

# Crosses to Cullens: The Western Vampire from Gothic Predator to Romantic Icon

Alex James Fewings, University of Warwick

## Abstract

Although the figure of the vampire in Western culture has undergone significant alterations from the nineteenth century to the modern day in terms of presentation, there has always existed a strain of latent sexual concern in their depictions. In earlier works, this sexuality was couched in a negative light, often incorporating themes of sexual assault, the violation of private spaces and dangerous, ‘tempting’ aspects of sexuality. This article will argue that, although there is continuity between early Gothic vampire fiction and modern vampiric paranormal romance in terms of their connection to sexuality, there has nevertheless been significant evolution in the manner in which that sexuality is approached, as it transforms from sexualised assault to a dangerous romance.

**Keywords:** Gothic literature, evolution of vampires in literature, development of literature into cinema, vampires and sexuality, horror and sexuality

The figure of the vampire has a singular place in the human imagination. From the Caribbean *soucouyant* to the Scottish *baobhan sith* to the Romanian *strigoi*, it seems that it is more common than not for cultures to produce such a concept. Even in the present day, when relatively few people believe in these creatures as literal monsters, vampires find a place in popular culture – but this place is significantly divorced from their original narrative role. The vampire has undergone a metamorphosis from a horrifying monster to a being with relatively little representation in actual horror media. In modern Western media, the vampire seems to have found a more constant home in the *genre* of romance fiction<sup>[1]</sup> than in horror. Although this difference has often been commented upon in other works, this article tracks the transition from the monsters of Gothic horror towards the vampires of the modern day, using comparative analysis of

different texts to trace the development of vampiric traits through this process. In particular, this article focuses on the development of the theme of sexuality, which has come to define the modern vampire, and in particular the way that this theme has developed over time to enter the realms of relative social acceptability, rather than being added at a later point. Thus, the development of the vampire into a romantic context can be seen as a reflection of the growing acceptance of sexuality in our modern society, taking these blood-sucking monsters from unhallowed chapels to standing them before the altar.

Before this evolution can be followed, however, we must first reach the roots of the family tree of undeath in Western popular culture. As aforementioned, the archetype of a vampiric, blood-sucking monster is common in folklore and mythology. Although ‘most casual vampirophiles today still mistakenly believe vampire lore to be primarily a Romanian phenomenon’ (McClelland, 2006: 16), it is more correct to say that the common Western idea of the vampire ‘is of Slavic and Bulgarian – or, more generally, Balkan – provenance’ (McClelland, 2006: 16).

[T]he tradition of the vampire and, indeed, of the word vampire itself, which also had a prefolkloric meaning, goes back several centuries before [Western] Europeans [...] had ever heard of such things. [...] Toward the end of the seventeenth century [...], scientists and journalists [...] ventured more intrepidly into such places as Serbia, Croatia, and other areas around the borders of the Habsburg Empire. Their noble intention was first to record and then explain the exotic and perhaps supernatural goings-on at the boundaries of the civilized world.

(McClelland, 2006: 3–4)

As a result of this, though, the concept of the vampire that the majority of later vampiric works, literary and otherwise, were principally based on a relative few outsiders’ accounts of a small number of specific and notorious incidents. This focus on a few sources and the outsider’s perspectives led to an ignorance of the folkloric context in which these vampire tales were based. Cut free from their home soil, the vampire was then reinterpreted through an [Enlightenment](#) worldview during the eighteenth century.

One of the earliest vampire narratives born from this reinterpretation was John William Polidori's 1819 novella *The Vampyre*, concerning the predation of the mysterious Lord Ruthven upon various victims. Christopher Frayling describes this horror novella as 'the first story to successfully fuse the disparate elements of vampirism into a coherent literary genre' (Frayling, 1992: 108). The novella incorporates many elements that find greater expression in later vampire fiction, but of particular interest are two themes relevant to the interrelation of vampire and romance fiction: corruption, and the association of vampiric predation and marriage. Regarding the former theme, Lord Ruthven is written as an embodiment or personification of moral corruption, as well as the destruction and 'bestiality' – in the sense of an animalistic state – which that leads to. He is consistently described as working to bring about the 'dissolution' of others, and as transgressing the bounds of 'polite' and 'corrupt' society:

His peculiarities caused him to be invited to every house; all wished to see him, and those who had been accustomed to violent excitement, and now felt the weight of ennui, were pleased at having something in their presence capable of engaging their attention. [... H]e was as often among those females who adorn the sex by their domestic virtues, as among those who sully it by their vices.  
(Polidori, 1997: 39–40)

Aubrey could not avoid remarking, that it was not upon the virtuous [...] that he bestowed his alms; – these were sent from his door with hardly-suppressed sneers; but when the profligate came to ask something, not to relieve his wants, but to allow him to wallow in his lust, or to sink him still deeper in his iniquity, he was sent away with rich charity.  
(Polidori, 1997: 42)

In placing the figure of wickedness personified as an inhuman monster infiltrating society, Polidori depicts anxieties around creeping moral corruption that both echo classical Christian concerns relating to the concept of sin and demonic temptation and presage the stereotypically Victorian concern with moral degeneracy. However, he necessarily tied this figure of corruption to ideas of pleasure and excess, temptation and desire. This figure of the vampire as a terrible but desirable icon of

enticement to corruption, or as a forceful initiator of that corruption, is a trope that reoccurs throughout the genre going forwards and will play an important role in the metamorphosis from monster to love interest.

Regarding the second theme, it is most notable that – although Lord Ruthven fed upon the Greek girl, Ianthe – the climax of the story is not this, but rather the marriage of the protagonist Aubrey's sister to the 'Earl of Marsden' – actually the vampire in disguise, who promptly murders her.

The guardians hastened to protect Miss Aubrey; but when they arrived, it was too late. Lord Ruthven had disappeared, and Aubrey's sister had glutted the thirst of a VAMPYRE!

(Polidori, 1997: 31)

Here again, we see the theme of corruption evident, in that the vampire subverts the sacred trust of marriage for the purpose of his predation. However, the association of marriage or relationships with vampiric predation in particular is notable. Perhaps the most classic site of this kind of fantastical attack is the bed, the clichéd image of the victim as the pale woman in the nightgown, sheets and gown both stained with crimson. The particular focus on the bed as a site of vampiric predation can be attributed to the fact that the bed and its room are seen as private locations, where one is vulnerable for long hours while asleep, but should, if the house is sound, be safe. Furthermore, they are powerfully representative of intimacy, especially in the context of the marital bed, which is particularly connected to blood due to the tradition of breaking the hymen during the first intercourse of newlyweds. Thus, the vampire's attack becomes a perverse parody of marital consummation.

The intimacy of the vampire's attack is not solely limited to the marriage bed, nor to the attack of the male vampire upon the female victim, however. In various cultures, childbirth – a profoundly dangerous period without modern medical aid – became associated with malevolent entities such as the Mesopotamian 'miscarriage-causing demoness Lamashtu' (Scurlock, 2014: 587), while McClelland writes that 'Inexplicable death, especially during sleep, is perhaps the most serious [phenomenon often explained by supernatural activity]' (McClelland, 2006: 64). Many such malevolent entities were construed as female, and female vampires have found their place in fiction as well as folklore. One early example of such is

Carmilla, of Thomas Joseph Sheridan LeFanu's 1872 novel of the same name. Later revealed to be the vampiric 'Mircalla, Countess Karnstein', Carmilla still preys upon a female victim, Laura, a young woman to whom the vampire attaches herself as a friend and confidant for an extended period.

LeFanu's work has gained some renown as the root of the sub-genre of lesbian vampire fiction, although this is not to suggest that it can be said to represent an effort to portray lesbianism in a positive light. The close relationship between Carmilla and Laura is founded upon a predatory desire to 'devour' the latter, forming another example of the alignment between vampirism and sexuality. This same alignment can be seen in Lord Ruthven's desire for marriage to Aubrey's sister and, later, in the Count Dracula's sexually charged attacks on Lucy Westenra and Mina Harker. In short, 'LeFanu's novella characterises Carmilla's monstrosity as a threat to her victims' sexual purity as well as to their lives' (Fong, 2016: 111). The novella goes so far as to directly comment upon the tendency of vampires to fixate upon specific victims in a manner where sexual/romantic desire and the desire to devour are intertwined, saying that 'The vampire is prone to be fascinated with an engrossing vehemence, resembling the passion of love, by particular persons' (LeFanu, 2019). It then goes on to further describe this 'engrossing vehemence', saying that the vampire will 'exercise inexhaustible patience and stratagem' and 'never desist until it has satiated its passion, and drained the very life of its coveted victim' (LeFanu, 2019.). The use of the phrase '*resembling* the passion of love' (emphasis mine) implies that the vampire is incapable of truly feeling love, which may be a result of LeFanu being unwilling to characterise female-female attraction as 'true love'. Even with this reluctance, however, the writer still compares this pursuit to 'the gradual approaches of an artful courtship' (LeFanu, 2019) and thus works to add the concept of attraction from the vampire to the victim, where Lord Ruthven seemed more motivated by simple sadism and hunger. However, Carmilla still stands as an early example of a trope of female vampires that would become regrettably central to their characterisation going forwards: the archetype of the female vampire as seductress, beguiling victims (particularly men) for the sake of her predation.

This trope is clearly manifest in the nameless Brides of Dracula in Bram Stoker's famous novel, *Dracula*. These female vampires represent a red-

toothed hedonism, sexually corrupting and mortally destructive. Hobson states that '*Dracula* establishes the vision of the female vampire sucking men dry, and these women have insatiable hungers for blood and for sex' (Hobson, 2016: 11). This same sexual danger is posed by Lucy Westenra when she is transformed in death into a vampire, as she 'becomes more physically attractive and her body is hyperbolically eroticised, with her "sweetness [...] turned to adamantine, heartless cruelty" and her "purity" transformed into "voluptuous wantonness"' (Fong, 2016: 112). Unlike the case of the male vampire, the female vampire's danger is attached to her physical attractiveness; beauty and voluptuousness are inherently tied to wantonness, just as in the myth of Pandora, a 'sweet, lovely maiden-shape' (Goold, 1982: 7) is paired with 'a shameless mind and a deceitful nature' (Goold, 1982: 7). This hypersexualisation of the vampiress blends destructiveness with beauty and womanly charms to the degree that the two are almost inseparable. This is not to suggest that Stoker's vampires were directly inspired by Greek myths, but rather that both concepts of the monstrous feminine sprang from profoundly misogynistic cultures, simultaneously ascribing to women the capacity for boundless evil, and near-totally confining that evil to culturally feminine spaces and trappings.

One example of this in *Dracula* is the way in which Lucy Westenra's introduction as a vampiress involves a perversion of the mother-child relationship, as she drains the blood from a small child and confronts the protagonists with that blood still on her lips. Another is the way in which the Brides of Dracula also predate upon small children, and their reliance upon seduction for hunting and as defence. Their introductory scene near the beginning of the novel involves the three Brides coming to the chamber of Jonathan Harker while he sleeps, evoking in him 'a wicked, burning desire that they would kiss me with those red lips' (Stoker, 2011: 44), and euphemistically referring to their intention to drain him of his blood as 'kissing': "'He is young and strong; there are kisses for us all'" (Stoker, 2011: 45). Meanwhile, at the end of the book, Abraham van Helsing experiences a sudden attack of longing when looking upon one of the Brides 'in her Vampire sleep, so full of life and voluptuous beauty that I shudder as though I have come to do murder' (Stoker, 2011: 444). This attack of conscience does not last, and van Helsing destroys the Brides with stakes; an act which, by dehumanisation, has been construed by the novel's male leads as more mercy than murder. In these representations of

the female vampire as demonic caricatures of female sexuality, we see a mirroring of the fears of a misogynistic society regarding that sexuality, and a ritual enactment of violent suppression.

The association of the vampire in the Gothic horror novel with mingled sexuality and violence is not unique to female vampires, however, and is often paired with the intrusion of an 'other' into Christian, upper-class life. This 'otherness' is often represented through foreignness, as we see in the origins of the Count Dracula in Romania, or Carmilla's status as an ancient Countess of Styria in Austria. McClelland notes that 'Even today, Eastern Europe is constructed as a disease needing to be quarantined' (McClelland, 2006: 225) and quotes Adam Burgess' *Divided Europe* in saying that:

There is a discernible medical emphasis, more particularly a suggestion of disease, in several of the principal themes through which the region [of Eastern Europe] is understood ... The conception of 'the East' as metaphorically diseased has disposed analysts to exaggerate all manner of real medical conditions, to the extent that they may even infect the West.

(Burgess, *Divided Europe*, 55–56, quoted in McClelland, 2006: 225)

Thus, Dracula's intrusion into upper-class, English Christian life becomes a kind of unholy plague, at once killing and corrupting into sexual deviance. Examples of this latter theme of 'deviance' include *Carmilla's* lesbian undertones, the Count Dracula's polygynous 'marriage' to his nameless Brides (which has a strange mirror in Lucy Westenra's proliferation of suitors and proposals), the Brides' own use of their sexuality and the bizarre perversion of breastfeeding which the Count performs to take control of Mina Harker:

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.

(Stoker, 2011: 340)

However, although these characteristics are put to the use of creating horror, they are also tropes that lend themselves well to the creation of intrigue and fascination – not to mention titillation. Dracula's plural

marriage to his wives evokes the [Orientalist](#) conception of the harem in Islamic culture. Although the Count places himself in opposition to the ‘Turks’, saying ‘Is it a wonder that we were a conquering race; that we were proud; that when the Magyar, the Lombard, the Avar, the Bulgar, or the Turk poured his thousands on our frontiers, we drove them back?’ (Stoker, 2011: 34), Stoker makes it clear in the first paragraph of the novel that by approaching Dracula’s castle, Jonathan Harker is ‘leaving the West and entering the East’ to go ‘among the traditions of Turkish rule’ (Stoker, 2011: 1). The implication here seems to be that, despite his pride in ‘dr[iving] ... back’ ‘the Turk’, Dracula belongs to the same exotic world, beyond the hallowed circle of ‘the West’. This exoticism encompasses both fear (most clearly manifest in the vampire’s predation and violent ‘seductions’) and intrigue, such as how both Dracula and his Brides have hypnotic power over the minds of their victims. This intrigue extends beyond the sexual and into the psychological. Abraham van Helsing spends significant time expounding on his theories about Dracula’s thoughts and mentality; although speculations, these are deeply marked by Victorian prejudices, such as when van Helsing describes Dracula as having a ‘child-brain’ due to being a ‘criminal’ (Stoker, 2011: 411), they still betray a curiosity about the internal life of an immortal being. Perhaps the most essential question about the vampire’s mentality is their reaction to their own state. Dracula seems to entirely accept – or even delight in – his unholy status; however, even before Stoker, there was the prototype for the ‘reluctant vampire’ – which has since become so common – in James Malcolm Rymer’s 1845–47 *Varney the Vampire: Or, the Feast of Blood*. This work was published as one of many ‘penny dreadfuls’ of the time; short instalments of serialised stories sold for low prices and aimed to some degree towards the working classes. Rymer’s work brought into prominence a trait that, over a century later, has achieved the status of cliché: the figure of the tragic vampire who rejects and hates their condition, but is nevertheless driven by it. In this original example, Sir Francis Varney, the titular vampire, throws himself into Mt. Vesuvius so as to assure his self-destruction. However, it was *Carmilla*, and later *Dracula*, that brought sufficient character to the vampire figure that it could be meaningfully developed to the point that it could be considered sympathetic, if not necessarily a traditional protagonist.

It is not correct to say that the figure of the vampire faded from popular culture following the end of the 1800s, or even that their romantic or



sexual elements fell by the wayside. Early films, such as the 1913 Robert G. Vignola *The Vampire*, featured heavily sexualised female ‘vamps’, a term synonymous with femme fatales at the time. *Nosferatu, eine Symphonie des Grauens* (in English, *Nosferatu, a Symphony of Horror*) is generally thought to be the first near-faithful adaptation of *Dracula* to film, directed by Friedrich Wilhelm Murnau in 1921. Ironically, though, the film was unlicensed as an adaptation. Despite adaptations made to the plot and characters, the production company was sued by the Stoker estate on grounds of copyright infringement. The suit was successful and the court ordered that the film be destroyed, although some copies survived. The attention the case gathered is thought to have contributed to the popularity of *Dracula* and the figure of the vampire more generally. Vampires often featured in pulp horror fiction, such as in the magazine *Weird Tales*. A perfect example is Akivasha in Robert E. Howard’s Conan the Barbarian novel, *Hour of the Dragon*, the ‘woman who never died, who never grew old!’ (Howard, 1935: 96). Claiming that ‘it is in the shadows that mortals find immortality!’ she attempts to – literally and quite explicitly, for the time – seduce Conan into joining her in immortality. However, all of this can still be considered more to extend rather than deviate from the work and archetypes of the 1800s, at least with regards to the humanisation of the vampire into a figure of romantic rather than horrific intentions. In this era, and going forwards, vampires still lingered in the shadows of mouldering castles, ancient mansions or forgotten tombs, waiting to drink the life of unfortunates who came too near, and with little in terms of human characterisation.

With the 1966–71 Gothic soap opera *Dark Shadows*, the character of Barnabas Collins forms another link in the vampiric chain. Barnabas is a descendent of the reluctant vampire seen previously in Sir Francis Varney. Nina Auerbach describes the character as ‘the first popular vampire to escape the Dracula plot into which Hammer movies were locked’ (Auerbach, 1995: 138). Barnabas Collins was written so as to elicit sympathy for the figure of the vampire, painting him and his state as ‘pitiful’ (Auerbach, 1995: 138) rather than solely monstrous. This, and ‘Anne Rice’s beautiful young males’ which Barnabas ‘anticipat[ed]’ (Auerbach, 1995: 138), served to add a vital element to the romantic cocktail of the vampire: sensitivity. The vampire is constructed as a being in mourning for the past in general and mortality specifically – in some ways recalling the Byronic hero of Romantic literature. Barnabas is

‘paralyzed by [R]omantic nostalgia for his nineteenth-century life in the “old” Collins mansion, which he reconstructs in fond, obsessive detail’ (Auerbach, 1995: 137–38). This nostalgia is another element that can serve as initial impetus for a relationship with a mortal, thanks to the clear ease with which ‘desire for a living existence’ can be diverted into ‘desire for the living’. Emotional sensitivity creates an ‘in’ for a romantic hero or heroine – and for the audience – to form an attachment to the vampire, and acts to humanise them. It also forms a contrast with the inherent violence and inhumanity of the vampire’s bloody thirst, creating intrigue and internal character conflict. Vampires thus become tragic rather than monstrous figures, potentially even tragic heroes – especially if they embrace some code or restriction regarding their feeding – and this formula found an acutely influential expression in Anne Rice’s *The Vampire Chronicles*.

In Rice’s work, vampires remain monstrous creatures who subsist on the blood of the living, often taking those lives as well. In fact, the first book of *The Vampire Chronicles*, the 1976 *Interview With the Vampire*, is focused deeply on the inherent tragedy and destructiveness of the vampires that its narrator, Louis de Pointe du Lac, has encountered during his two centuries of life, especially emphasising their self-destructiveness and the harm they deal to mortals and one another. It makes a point of the pointlessness of vampiric existence, with the self-proclaimed ‘oldest living vampire in the world’ (Rice, 1976: 183), Armand, discoursing on the absence of a divine or demonic agent in their origins, or some greater purpose to their being. However, the tragedy of their existence is motivated as much or more by the human stresses of immortal and predatory existence as by the hungers or some other inherent villainous impulse of their condition, such as a drive to spread moral corruption. While the vampires in Rice’s work do not seem to place much interest in the act of sex or romance in a human sense, they are ethereally beautiful and possess ‘quasi-angelic’ (Auerbach, 1995: 96) keenness of senses that allow them a wholly new experience of life. Indeed, in the scene during which the narrator becomes a vampire, he perceives the vampire Lestat as being ‘radiant’, ‘luminous’ and his laughter as being like ‘peals of bells’ (Rice, 1976: 15). This association of these archetypal creatures of the night with aspects of the church or even divinity itself has another correspondence with Rice’s vampires. Although they are frequently debauchorous, mingling sexuality and predation, the vampires of the *Chronicles* seem to experience what might be termed a form of

aesexuality; the sex act itself has little meaning to them, compared to the emotional intimacy they seek to create with whatever might bring happiness to their immortal existences. Despite this, though, the presence of the sexual element, paired with a desire for connection and emotional intimacy, creates a solid foundation for later works to move towards a more romantic angle.

*Interview* still remains solidly within the category of a horror story, relying less on brutality and more on a chronicle of immortal misery, longing and emptiness, and on the cold inhumanity of most of the vampires' sheer lack of regard for human life. Nevertheless, Rice's novel introduced both real attractiveness – as opposed to simply supernatural hypnotism and sexual victimisation – to the vampire, and the vampire's perspective to audiences. Sympathy, meanwhile, is built in Rice's later *The Vampire Chronicles* novels, where she presents a different view on vampiric existence through the eyes of Louis' vampiric sire, Lestat. The 1994 adaptation of *Interview* brought these qualities to cinemas with full visual force, starring Tom Cruise and Brad Pitt as Lestat and Louis respectively, and had a profound influence on vampire cinema. This second-hand influence can be seen clearly in a key difference between the 1992 *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* film and the 1997–2003 television series of the same name: the characters of Angel and Spike. The original movie was relatively standard horror fare, save for the subversion that the blonde 'popular girl' was the one with the destiny to hunt and destroy vampires, rather than simply being the victim. In the television serial, however, first Angel and then Spike are present. Each of these characters is a vampire (in this setting, people possessed by a form of demonic spirit) who acts as an ally, anti-hero, anti-villain and romantic interest at various points in the story. Angel proved successful enough in his own right to gain a spin-off series of the same name, which explored his character and 'redemption' further. Thus, we can see the figure of the 'bad boy vampire' being brought to the fore of the monster's characterisation in Western popular culture. Although even the original Lord Ruthven can be seen as a presaging of this, this transformation forms the very fundament of the final development of the vampire figure to be covered in this article: The vampire as love interest in paranormal romance.

The poster child of this particular sub-genre of vampire fiction is undoubtedly Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* series; the first book was

published in 2005 and went on to spawn three sequels and a few spin-off stories, all marketed towards the then-emerging ‘young adult fiction’ demographic. The concept of Meyer’s ‘sparkly vampires’ has become something of a household one, often compared mockingly to other vampire fiction. ‘Increasingly, the idea of “sparkly vampires” has been detached from direct critiques of the series, becoming something of a catch-all term to characterise a perceived “watering-down” of teen or popular culture, usually offered in comparison to some “true” version that existed in the past’ (Priest, 2018: 186) – ironic, given that, as with any originally folkloric figure, looking for a ‘true’ or ‘canon’ version of the vampire is an exercise in futility. However, that which separates the vampire in paranormal romance from other sub-species of vampire is less any characteristic of the vampire themselves and more to do with the focus of the narrative. The 2009–17 television show *The Vampire Diaries* unquestionably fits the definition of paranormal romance, and features vampires that burn rather than sparkle in the sun, wage conflicts over long-ago slights which have brutal consequences for nearby humans and otherwise fail to be ‘softened’ or ‘cheapened’. In the case of *Twilight*, ‘the heterosexual couple is established in the early chapters of the first book and their relationship remains the central focus of the series’ (Priest, 2018: 183). In the case of *The Vampire Diaries*, a consistent thread throughout the series’ many villains and plots is the love triangle between the heroine Elena Gilbert and the vampiric brothers Damon and Stefan Salvatore. The specifics of any given setting’s vampiric metaphysics are, largely, irrelevant compared to the shape of the narrative imposed upon and, to a lesser extent, created by those metaphysics. For example, the same trait – burning under sunlight – can be used both as a representation of holy power destroying the unholy, as in *Nosferatu*, or as a plot device to add night-time ambiance to assignations still tinged with danger and an edge of the ‘forbidden’. Likewise, the vampire’s bite can serve to ‘infect you in such wise, that [...] in time, death [...] shall make you like to him’ (Stoker, 2011: 386), or as a metaphor for sex. This ‘alternative penetration’ angle may account to some degree for the relative lack of female vampiric lovers in paranormal romance. The anxiety over gender roles portrayed in *Dracula*’s Brides remains manifest to some degree in the genre, not least in the mirroring of the power relationship between a man and a woman in a patriarchal culture, and a vampire and a mortal. This becomes particularly apparent as the vampire’s aristocratic nature in pop culture tends to bleed through to more modern settings in the form of wealth – an

example being the large house possessed by the Cullens. What mortals must accumulate via generational privilege, a vampire can justify as having acquired through superhuman power and the nature of their own immortality. Finally, the act of transformation into a vampire – ‘siring’, to use the terminology of Rice – is often used to constitute a metaphorical marriage. The ‘taking’ of virginity in traditional marital sex (involving the breaking of the hymen, as aforesaid) is mirrored both in the drinking of blood and in the ‘taking’ of mortality. As marriage (or the woman’s first intercourse associated with the marital bed) might classically be said to constitute the transformation of a girl to a woman, the vampiric ‘marriage’ of siring constitutes the transformation of a mortal to a vampire.

Even from Polidori’s *The Vampyre*, this type of monster has haunted bedrooms and been strangely concerned with the matter of marriage and romance in Western fiction. In this context, the figure of the vampire served as mask and manifestation of a variety of fears, including fear of the foreign and the other intruding into the circles of the writers’ world, but sexual anxieties were frequently at the forefront of these fears. This we see in Lord Ruthven’s corruptive influence, Carmilla’s ‘illustrat[ion of] the concerns of her era about unproductive and degenerate sexuality’ (Hobson, 2016: 12) and Dracula’s polygynous ‘marriage’ and sexualised assaults. Moving forwards, this trait remained in pulp fiction and some early adaptations of the vampire to the screen, while media such as *Dark Shadows* and *The Vampire Chronicles* served to begin the process of humanising the vampire – granting them sufficient sympathy that they could be seen as anti-heroes or even protagonists in their own right. A notable portion of this development occurred between *Interview with the Vampire* and *The Vampire Lestat*, which is considered by many a ‘soft reboot’ of the setting, allowing Rice to rehabilitate the character of Lestat and vampires in general by claiming an unreliable narrator for *Interview*. From this point, it was simply a matter of this more sympathetic characterisation of the vampire percolating into popular culture to the point that the idea of using one as a romantic interest reached the point of acceptability. In retrospect, it seems almost inevitable that the ‘profane lover’ of the vampire would undergo this transformation, with increasing acceptance of what would previously have been considered ‘sexual deviance’, from homosexuality to extramarital sex to **BDSM** and other forms of sex-play. With increasing sexual liberation and the acceptance of the ways in which pain and pleasure are not entirely separate, it seems that

vampires will continue to haunt the bedrooms of our imagination – although perhaps in a more consensual manner than their ancestors.

---

## Notes

[1] As a point of note, to distinguish ‘romance’ in the sense of romantic love and the genre of fiction surrounding it from the Romantic literary movement, in this essay things pertaining to the latter will be described in terms of ‘[Romanticism](#)’.

## References

- Anatol, G. L. (2015), ‘Preface’, in *The Things That Fly in the Night: Female Vampires in Literature of the Circum-Caribbean and African Diaspora*, New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Auerbach, N. (1995), *Our Vampires, Ourselves*, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Briggs, K. M. (1978), *An Encyclopedia of Fairies: Hobgoblins, Brownies, Bogies, and Other Supernatural Creatures*, New York, NY: Pantheon Books.
- Bunson, M. (1993), *The Vampire Encyclopedia*, New York, NY: Gramercy Books.
- Childs, P. and R. Fowler. (2006), *The Routledge Dictionary of Literary Terms*, Abingdon: Routledge.
- Fong, R. D. (2016), ‘A Feminist Bloodletting: Reading Suicide in Florence Marryat and Angela Carter’, in Hobson, A. and M. Anyiwo (eds.) *Gender in the Vampire Narrative*, Rotterdam: Sense Publishers, pp. 109–24.
- Frayling, C. (1992), *Vampyres: Lord Byron to Count Dracula*, London: Faber and Faber.
- Goold, G. P. (ed.) (1982), *Hesiod. The Homeric Hymns and Homeric*, Norwich: Fletcher & Son Ltd.

Hobson, A. (2016), 'Dark Seductress: The Hypersexualization of the Female Vampire', in Hobson, A. and M. Anyiwo (ed.) *Gender in the Vampire Narrative*, Rotterdam: Sense Publishers, pp. 9–28.

Howard, R. E. (1935), 'The Hour of the Dragon', available at <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/42243/42243-h/42243-h.htm>, accessed 5th Apr. 2021. (originally published in serial format from 1935–36 in *Weird Tales* magazine)

LeFanu, J. T. S. (2019), 'Carmilla'. *Project Gutenberg*, 29th Apr. 2019. <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/10007/10007-h/10007-h.htm>, accessed 5th Apr. 2021. (originally published in serial format from 1871–72 in *The Dark Blue* magazine)

McClelland, B. (2006), *Slayers and their Vampires: A Cultural History of Killing the Dead*. Michigan, MI: University of Michigan Press.

Polidori, J. W. (1997), 'The Vampyre' in Morrison, R. and C. Baldick (ed.) *The Vampyre and Other Tales of the Macabre*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 33–46 (originally published as *The Vampyre* in 1819 in *The New Monthly Magazine and Universal Register*).

Priest, H. (2018), 'Sparkly Vampires and Shimmering Aliens: The Paranormal Romance of Stephenie Meyer', in Murphy, B. (ed.), *Twenty First Century Popular Fiction*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Rice, A. (1976), *Interview with the Vampire*, New York: Ballantine Books.

Rymer, J. M. (1845–47), *Varney the Vampire: Or, the Feast of Blood*, London: Independently Published.

Scurlock, J.. (2014), 'Chapter 12: Obstetrics and Gynecology' in Lewis, T. J *et al.* (ed.), *A Sourcebook for Ancient Mesopotamian Medicine*, Atlanta, GA: SBL Press.

Stoker, B. (2011), *Dracula*, London: HarperCollins.

## Glossary

**Baobhan Sith (pronounced BAA-ban see):** A vampiric being from Scottish folklore, usually taking the form of an attractive woman with deer's

hooves. Associated with faeries, shapeshifting and attacking hunters by night (Briggs, 1978: 16).

**BDSM:** An abbreviation for 'Bondage and discipline, dominance and submission, sadism and masochism', used somewhat generally to refer to acts of sex-play involving those elements.

**Enlightenment, The:** Also called the 'Age of Enlightenment' or the 'Age of Reason'; a period generally considered to stretch from the mid-1600s to the late-1700s, characterised by rising interest in knowledge gained through reason and evidence of the senses, constitutional government, separation of Church and state, and ideals such as human happiness, liberty, progress and toleration, but also by disparagement of ideas, emotions and peoples considered 'superstitious', 'primitive' or 'irrational'.

**Genre:** A category of literature defined by a prevalence of particular key traits, such as focus on particular themes, settings or character archetypes, although boundaries between genres are often indistinct.

**Gothic:** A style of story characterised by terror and suspense, usually set in or partly in a medieval setting, such as a castle or monastery, hence the name. Related to the Romantic movement in the recalling of medieval ideas and centralising emotion and the supernatural (Childs and Fowler, 2006: 100).

**Orientalism:** Western ideas or media imagining Middle Eastern and Asian societies as mysterious, never-changing or sexually charged (Childs and Fowler, 2006: 162).

**Romanticism:** A literary movement generally considered to be rooted in the late-1700s to mid-1800s, characterised by a focus on emotion, creativity and art over reason and science, on the connection of human. Despite the name, Romantic works are not necessarily involved with love, though many often are.

**Soucuyant:** A vampiric being from Caribbean folklore taking the form of a reclusive old woman by day, but who takes off her skin at night to travel as a fireball and suck the blood of victims (Anatol, 2015: 10).



**Strigoi:** A vampiric being from Romanian folklore; the spirit or corpse of a dead man, particularly of 'profane' individuals, which rises from the grave and takes on animal forms to drink the blood of victims (Bunson, 1993: 247).

---

To cite this paper please use the following details: Fewings, A.J. (2022), 'Crosses to Cullens: The Western Vampire from Gothic Predator to Romantic Icon', *Reinvention: an International Journal of Undergraduate Research*, Special Issue | Reeling and Writhing: Intertextuality and Myth, <https://reinventionjournal.org/article/view/868>. Date accessed [insert date]. If you cite this article or use it in any teaching or other related activities please let us know by e-mailing us at [Reinventionjournal@warwick.ac.uk](mailto:Reinventionjournal@warwick.ac.uk).