FOREVER YOUNG, THOUGH FOREVER CHANGING: EVOLUTION OF THE VAMPIRE

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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

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

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