

AGNIESZKA IZDEBSKA  
Uniwersytet Łódzki\*



<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6253-8397>



## Nostalgic Aliens and Troublesome Citizens — on Vampire Stories Once Again

### Abstract

The article examines the representation of a vampire figure in contemporary culture, in particular within the framework of the gothic convention. In particular, the paper focuses on stories in which the vampire — as the classic Other — appears in social relationships. Therefore the article is an attempt to show how texts that can be classified as fantasy or Gothic fiction engage in a modern reality around us.

The Gothic novel, the Gothic mode, vampires, social exclusion, emancipation of marginalized groups

\* Katedra Teorii Literatury Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego  
ul. Pomorska 171-173, 91-404 Łódź  
e-mail: [agnieszka.izdebska@uni.lodz.pl](mailto:agnieszka.izdebska@uni.lodz.pl)

In his article, which opens the anthology *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*, Jeffrey Jerome Cohen emphasises human's eternal fascination with monsters and predilection to creating stories about them, a quality common to all cultures:

Monsters are our children. They can be pushed to the furthest margins of geography and discourse, hidden away at the edges of the world and in forbidden recesses of our mind, but they always return. [...] These monsters ask us how we perceive the world, and how we have misrepresented what we have attempted to place. They ask us to re-evaluate our cultural assumptions about race, gender, sexuality, our perceptions of difference, our tolerance toward its expression. They ask us why we have created them. (Cohen 1996: 20)

There is no doubt that monsters that seem to be the most attractive and — consequently — most often featured in contemporary culture are vampires. This figure appears not only in the kind of fiction that could be defined as Gothic. The vampire theme is also a frequently discussed topic in the criticism of the mode itself. Given the sheer volume of texts devoted to a vampire one way or another, one could even have the impression of exhausting over-production or over-presence of this topic in our contemporary culture. Therefore — what would be the point adding another one to that pile of texts? It is precisely because of its popularity and strong presence in contemporary culture that the “vampire issue” is an important element of the discourse on monstrosity in culture. This issue, inevitably, places us at the very centre of reflection on the world in which we live and which we create, involved in that reflection are such concepts as otherness, foreignness, and thus encourages us to reflect on what defines us as human beings. In his commentary on Julia Kristeva's work on “abjects”, J.A. Weinstock succinctly put it, “What this means is that to redefine monstrosity is simultaneously to rethink humanity” (2013: 275). So, to repeat Cohen's question: Why, how and what for do we create our vampires?

In William Hughes' opinion, both the pattern of vampire stories and the way their characters are constructed have been established relatively early, as have been the principal themes in critical reflection on this topic:

Polidori's work stabilised the form, and its configuration of the un-dead as an *isolato*, whose morally suspect presence infected others, aligned the vampire closely with the **Gothic Hero**. Perhaps

most significantly, Polidori's work endowed the vampire with an ambivalent sexuality — part seducer, part rapist; heterosexual yet ambivalently homosocial, the vampire came to stand for repressed and **taboo** sexualities — an enduring aspect of textuality which Gothic criticism has stressed often to the neglect of other implications. (Hughes 2018: 153)

But vampire figures — as all monsters in contemporary culture — have changed, they have become domesticated (Grady 1996: 226). As Fred Botting stresses, “Gothic monsters may look similar, but have different connotations, attractive rather than repulsive, desirable rather than disgusting. Opposites are inverted, polarisations reversed. Gothic monstrosities still register otherness in the policing of cultural norms and boundaries but also give voice to the effects of exclusion.” (Botting 2014: 172-13). That “giving voice” entails first-person monster narratives<sup>1</sup> and, as Weinstock claims, “When ‘the monster’ becomes protagonist and culture becomes antagonist, ideas of normality and monstrosity must be reconsidered” (Weinstock 2013: 276). Such a presentation of a vampire as an individual alienated from community is underlined by many critics — ones again Margaret Carter writes, “Today, creators of fictional vampires often choose the romantic path of identification with the ‘alien’ rather than with superstitious majority bent on excluding and destroying him or her” (Carter 1997: 28). Such a construction of the main character appears, for example, in *The Vampire Tapestry* by Suzy McKee-Charnas (1980) or *The Pilgrimage of Clifford M.* by Bob Leman (1984). In both these cases vampire heroes represent not people but another species, differing from the former in terms of details of their anatomical build. Wyland, a character from McKee-Charnas' novel, does not have the slightest problem with being “the other” and does not know the reasons for entering into relationships with animals that he sometimes hunts. Clifford, the main character of Leman's short story, was brought up as a man and eventually came to the knowledge of his own distinctiveness. When he meets representatives of his own species, all he sees in them are old, demented, animalistic creatures and he is unable to develop any sense of community with them. Not being a human and not wanting to be “that something”, he commits suicide. In fact, both stories deconstruct the romantic aura that surrounds a vampire as an alien.

Thus, the answer to the question as to why we tell stories about vampires — leaving our penchant for being scarred aside — is quite complex. Of course, on the existential level, vampire stories belong to the literary tradition of the “what if...” mode and represent our dream of immortality. Piotr Zwierzchowski notes that the desire for immortality, a life without dread and sadness, without the prospect of death, is one of the oldest myths of humankind (2003: 273). Therefore there are a lot of stories on this theme in many mythologies, but their message is clear: laws of nature that state that everyone must die cannot be broken (Zwierzchowski 2003: 274). The author suggests that contemporary popular culture has taken over the functions of ancient myths, narratives about vampires are those ones which face the issue (Zwierzchowski 2003: 279). Ultimately, as Zwierzchowski sums up, also in pop-cultural tales,

<sup>1</sup> Weinstock writes that John Gardner's novel, *Grendel*, published in 1970, initiated the trend (Weinstock 2013: 277). However, this is a matter for further discussion. From a certain point of view, a different trajectory can be observed, leading, e. g. from the novel *The Dwarf* by Pär Lagerkvist (1945) through *The Tin Drum* by Günter Grass (1962) to Katherine Dunn's *Geek Love* (1983) and the novel *Mendel's Dwarf* by Simon Mawer (1997). But, of course, the crucial point here is the status of the protagonists of all these novels: the question whether they are well-developed, psychologically credible characters or just literary concepts of aliens, metaphors used for delivering the authors' messages. Moreover, what is essential, all these figures were human beings, though they placed themselves ostentatiously outside the community.

mainly in cinema, the lack of awareness of the arrival of death as the ultimate relief turns out to be more of a challenge and suffering than the horror of its coming. Therefore, it is also impossible to exclude the possibility that if immortality existed, it would be absolutely unbearable (Zwierzchowski 2003: 293).

Anne Rice's 1976 novel *Interview with the Vampire* is a perfect example of this attitude. Juxtaposing Rice's novel with an earlier text by Fred Saberhagen *The Dracula Tape*, in which a vampire tells his own story, Weinstock admits:

Rice's achievement, however, is to create a rich, sensual world in which the traditional monster, the vampire, emerges as the complex and conflicted hero. Gifted with immortality, physical beauty, extraordinary speed and strength, and even the ability to fly, Rice's vampires are essentially transformed into superheroes. (Weinstock 2013: 278)

Botting adds:

The pleasure of eternal life and youth, the opportunity to satisfy desires and consume luxuriously and freely, are all shadowed by feelings of despair, anguish and alienation. [...] That, as much as the popular existentialism and fashionable postures on the issues of sexual freedom and identity, establishes Rice's vampires as models for new and positive associations of vampirism with consumer and youth culture. (Botting 2014: 188–189)

Nevertheless, Rice decided that the narrator of *Interview with the Vampire* would not be Lestat, delighted with his position of a ruthless predator, but the nostalgic Luis. Lestat describes him: "You are in love with your mortal nature! You chase after the phantom of your former self" (Rice 1995: 90). Lestat himself sees his position as a creature that was born a second time in order to become the most perfect being in the world:

Vampire nature has been for me the greatest adventure<sup>2</sup> of my life; all that went before it was confused, clouded; I went through mortal life like a blind man groping from solid object to solid object. It was only when I became a vampire that respected for the first time all of life. I never saw a living, pulsing human being until I was a vampire. I never knew what life was until it ran out in a red gush over my lips, my hands! (Rice 1995: 90–91)

Discussing their existential and moral status with Armand, a powerful and ancient vampire, Louis comments on Armand's suggestion that if God does not exist then "no sin matters":

That's not true. Because if God doesn't exist we are the creatures of highest consciousness in the universe. We alone understand the passage of time and the value of every minute of human life. And what constitutes evil, real evil, is taking of a single life. Whether a man would have died tomorrow or the day after or eventually ... it doesn't matter. Because if God does not exist, this life ... every second of it ... is all we have. (Rice 1995: 256)

They also comment on the most ambiguous gift offered to vampires: immortality. For Armand it is at the same time the heaviest burden they have to deal with:

<sup>2</sup> Significantly, the young man who listens to Louis' monologue uses the same word: "adventure" as the most important element of the vampire condition: "[d]on't you see how you made it sound? It was an adventure like I'll never know in my whole life! You talk about passion, you talk about longing! You talk about things that millions of us won't ever taste or come to understand" (Rice 1995: 365). For Louis, who thought his story was about loss, grief and loneliness, it proves he has failed once again.

How many vampires do you think have the stamina for immortality? They have the most dismal notions of immortality to begin with. For in becoming immortal they want all forms of their life to be fixed as they are and incorruptible [...] When, in fact, all things change except the vampire himself; everything except the vampire is subject to constant corruption and distortion. Soon, with an inflexible mind, and even with the most flexible mind, this immortality becomes a penitential sentence in a madhouse of figures and forms that are hopelessly unintelligible and without value. One evening a vampire rises and realizes what he has feared perhaps for decades, that he simply wants no more to life at any cost. (Rice 1995: 306)

In fact what we have here is an immensely conflicted approach to the human condition. Human condition defined by mortality, a change that is both a transformation and a dissolution. Therefore, we tell stories about aliens telling the stories about ourselves as beings that are outside the boundaries of what we defined as foreign/ alien.

Thus, stories about vampires created at the end of the twentieth century exposed the existential dimension of beings situated on the border between life and death, nostalgically aware of their fate rather than enjoying the relief being liberated from the dread of dying. But contemporary vampire stories often introduce the social context of the functioning of those non-human beings. Concerning the subject, we should ask: to what extent stories about vampires — which, above all else, offer an exciting departure from everyday life — reflect and comment on this external reality? To what extent — paradoxically — they have become quite a specific type of engaged literature?

I am going to discuss here two book series, both difficult to classify in terms of their genre: The Southern Vampire Mystery by Charlaine Harris and Terry Pratchett's Discworld novels. *True Blood*, a TV show based on Harris' books, is regarded as an important element of the discourse on American life at the beginning of the twenty-first century. As Lennie Blake comments, "the TV vampire of contemporary popular culture has become a significant figure for exploring the conflict and tension that underscore American subjectivity after 9/11" (Blake 2012: 42). The author sees those kind of stories as a real opportunity for cultural and political change, "Gothic television in the US might not be an antidote to the "War on Terror" but, at its best, it offers a creative and often subversive response to dominant political discourses and ideologies, encouraging audience to see beyond reductive binaristic agendas and the foundational myths of national selfhood that underpin them" (Blake 2012: 54).

*Dead Until Dark*, the first novel in Charlaine Harris' Southern Vampire Mystery series, is set in a world after the invention of synthetic blood produced by a Japanese corporation, and, consequently, after the so-called Great Revelation, when vampires officially came out into the human world. The story is told from the perspective of main character, Sookie, who at the beginning of the narrative meets her first vampire, who comes to the bar where she works:

He was pale, of course; hey, he was dead, if you believe the old tales. The politically correct theory, the one the vamps themselves publicly backed, had it that this guy was a victim of a virus that left him apparently dead for a couple of days and thereafter allergic to sunlight, silver and garlic. The details depended on which newspaper you read. They were full of vampire stuff these days. (Harris 2012: 2)

So Harris creates the world in that such dialogues are common:

‘What can I get you? I believe Sam has restocked the blood, Bill, if you’d like some? It’s flavoured  
A neg, or we’ve got the 0 positive’

‘Oh, A negative, I think’

(Harris 2012: 191–192)

or:

‘Blooood... In the Quarter [...] Your coffin away from home’

[...]

‘Good morning. This is Sookie Stackhouse calling from Bon Temps [...] I need to leave a message  
for Bill Compton. He’s a guest here.’

‘Fang or human?’

‘Ah... fang’

‘Just one minute, please.’

(Harris 2012: 292–293)

At the same time, however, it is a world of potential and real conflicts — as always when minorities come out:

They didn’t seem to ever imagine they were endangering themselves. The freedom of being out of the coffin had gone to their heads. The right to legally exist had withdrawn all their constraints, all their prudence and caution. Malcolm nipped at a bartender in Bogaloosas. Diane danced naked in Farmerville. Liam dated an underage girl in Shongaloo, and her mother too. He took blood from both. He didn’t erase the memory of either. (Harris 2012: 190)

Harris’ heroine knows perfectly well that her lover, Bill, as a vampire does not share human values. When women in Sooki’s area fall victim of brutal murders, the residents decide to mete out justice themselves to those they blame for it: the excessively bold vampires. They burn their house. Bill’s reaction to their deaths does not let Sooki forget who the creature she loves is: “I could feel his anger. I could feel his cruelty. I could feel his hunger. He had never been more completely vampire. There wasn’t anything human in him. He turned his face to the sky and howled” (Harris 2012: 202). In another novel of the cycle, Eric, Bill’s master, expresses his view on relationships between the two species very clearly:

‘Sookie, you have to understand that for hundreds, thousands years we have considered ourselves better than humans, separate from humans. [...] Very much in the same relationship to humans as humans have to, say, cows. Edible like cows, but cute, too.’ I was knocked speechless. I had sensed this, of course, but to have it spelled out was just... nauseating. Food that walked and talked, that was us. McPeople. (Harris 2005: 190)

Very complex cultural contexts that emerged when the story, and especially its televised version, the *True Blood* series, premiered, provoked several authors to write the book *True Blood and Philosophy. We Wanna Think Bad Things with You*. The critics pose a number of interesting questions, such as “Do vampires deserve rights?” (Foy 2010: 51). As Joseph Foy notes, the statement by the spokesperson for the American Vampire League (AVL) — “We’re citizens. We pay taxes. We deserve basic civil rights like everyone else” — is a traditional view

of the state as having been formed by a social contract” (Foy 2010: 52)<sup>3</sup>. Another author of the volume, William Curtis, poses a fundamental question: “How should a liberal political community deal with these vampire citizens?” (2010: 66). Yet “they have long been participants in an illiberal, hierarchical political system” (2010: 66), they have “a long history of killing people for food and even sport” (69). That, in turn, sets the fundamental goal of our time, namely establishing which practices can and cannot be reasonably tolerated in liberal societies. The author evokes contemporary examples of such acts, e.g. the anti-animal-cruelty laws that are regularly disregarded during the festival of Eid al-Adha, when sacrificial goats are slaughtered in Muslim homes in the Netherlands (Curtis 2010: 67). Thus, let us once again ask that crucial question: how can vampires blend into a liberal society?:

The ability of vampires to glamour humans—robbing them of free will, moral responsibility, and even their memories—could itself be an ethical deal breaker. How could humans ever be sure that vampires weren’t abusing their power? As Aristotle famously asserts, one who is unable to live in the human polis is either a beast or a god. Vampires may be closer to the latter two categories than they are to us. (Curtis 2010: 76)

Therefore, in the case of Harris’ *Southern Vampires Mystery* and the *True Blood* series, we use vampires as an exercise in the inclusion into the mainstream of human community such groups that are perceived as dangerous minorities by the rest, revealing the weakness of the entire system.

Terry Pratchett in his Discworld novels — usually defined as fantasy from the genre point of view — tells two different kinds of vampire stories and essentially composes various images of the creatures themselves. The first one is established in *The City Watch* series — with Samuel Vimes as a main character. In this cycle, vampires are one of the species living in Ankh-Morpork and are primarily subject to the social tensions typical of a city inhabited by beings from different groups and cultures. In *The Truth*, one of the principal characters is Otto Chriek, a vampire, enthusiastic photographer and an admirer of the possibilities offered by light — a passion that is extremely dangerous in his case. Obviously, Pratchett plays with Murnau’s oeuvre and his rich cultural legacy. Otto, like many representatives of this species living in the city, is a member of “the Uberwald Temperance Movement” and “signs up and forswears any human blood” — “ve prefer ‘zer b-verd”” as Otto corrects, replacing “Ws” with “Vs” in his pronunciation [Pratchett 2000: 98]. While meeting the photographer, William de Worde, an accidental editor of the Discworld’s first newspaper, considers issues of assimilating various species in Ankh-Morpork:

The vampire had never made it. They weren’t sociable, even amongst themselves, they didn’t think as a species, they were unpleasantly weird and they sure as hell didn’t have their own food shops. So now it was dawning on some of the brighter ones that the only way people could accept vampires was if they stopped *being* vampires. That was a large price to pay for social acceptability, but perhaps not so large as the one that involved having your head cut off and your ashes scattered on the river. A life of steak *tartare* wasn’t too bad if you compared it with a dead of stake *au naturelle*.

<sup>3</sup> Eventually Foy ascertains that in both versions — the book and the TV series — “the twofold goals of political equality and access to key social resources regardless of race, gender, sexuality, class, or ‘dietary needs’ is the lifeblood of any social contract that could underwrite a pluralist democracy like of the United States” (Foy 2010: 63).

(In any case, anyone eating raw steak from an Ankh-Morpork slaughterhouse was embarking on a life of danger and excitement that should satisfy anyone.). (Pratchett 2000: 98)

Therefore, living in Ankh-Morpork means complete abstinence and overcoming moments of weakness. Fortunately, friends can provide support whenever things become too difficult to bear:

'I *try*. Gods know I *try*. Three months, four days and seven hours on zer vagon. I give up zer whole thing! Even zer pale ladies viz the velvet basques vorn on zer outside and zer fetching black lace dresses and zose little tiny, you know, high-heeled boots [...] And stuff all gets broken and now my best shirt is all covered viz ... blood ...covered viz red, red *blood*, rich *dark* blood ... zer blood ... covered with zer blood... zer *blood* ...' 'Quick!' said Sacharissa [...] 'Mr Goodmountain, you hold his arms!! [...] I was ready for this! Two of you hold his legs! Dozy, there's a huge blutwurst in my desk drawer!' 'Let me valk in sunshine, Living not in vein...!' Otto crooned. (Pratchett 2000: 210–211)

However, Otto faces a a real test of humanity and compassion when he comes to confront William's father, who turns out to be the leader of a conspiracy to cleanse the city of "alien" elements, in the name of the motto "Ankh-Morpork for humans":

'Keep it away from me!' shouted his lordship. [...] 'oh, yes?' said Otto still advancing 'You think I am an *it*? Vell. Let me act like an *it*! He grabbed Lord de Worde's jacket and held him up in the air, with one hand, at arm's length. 'Ve have people like you at home. [...] Zey are the vuns that tell the mob vot to do. I come here to Ankh-Morpork, zey tell me things are different, but really it is always the same. [...] And now, vot shell I do viz you?' He wretched at his own jacket and tossed the black ribbon aside. 'I never liked zer damn cocoa anyway' [...] "You think I *bite* him? [...] Vell, maybe not, because Villiam here thinks I am a good person' [...] 'or maybe I just have to ask myself ... am I better than you?' [...] With great delicacy, he planted a kiss on Lord de Worde's forehead. Then put the trembling man back down on the floor and patted him on the head. 'Actually, maybe zer cocoa is not *too* bad and zer young lady who plays harmonium, sometimes she *vinks* at me' (Pratchett 2000: 295)

Thus, in the novel, Otto is meant to represent a minority that is not easily included in the community and is readily recognizable as "alien" rather than as a dangerous predator. *The Truth* is also one of Pratchett's novels that celebrates diversity and speaks against all those projects that aim to organise the joyful chaos of the world according to the concept "purity", "explicitness" and "obviousness".

In *Thud!*, vampires take the next step to become a part of Ankh-Morpork community — one of them joins the ranks of the Watch. Everybody knows that Commander Vimes hates vampires and does not want to have one on his police force, but when he realizes that the League of Temperance have found a candidate — he surrenders. The new one happens to be a "she", announced by Lord Vetinari himself as: "Salacia Doloresita Amanita Trigestatra Zeldana Malifee..." he paused, turned over several pages and said 'I think we can skip some of these, but they end "von Humpeding" [...] 'Oh, and she'd prefer to be known simply as Sally' (Pratchett 2005: 22). The first conversation between the Commander and Lance-Constable von Humpeding does not go well:

'You don't have to be frightened' said Sally [...] I am *not* frightened' said Vimes sharply 'Sorry, Mister Vimes. You smell frightened. Not *badly*!', Sally added, 'But a little bit. And your heart is beating

faster. I am sorry if I have offended. I was just trying to put you at your ease' [...] 'Don't try to put me at my ease, Miss von Humpeding,' [...] 'It makes me nervous when people do that. [...] And do not comment on my smell either, thank you. Oh, and it's Commander Vimes or sir, understand? Not Mister Vimes' [...] 'Any history of policing in your family?' [...] 'Not, just the throat-biting' said Sally. (Pratchett 2005: 53)

Therefore, being a vampire in the city means, as a matter of fact, to obey *savoir vivre* rules. From Vimes' point of view, vampires find it quite difficult, because, in his opinion 'Vampires were fine right up until the point where suddenly, they weren't'. (Pratchett 2005: 54). Sally receives her next lesson from Sergeant Angua — obviously the first one was not really effective. Angua is a werewolf, which does not make the situation easier — she feels like a hairy animal confronted with an elegant aristocrat. However, when they investigate together, she decides to offer some advice to the junior officer:

'O-key' said Angua. 'There's people up there. I can smell them — "I can count fifty-seven heart beating' said Sally. Angua gave her a Look. 'You know, that's one particular talent I'd keep to myself, if I was you' [...] 'Sorry, sergeant' it's not the sort of think people want to hear' [...] I mean, I personally am quite capable of cracking a man's skull in my jaws, but I don't go around telling everyone' 'I shall make a note of it, sergeant,' said Sally, with a meekness that was quite possibly feigned. (Pratchett 2005: 179)

Thus, in *The City Watch* series vampires are Black Ribboners (under the motto 'Not One Drop!'), neurotic, eccentric and aristocratic creatures. They have become involved in the well-established tradition of social-climbing in Ankh-Morpork, pretending not to be who they really are because they think the city offers them an illusive opportunity to choose their own identity. Eventually John Not-A-Vampire-At-All Smith (everyone knows he used to be Count Vargo St Gruet von Vilinus) "collects bananas and makes models of human organs out of matchsticks, because he thinks hobbies make him more human", but his wife (born in Cockbill Street, her mum was a washerwoman) tries to look more like a vampire and her fake teeth rattle when she talks. (Pratchett 2005: 21) Vampires of Ankh-Morpork enter the world of a big city, in which many species try to live the same life as where they came from, but at the same time trolls squeeze themselves into suits and Sergeant Cheery Littlebottom's make-up seems to suggest something unheard of, namely that she is a *female* dwarf. In this environment Otto can do his experiments with light and Salacia Doloresita Amanita Trigestatra Zeldana Malifee can attempt to make others call her simply Sally. They try to blend in into the rich texture of Ankh-Morpork's community and at the same time they want to invent themselves again within the framework that imposes their own nature and origin.

The novel *Carpe Jugulum*, announced as next in the Discworld chronicle, "but the first to star vampires", tells us the different story. In the world of the Ramtop Mountains of *The Witches* series, vampires are not social creatures:

Vampires are not naturally co-operative creatures. It's not in their nature. Every other vampire is a rival for the next meal. In fact, the ideal situation for a vampire is a world in which every other vampire has been killed off and no one seriously believes in vampires any more. They are by nature as co-operative as sharks. (Pratchett 1998: 254)

Thus, in *Carpe Jugulum* vampires are just predators, and not very smart ones. The introduction offers the same theoretical digressions on the subject of the nature of the species:

There are many kinds of vampires. Indeed, it said that there are as many kinds of vampires as there types of disease (which presumably means that some are virulent and deadly, and others just make you walk in a funny way and avoid fruit). (Pratchett 1998: 7)

We continue to explore the subject:

Two things have traditional puzzled vampire researchers. One is: why do vampires have so much *power*? Vampires are so easy to kill, they point out. There are *dozens* of ways to despatch them [...] Classically, they spent the day in some coffin somewhere, with no guard other than an elderly hunchback [...] The other puzzle is: why are vampires always so *stupid*? As if wearing evening dress all day wasn't an undead giveaway, why do they choose to live in castles which offer so much in the way of ways to defeat a vampire, like easily torn curtains and wall decorations that can readily be twisted into a religious symbol? (Pratchett 1998: 7–8)

Of course, as everyone knows, you can also take one sock from a vampire and he will spend the rest of eternity looking for it. However, the Magpyrs, who have been invited to the kingdom of Lancre for a royal wedding, are modern vampires. In a long speech to a young witch, Vlad, the son of the family, says,

Things will be changing [...] my father is right. Why lurk in dark castles? Why be ashamed? We're vampires. Or, rather, vampyres. Father's a bit keen on the new spelling. He says it indicates a clean break with a stupid and superstitious past. (Pratchett 1998: 74)

Still, they are creatures that want to control others, affect others just because they think of themselves as higher beings and they see no point in negotiating with food. However, they are forced to fight Granny Weatherwax, the famous witch of Lancre, a woman who seems to know everything about them: “But you wouldn't settle for black puddings, would you, because what you really drink is power over people. I know you like I know myself.” (Pratchett 1998: 266). This knowledge is not accidental — when bitten, Granny examined their blood and she is powerful enough to use their own strategy against them:

'I know all about what you can do and can't do [...] because you let me in. An' you think just like me, the difference bein' I've done it longer and I'm better'n you at it' 'You're *meat*, snarled the Count 'Clever *meat*!' 'And you *invited* me in [...] I'm not the sort to go where I'm not welcome, I'm sure' [...] 'We are vampires We cannot help what we are' 'Only animals can't help what they are,' said Granny. (Pratchett 1998: 254)

As a result of this confrontation, vampires experience an overwhelming need to drink a cup of tea and bite cookies. They are also sent back to the crypt for fifty years to “think about things”. Not for long, however, because, according to Granny Weatherwax, “People need vampires. [...] They help 'em remember what stakes and garlic are for.” (Pratchett 1998: 271).

Finally, in *Carpe Jugulum* vampires are nothing more than a kind of reminder of how dangerous the world is and how to deal with it. They also represent everything that Granny wholeheartedly hates: the pride of creatures who consider ordinary people to be mindless cattle, and who have nothing but contempt for the hardships of everyday existence of beings that are perfectly aware of their own mortality. That is why in *Lord and Ladies* she will have to confront the elves — cruel and deprived of any empathy.

Thus, vampire stories in contemporary literature have evolved and instead of trying to answer the question: “what if we were immortal?” they now explore another, namely: “What if we were forced to share our societies with creatures that are not human?” As Carter noticed, “Through this exercise of entering the mind of the alien, we may become freer to understand the frightening yet attractive ‘other’ sexes, races, and species that share our planet with us.” (Carter 1997: 44) It is a very optimistic conclusion — made at the end of the twentieth century. However, in the world after 9/11, in the world of renewed nationalisms and the ever-present populism, we keep telling ourselves stories about beings who are immortal and stronger than us but for some reason want to share our space on equal terms with us. Of course, there are still stories that are sometimes an apotheosis of our own condition as human beings: our constraints: transience, mortality and an awareness of our weakness, vulnerability as individuals and as a community. Therefore, that is why we have created those vampiric monsters: to see in them ourselves in our extremes, hopes, fears and dreams about a new brave bitter-sweet world.

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