otázky identity, genderu, sexuality a morálky.

Obě analýzy ukazují výrazný posun ve způsobu, jakým je upír v literatuře konstruován. Od monstra ohrožujícího společnost ke komplexní postavě, která ztělesňuje vnitřní morální konflikt, existenciální úzkost a narušení binárních kategorií. V práci jsou tyto rozdíly podrobeny textové a tematické analýze, přičemž je zdůrazněna důležitost vypravěče, zobrazení násilí, nesmrtelnosti a kulturních konotací spojených s násilím a sexualitou.

Závěr diplomové práce shrnuje hlavní poznatky, které plynou z porovnání dvou literárních reprezentací upírů a ukazuje, že proměna upíra ze záporné vedlejší postavy v hlavního hrdinu není náhodným vývojem žánru, ale důsledkem hlubokých kulturních změn ve vnímání zla, násilí a individuality. V románu *Drákula* je upír jednoznačně postaven mimo svět živých a reprezentuje změnu pohledu na sexualitu, gender, a rozdíl mezi dobrem a zlem. V románu *Interview s upírem* však čtenář sleduje příběh z perspektivy samotného upíra, což umožňuje hlubší porozumění jeho motivacím a vnitřním rozporům. Louis není hrdina v tradičním smyslu, ale tragická postava hledající smysl, vykoupení a komunitu, což zásadně

mění perspektivu, jakou je upír vnímán. Tím se postava upíra stává zrcadlem lidské psychiky, genderové identity, morálních dilemat a postmoderní nejistoty.

Práce ukazuje, že romantizace upírů není jen estetickým jevem, ale výrazným příznakem kulturní změny. Moderní literatura o upírech osciluje mezi fascinací a odporem, erotikou a násilím, individualitou a monstrozitou. Upír se stává zrcadlem, v němž se odrážejí dobové úzkosti a potlačené touhy. Z tohoto hlediska je literární reprezentace upíra příznačným předmětem analýzy, nikoli pouze z hlediska žánrové estetiky, ale i v rámci širšího diskurzu o tom, co znamená být člověkem.

Metodologicky práce přispívá k rozvoji interdisciplinárního přístupu ke studiu populární literatury, neboť kombinuje literární analýzu s kulturní teorií, filozofií subjektivity a teoriemi identity. Významný je rovněž důraz na vypravěčské strategie, které zásadním způsobem ovlivňují, zda je postava upíra čtenářem vnímána jako monstra nebo jako tragického hrdinu. Práce tak ukazuje, že forma vyprávění má přímý vliv na etickou čitelnost postavy a míru její humanizace.

Možnosti dalšího výzkumu se nabízejí v několika směrech. Jedním z nich je zaměření na ženské postavy v rámci upírské fikce, které často kombinují prvky abjekce a idealizace a jejichž romantizace může být propojena s odlišnými kulturními vzorci a společenskými očekáváními. Dále lze pokračovat v analýze současné young adult literatury, kde je romantizovaný upír často zobrazen jako objekt touhy pro dospívající protagonistky. Zajímavé by také mohlo být zkoumání transmediálních adaptací, například filmových a televizních verzí, které se liší mírou stylizace a vizuálním zobrazením postavy upíra.

Tato práce tedy nejen sleduje vývoj jednoho konkrétního literárního archetypu, ale přispívá i k širšímu porozumění tomu, jak literatura reflektuje, posouvá a přetváří kulturní významy, především v souvislosti s monstrozitou, morálkou, touhou a reprezentací odlišnosti.

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STATEMENT:

During the preparation of this thesis, I used several generative or assistive AI tools throughout my whole work. These include ChatGPT4, DeepL, Grammary, QuillBot, SciSpace, ScholarAI, NotebookLM, and WriteFull. These tools were used in accordance with the University AI usage guidelines. I have used them to improve stylistic clarity, summarize academic content during research of the secondary sources, and to check linguistic accuracy. They were not used for interpreting primary or secondary sources or drawing conclusions of any kind. The content of this thesis reflects my own academic judgment, knowledge, and critical thinking. I claim full responsibility for the content of this thesis, as it remains my own intellectual work. After using these tools, I reviewed and edited the content appropriately.