

Transforming the Vampire for Young Adults: Mr. Cullen's Distorted Reflection in the Mirror of Lord Ruthven¹¹⁸

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Abstract:

Themes and figures that originated in the literature of previous centuries are present in contemporary novels, with certain changes related to the evolution of the mentality of the society within which said novels were written. The vampire, more specifically, has been an element typically used to represent a danger to human beings in relation to sexuality and religion, particularly for young women. This representation has been maintained in the literature published today, with some relevant variations that offer a different point of view regarding this figure. Polidori's Lord Ruthven and Meyer's Edward Cullen are part of the same tradition, being two figures who cover the same topics, although from very different focuses. Both cases present a complicated morality; while the former rejoices in his wickedness, the latter constantly suffers for his condition. Beyond their internal characteristics, these two personifications of the vampire as a monster also present a series of common physical traits since one is the consequence of the other. This paper aims to prove that the feelings Ruthven and Cullen experience towards their vampirism is a representation of the socio-cultural background in which they were created. While Polidori's monster is presented as evil and damned, thus representing sinfulness, Meyer's creature is presented as a suffering and romanticised figure who atones for his nature.

Keywords: Gothic fiction, *The Vampyre*, YA fiction, *Twilight*, Christianity, morality.

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1. Introduction

As Michelle J. Smith and Kristine Moruzi state, the emerging literary genre of paranormal romance in young adult's literature (YA¹²⁰) derives from the Gothic tradition of the 18th and 19th centuries.¹²¹ This claim can be defended by looking at the central themes of Gothic novels, such as the feeling of love that is more powerful than anything, even life and death, an example of which would be the relationship between Heathcliff and Catherine in Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847). This topic is also a central point of many YA book sagas such as Richelle Mead's *Vampire Academy* (2007—2010), one of the novels that Smith and Moruzi take into consideration in their study.

The intense feelings of the main characters are not the only trait of the Gothic tradition that has persisted until contemporary times. Gothic plots explore the dark and uncanny elements that come from within, which "[seduce] the eye of the viewer."¹²² In relation to this, Smith and Mozuri write that the resurgence in popularity of Gothic themes can be appreciated in the "incorporation of Gothic motifs [...] of elements of darkness and misfortune to the romance."¹²³ As Christ Priestley et al. write, "from its beginning, gothic has been something of a patchwork [...] Eighteenth century gothic was a new literary vogue, but it was also something reconstituted, a repetition of past forms and stories."¹²⁴ These authors state that the Gothic is a genre in constant reinvention, as it is adapted to appeal to the new generations and, because of that, "it remains a rich mode for contemporary novelists to explore."¹²⁵ This is why it can be argued that the YA literary genre has not only been inspired by Gothic elements, but also owes to these the publishing success it has had in the recent decades.

One of the Gothic motifs present in YA contemporary literature can be appreciated in the portrayal of many supernatural figures, such as the vampire, which will be the

¹²⁰ Acronym for "Young Adult."

¹²¹ Michelle J. Smith; Kristine Moruzi, "Vampires and Witches Go to School: Contemporary Young Adult Fiction, Gender, and the Gothic," *Children's Literature in Education*, no. 49, (2018): 8, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10583-018-9343-0>.

¹²² Richmond-Garza, Elizabeth M, "The Vampire's Gaze: Gothic Performance in Theory and Practice," *The Comparatist*, no. 22, (1998): 92.

¹²³ Smith; Mozuri, 13.

¹²⁴ Christ Priestley, et al. "Patchwork Gothic." *Young Adult Gothic Fiction: Readers, Writers, Scholars. Beyond Twilight*, <https://www.lancaster.ac.uk/beyondtwilight/patchworkarticle.php>.

¹²⁵ Priestley, Christ, et al. "Patchwork Gothic."

main focus of this study. As Yoshitaka Inoue writes, “the images of vampires not only are universal but also have characteristics that change throughout history and cultures.”¹²⁶ Subsequently, the vampire evolves because society changes since, “the vampire is deployed [as] both conservative enforcer, and a reassuring object of fear.”¹²⁷ This figure has been used as a cautionary tale figure, an example of which would be by Heinrich August Ossenfelder’s poem, *Der Vampyr* (1784), to reinforce the prevailing moral values in different societies. The fear that this monster generates is used as a threat and possible punishment for any divergence from said moral code. Because of this, every vampire in every society has been characterised by the constant breaking of the moral codes, for instance “feeding on fish in Malaysia, elephants in India, or virgins in nineteenth-century European literature.”¹²⁸ It is not until the 20th century that this constant challenge to the established order becomes a romantic and seductive feature.

These monsters, at first, were terrifying creatures and not at all attractive from a sexual point of view. In the first representations of this myth, “the defining trait of vampires had been their sheer violence, manifested in craving for blood.”¹²⁹ Therefore, vampires like the one present in the aforementioned Ossenfelder’s *Der Vampyr*, were presented as monstrous and unsightly figures since their goal was to clearly represent the ugliness of sin and moral corruption, so that they were a visual representation of evilness. Unlikeable characteristics, such as a disturbing way of walking (“creeping”), or an unnaturally cold skin, can be appreciated in the following verses:

And as softly thou art sleeping
 To thee shall I come creeping
 And thy life’s blood drain away.
 And so shalt thou be trembling
 For thus shall I be kissing
 And death’s threshold thou’ it be crossing

¹²⁶ Yoshitaka Inoue, “Contemporary Consciousness as Reflected in Images of the Vampire.” *Jung Journal: Culture & Psyche* 5, no. 4, (2011): 83 <https://doi.org/10.1525/jung.2011.5.4.83>.

¹²⁷ Richmond-Garza, “The Vampire’s Gaze: Gothic Performance in Theory and Practice,” 94.

¹²⁸ James Craig Holte, “A Century of Draculas.” *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts* 10, no. 2, (1999): 109.

¹²⁹ Tudor Balinisteanu, “Romanian Folklore and Literary Representations of Vampires.” *Folklore* 127, no. 2, (2016): 153.

With fear, in my cold arms.¹³⁰

In contrast, when the aim of the vampire story was to show how evilness can seem desirable, vampires such as Bram Stoker's *Dracula* or Lord Ruthven, the protagonist of *The Vampyre* (1819) by John William Polidori, were portrayed. Another example would be the vampire Carmilla in *Carmilla* (1872) by Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu, that also introduced lesbianism, which at the time was an important sexual taboo. These examples show an uninhibited sexuality, so that "Victorian readers [...] uncomfortable with subversive sexuality and violence, read the vampire as a monster."¹³¹ At a time when pleasure as the main objective of sex was highly condemned, a monster whose way of attacking is through penetration —of its teeth into the flesh, a clear metaphor of coitus¹³²— and whose usual prey are young maidens, represented corruption, and thus encouraged the audience to stay away from it.

The sexual revolution in Western societies, and the disempowerment of conservative values, however, affected the way in which these stories were written. In literature, vampires kept their seductive physical characteristics, but these were no longer perceived as something inherently sinful. Therefore, they lost the trait that once terrified society, since for "post-modern [...] readers [who are] [...] more comfortable with sexuality, [...] *Dracula* is an attractive figure."¹³³ It is precisely the change in the mentality of societies that entails the change in the behaviour of vampires, so that contemporary fiction contains vampire-like characters with positive values and good intentions, as sexual attraction is no longer something regarded as negative.

After centuries of sexual repression and prohibitions regarding exploring the dark side of humanness, a new literary genre emerged. In the 20th century, the possibility of transforming the vampire, which had traditionally played the role of villain, into the hero of the story begins to be explored, just as "throughout their long and varied history, vampires have been able to transform themselves to satisfy their own needs, and the

¹³⁰ Heinrich August Ossenfelder, "Der Vampir," *Les Vampires*, May 18, 2022.
<http://www.lesvampires.org/ossenf.html>.

¹³¹ Holte, 122.

¹³² James Twitchell, "The Vampire Myth," *American Imago* 37, no. 1, (1980): 88.

¹³³ Holte, 112.

needs of readers.”¹³⁴ Once again, writers adapted the vampire, keeping some of the characteristics from previous traditions and adding or subtracting others, taking into account the tastes of the readers and the new possibilities of their time. An example of this phenomenon would be Coppola’s *Bram Stoker’s Dracula* (1992), a film adaptation that shifts the perception the audience has of the vampire, turning the villain into a romantic figure by establishing a romantic relationship between him and Mina, which does not exist in the original text. Moreover, in Stoker’s work, Dracula goes after Mina’s friend, Lucy, looking not for romance but for sexual possession, as he drinks her blood many times before turning her into a vampire. When Dracula tries to do the same with Mina, however, her relationship with her fiancé and her faith in God end up saving her. This new romantic facet of vampires, present in Coppola’s movie as well as the *Twilight* saga (2005–2008) by Stephenie Meyer, portrays a vampire “who serves as the narrative’s male lead and the heroine’s love interest [...] transformed into an alluring combination of danger and sensitivity, a handsome romantic hero haunted by his lust for blood and his guilt for the humans he killed in the past.”¹³⁵

In this way, characteristics that in previous centuries were regarded negatively have eventually transformed into desirable attributes, such as physical appeal or a dark past that the subject tries to make up for. Those traits that once tormented society now torment these new vampires as tortured and grey heroes. This new portrayal shows a complicated morality, as they are constantly forced to choose between quenching their thirst and their desire not to commit unlawful acts, such as killing, as they are now representatives of righteousness and redemption.

As Nina Auerbach claimed, “every age embraces the vampire it needs.”¹³⁶ The vampires present in contemporary fiction are part of the literary tradition that dates to the 18th century. Each vampire represents the moral values of their time, either presenting themselves as the counterpart against all that is acceptable, or as the suffering figure that must make an effort not to fall into the temptation of violating the

¹³⁴ Holte, 109.

¹³⁵ Karen Backstein, “(Un)Safe Sex: Romancing the Vampire,” *Cinéaste* 35, no. 1, (2009): 38.

¹³⁶ Smith; Mozuri, “Vampires and Witches Go to School: Contemporary Young Adult Fiction, Gender, and the Gothic,” 9.

established moral code. In this way, the eighteenth-century vampire and the modern vampire share a series of characteristics, for example their supernatural powers; although they differ in some others, being these the use they make of said powers, as well as the importance that they place both on Christian moral rules and the well-being of innocent humans. It must be considered that “the vampire myth is widespread and vibrant in our culture.”¹³⁷ The understanding which values of contemporary Western society the vampire represents can lead to a deeper understanding of the present morals and how these affect the literary tradition. Therefore, analysing its evolution as well as its similarities with previous traditions is of great relevance.

2. Religion and Sexuality: Lord Ruthven in Contrast to Mr. Cullen

2.1. The Evolution of Sex from Gothic Fiction into YA Literature

Cynthia Griffin Wolff explores the way in which Gothic literature expresses female sexuality, since at no time is it denied that women feel sexual appetite, but rather it is understood as “something both forbidden and dirty”¹³⁸ due to Christian influence. This study is focused on the novels written by Ann Radcliffe, but it can be extrapolated to the Gothic narrative in general since, as Wolff explains, Radcliffe created a language with which Gothic novels were able to present female sexuality in a “respectable”¹³⁹ way. What this narrative did was to divide the romantic interests into two categories, the priest and the devil, in such a way that while the former displayed an innocent and chaste, purely emotional attraction, the latter represented the physically appealing villain whose desire is to fulfil his basest passions by corrupting the virtue of the heroine¹⁴⁰.

In this context, it would make sense to affirm that Lord Ruthven personifies this archetype of the devil, since he lacks sentimentality, and all the actions he carries out are born from his selfish desire to feed himself and satisfy his lust. However, Radcliffe’s

¹³⁷ Twitchell, “The Vampire Myth,” 84.

¹³⁸ Cynthia Griffin Wolff, “The Radcliffean Gothic Model: A Form for Feminine Sexuality,” *Modern Language Studies* 9, no. 3, (1979): 110, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3194284>.

¹³⁹ Wolff, “The Radcliffean Gothic Model: A Form for Feminine Sexuality,” 98.

¹⁴⁰ Wolff, “The Radcliffean Gothic Model: A Form for Feminine Sexuality,” 99.

priest is not found in Mr. Cullen. Despite the fact that he refuses to maintain intimate relations with the heroine, he is presented as a character with both allure and sexual desire, so that this new vampire would be read as a mixture of both archetypes. This change occurs because, as Melissa Ames explains, “young adult literature is well known for its attention to interpersonal relationships [...] and, of course, teen sex”¹⁴¹.

YA literature presents a model of sexuality similar to that of the Gothic, but with a twist. As it can be seen, “the Gothic is constantly being reinvented in ways that address the current historical moment.”¹⁴² With the loss of the Church’s social influence, female sexuality ceases to be seen as something inherently sinful. While, even nowadays, in Western countries the Christian church still has a remarkably strong cultural influence, social movements managed to gain individual freedom outside of the church’s beliefs. One of these was the liberty to explore sexuality out of marriage, which led to the sexual revolution during the 1960s. Because of this, nowadays desire is no longer a trait belonging to the devils, and the representatives of pure love can also incorporate a certain amount of sensuality. Ames points out that “young adult texts began merging their narrative recipes with that of traditional gothic vampire tales”¹⁴³; that is to say, the literary subgenre known as paranormal romance —which is part of the YA genre— is the evolution of Gothic fiction, altered by the change of the way in which romance and sexuality are perceived by societies. The evolution of the perception of sex in literature can be appreciated both in *The Vampyre* and the *Twilight* saga, as it will be analysed in the following paragraphs.

2.2. Lord Ruthven as an Agent of Damnation

During the 18th and 19th centuries, there was a strong cultural importance placed on virginity, especially for women. Women who experienced sexual relationships before

¹⁴¹ Melissa Ames, “Vamping Up Sex: Audience, Age, & Portrayals of Sexuality in Vampire Narratives,” *The Journal of Dracula Studies*, no. 12, (2010): 82 – 84.

¹⁴² Smith; Mozuri, “Vampires and Witches Go to School: Contemporary Young Adult Fiction, Gender, and the Gothic,” 9.

¹⁴³ Ames, “Vamping Up Sex: Audience, Age, & Portrayals of Sexuality in Vampire Narratives,” 83.

marriage “faced exclusion,”¹⁴⁴ among other possible punishments, for example being locked up in asylums. Literature was used as a means to reinforce these ethical and religious values. This can be appreciated in how “many literary works for adults [...] endorsed Christian teachings,”¹⁴⁵ in such a way that together with the threat of the Church and the possibility of facing social ostracism, these women were also exposed, in the novels they read, to practical examples of what the fate of a misbehaving female could be.

This moral reinforcement is found in *The Vampyre*, as this story presents the vampire as a monster whose principal prey are young maidens, whom he drags to damnation, whether social or divine. Lord Ruthven uses his “irresistible powers of seduction”¹⁴⁶ so that his victim will be “hurled from the pinnacle of unsullied virtue, down to the lowest abyss of infamy and degradation.”¹⁴⁷ In this way, this monstrous character is presented as a handsome man who takes advantage of this attribute both to feed on the blood of innocent women and to end their status as virgins.

Throughout the story, the reader encounters numerous examples of Lord Ruthven’s threat to female virtue, such as the case of Ianthe. She is the beloved of Aubrey, the narrator of the story, who describes her as a representative of “innocence, youth, and beauty.”¹⁴⁸ Ianthe begins to be in danger from the moment she appears since the vampire’s actions are “most likely to end in the ruin of an innocent, though thoughtless girl,”¹⁴⁹ which is how this character is portrayed.

Given Ianthe’s innocent character, she believes in legends such as vampires, as she represents the perfect girl who fears sin for, she follows God’s teachings righteously. Moreover, over the course of her relationship with Aubrey, Ianthe tells him about the vampire legends she believes in, describing “the traditional appearance of these monsters, [so that] his horror was increased, by hearing a pretty accurate description of

¹⁴⁴ Maureen Moran, Maureen, *Victorian Literature and Culture*, (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2009), 37.

¹⁴⁵ Maureen, *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 25.

¹⁴⁶ John William Polidori et al, *The Vampyre and Other Tales of the Macabre*, (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008), 7.

¹⁴⁷ Polidori et al, *The Vampyre and Other Tales of the Macabre*, 7.

¹⁴⁸ Polidori et al, *The Vampyre and Other Tales of the Macabre*, 9.

¹⁴⁹ Polidori et al, *The Vampyre and Other Tales of the Macabre*, 8.

Lord Ruthven.”¹⁵⁰ Lord Ruthven, however, being “handsome, frank, and rich,”¹⁵¹ employs his paranormal qualities “to use the serpent’s art”¹⁵² to corrupt her. This is a reference to the Old Testament, when Eve eats the apple of the forbidden tree and “the woman said, ‘The serpent deceived me, and I ate.’”¹⁵³ Ianthe is, therefore, equated to Eve, an innocent woman close to God but who fails to resist the temptation of evil. Similarly to Eve trusting the serpent and, as a consequence, losing her innocence, Ianthe is shown as a character fearful of dark powers, someone who believes that these are true and therefore pose a real threat, but who is nonetheless unable to escape the damnation that Lord Ruthven brings with him.

Despite her beliefs, Ianthe is found dead in the forest, and the narrative suggests that her killer was Ruthven. Lord Ruthven’s attack on Ianthe is not narrated, as Aubrey is not a witness, but it is inferred that she was killed by a vampire as “upon her neck and breast was blood, and upon her throat were the marks of teeth having opened the vein.”¹⁵⁴ This bloody scene not only shows the death of Ianthe, but it is also a signifier of the loss of her maidenhood since “blood itself [is] sexually suggestive, and when the vampire bites and sucks the throat, he [is] symbolically violating his victim and inseminating her with his dread curse.”¹⁵⁵ Thus, the condition of vampire is used, in this tale, as a way to physically and visually show the corruption of the female body when exposed to extramarital sexual relations.

Not only is Lord Ruthven a character who steals the virtue of women by engaging in premarital sexual activities, but he is also presented as someone who mocks the religious rite of marriage, when he is to marry Aubrey’s sister at the end of the story, “bearing ruin upon his breath, amidst all [Aubrey] held dear.”¹⁵⁶ The tradition of marriage is usually related to women and men who follow the righteous path. However, in this case, while Miss Aubrey does not seem to have previously committed any sin

¹⁵⁰ Polidori et al, *The Vampyre and Other Tales of the Macabre*, 10.

¹⁵¹ Polidori et al, *The Vampyre and Other Tales of the Macabre*, 4.

¹⁵² Polidori et al, *The Vampyre and Other Tales of the Macabre*, 22.

¹⁵³ Genesis 3:13 (NIV).

¹⁵⁴ Polidori et al, *The Vampyre and Other Tales of the Macabre*, 12.

¹⁵⁵ David F Morrill, “‘Twilight Is Not Good for Maidens’: Uncle Polidori and the Psychodynamics of Vampirism in ‘Goblin Market,’” *Victorian Poetry* 28, no. 1, (1990): 2.

¹⁵⁶ Polidori et al, *The Vampyre and Other Tales of the Macabre*, 19.

related to lust, the ceremony is presented as a loss of honour. This can be understood as a reflection of the belief that “God would not save the soul of a person who was attacked by a vampire,”¹⁵⁷ so that Aubrey’s sister would be condemning herself through this marriage. Aubrey, who knows what the fate of his sister is going to be from seeing what happened to Ianthe, writes a letter in which he implores her not to marry Lord Ruthven, claiming that if “she value[s] her own happiness, her own honour, and the honour of those [...] who once held her in their arms,”¹⁵⁸ she would delay her wedding until Aubrey could see her and talk to her about the vampire’s nature. The young maiden, however, is not able to resist Lord Ruthven’s desires, and she dies shortly after the wedding, having “glutted the thirst of a VAMPYRE!”¹⁵⁹ However, while the wedding with a vampire in Polidori’s work is presented as a damned act, a different perspective can be found in Meyer’s work.

2.3. Edward Cullen as a Reinforcer of Moral Codes

Speaking specifically of Count Dracula, but applying this analysis to the way in which vampires are depicted in contemporary literature, Holte states that “recent adaptations, however, following the more positive depictions of vampires [...] depict Dracula as a romantic hero, and in doing so help establish a new narrative form, the dark romance.”¹⁶⁰ As a consequence of this literary evolution, two centuries after Lord Ruthven, the American writer Stephenie Meyer created Edward Cullen, “the vampire who wanted to be good.”¹⁶¹ Being the author a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter day Saints, her traditional values and Mormon views on topics such as marriage are present in her novels.

In contrast to Lord Ruthven’s “infernal power[s],”¹⁶² Mr. Cullen is described as a “godlike creature,”¹⁶³ since, from the first moment, the narration tries to make it clear

¹⁵⁷ Inoue, “Contemporary Consciousness as Reflected in Images of the Vampire,” 84.

¹⁵⁸ Polidori et al, *The Vampyre and Other Tales of the Macabre*, 22.

¹⁵⁹ Polidori et al, *The Vampyre and Other Tales of the Macabre*, 23.

¹⁶⁰ Holte, 112.

¹⁶¹ Stephenie Meyer, *Twilight*, (London: Atom, 2010), 179.

¹⁶² Polidori et al, *The Vampyre and Other Tales of the Macabre*, 11.

¹⁶³ Meyer, *Twilight*, 224.

that this vampire is not a creature of evil, but the tormented hero of the story. This characteristic is clearest in the second book of the saga, in a scene in which the protagonist, Bella Swan, is talking to Edward's father, who explains that "he thinks [they]'ve lost [their] souls,"¹⁶⁴ so that he lives constantly haunted by his condition as damned. Edward's belief that there is no Heaven waiting for him will make him worry about Bella's —the main character and the vampire's love interest— salvation. When she asks Edward to bite her and turn her into one of his own, his response shows this concern, as he declines by saying that he "refuse[s] to damn [her] to an eternity of night."¹⁶⁵ Throughout the saga, these two characters will have many disagreements regarding the condition of the souls of vampires, since while she believes them to be intact, he is convinced that they have been lost and condemned to Hell.

Taking into account the previously mentioned relationship between the penetration of the vampire's teeth in his prey's flesh with the loss of virginity, Mr. Cullen shows himself as a perpetuator of traditional values. Like Anna Silver explains, "for Edward [...] marriage is the only moral arena for sexual desire,"¹⁶⁶ so he sets the condition that they must marry before they have sex and, therefore, before he turns her into a vampire. Edward is convinced that the entrance to Heaven is closed to him, but he says that, although he is "one of the eternal damned,"¹⁶⁷ he will not "let them keep [Bella] out, too."¹⁶⁸ He believes that marital sexual relationships are not sinful and, therefore, not dangerous to Bella's soul; contrary to those out of wedlock.

On the other hand, Bella wants to leave behind her condition both as a human and as a virgin without marrying. In this work, stereotypical roles both in terms of gender, and in the dynamics of vampire as predator and maiden as prey, are subverted. It is the male vampire who "exercises self-control over his desire to drink Bella's blood (clearly analogous to sexual desire in this and other vampire lore),"¹⁶⁹ while the human

¹⁶⁴ Stephenie Meyer, *New Moon*, (London: Atom, 2010), 33.

¹⁶⁵ Meyer, *Twilight*, 415.

¹⁶⁶ Anna Silver, "'Twilight is no Good for Maidens: Gender, Sexuality, And The Family In Stephenie Meyer's 'Twilight' Series,'" *Studies in the Novel* 42, no. 1/2, (2010): 127.

¹⁶⁷ Meyer, *New Moon*, 478.

¹⁶⁸ Stephenie Meyer, *Eclipse*, (London: Atom, 2010), 403.

¹⁶⁹ Silver, "'Twilight is no Good for Maidens: Gender, Sexuality, And The Family In Stephenie Meyer's 'Twilight' Series,'" 128.

woman is constantly trying to sexually seduce the vampire. This dynamic can be analysed in the third book of the tetralogy, in which she begins to be more insistent in her attempts to initiate a more intimate approach. Edward complains by stating how unhelpful it is that she “is so eager to undermine [his] self-control,”¹⁷⁰ and wondering why “must [he] always be the responsible one.”¹⁷¹ Due to his concern about the state of the soul of his beloved, he does not give in to her desires until they have gone through the altar.

While it is true that Bella could turn to another member of the Cullen family to be transformed, the narration does not renounce the religious morality imposed by Edward, being the author a member of the Mormon church. Far from condemning Edward’s religiosity, Bella wants him to be the one to transform her. In this lore, what turns a human into a vampire is a poison that enters the bloodstream through the bite, and as the heroine of this story states, “[she] wanted *his* venom to poison [her] system.”¹⁷² This passage exemplifies the traditional nature of this romantic relationship since, as Ernest Jones explains, “in the unconscious mind, blood is usually an equivalent for semen.”¹⁷³ Sex and vampirism are closely linked, so it would be morally unacceptable to be transformed by any other creature who is neither her romantic partner nor her husband.

Vampirism in these novels can also be understood as an entrance to Heaven, since one needs to die in order to be transformed, only to resurrect again after the “three days that [...] set [one] free from mortality,”¹⁷⁴ which can be read as a reference to Christ’s resurrection, as he rose back from the dead after the third day: “for we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again.”¹⁷⁵ These vampires are usually referred to as immortals, thus underscoring this characteristic, which in the religious context is a signifier of salvation, as it is stated in the Bible “that whoever

¹⁷⁰ Meyer, *Eclipse*, 168.

¹⁷¹ Meyer, 171.

¹⁷² Meyer, 288.

¹⁷³ Twitchell, “The Vampire Myth,” 88.

¹⁷⁴ Meyer, 66.

¹⁷⁵ Romans 6:9 (NIV).

believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.”¹⁷⁶ However, although sins may have been committed, according to Christianity it is still possible to access Paradise, through cleansing one’s soul in Purgatory, since “nothing impure will ever enter it.”¹⁷⁷

In Meyer’s saga, it is explained how the first years after being turned into a vampire are a torture in which “rage and thirst”¹⁷⁸ are the only thoughts that occupy the monster’s mind, until the ordeal is over and the individual is able to act rationally again, which can be read as the passage through Purgatory until Heaven is achieved. All vampires go through this purgatory, so it can be understood that they have all reached the heavenly state. Although this may seem contradictory, since most vampires in these novels feed on human blood, ending the lives of their victims in the process, they all report living in a state of eternal happiness and comfort. Therefore, giving up feeding on human blood does not seem to be a requirement to achieve this happiness, although it is a requirement to live a morally good eternity.

In contrast to Lord Ruthven’s corruption of the institution of marriage, the nuptials between Edward and Bella are presented as a perfectly adequate procedure since, when Bella is finally transformed, she finds herself being perfectly capable of feeling those “human emotions and longings”¹⁷⁹ that she was supposed to lose for some time as part of “the deal, the price [she]’d agreed to pay.”¹⁸⁰ It must be noted that the vampires created by Stephenie Meyer have supernatural powers that are strengthened characteristics from their human years. An example of this would be Emmet Cullen, who was a particularly muscular human, and, when he was turned into a vampire, he developed superhuman strength. The superpower Bella develops is not her ability for self-control, but a psychic barrier she can create around herself, which she uses to protect herself and her loved ones, a consequence of her caring personality. Therefore, it can be argued that Bella’s capacity for self-control makes the only vampire who can enter Heaven without going through Purgatory, as she married before being

¹⁷⁶ John 3:16 (NIV).

¹⁷⁷ Revelation 21:27 (NIV).

¹⁷⁸ Meyer, *Eclipse*, 505.

¹⁷⁹ Stephenie Meyer, *Breaking Down*, (London: Atom, 2010), 362.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

transformed. By not being penetrated by the vampire's teeth before becoming a married woman, Bella gains direct access to Heaven.

There is a contrast between Polidori's *The Vampyre* and Meyer's *Twilight* saga in the way in which both works depict the vampire's morals. Like Anna Jackson states, "the monsters have become the heroes."¹⁸¹ While Lord Ruthven is a corrupting force who uses his prey to satisfy both his thirst for blood and his lust, the contemporary vampire is aware of his curse and fights his instincts to protect his beloved, even if she wishes to follow him to his doom. In these two figures, the contrast between the eternal religious struggle to resist the temptation of sin, present in Mr. Cullen, and the hedonism of Lord Ruthven, who is carried away by his vices and desires, is embodied.

3. The Paranormal Qualities of the Vampire and their Moral Entailment

The behaviour of Lord Ruthven and Edward Cullen is not the only layer that can be studied to analyse the morality they represent, for both vampires share a series of superpowers that also depict it. As Holte claims, the different vampires "resemble the others in some aspects —cold white skin, blood hungers, mesmeric powers— but each is a unique character."¹⁸² Being part of the same tradition, the distinctive features of these creatures have not changed much, but what is different is the perspective from which these are understood. Three main characteristics are to be analysed, these being their power for hypnosis, the addiction that they generate in humans, and the exceptional physical attributes that these vampires share.

Firstly, Lord Ruthven and Cullen have the power of hypnosis, but the difference in their morals lies in the use they make of said power. In Polidori's vampire, on the one hand, it is never clearly stated that he possesses a supernatural control over the minds of human beings, but it is inferred in passages such as when "Aubrey often wished to [...] beg him to resign that charity and pleasure which proved the ruin of all,"¹⁸³ which indicates that, while he is charismatic, this is a dangerous quality that is nonetheless

¹⁸¹ Smith; Mozuri, "Vampires and Witches Go to School: Contemporary Young Adult Fiction, Gender, and the Gothic," 17.

¹⁸² Holte, 110.

¹⁸³ Polidori et al, *The Vampyre and Other Tales of the Macabre*, 6.

difficult to resist. Yet, the part of this story in which this hypnosis situation is more clearly presented is towards the end, when Lord Ruthven forces Aubrey to swear he will keep his secrets, only for the latter to find himself physically unable to break his oath not even to save his sister's life, as "his tongue had dangers and toils to recount,"¹⁸⁴ in such a way that Aubrey is able to communicate that Ruthven is someone dangerous, but cannot indicate the reasons.

Therefore, "Lord Ruthven can be viewed only as a harmful influence,"¹⁸⁵ as the only one who benefits from his hypnotic powers is himself. If Aubrey's free will had not been taken away, he could have saved his sister, and Ruthven would not have been able to quench his thirst with her. The moral implications of this are inherently negative, because as it can be read in the Bible, selfishness is a sin, "for where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice,"¹⁸⁶ so this feature is a new example of how this monster represents what is undesirable from the Christian point of view.

Edward Cullen possesses these supernatural qualities but, far from being a useful tool for him, they are a characteristic of his condition that he detests, since they pose a danger to human beings and, specifically, to his beloved. Edward describes how his paranormal characteristics work, not specifying that they have to do with hypnosis, but stating that these overpower humans' self-control: "I'm the best predator in the world, aren't I? Everything about me invites you in — my voice, my face, even my smell."¹⁸⁷ Similarly to Polidori, Meyer does not specify that her vampire possesses this mind-controlling power, but it can be deduced from certain passages of the novels in which Bella's free will seems to weaken: "he breathed, and just his smell disturbed my thought processes [...] I knew there was a second part to my brilliant defence, but I couldn't quite call it back."¹⁸⁸ In this particular passage, the goal that the vampire intends to reach is that the girl accepts to climb on his shoulders so that he can transport her through the

¹⁸⁴ Polidori et al, *The Vampyre and Other Tales of the Macabre*, 21.

¹⁸⁵ Richard Switzer, "Lord Ruthwen and the Vampires." *The French Review* 29, no. 2, (1955): 112.

¹⁸⁶ James 3:16 (NIV).

¹⁸⁷ Meyer, *Twilight*, 231.

¹⁸⁸ Meyer, 316.

forest using his supernatural speed, so that she will be protected from the rain and the dangers of the woods.

Accordingly, as Inoue writes, these new vampires, “while taciturn, they think and feel about humans and have an inner life, allowing readers to empathize with their solitary lives,”¹⁸⁹ meaning that characters such as Mr. Cullen have gained an ethic consciousness which stops them from taking advantage of humans. Taking into consideration the religious baggage of this story, Edward is once again presented as a reinforcer of positive and acceptable values because, as it can be read in the Scriptures: “each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed [...] after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin.”¹⁹⁰ Indeed, he resists the temptation to utilise his powers to feed on Bella, as he himself claims by saying “mind over matter,”¹⁹¹ clarifying that not only does Edward refrain from using them, but when he does use them it is presented as undoubtedly for her own good, as is mentioned in the previous paragraph, turning it into a clearly good thing.

In relation with their psychic capacities, these vampires seem to also have an addictive element to them, so that the humans that spend too much time in their presence start developing both an emotional and physical dependency. In Lord Ruthven’s case, it can be appreciated in how Aubrey starts obsessing over him even before finding out about his supernatural condition, as when he “was near the object of his curiosity, he obtained no greater gratification.”¹⁹² In other words, Lord Ruthven’s very existence causes in Aubrey a great satisfaction, as he feels drawn to this creature who generates in him a feeling of curiosity and the need to know more about this picturesque character. Moreover, Lord Ruthven’s “peculiarities caused him to be invited to every house; all wished to see him, all [...] were pleased at having something in their presence capable of engaging [his] attention,”¹⁹³ suggesting again this human necessity of existing in the vampire’s mind. Backstein explains how “the vampire’s effect on his

¹⁸⁹ Inoue, “Contemporary Consciousness as Reflected in Images of the Vampire,” 96.

¹⁹⁰ James 3:14-15 (NIV)

¹⁹¹ Meyer, *Twilight*, 262.

¹⁹² Polidori et al., 7.

¹⁹³ Polidori et al., 3.

victim has always been one of transformation, but a negative one: the draining of blood, the draining of energy, the draining of life,”¹⁹⁴ which means that the relationship between the vampire and his companion is similar to that of cocaine and the drug addict. The monster generates in humans an admiration that ends up consuming them, not only in the draining of their blood, but in the total occupation of their mind.

Lord Ruthven, for his part, is not only aware of the effect he has on people but also takes advantage of it to achieve his objectives, as “because [...] of his mysterious nature, Ruthven becomes something of a violent thrill to the bored minions of high society.”¹⁹⁵ The aristocrat uses this addictive quality for his own benefit, that is, to establish himself as a more than respectable member of society in such a way that he has easier access to his victims. In this way, “many of the female hunters after notoriety [attempt] to win his attentions,”¹⁹⁶ so that he does not even need to approach the maidens for his supernatural appeal to take effect on them, but rather they are the ones who get close to him and get into the lion’s den.

In like manner, Edward Cullen’s human companion – his romantic partner Bella – develops a strong addiction to this vampire. In contrast to Polidori’s work, in Meyer’s novels this addiction is clearly stated on many occasions, one of them being a passage in which, after having spent the day together for the first time, Edward suddenly realises that Bella has gone several hours without eating. While he is insisting on her going back home to get dinner, she tries to stay with him trying to lie saying that she is not hungry, but knowing that she is being betrayed by “[her] hopeless addiction to him,”¹⁹⁷ which can be clearly appreciated in her voice. However, the part of this story in which the paranormal layer to the addiction that Bella feels towards Edward is more evident is in the second book of the saga, in which the vampire decides to leave the girl in order for her to be able to have a normal and safer life. During this period, Bella will describe herself as a “lost moon — [her] planet destroyed [...] that continued, nevertheless, to

¹⁹⁴ Backstein, “(Un)Safe Sex: Romancing the Vampire,” 40.

¹⁹⁵ Morrill, “‘Twilight Is Not Good for Maidens’: Uncle Polidori and the Psychodynamics of Vampirism in ‘Goblin Market,’” 3.

¹⁹⁶ Polidori et al., 3.

¹⁹⁷ Meyer, *Twilight*, 255.

circle in a tight little orbit around the empty space left behind.”¹⁹⁸ Through this metaphor she explains how her only purpose in life is to act as Edward’s partner, a purpose that was lost once he left so that now her existence has no meaning, she even states how “death unquestionably would have been a relief.”¹⁹⁹ These passages show how this is not the natural reaction to a breakup, but rather the withdrawal syndrome that a drug addict might feel. In fact, Bella’s feelings towards Edward are compared to a drug addiction many times throughout the series, for as Jacob, her best friend states, “[Edward] is like a drug to [her].”²⁰⁰

Bella feels this way until “[her] subconscious mind [gives her] what it thought [she] wanted,”²⁰¹ and starts creating hallucinations of Edward. Following this, Bella tries to carry out activities that trigger these hallucinations. She discovers that what starts them is adrenaline because, when saying goodbye to her, the vampire made her promise not to “do anything reckless.”²⁰² The breaking of this promise, consequently, makes her mind think about him. She puts herself in very dangerous situations, such as riding a motorbike without knowing how to do it or jumping off a cliff, because as she gets closer to what is going to generate this adrenaline, “the pain [starts] easing, as if [her] body knew that Edward’s voice was just seconds away.”²⁰³ These passages prove how damaging the relationship with the vampire is for the human, and how addictive it can become for the latter, as she will put her life in danger just to get a taste of what the company of the former used to be like.

At the end of the novel, Edward comes back to Bella just to show how regretful he feels for having left her. Contrary to Lord Ruthven, who takes advantage of his effects on humans and, particularly, on young maidens, Edward shows himself to be a selfless character whose intention was for her to “move on with [her] life.”²⁰⁴ Edward will continue to show his repentance throughout the next books of the saga, as he “will

¹⁹⁸ Meyer, *New Moon*, 177.

¹⁹⁹ Meyer, 98.

²⁰⁰ Meyer, *Eclipse*, 531.

²⁰¹ Meyer, *New Moon*, 100.

²⁰² Meyer, 63.

²⁰³ Meyer, 315.

²⁰⁴ Meyer, 449.

never forgive [him]self for leaving [her] [...] not if [he] live[s] a hundred thousand years,”²⁰⁵ explaining that he feels he has committed a sin that he must now purge, which, once again, shows the way in which this character is used to reinforce values that are considered to be positive. The quality that is being praised in this case is penance, as the Christian view on this issue is that “repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in His name to all nations,”²⁰⁶ meaning that this religion understands that sin is inevitable, but that what matters is to acknowledge it and repent.

Finally, the vampires’ physical characteristics are to be analysed, being these supernatural strength, that fire is lethal to them, and the fact that death is a necessary step in order to become a vampire. Because in Lord Ruthven’s story the relationship between the vampire and the narrator is not particularly close, despite spending a great deal of time together, the monster’s paranormal powers are not as clearly specified as in the case of Edward Cullen, who reports these to his partner. Yet, as with the previous issues that have been analysed, these can be extracted from the descriptions that Aubrey does of Ruthven’s actions.

In the second half of the story, when both protagonists are being attacked by a group of bandits, Lord Ruthven fights back in such a way that one of the attackers finds “himself grappled by one whose strength seemed superhuman [...] he was lifted from his feet and hurled with enormous force against the ground.”²⁰⁷ Similarly, Bella explains how Edward “had scooped [her] up in his arms, as easily as if [she] weighed ten pounds instead of a hundred and ten [...] supporting all [her] weight with just his arms [which] didn’t seem to bother him.”²⁰⁸ Taking these two examples into account, it can be seen how each vampire uses the same powers, one as a way of causing damage while the other as a gesture of love and protection, once again pointing out how the same motifs are used to express the difference between the 18th century monster and the 21st century hero.

²⁰⁵ Meyer, *Eclipse*, 28.

²⁰⁶ Luke 24:47 (NIV).

²⁰⁷ Polidor et al., 12.

²⁰⁸ Meyer, *Twilight*, 83.

Concerning the danger that fire poses to vampires, there is no different moral reading to these two stories. In the context of Christianity, fire is understood as a signifier of Hell, since sin “corrupts the whole body, sets the whole course of one’s life on fire, and is itself set on fire by Hell.”²⁰⁹ As it happened in the Old Testament with Sodom and Gomorrah, God uses flames to punish those who commit unforgivable crimes, so it is not surprising that in the context of two vampire stories highly concerned with religion, these immortals who feed on the blood of virgin women must take special care with divine punishments.

In Polidori’s *The Vampyre*, in the same passage in which the gang of criminals is trying to attack Aubrey and Ruthven, it is told how the attackers start brandishing some fire torches, and how Ruthven’s reaction is to “instantly [rise] and, leaving his prey, rush through the door.”²¹⁰ The narrative does not provide an explanation for this behaviour, however *The Vampyre* portrays vampires as they are understood in the traditional folklore, part of which consisted on burning corpses as a measure to avoid vampirism, as it was generally believed that fire was harmful for this creatures. This aversion to fire is explained in the *Twilight* saga; it is clearly seen how they burn the bodies of the vampires who they are forced to kill. In the third book of the series, Edward must fight another of his kind who wants to feed on Bella, and when the battle ends, he throws the other vampire’s body into a “raging fire [which] was sending a pillar of choking purple towards the sky.”²¹¹ As Smith and Moruzi write, “the central concerns of Gothic YA remain consistent with those of canonical Gothic texts,”²¹² that is, that taking into account that both texts belong to the same tradition, they have common characteristics.

Lastly, another trait that both Ruthven and Cullen share is that death is a necessary step to access vampirism, but in this case the connotations of it are presented as opposite. Lord Ruthven dies towards the end of the story, and despite the fact that before his death he had already presented vampire-like traits, it is after this that his

²⁰⁹ James 3:6 (NIV).

²¹⁰ Polidori et al., 12.

²¹¹ Meyer, *Eclipse*, 492.

²¹² Smith; Mozuri, “Vampires and Witches Go to School: Contemporary Young Adult Fiction, Gender, and the Gothic,” 8.

condition is shown as evident, since when Aubrey wakes up the morning after, he finds that “the corpse [...] was no longer there.”²¹³ While this could be a strategy to deliberately confuse Aubrey, in the narrative, Ruthven fully unleashes his vampirism after dying, so this death and apparent resurrection will be analysed as such. Lord Ruthven’s resurrection is not presented as a miracle or something positive, as “Polidori recounts how vampirism is a sort of punishment after death for some heinous crime,”²¹⁴ similar to the generalised idea of what Hell is, so that Ruthven is doomed to an eternity of decadence and corruption, as Morrill points out.

Meyer’s vampires also require a process of death and resurrection. This can be clearly appreciated in the last book, in which Bella is finally turned into a vampire when, after three days of transformation, “[her] heart stuttered twice, and then thudded quietly again just once more [...] there was [...] no breathing.”²¹⁵ Vampirism is understood as an entrance to Heaven, so that one of the first things that Bella discovers about herself when she is reborn as an immortal is that “[her] old mind had not been capable of holding this much love [...] [as her] old heart had not been strong enough to bear it.”²¹⁶ Bella exemplifies the biblical belief that “whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them,”²¹⁷ as she explains how in this state of eternity she feels an overwhelming love for all those around her.

4. Conclusions

The motifs and character stereotypes that originated in traditional Gothic texts have evolved from then to today’s literary market, altered by the different necessities and tastes of new readers. One such 18th century stereotype that tends to recur in both traditions is that of paranormal creatures, particularly the vampire, as it has been a myth used to reinforce the ethics that every society considered unquestionably correct. Originally, the vampire was described as “a grotesque monster that frightened people

²¹³ Polidori et al, 15-16.

²¹⁴ Morrill, “‘Twilight Is Not Good for Maidens’: Uncle Polidori and the Psychodynamics of Vampirism in ‘Goblin Market,’” 3.

²¹⁵ Meyer, *Breaking Down*, 356.

²¹⁶ Meyer, 394.

²¹⁷ John 4:16 (NIV).

and was excluded from human contact,”²¹⁸ as they were utilised as a practical example of hellish punishment. Nevertheless, it turned out that readers, particularly women, were not realising that the attack of those unattractive vampires was a metaphor of the seduction of handsome human men, so educational literature had to be adapted and attractive vampires appeared, among which Polidori’s Lord Ruthven can be found.

However, as the centuries advanced and the Church lost influence among the masses’ ideology, sexual intercourses were no longer regarded as a synonym of sin. As a consequence, the sexual appeal of vampires in literature lost this hellish dimension. In the 21st century’s vampire traditions, these creatures are not regarded as villains whose only wish is to drag young maidens to damnation, but as romantic heroes who must fight their instincts in order to protect humanity. An example of this new vision on vampires is Edward Cullen, a vampire who falls in love with a young maiden, but who will try to keep both her body and her soul as pure as he is able to, in contrast to Lord Ruthven’s constant attempts to corrupt women. Both Ruthven and Cullen act as reinforcers of moral values, the difference lies in that, while the former exemplifies the dangers of sin as well as the actions and people that a righteous female should run away from, the latter represents the idea of resistance against temptation in order to follow the morally correct path.

Both characters share a series of supernatural abilities, but the evolution of this archetype can be appreciated in the different uses they make of these powers: while the evil seducer employs his hypnosis and super strength to take advantage of humans, the penitent religious vampire uses them to protect his human partner. Ruthven as well as Cullen generate a feeling of addiction similar to the one created by drugs on humans, but the former tries to enhance it to gain as much benefit as he can get from it, while the latter tries to separate himself from the human in order to give her the opportunity to disintoxicate herself. Therefore, Lord Ruthven in Polidori’s *The Vampyre* is used as a metaphor of sinning and Hell, as this creature is violent, sexually promiscuous, and selfish. On the other hand, the main vampire character present in Stephenie Meyer’s

²¹⁸ Inoue, “Contemporary Consciousness as Reflected in Images of the Vampire,” 88.

Twilight saga, Edward Cullen, is used to represent the Christian idea of a heavenly state, in which an eternal and overwhelming love is a constant.

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