Race in the Vampire Narrative

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Race in the Vampire Narrative unpacks the vampire through a collection of classroom ready original essays that explicitly connect this archetypal outsider to studies in race, ethnicity, and identity. Through essays about the first recorded vampire craze, television shows True Blood, and Being Human, movies like Blade Trinity and Underworld, to the presentation of vampires of colour in romance novels, graphic novels, on stage and beyond, this text will open doorways to discussions about Otherness in any setting, serving as an alternative way to explore marginality through a framework that welcomes all students into the conversation.

Vampires began as terrors, nightmares, the most horrifying of creatures; now they are sparkly antiheroes more likely to kill your dog than drink you to death; commodified, absorbed, and defanged. Race in the Vampire Narrative demonstrates that the vampire serves as a core metaphor for the constructions of race, and the ways in which we identify, manufacture, and commodify marginalized groups. By drawing together disparate discussions of non-white vampires in popular culture, the collection illustrates the ways in which vampires can be used to explicitly help students understand ethnicity in the modern world making this the perfect companion text to any course from First Year Studies, Sociology, History, Cultural Studies, Women's Studies, Criminal Justice, and so much more.

"Especially in light of recent events, such as the Charleston church massacre and the nation-wide protests over police brutality, each essay offers a sophisticated, yet accessible reading of the vampire that is meant to help students acquire the necessary theoretical foundation to understand race-ethnic categorizing and to participate in contemporary public debates." – Ana Gal, University of Memphis

"Students and educators alike will benefit from the thought-provoking explorations gathered in this collection as they re-examine classic texts in the vampire canon and, perhaps, learn of ones that thus far have lingered at the peripheries of it." – Lisa Nevarez, Professor of English and Director, Multicultural Studies Minor, Siena College, NY

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The Teaching Race and Ethnicity series publishes monographs, anthologies and reference books that deal centrally with race and/or ethnicity. The books are intended to be used in undergraduate and graduate classes across the disciplines. The series aims to promote social justice with an emphasis on multicultural, indigenous, intersectionality and critical race perspectives.

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Race in the Vampire Narrative

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Race in the Vampire Narrative provides a welcome—and long overdue—avenue toward talking about race and ethnicity and Otherness in vampire literature, film, and television. Students and educators alike will benefit from the thought-provoking explorations gathered in this collection as they re-examine classic texts in the vampire canon and, perhaps, learn of ones that thus far have lingered at the peripheries of it. The scope of Race in the Vampire Narrative is inclusive of pertinent and timely discussions of what—and who—constitutes the “monstrous” and offers a means of bridging and integrating the classroom and society.

Lisa Nevarez, Professor of English and Director, Multicultural Studies Minor, Siena College, NY. Editor, The Vampire Goes to College: Essays on Teaching with the Undead (McFarland & Co Inc, 2013)

I highly recommend Editor Melissa Anyiwo’s recent book Race in the Vampire Narrative to any scholar/teacher interested in incorporating vampire texts into the classroom as well as to those already teaching or researching the vampire. Drawing primarily on critical race theory and cultural studies, this collection makes an exceedingly important contribution to the existing literature in the field of literary and cultural studies by fostering crucial conversations about the politics of race and marginality that have shaped the Western vampire discourse since its inception. Especially in light of recent events, such as the Charleston church massacre and the nation-wide protests over police brutality, each essay offers a sophisticated, yet accessible reading of the vampire that is meant to help students acquire the necessary theoretical foundation to understand race-ethnic categorizing and to participate in contemporary public debates.

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This volume is dedicated to all those who exist on the margins, whether they choose to be there or not. Moreover, to all those in my life who consistently remind me that there is good in the light, despite the seductive allure of the dark.

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To Patricia Leavy-Rosen, there really aren’t words but you, Maddy and Mark are my chosen family and I’m ever thankful that I know you. Thank you for trusting me with this book and so much more.

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May we always be powerful, beautiful, and without regret.
1. INTRODUCTION

When I was ten years old, the librarian at my primary school solemnly handed me the book that would quietly change my life with a smile and a whispered “now don’t read this one before you go to bed.” That book was Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*, and it was a book that led me on a strange journey through identity, race, and marginalization. Of course at the time, what stood out was that I immediately unknowingly identified with the monsters in the book, Dracula himself and Lucy Westenra, those two dark creatures, both damned by their birth and both demonized for discovering an imperfect way to exist in a world that saw them as nothing more than innately evil creatures. This was the early 1980s, and I was the daughter of Nigerian immigrants, in a period in which being black, and worse still African, was a particularly dangerous signpost to carry around. I was one of three black children in my primary school, two after my brother abandoned me by graduating, and was always reminded of my difference and inferiority in endlessly passive and not so passive ways. It was through books like the *Lord of the Rings*, the *Talking Parcel*, and *Dracula* that I discovered characters equally made prey by qualities deemed innate by the wider overwhelming world that comforted themselves by making them, me, the bad guys. I was not exposed to peoples of my colour in the books I was forced to read, unless they were in Agatha Christies 10 Little Niggers, or Nigger Jim in *Huckleberry Finn*, or in the endless images of West Indians on television, all images created to remind us of the subordinate place of blackness in the United Kingdom. By burying myself in the contradictory joys of Jane Austen, S.E. Hinton and the ever darker world of the supernatural through Stephen King and Shaun Hutson, I unknowingly became enamoured of the Outsider, and it bled its way into my studies drawing me to the images and stereotypes that form our identities and make flawed meaning of the world.

The joy of the vampire tale is that it perfectly mirrors that search for identity, offering a figure on which to mirror everything we desire and fear. Dracula drew me in because I saw in him a man driven by the insurmountable knowledge of how others saw him. But as the vampire morphed from bad guy to hero in stories like Anne Rice’s *Interview with the Vampire* or
Whitley Strieber’s *The Last Vampire*, he also came to represent the story of the outsider from his own perspective. Most academic discussions of the vampire unpack these tales by applying a sophisticated look at race, marginalization, and difference as it unfolds in the worlds in which these stories appear. Yet through all of this, the vampire has remained ultimately the narrative of whiteness, and the most popular tales feature the outsider in the form of a white, cultured, heterosexual male. Indeed Dracula told the tale of fears of foreign encroachment, but the fear was of the contamination of blood, and he was terrifying because he could so easily blend in with the white English populace, unlike those of us with visible, more obvious markers of difference.

Since the release of Rice’s *Interview with the Vampire* in 1976, we have seen discussions of the steady change from the vampire as primarily a monstrous corpse to largely sympathetic, romantic, outsider. Of course, many scholars have discussed this transition in a variety of ways with critiques focusing largely on the idea that the vampire represents the outsider in all of us. It seems almost reductive at this point to explicate on ways in which the vampire has been sympathized and humanized. Yet this image functions in multiple ways that make it more interesting and accessible than other populist monsters like zombies or werewolves. Their attractiveness and accessibility make them wondrous reflections of modern life, connecting us both to the worlds in which we live and the imagined pasts they, as timeless immortals, necessarily represent. Whether it is the Byronic heroes like Louis de Pointe du Lac or Edward Cullen or the hedonistic bad boys like Lestat de Lioncourt or Eric Northman, these characters represent the many aspects of race, gender, and class; the duality of normality and humanity.

Thus the vampire functions in a multiplicity of ways depending on the cultural positioning of its creation; the ways a particular generation views itself, but in all iterations it reflects our desires and concerns, while reflecting our solutions to the problems of the day. In this context, it is not only the intent of the production that matters, but the ways that production is seen/understood by the audience. The reading itself is as indicative of one’s social positioning as the rendering. In this sense, the vampire is an endlessly fascinating indicator of both the concerns of any given society, and the reflective nature or social position of the audience. This recognition seems far more obvious to those who lack the privileges of whiteness, heterosexuality or class, for their position on the outside connects them to the vampire in ways that it cannot for those positioned on the inside. The privilege of those on the inside is thus marked by their ability to consume otherness as something
reflective of nothing more than another choice, to therefore paint the vampire in any way that brings them pleasure. The vampire is rightly described as a humanized sympathetic figure when one explores through a particular gaze.

Yet despite the ways in which this archetype can be used to explain Otherness, there are limited representations of explicit racial Other in mainstream tales. *Race in the Vampire Narrative* fills that gap by presenting a collection of classroom ready original essays that explicitly connect the vampire narrative to studies in race and ethnicity. The two core areas of exploration are the use of vampires as metaphors for race/ethnic construction and/or marginalization; and the place (or lack of it) of non-white vampires in mainstream popular culture. These two broad areas will hopefully open doorways to discussions about Otherness in any setting, serving as an alternative way to explore marginality through a framework that welcomes all students into the conversation using a non-traditional yet all-encompassing archetype. In short, this text draws together the disparate discussions of non-white vampires in popular culture, demonstrating the ways in which vampires can be used to explicitly help students understand ethnicity in the modern world.

The book begins with an historical framing of the start of the contemporary vampire narrative through an exploration of the Greek undead and the true meanings of the first western vampire hysteria during the 18th century. Alvaro García Marín argues in “Our Vampires, (not) Ourselves: the Greek Undead in the Age of Racialization” that the construction of the vampire as a social threat coincided with the construction of whiteness as a racially privileged category. By introducing his audience to the first documented vampire hysteria, Marín provides readers with a grasp of the enduring connections between monsters and racism.

Amanda Hobson eloquently takes us into the world of popular romance asking the insightful question just where are all the vampire heroes of colour? Grounding her work in critical race theory, Hobson postulates that authors often characterize black vampire heroes through cultural stereotypes of black masculinity while humanizing their white vampire protagonists. By focusing on Kerrelyn Sparks’ *Love at Stake* series (2005–2014) and J.R. Ward’s *Black Dagger Brotherhood* series (2005–present), Hobson offers a very contemporary analysis of romance readers and the industry that tells them what they are supposed to desire in their romance, and who they are supposed to desire, while marginalizing authors of colour.

Christi Cook explores a very different element of the ethnic experience by deconstructing the trope of ‘home in flux’ as it appears in young adult
literature specifically Estrella’s Quinceañera by Malín Alegria, and Marked, the first novel in the bestselling House of Night series by P.C. Cast and her daughter, Kristin Cast. By comparing and contrasting the meanings of home and their central place in the search for identity Cook argues that cultural hybridity (Chicana/white, vampire/human) impacts the concept of home for characters and, by extension, for young adult readers. Through these texts, she effectively argues that we are all ultimately cultural hybrids, allowing readers to recognize their own experiences in works that universalize the experiences of young adults through non-traditional settings.

Lisa Lampert-Weissig also explores concepts of home spaces in her chapter “The Uncanny Human Condition in Being Human (2008–2013),” the BBC series that followed the double outsiders: Irish vampire Mitchell, Jewish werewolf George and the mixed-race ghost Annie. Lampert-Weissig posits that through their struggles to find acceptance despite their hybrid-marginalized status Being Human subtly reveals cracks in a façade of British multiculturalism to reveal that constructed innate qualities always trump behavior even when the monsters are more ‘human’ than those that oppress them.

In “Racial Hybridity and the Reconstruction of White Masculinity in Underworld,” David Magill takes us to the world of urban fantasy arguing that in print or digital frame, vampire tales serve as a central space for processing the anxieties and fears of American culture and its identities. The Underworld Series appears on the surface be to an allegory of American multiculturalism played out through a Gothic vampire-werewolf civil war in order to combat white supremacy. Yet, when you look a little deeper it becomes clear that the film’s gender politics intersect with its racial storylines in order to actually support a reconstituted white masculinity. By deconstructing the visual codes used by the filmmakers, Magill forces us to look more closely at the lessons presented to us on film, supporting the idea that the vampire image does more to validate exiting notions of white supremacy than overturn them.

Anyiwo continues down this rabbit hole by exploring the ‘real’ lessons offered in the conclusion of vampire tales; that marginalized groups are indeed excluded because of their own inherent dangerously inhuman characteristics rather than the prejudice of the majority. In “The True Monstrosity of Monsters: the hidden solution to Otherness in True Blood and Blade: Trinity,” Anyiwo deconstructs two opposing vampire tales, one where the vampires are the heroes (True Blood) and one where they are the bad guys (Blade: Trinity). While on the surface these tales are presented as equalitarian tales where difference is overcome by reframing the monster as
just like us, what they really achieve is the resurgence of evidence that all those who are different are only playing at humanity, and are thus deserving of whatever fate befalls them.

In “Do You Love Me Shori, Or Do I Just Taste Good?” Re-conceptualizations of Interracial Desire, Romantic Love, and the Nuclear Family in Octavia Butler’s Fledgling,” Marie-Luise Loeffler investigates the unusual interracial bond that Butler constructs between her black female vampire protagonist and a white male human host. Using the powerful science-fiction narrative about blood, race, and sexuality in the contemporary world, Loeffler argues that Butler’s use of the figure of the black female vampire creates a counter-narrative to conventional conceptions of interracial intimacy and desire in American—and particularly in African American—literature, as Butler continuously negotiates and ultimately dismantles dominant sexual, gendered, and racial positionalities.

Na’Imah Ford introduces the audience to a very different vampire species in the form of Jewell Parker Rhodes’ wazimamoto. In “A Voodoo Queen and a Blood Fiend: An Exploration of Memory and Rememory Jewell Parker Rhodes’ Yellow Moon,” Ford unpacks Rhodes re-visioning of the vampire as a metaphorical and physical representation of an entity that exists in the collective memory of peoples who were subjected to one of the most peculiar evils mankind has inflicted in the last 400 years, chattel slavery. By using a historiography grounded in the realism of African American life, Rhodes’ depiction of the wazimamoto in Yellow Moon illustrates that the past is a living breathing entity, sucking dry the descendants of enslaved Africans, just as it had on the African continent and during the Middle Passage. In this way, Ford introduces the reader to a vitally different construction of an image we have come to know so well while tapping into the roots of racism so present in the world today.

In the penultimate chapter “Exploitation by Invitation: The Supernatural Solution to Neoliberal Femininity in Charlaine Harris’ Dead Until Dark and L.A. Banks’ Minion,” Jessica Birch unpacks the complexities of human/vampire (interracial/interspecies) relationships. By specifically examining the feeding interactions between vampires and their human lovers in two popular romance novels, she focuses on the positioning of women as uniquely vulnerable to abuse and considers how specific models of femininities and masculinities are co-constructed with class and race. In this way, she controversially proves that even where “loving” vampire partners endlessly lust for their human lovers’ blood, these are really tales that validate male heterosexual privilege in multiple spheres, both public and private.
Finally this volume ends with a look at another alternative vampire community through adaptation in “We Take Blood, Not Life: Urban Bush Women’s Bones and Ash: A Gilda Story” by Rosemary Candelario. Based on Jewell Gomez’s Lambda Literary Award-winning novel, The Gilda Stories (1991), the evening-length dance production Bones and Ash: A Gilda Story (1995) stages vampires as an alternative community who use their long lives and the exchange of blood to bring healing to themselves and others suffering from the horrors of slavery and ongoing racism. She argues that in a world where vampires are typically depicted as white men, the community of female African diasporic vampires Bones and Ash … is a major intervention into vampire mythology that reflects traditions found in African American female literature. Candelario illustrates the ways vampire/dancers’ communal movements and songs—drawn from West African, African American, and social dance vocabularies—provide a model for how to live in the real world, offering hope for egalitarianism, community, and forgiveness.

Ultimately, the vampire exists as a being that parallels humanity but exists outside of it. They look like us, act like us, drink, drive cars, date, and want to exist. Moreover, the ways that the myth has changed over time perfectly track the rise and fall of different social values, beliefs, commodification of minorities, scientific and technological developments; in short, the progress of humanity. Thus vampires began as terrors, nightmares, the most terrifying of creatures. Now they are sparkly antiheroes more likely to kill your dog than drink you to death; commodified, absorbed, and defanged. When applying the same development model to other nightmare groups—racial minorities, women, homosexuals, Muslims, Jews, the underclass—each of these and more has at one time in history been used as the repository of our darkest fears and treated accordingly. Through this text, the authors demonstrate that the vampire serves as a core metaphor for the constructions of race, and the ways in which we identify, manufacture, and commodify marginalized groups.

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2. OUR VAMPIRES, (NOT) OURSELVES

*The Greek Undead in the Age of Racialisation*

And I realized, through my frantic sobbing breaths, what it was I held in my arms. The two huge eyes bulged from naked sockets and two small, hideous holes made up his nose; only a putrid, leathery flesh enclosed his skull, and the rank, rotting rags that covered his frame were thick with earth and slime and blood. I was battling a mindless, animated corpse. [...] We had met the European vampire, the creature of the Old World. He was dead.¹

Anne Rice, *Interview with the Vampire*

ENCOUNTERING EASTERN VAMPIRES, INVENTING EASTERN (NON-) SUBJECTS

Anne Rice’s American vampire Louis thus expressed his disappointment at meeting the Eastern European vampire, the alleged origin of his kin, for the first time, and finding it was no more than a dumb, mindless animated corpse lacking any trace of subjectivity or self-awareness. The whole description can be read as reminiscent of the otherising discourses employed to describe the colonized or racialised subject in the Western world since the eighteenth century. Louis seems to imply that the creature he and Claudia have greeted by killing it and obliterating its threatening difference belongs to their same species, but just as their biologically and intellectually underdeveloped counterpart. European colonizers used the same logic with the native inhabitants in many of the ‘newly discovered’ lands.

In a sense, Louis is merely reproducing an old discourse that, applied to living human beings instead of vampires, emerged both in and as a consequence of the irruption of the latter in the cultural space of Western Europe. In the first third of the eighteenth century, the Austrian Imperial authorities had to send military officers stationed in the Serbian lands newly
Á. G. MARÍN

conquered from the Ottoman Empire to cope with the social unrest caused by a supposed epidemic that originated in certain mysterious beings called vampyr. The reports sent back to Vienna were dominated by the consciousness (under rhetorical construction in these very reports) of an unbridgeable ethnic gap between Habsburg officers and local peasants. This gap, probably fully realized here for the first time in modern terms, was grounded not only on military or discursive authority, but also on substantial differences such as scientific development, biological conditions of life, and lack or not of individual subjectivity and intellectual independence. Most of these reports began by stating the ethnic otherness of the native population, explicitly denomining them ‘Rascians’ (Ratzen in German), the then usual term for Serbians or, sometimes, in a wider perspective, Southern Slavs. Both military chaplain Frombald, who reported from the Serbian village of Kiselova the first case of vampirism that reached the West in 1725 (Hamberger, 1992, pp. 43–45), and the epidemiologist Glaser, sent to the village of Medvegia, also in Serbia, to investigate the strange incidents that took place there at the end of 1731 (Hamberger, 1992, pp. 46–49), attributed more or less overtly the local beliefs—that they mostly despised—to Rascian uncivilized customs or superstition. In the wake of the latter case, quickly disseminated across the whole continent already during 1732, a frantic attempt to explain the enigmatic episodes irrupted among the scientific circles of the West. Rascian, or merely Eastern European otherness, was frequently proposed as the cause of a phenomenon generally regarded with contempt from the vantage point of Enlightenment mentality as an instance of backwardness, discursive underdevelopment, and irreflexive submissiveness inherent to Slavic peoples. In his Besondere Nachricht von denen Vampiren (Special Report about the Vampires, 1732), the doctor Johann Christoph Meinig—writing under the pseudonym ‘Putoneus’—credits the existence of such ‘absurdities’ to the ethnic condition of the Rascians:

It is initially worth noting that this fact had to take place among the Rascians, that is, among a people dominated not only by the greatest ignorance of all natural things, but also by the greatest superstition; consequently, such subjects are inclined to fancy the most foolish things, and their priests know they can make of them what they will. (Hamberger, 1992, p. 119, my translation)

A wider reference to ‘the Eastern part of the world’ can be found in a singular anonymous article published in London as soon as May 1732:
I must agree with the learned Doctor, that an inanimate Corpse cannot perform any vital Functions; yet, agree with the Lady that there are Vampyres. This Account, you’ll observe, comes from the Eastern Part of the World, always remarkable for the Allegorical Style. The States of Hungary are in Subjection to the Turks and Germans, and govern’d by a pretty hard Hand; which obliges them to couch all their Complaints under Figures. (Political Vampires, 1732, p. 631)

Here, ethnic difference is accounted for in terms of political regime and, above all, discursive practices. A politically subject people cannot but produce psychic non-subjects who, unlike Western citizens, are incapable of speaking for themselves and of distinctly perceiving, analysing and naming reality.

Many ethnic and cultural negotiations about the notions of Europeanness and subjectivity are at stake in the discursive contact space that the eighteenth-century Western reception of vampirism came to represent. Vampirism and vampires themselves were thus configured from their introduction in the West as a surface that absorbed, projected, and simultaneously facilitated and problematized the construction of discursive, conceptual and ethnic boundaries between the civilized self and its irreducible other. However, to a certain extent, this was not just an innovative feature that emerged in the cultural contact. Beyond the discursive realm, in Eastern European folklore the vampire already emblematized ethnic crossing and confrontation, as a rapid reading of the very same cases I have just mentioned will make clear.

VAMPIRIC POLLUTION AND THE INSTITUTION OF THE SELF

As a site of (ontological, ethnic, cultural) crossing, the coarse corporeality of the vampire embodies at the same time the threats and the fluidity of existential difference. It allows inscribing or turning visible the separation between self and other, but simultaneously complicates such separation, revealing its precariousness. The rejected difference, death, evil, or strangeness, comes back with the corpse to be compulsively (re)incorporated into the space of the self.

The Serbian peasants from the cases reported by Austrian officers found themselves in a period of transition between different foreign rules, namely the Ottoman they had just left, and the Habsburg they were becoming acquainted with. At this moment, both their self and difference were being redefined. The complexities of the vampire seem to stand in some way for the intricacies of these identity negotiations. Both in Frombald’s 1725 report,
and in the diverse Medvegia ones, the locals refer vampirism to Turkish geographical or temporal spaces. Frombald’s informants allege a connection between their present afflictions and ‘Turkish times,’ while all the original vampires in Medvegia 1731–2 had been infected while temporarily living in a loosely defined ‘Turkey.’ As Erik Butler has suggested,

in both cases, the vampire represents an outside contaminant that has lodged in a member of the social body and now stands to sicken the whole populace. […] Thus, when villagers united to do away with one of their own […] they affirmed that they would not allow foreigners to incorporate them, a fate even worse than death. (Butler, 2010, p. 38)

Not only were the Serbian peasants trying to re-found their own identity in front of the new Austrian rulers and apart from the old Ottoman ones; they were at the same time acknowledging, through the hideous body of the vampire—one of themselves—the uncertainties of identity and the frightful hybridity which they tried in vain to get rid of. Besides implying the emergence of an other and thus a new, stronger delimitation of the self, the sudden appearance of the vampire entails from the beginning an othering of the self, its advent as an element always already in question, contaminated or contaminable by the other.

In this sense, the Serbian episodes of 1725–32 can be read as a twofold phenomenon: on the one hand, the vampire provided a space of definition for Western Europeans in opposition to the East; on the other, it offered a site of self-delimitation for Slavic populations. In both cases, though, self-definition was haunted by the anxieties derived from the uncertainty of limits embodied in the transgressing figure of the vampire. In fact, the reaction of both sides to the threat of vampiric pollution is entirely parallel, if by different means. The physical extermination of the undead carried out by Serbian villagers in order to eradicate this element of internalized difference menacing their community can be equated to the discursive endeavours of European scholars to annihilate the sphere of epistemological difference represented by the superstition of Eastern peoples on the edge of the Empire, and thus prevent any chance of contamination.

THE GREEK UNDEAD AND THE UNDERMINING OF THE EUROPEAN SELF

The plot thickens when we notice that, at the time, the vampire was globally considered to be originally Greek. The West had known the living dead from the beginnings of the sixteenth century under the name *vrykolakas,*
as a phenomenon occurring among the Greek-speaking communities of the
Ottoman Empire. Reports from the then called Levant kept arriving almost
uninterruptedly until the beginnings of the eighteenth century, and continued
to do so for much longer.7 By the time the Serbian cases irrupted in Western
European public space, most writers dealing with them acknowledged that
the origins of vampirism were to be searched for in Ottoman Greece.8

Now, the problem rested on the fact that the very idea of Europe, under
construction from the sixteenth, and especially enhanced in the eighteenth
century, relied precisely on Greece as the (phantasmatic) genealogy of the
West. Certainly, at this point Greece meant almost exclusively ancient Greece.
Europeans of this time, though, believed there had to be in Modern Greeks
a necessary continuity with their ancestors, only thwarted by the barbaric
but circumstantial Ottoman rule. This was mostly due to the generally
accepted climatic theories, which affirmed that the physical conditions of
a territory determined the character and qualities of its inhabitants. More
significantly, rationalism as the basis of the epistemology distinguishing
Western Europe from its Oriental others was understood as a direct legacy
of classic Hellenism, while ancient Greece at its height represented Europe’s
Golden Age, now on the verge of being resuscitated by the Enlightenment.
The fact that the discourses and the social practices associated with the
vampire had emanated from Greece unsettled these assumptions. Vampires,
vampire believers, and Europeans, could not be Greek at the same time. Split
between the roots of the European self and the core of cultural and ethnic
otherness, the category of Greekness—and that of the vampire—acquired an
ambivalent quality haunting the rigid identity building of the Enlightenment
from its foundations.

It is not difficult to find expressions of bewilderment regarding the Greek
origin of vampires. Joseph Pitton de Tournefort, a French botanist who
travelled across the Aegean and left the most detailed account of a vrykolakas
infection, in Mykonos, 1701—without any doubt, the best known narrative
of a vampire epidemic before the Serbian cases—finished his account by
disavowing the very Greekness of contemporary Greeks, insofar as they
do not belong in the cultural space the West had reserved for them: “After
such an instance of folly, can we refuse to own that the present Greeks are
no great Greeks and that there is nothing but ignorance and superstition
among them?” (Tournefort, 1717, p. 136). Some decades later, long after
the frenzy about the Serbian vampires had calmed down in the continent,
Voltaire addressed the question as an entry of his Philosophical Dictionary
(1769). He exemplified accurately the European anxiety about the bordering
position of Greece; the solution, as was prefigured in Tournefort, seems to be the dissociation between *our* Greeks and *other*, oriental, Slavicized or Ottomanized Greeks:

Who would believe, that we derive the idea of vampires from Greece? Not from the Greece of Alexander, Aristotle, Plato, Epicurus and Demosthenes; but from Christian Greece, unfortunately schismatic. (Voltaire, 1824 [1769], p. 305, from the entry vampire)

This dissociation reinforced Greece’s location as a site of uncertainty and cultural ambivalence. Especially because it did not deny its belonging to one of the two spaces to pinpoint it on the other. To some extent, Greece in this period came to be paradoxically and simultaneously conceived as the epitome of Western and non-Western civilization.

There was yet another disquieting dimension in the construction of Greek Antiquity as the cultural departure of Europe. Implied in this notion was the idea that the latter, while claiming to represent pure, disembodied and self-aware subjecthood, was itself an undead, just the product of a late resuscitation lacking originality. Actually, terms related to the notion of resurrection can be traced in the whole tradition connecting modern Europe with Ancient Greece, from the inaugural ‘Renaissance.’ Modern Western identity, defined in part, as we have seen, against the possibility of soulless and dumb vampires, emerged then as a half-vampiric entity, contaminated by the very disease it was convinced to escape.

One of those responsible for this dialectic of rebirth was the German art historian Johann Joachim Winckelmann (1717–1768). According to Martin Bernal (1987, pp. 212–215), his reflections on Ancient Greek art and aesthetics, highly influential during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, were vital to the birth of the so-called Aryan model for Classical civilization, since they ‘sought to remove Greek culture from the “taint” of a long-recognized and historically demonstrable African ancestry, by denying its derivation from ancient Egyptians’ (Bindman, 2002, p. 91). While Winckelmann appears to have had little faith in the possibility of Europe resurrecting the Greek Golden Age, this did not stop others from doing so. Implicitly, in fact, Winckelmann’s classic ideal already suggested a connection between Greekness and Europeanness, the former being the aesthetic and intellectual origin of the latter. It was rather simple for later thinkers to conclude from this that for Europe to reach its summit as civilization, it would suffice to ‘return’ to the Greeks. Philhellenism, one of the leading cultural discourses of modernity, emerged from this idea. In a sense, Western Philhellenes in the
eighteenth and nineteenth centuries followed the same pattern as Louis’ and Claudia’s journey in Anne Rice’s novel: they travelled eastwards in search of the origins of their kin that could explain their identity and provide them with a guiding self-knowledge, but found instead no more than monstrous, deviant and mindless fellow beings, unaware even of who their glorious ancestors were. Winckelmann’s aesthetic ideal, discernible in Greek statues of the Classical Age (fourth and fifth centuries BC), was at the basis of his whole understanding of civilization. Political freedom, philosophy, critical thinking, science, subjecthood and all the other virtues of Hellenism were but natural consequences of their aesthetic regime. At the heart of this regime was the Greek ideal of beauty, a sort of zero-degree model of humanity transcending the particularizing effects of environmental context. ‘The Greek ideal was rescued as a universal paradigm by defining it negatively, as the relatively empty image of the human figure that emerged once the “inadequate” particularities determined by custom and environment were expunged’ (Potts, 1994, p. 160). This definition associates the Winckelmannian model of Greek beauty with the general notion of the subject of the Enlightenment, ideally conceived, as Slavoj Zizek has pointed out, as an empty form devoid of any positive content, ‘the void which remains after the entire substantial content is taken away’ (Zizek, 1992, p. 134). From this point of view, is not the (Greek) vampire, the figure that had been haunting Philhellenism from its inception,9 the aberrant obverse of the empty (Greek) subject of the Enlightenment represented in the colourless, transcendental, and abstracted statues of Winckelmannian classicism? As a perverse counterpart of the Kantian subject, a vampire is precisely an individual devoid of specific content, detached from the human community of the living and reduced to the pure form of compulsive, repetitive activity.10 On these grounds, we might assert that vampirism, a component that European civilization is trying to reject during the Enlightenment in order to attain a stable self-definition, is already (disruptively) inhabiting such process as an essential constituent.

DE-RACIALISING EUROPEANS, RACIALISING VAMPIRES

The European discourse of racialisation11 initiated in the eighteenth century (cf. Fredrickson, 2002, pp. 52–53; Baum, 2006, p. 9) arose from this racial emptying of the white European man—since it was also a gendered process—heir of the Greeks, that became a sort of unmarked universal paradigm of humanity. The historical enactment of the empty subject of the Enlightenment involved this operation. It entailed a kind of de-corporealisation of the body,
as becomes clear in Winckelmann’s Greek ideal, where the body remains but is transcended and sublimated in aesthetic representation through

the skin’s supple embrace of the body [that] makes its beauty visible. The skin permits the appearance in real bodies of something unreal—of an ideal, a soul, a divinity—but to do that it must render itself invisible. The perfect skin is one that appears perfectly transparent, one that allows us to see right through it, into incorporeality, into transcendence. (Chaouli, 2006, p. 28)

In this context, both vampirism and race share a common feature: they bring back to the fore, in all its coarseness, the corporeal surplus that was trying to be evacuated from the site of the (universal) subject. Such corporeal surplus may manifest itself in different ways, dark skin that dulls the vision of human transcendence, or abject corpses violating the skin boundaries and turning the body’s inside out (bloodsucking, autopsies exposing the entrails of presumed vampires in Serbian or Greek cases) (cf. Hamberger, 1992, pp. 43–54; Tournefort, 1717, pp. 133–134), but always leads to the same effect: the invasion of excessive fleshliness in the realm of conceptualization and the spirit.

It might not be a coincidence that, besides sharing a concern about ethnic identity and the anxiety about the bodily fluidity of the self, both racialisation and the response to vampirism were created around the same period as mainly medical and anatomical discourses in the framework of the developing Enlightenment fixation with scientific classification. Linnaeus’ original attempt at dividing the human species into varieties based on physical typology in 1735 (Fredrickson, 2002, p. 56; Baum, 2006, pp. 66–67) is contemporaneous with the medical treatises produced in the wake of the Austrian reports from Serbia, that endeavoured to expel vampirism and vampires from the European self under construction—but, it should be said, achieved exactly the opposite: to incorporate them as a central myth of modern Western culture.

Though not initially conceived in racialising terms (Potts, 1994, pp. 160–162), Winckelmann’s formalization of the Classic ideal gave a boost to racialisation by locating Greek sculptural beauty, and therefore European typology, as the normative form of humanity. For him, ‘white European Greek ideal possessed an abstract perfection of form that transcended the relativism of any actual norm of physical beauty’ (Potts, 1994, pp. 159–160). Although ‘framed in abstract aesthetic terms rather than in the ones of the more explicitly racist anthropological theories current at the time’ (Potts,
Winckelmann’s theories provided contemporary and later racialising discourses with the assumption that the Eurocentric white Greek ideal was closer to the original type of humanity, while other racial types were deviations from this model. Blumenbach’s notion of ‘Caucasian race’ lies on this idea (Fredrickson, 2002, pp. 56–57). When the discourse on races became (pseudo)scientific, between the end of the eighteenth and the beginnings of the nineteenth century, the measurement of skulls and profile lines was generalized as a method of establishing the structural differences between human typologies. Mankind was typically placed on a scale ranging from animality to perfect humanity, or even godliness. Significantly enough, while on the lowest extremity diverse animals could alternate, mostly an ape or a frog, a classical head of the Greek god Apollo invariably occupied the highest position. This was usually the head of the Apollo Belvedere, one of the sculptures Winckelmann considered as the most perfect representation of the Classical Age of Greek art. Peter Camper in 1791 (pp. 83–84), Johann Caspar Lavater in 1803, or Victor Courtet de l’Isle in 1849 (pp. 44–45), who are the widest known examples, included diagrammatic charts of comparative skulls in their works about human races. In all of them, unsurprisingly, the European was placed next to the Greek god, and the African next to the animal. Even when the author did not intend to fully racialise or hierarchically discriminate between human typologies, as is the case with Peter Camper, their diagram ‘conveys inescapably a hierarchy that appears to reinforce the Great Chain of Being’ (Bindman, 2002, pp. 205–206). On the other hand, Victor Courtet de l’Isle, writing in the mid-nineteenth century and thus entirely embedded in the anthropological racism of this age, explicitly stated that the most beautiful of races is ‘the blonde type that ancient traditions make originary from the Caucasus, whose cradle, according to modern science, is located in Central Asia, and whose most brilliant personification is the Greek head of Apollo and Minerva’ (Courtet de l’Isle, 1849, pp. 44–45).

In this framework, the vampire points, as usual, to a paradoxical position. On the one hand, it represents the surplus corporeality lacking in the idealized universal subject of the Enlightenment, that is, the brutish deviation of lower races. As with the Frankenstein’s monster, its corpse-like body evokes de-subjectivation, physical degeneration, and abjection, all of them characteristics ascribed to ethnic groups different from Western Europeans. Before Bram Stoker and the Dracula mythology, in fact, the stereotypical vampire was not the pale, elegant Central European aristocrat, but a plump, swollen, brownish-skinned Slavic peasant still showing in their body abhorrent vestiges from the grave. It might be interesting to compare
such descriptions with those in travel accounts where travellers express their disappointment at realizing how much the modern Greeks typologically diverge from the classic ideal of beauty. The term ‘degeneration’ is usually present in them, understood naturally as deviation from the (Western European) classic model. In fact, the accusation of being of Slavic lineage, and not direct descendants of the Ancient Hellenes, was commonly made against modern Greeks in the nineteenth century, questioning their legitimacy as nation and, above all, their genuine belonging to the West.

On the other hand, vampires were undecayed corpses that had preserved physical integrity, and especially a smooth skin, after death. Most of the reports and descriptions of vampiric episodes highlighted this. Martin Kraus, for example, says that the skin of an unburied corpse in Greece ‘was intact’ (Kraus, 1584, p. 490). Undecayed corpses suspicious of having become vampires were frequently called *tympaniaios* (drum-like), precisely because their skin was preserved and looked extremely tight. From a purely external perspective, Greek vampires were not so different from idealized Greek sculptures: in both cases, we had Greek bodies intact for a long time, untouched by history, death and decay, who enjoyed a second, re-contextualized life. The liveliness Winckelmann had underscored as the main feature of Greek art and sculptures could also elicit an uncanny reading like this when considered in the framework of the European discourse about ‘resuscitating’ the Classic tradition. In a sense, the (Greek) vampire embodied the disquieting aspects of the Hellenic revival. It revealed that under the smooth, transparent skin of the white statues and their familiar Greek aspect might lie not only transcendence, abstraction and universality, but also monstrosity, uncanniness and the most abject dimensions of corporeality. Byron appears to have understood the double challenge posited by vampirism in a Greek background. He included the *vrykolakas* for the first time in a Western literary fiction, the poem *The Giaour* (1813). This work featured Greek folkloric traditions about undeadness in the context of modern Greece’s struggle for national renaissance against the Turks. Relevant for us here, however, is the description of the Greek shore at the beginning of the text. Full of ruins, antiquities and other treasures, its smooth, marble-like surface reminds the reader of classic harmony as much as of an undecayed corpse waiting for a soul to stand up and walk. The Winckelmannian Greek ideal and the vampire are thus merged in the passage, disclosing their uncanny complicity:

He who hath bent him o’er the dead
Ere the first day of death is fled,
[...] (Before Decay’s effacing fingers

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Have swept the lines where beauty lingers,)
And mark’d the mild angelic air,
The rapture of repose that’s there, […]
So fair, so calm, so softly sealed,
Such is the aspect of this shore;
‘Tis Greece, but living Greece no more!
So coldly sweet, so deadly fair,
We start, for soul is wanting there. (Byron, 1900, p. 70)

Byron’s disturbing suggestion that the aesthetic ideal buttressing European racial identity was complicit with a deviant, abject vampiric condition, indisputably contributed to abridge the life of the Greek undead in European fiction.

NOT OURSELVES: CLEANSING WESTERN EUROPEAN BLOOD(SUCKING)

Villa Diodati, near Geneva, was arguably the place of birth of the vampire as a myth of modernity. There, on a stormy night in the summer of 1816, four Philhellenes (Mary Shelley, Percy B. Shelley, Lord Byron, & John Polidori) decided to spend the evening inventing ghost stories just for fun. From this ‘jam session’ of Gothic literature emerged the two monsters par excellence of modernity: Frankenstein’s creature, and the fictional vampire. After the meeting, Polidori, incapable that night of finding inspiration by himself, took advantage of Byron’s unfinished story and later published The Vampyre: A Tale under the latter’s name in 1819. Unquestionably boosted by Byron’s fake authorship, the book met with overwhelming success, and its numerous theatrical adaptations filled the European stages for several decades. Polidori’s Lord Ruthven, who inaugurated the line of literary vampires that would culminate in Bram Stoker’s Dracula, was modelled on the vrykolakas and acted for the first time in Greece. He was an English aristocrat behaving as a Greek undead. Fear of miscegenation seems already at work here. The Greek component in the European self can adopt the healthy form of classic, purely aesthetic Philhellenism, as in the protagonist Aubrey, but also the monstrous appearance of Lord Ruthven’s undeadness, taken back to England to haunt and prey upon Western bourgeois society.

The modern literary vampire was thus born as a Greek, just to be gradually expelled beyond the borders in the course of the following decades. From the more than twenty sequels premiered or published just in the 1820s, scarcely a tenth preserved the Greek setting, displacing the scenery to less compromising or
more recognizable spaces of otherness such as Moldavia, Hungary or Scotland. By the 1870s, the vrykolakas as a Greek phenomenon was constrained to scattered mentions in travel accounts or ethnographic scholarship. But, as the subtitle of the 1828 novel *The Vampire Bride: A Novel Based on Modern Greek Traditions* by the German Theodor Hildebrand reveals, in the 1820s there was still a widespread consciousness that the figure came from Greece; even when the undead in the story is a Moldavian woman.

The developments in the next decades lead to the Western culture’s ‘arch-vampire’ and heir of Lord Ruthven, Count Dracula, belonging to an easier emblematisation of intra-European otherness: Transylvania (cf. Lucendo, 2009, p. 117). By the end of the nineteenth century, the myth of the Ancient Greek genealogy of Western civilization had triumphed, whereas colonialism and imperialism, now at their height, required the racial identity of Europeans not to be questioned. Transylvania became immediately the land of vampires, displacing Greece as the space where the whole story had begun. Curiously, in their urge to de-orientalise themselves and be recognized as Europeans, modern Greeks themselves repressed the *vrykolakas* during their whole process of nation building in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

CONCLUSION

The almost absolute ignorance nowadays, among natives and foreigners, about vampires having existed sometime in Greece, attests to the success of this—conscious or unconscious—‘ethnic (self-)cleansing.’ For Europeans, vampires might well be ours, but they should never be suspected, even slightly, of being us. Accepting a common Greek genealogy for vampires and Westerners would imply to acknowledge the inherently miscegenated origin of our civilization, its historical, provincial condition. It would mean as well to reveal the revenant-like quality of the ‘regeneration’ involved in the emergence of modernity as the re-enactment of a dead—Classic Greece—against the immediately previous ‘dark ages.’ The axiom of Modern Europe constituting a separate realm of progress and de-racialised human civilization contains thus, as its uncanny reverse, clear vampiric undertones that would have been dangerously underscored by bringing Greek vampires to the fore.

The equation Greece-us has been indispensable to sustain the hegemonic understanding of Western civilization upon which Europe’s imperialist and colonialist project has rested during the last two centuries. This implied a de-racialisation of the self and a racialisation of the Other(s). So, Greece had to be attracted to the West, and its vampires, a reminder of both the ambiguities
of the racial ideal embodied in Ancient sculptures, and of the impurity of its contemporary inhabitants, evacuated from the space of Western culture.

Indeed, we can mention two recent historical instances of the long endeavour to buttress European identity by including Modern Greece in its symbolic realm. After World War II, when the triumphant powers were negotiating how to divide the world, Winston Churchill pronounced his famous Iron Curtain speech at Westminster College in Fulton, Missouri (March 1946). Significantly enough, of all Eastern Europe, he excluded from the region of Soviet influence only Greece, and this on account of its paradigmatic cultural and historical role for the West: ‘Athens alone—Greece with its immortal glories—is free to decide its future at an election under British, American and French observation’ (Kishlansky, 1995, p. 301). Something similar happened with Greece’s hasty acceptance into the European Union (1981) when it was obviously still far from meeting the economic, political and social requirements. Curiously, and rather symptomatically, during the recent debt crisis in Europe, which broke out precisely in Greece, vampiric imagery associated with this country has resurfaced in the media. Not only have the public discourses of wealthier European countries such as Germany underscored that Greece’s irresponsibility was threatening the stability of the Union as an external menace; they have also emphasised the vampire-like quality of its sucking the economic resources of more industrious societies in order to stay alive.

However, no popular fictional vampire in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, either in literature, TV, or the movies, could keep any Greek connection at all. This may be why Louis and Claudia would not travel to Greece in search of their roots.

NOTES

1 Rice (1997, p. 188).
2 In 1718, by the Peace of Passarowitz between the Habsburg and the Ottoman Empire, parts of Serbia and Walachia were turned over to Austria. These territories remained Austrian until 1739, when they were occupied again by the Ottoman Empire (cf. Barber, 1988, p. 5).
3 About this question and the context of the depiction of these populations in the reports, cf. Butler (2010, pp. 27–37).
4 No less than thirty texts were published just in 1732 about the vampire cases in Medvegia. Among them were articles in the press, medical dissertations, legal works, or theological treatises. For a partial bibliography, cf. Hamberger (1992, pp. 271–286).
5 About this, see Butler (2010, pp. 38–39).
6 In his report of December 1731, Glaser presents the testimonies of the locals, according to which the direct cause of the present epidemic was Miliza, a woman ‘fifty years old, buried for seven weeks, who returned six years ago from Turkish lands.’ While in Turkey, ‘she had
“...eaten from two sheeps killed by a vampire” (Hamberger, 1992, p. 47, my translation). In the famous report by the field surgeon Flückinger from January 1732, the ‘arch-vampire’ Arnold Paole, dead five years ago, was thought to be the original cause of the epidemic. He ‘had during his lifetime often revealed that, near Cossowa in Turkish Serbia, he had been troubled by a vampire, wherefore he had eaten from the earth of the vampire’s grave and had smeared himself with the vampire’s blood’ (Hamberger, 1992, p. 50, my translation).

The first mention can be found in the Italian Humanist Antonio de Ferraris at the first decade of the sixteenth century (De Ferraris, 1558, pp. 620–621). Here is a list of some of the later references, with the original year of publication: Agrippa (1531, p. 430); Kraus (1584, p. 490); Allatius (1645, pp. 142–158); Richard (1657, p. 208); Thévenot (1664, p. 182); Coteller (1677, p. 728); Ricaut (1679, pp. 273–286); Smith (1698, p. 386); Saulger (1698, pp. 255–256); Lucas, 1704 (pp. 328–329); Heineccius (1709), Tournefort (1717, pp. 133–136); Huet (1722, pp. 81–84).

The following references are the most important acknowledgments of the Greek origin of the vampire in post-1732 texts: Hamberger (1992, pp. 65); Zedler (1732–1754, pp. 476–480); Calmet (1746, pp. 251–253); Van Swieten (1768, p. 6); Voltaire (1824 [1769], pp. 304–308).

The foundational text of European Philhellenism, Martin Kraus’ Turcograecia, contains already a reference to the vampire, cf. Kraus (1584, p. 490).

We can understand in these terms Zizek’s claims of the monster being the subject of the Enlightenment, cf. Zizek (1992, pp. 134–140).

In the use of this term, I follow Bruce Baum (2006, pp. 10–12).

Though Winckelmann and Pierre Camper, among other theorists, still distinguished between the ideal beauty of the ancient Greeks and the imperfect form of modern Europeans, such distinction was lost later, “to be replaced by an assumption that the Greek ideal represented the generic typology of “civilized” Europeans” (Bindman, 2002, p. 221).


While scholars have discussed about the authorship of this work and how it appeared in the first publications, the title of the very first edition was The Vampyre: A Tale by Lord Byron. Some immediately subsequent re-editions actually still reproduced the ascription to Byron, while later ones in the same year specified that it was a tale told by Lord Byron to Polidori. Maybe since the former complained about this ascription in a letter to his editor, the following editions were already anonymous.

About the theatrical adaptations, see Stuart (1994).

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