

Dracula and the Gothic in Literature, Pop Culture and the Arts

Edited by

Isabel Ermida



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FOREVER YOUNG, THOUGH FOREVER CHANGING: EVOLUTION OF THE VAMPIRE

MARIA ANTÓNIA LIMA

The enduring influence of the vampire myth on many young people today reveals the relevance of one of the nineteenth century's most powerful surviving archetypes. Yet, since Bela Lugosi's portrayal of Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, the figure of the vampire has undergone many transformations. In recent years, works such as Anne Rice's *Vampire Chronicles*, Elizabeth Kostova's *The Historian* and Stephanie Meyers's *Twilight* series illustrate this evolution. This article strives to understand how pervasive the vampire tale currently is in world culture and why this may be so at this particular time, interested as we are in images of eternal youth. Besides, it aims at discussing what the vampire myth can tell us about sexuality, power, alienation, sickness, evil, loneliness and death, at the same time as it tries to establish whether vampirism may be regarded not just as a looming presence in the night, but as a symbol of our own human insecurities and desire for love, justice and freedom.

One of the most outstanding prerogatives of the vampire character is its capacity to win over time and extend its life for all eternity. The vampire myth according to the Gothic framework from which it springs has indeed the gift of immortality and the power of remaining *forever young*. Due to its extraordinary versatility and capacity for adaptation, the vampire can embody the fears and anxieties of different times and places, as Nina Auerbach remarks: “[E]very age embraces the vampire it needs.”¹

How can the popularity, adaptability, and unique appeal of the vampire figure to this day be accounted for? The American writer Les Daniels, author of *Citizen Vampire* and *Yellow Fog*, states: “The sexual metaphors, from seduction to the stake, continue to resonate Our era is more obsessed than any other with immortality and eternal youth. The vampire is not really a menace. It's what we long to

¹ Nina Auerbach, *Our Vampires, Ourselves*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995, 145.

be.”² Such a statement reveals that the character of the vampire has come a long way since its emergence as a terrifying and frightening figure. Today, the proliferation of vampire narratives in all media formats – from literature to film – is closely connected to a “new” vampire, one who still shares some of its original traits, but who has adapted to new realities and challenges.

The idea of eternal youth is central to the construction of the vampire myth throughout the decades. It could be argued that some of the most obsessive desires for eternal youth which modern society reveals, and which it seeks by means of plastic surgery and other artificial methods, are as dangerous as the immortality of the vampire. Indeed, rather than the idealized life of the everlasting, the idea of living forever seems to produce an extremely disturbing state of unending, living death. As actor Christopher Lee rightly observed, “to be condemned to live, or to ‘exist’ is really the word, *forever*, when you are dead, and yet in a sense living is ghastly. It’s like being in a permanent state of burial”.³ Acknowledging the trap that immortality actually entails is one of the reasons why audiences have felt empathy with the vampire for so long. After all, this is a creature which, unlike ourselves, is not exposed to the physical vulnerability and the dangers of a mortal existence which render us so helpless. Unlike us, the vampire is immortal – but at what cost?

This article will discuss the appeal which the figure of the vampire has exerted in literature and the arts ever since its creation. It will analyze the evolution of the vampire figure from its inception to present-day versions. More specifically, it will investigate the concepts of immortality and eternal youth as regards their present-day expressions in such media as cinema and television. The first section looks into the seductive quality of the vampire trying to approach the reasons for its increasing popularity. Conversely, the second section analyses the repulsive quality of the vampire reflecting on its simultaneous powers of attraction and repulsion. The third section debates this contradictory quality of the vampire as a contemporary

² Daniels as cited in Katherine Ramsland, “Drinking in the Vampire”, *Chicago Tribune*, December 08, 1989. Accessed June 12, 2012. http://articles.chicagotribune.com/1989-12-08/features/8903160447_1_new-vampire-vampire-research-center-count-dracula-fan-club/3

³ Christopher Lee as cited in Martin Riccardo, *Liquid Dreams of Vampires*, St. Paul, Minnesota: Llewellyn Publications, 1997, 13.

dilemma of the self, venturing that its paradoxical nature is the most appealing element to many readers and viewers.

The seductive quality of the vampire

What is the appeal of vampires and why has our obsession with them become so compelling? Why have they acquired such tremendous popularity and why do people still fall prey to their magnetic allure? There is much in our attraction for vampires that may remain inexplicable, but possible answers to this mystery are still of great interest as they reveal feelings, urges and aspirations of our contemporary societies. Just as vampires hold a strong attraction power, so do other personifications of handsome evil represented in literature and the cinema by characters such as Lord Ruthven, Varney, Dracula, and Lestat. Indeed, since the first literary and cinematic creations, and with the exception of Murnau's *Nosferatu*, which featured a rather repulsive protagonist, not only has the vampire been immortal, but he is also very sophisticated and attractive. The paradox of this attraction has been particularly well represented in the American cinema. Bela Lugosi started this trend and Christopher Lee, Raul Julia, Frank Langella, Gary Oldman, Tom Cruise, Brad Pitt and Robert Pattinson continued it, rendering the vampire both romantic and seductive. Some writers and film directors seem to know that the best way to transport their victims to the dark side is through seduction.

If we examine the above-mentioned sexy vampires which the cinema and television series have immortalized, we can conclude that they all portray the vampire as an extremely attractive bad boy or rebel, who seems to be a mixture of Lord Byron, James Dean and a rock star, ready to defy all authority, who is admirable for what Carol Senf called his "romantic independence" and for his "refusal to conform to arbitrary social standards".⁴ In *The Vampire Lestat*, Anne Rice transformed Lestat into a rock star, because, she claims, "rock singers are symbolic outsiders" who are "expected to be completely unpredictable, and completely themselves, and they are rewarded for that".⁵ This reward seems to compensate them for the anguish of living between life and death, especially at those moments when they

⁴ Carol Senf, *The Vampire in Nineteenth-Century English Literature*, Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1988, 7.

⁵ Anne Rice, *The Vampire Lestat*, New York: Ballantine, 1985, 38.

seduce their victims. These, in turn, are easily seduced into experiencing painful and pleasurable feelings, in the tradition of a dark romanticism to which Anne Rice refers in an interview:

I think the vampire is a romantic, enthralling image, ... the image of this person who never dies and takes a blood sacrifice in order to live and exerts a charm over people; a handsome, alluring, seductive person who captivates us, then drains the life out of us so that he or she can live. We long to be one of them and the idea of being sacrificed to them becomes rather romantic.⁶

But why are people so attracted by the seductive allure of a vampiric criminal and by the possibility of achieving immortality through death? The popularity of the famous song *Killing Me Softly* (a product of pop culture which has no connection with the Gothic phenomenon, but where death and pain are used as metaphors) comes to mind. The truth is that many vampire enthusiasts are unconsciously drawn to the imagery of death, without being able to explain the nature of this irresistible impulse, which Freud called “Thanatos”, a death drive that compels humans to engage in risky and self-destructive acts that may lead to death. In vampires, Eros, the life instinct, and Thanatos, the death instinct, are so closely interconnected that only a constant blend of the two can faithfully reflect the dual nature of the vampire, in which sex and death are so closely associated.

In *Liquid Dreams of Vampires*, Martin Riccardo is aware that human motivation is driven by these subconscious forces and that deep undercurrents and hidden motivating factors relating to vampires must be discerned. In his work, the author examines many aspects of the vampire’s appeal that relate to the human condition, such as death, immortality, alienation, romance, sexuality, violence, power, surrender and the vampire’s kiss. Focusing on the variety of emotional elements in the perception of the undead, Riccardo explores the psychological impact of the vampire on our dreams and its strange appeal in popular culture, concluding: “On the level of dreams and

⁶ Anne Rice, *Interview with the Vampire: a Critique*. Accessed June 13, 2012 in <http://voices.yahoo.com/interview-vampire-critique-2437697.html>

fantasies, vampirism can be an outlet for erotic feelings that might be difficult to accept in a direct way”.⁷

In a society that is so heavily engaged in the exploration of dark and forbidden erotica this difficulty may be easily negotiated; however, there is a risk of the vampire becoming obsolete and losing its value in providing a powerful and meaningful metaphor. In the age of *Buffy, the Vampire Slayer, True Blood, and Blade*, is the vampire a dying species, or will it return to its original roots of pure villainy and perverse transgression? This is why the myth has to adapt, in order to provide new ways of meeting each age’s new social and existential challenges. It thereby continues to offer the opportunity of escaping from our fears and limitations, and to stand for the promise of the transgressive and the subversive, which William Patrick Day considers an indispensable feature of its attraction. In his work *Vampire Legends in Contemporary American Culture*, Day is conscious of the ambiguous nature of the vampire, especially in an era in which we are no longer sure what human nature is, living as we do with the uncertainty of whether humanity is defined by our capacity to control our desires and impulses or by our tendency to seek to liberate and affirm them. However, Day is certain that “[t]he fundamental appeal of vampire stories, what catches our attention at even the mention of the undead, remains their lurid extravagant, exotic sensationalism,” because he believes that “the vampire story is a chance to walk on the dark side, indulge in the perverse, the forbidden, the dangerous, the supernatural.”⁸

The repulsive quality of the vampire

But the question remains: why are people, particularly women, so strongly attracted to such a terrifying creature? Bram Stoker describes Dracula as a man with a strong and aquiline face, massive eyebrows meeting over the nose, a heavy mustache and, most importantly, razor sharp white teeth protruding over his lips, pale, pointed ears, thin cheeks and a strong chin. And he sums up: “The general effect was one of extraordinary pallor.”⁹ In the nineteenth century, this description helped to associate Dracula with pure evil, making him be

⁷ Martin Riccardo, *Liquid Dreams of Vampires*, 89.

⁸ William Patrick Day, *Vampire Legends in Contemporary American Culture*, Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2002, 5.

⁹ Bram Stoker, *Dracula*, New York: Norton Critical Editions, 1997, 24.

seen as a diabolic villain. Although his image has changed in the meantime, acquiring more eroticized and sympathetic traits, we still find there is strangeness in the power of an attraction which at the same time implies a degree of repulsion.

John and Anna Laetitia Aikin attempt an explanation in *On the Pleasure Derived from Objects of Terror*. They observe that “the apparent delight with which we dwell upon objects of pure terror, where our moral feelings are not in the least concerned and no passion seems to be excited but the depressing one of fear, is a paradox of the heart ... difficult of solution”.¹⁰ While confirming that the imagery of horror fiction seems to be necessarily repulsive, in his work *The Philosophy of Horror or the Paradoxes of the Heart*, Noël Carroll finds that the genre has no lack of consumers. According to Carroll, this is due to the fact that the key element in the emotion of art-horror is repulsion or disgust. What motivates people to seek unpleasant experiences in art is the fact that they are seduced by the force of the power possessed by monstrous entities such as Dracula or Lord Ruthven (in Polidori’s *The Vampyre*) which induce an overwhelming awe, like all deities and demons, leaving us defenseless in their irresistible presence. He clarifies this line of thought as follows: “The objects of art-horror have power, i.e., they are fearsome, and they engender a paralyzing sense of being overwhelmed; they are mysterious in a way that stuns, rendering one dumb and astonished by the onset of otherness, if the fiction is artful.”¹¹

To go further into this paradoxical mystery, Carroll evokes Descartes’ “Third Meditation”, in which he draws a distinction between what he calls objective reality and formal reality in order to explain that the objective reality of a being is the idea or thought of that being without a commitment to its existence. We can think about vampires without thinking that vampires exist. On the other hand, a being that has formal reality exists. From this perspective, Dracula might be said to have objective reality but not formal reality, which led Carroll to conclude: “Saying that we are art-horrified by Dracula means that we are horrified by the thought of Dracula, where the

¹⁰ John and Anna Laetitia Aikin as cited in Noël Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror or The Paradoxes of the Heart*, London: Routledge, 1990, 161.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 166.

thought of such a possible being does not commit us to a belief in his existence.”¹²

The objective reality of the vampire, or what Auerbach has called its “non-existent abstraction”,¹³ and the aesthetic distance maintained by the media in relation to the objects of art-horror allow us to enjoy the thrill of being haunted by the vampire because we know we are safe from its destructive powers. In *Liquid Dreams of Vampires*, Riccardo argues that nowadays with real-life threats such as date rape, stalking and domestic violence, the vampire has become a safe sex metaphor for expression of self-victimizing fantasy. Auerbach also confirms the irony implicit in this preference for safe relationships with vampires, instead of more dangerous relations with humans in real life, when she explains that we continue to believe in them perhaps because “our century has made it impossible for us to believe in wiser fiends or better friends”.¹⁴

It seems to be a fact that love, sex, and death create powerful emotional experiences that can be potentially attained to a more intense degree through a highly idealized aesthetic connection with the vampire, which may have induced the overwhelming attraction many people feel. James Hart, the screenwriter for Coppola’s 1992 *Bram Stoker’s Dracula*, apprehended the irony involved in the allure of death in the vampire, observing: “The vampire comes and says, ‘I’m going to kill you and you’re going to love it – and not only that, you’re going to want more.’”¹⁵ Achieving love through death requires submissive and sadomasochistic attitudes which expose a perverse fascination for a simultaneously brutal and seductive being, subordinating the victim to the vampire, which ties in with what Sylvia Plath noted when she wrote: “Every woman adores a Fascist, / The boot in the face, the brute / Brute heart of a brute like you.” (“Daddy”). Rather than causing repulsion, the vampire causes desire for and attraction to all the feelings of dependency, entrapment and victimization he manages to provoke, filling his victims’ empty lives. These perverse impulses reveal the dark side of human identity in a world hungry for mystery in which people desperately seek Faustian knowledge without being aware of its destructive effects. In this

¹² *Ibid.*, 29.

¹³ Nina Auerbach, *Our Vampires, Ourselves*, 6.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 98.

¹⁵ James Hart as cited in Martin Riccardo, *Liquid Dreams of Vampires*, 17.

respect, Dani Cavallaro states: “The vampire is used to expose the monstrosity of humanity itself, the gaping and festering wounds of cultures and civilizations which may only perpetuate themselves through brutality and iniquity.”¹⁶ It is a fact that blood has been used as a rejuvenator throughout history and even now there is some evidence of extreme cases of vampire torture or murder, in which the killer drinks the victim’s blood in order to obtain their life.¹⁷ As an icon of the failure of culture itself, the vampire has thus turned into a cultural necessity. Some recent adaptations satirize the cult of the romantic, erotic vampire, as Robert Bierman’s *Vampire’s Kiss*, a criticism of a post-human future, and the television series *The Lost Boys*, which explores the audience’s fascination with the subject through a mixture of horror and humour.

Many examples, which demonstrate that the vampire has caused fascination more often than terror, can be found in interviews with vampire fans, followers of vampire cults and members of Gothic urban subcultures which make sense of its appeal and reveal its significance today. A few significant statements and comments are the following:

–!“I’ve always wanted to be a vampire ... because vampires live forever.”¹⁸

–!“I want to be drained” She believed that giving herself to a vampire would be “the ultimate sacrifice – more than desire or love.” If she got killed “it would be an exciting way to die.”¹⁹

–!“I just can’t believe that this is all there is to it – we’re born and then we live and then we die ... I mean Lestat made such a big impact on everyone he met.”²⁰

–!“He’s never satisfied, he (Lestat) always has to look for more things, to challenge one more thing. It’s what you and me keep doing.”²¹

¹⁶ Dani Cavallaro, *The Gothic Vision – Three Centuries of Horror, Terror and Fear*, London: Continuum, 2002, 188.

¹⁷ Matthew Beresford, *From Demons to Dracula – The Creation of the Modern Vampire Myth*, London: Reaktion Books, 2011, 195.

¹⁸ Martin Riccardo, *Liquid Dreams of Vampires*, 7.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 23.

²⁰ Milly Williamson, *The Lure of the Vampire – Gender, Fiction and Fandom from Bram Stoker to Buffy*, London: Wallflower Press, 2005, 187.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 188.

These examples show the curiosity and fascination surrounding the myth of Dracula and other vampires. More than one hundred years after Bram Stoker's influential novel was published, it is important to notice that an interest in vampires is still prevalent in popular culture. This is suggested by the recent popularity of many television shows and the widely known success of Anne Rice's novels. Testimonies such as these are also an interesting way to look at the issues of gender pertaining to both vampires and their followers, the modern portrayal of vampires, the nature of identity and identification, and the nature of fandom.

The contradictory quality of the vampire, or, the contemporary dilemma of the self

The attraction to the vampire's eternal life is closely associated not only with a permanent dissatisfaction with our present condition in life, but also with our contemporary fascination with fame, success and social recognition, which leads to frustration and anxiety. According to Milly Williamson in *The Lure of the Vampire – Gender, Fiction and Fandom from Bram Stoker to Buffy*, we live in a “‘success’-oriented culture which also severely curtails the possibility of the self”.²² Vampire narratives today expose this contemporary dilemma of the “self” which also constitutes one of the reasons for their appeal. According to Williamson, the vampire personifies another dilemma of the “self”, namely its duality, that appealing mixture which associates, for example, Louis' sorrow and Lestat's glamour in *The Interview with the Vampire*. This duality, which creates an effect of simultaneous attraction and repulsion, has generated enormous fan cultures in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

A misfit with a positive image, the vampire also seems to live in a state of existential contradiction due to his condition of a living dead, possessing a conflicting nature which, in *The Blood is the Life: Vampires in Literature*, Mary Pharr and Leonard Heldreth call an “oxymoron implying someone both admirable and subversive”.²³ They claim that “the vampire's contemporary image envisions a being who is simultaneously terrifying and attractive – even envied, a being

²² *Ibid.*, 2.

²³ Mary Pharr and Leonard Heldreth, *The Blood is the Life: Vampires in Literature*, Bowling Green: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1999, 1.

whose allure reaches to the deepest levels of the collective unconscious". As a creature of both darkness and light, an immortal yet dead being, a beautiful but monstrous individual, the vampire personifies transgression due to its power of confounding all categories of thought. Typical of the Gothic is the fact that its narratives aim at dissolving the boundaries which separate the human from the monster. The close relationship between these opposing facets, which reflect human identity, is what creates sympathy for the monstrous outsider, in the tradition of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818).

This sympathetic relationship with the vampire expresses, as Margaret Carter well observes, "a shift of emphasis from the threat of the other to the allure of the other".²⁴ Joan Gordon and Veronica Hollinger also argue that the figure of the vampire has undergone a variety of fascinating transformations and significant metamorphoses. According to them, these transformations began in the mid-1970s, especially with Anne Rice's *Interview with the Vampire* (1976), a key moment that defined the late twentieth-century tendency for depicting the vampire sympathetically. Consequently, the contemporary vampire has ceased to be associated with the pure evil represented by Count Dracula, or with his metaphysical dimension as an anti-Christ, and has become the expression of the human condition. The reason why people identify so closely with vampires is that there is a long history of vampire fiction in which the vampire is sympathetically constructed, originating a legacy that does not derive directly from Dracula but rather from Lord Ruthven in Polidori's "The Vampyre" (1819) and Varney in Rymer's "Varney the Vampyre" (1847). If the Victorian reader was essentially attracted by the horror of vampirism, the late twentieth-century reader is less interested in the diabolic image of the vampire than in its erotic and alien qualities, which are often perceived as attractive. This change in readers' preferences also reflect a change in cultural attitudes which nowadays are more likely to involve sympathy with the alien other or the outsider, someone who simultaneously threatens and attracts.

Margaret Carter acknowledges all these changes in the fictional characterization of the vampire when she states: "Today, creators of

²⁴ Margaret Carter, "The Vampire as Alien in Contemporary Fiction", in J. Gordon and V. Hollinger (eds), *Blood Read: The Vampire in Contemporary Culture*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997, 30.

fictional vampires often choose the Romantic path of identification with the ‘alien’ supernatural being rather than with the superstitious majority bent on excluding and destroying him or her”.²⁵ It is thus understandable that contemporary writers should treat vampires sympathetically, for exactly the same reasons as nineteenth-century authors vilified them in order to justify their necessary persecution. In *Fantasy – The Literature of Subversion*, Rosemary Jackson asserts that by having his heroes stake Lucy and Dracula’s three wives, “Stoker reinforces social, class, racial, and sexual prejudices”, and that “[b]y defeating these [forbidden sexual] desires, the narrative reasserts a prohibition on exogamy”.²⁶ Jackson sees the vampire as an alien whose sexuality causes a very strong appeal which the nineteenth-century managed to suppress, but which is now a source of attraction. This is the result of the transformations in the metaphorical charge of the vampire which has led to an empathic portrayal that would have been unthinkable in the past, as Rice’s novels and those of Chelsea Queen Yarbro and Stephanie Meyer well illustrate. As an extremely powerful metaphor in contemporary culture, the vampire possesses an essential function which helps to explain its continuing “undeath” in the twenty-first century, due to its powerful effect on the collective imagination. For Jackson, the work of metaphor is vital for the construction of all fantastic narratives because the realm of the fantastic is composed of “all that is not said, all that is unsayable, through realistic forms”.²⁷ And this is especially true when applied to the vampire myth, because it apparently holds the key to some incredible knowledge, but this knowledge is only attainable through suffering. This can turn the power of the vampire’s intellect into a metaphor for a warning against some things that one does not want to know, a necessary condition that contributes to preserving the mystery of the myth.

There are so many nuances regarding the myth of the vampire that it is impossible to arrive at a final and complete answer as to the fascination it provokes. As Riccardo puts it, “there is no single aspect of the vampire that explains totally the popularity of the image or the power it sometimes has over people. The vampire is plainly

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 29.

²⁶ Rosemary Jackson, *Fantasy - The Literature of Subversion*, New York: Routledge, 1995, 121, 119.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 26.

multidimensional in its appeal.”²⁸ A mysterious being, nowadays a reluctant symbol of evil whose innocence is hidden, the vampire as the outcast indicates an “unspeakable” existence of terrible injustice. It should be remembered that behind its celebrity status there lies the experience of a marginalized self, which Peter Brooks describes as “innocence buried alive and unable to voice its claim of recognition”.²⁹ Fans have proved extremely responsive to this sense of otherness, of feeling alien or like an outsider in a world of humans, which finds correspondence in the sense of alienation often felt by the characters portrayed in works of art. The Byronic idea of the lonely vampire bohemian is very attractive to young people. One example is Spike’s popularity with fans of *Buffy, the Vampire Slayer*. Confirming her sympathy for this kind of vampire, Laura, one of his fans, explains Spike’s appeal:

As a human, he was incredibly sensitive – as a vampire, Spike is still “tainted” by humanity ... Spike is capable of love and selflessness. Spike loves more completely and powerfully than any other character on the show ... Why relate to Spike? Spike is the ultimate outcast. He does not fit in anywhere, and is struggling to find his place in the world.³⁰

This description could be applied to Count Saint Germain’s disenchanted idealism, to Lestat’s status as a rule-breaker and the glamour this affords, and also to the most depressive and romantic moments of the inhumanly beautiful Prince Charming, Edward Cullen, in *Twilight*. Reflecting the crisis of authority in our time, the vampire as an attractive rebel is a twentieth and twenty-first century figure, in spite of the existence of potential rebellion in all vampires. This kind of attraction is due to the transformation of the vampire as villain into the vampire as hero, a fact that has led Margaret Carter to state: “As a rebellious outsider, as persecuted minority, as endangered species, and as a member of a different ‘race’ that legend portrays as

²⁸ Martin Riccardo, *Liquid Dreams of Vampires*, 22.

²⁹ Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess*, York: York University Press, 1995, 20.

³⁰ Milly Williamson, *The Lure of the Vampire*, 74.

sexually omnicompetent, the vampire makes a fitting hero for late twentieth-century popular fiction.”³¹

Let Me In, a 2010 American romantic horror film directed by Matt Reeves, provides an example of a creature of the dark leading the audience, with unexpected heroism, to light. Owen is an unhappy and lonely twelve-year-old boy who is neglected by his divorcing parents and is continually harassed at school by bullies. When he meets Abby, the vampire girl next door, he is finally able to fight his loneliness and his adversaries at school. This story of friendship, between a young boy and a vampire child in New Mexico in the early 1980s, deals with the theme of integration, which in this case is as important to the boy as it is to the vampire, which shows their similar struggle to fit in. Both of them personify the figure of the excluded “alien” which the vampire is used to representing. The representatives of the social order can maintain that order only by discriminating against different existences and by persecuting otherness, instead of accepting it. This ruling human perversity feeds on our energy and creativity, as Auerbach notes: “There are vampires and vampires, and the ones that suck blood aren’t the worst”.³² This dominant psychic vampirism is also an extremely important reason for our empathy with vampires because through them we are able to tear off the mask of injustice and corruption that undermines our troubled present times. Auerbach also observes:

Dracula’s dominance in our century allows us to imagine our relationships, intimate and political, as entangled in psychic vampirism. Vampires and vampires live with us today because, throughout the twentieth century, we have embraced Draculas and Draculas.³³

To conclude, the desire to be forever young like the vampire takes its toll: being cursed to roam the earth forever, loveless, suffering and in a state of eternal need, depending on young blood to survive, like Barnabas Collins in *Dark Shadows*. Bram Stoker also conveys the

³¹ Margaret Carter, “The Vampire as Alien in Contemporary Fiction”, in J. Gordon and V. Hollinger (eds), *Blood Read: The Vampire in Contemporary Culture*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997, 29.

³² Nina Auerbach, *Our Vampires, Ourselves*, 101.

³³ *Ibid.*, 111.

same kind of ethical message, perhaps to disturb the most self-confident readers of his time: “How blessed are some people, / Whose lives have no fears, no dreads, / To whom sleep is a blessing that comes nightly, / And brings nothing but sweet dreams.”³⁴ Fear is an integral part of human life, but it seems that the beings we should fear most are ourselves, divided as we are in a maze of contradictions and split motivations.

The postmodern subject is lost in doubt, forever questioning the meaning of life and the role of existence. Just like present-day vampire adaptations, the individual’s identity is fragmented, laden with conflicting urges and incompatible needs: the body and the mind, the technical and the spiritual, the ephemeral and the eternal. And the appeal of the abyss seems to lurk somewhere – perhaps in the alluring charm of the vampire.

³⁴ Bram Stoker, *Dracula*, 122.