

This reduction of vampirism to psychopathological symptoms has formed the basis for a number of texts that, while not exactly science fiction, have continued the trend toward naturalizing these creatures begun by SF. Theodore Sturgeon's 1961 novel *Some of Your Blood*, for instance, focuses on a Hungarian immigrant named Bela whose sanguinary urges are traced, via psychoanalytic methods, to a series of traumatic childhood experiences; once again, what appears to be vampirism is explained away through the intervention of scientific discourse. In George Romero's 1977 film *Martin*, a disturbed teenager lives out a fantasy life as a blood-drinking stalker; though harassed by his elderly cousin who believes him a demon, he serenely asserts his mundane nature in a sentence that could stand as an epigraph for the entire SF-vampire tradition: "There's no real magic, ever."

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Sexuality in Vampire Fiction

In 2001, feminist literary critic Sarah Sceats noted that "at the beginning of the twenty-first century, vampires are as popular as ever. . . . Perhaps it is their insatiability that fascinates, characterized as they are by a ravenous displaced sexuality whose oral focus touches some atavistic chord in our consumerist culture" (107). Unlike some other monsters in the horror genre, vampires can at times be well-rounded, developed, interesting, and sympathetic characters, sometimes even enviable, since they combine two desirable traits: immortality and sexuality. Given the nature of vampirism, namely the taking of blood orally in order to slake one's desire, most scholars argue that both lust and eroticism are inextricable from vampirism. Literary vampires, in particular, are not only charismatic, but they can also come across as extremely suave, perhaps even possessing sex appeal, and the actions most associated with them—that is, taking blood orally, from the neck or any other part of the human body (depending upon the text)—is extremely intimate, perhaps even sexy. Going all the way back to the oldest literary vampires in the English language, John Polidori's Lord Ruthven and James Malcolm Rymer's Varney, it is obvious that such horror icons represent the predatory nature of the animalistic part of the human psyche, which appeals to the flight-or-fight, predator-or-prey mentality of the lower brain stem, and may have an erotic appeal to some.

More recent vampire fiction explores the other end of the spectrum, where vampires can be attentive, caring, and loving partners—hence, extremely erotic to both female and male audiences. As Judith E. Johnson points out, in Jewelle Gomez's *The Gilda Stories: A Novel* (1991), the text is a "lyrical and contemplative

new vampire narrative [where] drinking blood is tender, compassionate, erotic" (72). Here, the act of vampirism becomes a fair exchange rather than a predatory act. In her 2002 article for the ezine *Strange Horizons*, Margaret L. Carter finds a similar phenomenon in Fred Saberhagen's Count Dracula character, of *The Dracula Tapes* (1975) and its sequels in the Vlad Tepes series (*The Holmes-Dracula File* [1978], *An Old Friend of the Family* [1979], *Thorn* [1980], *Dominion* [1982], *A Matter of Taste* [1990], *A Question of Time* [1992], *Séance for a Vampire* [1994], *A Sharpness on the Neck* [1996], and *The Vlad Tapes* [2000]). Carter points out that Saberhagen's Dracula "derives most of his nourishment from animal blood. He drinks from Lucy and Mina, who come to him of their own free will, not out of hunger but out of erotic passion [and] Saberhagen clearly implies the superiority of vampire sex, since Lucy reaches orgasm from Dracula's bite alone." Francis Ford Coppola's *Bram Stoker's Dracula* (1992) also engages the idea that Dracula's vampirism is both invited and welcome by both Lucy and Mina.

In 1988, Carol Senf made the astute observation that qualities that made vampires a threat in the Victorian era, especially those dealing with eroticism, power, and danger, are ironically the same traits that make the vampire appealing to twentieth-century readers, particularly when authors make it a point to emphasize the positive aspects of vampiric eroticism (163). The interrelationship between sexuality and vampire fiction has typically been attributed to the fact that aggressive and powerful eroticism is perhaps a natural by-product of vampiric power, both in its psychological and physical manifestations, and possibly even in its economic ramifications. If the vampire is the attractive part of the raging id (where the werewolf would be the unattractive aspects), he/she is an embodiment of both individual and societal fears, which are often repressed or unconscious. This trait is exemplified in Jonathan Harker's reaction to the three vampire women in *Castle Dracula*, which is a combination of dread and desire. As Christopher Craft argues in his 1984 benchmark article, "Kiss Me with Those Red Lips: Gender and Inversion in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*," the attraction is both personal and a reaction to societal mores. Craft posits that Harker is "immobilized by the competing imperatives of 'wicked desire' and 'deadly fear' . . . [and] awaits an erotic fulfillment that entails both the dissolution of the boundaries of the self and the thorough subversion of conventional Victorian gender codes" (108). Of course, this is an oversimplification of the fears associated with vampirism, which can include not only sexual urges but also the attraction/repulsion nature of danger itself and the fatal attraction of raw power. In recent texts, the vampire's erotic power tends to take the form of the dangerous liaison, resulting in reluctant relationships where the human (and sometimes the vampire) is placed in great danger because of the tryst. In layman's terms, the vampire, whether male or female, can be used as a

supernatural metaphor for the men and women that our mothers warned us about, those bad boy and bad girl types which often hold a great attraction.

As Craft notes in his article, when Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu wrote his tale of symbolic lesbian vampirism, “Carmilla” (1871–72), with the knowledge that the vampire “is prone to be fascinated with an engrossing vehemence resembling the passion of love,” he was indicating the relationship between vampirism and sexual desire that would prefigure subsequent texts (107). When Victorian readers were introduced to the prototype for the literary male vampire, Bram Stoker’s *Count Dracula*, they met a textbook version of Le Fanu’s theory. The Count is both menacing and inviting, and these qualities make him, in his time, a unique horror figure. In essence, he represents the Freudian id, a force capable of taking over bodies from the inside, unlocking the deepest desires of the two women he vampirizes (Lucy and Mina). We see this both in Stoker’s text as well as in many of the film adaptations and alternative retellings of the *Dracula* story. Some scholars argue that *Dracula* personifies the link between horror and eroticism, and that as a novel steeped in fin-de-siècle decadence, Stoker’s *Dracula* (1897) revolves around the theme of sexuality. They theorize that Count *Dracula*’s erotic desire, rather than sheer survival or the need for absolute power, is truly the force that drives him, since the goal of the id is oral pleasure.

As to the erotic nature of the vampire in folklore, the debate seems to be whether the fatal attraction of vampires (particularly in their manifestations as succubi and incubi) outweighs the repulsion of visitations from either demonic creatures or the undead. Certainly, Stoker can be credited with deftly handling such concerns by imbuing his Count with the powers of mesmerism and shapeshifting, thereby making him attractive regardless of the potentially repulsive nature of his being. Tod Browning’s influential film version of the novel (1931), based on the Hamilton Deane and John R. Balderston play (originally written in 1924, published in 1927), all but did away with the repulsion problem by casting the sophisticated-looking Bela Lugosi in the title role (the stage play starred Raymond Huntley, who was often cast as an authority figure).

Sceats argues that although vampires are versatile figures that can offer any number of readings based on the economies of a power structure, “in recent decades there has been an emphasis on performance and moody style (all those dark looks and sweeping black cloaks) and a reinvention of the vampire as persecuted romantic, [and] vampirism has more recently been seen and used as a vehicle for the expression of homosexual desire and gay culture” (108). Many scholars argue that this tendency harks back to Anne Rice’s *Interview with the Vampire* (1976), where elements of homoeroticism are reintroduced and reinforced. Such elements had been previously glimpsed briefly in “Carmilla,” but Rice’s *Vampire Chronicles* (*Interview with the Vampire*, *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], and *Blood Canticle* [2003]), as a reaction to the too-subtle sexuality of Victorian vampire narratives, re-imagines the vampire as an physically erotic creature rather than one symbolic of sexuality. This portrayal is exemplified in the descriptive language of scenes where humans are transformed into vampires through exchanges of blood, and is especially noticeable in the Neil Jordan film adaptation of *Interview with the Vampire* (1994), when Lestat literally carries Louis up toward the sky in an embrace as he feeds on him.

As a result of the erotic nature of the vampire and of vampire fiction, the subgenre eventually had to redefine the traditional concepts of gender. With the brief exception of Dracula's three "wives" and Carmilla, women were presented as victims of the vampire, up to the 1970s. But because of their sexual nature and the marketability of softcore pornography and sexploitation, as glimpsed in the Hammer films (*Dracula* [1958], *The Brides of Dracula* [1960], *Dracula: Prince of Darkness* [1966], *Dracula Has Risen from the Grave* [1968], *Taste the Blood of Dracula* [1969], *Scars of Dracula* [1970], *Dracula A.D. 1972* [1972], *The Satanic Rites of Dracula* [1973], and *The Legend of the 7 Golden Vampires* [1974]), which delved into the idea of lesbian vampires and overtly sexual female vampires, the possibilities for gender role identifications have greatly expanded. Over the last twenty-five years, female vampires make their appearance almost as often as do their male counterparts, and movies like *Let the Right One In* (*Låt den rätte komma in*, 2008) have even begun to explore the potential of androgynous and hermaphrodite vampires. To many contemporary readers, both the otherness and the potential sexual ambiguity of the vampire are alluring, and when these traits are combined with the superhuman characteristics of the traditional vampire, as they are in the fiction of Anne Rice, Chelsea Quinn Yarbro, and (for young adult readers) Stephenie Meyer, the vampire becomes more attractive than horrible. If male, the vampire in Rice's novels is rendered incapable of penile-vaginal intercourse and thus becomes even more "safe" to a female readership, as does a vampire like St. Germain, who yearns for intimacy; St. Germain is always seeking his one true love. This desire can be contrasted to the male vampires in Poppy Z. Brite's *Lost Souls* (1992), who prefer homosexual relationships but are capable of penile-vaginal intercourse and propagation. They will aggressively and inevitably impregnate human women—with deadly results. One of the few modern throwbacks to the traditional, predatory sexual vampires is Mary Ann Mitchell's Marquis de Sade, the main character of the series of the same name (*Sips of Blood* [1999], *Quenched* [2000], *Cathedral of Vampires* [2002], *Tainted Blood* [2003], *The Vampire de Sade* [2004], and *In the Name of the Vampire* [2005]). These texts follow the exploits of the libertine as he forcefully vampirizes, among other victims, under-aged girls. In this series, there are no grey areas between predator and prey.

Strong, often erotic female vampires are also becoming more prevalent. In *The Gilda Stories*, as well as in *Desmodus* by Melanie Tem (1995), female vampires are more powerful than males, perhaps reflecting the matriarchal hierarchies of some societies. And characters like Buffy Summers of the “Buffy the Vampire Slayer” television series (and a series of novelizations), along with Damali Richards of L. A. Banks’s series *The Vampire Huntress Legend* (*Minion* [2003], *The Awakening* [2004], *The Hunted* [2004], *The Bitten* [2005], *The Forbidden* [2005], *The Damned* [2006], *The Forsaken* [2006], *The Wicked* [2006], *The Cursed* [2007], *The Darkness* [2008], *The Shadows* [2008], and *The Thirteenth* [2009]), are more capable than men of serving as vampire hunters. These women are supernatural beings (often half-vampire) destined to destroy the very creatures that once preyed on defenseless women. Gomez’s female vampire, Gilda, goes beyond simply empowering women: she both rescues a slave girl who is about to be raped and possibly killed and then teaches her such utopian ideas as compassion, tenderness, and responsibility. She subverts not only gender expectations but racial and class barriers by actively educating a slave (Johnson, 73). In some respects, Ariane Dempsey in Jemiah Jefferson’s highly sexualized *Voice of the Blood* series, published by Leisure (*Voice of the Blood* [2001], *Wounds* [2001], *Fiend* [2005], and *A Drop of Scarlet* [2007]) subverts authority as well, for when the series begins she is a graduate student baby-sitting lab rats at a university, and by series end, she is synthesizing a drug to moderate vampire reactions to blood-lust.

Bibliography. See Margaret L. Carter, “Lust, Love, and the Literary Vampire.” *Strange Horizons*. July 22, 2002. <http://www.strangehorizons.com/2002/20020722/vampire.shtml>; Christopher Craft, “‘Kiss Me with Those Red Lips’: Gender and Inversion in Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*,” *Representations* 8 (Autumn 1984): 107–33; Judith E. Johnson, “Women and Vampires: Nightmare or Utopia?” *Kenyon Review* New series 15 (Winter 1993): 72–80; Sarah Sceats, “Oral Sex: Vampiric Transgression and the Writing of Angela Carter,” *Tulsa Studies in Women’s Literature* 20 (Spring 2001): 107–21; Carol A. Senf, *The Vampire in Nineteenth-Century English Literature* (Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1988).

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Shadow of the Vampire

Shadow of the Vampire (BBC Films/Delux Productions, 2000, color and black and white, 92 minutes), British-American vampire film directed by E. Elias Merhinge. It is a metafictional account of the making of F. W. Murnau’s 1922 silent film