Blood, Coffins and Transformation

*The Image of Dracula in Children’s Vampire Fiction*

B.A. Essay

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Abstract

This essay examines the role of children´s literature, especially in fantasy and fiction. Studies have shown that literature has the important job to educate and entertain. The essay explains how personal development of a child is affected with the help of fantasy and fiction and impacts the emotional, social and psychological development on the road to adulthood. The essay focuses on the genre that is vampire fiction meant for children. It makes the point of showing the connection between Bram Stoker´s Dracula and children´s vampire fiction and points out the elements, needed in a work of fiction to make the concept of the vampire child friendly, since vampires are originally meant to be a source of horror. This is achieved with the help of a combination of frightful scenes and humor, and a positive ending. There are three forms of storytelling used as a reference in this essay, The Little Vampire (1973), which is a book, Little Vampire Goes to School (1999) a picture book and finally the film Hotel Transylvania (2012). Finally the essay examines the potential aim of such stories, making the emphasis on how the emotion of fear in children´s fiction can help the reader or viewer overcome their own personal fears. By using these works of fiction, the essay hopes to have identified the elements that are derived from Bram Stoker´s Dracula and Bela Lugosi´s portrayal in the film Dracula in 1931, by examining closely the elements that appear both in Stoker´s Dracula and in the vampire stories chosen, such as the image of vampires in children´s vampire fiction, coffins, how blood is discussed, garlic and sunlight, as well as the ability to transform. This essay is an attempt to point out how they appear in the books and the film and why.
# Table of Contents

Introduction ........................................................................................................................................ 1  
Children’s literature......................................................................................................................... 4  
Fantasy and vampires ....................................................................................................................... 5  
  Fear and humor .............................................................................................................................. 6  
  Happily ever after ........................................................................................................................... 6  
The Image of Dracula in Bram Stoker’s novel and in films ......................................................... 7  
  *The Little Vampire* ....................................................................................................................... 9  
  *Little Vampire Goes to School* ..................................................................................................... 11  
  *Hotel Transylvania* .................................................................................................................... 12  
Characteristics and core elements in selected sources derived from Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* ................................................................................................................................. 15  
  Coffins ........................................................................................................................................... 15  
  Sunlight ......................................................................................................................................... 16  
  Garlic ............................................................................................................................................ 17  
  Hypnotic powers ............................................................................................................................ 18  
  Transformation and control of animals ....................................................................................... 19  
  Blood and feeding ........................................................................................................................... 19  
  How to kill a vampire ..................................................................................................................... 21  
What is the main objective of vampire fiction for children? .................................................... 22  
Conclusion ....................................................................................................................................... 23  
Works Cited ...................................................................................................................................... 25
Introduction

Literature has been the source of entertainment since the people began to put words to paper. It can be viewed as a tool for achieving personal growth and help people realize their full potential. This is especially apparent in children’s literature because of their road to maturity. Children’s literature has a short history, but since its independence from adult literature, it has undeniably shown its importance towards the development of children. Stories made for children have the responsibility to be interesting as well as educational and help children come to terms with their feelings, their role in their family and larger groups and introduce children to the diversities of modern society (Sutherland and Arbuthnot 7). Through literature and other forms of storytelling children at different stages of childhood can acquire the tools to deal with situations such as death of a loved one, frightening or demanding situations (Sutherland and Arbuthnot 20).

In modern fiction, the medium used for children is primarily picture books for the youngest age group, television series, animated films and finally full-fledged books, depending on the level of literacy and maturity of the child (Zanger 18). Modern fantasy is the form where the reader is shown how characters can be brave and noble and is a form where the characters would encounter magic and beasts and expand the reader’s horizon (Sutherland and Arbuthnot 54). Fantasy literature for children approaches potential problems that children might have to encounter, informing them on what is considered good and bad, as well as what is right and wrong (Hunt 185). This approach has become popular where topics such as fear, anxiety and social problems are tackled within a fantasy world. The stories can be set in the real world but have fictional creatures living amongst the humans. This is where vampire fiction comes into view.

The concept of vampires has been a part of society since before written accounts although the exact time of its conception is not known, the belief in creatures similar to vampires have a long history (Melton xiii). Through these accounts the vampire emerged a literary icon that is Bram Stoker’s Dracula in 1897. Stoker made a mark in history with his novel and created a vampire that became the stereotype for the modern perception of what a vampire should look like and behave (Skal Loc 40 of 5630). Another contribution to the image of vampires is Bela Lugosi’s portrayal of Count
Dracula in the 1931 film Dracula, which became the “standard against which all later vampires were judged.” (Melton 383).

Vampires are considered iconic within the horror genre in fantasy, but they are also a topic within children’s fantasy. In order to use a creature, that originally was meant to be frightening, the creators of such stories have to change and discard certain elements of the vampire in order to make a story suitable for children and make it have a purpose. Such stories, like all children’s literature, have the aim to be interesting and educational while using potentially horrifying elements. The educational aim of vampires in children’s fantasy can be to inspire bravery and that it is alright to be different. However, teen and young adult vampire fiction goes deeper in confronting the emotional needs of the reader or the audience, it focuses on romance as well as relationship between a vampire and a human, usually a human girl that has low self-esteem or some other issues that the vampire helps alleviate, this is evident in the teen series Twilight (2005-2008). In children’s vampire fantasy stories the human is usually a boy that is experiencing an adventure, filled with excitement and sometimes scary moments.

The use of fear, frightening scenes and humor is important in children’s vampire fiction and much like fairy tales, it has to have a happy ending. An important quality of children’s fantasy is to make it easy for the audience to identify with the characters and the story even though it contains creatures and fantastic elements that are not present in the real world. This is often done with the protagonist being a child or a short person and the presence of adults is either very little or none at all (Hunt 12).

The works chosen for this essay are vampire stories for children. The first story is the picture book written and illustrated by Joann Sfar Little Vampire Goes to School (1999) is an example of a book for very young readers containing various elements of the stereotypical vampire and also some frightening scenes that are followed with comedy. The second story is Andrea Sommer- Bodenburg’s The Little Vampire (1979), which is a book with little illustrations, complex text and is suitable for children that have learned to read or have an adult reading for them. The Little Vampire makes slight adjustments to the appearance of vampires but otherwise stays true to the iconic vampire image of Bram Stoker’s Dracula. The third story is another form of storytelling, it the animated film Hotel Transylvania (2012). As is often with both books
and popular media, it is the parent’s responsibility to evaluate if the child is mature enough to handle the story. The film *Hotel Transylvania* makes the connection to Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* fairly obvious, such as the main characters name, and his appearance, the similarities in the two books and the film will be discussed later in the essay. Horror is not considered to be suitable for children and therefore the stories discussed in this essay all treat the elements from *Dracula*, which are meant to be horrifying, with humor or dismissal. They share the stereotypical characteristics of the iconic appearance of the vampire seen in Bram Stoker’s novel *Dracula* and Bela Lugosi’s portrayal of the character from the novel. This essay will focus on identifying what vampire fantasy is within children’s literature is and what elements from Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* are included and changed to suit the age group.
Children’s literature
Children’s literature has a short history, in the seventeenth and even eighteenth century very few children could read and therefore there were no books directly written for them. However, because those children that could read were reading stories intended for adults such as Robinson Crusoe and Gulliver’s Travels became known as a part of literary history for children (Sutherland and Arbuthnot 6). It was not until the twentieth century that children’s literature began to make a mark on the academic and publishing world, most children learned how to read and were in desperate need of books suitable for their level of literacy (Sutherland and Arbuthnot 7).

Children’s literature is a complex form that requires much from both the writer and the reader. It has the responsibility to its readers to meet the requirements set forth by society, introduce children to desired moral standards, educational as well as entertaining:

It is arguably impossible for a children’s book (especially one being read by a child) not to be educational or influential in some way; it cannot help but reflect an ideology and, by extension, didacticism. (Hunt 3)

Children’s books thus become complicated in nature because they have to cater to the educational needs as well as to the psychological needs of a child which is an aspect that other age groups in literature do not have to worry about (Hunt 4). Children’s books put emphasis on action rather than reflection (Hunt 12). It is more important to show how a character handles different situations in a way that the reader can identify with, rather than reflecting on what possibly should be done, which is possible because the central characters are more likely to be children or generally shorter, much like the readers themselves (Hunt 12). All these aspects must be confronted in children’s literature which makes the process of writing such stories complicated and challenging because they are written in most cases by adults trying to write from the child’s perspective (Hunt 14). The complexity of themes is depending on the level of literacy and maturity, either read by an adult to the child or the child reads to themselves. Authors contributing to this age group have the demanding job of catering both to an adult as well as a child (Hunt 13). This is often seen when there are scenes in a book that appeals more to the adult than the child, where the joke or reference is directed to a reader that has a higher literacy level and experience. These aspects almost always go unnoticed by
the child who is reading, because the maturity levels of a child and an adult are so different (Hunt 3). The levels of literacy and maturity develop as the child grows up, the literary material becomes more complicated and more suited for the emotional needs of the person reading the story (Norton 5).

Emotional responses are inevitable when reading a good book. A part of growing up to be an adult is to experience many difficulties and challenges in order to learn to express feelings, empathy for others, develop feelings of self-worth and self-esteem which includes overcoming fear and anxiety (Norton 14). All human beings inevitably experience times of doubt, sadness and fear and through literature these feelings can be addressed (Norton 15). Therefore, personality and emotional development can be seen through literature, children learn to understand their feelings, compassion and understanding their fears (Norton 17). The idea of children learning from the experiences of others, even though it is just from a character in a book, plays a crucial role in a child’s development (Norton 17). He or she becomes aware of his or her emotional maturity and learns that he or she is not the only one who feels that way. There are many different genres within literature and fantasy is one of the tools to help children realize their potential, as well as fulfilling their need for excitement and entertainment.

**Fantasy and vampires**

Fantasy can be described as using a mental representation of things not actually present in order for readers to understand and judge the world he or she lives in and perhaps form a judgment on where the world might be heading (Le Guin 12). This means that fantasy handles aspects found in history, the society and personal in order to make sense of and perhaps predict how the future will be.

Fantasy can approach topics such as good and evil, and death because it can turn it on its head and change the rules (Hunt 167). Furthermore, the genre makes the point of exploring the topic of growth of the character and the world the story takes place in (Hunt 180). The special qualities of fantasy is the use of the mythical, folkloric or completely new type of creatures, things that do not exist in the real world, but contains topics that can happen in real life, thus making it easier to approach topics that otherwise would not be suitable for children (Sutherland and Arbuthnot 226).
Fantasy for children explores moral and psychological elements in order to help readers learn how to function in his or her own reality. As children grow up within the literary world they demand more complex texts that make them feel fear, anxiety, excitement and happiness.

**Fear and humor**

Fear is an emotion that has intrigued the human race and for some people it is the most sought after emotion when reading a book or watching a film. Children, teens and adults will always want to explore their boundaries of fear with the use of literature and films. The use of horror to invoke fear is an entire genre of itself within fantasy and in the world of children’s fiction though this element is handled in a different way, it has a purpose. Some children are drawn to the supernatural because of the excitement of reading or watching something that invokes fear but in children’s literature and films, the purpose of fear is to show when a character in a story is tested against his own fears and emerges stronger, and maybe the reader will as well (Bharat 305).

Vampire fiction for children has the ability to help them overcome unconscious feelings of anxiety and personal fears. When authors use a mixture of fear and humor it makes the child want to know what happens next in the story as well as laugh at the misfortunes of the characters (Bharat 305). Both fear and humor are essential aspects of children’s fiction and provide a good balance of emotional responses and keep the child interested.

Stories that make the reader feel afraid might suggest that even though it has a scary concept or actions the reader knows it will all end well. It is considered important that stories intended for children end on a positive note, and they experience a sense of closure, this is crucial in fiction for children because of potential horror elements (Nikolajeva 103).

**Happily ever after**

Most people think of fairy tales and children’s stories when considering the concept of a happy ending. This has been a popular aspect of stories meant for children throughout history, and will continue to be so. There are two kinds of endings, both of which have to be present to create a concrete happily ever after ending, the structural closure, where the plot is resolved, and the psychological closure “bringing the protagonist’s personal
conflicts into balance” (Nikolajeva 102). In children’s literature these often go together to form a happy ending. By providing a happy ending in a book or film, the fear becomes smaller and the child might actually feel better about itself (Bharat 305). It is very important to have a happy ending in children’s fiction, if it is not present, there would not be any solution to the particular problem and might confirm the child’s fear and even magnify it (Bharat 305). In fairy tales, the good always conquers the evil in the end. Because of that knowledge, the reader or viewer can fight trolls and other monsters right beside the hero of the story (Gestsdóttir 31). With the knowledge that the hero will triumph, the reader finds even more courage and wants to fight alongside the hero, knowing that everything will be fine in the end. This is in connection with literature that is intended for older children that have the ability to identify with the characters and put themselves in the character’s shoes (Bharat 316).

If the outcome of a fictional work has a happy ending, where the story succeeds in making a defining, positive ending the child experiences a sense of accomplishment, as if the child has triumphed over evil and not just the characters in the story (Nikolajeva 103). In modern literature and films for children it has become increasingly popular to have an almost closed ending, where the obstacles in the particular book are resolved but it has a bigger obstacle that the character has to confront in the next book (Butler 225). This is evident in J.K. Rowling’s series Harry Potter (1997-2007). In that series, the protagonist, Harry Potter, fights the antagonist, Voldemort, throughout the series achieving small victories and shows signs of personal growth at the end of each book, it is not until the final book where the full closure takes place (Butler 225).

In vampire fiction for children the happy ending, the closure and psychological ending is important in order to leave the reader with that sense of accomplishment, an educational and moral message. When this ending is present the author can use whatever kind of monster or creature in the story without leaving the child afraid. In fantasy for children the use of vampires is popular and the image set forth in modern vampire fiction for children takes multiple characteristics from Bram Stoker’s Dracula and the iconic cinematic role of Bela Lugosi in 1931 Dracula.

The Image of Dracula in Bram Stoker’s novel and in films
Bram Stoker’s Dracula was published in 1897 and is the most famous vampire within its genre, David J. Skal argues in his book Hollywood Gothic: The Tangled Web of
Dracula from Novel to Stage and Screen that today Stoker’s Dracula is so well known that people know what the story is about, even if they have not read it (Skal Loc 30 of 5630)

The first description of the Transylvanian Count in Dracula is early in the novel, Johnathan Harker sees Dracula, he describes Dracula in his journal entry as “a tall old man, clean shaven save for a long white moustache, and clad in black from head to foot, without a single speck of colour about him anywhere.” (Stoker 17). Harker continues his description of Dracula´s appearance and recalls that his mouth was “fixed and rather cruel-looking, with peculiarly sharp white teeth; these protruded over the lips.” (Stoker 20). Dracula’s nails were long and sharp and his hands were cold to the touch, like a dead man (Stoker 20). Later in the novel Harker sees Dracula asleep in his box when trying to escape the castle, horrified, he describes his encounter thus:

There lay the Count, but looking as if his youth had been half renewed, for the white hair and moustache were changed to dark iron-grey; the cheeks were fuller, and the white skin seemed ruby-red underneath; the mouth was redder than ever, for on the lips were gouts of fresh blood, which trickled from the corners of the mouth and ran over the chin and neck. (Stoker 57)

Dracula’s appearance keeps changing throughout the novel, from an old man that might be considered harmless to a cold man with piercing red eyes, black hair and blood red lips.

The physical appearance of Dracula discussed in the section above has in mostly survived into modern vampire fiction and is considered to be the stereotypical appearance of vampires. The image set forth by Bram Stoker has been adapted into plays and films too many times to count, since it’s publication 1897. In films, it was the movie, starring Bela Lugosi, Dracula that set the stage for the typical vampire appearance (Melton 19). There he has an Eastern European accent, which is consistent with the origin of Dracula in Bram Stoker’s novel, where his native land and castle is situated in Transylvania (Melton 610). In the film Dracula, Bela Lugosi has black hair, which is slicked back and pale, white skin. However, he is missing the white moustache and the large canine teeth which were not included until the release of Horror of Dracula in 1958 where Christopher Lee appears with fangs (Melton 20). The fangs are
considered essential in modern vampire fantasy and appear in most new stories about vampires.

The reason why vampires in children’s fantasy draw their inspiration from Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* could be in order to show vampires in a simple manner, recognizable and familiar, the iconic wardrobe that Bela Lugosi made famous has become the stereotypical view of how a vampire should dress, apparent in Halloween costumes, where people dress up as a vampire (Skal Loc 3479 of 5630).

Bram Stoker was not shy in admitting to have borrowed elements originating in folklore from Eastern-Europe in the development of the novel *Dracula*. However, some of the elements and characteristics of the vampire were Stoker’s own imagination, appearing to him in a dream (Skal Loc 404 of 5630). Considering the description of the famous vampire Dracula and the extent of his exposure in literature, films and theaters, it evident that the image of Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* as well as Bela Lugosi’s portrayal of the character extends into children’s vampire fiction.

**The Little Vampire**

*The Little Vampire* is a children’s book written in 1979 by Angela Sommer-Bodenburg. The story follows a nine year old boy called Tony that becomes friends with a vampire called Rudolph Sackville-Bagg. Throughout the story Tony experiences and learns many things about vampires and although he tries to explain to his parents that vampires are real, they never believe him, they think he has a really active imagination.

Tony is a child that has great imagination and watches scary movies, reads books about Frankenstein and becomes fascinated with vampires when he meets one. He seems to like the feeling of fear, but only when it is in the fictional world. When Rudolph first visits and Tony is very afraid, he is standing in the hallway in the dark imagining what the noise in the other room might be, his first instinct is that there is a real world threat of someone breaking in:

> Terrible pictures appeared before his eyes, pictures of men with stocking masks, knives, and guns who broke into empty flats at night to steal, and who would allow no one to stand in their way. (Sommer-Bodenburg Loc 40 of 1386)

He does not consider the possibility of some creature visiting him and becomes extremely afraid when he sees Rudolph the little vampire for the first time. At first Tony
is afraid because of all he has read and seen in movies about vampires. There prior view of vampires come into his mind when Tony first encounters Rudolph, he sees him in the window behind the curtains and his reactions and observations are:

A Thing was sitting watching him. Tony thought he would faint with horror. Two small, bloodshot eyes gleamed at him from a deathly pale face framed by tangled hair, which hung in tendrils down to a grubby, black cloak. The figure opened and closed its gaping mouth, grinding its teeth in a most terrifying manner, and Tony noticed that these teeth were extremely white, and pointed like daggers. (Sommer-Bodenburg Loc 51 of 1386)

Tony has the opportunity to overcome his fear, pushing his boundaries more and more with each encounter with the vampires. As the description above indicates Tony is truly frightened and as the story progresses Tony is faced with other challenges that are very frightening. Each and every challenge Tony rises to the occasion and finds that his imagination gets the best of him.

The connection to Bram Stoker´s Dracula is obvious like many other children´s vampire stories. What is similar to the image set forth by Bram Stoker and Bela Lugosi to the story The Little Vampire are the black capes that the vampires wear, white skin, red lips and coffins. The main difference is that in Sommer-Bodenburg´s book the vampires are described as filthy, their clothes are tattered and have holes in them. A certain smell follows them everywhere they go and their hair is messy, although, black it is not combed or smooth like Dracula has in Bram Stoker´s Dracula. The reason for their bad odor is explained as a result of never being able to air out their coffins and the fact that they live in a vault in the cemetery (Sommer-Bodenburg Loc 985 of 1386). Another difference is that the vampires in The Little Vampire do their best to hide their existence to the outside world and do not show a sign of nobility or class while Dracula is a sophisticated aristocratic figure. Another connection to Dracula is the Nightwatchman, Mr. McRookery, he can be seen as a reference to Van Helsing because of his knowledge of the existence of vampires as well as him being an expert in the means of protection against vampires and method of killing them.

The main theme of the book is the fear of the unknown and realizing that it is possible to be afraid and still be able to be brave. Another theme is friendship, being
able to make friends with a person that is different and accepting their differences. The book has a defining ending where Tony goes to bed content with his encounters and achievements while interacting with the vampires in the story (Sommer-Bodenburg Loc 1348 of 1386).

The novel deals with scenarios that can be frightening for really young readers and so it could be recommended for children at the age of seven to eleven. However, there are novels containing vampires published that are suited for children much younger.

*Little Vampire Goes to School*

Joann Sfar’s book *Little Vampire Goes to School* is a story that is suited for very young children, containing no frightening scenes and is primarily a picture book with little text.

The book follows a little vampire through the happiness of getting permission to go to school until ultimately the disappointment of realizing that children go to school during the day and not the night. The little vampire likes nothing more than to go to school and be like all the other children “his own age” (Sfar 3). His mother allows him to go but makes him promise to be back before dawn (Sfar 3). Even though the story is centered on the little vampire and Michael, and how the vampire finds pleasure in doing Michaels homework every night, the educational element for the reader is that you should not rely on anyone else to do your homework or chores, and should finish it before doing anything else. This can be seen in a larger context by saying that as a functioning person in society you have to be willing to do the work in order to make time for what you desire and find amusing. Although the book is directed towards children it tackles important topics such as death, being different and the importance of doing homework.

In the story Michael is really scared of the little vampire when he meets him the first time but soon learns there is nothing to be afraid of. Later in the story Michael is summoned to the castle to meet the Captain and he is frightened of all the other monsters there, ghosts, zombies and The Captain himself. Michael soon conquers his fears when getting to know the creatures and seeing that they are not that much different from him. Throughout the book there is a clear use of potentially frightening scenes accompanied by funny remarks and actions. This is a clear technique in children’s
fiction to help them realize that there is nothing to be afraid of and ultimately a happily ever after moment in the end. Fear of the unknown and unfamiliar is a theme throughout the story and the ability to see past differences. The reader gets the feeling that although somebody is different, it does not mean they cannot be friends.

The monsters and creatures in the book live in seclusion, they do not interact with humans and when the Captain of the dead finds out that the little vampire has been interacting with a human he explains his fear of people knowing about them and the fear of their reactions, “they would tear down our old house and we would have to move again” (Sfar 14). The reader might interpret this as a reverse fear, as vampire fantasy has been described it happens in a world similar to the readers but with fictional creatures and topics are often shown in reverse. Such as the monsters are more afraid of the humans than the humans of them. This indicates, the monsters have a community of their own and hiding from the rest of the world. Only to be proven wrong in doing so, at least towards one human, Michael. He accepts the monsters for being fun and starts seeing that they are not that much more different.

Since the book is a picture book directed at children of young age, the overall appearance of the vampires in the story is simple. The little vampire is wearing a black cape, white face and red lips, it is similar to the appearance of the iconic image of Dracula in Bram Stoker’s Dracula, but friendlier. The Captain of the dead describes the benefits and abilities of vampires perfectly in the book:

> Vampires are free as the wind. They can fly; they can turn themselves into rats, wolves, or bats; they can even bite little girls till they bleed, without ever getting into trouble with their parents. (Sfar 2)

This is the only time in the book that blood is mentioned and the topic of feeding is not addressed in more detail than this possibly due to the age of the target audience.

The theme of friendship, acceptance and overcoming fears can be traced through most of children’s literature containing vampires and it can even be found in television series and films for children.

**Hotel Transylvania**

Another form of storytelling for children is through animated films. Although children read books, it has become popular amongst children to watch movies or television
shows. With this form of storytelling the viewer has the chance to focus on the story while it provides visual images. During the last few decades the topic of vampires has become increasingly popular amongst all ages and it still contains clear references to *Dracula* in all forms, literary, cinematic or television, especially for children.

*Hotel Transylvania* is an animated film, the title is a clear reference to *Dracula* where Dracula’s castle is said to be located (Stoker 2). Another element such as the name of the character is the same in both works is also a clear reference to Bram Stoker’s novel. Dracula builds a hotel for all the monsters that seek a vacation from their normal lives and freedom from the persecutions of humans. The monsters are depicted as being terrified of the humans and their only wish is to live separate from them in peace. The fear of persecution and the monsters base their fears of humans that all humans must be the same and react the same. Towards the end of the film the monsters have to go through a town full of people and although fearing their reactions, the humans accept the monsters as they are and are treated as rock stars.

In the film, Dracula has a daughter called Mavis, who is a young vampire that desires nothing more than to “Zing” with someone, which is to fall in love just like her father did when he met her mother. She also desires to explore the world but Dracula tries to keep her in the castle, hopefully forever. As a father, he has a hard time at letting her grow up. It is when a human backpacker called Johnny accidentally finds the hotel that the story begins. Dracula has to dress him up as a monster and conceal him from the other monsters because he is afraid of what they might do if the y found a human in the hotel:

Johnny: Are these monsters going to kill me
Dracula: Not as long as they think you are a monster
Johnny: huh… That’s kinda racist (Baynham and Smigel)

This tackles the topic of the fear of someone that is not like them, the opinion that the monsters have of humans is fear and in a sense racist. They like Johnny while they think he is one of them, but when they find out that he is not a monster, they panic at first and are full of hatred. Dracula predicts how the other monsters would react to a human in the hotel because of his initial fear of humans but soon discovers they are not that different from them. Dracula and the other monsters overcome their fears of humans by the end of the film.
Another factor of Dracula’s fear is what Mavis might want to do if she finds out that not all humans are terrible, murderous and violent creatures. She would want to go away to explore the world. There is a scene in the film where Dracula allows Mavis to go to a nearby village on her birthday to see how humans really are, she does not know that he has built the village and makes zombies dress up as humans. There they threaten to burn her, decapitate her and try to repel her by sticking garlic bread in front of her (Hotel Transylvania). The scene shows how far Dracula is willing to go to keep Mavis at home in the castle and his inability to realize that she is a grown vampire that has the right to experience the world. In the context of the real world, this can be a problem that every parent has to deal with, trying to protect his child from potential harm that it might experience, but through a child perspective he can be seen as unfair and overprotective. This is a layered message that can both be beneficial for the child as well as the parent watching the film.

A number of scenes in the film use the classical mixture of humor and fear. Throughout the film, whenever Dracula shows his anger, his face turns fire red, his fangs are more visible than usual and the focus is on the loud sound around him as well as fire. This is always followed by a comic remark or action to help children get over the previous outburst of anger that might have frightened them. These might be too frightening for very young children as they are likely to not understand the humorous scene following.

Hotel Transylvania is no exception from the stereotypical appearance of the vampires where Dracula shares Bela Lugosi’s portrayal of Dracula with the black cape, black hair, the white skin and the foreign accent. In both films Dracula is seen as an aristocratic figure that is very sophisticated in both language and appearance. He is seen as very clean, his clothes are perfectly stylish in the fashion suited for the “real” Dracula. Even though the image of vampires in children’s fantasy seems to be borrowed from Bram Stoker’s Dracula and Bela Lugosi’s portrayal of the first literary vampire, it is interesting how other aspects and characteristics of the original vampire has survived into modern vampire fiction. Many characteristics that contribute to the horror element of Dracula are even present in children’s vampire fiction.
Characteristics and core elements in selected sources derived from Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*

Children watch and read vampire fiction for entertainment and the popularity of vampires seems to be a constant in the world of fantasy. The world of fantasy for children is made to be obvious, comic as well as simple references and relatable characters. In order to keep children interested in fantasy, authors have resorted to using popular horror figures from adult fiction, such as vampires, in children’s fiction.

There are many elements and abilities that are derived from Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* other than just the appearance and are considered to be the cornerstone of how vampires are perceived in modern fiction. These elements are even present in vampire fiction for children such as coffins, hypnosis, transforming into animals and blood. These elements and more will be discussed in the following chapters.

**Coffins**

Modern vampire fiction claims that vampires sleep in coffins and folkloric accounts say that vampires were discovered in their graves, their bodies well preserved and the ground around the grave disturbed (Barber 113). However, the use of coffins for vampires did not originate from folklore because the use of coffins was mostly reserved for people of wealth, and most people prior to the nineteenth century were not buried in coffins (Melton 106). Stoker mentions no coffins in his novel *Dracula* only described as boxes, but describes Dracula sleeping on native soil which he transports with him when travelling. (Melton 107). Coffins are the logical choice of resting place for the undead because when they were buried they were put to rest in a coffin, the idea is that they are in turn bound to that same resting place and have to sleep there during the day (Melton 430).

The modern idea of vampires resting in coffins originates from Bela Lugosi’s movie *Dracula*, showing that the vampire is dead and the coffin filled with dirt (Melton 107). *Hotel Transylvania* shows that Dracula sleeps in a coffin but Mavis has a normal bedroom with a bed even though she is a vampire as well, however, the bed is in the shape of a coffin.

This is an important element in the book *The Little Vampire* where all the Sackville-Bagg family all sleep in the same vault in the cemetery, each in separate coffins (Sommer-Bodenburg Loc 358 of 1386). The coffins and the vault are the source
of their bad odor, because of their inability to provide fresh air in the vault, and they cannot take the coffins outside to air them out. This is a humorous way to explain why the Sackville-Bagg vampires are so filthy instead of being more like Dracula, as well as showing that years of persecution from humans has made them resort to living in cemeteries in hiding.

Even though coffins seem to be an important aspect of vampires and a central element in most vampire stories, it is not so in the book Little Vampire Goes to School, where it is not mentioned at all. The little vampire is never seen sleeping, and his room is never depicted or described in the book. Perhaps the idea is the same as in Stephenie Meyer’s Twilight (2005), where the explanation is that vampires do not sleep, and they avoid sunlight.

**Sunlight**
In modern vampire fiction, vampires are nocturnal beings that do not go out during the day, but this has not always been the case. In folklore, vampires could walk in the sun and lead almost normal lives (Melton 592). Bram Stoker’s Dracula provides the information that the vampire is able to be out during the day but his powers are reduced, making it more vulnerable to attacks (Melton 593).

*Hotel Transylvania* tackles the element of sunlight numerous times throughout the film, not in the sense that vampires would die but they merely get bad sunburns. Which is evident when Dracula goes after Johnny in the end of the film to stop him from leaving and he experiences sunburns in his efforts to fly after the plane to get him back. He still has his vampire powers, he can transform into a bat and perform hypnosis. The film explains the result of vampires exposed to sunlight but not all stories explain this element.

Day and night is an issue in *The Little Vampire* for both the vampires and Tony. The vampires do not go out in the sun, and they stay in their coffins until the sun sets. The topic is obvious throughout the novel and Tony attempts to explain to his parents that his new friend sleeps during the day and can only play at night. It is not mentioned what will happen to the vampires if they go out in the sun, but presumably, because of accuracy of other elements connected to folklore in this story, it is safe to assume that their reaction to sunlight would be death.
Little Vampire Goes to School shows the nocturnal element by mentioning that the little vampire is not being able to attend school during the day but the author does not specify what would happen if he were to go outside in the sun. Since this is a picture book meant for young children it is not relevant to go into detail about certain things, such as how vampires die. The little vampire and the other monsters are essentially all good and friendly so it is not important to the overall story to confront the topic of vampire weaknesses like the other stories, even though it would be done with humor.

These three core stories including Dracula show in different ways that the sun can harm vampires and restrict their abilities. That is not the only thing that is believed to be able to harm them and keep them away.

Garlic
A form of protection from vampires is the use of garlic. This element is derived from folklore as many other elements that Stoker adapted to his novel (Barber 114). In Stoker’s Dracula, it is shown through the character Van Helsing, who is a vampire hunter by trade. Garlic is a tool to keep vampires away in Dracula, most apparent when Van Helsing decorates Lucy’s room with garlic and makes a wreath for her to wear while sleeping. John is puzzled with Van Helsing’s action and says

Well, Professor, I know you always have a reason for what you do, but this certainly puzzles me. It is well we have no sceptic here, or he would say that you were working some spell to keep out an evil spirit. (Stoker 146)

Van Helsing’s reaction to this is that it is indeed what he is trying to do (Stoker 146).

The use of garlic as a means of protection is common knowledge in today’s literary and cinematic society. In the book The Little Vampire the Nightwatchman, Mr. McRookery, is the guardian of the cemetery and knows of the existence of vampires. He chews on garlic to prevent the vampires from drinking his blood and keeps the vampires away from him. The intended purpose of garlic in this story is similar to the use of it in Dracula. The film, Hotel Transylvania, mentions this element twice, the first time when Mavis visits the village nearby the hotel and is attacked by zombies disguised as humans, they shove garlic bread towards her as a mean to repel her. The second time is when Johnny asks Dracula what the deal is with garlic and is told that it does not keep vampires away, although Dracula hates garlic but only because it makes his throat swell
up and he does not like the taste of it, this showing the use of humor. Through the use of humor it is evident that elements that were meant to be horrifying for adults are made to be funny and/or not essential in children’s fiction.

**Hypnotic powers**

Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* introduced the power of hypnosis to the concept of vampires and it has become an essential part of powers in modern vampire fiction (Melton 315). In the novel the ability is most apparent when Dracula manipulates Lucy while she sleeps, making her sleepwalk to meet him and feeds on her. She becomes very weak and frightened of the situation. As the novel progresses Lucy becomes increasingly weak and anemic making her more acceptable to manipulation. This is because the bond between the vampire and victim becomes stronger after the first bite and makes it easier for the vampire to use the power of hypnosis (Melton 315). There is only one scene in Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* where the power of hypnosis is used on a person that is awake and that is when Harker tries to kill Dracula with a shovel but Harker becomes paralyzed by the intense hypnotic stare of Dracula (Stoker 58). In other cases the victim has to be asleep as is seen in the case of Lucy.

Although hypnosis in vampire fiction can be considered a horror element it can even be seen in vampire fiction for children. However, not all vampire stories for children have this element and it is most noticeable in animated films of recent years such as *Hotel Transylvania*. There it depicts this ability in a humorous way when Dracula goes after Johnny in the end of the film after ordering him to leave. He uses his ability of mind control in order to make the pilot of the plane tell Johnny that he is sorry for making him leave, in addition, Dracula tells Johnny he was wrong about everything and wants to bring him back to the castle. In modern vampire fiction, the vampire only has to look into the eyes of its victim and tell them what they want done or forgotten (Melton 316). Dracula does so to the pilot, but when he tries this on Johnny it fails because Johnny is wearing contact lenses, serving as a sort of protection from the vampire.

Vampires have many different abilities and the power of hypnosis is considered to be the one that came directly from Bram Stoker (Melton 316). It became an essential power of vampires in modern fiction, however in children’s fiction it is not essential to convey such an ability. The vampire’s ability of hypnosis is not present in *The Little*
*Vampire* or *Little Vampire Goes to School* which might be due to the age the readers and their level of maturity. Most children find it interesting that vampires can transform into other animals, the ability to become something else, and it is an element that is very present in all the vampire stories discussed in this essay.

**Transformation and control of animals**
Vampires are believed to be able to transform their appearance into many different forms as well as command the animals around them (Melton 16). The most popular form of transformation for vampires is a bat, wolves and dogs, but vampires are also known to be able to transform into a mist or dust clouds (Melton 609).

In Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* the connection to animals becomes apparent early in the novel and that was especially his power to control wolves. Dracula is often seen in the form of a bat and during his travels to England aboard the ship he escapes in the form of a dog (Melton 16). The ability of transformation is also present in *The Little Vampire* where the vampires transform into bats when visiting Tony in his bedroom on the sixth floor of the house. Tony remarks that they are large moths, but is corrected with Rudolph explaining that they appear to be moths but are in fact just small bats due to their young age (Sommer-Bodenburg Loc 297 of 1386). The film *Hotel Transylvania* shows this particular power numerous times, most often when Mavis and Dracula turn themselves into bats. In *Little Vampire Goes to School* the little vampire does not transform himself into a bat, but the ability to do so is mentioned by the Captain of the Dead when he is pointing out the advantages of being a vampire (Sfar 2). Instead of transforming he is seen flying in his vampire form, he also has a pet dog called Phantomat that can fly and speak.

All three stories contain an element of animals to some degree, they show the connection to the vampire being an animal themselves and can control as well as communicate with other animals. This element suggests that the vampire itself is an animal, with animalistic urges and that it’s feeding habits and preferred diet is important.

**Blood and feeding**
Blood is essential when discussing vampires, even in children’s fantasy. The concept of blood and feeding is complex and the relationship between the vampire and blood
consumption has many different meanings. In Bram Stoker’s Dracula the consumption of blood is a source of life, and Dracula becomes younger and stronger as he feeds (Stoker 58). As Reinfield remarks in the novel “The Blood is the Life” (Stoker 158).

The Little Vampire is a children’s book and is not appropriate to address the subject of blood in a serious way but the book makes fun of the element and implies that vampires drink human blood. The topic is confronted by fragmented sentences and plays with the notion that it is common knowledge that vampires feed on the blood of humans. This is seen early on in the book where Tony meets Rudolph for the first time, Rudolph makes the joke about feeding on Tony’s parents and asks “Aha. Now let’s see. Is your father a healthy fellow? Would his blood be … er, tasty?” (Sommer-Bodenburg Loc 65 of 1386). Another example is when the youngest vampire Anna says to Tony that no one looks after them and “My family are either all asleep in their coffins or out and … well, you know all about that.” (Sommer-Bodenburg Loc 848 of 1386). Since these are vampires that are children their development and nutritional needs are not the same as for the adult vampires, Anna is on a strict diet, drinking only milk, because her fangs have not come down yet (Sommer-Bodenburg Loc 641 of 1386). And they are supposed to keep away from sweets because it is like poison for vampires (Sommer Bodenburg Loc 75 of 1386). This is an educational element in this story because children that read this story are supposed to choose milk instead of soda and stay away from sugar because it is not good for them.

Hotel Transylvania approaches the topic of feeding and blood in a humorous way just like the other stories, Johnny asks Dracula if he drinks human blood but he answers with disgust that human blood is too rich of fat and they drink only substitute or synthetic blood. This means that although they drink blood it is not in the form of directly hurting a human in order to feed and might be tackled in such a way so the subject can be dealt with harmlessly and without going into too much details.

The picture book Little Vampire Goes to School mentions blood and biting just at the beginning where the Captain of the Dead is describing the benefits of being a vampire and that vampires can bite little girls until they bleed without getting into trouble (Sfar 2). This remark is somewhat more serious, describing how vampires can bite humans without getting into trouble, indicating that vampires do drink blood and it
is their source of life. However, it is not mentioned again and the little vampire is never seen consuming blood.

While this could indicate that by decreasing the horror element in children´s fiction the creators still can use the topic of blood and transform it into an educational element concerning diet for children as well as relying on the common knowledge of vampires to avoid going into too much detail.

**How to kill a vampire**

Another element that has become a common knowledge within the literary world are various ways to kill a vampire. In Bram Stoker´s *Dracula*, the method of killing vampires is to attack it between noon and sunset because vampires are supposed to be at their weakest state. Van Helsing and company travel to Dracula´s castle in a mission to kill him, right before sunset they manage to kill Dracula with a knife through the heart (Stoker 605). This is a slight adjustment from folklore because it always had to be a wooden stake through the heart, decapitation, burning of the body or all of the above (Barber 114).

Even in children´s literature and films the topic of how to kill a vampire is addressed to some degree. It is either just hinted at the notion that vampires can be killed or the topic is dealt with humor and dismissal. Sommer-Bodenburg´s *The Little Vampire* does venture a bit further with the topic than most children´s stories by revealing the notion that vampires can be killed with a stake through the heart. Rudolph explains this fact to Tony when telling him about the Nightwatchman in the cemetery who is hunting the vampires and had put a wooden stake through the heart of his uncle Theodore (Sommer-Bodenburg Loc 336 of 1386).

The picture book *Little Vampire Goes to School* tackles the topic of death but not how to kill vampires. Michael is an orphan and through the adventure of meeting the little vampire he learns to accept that his life is not as bad as he thought and receives advice from the Captain of the Dead concerning belief. The Captain says to Michael: “You should think about all that some more. Sad times often open miraculous doorways.” (Sfar 22). The Captain advises Michael to not be quick to not believe in God even though his parents are dead, to which Michael replies “Well maybe he exists, Captain, but after what he did to me, I don´t feel like I owe him anything.” (Sfar 22). To the vampire and other monsters living in the castle the most harm that a human can do
to them is to force them to leave, so there is no talk about killing the monsters only the sadness that would follow if they would have to find another home (Sfar 13). In *Hotel Transylvania* Johnny asks Dracula if a wooden stake through the heart would kill vampires and Dracula answers “Yeah well who would not die from that.” (Baynham and Smigel) The element of fire is also the prime method of killing a vampire and is briefly mentioned in the film when Dracula is remembering how his wife died at the hands of humans when they burned down the castle.

With all these elements and more making up the concept of vampires it is still a question if it is really appropriate to make vampire stories for children. There is always a reason and purpose when creating a good children´s book or films, the quality can vary but the stories that are in question in this essay all have a purpose, whether they are educational, entertaining or to give its reader a sense of power.

**What is the main objective of vampire fiction for children?**

Historical and folkloric elements are very typical for the basic idea and characteristics of the vampire, especially *Dracula*. They go almost always unnoticed by the children in literature and film but they help them form their idea of what a vampire would look, sound and be like if it were real. However, mostly the use of monsters makes the child be intrigued and has their attention throughout the film. The references, to how a vampire can be killed, hurt or how they feed is addressed with subtle and funny scenes, but are essentially there for the parent’s amusement (Hunt 12).

Fantasy for children is mainly created to help children be interested in reading and learning, help them cope with difficult emotions, feelings and situations. Characters and stories have to be relatable for children even though the setting of the story is in a world that is completely different from theirs where they can fly, change themselves into something else and meet magical or scary creatures (Norton 294). The imagination and creativity helps children grow and their ability to relate to a character, see that everyone is different and unique is an important aspect of fantasy.

The moral message of fiction for children can be that everyone has fears but it is possible to overcome those fears, that everyone desires to be accepted and learn tolerance towards others that are different from them (Melton xxv). The three stories explore this element by showing that vampires are also afraid of humans and have a pre-existing notion of how humans behave.
Conclusion
Children’s literature is a genre that is young. It took a long time for children’s literature to acquire its academic reputation that it has today and when it did it bloomed into an industry that produces and publishes many stories each year. But the reasons why it took such a long time for it to be acknowledged are simple, in the seventeenth and eighteenth century, literacy amongst children was low, as the centuries went on literacy grew and the need for literature aimed at children was great. Children’s literature has a complicated formula, and it is expected to meet certain needs in the development of children, psychological and social. It has the responsibility to be entertaining as well as educational, and fantasy is a form that meets these needs and offers many different fantastical beings, a variety of monsters such as vampires.

Fantasy is the most popular genre amongst children, offering them an escape and fun characters. A world similar to the real world, with creatures and other creations are set in situations that the child might find educational and might be able to relate to the emotions depicted by the character. The use of frightening scenes and humor is very present in children’s vampire fiction as well as the use of a happy ending, like fairy tales. The origin of vampires in literature considered to be Bram Stoker’s Dracula, published in 1897.

The image of Dracula as Stoker describes in his novel and Bela Lugosi’s portrayal of the character in the film Dracula, is in its essence used in children’s vampire fiction, either exactly the same or with slight adjustments. His black hair, white skin, formal evening attire and the cape are all imagery that is imprinted in the minds of men, women, and children. Dracula is shown to be an aristocratic figure that has the charisma and mysteriousness to make the impression of importance. He is not always depicted in such a light but in the children’s vampire stories chosen for this essay share remarkable similarities to both the image and characteristics set forth in the novel Dracula and Bela Lugosi’s appearance.

Vampire fiction in children’s literature has been present for decades and will not be disappearing any time soon, much like vampire fiction for adults. The long running popularity is shown by the stories chosen in this essay, ranging from 1979 until 2012. The Little Vampire was published in 1979. Little Vampire that Goes to School published in 1999 and then finally the film Hotel Transylvania which came to theaters in 2012.
The image of vampires, in these stories, show that children’s vampire fiction uses Bram Stoker’s creation and that Bela Lugosi made a mark in the literary and cinematic world with his portrayal of Dracula.

Besides the image of the vampire, how he looks and behaves, there are other elements that have made the characteristics of vampires as they are known in modern vampire fiction. These are even present in children’s vampire fiction, and include how sunlight affects vampires, forms of protection such as garlic, how the subject of blood and feeding is tackled in children’s vampire fiction, the transformation into other animals and even how to kill a vampire. All these elements are derived from Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*, showing that the novel made an impact that will not disappear any time soon.

The purpose of vampire fiction for children is in its essence to arouse interest in literature and literary icons by having the main character be a human encountering a mystical creature such as vampires. All three stories have a human boy, meeting a vampire and initially being afraid of the creature because of their pre-existing notion of how vampires behave, but ultimately find that vampires are harmless creatures that just want a normal life. The objective is to show the reader that even though you think you know everything about something it does not mean it is that way.

The image derived from Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* is present in the three works of children’s vampire fiction as well as some of its characteristics. This shows that Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* is still relevant in vampire fiction and that the elements that originally were meant to be the source of horror can be changed and approached differently in order to make it more suitable for children.

This essay is an attempt to show the elements of the novel *Dracula* and point out those elements that are present in all three stories as well as indicate that Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* and Bela Lugosi’s iconic portrayal of the title character provided the stereotypical image and characteristics of the vampire that everyone is familiar with.


