

SEVERAL EVOLUTIONS OF THE VAMPIRE FIGURE IN CONTEMPORARY POPULAR CULTURE

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Abstract: Across time, the stories about vampires have evolved, adapting to new cultures and to ever-evolving social mentalities. Dracula – perhaps the most famous vampire figure – has undergone radical transformations in popular culture, generating a great variety of vampire types and sub-types. This paper aims to briefly present the evolution of the vampire figure in popular culture (especially in literature and film), starting with the publication of Stoker’s epistolary novel “Dracula”, and focusing on Rice’s “Vampire Chronicles” and on several well-known films, such as “Dracula” (1931), “Bram Stoker’s Dracula” (1992), “Interview with the Vampire” (1994), “The Twilight Saga” (2008-2012), the “Underworld” series (2003-2016) and “Priest” (2011).

Keywords: vampire, Dracula, myth, film, popular culture

1. Introduction

Stories about vampires – “mythological or folkloric beings who subsist by feeding on the life essence (generally in the form of blood) of living creatures” (Thakur 2012, pp. CLXXIX) – have always haunted human societies and civilizations, and some of them are thousands of years old. Among the oldest ones are those mentioned by Persians (blood-drinking demons drawn on pottery shards), Ancient Babylonians (demon Lilitu – also known as Lilith in Hebrew – feeding on the blood of babies), Greeks (Empusa – a demonic, bronze-footed creature that would seduce men and drank their blood; Lamia – sucking the blood of children at night; *striges* – feeding on children and young men), Romans (the *strix* – derived from the Greeks’ *striges*), Malaysians (*penanggalan*), Filipinos (*manananggal*), Australians (*Yara-ma-yha-who*).

However, the vampire figure that our contemporary society is familiar with today is extensively based on Eastern European myths. For instance, the Slavic myths that developed during the ninth century mention, as causes of vampirism, the following: “being born with a tooth, a tail or a caul (...); being conceived on certain days; suffering an irregular death (...); being excommunicated; or being improperly buried” (Renoux 2005, p. 31). Slavic people believed that the death of cattle, sheep, relatives, and neighbors, exhumed bodies in a lifelike state with newly grown fingernails or hair, blood on the mouth represented evidence of vampire existence, according to Renoux (2005).

According to these myths, a person could be prevented from becoming a vampire by taking various preventive measures, such as: putting a crucifix in one’s coffin; nailing one’s clothes to coffin walls; spreading millet or poppy seeds over one’s grave because it was thought that vampires were obsessed by counting, piercing one’s body with thorns or stakes (see Todd 2007; Guiley 2005). A vampire could be destroyed by staking, decapitation, burning, repeating the funeral service, pouring holy water on the grave, performing exorcism.

It is commonly thought that vampire legends emerged because in ancient times people did not have the necessary scientific knowledge in order to be able to explain several natural processes related to death, body decomposition, diseases (such as tuberculosis, rabies, porphyria – which caused photosensitivity, reddish teeth and fingernails), psychopathology (murderers performing vampiric rituals upon their victims), etc.

These myths fed and intermingled with other famous stories, such as those about Elizabeth Bathory's serial killings or Vlad the Impaler's reputed cruelty, and also inspired famous works, such as John Polidori's "The Vampyre" (1819), Joseph Thomas Sheridan Le Fanu's "Carmilla" (1872) and Bram Stoker's "Dracula" (1897), which heavily influenced modern popular culture.

2. The influence of Bram Stoker's "Dracula": the first portrayals of the vampire figure in films

The epistolary novel "Dracula", written by the Irish author Bram Stoker, and published in 1897, has had a large influence in what concerns the popularity of the mythical vampire. Moreover, across time, the vampire's features described by Stoker intermingled with those mentioned by the folkloric tradition, engendering the modern fictional vampire (Gurmundsdottir 2005) that has starred in countless books and films. In his novel, Stoker portrayed vampirism as "a supernatural disease, a kind of contagious demonic possession" (Molina Acevedo 2016), stained by sex, blood and death. Moreover, Stoker's vampire is recognizably an outsider, a foreign monster that invades a modern environment. However, one may notice the dual nature of the character. Although Dracula is mainly conceived as an incredibly evil character, proud, noble, and self-confident in his supernatural and mesmerizing powers, the author subtly inserts some hints suggesting that Dracula might still remember how it felt to be human. This vampire-predator is also endowed with several humanizing features that make him appear noble and vulnerable. Thus, according to Senf (1979), on the one hand, Dracula is characterized as a demonic, hideous, threatening and bloodsucking creature whose presence brings only death; on the other hand, he appears as a lonely and silent figure, hunted and persecuted by humans.

This novel has given birth to a great number of interpretations within the domain of films and the theater, especially during the 20th and the 21st centuries (engendering over 170 versions).

However, it is noteworthy that Count Dracula has gone through many changes since the original publication by Bram Stoker in 1897, as he has been depicted in many different views in film and theater. For instance, an authentic supernatural vampire (similar to Stoker's Dracula) appears in the silent film "Nosferatu" (1922, Germany, directed by F. W. Murnau). Max Schreck plays the role of Count Orlok, a hideous vampire whose portrayal is also similar to the one from the European folklore. Being an unlicensed version of Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, the estate sued and won and all copies had to be destroyed. However, in 1994, a team of European scholars restored it, based on several copies that had escaped destruction (Valjak 2017). A very important scene in this film is the final one, when the vampire is killed not by the traditional stake through the heart (as it happens in Stoker's "Dracula") but by sunlight.

In 1924, the story of Dracula had been adapted for the stage by Hamilton Deane and in 1927 the play had been revised by John L. Balderston and opened on Broadway in a production starring Bela Lugosi as Dracula. Bela Lugosi reprised his role in the 1931 film version (directed by Tod Browning), which drew on the Deane-Balderston play (see Hutchings 2013; Guiley 2004).

The Hungarian Bela Lugosi – the first actor impersonating Dracula on stage – had a great impact upon the American culture, in terms of the vampire's portrayal, first in the theater and afterwards in films. The actor is reported not to have been able to speak English and to have phonetically learnt his part in the play (Lennig 2003). Due to Bela Lugosi, "to be Dracula meant speaking in a different voice", says Auerbach (1995) in her work, "Our Vampires, Ourselves", more precisely in the subchapter "Dracula and Draculas"; that is

because Bela Lugosi's *Dracula* instantly gave himself away as a foreigner, through both his accent and uncomfortable but elegant clothes (singularity became thus a vampire's attribute).

It is noteworthy that the shift from silent films to the so-called "talkies" concurred with the release of Browning's "*Dracula*". Since the technology of those times was quite limited, the film had few sound effects and no musical score; therefore, Lugosi's Hungarian accent – which had already become legendary – contributed heavily to the distinctive sound of the film (see Kóvári 2003; Dawson Edwards 2006).

One may notice that the minimal makeup, the tuxedo and the black opera cape that Lugosi is wearing in the film transform him into the evil elegance personified; his eyes full of arrogant malice and his heavily accented voice add to the vampire's attributes. Bela Lugosi created the so-called "vampire signature" and Browning's film "*Dracula*" led to a radical transformation of the common concept of what a vampire looked like, sounded/ spoke like and acted like. It is noteworthy that Lugosi's *Dracula* is a much more attractive character as a vampire than Stoker's *Dracula* (the latter had hairy palms and bad breath). Moreover, in Stoker's novel, *Dracula* had "peculiarly sharp white teeth (which) protruded over the lips", while the vampires from the films released before the late 1950s (including "*Nosferatu*", "*Dracula*", "*Son of Dracula*", "*House of Dracula*") lacked these fangs.

Thus, the film "*Dracula*" (1931), starring Béla Lugosi, "the world's best known vampire" (Light 2016, p. 1), and directed by Tod Browning become one of the most famous versions of *Dracula*'s story and nowadays it is commonly seen as a horror classic, due to its distinctive eerie and chilling atmosphere. Being a "culturally significant" film, the US Library of Congress decided in 2000 to preserve Browning's "*Dracula*" in the National Film Registry (Scivally 2015).

Another interesting reinterpretation of Stoker's "*Dracula*" is the 1992 film, "*Bram Stoker's Dracula*", directed by Francis Ford Coppola and starring Gary Oldman as *Dracula* (this film transformed Oldman into a famous portrayer of evil characters in American cinema). In this film – which won three technical Academy Awards – *Dracula* is not portrayed anymore as a ruthless monster (as in Tod Browning's film), but he appears more like a romantic tragic figure, as director Francis Ford Coppola has intertwined the horror formula with that of a tragic love story.

Furthermore, the vampire is demythologized and humanized, as *Dracula* is portrayed as being able to love, to feel remorse for his past crimes, and even to perform moral acts. Therefore, in Francis Ford Coppola's film, the focus falls on the erotic side of vampirism and the human side of *Dracula* (Grímólfisdóttir 2013), *Dracula* the lover (not *Dracula* the blood thirsty monster) being in the limelight.

Furthermore, within this film, *Dracula* is presented as having Romanian origins, i.e. at the beginning, there is pseudo-historical prologue presenting Vlad the Impaler's fight against the ottomans, and the dialogue is in Romanian. Thus, *Dracula* is historicized and mythologized, and his vampire condition and mysterious curse are somewhat explained, elevating him to a tragic Romantic figure. It should be noted that in "*Bram Stoker's Dracula*", the main character is human before he is beast, and he vacillates between savage and civilized behavior. For instance, in the film, *Dracula* appears as the 15th century Prince Vlad (in the prologue), as an old lonely man and a stylish Victorian dandy (as human incarnations), but also as a werewolf, a bat-like creature and as a group of rats (Abbott 2003). Moreover, *Dracula* manifests his psychic and truly supernatural powers when he transforms himself into a blue flame, green mist and white fog; he is also able to provoke storms and to telepathically manipulate his victims' minds.

In both films (i.e. the one directed by Tod Browning and the one directed by Francis Ford Coppola), *Dracula* is a refined, elegantly dressed and well mannered rich man, endowed with superpowers (he can transform himself into a wolf, he telepathically controls his

victims) and extraordinary strength. Moreover, he can be harmed by Christian symbols, stakes, garlic and sunlight.

Bram Stoker's *Dracula* and the above mentioned films reveal that, at that time, the general trend was to cast the vampire in the role of the evil, inhuman one-dimensional monster, which one or more protagonists must overcome in order to save themselves and their loved ones. Vampires had no place in humanity due to their predatory nature (especially in Bram Stoker's "Dracula"), as they killed without remorse. Furthermore, the story was usually narrated from the victim's perspective or it was told by an omniscient narrator, who sided with the victims.

3. The evolution of the vampire figure from monster to romantic hero: Ann Rice's "The Vampire Chronicles"

The 1970s brought a new and fascinating trend in which vampires were portrayed in a much more human and sympathetic way, as tragic heroes rather than embodiments of evil. One of the first authors who really departed from the old traditions was Anne Rice with "Interview with the Vampire" (1976) and continued with "The Vampires Chronicles" ("The Vampire Lestat" – 1985; "The Queen of the Damned" – 1988; "The Tale of the Body Thief" - 1992; "Memnoch the Devil" - 1995; "The Vampire Armand" - 1998; "Merrick" - 2000; "Blood and Gold" - 2001; "Blackwood Farm" - 2002; "Blood Canticle" - 2003; "Prince Lestat" - 2014; "Prince Lestat and the Realms of Atlantis" - 2016; "Blood Communion: A Tale of Prince Lestat" - 2018).

In these books, Rice created her own vampire breed ("near-human beings"), breaking from the traditional stereotype (for instance, garlic, crucifixes and stakes do not harm vampires anymore and they possess reflections) and making the reader to empathize with the vampire's story. Moreover, she continuously developed the vampire realm, every novel adding new details to the overall story.

In "Interview with the Vampire", Rice even emphasizes the contrast between the old vampire beliefs and her newly created vampire features; for example, the main character, Louis asserts: "Oh the rumor about crosses! (...) Nonsense, my friend, sheer nonsense. I can look on anything I like. And I rather like looking on crucifixes in particular" (Rice 1976, p. 23).

The story of the above-mentioned novel is told by a subjective narrator, i.e. Louis, who reveals how he became a vampire, gives details about his "life" with the other vampires and portrays vampires as people rather than as monsters. He reveals the hopes, dreams, and fears of his peers, highlighting also the theme of the sensitive vampire who experiences exaltation, elation and intimacy when drinking blood.

At a certain point in the novel, Louis the vampire becomes a witness to the rituals destined to destroy vampires: he witnesses the people's savage actions, and considers the desecration of one's body grotesque and unnecessary. The novel provokes the audience to ask themselves who the real barbarian in the story is. Is it the vampire or is it the angry mob that is willing to desecrate a corpse based on their skewed yet ignorant vision of safety based on cultural tradition?

Moreover, some of Rice's vampires suffer from guilt and loneliness because they experience strong connections to their former humanity; they appear as tragic figures, as former humans who had made the fatal mistake of choosing such an existence to their deep regret (see Kutzuba 1997; Ragnarsdóttir 2011). Therefore, due to the depiction of the vampires' emotional states and inner conflicts, the reader may even experience a sense of sympathy, forgiveness and even justice to some of the murderous actions committed by these creatures and some of their vicious and sadistic actions become acceptable to the audience, due to the access to the vampire's perspective. Some of Rice's characters (for instance,

Louis) speak about their forced transformation into vampires, about their solitude and lack of understanding, about their troubled relationships with other vampires and even with mortals; they even long to become humans again.

Rice's "Interview with the Vampire" was adapted for screen and the film directed by Neil Jordan was released in 1994, starring famous actors, such as Tom Cruise (as Lestat), Brad Pitt (as Louis), Kirsten Dunst (as Claudia), Antonio Banderas (as Armand), Christian Slater (as the reporter Daniel Molloy), and Stephen Rea (as Santiago). Overall, this gothic romantic horror film enjoyed great success and got two Academy Awards nominations, a Golden Globe nomination and two BAFTA Awards (1995). In its turn, the film "Queen of the Damned" was released in 2002, based on Rice's novel with the same name, published in 1988, and, to a certain extent, on "The Vampire Lestat" (published in 1985).

Due to these stories narrated into a subjective manner, at the first person, both in Rice's novels and in the films, the monstrous aura of these legendary monsters, i.e. vampires, is deconstructed, as they are depicted in a more sympathetic way. They struggle for integration and they are forced to deal with solitude, as they are banned from daylight and marginalized from their former human world; they also suffer from heartbreak. Moreover, according to Abbott (2003), as they hesitate to feed on humans, Rice's modern vampires become "anorexic absences". For instance, in "Interview with the Vampire", Louis refuses to drink human blood and feeds on rats, struggling with his crave for blood, which he assimilates with an unsupportable hunger. Therefore, the modern and sensitive vampire avoids feeding on humans and either drink animals' blood, or drinks human blood from a secondary source (such as a blood bank). Furthermore, the audience may notice the division of vampires into two categories, i.e. good and sensitive vampires (such as Louis), which struggle to protect themselves, the loved ones and even humans, and evil ones, which are vengeful and cruel, feed on humans and even harm or kill other vampires on purpose (such as Lestat and Armand). Rice's vampires are immortals endowed, among others, with superhuman strength, agility, sharp senses and eternal youth.

All these differences between the so-called traditional or mythical vampire, as portrayed in old legends but also in Stoker's "Dracula", Polidori's "The Vampyre" and Le Fanu's "Carmilla", and the modern vampire, as depicted in Rice's "Vampire Chronicles", highlight a shift of this legendary creature from the magical realm to the mundane. The vampire no longer stars as a Satanic figure, as an impersonation of cosmic evil, but as a humanized being, as an outsider that rejects his/her vampire condition and longs to become human again.

4. The emergence of new vampire "species" in contemporary popular culture. Case studies: "Twilight", "Underworld" and "Priest"

Rice's trend of portraying the vampire as a marginalized being that tries to go unnoticed, to hide his/ her true nature and to integrate into the human world was further developed by other literary works and films, entailing the emergence of a great variety of vampire species and mirroring the amazing power of imagination that characterizes the human mind. In the following section, we will tackle only three such cases that we deemed as among the most interesting ones, i.e. the films "Twilight" (2008), the "Underworld" series (2003-2016) and the film "Priest" (2011).

"Twilight" (2008) and "the sparkling vampire"

The American film "Twilight", released in 2008 and based on Stephanie Meyer's novel that bears the same name is part of "The Twilight Saga" film series ("Twilight" – 2008;

“The Twilight Saga: New Moon” - 2009; “The Twilight Saga: Eclipse” – 2010; “The Twilight Saga: Breaking Dawn – Part 1” – 2011; “The Twilight Saga: Breaking Dawn – Part 2” - 2012). “Twilight” (2008), directed by Catherine Hardwicke, focuses on teenage Bella Swan and vampire Edward Cullen’s romantic relationship and on the latter’s efforts to save Bella from several evil vampires. Therefore, from the start, one may notice the same division of vampires into two main categories, i.e. the good vampires that feed on animal blood and try to integrate into the human world, unnoticed, and the evil vampires, which are characterized by cruelty and violence and which feed on human blood.

In “Twilight”, vampires deviate quite significantly from those of the traditional myth. Throughout the novel and the film, details about their physical features and abilities are added and sometimes explained in a scientific manner, outlining the portrait of a romantic hero that strives to blend in the human society or of a cunning creature that subsists on human blood unnoticed by its prey. For instance, vampirism is caused by a type of venom, produced by the vampires’ bodies and injected into their victim’s bloodstream when biting him/her. Moreover, the transformation into a vampire is accompanied by great pain (see <https://twilightsaga.fandom.com/wiki/Vampire>).

In terms of physical appearance, “Twilight” vampires are endowed with physical perfection (such as alluring scent, seductive voice, extreme beauty), which allows them to fascinate and ensnare their human prey. A common feature shared with other vampires from other films is their exceptionally pale skin, described as flawless, impenetrable, chalky, alabaster, or marble, much harder and stronger than granite (see <https://twilightsaga.fandom.com/wiki/Vampire>). However, what makes them different from other types of vampires is their ability to sparkle, when exposed to sunlight. This feature is “scientifically” explained in the novel by the fact that the vampires’ cells have crystalline properties. Thus, although sunlight does not harm them (as happens in Rice’s “Interview with the Vampire”), it can expose their true vampire nature (hence the nickname of “sparkling vampires”). In “Twilight”, vampires are able to remain immobile for an extremely long time (even several thousand years), in a statue-like state, without losing their supernatural physical abilities (to a certain extent, this feature is also shared by Rice’s vampires).

Their eye color reflects their feeding habits. The eyes of the vampires feeding on human blood reflect a deep red, while those subsisting on animal blood reflect a medium gold color (see <https://twilightsaga.fandom.com/wiki/Vampire>). In addition, they do not need to blink and they cannot produce tears because there is a special fluid in their eyes (based on the vampire venom) that lubricates and protects them, fulfilling the function of eyelids.

In terms of superpowers, “Twilight” vampires are endowed with eternal life and youth, extreme speed and strength and incredibly sharp senses (for instance, they can hear from a great distance and see in total darkness). The majority of these features are also shared by Rice’s vampires (and even with the old vampire myths). The sense of smell is very important to “Twilight” vampires because it warns them of an incoming threat or potential prey. They are also endowed with a sixth sense, as they can detect danger unconsciously. Moreover, they can leap incredible distances, they cannot sleep, their heart no longer beats, they do not need to breathe (thus, they can stay underwater for unlimited time spans and are excellent swimmers) and some of them have other special abilities, such as foresight or telepathy.

Another distinction from both the myth and from Stoker’s “Dracula” is represented by the fact that “Twilight” vampires do not have fangs and they are immune to sunlight. Their immunity to garlic, holy items or wooden stakes is also shared by Rice’s vampires (but not by Stoker’s “Dracula”). Moreover, “Twilight” vampires have reflections and shadows and they are able to enter into someone’s house without permission. Another novelty is

represented by the fact that they can consume food and drinks, but they must cough it up afterwards because they cannot digest it.

Indestructibility, agility and flexibility are also two other superhuman features that characterize “Twilight” vampires. This is “scientifically” explained in the novel by the fact that a vampire’s cells are extremely hard, durable, and refractive, making their bodies almost impenetrable (see <https://twilightsaga.fandom.com/wiki/Vampire>). If a vampire’s body part is severed, it can be easily reattached by covering it with vampire venom (which acts as an adhesive and enhances healing). “Twilight” vampires can be killed only by other vampires and werewolves, by dismemberment followed by burning (in order to prevent the vampire to reconstruct itself). Although they do not have any fangs, the teeth of “Twilight” vampires are flawless, unbreakable, extremely sharp and strong, being able to sever the limbs of their opponents. Moreover, the teeth are venomous, carrying the vampire venom, which can harm other vampires (i.e. it can scar them). All these extraordinary features are “scientifically” explained in “Twilight” by the fact that vampires’ DNA has 25 pairs of chromosomes (i.e. two more than humans) (see Brodman and Doan, 2013).

The “Underworld” series (2003-2016) and “the transgenic vampires”

The series of action horror films “Underworld” (“Underworld” - 2003, “Underworld: Evolution” - 2006, “Underworld: Rise of the Lycans” - 2009, “Underworld: Awakening” - 2012, “Underworld: Blood Wars” - 2016) is mainly focused on conflicts between different vampire covens, or between vampires on the one hand, and lycans, on the other hand, the human species being caught up in the middle of these wars. The development brought by these series – as far as the vampire figure is concerned – lies in the fact that these creatures of the night are represented as “biologically immortal transgenics”, vampirism being caused by a virus that infects living creatures (see <https://underworld.fandom.com/wiki/Lycan>). The series narrates that Marcus Corvinus (an immortal who was bitten by a rabid bat) was the first person who became a vampire and transmitted the virus to other humans, creating the whole vampire species. However, it is noteworthy that only a small percentage of humans transform into vampires after being bitten because most of them do not survive the infection caused by the vampire virus.

In terms of physical appearance, in their normal, relaxed state, “Underworld” vampires look like humans, except for their overgrown teeth and somewhat pale skin. When nervous or agitated, vampires change their physical appearance, as their canines suddenly grow and their eyes become either bright blue or gold. Their heightened senses include a sharp sense of smell and hearing, the ability to see in the dark and depth perception. Moreover, the vampire virus grants them immortality, heightened senses, superhuman strength, speed, agility, reflexes, body elasticity, endurance, durability and enhanced healing – features also shared by Rice’s sensual vampires, by the sparkling vampires featuring in “Twilight” and, to a certain extent, even by Stoker’s vampires and by the vampire myths.

The strength of “Underworld” vampires does not depend on their height or body mass but on their age: the older they are, the stronger they become. This feature is also shared by Rice’s vampires. However, in “Twilight”, newborn vampires are the strongest ones. Both in “Underworld” and in “The Vampire Chronicles”, vampires remain strong, keep their recovery abilities and can resist injury and pain by feeding on human blood. However, if they do not feed, “Underworld” vampires do not die from starvation, but grow weaker, eventually becoming dried out husks. Additionally, some vampires can obtain memories by drinking others’ blood (this is “scientifically” explained by the fact that the vampire virus is able to carry bio-organic signals and information) (see https://underworld.fandom.com/wiki/Blood_Memories).

However, the virus causes photo-sensitivity, vulnerability to ultraviolet light and thirst for blood. As in “The Vampire Chronicles”, direct exposure to sunlight sets “Underworld” vampires on fire and prolonged exposure burns their flesh, while indirect exposure hurts their eyes. The weakness and the injuries caused by sunlight heal completely when “Underworld” vampires feed (another feature also shared by Rice’s vampires). Severe physical trauma (such as amputation, dismemberment, decapitation and severe blood loss) can kill or permanently harm vampires. Similar to “The Vampire Chronicles” and “Twilight”, the mystical vulnerabilities of the old vampires (i.e. crosses, holy water, garlic or stakes) do not apply in “Underworld”. Moreover, the “Underworld” series also creates a new (evolved) vampire type that is immune to sunlight and physically more powerful than the older generation.

“Priest” (2011) and “the non-human vampires”

It should be noted that two main trends have been developed in our contemporary popular culture (especially in films), as far as the portrayal of the vampire character is concerned. On the one hand, the vampire figure has evolved from the monstrous, deadly and satanic creature to the beautiful, attractive and human-like being, as seen in “The Vampire Chronicles”, “Twilight” and the “Underworld” series. On the other hand, other films, such as “Blade II” (2002), “30 Days of Night” (2007), “Legend” (2007) and “Priest” (2011) continued to portray the vampire as a hideous and deadly creature, which even endangers the existence of the human race.

For instance, the film “Priest” (2011), directed by Scott Stewart, envisages a universe where humans and vampires are engaged in a centuries-long war. One of the major differences from other vampire films lies in the fact that these vampires have no human origin (the humans bitten by these vampires do not transform into vampires but into a sort of slaves, called “familiars”). The vampires in “Priest” come in various forms and sizes (e.g. queen, guardians, hive drones, etc.); they were not played by actors but were computer-generated. These vampires share several features with the vampires previously discussed in this paper, i.e. they are extremely fast and strong; they are able to see in the dark and they can be killed by sunlight.

Director Scott Stewart also describes them as “the enemy we don’t really understand, but we fought them for centuries. They are mysterious and alien, with their own culture. You sense that they think and communicate, but you don’t really understand what they are saying” (LYNNPD, 2010). Thus, Stewart underlines the non-human origin and nature of the vampires featuring in “Priest”.

5. Conclusion

The vampire myth has survived across centuries due to its flexibility, due to its ability to change and to adapt to new cultures and to ever-evolving mentalities. One of the most popular vampire figures that suffered such transformations is Dracula, an archetype that has generated a large number of vampire types and sub-types, displaying thus the endless resources of human imagination.

Over the last decades, the leading trend that haunted our popular culture, in terms of vampires, encouraged the portrayal of the vampire character in a more human-like fashion, as a seducing and even romantic and passionate being, which mesmerized the audience. Such instances are represented by Rice’s “The Vampire Chronicles” and their subsequent (and even successful) adaptations for the screen and by Meyer’s novel “Twilight” that, in its turn, triggered the release of an entire film series, known as “The Twilight Saga”.

However, our contemporary popular culture also displays another trend that attempts to move the vampire figure back to its previous monster-like status, as displayed by films

such as “Blade II” (2002), “Legend” (2007) and especially “Priest” (2011). Given the strong ability of the vampire myth to adapt itself but also the infinite resources of human imagination, the future in this regard will be full of surprises.

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