A Study of the Popularity and Conventions of Vampire Fiction
and
Vampire Night:
A Creative Interpretation of the Genre Formula

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

by

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Abstract

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the growing popularity of vampire fiction, particularly paranormal and vampire romances for teens. Vampire fiction began with *Carmilla* and *Dracula* as popular scary stories the 1800s, but in recent years has been transformed into a cultural phenomenon that represents love and acceptance. Traditional vampire mythology has been renewed and recreated for a younger modern audience. However, as with other popular genres, vampire fiction follows set narrative patterns. This thesis will explore the conventions of vampire literature and its transformation into its current form.
Love at First Bite:  
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Love at First Bite:
A Study of the Popularity and Conventions of Vampire Fiction

For centuries, the undead have fascinated and frightened readers—tales of the dead rising from the grave to haunt the living have terrified and entranced us. Well before the iconic Dracula, stories of vampires filled readers' nightmares in folktales and legends. While vampires have never truly disappeared from literature, they were forgotten for a time, regarded as merely scary stories not worthy of literary merit. Classic volumes of Dracula often sat collecting dust or resting in anthologies, and before the 1970s, who had even heard of Carmilla or “Good Lady Ducayne”? Recently, however, vampires have risen from their literary grave to stalk through the pages of popular fiction once again. Entire sections of vampire fiction now fill our bookstores. One cannot walk past a movie theater without seeing posters for the next vampire movie or installment of The Twilight Saga. But why the sudden resurrection? Anne Rice, beginning in the 1970s, revitalized the genre. Starting with Interview with the Vampire, the undead recaptured our imaginations. Now, Stephenie Meyer and others have transformed the vampire into something for the younger generation to fall in love with. Paranormal romances—the recent term bookstores have used to dub their aisles of teen romances involving vampires, werewolves, and the like—have become one of the most popular genres in recent years.

What Is Genre Fiction?

Whether it is a detective novel, an adventure story, or a Harlequin romance, popular fiction follows a formula. Individual books may be unique in their setting or their characters, but the elements that make up the book as a whole are essentially the same. Larry McCaffery uses the image in “The Library of Babel” by Jorge Luis Borges of a library composed of “five shelves
[that] correspond to each of the walls of each hexagon; each shelf contains thirty-two books of a uniform format; each book is made up of four hundred and ten pages; each page, of forty lines; each line, of some eighty black letters" to describe one of the common views of popular fiction (21). The eighty letters are combined and recombined to create a multitude of lines, which are combined and recombined to create a multitude of pages, and so on. Throw the same elements into a blender, pull the first ten out, and you have a new story; they are same parts just in different combinations over and over again. John Cawelti uses the definition: “A formula is a combination or synthesis of a number of specific cultural conventions with a more universal story form or archetype” (Adventures 6). For many, this leads to the assumption that formula fiction is not real fiction. It is not serious or of literary merit. It should not be canonized or studied. Cawelti himself states that the “two central aspects of formulaic structures have been generally condemned in the serious artistic thought of the last hundred years: their essential standardization and their primary relation to the needs of escape and relaxation” (8).

Yet it would be remiss to ignore the literary merit of popular fiction. For example, Gothic novels were virtually ignored by literary critics until Robert D. Hume in 1969 argued that these novels should be studied alongside other classic literary forms. In his article “Gothic versus Romantic: A Revaluation of the Gothic Novel,” Hume “suggest[s] that the Gothic novel is more than a collection of ghost-story devices” (282). In analyzing “the characteristics and development of the Gothic novel,” defining the “essence” of the Gothic, and setting “the original Gothic novels in better historical perspective by defining their relation to the romantic literature of the same period,” Hume makes a case that even though these novels were popular when they were published, there is literary merit here (282). The same is true for other forms of popular fiction. While it may seem irrelevant that there are hundreds of books featuring virtually the
same characteristics. It in truth says something about the culture in which they are created, and, if the formula persists beyond a single culture or time period, it speaks to more than just a passing fad, but to something of definite value.

Elements of Genre: The Formula

Popular fiction, as previously noted, follows a formula. For example, every mystery or detective novel has specific elements that are universal, such as “[beginning] with an unsolved crime and [moving] toward the elucidation of its mystery” (Cawelti 80). There are variations, but the formula is essentially the same for all novels within that category. In order to fully study vampire romance as a genre, a formula must be defined. Elements that are consistent throughout vampire romances have to be identified in order to examine what makes specific works within the genre unique. However, formulas generally do not begin with one single book—they either stem from a previous genre or are not identified until the formula has already been established. A lot can be gained from studying previous genres and literary movements to explain the origins and conventions of a current popular genre.

Gothic Influence

While there are novels explicitly called Gothic romances, vampire romances—although borrowing substantially from Gothic romances—are different. Characterized by an “eerie mood” and “occult happenings,” Gothic romances take a cue from more traditional Gothic novels as far as setting and tone (Lowery 20). However, vampire romances draw far more heavily from Gothic literature than other Gothic romances. They maintain some of the mystery and eeriness of both Gothic literature and Gothic romances, but while Gothic romances have logical explanations of
seemingly supernatural occurrences, vampire romances take a page directly out of *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* or *Wuthering Heights*.

One of the most important elements of a Gothic novel is the atmosphere. In any Gothic novel, the setting is used to create the tone of mystery and suspense for the rest of the novel. A great deal of time is spent describing the location, as it is the backdrop for the coming ominous portents and shadowy happenings (Hume 284). For example, *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* by Robert Louis Stevenson would not be the same without the dingy, fog-bound streets of London. The ghostly laughter in *Jane Eyre* would not have the same effect without the loneliness of the brooding forest surrounding the Rochester estate. Whether the characters are secluded in the moors of *Wuthering Heights* or in the freezing arctic in *Frankenstein*, the Gothic novel uses distance to seclude the events and add to the sensation of the unfamiliar.

In vampire romances, the stories take place in either the past, a foreign country, or very small-town, isolated America. Rarely does action occur in modern-day American metropolises. Beginning with the Anne Rice novels, vampires began to appear in American towns, but the stories themselves still took place in the past or told of events occurring in Europe. Today's most popular vampire romances, *Twilight*, the *Sookie Stackhouse Novels*, and *The Vampire Diaries*, all take place in small towns in Washington, Louisiana, and Virginia, respectively. Forks, Washington is constantly dark, rainy, and foggy; and Bella and the vampires of *The Twilight Saga* are usually found in the woods that surround the town. Bon Temps, Louisiana of the *Sookie Stackhouse Novels* is an almost back-water town in which most of the action occurs at night due to Sookie’s job as a cocktail waitress and the nocturnal vampires. Additionally, Sookie lives alone in a house away from the main part of town at the end of a long gravel drive surrounded by woods which adds significantly to her own isolation. *The Vampire Diaries* seems the most
Ray & Ruling

contemporary and lively, comparatively, but the characters are still in a small town and no one ever leaves. There is an old graveyard that characterizes many scenes with the vampires, and again, a lot of vampire-human interactions occur in the woods surrounding the town. These secluded, physically distant locations create the overall “Gothic” feel of the vampire romance.

But there is more to what constitutes a Gothic novel than a spooky setting. Two other major elements of Gothic novels are moral ambiguity and psychological responses to extreme circumstances (Hume). Moral ambiguity questions what is right or wrong, lacks a sense of satisfying closure, and generally creates less than righteous means of gaining an end. The Cullen clan in *Twilight* is “vegetarian,” drinking blood only from deer, mountain lions, and bears because they feel it is wrong to drink human blood. However, Edward still questions whether or not he has a soul and what being a vampire truly means. In *Dead Until Dark*, the first of the *Sookie Stackhouse Novels*, Bill, Sookie’s vampire boyfriend, murders Sookie’s sexually abusive great-uncle and two vampire drainers who beat her up. She is very upset by this because, while she feels it is wrong for Bill to murder these people, is it murder if he is a vampire? This situation bleeds directly into the psychological response Sookie has to these questions. She is shaken by what Bill has done for her, and her relationship with Bill becomes strained. Bella, on the other hand, does not exhibit quite the same emotions as Sookie. She is much more accepting of Edward’s vampirism, creating a less realistic response to being confronted with an extreme situation.

The last Gothic element that plays a huge role in vampire romances is the monster. Jeffrey Cohen states that Gothic monsters “quite literally [incorporate] fear, desire, anxiety, and fantasy... giving them life and an uncanny independence. The monstrous body is pure culture” (4). In short, monsters would not exist without a society to create them. If a society were afraid
of nothing, a monster would not be necessary to embody its fears. Frankenstein’s monster, Mr. Hyde, and especially Count Dracula all embody cultural fears of the time, and today’s monsters do the same. However, contemporary vampires are not like Count Dracula. They embody less and less fear and anxiety, and ever more fantasy and desire.

While the vampire is most often connected to Dracula, the idea of the vampire in literature came long before then. Two tales modern readers may not be familiar with are John Polidori’s The Vampyre and Sheridan Le Fanu’s Carmilla. Published in 1819 and 1872 respectively, these novels are the forerunners, and in Carmilla’s case, inspiration, for Dracula. With these first novels, the “prerequisites” of vampires were formed, everything from their actions to their physical features. Ronald Foust in his essay “Rite of Passage: The Vampire Tale as Cosmogonic Myth” highlights these features using The Vampyre:

Polidori’s novel both initiates the modern [1981] vampire story and adumbrates the major elements that will become the archetypal staples of the form. These include the vampire’s “evil eye” or hypnotic power, its tremendous strength, its pallor and association with the moon, its immortality, its identity as a self-absorbed egotist who brings ruin on individuals and societies, its thirst for blood…, and its associations with the grave…, with Satan, and with the love-crime [destroying the institution of marriage (74)] that Mario Praz feels is at the heart of the vampire story. (74-5)

Foust then shows that just one vampire novel later with Carmilla, there is already a standard for literary vampires to follow: “Carmilla is pale and languid, eats nothing and appears only late in the afternoon…. She has the gleaming eyes and passionate gaze that are attributes of the
vampire” (75). Vampire romances continue the themes presented in the early novels, but with vampires as heroes rather than villains.

**Romance Influences**

In addition to capturing elements from Gothic literature and classic fantasy, vampire romance draws heavily from the traditional romance genre, or Harlequin romance. Marilyn Lowery defines the traditional romance formula:

1. A girl, our heroine, meets a man, our hero, who is above her socially and who is wealthy and worldly.
2. The hero excites the heroine but frightens her sexually.
3. She is usually alone in the world and vulnerable.
4. The hero dominates the heroine, but she is fiery and sensual, needing this powerful male.
5. Though appearing to scorn her, the hero is intrigued by her and pursues her sexually.
6. The heroine wants love, not merely sex, and sees his pursuit as self-gratification.
7. The two clash in verbal sparring.
8. In holding to her own standards, the heroine appears to lose the hero. She does not know he respects her.
9. A moment of danger for either main character results in the realization on the part of the hero or heroine that the feeling between them is true love.
10. A last-minute plot twist threatens their relationship.
11. The two finally communicate and admit their true love, which will last forever. (17-8)

Vampire romance follows this formula almost exactly with a few variations and additions that are specific to the genre. For example, the vampire romance features a female, human protagonist who is intrigued by the male vampire, who in turn is fascinated by some unexplained characteristic of the female protagonist.

In *Twilight* by Stephenie Meyer, Edward Cullen is inexplicably drawn to Bella Swan because of her scent and his inability to read her mind, while Bella is completely fascinated by
Edward’s characteristics and charisma that she cannot explain. These characteristics end up being his vampirism. In the *Sookie Stackhouse Novels* by Charlaine Harris, Sookie Stackhouse is telepathic. However, she is unable to read vampire minds (just as Edward is unable to read Bella’s), which causes her to find comfort in the silence that she cannot find with human companions. To vampires, Sookie has a particularly alluring scent and taste, which is later revealed to be due to her fairy ancestry. Similarly, in L.J. Smith’s *Vampire Diaries*, the male vampire Stefan Salvatore is attracted to human Elena Gilbert because of her striking resemblance to the vampire that created him and the unexplained connection between them. Like Bella to Edward in *Twilight*, Elena is attracted to Stefan’s broodiness and the fact that he does not worship her like everyone else in her school does. Each heroine has some attribute that makes her especially desirable, while some equally appealing attribute makes the vampire irresistible.

As Lowery notes, in a romance novel the man is “above [the heroine] socially and [he] is wealthy and worldly” (17). The same holds true for vampire romance. Whether the story is aimed at teens or adults, the vampire is inevitably more experienced and cultured than the female protagonist. As the vampire has lived for decades, if not centuries, longer, it is not entirely unexpected that she finds him socially superior. They have had years to accumulate wealth, social graces, and experience. Edward impresses Bella with his knowledge of literature, his ability to play piano, his family’s wealth, and his ridiculously expensive array of cars. He’s socially her superior as a member of the mysterious clique of incredibly attractive Cullens at the high school, while she is the new student. Bill Compton of the *Sookie Stackhouse Novels*, on the other hand, as a soldier from the Civil War has an ingrained politeness and Southern charm that persuades nearly every human that vampires cannot be as horrible as they’ve heard. He buys her expensive items, including her favorite department store, and showers her with gifts. Stefan,
correspondingly, lived during the Italian Renaissance and is infinitely more cultured than the average American high school student.

While their past makes them all the more intriguing, the difference in social standing adds to the inequality of power in the relationships. Not only are the vampires socially superior but they are also physically superior. No matter the other characteristics or powers ascribed to vampires, three main things are consistent. First, they are essentially immortal. Second, they drink blood to survive. Third, they are physically stronger than humans. In vampire romance, this inequality of power leads to the desire to protect their human companions. They feel obligated to shelter them from the dangers of vampire life. This generally appears most prevalently during their initial encounter and the formation of the relationship, but continues throughout.

After the first meeting of the two main characters, there is generally a period of discovery on the part of the heroine and a period of avoidance by the vampire. Depending on the mythology of each series or book, the protagonist does not know about the existence of vampires. The protagonist, intrigued by the hero, is determined to find out about him. Bella is constantly asking about the Cullen family—what they do, where they live, where they come from. Eventually, she turns to the internet to find explanations for Edward’s strange behavior and cold skin. Elena, on the other hand, is simply focused on capturing Stefan’s attention. She is confused by his indifference and curious as to why he ignores her.

This period of time, however, is characterized by strict avoidance on the part of the hero. The vampires in these romance novels are keenly aware of the danger they pose to their fragile human lovers. For Edward, Bella is a peculiar temptation, and he immediately chooses to spend as little time as possible in her presence. Bella interprets his actions as hatred, but he is merely attempting to protect her. Stefan, likewise, avoids Elena because he is worried about the danger
his affection might cause. Each vampire sees the heroine as in desperate need of protection who cannot possibly cope with the situations or knowledge that being in a relationship would bring. This period mimics the idea within a traditional romance when “appearing to scorn [the heroine], the hero is intrigued by her,” but with different motivations and generally with the attempt to not “pursue her,” unlike the traditional romance (17).

With any formula, there are exceptions. The period of discovery and avoidance is distinctly different for those stories in which the mythology includes the acknowledgment of vampires by human society. In Harris’s Sookie Stackhouse Novels, vampires have “come out of the coffin” (similar to the phrase “come out of the closet” used for when homosexual men and women tell others they are gay) and have announced their existence to the general human population. Similarly, the House of Night series by Kristin and P.C. Cast features vampires who have always been recognizable as different from humans. While neither series shows vampires as a completely accepted part of society, both depict knowledge about vampires. Nevertheless, even when vampires are known, there is an element of avoidance and need for protection. Sookie in the Sookie Stackhouse Novels chooses to shun the company of Bill Compton, her vampire boyfriend, after a terrifying experience with another group of vampires. Conversely, when they are reunited, Bill feels guilty about the possibility of peril surrounding Sookie because of her involvement with him and the vampire community. He believes he is responsible for protecting her and ensuring her safety. In both cases, whether or not vampires are known, the hero feels the need to separate himself from the heroine in order to protect her.

The misunderstanding of intentions is a common theme throughout romance novels. Ann Barr Snitow states, “[Harlequin romance] novels have no plot in the usual sense. All tension and problems arise from the fact that the Harlequin world is inhabited by two species incapable of
communicating with each other, male and female…. They find each other utterly mystifying” (190). The inability to communicate in vampire romance is further complicated by the fact they are in actuality two separate species. They have different cultural backgrounds, different physiological makeup and needs, and lifestyles. All of the differences between human and vampire culminate in a barely surmountable communication gap. For example, Bill is constantly offending Sookie because of his old-fashioned attitudes towards women; “Bill made as if to pick me up. ‘I am a grown woman,’ I snarled. ‘I can walk into the house on my own” (Harris, Dead Until Dark 191). He cannot understand how to treat modern human women as he has not truly interacted with them for centuries.

“In holding to her own standards, the heroine appears to lose the hero. She does not know he respects her” is one of Lowery’s criteria for a romance novel, but it is not a universal characteristic of vampire romance (17). The Sookie Stackhouse Novels, which tends to follow the romance formula more strictly than others in vampire romance, includes a scene in which Sookie is appalled by the amount of bloodshed Bill has caused and refuses to see him. However, this does not have corresponding scene or sequence in other vampire romance works. Instead, the heroine’s infatuation with her vampire lover is too great for her to be greatly perturbed by what he is. For example, while Edward argues he has no soul, Bella is continually trying to convince him otherwise as she believes him to be absolutely perfect. The entire Twilight Saga is filled with references to Edward’s beauty and perfection. Bella cannot find any flaw with him. Elena, likewise, believes Stefan when he denies accusations of being responsible for the “animal attacks” that are in truth perpetrated by his brother, Damon (who is also a vampire). Despite knowing that he is equally capable of the killings, she remains loyal to him. The heroines
consistently look past the fact that, as vampires, the heroes are monsters. It is only Sookie who
seems aware of the true horrors they can commit and have committed in the past.

“There seems little doubt that most modern romance formulas are essentially affirmations
of the ideals of monogamous marriage and feminine domesticity” (Cawelti 42). The goal of a
romance novel is the pursuit of a relationship that eventually leads to marriage. Snitow claims
that “the heroine is not involved in any overt adventure beyond trying to respond appropriately to
male energy without losing her virginity” (191). However, vampire romance changes that aspect
of the romance novel. While the main focus remains on the relationship between human
protagonist and vampire lover, there are added elements of danger, suspense, and adventure. For
example, Sookie is removed from her small town life to travel with the vampires as a sort of
consultant in their interactions with humans. She becomes enwrapped in intrigue and mystery
with kidnappings, murders, and assassination attempts. Although not quite as dramatic, Bella is
confronted by vampires who wish to hunt her, rampaging groups of newly made vampires, and
clan fights between vampires and, for all intents and purposes, werewolves. Vampires create a
new element for romance novels: instead of merely trying to maintain her virginity, the heroine
must maintain her mortal life while still juggling the new knowledge of the paranormal and a
relationship.

Teen Versus Adult Vampire Fiction

While the formula for plot in a vampire romance is fairly standardized, there is a
separation between adult vampire romance and teen vampire romance. The plots mirror one
another closely, but it is more than just age that separates teen from adult. Lowery describes
“young adult romance”:
These romances are geared for readers from age twelve to fourteen with heroines of fifteen or sixteen and heroes of seventeen or eighteen. The heroines are from typical middle-class backgrounds and lead wholesome lives. The emphasis is on the first romantic relationship, and usually the first kiss is uppermost in the girl’s mind. The settings are those normal for a U.S. teenager, and minor characters are included in the form of friends, teachers, parents. These are not the lonely girls of the traditional romances. (22)

The focus in young adult romances is on wholesomeness. The heroine remains pure throughout, and sexual encounters do not occur. This is also the first main difference between teen and adult vampire romances. Bella and Edward do not consummate their relationship until after they are married in the fourth and final book of the series, and the scene is not explicitly described. The extent of their intimacy prior to this is a handful of very brief touches of the lips. Throughout the Sookie Stackhouse Novels, a series written for adults with adult themes, Sookie engages in a multitude of physical relationships with a variety of both vampires and shape-shifters. While the teen vampire romance novels focus on finding true love, the adult versions, though still interested in love, are more concerned with the physical aspects of a relationship. There is little that can be described as wholesome in many of the adult vampire romance novels.

Despite these differences, there are a few aspects that tend to stay the same in teen and adult vampire romances. For example, the idolization of the male figure is carried throughout teen and adult vampire romances. Due to the adult content of adult vampire romances, the novels necessarily describe the physical attributes of the hero in immense detail. Snitow comments:

In a sense the usual relationship is reversed: woman is subject, man, object. There are more descriptions of his body than of hers though her clothes are always
minutely observed. He is the unknowable other, a sexual icon whose magic is maleness. The books are permeated by phallic worship. Male is good. male is exciting, without further points of reference. (190)

As the romances are seen from the female point-of-view, most of the descriptions focus on the male character. Little time is given to the description of the protagonist unless it adds to the tone of a particular scene. Instead, the focus is on the male body. For example, in *Dead Until Dark*, Sookie describes Bill’s appearance in depth: “his lips were lovely, sharply sculpted, and he had arched dark brows. His nose swooped down right out of that arch, like a prince’s in a Byzantine mosaic” (Harris 2). Later in the novel, upon meeting Eric Northman (another vampire and eventual love-interest), Sookie describes him as “handsome, in fact, radiant; blond and blue-eyed, tall and broad shouldered. He was wearing boots, jeans, and a vest. Period. Kind of like the guys on the cover of romance books” (105). While teen romances may be unfailingly wholesome in the relationship between the heroine and her vampire love-interest, the heroine is still obsessively focused on the hero’s physical form. The authors repeatedly mention the hero’s appearance and how it contributes to the protagonist’s attraction to him. Stefan, in *The Vampire Diaries*, is continually described as dark and handsome. Edward, on the other hand, is said to be beautiful or incredibly striking in nearly every scene in which he appears in the *Twilight Saga*—“His hair was dripping wet, disheveled—even so, he looked like he’d just finished shooting a commercial for hair gel. His dazzling face was friendly, open, a light smile on his flawless lips” (Meyer 43). The descriptions may fail to go as far as adult romances in sexualizing the appearance of the male hero, but the male is still objectified.

Likewise, the isolated heroine remains a consistent characteristic of both teen and adult vampire romances. The heroine in an adult romance is isolated from the outside world; if not by
location, than by some other aspect of her life. Sookie, for instance, is isolated as the town “crazy” as her telepathy makes normal conversation almost impossible. However, in teen romance, Lowery writes, “These are not the lonely girls of the traditional romances,” but in vampire romances they are. Loving a vampire means a heroine cannot be the popular girl—sleep schedules are warped, mystery surrounds everything about the male which the female then seeps herself in it, and discovering the vampire out or being with him alienate the heroine from society. Bella is the perfect example. She moves from Arizona where she has no friends to a school in Washington where she is the “new kid.” This makes her popular because she is a commodity (and her father asked all the students to be welcoming and make her feel included). But Bella does not want to be popular. She instead devotes her time to understanding why Edward is withdrawn and why his family seems so mysterious. Elena’s case is slightly more problematic. Elena is the popular girl—she runs the school, she is the Homecoming Queen. When Stefan arrives, however, Elena shirks her Queen Bee duties and devotes herself to attaining Stefan. He does not give her the time of day and he is the only person in the school who does not. This intrigues Elena and she must figure him out, alienating all but her two closest friends in the process.

On the other hand, as teen vampire romances are aimed at a teenage female audience, not only are they wholesome, but they also focus on those things that an average teenage girl is most concerned about—boys, parents, and school. The novels take place during high school and mention classes and teachers and, of course, popularity. While the appearance of vampires alters the worldview of the protagonist somewhat, her main problems still pertain to boys (i.e. the vampire) and how to cope with the stress of high school and a relationship. Adult vampire romances, however, are able to expand the focus to matters such as society and politics as well as
more minor concerns such as finances and careers. While the relationship is vitally important in both of these, the adult vampire romance has the ability to make broader statements about the society in which they are produced. Yet, while *Twilight* and other teen vampire romances generally do not reflect any themes that affect the average adult, they have still been able to garner a wider audience than the teenage girl which they were written for. As the plethora of news stories regarding the spread of the *Twilight* phenomenon indicate, the books are being read by pre-teens, teens, and adult women alike. Whether the issues presented are about society at large or high school drama, be they teen or adult, the thing they all share is the vampire.

**The Ever-Changing Vampire and Cultural Fears**

One of the quintessential aspects of vampire romance novels is of course, the vampire. But what is a vampire? From Count Dracula to Edward Cullen, literature has been defining and redefining the concept of “vampire.” A vampire, as the general republic regards it, is an undead human who survives on drinking blood from living creatures. No matter what vampire mythos is being examined, this is essentially the same. However, many aspects of the vampire iconography have changed over time. In Cohen’s essay “Monster Culture” he lists seven Monster Theses. Number two, “The Monster Always Escapes,” shows us that although the physical monster of the story may die, the cultural fear lives on, changing for an ever-changing society. “No monster tastes of death but once,” he writes. “The anxiety that condenses like green vapor into the form of the vampire can be dispersed temporarily, but the revenant by definition returns. And so the monster’s body is both corporal and incorporeal; its threat is its propensity to shift” (5). He goes on to illustrate how vampires embody this thesis—“Each time the grave opens and the unquiet slumberer strides forth..., the message proclaimed is transformed by the air that gives its speaker
new life. Monsters must be examined within the intricate matrix of relations (social, cultural, and literary-historical) that generate them” (5). This, therefore, is why the vampires change—social, cultural, and literary-historical relations and ideas are always changing with the times. Acting as monsters, vampires reflect a culture’s fears and desires, and whatever is unseemly about the culture is thrown off onto the vampire. In the 19th century, those fears and desires were easily recognizable with works like Dracula. Today however, those cultural abjections are less clear and are reflected in our society’s vampires who resemble humans much more than their Gothic counterparts.

In Gothic literature, the vampire often represented the cultural fear of violating gender norms and gender roles. As mentioned earlier, Foust claims that love-crimes are “necessary to the vampire motif” (75). In Carmilla, the crime is lesbianism (75). Carmilla preys on the young narrator Laura, draining her blood almost to the point of death. However, it was not only the vampirism that frightened readers at the time, but also the homosexual overtones that were implied. Carmilla proclaims to Laura, “In the rapture of my enormous humiliation I live in your warm life, and you shall die—die, sweetly die—into mine” (Le Fanu 104). Laura admits that these words and Carmilla’s tender actions are “like the ardour of a lover; it embarrassed me; it was hateful and yet overpowering” (104). To further this, Carmilla “with gloating eyes drew Laura to her, and her hot lips travelled along her cheek in kisses; and she would whisper, almost in sobs, ‘You are mine, you shall be mine, and you and I are one for ever’” (105). These fears of lesbianism for a 19th-century audience directly conflict with modern readers’ visions of a male vampire bent over the neck of a young woman.

As noted, in most modern vampire romance tales, the protagonist is female and she falls in love—or at least in lust—with a male vampire. In each of the novels, this remains fairly
consistent. However, beginning with Anne Rice who "has given the myth a modern rewriting in which homosexuality and vampirism have been conjoined, apotheosized... at a time [Interview with the Vampire was published in 1976] when gender as a construct has been scrutinized at almost every social register" (Cohen 5), the fear of violating gender norms and heterosexual relationships remains an aspect, if perhaps a less pronounced one, in vampire romance. In the Sookie Stackhouse Novels, vampires are said to have “come out of the coffin” and are actively fighting for political rights, including the right to marry humans. Their efforts are frequently met by the same opposition that currently faces the LGBT (Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender) community. The vampires are despised by religious groups, while those humans that are accepting of the vampires are derided as “fang-bangers” and are subjected to multiple types of prejudice and persecution. In addition, multiple characters, both human and supernatural, are gay or lesbian in the series. Three of the main “ruling” vampires in the series are homosexual and there is even the portrayal of a wedding between two vampire kings, the King of Mississippi and the King of Texas. Similarly, the Queen of Louisiana is shown in a relationship with the Sookie’s female cousin, Hadley.

In Twilight and The Vampire Diaries, the fear is expressed in the distinct lack of homosexual themes or any violation of gender stereotypes. Simply, the girls act as girls and the boys act as boys. While every vampire in vampire romance novels feels protective of their human lover due to their lack of physical strength, the protective aspects of the male vampire is even more greatly pronounced in Twilight and The Vampire Diaries. Whereas Sookie is eventually allowed to fend for herself, it is not until Bella and Elena are each transformed into something beyond human that they begin to show independence. For example, in New Moon, the second book of the Twilight Saga, Bella’s entire world is centered on Edward to the point where
once he leaves her for an extended period of time, her entire life completely stops. Represented by a section of blank pages with only the name of months written upon them, Bella has no recollection of the passage of time without Edward. Gender norms are constantly reinforced through the behavior of the characters as Edward makes every decision regarding the relationship and what is best for Bella. While not as shocking as lesbianism in the 19th century, the breach of gender roles is still central to the fears that vampires can represent.

The character Dracula represented the incarnation of evil itself. Jules Zanger writes “In Stoker’s novel, Dracula is presented to the reader as the earthly embodiment of supernal Evil, as the ‘arrow in the side of Him who died for man’…Dracula, for Stoker and for Stoker’s readers, is the Anti-Christ” (18). Simply, Dracula has no hope of redemption or for acting for the good of anyone. He represented the fear of pure evil in a form that could briefly pass for human.

However, even at the time of Dracula, authors were beginning to explore the idea of evil coming from within ourselves rather than from some supernatual source. For instance, The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde clearly shows the horror of evil coming from within not only one’s own country, but from within one’s self. Modern vampire tales take more of a cue from Stevenson than Stoker. Zanger continues:

The ‘new’ vampire possesses very little of that metaphysical, anti-Christian dimension, and his or her evil acts are expressions of individual personality and condition, not of any cosmic conflict between God and Satan. Consequently, the vampire’s absolutely evil nature as objectified in Dracula becomes increasingly compromised, permitting the existence of ‘good’ vampires as well as bad ones. (18-19)
In other words, vampires are no longer inherently evil, but rather their penchant for murder or violence stems from their individual senses of entitlement or from the fact that absolute power corrupts absolutely. This allows there to now be a romantic relationship between human and vampire without readers being horrified by the choices the heroine makes. The glittering vampires of *Twilight* bear little resemblance to the terrifying creatures of *Dracula*.

Among other shifts, Zanger lists changes in vampires “from solitary to multiple and communal, from metaphoric Anti-Christ to secular sinner, from magical to mundane” each of which serves to demythologize the vampire until “the new vampire has become, in our concerned awareness for multiculturalism, merely ethnic, a victim of heredity, like being Sicilian or Jewish. Or, alternatively, vampirism can be understood… as a kind of viral infection, possibly like AIDS, without any necessary moral weight” (19). While Zanger is referring to the vampire tales of the 1980s, the shifts in characterization remain static, although the vampire is not entirely demythologized as she suggests. The vampires of the current trend in vampire romances retain some aspects of magic and mythology even if they are no longer connected to Christianity or Satan. The vampires have no fear of crosses or holy water, but there are characteristics that cannot be explained and must be consigned to the realm of the supernatural. They may be infinitely more humanized than vampires of the long past, but they are still creatures of mystery, which is perhaps why readers are still so drawn to them.

As Nina Auerbach aptly titled her book *Our Vampires, Ourselves*, our vampires are ourselves. We created vampires two centuries ago to cope with cultural fears—we personified them with those fears and staked and beheaded them away. “Individual vampires may die; after almost a century, even Dracula may be feeling his mortality; but as a species vampires have been our companions for so long that it is hard to imagine living without them. They promise escape
from our dull lives and the pressure of our times, but they matter because when properly understood, they make us see that our lives are implicated in theirs and our times are inescapable" (Auerbach 9). Yet no matter how many vampires or fears we cycle through, we cannot kill the overarching concept of “vampire,” and even when we have no more fears to project onto them, we transform them from fear personified to desire idolized.

From Dracula to Edward Cullen, from Carmilla to Eric Northman, and from popular scary stories to cultural romantic sensations, the vampire phenomenon has only truly shifted in what the vampire represents. It is no longer the thing of nightmares, but rather the thing of dreams. Young girls dream of meeting a tall, dark, handsome stranger to whisk them off into the night and women dream of the dangerous, but chivalrous Viking or Civil War soldier to call their own. These vampires reflect the escape we seek when faced with political turmoil, war, and economic crisis. Instead of imagining the supernatural terrors we will never face, we instead seek comfort in the monsters that formerly terrified as protectors and unchanging pillars of strength in a time when everything appears to be moving too quickly and changing too fast. Vampires will remain regardless of what changes around them. Edward Cullen will remain the statuesque figure he is today just as Dracula has remained the villain that he first was in 1897.
Works Cited


Authors’ Statement:

“Vampire Night”: Our Take on the Vampire Romance

Knowing the above formula and the elements that constitute a vampire romance, we specifically altered or, conversely, preserved many elements of the formula to create our own story. There are many reasons why we changed some elements and kept others. To begin, we decided that the overarching formula of introduction, resistance, discovery, hardship, and reconciliation should remain the same. These are consistent in each vampire romance, and without them, it would not be a vampire romance. Julia and Ethan follow this to the letter: they meet, she attempts to resist him until giving in, he discovers what she is, their relationship is quite rocky, and then they reconcile. From this point, however, the plot deviates. Instead of Ethan becoming a vampire and the two living happily ever after into bloodsucking eternity, Ethan becomes crazed and Julia, Ettie, Will, and Sam kill him. We chose to do this because we did not want to write a straightforward, formulaic teen paranormal romance as for many the idea of finding true love so young and between such disparate beings (humans and vampires) seems unlikely. While keeping a romanticized view of vampires, we did not want to defang them entirely, but rather wanted a sympathetic character that kept all of her independence when confronted with a romantic relationship.

The first major change the reader will notice is the gender and species reversal of the main characters. In Twilight, The Vampire Diaries, and The Sookie Stackhouse Novels, the main female protagonist is a human female whose love interest is a male vampire. We reversed this. While the main protagonist is still a woman, she is the vampire and her human love interest is male. Stories told from vampire perspectives are generally male (Interview with the Vampire, etc.) or less mainstream (In the Forests of the Night by Amelia Atwater-Rhodes). No matter how
strong a female protagonist might be in a teen vampire romance, she is always made to seem or feel weaker next to her vampire counterpart. By making our female protagonist a vampire, she automatically becomes stronger, both physically and emotionally. Gender stereotypes can then be avoided and in some cases completely broken.

Another big change is the audience for which this story was written. It is not for teenagers—the main characters are not 16-18 years old and no one goes to high school—nor is it for adults—our characters’ lives do not revolve around working at a bar or a company and mortgages are not an issue, nor does it venture too far into the world of politics or social controversies. We chose the midway point of college students. Creative writers are always told to write what they know, and we chose to do that while subverting the genre with a story meant for an in-between readership. College students are certainly not teenagers, but they are also not full adults, so why should they not have their own paranormal romance? In setting “Vampire Night” in a college atmosphere, we made vampire fiction more accessible to college students and created a unique vampire community we have not previously seen.

Making this story more accessible to college students placed it more on the adult end of the paranormal romance spectrum, which means the story is more graphic than teen romances. Drinking, partying, sex, and violence are all described explicitly, and this not only submerges readers who are familiar with these activities more fully into the story, but it also has a greater sense of realism. These activities occur on most college campuses and humans freely participate in them, so who is to say vampires do not? Additionally, the vampires we have created drink human blood, they are hundreds if not thousands of years old, and in order to survive they would be subjected to violence. To leave that out would mean sweeping this under the literary rug and would not provide an accurate or detailed picture of the world we have created.
This leads us to Ethan’s death. It is violent and it completely contradicts the happily ever after that most romances create. Vampires are, as stated, bloodsucking creatures who, despite human emotions or sympathies, rely on instinct and violence to survive. And love is not always happily ever after. Literarily it works out quite nicely—teens read their romance to escape into a world where everything is wholesome and works out for the best. Adults read their romance for the thrill and the hope that everything will work out, but understand that it cannot always work out. Despite the fact that this is a tale about vampires and it can only be so “real,” we wanted the story to have a sense of realism to it, that if this actually happened, it would not be all butterflies and sunshine (or twinkling stars and glowing moonlight). We felt, realistically, that someone who came into power like Ethan did would not be able to control it, nor would he want to. Our vampires are not the type to give multiple chances and when someone or something threatens their chance of survival, it must be eliminated. Therefore, Ethan had to die. Happily ever after has a different meaning to a vampire.
Vampire Night

By Madisen Ray and Karen Ruling

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