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ZERO TO HERO: THE TRANSITIONAL VAMPIRE AND HUMAN BECOMING

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Abstract: *Just as Count Dracula from Bram Stoker's novel could change and mutate at will from bat to wolf, and from swarm or rats to a miasmatic mist, this paper will show the many and varied transitions and transformations of the vampire in European culture. From factual starts of eye-witness accounts and official reports from the 18th century, to evolutionary endings in cinematic pre-cursors to actual medical advancements, the blood-sucking undead have metamorphosed across genres and mediums, from fact to fiction, and from page to screen and beyond. Nina Auerbach, in her influential book *Our Vampires, Ourselves* famously said that each generation creates the vampire that it needs and this observation will, indeed, form the trajectory of this examination. It will also highlight the revenant's capacity to act as a buffer and so not just reflecting the age it lives in but prefiguring the next.*

Introduction

Just as Count Dracula from Bram Stoker's novel could change and mutate at will from bat to wolf, and from swarm or rats to a miasmatic mist, this paper will show the many and varied transitions and transformations of the vampire in European culture. From factual starts of eye-witness accounts and official reports from the 18th century, to evolutionary endings in cinematic pre-cursors to actual medical advancements, the blood-sucking undead have metamorphosed across genres and mediums, from fact to fiction, and from page to screen and beyond. Nina Auerbach famously said that each generation creates the vampire that it needs (Auerbach 1-9), and this observation will, indeed, form the trajectory of this examination. It will also highlight the revenant's capacity to act as a buffer and so not just reflecting the age it lives in but prefiguring the next.

This study will divide down into five sections, beginning with the first appearances of the vampire in the 'plague' of instances, sightings, and reports that spread across Eastern Europe in the early 1700's. These focused at the edges of state authority and at the encroaching dissolution of the Habsburg Empire, giving physical presence to social and collective worries about change and a resisting past that was being forcibly dragged into the future. From there the vampire became a literary figure expressing less the fear of change but more the fear of the past. Bram Stoker's *Dracula* in particular concentrates on the sense of endings and new beginnings in the Victorian *fin-de-siecle*. The Count is specifically constructed as oppositional to the enlightened present and the product of a past that offered the nightmares of superstition and chaos rather the future

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dreams of science and order. However, his incursion into the light of reason held further dangers in that his fictional presence could also release the formally repressed sexualities and identities contained by social order and patriarchal authority.

As the twentieth century progressed, the vampire again transformed, this time from page to screen, and from the aged aristocrat to a teen-vamp. By the 1980's the undead became the focus of adolescent rites of passage and reaffirmation of dominant ideology, films such as *The Lost Boys* (Schumacher 1987) and *Near Dark* (Bigelow 1987), example a reverse of the Victorian revenant where the teenage boy became reintegrated into society and the family through killing the vampire. By actively suppressing the subversion offered by the undead and the uncontrolled, the order is restored, once again conceptualizing the vampire as the embodiment of excess and irresponsibility abhorred in an age of conservatism. At the end of the twentieth century this situation has dramatically changed, with the literary and the cinematic vampire being configured as good not bad. The teenage vampire no longer needed to be killed by the burgeoning adolescent male to gain social acceptance but needed to be embraced and emulated. The eternally teenage vampire, Edward Cullen, from *The Twilight Saga*, both the novels and films, is an icon of style and restraint. He is the boy who is both a parental and a cultural ideal, and one that teenage youth aspire to be. The contemporary vampire no longer describes what society views as abject or dangerous, the figure that one opposes or destroys to be accepted, but is shown as desirable, as someone to be emulated.

However, within these later narratives it can be shown that the subversive elements of an earlier age still reside within the literary and cinematic blood-sucker and that other readings of texts like *Twilight* offer a very different picture of vampiric transition – not into the perfect son-in-law or late capitalist consumer but into the next stage of human evolution. For whilst the vampires might be configured as the perfect boyfriends or girlfriends, they also allow for humans to become vampires, or even a new hybrid species. Therefore, this article will argue that these newer narratives are actually transitional texts preparing us for possible new stages of human evolution, and that the new breed of hybrid human/vampire characters appearing, such as Blade, in the *Blade Trilogy* of films, and Renesmee, from *Breaking Dawn; The Twilight Saga*, prefigure the kinds of genetic mutations and medical procedures that prolong human life and physical and mental ability. The vampire, then, may come full circle from fact to fiction to fact again; from manifesting a fear of the future to embodying the evolution of human becoming.

“Just the facts Ma’am!”¹

“The appearance of vampires becomes the sign of profound trouble.” (Arata 115)

¹ This was the catch phrase of the longest running police series on American television, *Dragnet*, which began in 1951. Attributed to its main character, and creator, Jack Webb, badge 714, the line is actually never used within the series. The line his character uses is in fact “All we want are the facts ma’am.”

Strange as it may seem today, 300 years ago vampires were not just the stuff of fiction but were accepted as a factual part of life. The Age of Enlightenment, somewhat anachronistically, opened with a series of real-life reports of vampire sightings and attacks, and Europe caught fire with what cultural theorist, Erik Butler, describes as “vampire fever” (Butler 27). This coincided with the word “vampire” itself coming into common usage across Europe and entering the Oxford English Dictionary in 1734.² Coming on the tail end of the second wave of witch hunts that crossed northern Europe in the 17th century, the appearance of vampires can also be tied to changes within society. Whereas, as identified by Estes Leland, the “witch craze” in Europe has been largely attributed to ‘the emergence of secular humanism and the rise of science’ (Estes 271), the outbreak of the dead mysteriously returning to live has been variously attributed to the Peace of Passarowitz in 1718.³ This saw parts of Serbia and Wallachia come under Austrian rule, and almost inevitable frictions between the new and the old orders arose. The Habsburg elite dominated the “Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation” and, as such, were greatly influenced by the Lutheran upheavals of the 16th century. There grew tensions between what was seen as the politically correct Protestant North and the backward and superstitious Catholic South. Indeed, it was the occupying forces that first noted strange happenings and the unusual procedures being undertaken by the locals. Paul Barber describes how the troops “began to notice, and file reports on, a peculiar local practice: that of exhuming bodies and ‘killing’ them” (Barber 5). This clashing of cultures is somewhat over dramatized by Barber as he further describes the situation thus:

The vampire craze, in other words, was an early "media event," in which educated Europeans became aware of practices that were by no means of recent origin, but had simply been provided, for the first time, with effective public-relations representatives. (Barber 5)

However, it took some time for the reports from the front to build up a head of steam. Although the first one was sent to the central administration in Vienna in 1725 by a medical officer named Frombald it was not until another medical officer, Fluckinger, documented another ‘execution’ in a Serbian village in 1732 that the flood gates opened. Though sent to authorities in Belgrade, it soon reached the majority of European capitals as well as German-speaking central Europe. The two most well known vampires from this period are Peter Plogojowitz (1725) and Arnold Paole (1732). When Plogojowitz was disinterred for examination, as noted by Raymond McNally and Radu Florescu, “[t]hey found fresh blood flowing from his mouth and his body appeared to be without any signs of rigor mortis or decay.” (McNally and Florescu 119) It is perhaps no coincidence that there also arrived upon the scene a Catholic interpreter of such events, a French Jesuit named Dom Calmet. Most well known today for his work “*Traité sur les Apparitions des Esprits, et sur les Vampires*” he wrote in 1746:

² See Barber 5. For the etymology of the word itself see Kreuter 57- 64.

³ See Barber 5; Butler 40; McClelland 88-90.

Cultures in/of Transition

In this present age and for about sixty years past, we have been the hearers and the witnesses of a new series of extraordinary incidents and occurrences. Hungary, Moravia, Silesia, Poland, are the principal theatre of these happenings. For here we are told that dead men, men who have been dead for several months, I say, return from the tomb, are heard to speak, walk about, infest hamlets and villages, injure both men and animals, whose blood they drain thereby making them sick and ill, and at length actually causing death. (Calmet Vol.II, 2)

Bruce McClelland points out that the reported cases, “had no clear precedent in Roman Catholic and Protestant countries. [and that] In East and South Slavic regions, any question of the actuality of the vampire was moot, since the folkloric vampire represented above all a mode of village justice” (McClelland 89). It can then be seen more clearly as an oppositional process that kept the village under its own control rather than that being imposed upon it from outside. The ‘justice’ enacted upon the deceased, or the “undead”, can then be seen as a way of establishing a sense of inclusion and collective identity against that which is trying to exert its own will upon them. This imposed external will can further be configured as something beyond the world that the local people inhabit, almost other-worldly if you will, and so the revenant comes to signify the dangerous and infectious nature of this imposed rule and ideology. As noted by Montague Summers “the essential feature of the Vampire proper lies in the fact that he is a dead body re-animated with an awful life, who issues from his tomb to prey upon the living by sticking their blood which lends him new vitality and fresh energies.” (Summers 29) Once let loose, this embodiment of contagion will run riot infecting more and more of the people in the village, and, hence, quick and decisive action is required. As the newly reformed Serbia was also on the frontier between Islam and Christianity, this sense of impending loss of identity was intensified. The constant danger of invasion and the imposition of foreign rule and law became concentrated in the figure of the vampire. It then simultaneously embodied not only a communal folk-lore that bound them together but also the uninvited invader that, like the revenant, “attacked victims with impartiality and threatened to make them a soulless shadow of life, like itself.” (Butler 40) The vampire, then, configured a very real buffer for actual events that the peoples of the newly occupied areas could not control. Whilst constructed of the lore of their own traditions, it also encapsulated the fears that they felt for the past; by staking and decapitating the undead they symbolically removed the power of the forces that promised to consume them. The vampires may not have been ‘real’ in the sense of actual reanimated dead bodies but they offered strategies for the coping and managing in transitional times that would drive them inexorably into the future. Erik Butler notes that “the vampire was terrible not because it meant the resurgence of the primitive, but because it was the harbinger of things to come” (Butler 44). In the case of Central Europe of the early 1700’s this was predominantly true as the past was signified as the safe and the known but by the late Victorian period this would change, for the fictional vampire, Count Dracula, represented the past that the British Empire feared to its very core.

A Blast from the Past.

Nora said, "This is something new."
"Or something very, very old." (Del Toro and Hogan 164)

Dracula by Bram Stoker was not the first vampire in literature but it is surely the most well-known and influential one. Written in 1897, it has never been out of print since; if Helen's was the face that famously launched a thousand ships, then Count Dracula's fangs gave birth to a thousand vampires. The reasons for the novel's success are many but one was inevitably to do with the right timing. As Stephen Arata notes, the novel appeared at a very specific time of social anxiety brought on by:

The decay of British global influence, the loss of overseas markets for British goods, the economic and political rise of Germany and the United States, the increasing unrest in British colonies and possessions, the growing domestic uneasiness over the morality of imperialism. (Arata 622)

The future was no longer a time to be unconditionally sought after and embraced, and, indeed, the novel features many of these points of cultural unease. As observed by Terry Phillips, these included "the New Woman, sexual deviance, invasion and racial contamination, the fear of mental and physical degeneracy" (Phillips 65). Stoker's novel, particularly in retrospect, has been seen to be rife with motifs of sexual repression, and much has been written on Freudian and Lacanian analysis and the sexuality and gender alignment of the Count and all the other characters involved.⁴

There is a certain measure of inevitability about this with the rising call for women's rights at that time, and with also the infamous Wilde trial in 1895, but if the future described by these events seemed undesirable a retreat to the past, it was equally fraught with danger. The yearning for times past was seen in the Gothic revival that happened at the end of the 19th century and, as noted by Elizabeth Miller, "shared with Romanticism its focus on subjective experience, the emphasis on the imagination as the central human faculty and, most essentially, the reaction against rationalism and empirical science" (Miller 5). However, Stoker's novel reveals how dangerous such excursions into the past and beyond reason can be, and it perfectly embodies the "modern man" finding himself in increasingly unknown territory. The novel starts with Jonathan Harker writing in his journal and his subsequent entries chart about the growing unease he feels about his surroundings as he travels eastwards:

It seems to me that the further East you go the more unpunctual are the trains...I did not sleep well, though my bed was comfortable enough, for I had all sorts of queer dreams. There was a dog howling all night long under my window, which may have had something to do with it; or it may have been the paprika, for I had to drink up all the water in my carafe, and was still thirsty. (Stoker 2-3)

⁴ See Astle 98-105; Copjec 24-43; Bentley 27-32. For psychoanalytic readings and for sexuality and gender see Stevenson 139-149; Roth 113-121; Griffin 454-465; Demetrakapoulous 104-113; Craft 1994.

The further his incursion “amongst the traditions of Turkish rule” (1), the more out of place he feels, and the greater the sense that he is entering a world that he cannot comprehend, even though its inhabitants try to tell him:

Do you not know that tonight, when the clock strikes midnight, all the evil things in the world will have full sway? Do you know where you are going, and what you are going to?...[and] I could hear a lot of words often repeated, queer words ... ‘Ordog’—Satan, ‘pokol’—hell, ‘stregoica’— witch, ‘vrolok’ and ‘vlkoslak’—both of which mean the same thing, one being Slovak and the other Servian for something that is either were-wolf or vampire. (Mem., I must ask the Count about these superstitions.) (5-6)

Harker’s unwillingness to acknowledge the lore (laws) that govern the world he has entered sound a strange and not unfamiliar resonance with the earlier Austrian troops of the Habsburg Empire when they actually occupied the same territories a hundred and sixty years before. Just as the vampire represented the world before, outside incursion for the Serbians of an earlier generation, here it configured the danger of ignoring those superstitions in the present; for the Count is the embodiment of a past that has most definitely come to bite back.

That Dracula is history made flesh is made clear at various points, not just from his own words (“I have been so long master that I would be master still” (22)) but also in the connection between himself and the land he is master of (“for it was the ground fought over for centuries by the Wallachian, the Saxon, and the Turk. Why, there is hardly a foot of soil in all this region that has not been enriched by the blood of men, patriots or invaders” (23-24)), and, finally, in the gold that he possess:

The only thing I found was a great heap of gold in one corner— gold of all kinds, Roman, and British, and Austrian, and Hungarian, and Greek and Turkish money, covered with a film of dust, as though it had lain long in the ground. None of it that I noticed was less than three hundred years old. (51)

Dracula’s immortality is directly tied to the notion of eternity, as configured through the history of the land, and to the undying nature of money. As such, he configures all that the British Empire desires but also fears – the quest for an eternal Empire fuelled by the immortal life-blood of capitalism: money. However, the catch at its core is a return to a time before industrialisation and modernism. This is seen in the fact that that Dracula symbolizes not only old money and the return to a feudal past but also a time before civilisation. There is in his self-obsession and amoral actions more than a suggestion of Rousseau’s noble savage, an almost pre-lapsarian being that exists outside the strictures and constraints of civilisation and repression. This position is oddly echoed later in the novel by Professor Van Helsing when he says, in his faltering English:

With the childbrain that was to him [Dracula] he have long since conceive the idea of coming to a great city. What does he do? He find out the place of all the world most of promise for him... He find in patience just how is his strength, and what are his powers. He study new tongues. He learn new social life; new environment of old ways, the

politic, the law, the finance, the science, the habit of a new land and a new people... His glimpse that he have had whet his appetite only and enkeen his desire. (348)

This further reveals how Dracula operates outside the oppressive constraints of society and lives by his own laws (lores) – a state that exhilarates but also frightens the Victorian world. Consequently, this informs the notion of reverse colonialism, as put forward by Stephen Arata and others where the fear of an invasion from the East signifies the loss of imperialist conquests and subsequent invasion of the British homeland but also a return to times before Empire.⁵ This would deny both Britain's place as the guiding hand for mainland Europe but also the possibility of the continuance of imperialist progress. As Eleni Coundouriotis states:

the Europeanized Ottoman state had proven to be impossible to realize; hence, Britain's burden as the hegemonic force behind the Concert of Europe was to create a new Europe by destroying what remained of the sick man of Europe and his antithesis, the powerful belief in the existence of a 'pure' Christian Europe. The destruction of Dracula fantastically enacts the destruction of these historical resonances. (Coundouriotis 154)

Dracula then represents not just a reverse colonisation but a reverse industrialisation; he does not just stop history, he turns back the hands of the clock of time itself.

This again is shown in Stoker's novel. Both Judith Halberstam and Jennifer Wicke in their respective essays, *Technologies of Monstrosity* and *Vampiric Typewriting* have pointed to the amount of new technologies that Stoker mentions in his book; the typewriter, the stenograph, the telegraph and the cinematograph to mention the main ones. All of these configure the cutting edge of modernity and progress, and, consequently, align that progress to the notion of human communication. The future is communication. Yet Dracula, for all his adaption to the techniques and performances of civilisation, as mentioned in the quote by Professor Van Helsing earlier, does not use any of these but relies on telepathy. More significantly, it is initialized by a blood bond for it is only through drinking the blood of Mina, and her partaking of his, that this connection is made. For the Count, communication is directly related to physical contact and not disembodied voices or electronic beeps. Halberstam and Wickes very much see the vampire as existing within modern technology, which, as we use and consume it, feeds upon us. I would argue, however, that Dracula is precisely the opposite, and that he configures a time before industrialisation and mass communication; and that the anxiety he engenders is felt by the social order guided by the teleological inevitability of progress and not the individuals that actually constituted it. As such, the vampire in literature became an outlet for these feelings and anxieties over the future and the past. It then acts as a space to work out the tensions between a future that seemed increasingly impersonal and unsure and a past that promised to hold you in its embrace forever.

⁵ See Arata 1996; Gibson 2006.

Growing Pains

[Dracula] “And you, their best beloved one, are now to me flesh of my flesh; blood of my blood; kin of my kin; my bountiful wine-press for a while; and shall be later on my companion and my helper.” (Stoker 311)

The first two sections saw the vampire as an historically transitional figure, one that provided a psychological buffer, or phantasy space, which helped one age grow into the next. This section, too, will show how the undead were used to facilitate such a change of ages but one which saw the adolescent boy become a man. The specific cultural ideologies underlying such a “rit-of-passage” in itself suggests a very particular combination of traditionalism and conservatism, and this does, indeed, form the backdrop to this transition. First, however, we must turn to the cinematic American teen-vamp explosion of the 1980’s.

Curiously, the 70’s ended with very traditional vampire fare. 1979 saw three films all featuring Count Dracula or, his German persona, Count Orlok.⁶ *Dracula* by John Badham was a film adaptation of the successful stage play and featured a very romantic Count in the figure of Frank Langella. *Love at First Bite*, by Stan Dragoti, was one of the more successful Dracula spoofs on film and saw the Count evicted from his castle in Transylvania by communist authorities and moving to New York. And, finally, *Nosferatu, the Vampyre* was an idiosyncratic remake of F.W. Murnau’s classic 1922 film, *Nosferatu: A Symphony of Horror*. As such, they made the sudden eruption of teen-orientated films even more shocking. Between 1985 and 1989 there were six mainstream American teen-vampire films: *Fright Night* (Holland: 1985), *Once Bitten* (Storm: 1985), *Vamp* (Wenk: 1986), *The Lost Boys* (Schumacher: 1987), *Near Dark* (Bigelow: 1987), *My Best Friend is a Vampire* (Huston: 1988), and *Fright Night II* (Wallace: 1989). All of them are united by the fact that they feature a teenage boy on the cusp of adulthood with the vampire providing the means to accomplish that transition. However, rather than just being about the male rite of passage, it becomes a critique of the American family for within the films, as Pat Gill observes, the ‘teenage protagonists must face their horrors alone or with their peers. As their fellow adolescents fall to one monstrous force or another, they must save themselves and their world on their own. (Gill: 19) All of the teen-vamp films show adults, and in particular parents, to be largely useless or completely absent from children’s, and subsequently, family life. *The Lost Boys* in particular shows this as we see the one-parent Emerson family moving to Santa Carla to live with their idiosyncratic grandfather. As Sorcha Ni Fhlainn explains:

⁶ This change of name came about as Murnau’s film was an unofficial adaption of Stoker’s novel, and so he changed the names of the characters and settings to avoid copyright infraction. However, Stoker’s widow, after protracted legal proceedings, managed to obtain a writ demanding the destruction of all copies of the film. Fortunately, this was rather haphazardly enforced and so copies remain intact, if not complete, to this day. For an in depth study of this see Skall 1990.

The breakdown of the Emerson family in *The Lost Boys* can be largely blamed on the hippie generation, of which the mother, Lucy, is a proud member. In the opening credits of the film, she is crooning to songs such as “Groovin on a Sunday Afternoon” and when we first meet her hippie father, we notice he is growing marijuana on his windowsill. (Ni Fhlainn 149)

As such, the view of the family in these films, and the relation of the teenage boy and the appearance of the vampire, comes to take on a far more overtly political stance. As Barbara Whitehead points out: “beginning in the late 1950s Americans began to change their ideas about the individual’s obligations to family and society. Broadly described, this change was away from an ethic of obligation to others and toward an obligation to the self” (Whitehead 4). *The Lost Boys* explicitly plays upon these conflicts as we see the eldest male child, Michael, struggle to choose between his biological family and the new vampire family. Ni Fhlainn succinctly sums this up “[u]nlike J.M Barrie’s *Lost Boys* who choose to remain boys forever by staying in Neverland, Michael rejects the false promises of remaining eternally youthful and in perpetual boyhood due to the over-arching need for a paternal figure” (Ni Fhlainn 151). This self-imposed obligation to family is largely configured from ideology of the Reagan administration at this time which, as Leger Grindon notes, “looked back to the 1950s” (Grindon 166) and, in particular, to an idealised notion of the All American family.⁷ In Reaganite ideology, then, the perfect family of the 50’s was corrupted by the 60’s. Graham Thompson notes “one of the features of moral conservatism in the 1980’s was the frequency with which the sixties served as a spectre of damaging moral, social and cultural promiscuity” (Thompson 9). As such, the children of the 1960’s have refused to “grow up” and become the adults of the 1980’s, becoming themselves an incarnation of Barrie’s “lost boys”. As I have noted elsewhere, “the parents then stand-in for the damaging residue of 60’s liberalism in Reagan’s neo-conservative 80’s, it is down to the children, always male, to rebuild order out of the chaos” (Bacon 30).⁸ In *The Lost Boys*, the appearance of the vampire comes to resolve not just the problems of ‘troubled youth’ as embodied in the teenage boy, but also that of the parents, in this case Lucy, who have refused to grow up.⁹

Also in these films, and in particular *Fright Night*, the adolescent does not just stumble across the vampires lair but actually makes it manifest through his own psychic, or sexual, frustrations. In *Fright Night* we see the teenage boy, Charley Brewster, being continually frustrated by his girlfriend who refuses to let him go ‘all the way.’ It is only at this point that he first sees the vampire. Similarly in *Near Dark*, the adolescent son, Caleb, only sees the revenant after he experiences the sexual frustrations of being ‘trapped’ on the family farm or, as Ken Gelder describes, it “Caleb’s sexuality is also

⁷ Somewhat coincidentally in an interview with Barbara Walters Ronald Reagan claimed that *Dracula* was one of his favourite films. See Rickels 201.

⁸ As yet unpublished Masters thesis.

⁹ Within the text of Stoker’s *Dracula*, the character Lucy Westenra is by far the most liberal and irresponsible as shown by her continual flirting and her wish to marry three men at the same time (Lord Godalming, Dr. John Seward, and Quincey Morris).

Oedipally directed, a regressive drive which weakens him or renders him infantile” (Gelder 105).¹⁰ The vampire then not only provides the means of resolution but is actually created by it in the first place, configuring not only the uncontrolled monstrosity of the teenager and the emotions he feels but also that of the adult population towards him, and even the larger conservative government towards the liberal parents. Interestingly, these films also posit a new transitional phase within the vampire genre – that of the half-vampire. Once the teenage protagonist has been bitten, or drank an amount of vampire blood they slowly begin to transform and so exist in a liminal state being neither human nor undead. This is often seen through the use of mirrors where their reflection drifts in and out of focus, offering them the choice between solid reality or transparent fantasy. The resolution of this state enacts either the acceptance, or denial, of manhood and responsibility, as Alain Silver and James Ursini observe, “for New Age undead the first kill, like the first sexual experience, might be regarded as a rite of passage.” (Silver and Ursini 168) However, the true event that accomplishes this is, in fact, killing the vampire, in an extremely Freudian way, with a stake. As such, its overtones of the Oedipus complex sees this not just as destroying, or controlling, the irresponsible child within themselves but also symbolically killing the father so that they can take his place the male head of the family.

This reading of the vampire on the micro scale would seem to conform to Nina Auerbach’s disappointed view of the vampire in the 1980’s, “[t]his purified family is all we need to see: the ramifications of vampirism have shrunk from the political arena into the snug domestic unit” (Auerbach 168). However, once it is seen in the political context, its manifestation as a transitional object/space becomes much more complicated, not just within the narrative itself but as a way of relating it to actual real-life events. The vampire becomes the physical embodiment of forces that threaten disruption, on the individual and collective levels, but also the means to resolve them and restore order. This is predominantly through an experiential process of self-discovery but also through realizing ones place within the larger order. Whilst this would seem to instill an overtly conservative ideology upon the figure of the vampire, or the vampire slayer, the films also reveal points of resistance and subversion. For although the restoration of the ideal family seems the final goal of these narratives the undead blood of the vampire never truly vanishes. In *Fright Night*, Charley Brewster’s teenage friend, “Evil Ed”, lives on as a vampire, and Jerry Dandridge’s vampire sister returns for revenge in the sequel; in *Near Dark*, though now seemingly returned to a human, Mae was a full-blown vampire; in *Vamp*, the hero returns home not just with the girl but his now vampire-best-friend A.J.; in *My Best Friend is a Vampire*, the protagonist’s family profess their love for him and want to help with his “problem” (he’s a vampire); and, finally, in *The Lost Boys*, Michael enjoys “staking” David, the leader of the lost boys, just a little too much. As such, the way is left open for the vampire to return once again but this time not as the result of the burgeoning sexuality of the teenage boy but as the sexual fantasy of the teenage girl, and the role-model for a generation.

¹⁰ Here, unusually, the one parent family has a father but no mother. It is down to Caleb to become a ‘man’ and bring home a new mother, which he subsequently does in the ‘saved’ vampire, Mae.

To Die For!

“Sleep all day. Party all night. Never grow old. Never die. It’s fun to be a vampire.” (*The Lost Boys*, Schumacher 1987)

Rob Latham, in his book *Consuming Youth*, identifies *The Lost Boys* as a seminal film in the connection between consumerism and adolescence. Building on the work of Franco Moretti in *Signs Taken for Wonders*, he posits a Marxist interpretation of the vampire as a creature that both embodies the ‘undead’ wealth of capitalism that feeds off the labour force but also the act of continual and insatiable consumption that drives it forward. Latham sees this identified in the disaffected mall-hopping of the vampire gang led by David (Kieffer Sutherland), “the eponymous pack of adolescent vampires wanders sullenly through a crowd of boardwalk shoppers, prompting the owner of a video parlor to throw them out of his store and a security guard to chase them away” (Latham 36). As such, as mentioned above, they embody the mindless consumption of, and by, youth that erodes traditional family values. Latham, however, posits a worm at the core of this for whilst ‘the monster is consumer youth culture generally’ as embodied by David’s gang, they are also necessarily constructed as “genuinely attractive and fascinating, not only to Michael but to the entire teenage audience” (Latham 64). Consequently, as Latham explains further:

The Lost Boys demonstrates, contemporary capitalism’s fetishization of youth as a privileged category within the domain of consumption makes possible both a real cultural agency for adolescents and a cynical recuperation of youthful leisure as “lifestyle”; consumption thus becomes for teens both an avenue of self expression and also of objectification in the form of fashion. The result is an ambivalent dialectic of empowerment and exploitation, in which teens are both consumers and consumed, vampires and victims. (Latham 67)

Here, the vampire, rather than being the monster to be destroyed, offers ambivalent spaces of negotiation with the external pressure of modern existence as imposed by the wider culture that one lives in. This does not fit easily into the binary systems as put forward in the Reagan ideology that underpinned the teen-vamp films of the 80’s, as here responsibility no longer automatically implies growing up or becoming an adult but rather in creating strategies of resistance.¹¹ Within this framework, eternal youth becomes not a state of denial or narcissistic self interest but a progressive act of social participation and individual agency. The allure of the teenager, as well of the vampire, then, configures a focus of cultural aspiration and personal identification. The validity of this is seen in the in the perfect contemporary example of this, the Cullen

¹¹ See de Certeau 1988, for notions of strategic and tactical performance/choreography in relation to societal proscription.

family in Stephenie Meyer's *The Twilight Saga*.¹² Though they can be seen to construct, as J.M. Tyree notes, “advertising for conservative American family values” (Tyree 32), the focus is actually upon the teenagers of the family.

The ascendancy of the teenager within the family unit within Meyer's narrative is explained by Nancy Reagin: “*The Twilight Saga* is full of teenagers acting as adults. The fate of the world sometimes rests on their shoulders, and they confront horrors and trials both alone and together, without the benefit of adults in authority” (Reagin 259). Whilst somewhat overstating the case, Reagin also points out that “the Cullen family, headed by Carlisle, represents a break from the excesses and cruelties of Old World vampirism” (Reagin 53). This is both true and false for there is one excess they do share with the vampire of old and that is in wealth and possessions. As mentioned earlier, in the case of Count Dracula, the vampire is the embodiment of the phrase ‘time is money’, and is often described as being extremely wealthy. The Cullen's are no exception to this.¹³ As the female, human, protagonist of the novels, Bella, explains:

Edward had a *lot* of money—I didn't even want to think about how much. Money meant next to nothing to Edward or the rest of the Cullen's. It was just something that accumulated when you had unlimited time on your hands and a sister who had an uncanny ability to predict trends in the stock market. (*Eclipse* 7)

And, further “even taking into consideration the bloated accounts that existed all over the world with the Cullen's various names on them, there was enough cash stashed all over the house to keep a small country afloat for a decade” (600). Here though, unlike Dracula's “undead” money, the Cullen's actually use theirs. Particularly in the films we see the family not only living in a huge modern house but also the teenage Cullen's are constantly dressed in new designer clothes and driving expensive cars. As such, they are active consumers, but not like the vampires of old.

The Cullen's are strictly vegetarian, as noted by fellow “abstainers” in *The Twilight Saga*, “abstaining from human blood makes us more civilised” (559). This civilisation means that they take part within contemporary culture, not prey upon it as Dracula so yearned to do when he said, “I long to go through the crowded streets of your mighty London, to be in the midst of the whirl and rush of humanity, to share its life, its change, its death, and all that makes it what it is” (Stoker 22). Also, unlike the Lost Boys before them, they do not “trawl” the mall, seeking quick thrills and instant sensations but are restrained buyers. Brendan Shea notes, underlying the *Twilight* teenager's

¹² The saga consists of four books *Twilight*, *New Moon*, *Eclipse*, and *Breaking Dawn*, published 2005- 2008 by Lane, Brown and Company. Each is to be made into a film, and, at the time of writing this article, three have been released: *Twilight*, dir. By Catherine Hardwicke (Summit, 2008); *The Twilight Saga: New Moon*, dir. by Chris Weitz (Summit, 2009); and *The Twilight Saga: Eclipse*, dir. by David Slade (Summit, 2010). *The Twilight Saga: Breaking Dawn, Parts 1&2*, dir. by Bill Condon are to be released on Nov. 2011 and Nov. 2012 respectively.

¹³ Interestingly, the vampire Weyland in *The Vampire Tapestry*, purposely avoids such excess because, as he notes: ‘Unfortunately, great wealth, like renown or exalted rank, attracts too much attention, most of it hostile’ (Charnas 81).

consumerism is a sense of thrift, that “the Cullen’s enormous wealth, is meaningless to those who have an infinite amount of time to gather money. The same point holds for virtues such as moderation or dedication to a craft” (Shea 86). Such restraint can be read in many ways, not least as the kind of conservative values that the Reagan administration tried to impose. In an America that still lives in the shadow of 9/11 and the “War on Terror”, as well as being engaged in military offensives in Afghanistan and Iraq, such models of restraint are once again being called for. As explained by Thomas Garza, chair of Slavic and Eurasian studies at the University of Texas:

Impulse-control is an especially resonant theme in the current era of conflicts and cutbacks... With a recession and war, the conflict has indeed seemed to turn inward, as we question our fiscal, political and moral status. ‘Have we been too excessive? Do we need to be more restrained? (La Ferla 3)

In this light, the vampire is constructed as a role model for a society, or its youth, that are seen as out of control. Though still the means to attain responsibility, the vampire is no longer to be immolated but emulated – as once Dracula strove to imitate the traits and characteristics of the modern world now we must learn the ethos of the New Age vampire for, as Nicolas Michaud points out, “Edward [Cullen] might be not only a person, but a better person than most humans” (Michaud 47).

However, I would argue that there is slightly more to this. Looking back to Rob Latham’s interpretation of *The Lost Boys* it is only the vampires that seem to have any prescience of the consumerism that threatens to engulf them, with Michael and his family happily returning to the embrace of capitalism and normality. Transposing this to *The Twilight Saga*, its human characters too seem totally oblivious of the consumerist world that they inhabit with all Bella’s fellow schoolmates aspiring to possessions and the thrills of the mall. It is only the vampire teenagers of the Cullen family that see beyond this, and so restrain themselves, morally, ethically, and financially. Curiously, the consumerist world of Bella’s peers seems to offer little engagement for her, and so it is no surprise when she says towards the end of the cinematic version of *Eclipse: The Twilight Saga* (Slade 2010):

“It was a choice between who I should be and who I am. I always felt out of step. It was like literally stumbling through my life. I’ve never felt normal, because I’m not normal. I don’t want to be...in your world...I’ve never felt stronger and more real. More myself, because its my world too. It’s where I belong.” (Slade 2010)

In fact, what she means is that she was not a mindless consumer like the other humans around her.¹⁴ Her desire to be a vampire, then, is one to step outside the never-ending expenditure and frenetic rush of capitalism and subsequently experience time more fully in the position of the vampire.

¹⁴ The only other figures who resist the lure of constant consumption are the local Native American community, as seen in the figure of Jacob, who, of course, are not humans either but shape-shifters.

The contemporary vampire, whilst still being a figure of desire, reveals itself not as one that fears or desires times that have past, or one that holds itself in a forever present that must be destroyed so that time can continue. It becomes a way to stand outside of time, a transitional construct that allows us to truly see where we are and possible ways we might want to move forward. This is identified by Alluquere Rosanne Stone in her book *The War of Desire and Technology at the Close of the Mechanical Age* where she specifically sights the vampiric vision as a way beyond the human present. Focusing on the vampire Lestat from Anne Rice's *Vampire Chronicles* she notes that, "with his vampire gaze, Lestat sees subjectivity as possibility, and thus the myriad aspects of subjectivity that mortals take for granted as no more than boats temporarily at anchor in a sea of possibilities" (Stone 180). Subsequently, the vampire in the 21st century provides not just a way of seeing humanity beyond capitalism and consumerism but beyond the categories of humanity itself.

Conclusion... or Evolution?

Deacon Frost: "We're a function of natural selection man. The new race." (*Blade*, Norrington 1998)

As shown above the vampire has been used both actually and metaphorically as a transitional object as one period of time changes into another. Whether this is enacted on the individual or collective scale this transition has been of an evolutionary character, as the boy becomes a man, the collective becomes a nation, or the empires of the past change into the worlds of the future. At the start of the 21st century it is the evolutionary nature of the vampire that looms sharper into focus, manifesting not just possible changes on the individual and social level but also on a global one. Whilst the eco-vampires of *Twilight* might reveal the potentialities of differing philosophies towards life and the environment, they also, simultaneously, offer a more profoundly biological development; a way to be more human than human.

In light of the modern adoration of the vampire, it seems somewhat strange that Stoker's *Count Dracula* was not envisioned as the future of mankind but its biological and historical past, one that needed to be. As Catherine Ramsland explains, "[t]he novel takes great pains to describe Dracula himself along then popular conceptions about Darwinism, especially the notion of evolutionary 'degeneration' [a throwback to primitive intelligence]" (Ramsland 8). This point is further corroborated by Matthew Gibson when he notes "Dracula echoes Gladstone's fear that the Balkans represents a hybrid society which, thanks to its Ottoman past, cannot be incorporated within Europe and whose history must thus be repressed" (Gibson 82). As such, the vampire at the end of the 19th century was not just 'stuck in the past', as Erik Butler observes, but also configured a degeneracy that threatened to corrupt the present.¹⁵ However, such a view point did throw up another disturbing implication of such a Darwinian view of evolution, and one which

¹⁵ Butler 121.

is particularly relevant to this paper – if the vampire is no longer seen as an agent of the devil but a rung on the evolutionary ladder, how does that affect our place in relation to it and the wider world in general. Sharon Monteith explains that “what seems to have been repressed in this instance, and is now returning with a vengeance, is a sense of an evolutionary history in which humanity is merely one species among many rather than the fulcrum around which the whole of the biosphere turns” (Monteith 23-24). The idea that vampires could configure different “biologies” and different histories than our own began to take hold in the 1980’s. Novels such as Suzy McKee Charnas’ *The Vampire Tapestry* (1980) and Whitley Streiber’s *The Hunger* (1981), subsequently filmed by Tony Scott in 1983, show Dr. Edward Weyland and Miriam Blaylock, respectively, as vampires who are co-evolutionary partners to humans. Both accounts are constructed around medicalized narratives investigating not only the biological characteristics of the vampire but also ways in which we differ or may be changed to be like them. As Stacey Abbott observes, in these and later in interpretations “vampirism is increasingly explained through the language of science...[which has] contributed to a reconception of generic conventions and iconography that undermines the law of religion and folklore in favour of the laws of science and technology” (Abbott: 197). Films such as *Blade* (Norrington 1998), *Blade II* (Del Toro 2002), and *Blade Trinity* (Goyer 2004) explicitly make these connections, whilst also positing, if not the hybridity of species, then certainly genetic engineering and/or cloning as part of the continuing evolutionary process. A more common thread coming out of the novels from the 80’s is the possibility of inter-species fertilisation. Although the vampires here are incapable of fertilising a human woman, a theme continued in the current HBO hit television series *True Blood*, sex is most definitely not out of the question. Somewhat interestingly, this was not an uncommon feature of the revenant of 18th century folklore, and one which extended beyond just a straight forward case of necrophilia, as Bruce McClelland explains “vampires at the other end of the evolutionary spectrum can impregnate as well: when they acquire a mimetic human shape (albeit without a skeleton!), they are thought to move to another village, where they may take up with another woman and even raise a family” (McClelland 92-93). The possibility and ramifications of being able to share the same, or similar, rungs on the evolutionary ladder suddenly begin to break down the former divides between human and non-human, a point made by Robert Azzarello, “[o]ne of the central legacies of Darwinian evolutionary theory has been the blurring of the line between the human and the animal, and concomitantly, between the natural and the unnatural. Indeed, if humans are animals how can they behave unnaturally?” (Azzarello 143) As such, we are no longer separated by biology but conjoined by it, which Donna Haraway neatly sums up as being “Partners in the crime of human evolution” (Haraway 5). Such possibilities were tentatively explored as far back as Stoker’s novel when Mina and Jonathan’s child, Quincey, is born containing not just the ghost of their “brave friend’s spirit” (Stoker 411) but also the blood of the Count himself. More contemporary explorations of the theme have appeared in films like *Underworld Evolution* (2006) by Len Wiseman and *Perfect Creature* (2006) by Glen Standring but, perhaps more interesting, in the novel *Breaking Dawn* by Stephenie Meyer and its forthcoming cinematic representation directed by David Slade.

Examplifying again the self referencing and reflexivity that has become indicative of the contemporary vampire narrative that envisions a human/vampire future harks back to the concerns of an earlier time. Nina Auerbach's lament that the vampire had become limited by domesticity mentioned earlier seems strangely re-enacted in the 'home-sweet-home' bliss of Edward and Bella's marriage and subsequent her pregnancy, except that during the birthing Edward had to cut through the placental cord with his teeth and turn his wife into vampire to save her. However, their offspring, Renesmee, was conceived whilst Bella was still human and so she examples one of the first fully hybrid children born of both human and vampire parents.¹⁶ The extraordinary nature of the child is shown in the novel in the following excerpt:

At three months, Renesmee could have been a big one-year-old, or a small two year-old. She wasn't shaped exactly like a toddler; she was leaner and more graceful, her proportions were more even, like an adult's. Her bronze ringlets hung to her waist; I couldn't bear to cut them, even if Alice would have allowed it. Renesmee could speak with flawless grammar and articulation, but she rarely bothered, preferring to simply show people what she wanted. She could not only walk but run and dance. She could even read. ("*Breaking Dawn*" 581)

What is particularly interesting within the novel is the very sense of domesticity that is formed around the fantastic nature of the events, or characters, that take place there. The fact that the Cullen's live for hundreds of years, are amazingly agile and strong, and incredibly resistant to infection and disease seems commonplace. As does the birth and upbringing of Renesmee, who for all her special gifts, incites not fear and trepidation but the usual sense of wonder and fascination that gathers around any new member to a family. This is one of the major features of the narrative that inexorably, and continually, asserts the possibility of being more human than human, or superhuman. As Bella herself says more than once, the state configured by the vampire is a world "where I belong" (Slade 2010). Unlike other readings of the vampire such as *Near Dark*, *The Forsaken* (Cordone 2001), and Guillermo del Toro's novels *The Strain Trilogy* (2009-2010) vampirism is no longer an infection or a virus but an evolutionary possibility.

Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari specifically see this potentiality of the subject in terms of what they call "becoming", which they describe, somewhat conveniently for this paper, in terms of vampires:

We believe in the existence of very special becomings- animal traversing human beings and sweeping them away, affecting the animal no less than the human. "From 1730 to 1735, all we hear about are vampires." Structuralism clearly does not account for these becomings, since it is designed precisely to deny or at least denigrate their existence: a correspondence of relations does not add up to a becoming. (Deleuze and Guattari 237)

¹⁶ Blade from the *Blade Trilogy* of films mentioned earlier is a Dhamphir, whose pregnant mother was bitten by a vampire, Deacon Frost, and so was born a vampire but of a human Mother. Also Rayne from *BloodRayne* (Boll: 2005) has a human mother and a vampire father but is again labelled as a Dhamphir.

Their configuration fits to the one posited earlier in this paper where the categorisation of difference between species is incidental to a larger notion of biological progress, or what one might call the inevitability of life. Deleuze and Guattari, then, opportunely link our beginnings with our endings through their description of the transitive nature of the vampire, seeing it not as an either/or but as the thing that dissects the two and, consequently, is never static but always changing. As they go on to explain: “a becoming is neither one nor two, nor the relation of the two; it is the in-between, the border or line of flight or descent running perpendicular to both” (Deleuze and Guattari 293). In the cases discussed above, the vampire has been utilized to negotiate with, or provide a buffer between, the past and the present, whether either or both of these were ideologically unpleasant to those that revived, or brought forth, the revenant to intercede and facilitate a sense of control and agency. In the 21st century this “line of descent” that constructs the vampire relates no longer to a past but to a future – one that creates as much anxiety as that felt by Serbian peasants three hundred years ago – except the reassuring tales we tell ourselves do not resurrect the dead but conceive of new forms of the living. The increasing medicalisation of the human body to improve longevity, brain function, and resistance to disease, even unto cross-species hybridity, is subliminally configured within the body of the contemporary vampire. That an ordinary, everyday girl as configured in the character of Bella Swan can be shown to quite happily integrate into not just a different species, but our evolutionary future. The inevitability of this process does not decrease the anxiety it engenders, as Allequere Rosanne Stone observes, “as we inexorably become creatures that we cannot even now imagine. It is a moment which simultaneously holds immense threat and immense promise” (Stone 181). The Cullen’s and their ilk not only constitute the continual transitions of becoming but provide a future with a familiar face, and, strangely, it is one we have known from our distant past.

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