



HÁSKÓLI ÍSLANDS

Hugvísindasvið

The progressing female

The development of the female through vampire fiction

Ritgerð til BA-prófs í ensku

Gunnhildur Schram Magnúsdóttir

Febrúar 2014

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Kt.: 241285-2279

Leiðbeinandi: Úlfhildur Dagsdóttir

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Summary

Throughout time, women's progressing fight for equality can be seen to coincide with the development of female characters in vampire fiction. In the ancient world the demonic vampire is often of feminine gender and it seems that most cultures, at one time or another, have some version of a female vampire or blood-sucking fiend. Some might say that in old-fashioned vampire fiction, for instance Polidori's "The Vampyre", the female characters were most often secondary to the males. However, through the development of vampire fiction, female characters have become some-what more powerful and often play a more vital role than before. This essay will explore and discuss the female characters in "Carmilla", *Dracula*, *Interview with a vampire* and *The Radleys*, emphasizing their different strengths and weaknesses, and comparing them to the status of women in the era in question.

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Introduction

The vampire is a well-known figure, appearing in many different forms in most cultures, ancient as well as modern, and often times these figures are of a feminine nature. Through-out history men have been terrified of women, causing at times, the persecution and oppression of women. In vampire literature women are, in several cases, pacified and victimized characters. However, throughout the development of the genre, as well as women's fight for equality and the rise of the New Woman, the status of the female in vampire literature has become significantly more powerful, owing, perhaps in part, to the two older works discussed below. This essay will explore and compare the female characters in four different vampire stories from different periods of time. The two older stories are; the short story "Carmilla" by Sheridan Le Fanu, published in 1872 and Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, published in 1897. The more modern stories are the novels; *Interview with the vampire* by Anne Rice, published in 1976 and *The Radleys* by Matt Haig, published in 2010. The female characters in these four works play a pivotal role in the stories, and in some instances the gender roles are reversed. Several of the female characters seem to defy the gender stereotypical role, that women are inferior to men both physically, morally as well as intellectually, while for other characters the fight for equality is still ongoing. The older stories, *Carmilla* and *Dracula*, gave a voice to oppressed 19th century women, empowering them to fight for their rights, creating a stepping-stone for future female characters, for example in *Interview with a vampire* and *The Radleys*.

The Original Monstrous Feminine

In the ancient world the demonic vampire, or vampire-like monster, is often of feminine gender and it seems that most cultures, at one time or another, have some version of a female vampire or blood-sucking fiend. Lilitu, the Babylonian snake-goddess, is one of the first known female vampires on record. The Hebrews borrowed her and renamed her Lilith (Frost 6). This ancient Jewish figure was supposedly Adam's first wife. She sucked the life and blood out of men, attacked children and turned them into her own blood-sucking, childlike fiends, called Lilam. In ancient Greece, the vampires were beautiful seductive women, who drained innocent people of their blood. These vampires were the children of Hecate. Another example is Kali, a Hindu goddess of India, who had vampire-like symptoms and such an overpowering lust for blood that she would tear open her own throat and drink her own blood if she was unable to find a victim (Penzler xvii). The Baobhan Sith, sometimes called the White Women of the Scottish Highlands, could be considered as some type of a vampire in Scottish mythology. Legend has it that they would take the form of a beautiful woman, who would exhaust her male victims by dancing with them and then drink their blood (wordpress.com). Looking at all these different myths, from various different cultures, the conclusion can be drawn that the female image is in this instance a somewhat domineering one.

There have been documented accounts of "real-life" vampires, or rather people who have displayed traditional symptoms of vampirism. One such case was Countess Erzebet Bathori, also known as the Bloody Countess. One version of the story says that she lived in a castle on the border of Hungary, Austria and the Slovak Republic, from 1560 to 1614, where she tortured her servants and bathed in the blood of virgins, convinced that their blood helped her regain her youth and beauty. After countless blood-drained bodies were found in and around her castle, people started to believe that something like vampirism was taking place. According to legal documents, she killed 650 young women (Penzler xvii-iii). However, there are several versions of the story. In her book *The Ingrid Pitt Bedside Companion for Vampire Lovers* published in 1998, Pitt points out some discrepancies in the version here above, and argues that her trial may have been a political ploy, enabling the King to take possession of her valuables (Pitt 89).

Ever since the beginning of time, or since Eve committed the original sin by eating the forbidden fruit, men have been suspicious and even fearful of women, “the source of all man’s evil – soiling his ‘reason’ with her ‘desire’” (Leatherdale 133). Eve was considered by many to be weak-minded and fickle and her sinful behavior seems to have infected the image of women in general. In 1487, the book *Malleus Maleficarum*, also known as *The Hammer of Witches*, was first published. It was a witch-hunt manual, allowing people to recognize and persecute alleged witches, by ways of torture and execution. It was largely used by men to dispense of women, mainly whom they found to be dangerous, sometimes for no better reason than having a strange birthmark, living alone, having a mental illness, or simply for the financial gain of the accuser. This following extract shows rather well the blatant misogyny in the book: “What else is a woman but a foe to friendship, an inescapable punishment, a necessary evil, a natural temptation, a desirable calamity, a delectable detriment, an evil of nature, painted with fair colors!” (Keeseey 36). In 16th century Europe, the Church’s official view of women had not changed. The Church had allowed the dissection of bodies at medical schools (localhistories.org). After dissecting a woman’s body, they were found to have the mark of the devil on their anatomy, as Clive Leatherdale writes in his book *Dracula: The Novel and the Legend*, published in 1985; “two sweeping Fallopian tubes – surely the horns of the devil” (Leatherdale 133). Women supposedly attracted the devil. The Church, however, had troubles reconciling this obscene evil view of women with the divine and immaculate Virgin Mary. The resolution was that women were either an evil living entity and deceitful beings in contact with the devil or the purest of pure, spiritually, as well as physically, obeying every command, sacred in every sense of the word. For women there was no middle ground. During the Victorian era, or up until the 1870s, the Household Fairy was the stereotype for women of the middle class. They were expected to essentially sacrifice their own dreams and desires for the needs of the family. Their duty, as the woman, along with having children, was to create and sustain a serene and relaxing environment within the home, where the husband could be at leisure after a day of work (Rowbotham 15). Homemaking was meant to be a woman’s only career and in a way her only possible profession. Therefore, the female of the home was the glue that held the family together (Rowbotham 18). Around 1870, the Household fairy image began to develop, due to a great many women who found this

traditional female role limiting and fought to expand and redefine the role of women. Thus, the Home Goddess was created, and women were able to receive an education of a higher quality and were allowed to conduct various activities outside the home. Although this change had occurred, it had not become a substitute for the main role of a domesticated and naturally maternal woman (Rowbotham 12). Despite its positive aspects, the Home Goddess was not a status that women were ready to settle for. It was merely a phase that would bring them closer to their goal. Subsequently, the world witnessed the dawn of the New Woman, a movement that began in the late 19th century and brought about great changes for the status of 20th century women. This movement would prove to be a very important step in women's continuing fight for equality, which lasted well into the 20th century, a fight which is, in some ways, still ongoing.

Carmilla

In this chapter, the characteristics of the 19th century woman will be compared to the female characters in Sheridan Le Fanu's short story "Carmilla". It was first published in 1872, and is thought to be one of the most important and greatest vampire story ever written. "Carmilla" was, in some ways, way ahead of its time, in view of its very strong lesbian undertones, considering the still highly conservative community in that time period. The focus of the story is the relationship between two young women, Carmilla, a vampire, and Laura, a teenage girl who is infatuated with the stunningly beautiful vampire. Carmilla manages to make herself welcome in Laura's home, where she secretly preys on the young girl as well as other girls in the area. Carmilla leads a life that resembles human life, living amongst humans and interacting with them, even having an intimate relationship with Laura. This strongly resembles the 20th and 21st century vampires, where they strive to live like humans, fall in love with them and live amongst them. The fact that the two main characters are female, also suggests that it has a lot in common with 20th century vampire literature, because 19th century literature, more often than not, had a male character at the center of the story. Women were most often reserved for the role of the victim. Carmilla, in a way, takes over the part of the male, wooing Laura, and having intimate nocturnal visits, where she seemingly strokes her body and sucks her breast, instead of her neck, which is the most common place for the vampire bite. Carmilla's beauty, as well as her femininity and seemingly graceful

manner, is another thing she has in common with 20th century vampires. This is all rather unconventional, compared to mythological vampires discussed in the previous chapter, whom were often described as being monstrously ugly. She is a sophisticated vampire, depending more on the act of seduction than a vicious attack, often associated with male vampires. Although they are somewhat seductive as well, two examples of more vicious attackers are Polidori's Lord Ruthven and Stoker's Dracula. In fact, the description of Carmilla's nocturnal visits to Laura, even though aggressive, sound more like love making than any violent act, as can be seen in the following extract.

"Sometimes there came a sensation as if a hand was drawn softly along my cheek and neck. Sometimes it was as if warm lips kissed me, and longer and more lovingly as they reached my throat, but there the caress fixed itself" (Le Fanu 128). This shows how very different Carmilla is from her male counterparts.

In 19th century fiction women were often the victims of vampire attacks. This corresponded to the ways of society, considering how social conditioning had pacified women making them powerless to change their fate. "Carmilla" can be read as a criticism on the way many women were forced to live their lives during the 19th century. In Victorian society women can be seen to have functioned like parasites, much like the vampire. The vampire has parasitic tendencies by nature. Women were not expected to work and were forced to rely on the men to support them, therefore, exhibiting parasitic tendencies. The vampire is dead and, in a legal sense, women were dead. They had no rights whatsoever. Rather than being defined by intelligence, women and vampires are both mostly defined by their physiology, with detailed descriptions of their beauty and poise (Senf 53). The fact that Carmilla, a strong confident woman, takes the place of the male figure can be considered a criticism on how women, at the time, were being forced to live their lives, smothered within the walls of their home, wanting to break free and be their own master. The image that Le Fanu gives Carmilla can be considered a positive one for women, perhaps even an attempt at giving them a voice and the courage to break free from the stereotypical and traditional image of the oppressed woman.

The relationship between Carmilla and Laura, her victim, shows how powerless women were in the 19th century. Laura's character is the portrayal of the oppressed woman. The reader receives very few details about her, seemingly having very few interests, as well as being nameless in the first half of the story. Carmilla, however, is an

exaggeration of what women should strive to become. In her book, *The Vampire: In 19th century English Literature*, published in 1988, Carol Senf points out that because of the oppression, many women were forced to master the art of manipulation in order to occasionally voice their opinion, and Le Fanu reveals this through Carmilla's extremely manipulative character. She is beautiful and seductive, unlike male vampires who are often aggressive and violent. According to Senf "Lefanu [sic] reveals that women – though considered weak and frail – may have more real power than men", and when it comes to destroying Carmilla, the men in the story, the doctor, Laura's father, the General and the priest, use their main skill, physical force, to overpower her, and at first it seems to have worked (Senf 55). Although, at the end of Laura's narrative, it is evident that Carmilla still exists, in the memory of Laura. Her power over Laura was so strong that she concludes her story with these words; "the image of Carmilla returns to memory with ambiguous alternations – sometimes the playful, languid, beautiful girl; sometimes the writhing fiend I saw in the ruined church; and often from a reverie I have started, fancying I heard the light step of Carmilla at the drawing-room door" (Le Fanu 146). In the beginning of the story the reader is told that Laura has died, and perhaps Le Fanu is hinting to the fact that Carmilla had succeeded in converting her into a vampire. The end of the story can be seen as a reflection of women's struggle within 19th century society. Carmilla represents the New Woman, who is trying to break free from the traditional role of the oppressed woman and the main male characters in the story represent the male dominant population that try to undermine this battle for equality, by trying to "destroy" the New Woman. However, like Carmilla in the story, the essence of this New Woman survives within the supposedly converted Laura, who will continue to fight for equality.

Mina, Lucy and the Three Brides of Dracula

Different aspects of the New Woman can also be seen in the female characters in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, first published in 1897. The book is, without a doubt, the best-known vampire story of all time and Dracula is the vampire that every other vampire is compared to. *Dracula* is a compilation of diary entries and letters written by Mina and Jonathan Harker, Lucy Westenra, Dr. John Seward and Dr. Van Helsing. It is mainly about their various encounters of the vampire Count Dracula, who travels all the way to

London from Transylvania, where he intends to feast on young English women. These five individuals, along with two additional friends, Quincy Morris and Arthur Holmwood, together form a group set out to pursue and destroy Count Dracula, in order to avenge for the death of Lucy Westenra and save the main female character and heroine, Mina Harker, as well as possible future victims.

According to Jean Lorrain, considering other works of Stoker, it is evident that he was an admirer of strong women. As she points out in her article “Dracula Meets the New Woman: The Blood is the Life”, one of his heroines in *The Lady of the Shroud*, published in 1909, who is the queen of a fictional mid-European country, is forced to be buried alive, but survives to be the head of her own army. Although he was never publically a supporter of the Women’s Movement, his mother was an advocate for the movement in Ireland (Lorrain 31). The first half of *Dracula* has, for many years, been viewed as a book filled with hatred and detestation towards women. However, in modern times this view has become very controversial, and it can also be read as a tribute to the New Woman (Lorrain 31). The New Woman was a status that many women were fighting to incorporate into society, all the while challenging the traditional gender role of the old-fashioned woman, which frightened the male population, as well as some of the more traditional women of the era. The New Woman was much the same as the feminists of today. They meant to break the barrier that had been built around women by the dominating males, not only a mental barrier, but a physical barrier as well; a whalebone prison, meaning the corsets that women were expected to be strapped into and endure for hours on end. It was not merely fashion that the New Woman objected to. They wanted careers outside the home, financial independence and sexual freedom. Consequently, the traditional Victorian role of wife, homemaker and mother, also known as the Household Fairy and Home Goddess discussed in the first chapter, was in danger of being eliminated (Leatherdale 139).

In the time of his entrapment in Castle Dracula, during which the gender roles are reversed, Jonathan Harker encounters the three Brides of Dracula. While Harker lays helpless and frightened in his bed, the three vampire women express a lustful appetite that was, during this period in Victorian society, only allowed to men. According to Lauren Gantz, this role reversal can also be seen in “the displacement of the power of sexualized penetration from male to female” (Gantz), meaning the fangs

making a dent in Harker's neck, as he waits in suspense for that penetrating sting. It is evident that to a Victorian audience, as well as to Harker, these three vampire women are indisputably foreign. It is human nature to be frightened of foreign things, and in much the same way that these vampire women frightened Harker, the New Woman, and her views, frightened the male population of the late 19th century (Gantz). Arguably, these three women can be seen to represent what the old-fashioned men found to be the negative aspects of the New Woman. Another similarity between the three Brides of Dracula and the New Woman can be seen in their refusals of the traditional role of the mother. When Dracula forbids the three women to attack Harker, he throws them an infant child, which they feast on, denying entirely the concept of motherhood, like the New Woman was at risk of doing, by pursuing a career outside the home. The three women are also very sexualized, with "voluptuous lips" (Stoker 31), creating in Harker "a wicked, burning desire that they would kiss me with those red lips" (Stoker 32). This can also be seen to reflect the New Woman, who strived to achieve sexual freedom and wanted sex-related issues to be discussed more openly, which was the most controversial issue of their campaign for women, with accusations of weakening society by bringing about moral decay (Gantz, Leatherdale 140). Harker's desire is a reflection of the burning desire that the 19th century male could not help but feel towards the New Woman's sexual freedom.

The character of Lucy Westenra is a controversial one. She is an upper-middle class nineteen-year-old girl, living with her mother. Although Stoker is vague on the looks of his heroines, the book suggests that Lucy is thin and pale, a desirable complexion at the time. Some critics find her to be a self-centered, pampered child and in Victorian society her character would probably not be considered a very virtuous one, considering how she flaunts her three marriage proposals and practically admits to being a "horrid flirt" (Stoker 50), therefore knowing that this is not the way virtuous women should behave (Leatherdale 135). As Jean Lorrain points out in her article, Lucy attempts to shock Mina, knowing that Mina identifies with the New Woman, by asking "Why can't they let a girl marry three men, or as many as want her?" (Stoker 50). She disregards the idea as blasphemy, but the reader is left with a sense of seriousness. Although Lucy seems to be very much on the verge of being a wanton woman, which perhaps makes her more susceptible to Dracula's vampiric advances, she can be seen as

the representation of the old-fashioned young lady of the Victorian era, as opposed to a New Woman, who would not have been interested in simultaneously catering to three husbands. She would most likely rather have none. In addition, Lucy does not seem to have any interests, other than the three marriage proposals she receives. She never mentions charity work or interesting books she has read, nor does she show any interest in social progress, which would very much interest a New Woman. Therefore, it can be concluded that Lucy is, in fact, a typical old-fashioned young lady, merely concerned with her looks and finding a wealthy man to marry. Even her choice of fiancé shows how simple she wants her life to be, choosing an English Lord over an outdoorsy Texan, which would most likely have brought some adventure to her dull existence, something that a New Woman, if choosing a husband, would have opted for (Lorrah 35). Lucy, being such a simple creature, is easy prey for Dracula, letting him in through the window of her room, making it very easy for him to attack her several times, ending with her demise.

Once Lucy is transformed into a vampire she starts to resemble the three Brides of Dracula. When vampirism takes over, the role of the mother is reversed. She, similar to the Three Brides, also preys exclusively on children, denying the traditional role of the woman, motherhood. She also becomes overtly sexual, like the three Brides, having a “voluptuous smile” and speaking to Arthur, her fiancé, with a “languorous, voluptuous grace” (Stoker 181). These phrases call to mind the phrase about the voluptuous three vampire women in Dracula’s castle, mentioned above (Gantz). Lucy, in vampirism, has become overtly sexual. She can be seen to represent the negative aspects of the New Woman, aspects like overt sexuality, which the male community despised. John Seward, who, when he sees Lucy as a vampire, has a longing to decapitate her, says that “my love passed into hate and loathing; had she then to be killed, I could have done it with savage delight” (Stoker 181). The men represent the 19th century male, who wanted to destroy the desirable, and in their mind, dangerous New Woman (Leatherdale 142).

Mina Murray/Harker is the main heroine of the story. The fact that Mina and Lucy are best friends is interesting, considering how different they are, practically opposites. According to Clive Leatherdale “Mina is as resourceful as Lucy is resourceless” (Leatherdale 137). While Lucy was being born with a silver spoon in her

mouth, Mina was growing up in an orphanage, where she receives training as a teacher, and it is also where she meets her future husband, Jonathan Harker (Lorrah 34). Mina is virtuous, thoughtful and deeply religious. At one point she slightly resembles the Virgin Mary, when she gives a small speech about Dracula, believing that even he, who is trying to take her life, can be redeemed (Leatherdale 138). “That poor soul who has wrought all this misery is the saddest case of all. Just think what will be his joy when he, too, is destroyed in his worser part that his better part may have spiritual immortality. You must be pitiful to him, too, though it may not hold your hands from his destruction” (Stoker 265). Several comments made about her throughout the book, mainly by Van Helsing, support this notion of a saint-like character. For example, when Mina suggests that she be hypnotized, so that she might be of service in the pursuit of Dracula, Van Helsing says, “Madam Mina, you are, as always, most wise” (Stoker 280). When Van Helsing sees how she has written out the diaries and letters he says “Oh, you so clever woman” (Stoker 156). Van Helsing finds Mina to be the perfect combination, having the brain of a gifted man and the heart of a woman. All the men obviously have the greatest of respect for Mina. Although Stoker keeps the physical descriptions to a minimum, it can be read that Mina is attractive, although not as stunningly beautiful as Lucy, who has “rippling black hair to offset her countenance” (Leatherdale 136-7). Mina’s character is blessed with other, more important, attributes. Already a teacher, Mina is on her way to having a new career, as her husband’s secretary, which, at the time, was exclusively a job for men (Lorrah 35). Already we see qualities in Mina that link her to the New Woman, the pursuit of her own career, which was one of the things that the New Woman pursued. Mina becomes quite accomplished in shorthand, which benefits greatly in writing and organizing, in chronological order, all the different diary entries and letters, in order to map the recent events. At one point Jonathan mentions in his diary that “now that her work is done, and that it is due to her energy and brains and foresight that the whole story is put together in such a way that every point tells” (Stoker 213), acknowledging the fact that this was her idea, and that her practical thinking and intuition are critically important when it comes to tracking down and destroying Dracula. In addition, Mina decides to read Jonathan’s diary, from the time of his captivity in Castle Dracula, which he had been unable to do, due to the trauma that he had suffered during his stay. Consequently, she makes the important connection

between Jonathan's experience and Lucy's eventual death, identifying Dracula, as well as assuring Jonathan that he is not mad (Lorrah 37). When the men are plotting against Dracula, they decide to leave Mina out of it, in order to protect her, not realizing that by doing so they put her in danger because she is vulnerable, and without protection at night, Dracula attacks her several times before the men realize what is happening to her. Here the men's poor judgment is evident. Jean Lorrah argues that subconscious jealousy causes Van Helsing to give a crucifix to all the men, but does not give one to Mina, making it very easy for Dracula to attack her at night. Van Helsing's patriarchal refusal to disclose to Lucy what is happening to her, and deciding to keep Mina out of the plans, is detrimental to both of them, in a way, causing the death of Lucy and the attack on Mina (Lorrah 39). In view of these facts, Van Helsing is, in some ways, failing as the leader, and Mina, considering all that she has contributed to the cause, is looking like the better leader.

After Mina is bitten and forced to drink Dracula's blood, Dr. Seward and Van Helsing fear that her mind may be under the influence of the Count. Mina has sense enough to realize herself that her knowing the plans for the campaign against Dracula is dangerous, because of her connection to him. She even makes her husband promise that he will not disclose anything about the plan to her, even though, at some point, she might beg him (Stoker 279). However, Mina soon realizes that her connection to Dracula can be very beneficial in the war against the Count. She receives messages from him, through a psychic link, at one time enabling her to warn the men, when they are in one of Dracula's houses, inspecting it as well as waiting for him, allowing them to be prepared for his coming (Stoker 260). When Dracula tries to escape from London by sea, they are able to track him through Mina's link to the Count. In her memorandum, Mina considers all the possibilities in which Dracula could make his way home, and she concludes that the safest way would be by water, which turns out to be correct, giving them a new lead to Dracula's whereabouts. When Mina tells the men about her conclusion they shake her hand and Van Helsing says, "Our dear Madam Mina is once more our teacher. Her eyes have been where we were blinded. Now we are on the track once again, and this time we may succeed" (Stoker 304). In the end, thanks to her, they defeat Count Dracula.

As soon as Mina is brought back to the scene, after the men have been forced to decapitate and stake Lucy, she helps them confront and express their feelings about the past events, serving as a sort of motherly figure for all the men. After her first meeting with Lord Godalming, Lucy's fiancé, where he breaks down and cries on her shoulder, she writes in her diary, "I suppose there is something in woman's nature that makes a man free to break down before her and express his feelings on the tender and emotional side without feeling it derogatory to his manhood [...] We women have something of the mother in us that makes us rise above smaller matters when the mother-spirit is invoked" (Stoker 196-7). In the following scene, Quincy Morris says to Mina, "No one but a woman can help a man when he is in trouble of the heart", and Mina, seeing how troubled he is, responds by offering to comfort him as well, if needed. Mina also emphasizes to the men the importance of eating breakfast, in order to be strong for the task at hand, which is a very motherly thing to do (Stoker 254).

Several critics have found the following comment that Mina makes about the New Woman to be sarcastic and therefore a disapproval of the New Woman. "But I suppose the New Woman won't condescend in future to accept; she will do the proposing herself. And a nice job she will make of it, too!" (Stoker 77). However, Jean Lorrain disagrees with this, pointing out that that sort of reading would have been more appropriate in a late 20th century text. It is a positive comment about the strength of the New Woman, and according to Jean Lorrain, the line is foreshadowing (Lorrain 32). When she finally receives news of Jonathan after months of silence, Mina makes the long and hard journey to Transylvania alone, where she finds him ill with brain fever, after having been held captive in Castle Dracula. Although Jonathan had already proposed to Mina before his departure for Transylvania, she decides that they must marry immediately, and makes all the necessary plans herself, all the while nursing Jonathan back to health (Lorrain 33). Mina has such a strong character, even after having been attacked by Dracula, she is still herself, and fights the power and influence he has over her, so much that even Dracula seems to be afraid of her. With the group closing in on his route, Dracula sends the three vampire women in order to persuade her over to their side. However, she withstands their advances, and with the help of Van Helsing, is protected (Lorrain 41).

In conclusion, Lucy represents the old-fashioned young lady, but when she is transformed into a vampire she, along with the three Brides of Dracula, represents the negative aspects of the New Woman, the distorted aspects that frightened the old-fashioned men of the 19th century. By emphasizing Mina's strength and talents, Stoker shows that there is no need for men to fear the views of the New Woman. Mina does not show any signs of sexual promiscuity, which some men found that the New Woman displayed, and found to be negative (Lorrah 35). Mina represents the positive aspects of the New Woman, those aspects for which men should strive to overcome their prejudice, and accept the New Woman as their equal partner. Therefore, it can be argued that, through *Dracula*, Stoker is allowing the voices of oppressed 19th century women, who, like the New Woman, longed to be heard.

Claudia

“[W]omen claimed their equal rights to the manipulation of the vampire [...] mirroring the “evolution” of art in the twentieth century” (Amador). According to some the 20th century can be viewed, among other things, as the century of women. The free love of the hippie movement emerged in the 1960s and 1970s, and women were demanding sexual freedom and equality, many even revealing their lesbianism. Women, in literature had, by the 20th century, taken control of the female vampire's power and eroticism, even creating a new genre labeled lesbian vampire writing. Therefore, women have become a powerful force in the portrayal of the vampire myth, for example Vampirella, a voluptuous comic book vampire published originally in 1969, and Miriam in Whitley Strieber's *The Hunger*, published in 1981.

Written in the after-effects of the second wave of the feminist movement, *Interview with the Vampire*, first published in 1976, is the first book in a series called *The Vampire Chronicles* by Anne Rice (Doane and Hodges). Unlike *Carmilla* and *Dracula*, this story is told from the vampire's point of view, and according to some, Rice is one of the first authors to allow the vampires to tell their own story, by presenting them as the subject, instead of the object (Jowett). The approximately 200-years-old vampire, Louis, tells his story to a young journalist, with hopes of better understanding himself and his purpose. Having been converted by a slightly older vampire, Lestat, an aggressive and impulsive character, Louis struggles with his

animalistic desires to attack humans. He is a vampire with a conscience, who limits his diet to rats and other animals. In a moment of weakness, Louis attacks Claudia, a five-year-old orphaned girl, nearly killing her. Lestat, in an attempt to maintain his relationship with Louis, turns her into a vampire, not realizing, or caring, that by doing so she will be trapped in a child's body forever.

In his book *Reading the Vampire* published in 1994, Ken Gelder discusses the differences between the two main male vampires, describing Louis as “delicate and sensitive (i.e. feminized) and Lestat as aggressive and impetuous (i.e. masculinized)” (Gelder 112). Their relationship, and later the relationship between Louis and Armand, the ancient vampire in Paris, can be read as highly homosexual. For a while, Louis and Lestat coexist as a sort of gay couple, with Claudia as their daughter. Although, at times there is strong sexual tension, mainly between Claudia and Louis, indicating that their relationship is a mixture of father/daughter and husband/wife. The story can be seen to have several Oedipal moments. Janice Doane and Devon Hodges point out in their article “Undoing Feminism: From the Preoedipal to Postfeminism in Anne Rice’s *Vampire Chronicles*” published in 1990, that the beginning of the oedipal moment is “with the father’s embrace of the girl child in a patriarchal order that so restricts her possibilities for development” (Doane and Hodges). Claudia is trapped in this Oedipal embrace, desperately trying to break free and protest against the imprisonment in her own body, in other words the oppressive role of women in patriarchal culture. Thus, it can be argued that this fatal embrace from the patriarchy, or Claudia’s father’s, infantilizes her womanhood, and attempts to create a controllable woman. Doane and Hodges are in agreement, describing Claudia as “the infantilized woman who is a perfectly obedient and dependent object of desire” (Doane and Hodges). Claudia, however, is not easy to control, making this a failed effort. When Lestat dances with the corpse of Claudia’s mother, before taking her as his own, he desecrates her mortal mother, subsequently destroying the female (Jowett). The image of the mother is erased and two fathers take its place, consequently, robbing Claudia of her chance at motherhood, as well as the chance of producing another vampire, making her powerless. Claudia never quite accepts her mother’s death, and shortly after her conversion she says in disagreement; “I’m not your daughter [...] I’m my mamma’s daughter”. Lestat then tells her “No, dear, not anymore. [...] You’re our daughter” (Rice 93). Lestat’s

following question; “Now, whom should you sleep with? Louis or me?” (Rice 94), is an obvious Oedipal moment, showing the father’s desire for the female child, rather than the child’s desire for the father (Doane and Hodges).

According to Anne Rice herself “she views vampires as affording a gender-free perspective” (Jowett), therefore, the vampires in Rice’s novels can be seen as androgynous and sexually ambiguous. Although, considering the fact that the novels’ main characters are male, some critics have pointed out that this “gender-free” state is achieved by the erasing of women (Jowett). Rice has also said that; “Claudia is the embodiment of my failure to deal with the feminine” (Jowett). Despite her self-claimed “failure” and the fact that she identifies with the male rather than the female, it can be argued that Rice has made Claudia into a powerful symbol. Rice describes Claudia as “a woman trapped in a child’s body, robbed of power, never knowing what it’s like to really be a woman and make love. She becomes a metaphor for a raging mind trapped in a powerless body” (Ramsland 21). Claudia constantly questions Louis and Lestat about the reason for her creation, angry about all the things that she will never possess, or be able to experience, desperately wanting to understand; “But tell me one thing from that lofty height. What was it like [...] making love?” (Rice 207). “Six more years, seven, eight. [...] I might have had that shape! I might have known what it was to walk at your side” (Rice 259). Louis and Lestat do not, and will never understand Claudia, because firstly, having been converted in the prime of their mortal life, they have never been in her situation, and secondly, because she is a woman (Jowett). In her article “Mute and beautiful: The Representation of the Female in Anne Rice’s Interview with the Vampire” published in 2002, Lorna Jowett argues that Claudia, being the only prime female character in the book, is a representation of the female in the patriarchal world, presenting her “as an exaggerated symbol of the female” (Jowett). Female vampires are the embodiment of the monstrous feminine, and despite the fact that she is a child female vampire, Claudia still shows some aspects of the monstrous feminine, although “her childish physical form tempers the idea of a dangerous female sexuality” (Jowett). According to Doane and Hodges, *Interview with the Vampire* is different from the “classic monster narrative”, because Claudia is not “the woman who must be protected from the monster; she is the monster” (Doane and Hodges). Claudia’s monstrous behavior is seen in her brutal hunting of humans, at one time killing a mother and

daughter, and keeping their bodies. At one point Louis describes her as “the white and fierce and unnatural childthing” (Rice 260) and even Claudia herself says “I have no human nature” (Rice 116).

Louis and Claudia sometimes seem to have reversed gender roles. Claudia is the one who protects Louis from Lestat, saving him twice, and therefore taking on the role of the typically male protector. The idea of getting rid of Lestat is entirely hers and it is she who executes the plan. Even though she is supposed to be the child, she tries to be the leader, persuading Louis to take an extensive trip to Europe in search of other vampires. “It was her idea most definitely that we must go to central Europe, where the vampire seemed most prevalent” (Rice 146). As mentioned earlier, Ken Gelder finds Louis to be feminized and Jowett describes him as “the caring, constant mother” (Jowett). Lestat can be seen as the patriarchal man of the house. According to Gelder he is masculinized, and Jowett sees him as the “strict, sometimes distant father”. Lestat, as the patriarch of the family, reserves for himself the powers of creating new vampires. By, seemingly, withholding information from Claudia and Louis, about their origin and kind, he believes he can control them. Controlling Claudia, however, turns out to be quite a difficult task for Lestat. She breaks the rules of both natural law, on account of her incestuous relationship with Louis, as well as vampire law, by attempting to kill Lestat, a fellow vampire as well as her maker. As a consequence, Claudia will suffer the same fate of a woman fallen from grace, death (Jowett). Even though, Lestat also breaks a vampire law by creating a child vampire, and Louis as well by killing all the vampires in the theater in Paris, Claudia is the only one who is held responsible and pays for her transgressions with her life. Lestat can be viewed as a representation of the old-fashioned patriarchal male, whom Claudia, the representation of the oppressed woman, tries to kill in order to free herself and Louis. Louis could be seen to represent a “new man”, in search of something slightly different than Lestat’s way of life, as well as an explanation of his own nature and origin (Jowett).

Jowett points out that “Claudia embodies at least two paradoxes: the child's innocence and the vampire's evil; the child's weak body and the woman's strong spirit”. Physically she is a child, but mentally she has developed into a woman. She is a powerful character and Lestat and Louis both talk about her strength; “She is too strong for me” (Rice 101). However, because of her arrested physical development, she must

rely on Louis and Lestat as her constant guardians, which is very frustrating for her. Claudia longs to be able to do everything an independent woman can do, as well as having all the physical features of a young, beautiful woman. Louis, more than once, describes Claudia as “Mute and beautiful, she played with dolls. [...] Mute and beautiful, she killed” (Rice 97). These characteristics are a reflection of the characteristics of women in the patriarchal world. They, like Claudia, are beautiful, thus worth looking at, but also mute, not worth hearing. Her silence is a symbol of her powerlessness. Claudia’s story is told by her father or husband, Louis, thus like women throughout history, she is denied her own voice. Being tied down, and absolutely dependent on two patriarchal fathers or husbands, she does not even have the power to reproduce without their help, for being a child vampire, she does not possess the strength she needs to make another vampire. Therefore, like women of the past, she is solely dependent on her father/husband (Jowett). Claudia is always seen through Louis’ eyes. More than once she is talked about, or presented as a doll. After attacking Claudia, Louis narrates: “I threw the child down. She lay like a jointless doll” (Rice 74). At another time Louis says: “Lestat played with her as if she were a magnificent doll, and I played with her as if she were a magnificent doll” (Rice 98) Claudia herself is never seen as important, but merely an object to be used. In fact, one of Lestat’s reasons for converting her is: “We could use her, Louis, and think of all the pretty dresses we could buy for her” (Rice 74, Jowett). It is evident that they view her as a doll, merely something to control and with which to entertain themselves. Although Louis seems to have loving feelings towards her, he is very selfish. For example, when Louis has converted Madeleine into a vampire, after Claudia begs him to because she is afraid that he is about to leave her for Armand, Louis’ first concern is for himself. He does not accept any responsibility for his actions, killing Claudia, and then wanting to abandon her for Armand. After he reluctantly converts Madeleine, Louis accuses Claudia of killing the only part left of him that was human (Jowett). Claudia becomes the center for all accusations. She pays for her wrong-doing with her life, while Louis and Lestat are left unpunished for their crimes. Even though Claudia’s death seems to lead to the re-installation of homo-social bonds between men, the bonds seem to have diminished in the end of the book, considering that Louis and Armand part ways, and Louis leaves Lestat in his misery (Doane and Hodges).

Interview with the Vampire is a representation of the Oedipal arrangement of a patriarchal culture that presents the feminine as both an object of desire, as well as an object of horror (Doane and Hodges). In conclusion, Claudia, a mature and stubborn woman in the body of a child, strives to make her voice and feelings heard. However, despite her strong character, Claudia is forced to depend on two male vampires, Louis and Lestat, in order to maintain, a somewhat normal father/daughter image. Although she sometimes is heard and gets her way, in the end she is executed for her transgressions, and is thereby erased from the male dominant world. She, like women of the old patriarchal world, is a demonstration of the limitations of fixed gender roles (Jowett). Despite her efforts, Claudia never seems to find her own voice. Rice “valorizes homoeroticism while erasing female sexuality” (Jowett). It is ironic that the author is in fact a woman, considering that she fails to present an alternative to the role inflicted on women by society as well as literature. Even though Claudia’s attempt at killing Lestat, who represents the patriarchy, fails, the patriarchy is certainly weakened, considering Lestat’s diminished powers of persuasion and insane state of mind in the end. Decades later, Lestat’s face still shows scars from Claudia’s attempt on his life. Thus, even though she has been physically eliminated, Claudia’s efforts have left a mark on the patriarchal world.

Helen Radley

In her article, “The Post-feminist Vampire: A Heroine for the Twenty-first Century”, published in 2003, Victoria Amador writes about the development of the female vampire, saying that; “The victimized virgin of the early nineteenth century has become the social activist avenger of the twenty-first century and shows no sign of playing dead” (Amador). The changes that had occurred for female vampires in 20th and 21st century fiction made them more independent and self-sufficient. Exemplifying these changes is a 12-year old girl vampire, Eli, from the 2004 Swedish novel *Låt den rätte komma in* by John Ajvide Lindqvist. Eli, in the beginning, relies on her protector for blood, but ends up draining him of his blood and becomes an independent girl vampire (academia.edu), unlike Claudia for instance, who was unable to break free from her protectors. The changes that had occurred for female vampires in vampire fiction coincide with the changes apparent in today’s society, considering that women are, in

many aspects of society, equal to men. This equality is evident in the novel, *The Radleys*, discussed below.

The Radleys by Matt Haig, first published in 2010, is a story about a family of vampires living in a small town, who abstain from drinking blood and strive to appear as human as possible. The parents, Helen and Peter Radley, have for seventeen years, or from the time of their birth, never told their children, Clara and Rowan, that they are vampires, making up illnesses to explain symptoms like skin rashes, insomnia and a strong aversion to garlic. The secret unravels, after Clara, being pushed to her limits, loses control of herself and kills a boy who attacks her. This incident, which could potentially expose their true nature to the world, forces them to contact a family member, Peter's brother, Will, whom they have avoided for almost two decades. Will is a ruthless, non-abstaining vampire with a dark past linking him to Helen, in ways of which Peter is absolutely unaware.

Haig has managed to humanize the vampire by creating a vampire family of four, who strive to be as human as possible, willingly suppressing their monstrous instincts by abstaining from blood, the thing they crave the most. In addition, Haig has humanized the vampire itself, giving it human bodily functions. For example, their ability to live on red meat and other foods instead of blood, in which case they grow old faster and eventually die, unlike the vampires in "Carmilla", *Dracula* and *Interview with the vampire*, who stayed young and lived forever. The fact that these vampires are able to drink and live on vampire blood humanizes them as well, because it gives them the option of abstaining from killing humans. Although Haig's vampires prefer the shade, they are able to cope with the sun, allowing them to be creatures of the day as well as the night, unlike the old fashioned vampires, who were bound to the darkness and burned to ashes if caught in the sun. Haig's vampires are also able to re-produce, therefore there are two types of vampires, converted vampires and the ones who are born vampires, like the Radley children, presenting a new side of the vampire to the reader; involuntary vampires. Haig has constructed a more realistic creature, compared to the vampires in "Carmilla", *Dracula* and *Interview with the vampire*, by removing the "superstitious rubbish" like crucifixes, rosaries and holy water, which have followed the vampire myth for decades (Haig 86). The vampire community in *The Radleys*, have been able to incorporate themselves into society, forming the Sheridan Society, the

vampire rights organization for hardcore vampires. They deal with the police, for instance by giving them a list of vampires whom the police cannot touch. The unofficial agreement between the vampires and the police says that vampires “are meant to go for the easily explained disappearances – the suicidal, the homeless, the runaways, the illegal” (Haig 161). Despite their knowledge of them, the police have not revealed the existence of vampires to the world and have a secret unit, called the Unnamed Predator Unit, that deals with vampires. Alison Glenny, “the smug, crop-haired deputy commissioner”, runs the police’s counter-vampirism operation (Haig 136). The fact that Haig places a woman in charge of the operation, which in the 19th century would have been a male job, shows that there has been a power shift in society, allowing women to break away from the gender role that had been inflicted on them in and around the 19th century. Clara Radley, the daughter, is described as being “a small, slender-framed fifteen-year-old” (Haig 155) who no one, in their right mind, would suspect of having the strength to kill a boy “with a strong, rugby-player build” (Haig 64). When Harper attacks Clara, her inner monster is unleashed and she becomes the attacker, in a sense “raping” him with her penetrating teeth. She does not allow herself to be victimized, doing to him what he would most likely have done to her. Later, when her parents come to her aid, Helen notices that Harper’s “arms are raised above his head, as if in surrender” (Haig 64). The male has surrendered to the female. It is evident that Haig’s female characters have become slightly more powerful than, for instance, the character of Claudia, who is in many ways smothered by her fathers/husbands.

Helen Radley is a rather powerful woman. It could be argued that she is in some ways the head of the family, or at the very least equal to her husband. She is the one who insists on abstaining, as well as keeping the secret of their true nature from Clara and Rowan. Peter, the father, does not seem to have any say in the matter. For example, after Clara has killed her attacker, Helen wants Peter to carry the body to the car. Somewhat overwhelmed with all the blood, Peter pulls himself together thinking that he must do “as Helen instructed” (Haig 64). She is the one in control. While Peter is constantly tempted to succumb to his overwhelming blood thirst, Helen has such great will-power when it comes to fighting her instincts, both her thirst for blood, as well as her instinctive overwhelming sense of love for Will, a love that was thrust upon her after her conversion. She is filled with guilt over the fact that she allowed Will to

convert her instead of Peter, whom she was engaged to, making her forever bound to Will as well as getting pregnant by him, with Rowan. Helen's connection to Will can be seen to represent the stifling power and influence that husbands and fathers in the patriarchal world had over their wives and daughters. At one point Will objectifies Helen admitting that; "He thinks of her as a Russian doll. This tense, villagey outer casing" (Haig 140). Helen is very aware of the power that Will has over her, feeling intensely drawn to him, because he is the one who converted her, a fact completely unknown to her husband. She is wracked with pain over having committed adultery and lying to Peter about this for seventeen years. Even though she knows that one sip of blood would take all the guilt and pain away, she is able to contain herself in an attempt to correct the mistake she made all those years ago. Helen is desperate for a normal human life, as a wife and mother, instead of the wild vampire life she left behind almost two decades ago. At one point in the book she says to Will; "I think of me, how I used to be. How much I've had to sacrifice to live here, with all these normal people. Sometimes I just want to [...] give in and just walk naked down the street to see what people say" (Haig 140). It seems that, in some ways, she is punishing herself for her mistakes, by trapping herself in this suburban normalcy of life, a similar kind of life that women in the 19th century were trapped in. However, once her secrets have been revealed and she is free from Will's overbearing power, she opens her eyes to the fact that there are ways of living as a vampire without having to hurt people, by abstaining from human blood and merely consuming vampire blood. In the end, Helen is able to break the influential connection that she had with Will, repairs her relationship with Peter and stays with her family.

The Radleys is not just a book about abstaining vampires. It is a book about relationships, and the modern conflicts that many marriages face, for instance the dangers of fading love after years of marriage and even the unfaithfulness of a spouse. Despite its vampiric twists there are problems, for instance in Helen and Peter's marriage, which people can relate to. The problems that Clara and Rowan are having at school, merely being different, are problems that many children in the present day are faced with and could, therefore, relate to as well. *The Radleys* is very different from the older stories discussed in the chapters above. Considering their highly unrealistic and supernatural aspects, "Carmilla", *Dracula* and *Interview with a vampire* are in no way

relatable to the contemporary reader. The status of women in *The Radleys* is befitting to the status of women in today's society. Compared to their status in "Carmilla", *Dracula* and *Interview with a vampire*, it is apparent that women's fight for equality, although it is still ongoing, has been very instrumental in giving women, in general, the chance to a happier and more rewarding life.

Conclusion

The powerful feminine figures discussed in the chapter on the Original Monstrous Feminine, and the sense of fear that men had towards women, could be considered to be reasons for why the male community, at some point in history, felt the need to constrain women. An examination of the female characters discussed in this essay, has shown that each one is a representation of a certain type of status that women have had within society throughout the centuries. A modern reading of the works of Sheridan Le Fanu and Bram Stoker can be seen as a tribute to women, and even an attempt at giving them a voice at a time when society did everything in its power to keep them pacified and obedient. Le Fanu criticizes his contemporary society for the way it forces women into the role of the Household Fairy, mentioned in the first chapter, a role that will never benefit all women and creates in them the parasitic tendencies that make them similar to vampires. Despite the fact that Carmilla, the exaggeration of what women should strive to become, is destroyed, her message lives on in Laura. Stoker's take on the feminine corresponds with the happenings of his own society, bringing into play the newly introduced New Woman. He strives to create the perfect woman by giving Mina some qualities of the New Woman, qualities that the male community found to be positive. However, Lucy, as a vampire, and the three Brides of Dracula, embody qualities of the New Woman, for example sexual promiscuity and freedom, which the males found to be negative. Stoker concludes his story by killing the vampires and, therefore destroying the aspects of the New Woman that men found to be negative. Out of the four works discussed in this essay, Anne Rice is the only female author, and, ironically, her story has the poorest and most dissatisfying portrayal of women. "Rice's novels have an almost vampiric relation to feminism" (Doane and Hodges). Claudia, trapped inside the body of a child, is unable to break free from under the influence of her protectors. "Mute and beautiful", she is worth looking at but not worth hearing (Rice 97). Claudia, similar to many women of the 20th century, is without a voice. Despite her efforts, she is doomed to play the part of a pretty doll, to be admired and played with, and in the end she is erased from the patriarchal world for attempting to free herself. Therefore, as was still the case for many women in 20th century society, Claudia is not free from her oppressors. Matt Haig's portrayal of the abstaining female vampire is fitting to the

status of the modern woman, considering how far women have come in their fight for equality, and are, in some societies, relatively equal to their spouse. Helen and Peter can be seen to be in a marriage of equality, although at times Helen can be seen to have the upper hand, contrary to some of the other females discussed in this essay, for example Claudia.

It can be argued that through time, women's progressing fight for equality can be seen to coincide with the development of the female characters in vampire fiction. Similar to the much-improved status of women in today's society, although the fight for equality is still ongoing, the female vampire has become a rather powerful force in vampire fiction.

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