

# MONSTER AS A SUPERHERO: AN ESSAY ON VAMPIRE VOGUE IN CONTEMPORARY FILM CULTURE

LEJLA PANJETA\*

## **Abstract**

The worldwide popular series *Twilight* is the mixed genre phenomenon in literature, media and cinema. After monstrous cinema interpretations of vampires, Edward Cullen becomes a vampire that women fall in love with. Narrative draws on the legend of vampires as well as on the fairy tales archetype of the love between The Lady and the Beast. Sexual connotation in the stories of vampires are not new, but the global identification of the audience with the main characters in the romantic-horror plot in this series needs to be analyzed through the evolution of the vampire genre and psychology related issues. The popularity of this series and blossoming hybrid genre is related to the artificial catharsis and fulfillment of the market demand. Contemporary audience demands “to be special” and these profitable narratives are the fulfilled promise to the audience.

**Keywords:** vampire legends, teen vampire genre, abstinence narrative, vampires in cinema, catharsis.

## INTRODUCTION: ROMANTIC MONSTER OXYMORON

“And so the lion fell in love with a lamb... What a stupid lamb... What a sick, masochistic lion”.<sup>1</sup> One of the omens from the *Book of Revelation* that the world as we know it will come to an end is described when the lamb lies down with the lion. The story of *Twilight* categorized as teen vampire romance genre is the apocalypse of opposite genres: romance and horror. The horror genre as we know it and the romance genre have reached the point where their elements need to be combined together in order to survive the market demand of a consuming audience that desires more catharsis induced by adrenalin and romance ecstasy.<sup>2</sup>

Judging on the gained profit, this planetary popular series is a phenomenon of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Over 17 million copies of *Twilight Saga* have been sold and translated into 37 languages. A graphic novel has been issued, and the first three books of the series have been made into movies. According to the box office reports from the American and international market, the movie *Twilight*<sup>3</sup> made approximately 400 million dollars,<sup>4</sup> *New Moon*<sup>5</sup> over 700 million dollars,<sup>6</sup> *Eclipse*<sup>7</sup> 700 million dollars,<sup>8</sup> and *Breaking Dawn I*<sup>9</sup> over 700 million dollars.<sup>10</sup>

---

\* Lejla Panjeta, Ph.D., is an Associate Professor at the International University of Sarajevo, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Visual Arts and Communication Design. E-mail address: panjeta.lejla@bih.net.ba.

<sup>1</sup> Stephenie Meyer, *Twilight*, Vol. 1, London: Atom, 2006, p. 240.

<sup>2</sup> On this matter, see also Lejla Panjeta, “Popularni kinematografski vampirizam”, *Hrvatski filmski ljetopis*, No. 69, 2012.

<sup>3</sup> Director: Catherine Hardwicke. Release year: 2008.

<sup>4</sup> See “Box Office Mojo: Twilight”, <http://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=twilight08.htm>; last consulted in December 2011.

<sup>5</sup> Director: Chris Weitz. Release year: 2009.

<sup>6</sup> See “Box Office Mojo: New Moon”, at <http://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=newmoon.htm>; last consulted in December 2011.

<sup>7</sup> Director: David Slade. Release year: 2010.

<sup>8</sup> See “Box Office Mojo: Eclipse”, at <http://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=eclipse.htm>; last consulted in December 2011.

<sup>9</sup> Director: Bill Condon. Release year: 2011.

<sup>10</sup> See “Box Office Mojo: Breaking Dawn I”, at <http://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=breakingdawn.htm>; last consulted in December 2011.

Legions of ‘vampire intoxicated’ teenage girls are more than willing to sign a deal with the devil. This obsession with vampirism has culminated on red carpets; once the main character that portrays Edward appears, his fans ask to be bitten.<sup>11</sup> That this is the apocalypse of values and common sense, argues the fact that the teen fans fantasize about having sex with a vampire, but are flabbergasted by the fact that the main character smokes cigarettes in private life.<sup>12</sup> The phenomenon of this market explosion and consumers response to it has to be analyzed beginning with the vampire-love oxymoron based story.

After a hideous monster film *Nosferatu* (F.W. Murnau, 1922), an intimidating *Dracula* (T. Browning) from 1931 starring Bela Lugosi and a haunting 1958 *Dracula* (T. Fisher) performed by Christopher Lee, the vampires became beautiful and compelling in the 1990’s. The audience at the turn of the century feels compassion for vampires, e.g. the characters of Brad Pitt and Tom Cruise in *Interview with the Vampire* (N. Jordan, 1994), of Gary Oldman in *Dracula* (F.F. Coppola, 1992), or vampires and werewolves in *Underworld* (L. Wiseman, 2003). The main *Twilight* vampire, Edward Cullen, even becomes a character that women and teens all over the world fall in love with. How does a monster from folklore and legends become the lover boy rightfully compared to Mr. Darcy or Romeo?



Fig. 1 – Max Schreck in *Nosferatu, eine Symphonie des Grauens* (1922).



Fig. 2 – Bela Lugosi in *Dracula* (1931).



Fig. 3 – Brad Pitt and Tom Cruise in *Interview with the Vampire* (1994).

<sup>11</sup> Janet Mock, *Young Fan Asks Twilight Star Robert Pattinson to 'Bite Me'*, published on *People's* website, November 10, 2008, <<http://www.people.com/people/article/0,,20239273,00.html>>; last consulted in April 2010.

<sup>12</sup> Elena Gorgan, *Robert Pattinson Criticized for Glamorizing Smoking*, April 8, 2009, available at: <<http://news.softpedia.com/news/Robert-Pattinson-Criticized-for-Glamorizing-Smoking-108949.shtml>>; last consulted in April 2010.

*Twilight* is a love story between Bella, a 17-year-old girl who moves to a small town, and the most mysterious boy from her new school, Edward Cullen. While an average girl is falling in love with an extraordinary boy, he is trying not to kill her, because his extraordinariness is a curse – he is a vampire. This eternal love story of hormone induced passion is focused on the most desirable man in the world whose existence is impossible, because he is not human, but a vampire.

Edward is the embodiment of impossible love: the first love which causes suffering, pleasure, and makes one crazy. He is a fictional perfection, made of archetypal patterns, whose features are stolen from all attention-worthy men in literature, visual arts and film. He looks like Michelangelo's David, acts like Mr. Darcy, and suffers like Heathcliff. He is as passionate as Romeo and drives like Michael Schumacher. He has no romantic history. His every action, motivation and goals are in line with his temper and are intensified by his inner justifications in an extensive biography of a 17-year-old human and over 80 years of vampire existence. He is an experienced, strong, gracious, witty, smart, funny, ironic, educated, gentle, protective, caring, well mannered, polite man. His senses (sight, smell, hearing and touch) are unnaturally well developed and give him the characteristics of a superhero. Speed, strength, indestructibility, and mind reading are his powers. He is excellent in literature, music, cars and understands human characters well. He drives fast cars, plays piano, and wears modern and expensive clothes. He is dangerous, rebellious, mysterious and unreachable. He is tall, has a perfect body, a beautifully shaped nose, full lips, and a beautiful velvet-like voice. How could someone this perfect be among the living?



Fig. 3 – Kristen Stewart as Bella and Robert Pattinson as Edward in *Twilight* (2008).

The first part of the *Twilight Saga* combined with *Midnight Sun*<sup>13</sup> creates a character that is among the leading male vampires in literature. His silent suffering over the (non)life he lives changes with the emotion he feels towards his prey. His greatest obstacle is the thirst for human blood, which makes this urge and his motivations the tool for the development of his character as well as the construction of a love story between a 'lion and a lamb'. Fighting the monster within, Edward falls in love with a little, fragile and clumsy creature he once wanted to eat. Every sexual act could end with death, and this creates drama tension. The metaphor of forbidden love becomes an allegory for an abstinence story with high moral and/or religions reflections, created by the Mormon beliefs of the writer. Where is the genesis for the connection between death and eroticism in this modern high school immortal legend that became a popular phenomenon?

---

<sup>13</sup> Unfinished manuscript where the author Stephenie Meyers retells the story of *Twilight* from Edward's perspective. See *Midnight Sun* at <<http://www.stepheniemeyer.com/midnightsun.html>>; last consulted in June 2011.

## ORIGINS OF BLOOD LUST AND SEXUAL CONNOTATION

The etymology of the word *vampire* is still unclear, but the notion of those who return back from the grave is of Slavic origin, not Romanian.<sup>14</sup> In Illyrian *dhamp* means teeth, and *pire* means 'to drink'. Vampire studies are relying on the etymology done by Wilson<sup>15</sup> where four theories on the origins of the word are considered. One of them states that the word vampire originates from Turkish *uber* (witch), the other one connects it to the Greek verb that explains the notion of drinking. The third theory states that vampire originates in Serbian *bamiip*, which is just the word *vampire* written in Cyrillic letters and does not explain the etymology. The fourth theory originates from Hungarian, but has the same misinterpretation as the third one. It seems that Illyrian language might offer some explanations to the linguistic research, since that language has been in use in Serbia and other South Slavic territories where the first cases of vampirism have been reported. Transylvania left the legacy of the best novel on vampires, but the one of the first real cases of reported vampire staking happened in Serbia.

The first archived case of vampirism, published in an English newspaper in 1723, occurred in the vicinity of Belgrade.<sup>16</sup> The story of the undead immortals appears in almost all the cultures of the world, either as part of folklore tales or as an art form of gothic legacy. Turning into a bat or a wolf, sleeping in a coffin, harmed by garlic and crosses, killed by sunlight or by a stake driven through the heart, pale and beautiful or having horribly disfigured features such as nose, ears, eyes or nails, sparkling eyes, super sight/hearing/speed, long fangs, all of these are variable characteristic. What is common for all these stories is the instinct for human blood and a heart that does not beat. Blood is the essence of life. Creatures not made of flesh and blood are considered damned. Food, water, and air are not essential in keeping their bodies alive. Their undead existence is preserved by consuming other lives.

In Greek mythology the warlock Asclepiads brings the dead to life by Medusa's blood.<sup>17</sup> A bat drinks blood of others so that its blood cells would survive.<sup>18</sup> It is so with some human diseases such as leukemia and syphilis, that is, with diseases where blood changes so that in order to preserve one's blood, a transfusion from other one's is needed. The first cinematographic vampire, Murnau's Count Orlok, is connected to plague, a poisoned blood disease. His story is located in Bremen in 1838, at the time of the epidemic.

Although based on Stoker's plot, the changes of location and the element of plague were incorporated in the movie because the production company Prana Movie did not manage to acquire the rights to *Dracula*'s adaptation. In this movie version, Nosferatu brings to town the curse in a form of disease and death, which can only be broken by a virgin who is to be sacrificed willingly. The Undead Immortals can be released from eternal damnation only by taking blood willingly offered, not claimed by force. Lust and sex also make changes in blood through hormonal signals. It is only a woman who can release Stoker's *Dracula* from the spell, should she decide to offer her blood to him.

The blood is also drunk by creatures such as succubus (a female vampire who sexually abuses men) or incubus (a male vampire who sexually abuses and kills women), or other variations of south Slavic Mora from folklore stories, who attacks its victims in their sleep.<sup>19</sup> They correlate with the legend of Lilith. In this vampire story, the victim is not a woman. The legend is not of Christian, but of Old Testament's origin and is considered a Hebrew legend, although it is rooted in Mesopotamian sources, but also can be found in the Arabic mythology. She is the embodiment of an evil demon who brings death. According to classic Greek and Roman mythologies, Adam's first wife, being sexually unsatisfied, leaves him and becomes a demon that feeds on children and men.<sup>20</sup> From then on, she has been responsible for 'crib death'. It is still uncertain whether the word *lullaby* stems from her name, because the superstition about this goddess created a belief that by singing a lullaby before going to bed this demon could be driven away.

---

<sup>14</sup> See Theresa Cheung, *The Element Encyclopedia of Vampires: An A-Z of the Undead*, London: HarperCollins, 2009.

<sup>15</sup> Katharina M. Wilson, *The History of the Word 'Vampire'*, in *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 46, No. 4, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985, p. 577.

<sup>16</sup> Viktorija Faust, *Vampiri: Legenda koja ne umire*, Zagreb: Zagrebačka naklada, 1999, p. 10.

<sup>17</sup> Boro Djukanović, *Kultura, psihijatrija, psihologija*, Sarajevo: Akademija scenskih umjetnosti Sarajevo, 2002, p. 25.

<sup>18</sup> See Ali ibn Ebi Talib, *Šišmiš: O začudnoj stvorenosti šišmiša*, trans.: Mahmutčehajić, Rusmir and Mehmedalija Hadžić, Sarajevo: Kuća bosanska, 1996.

<sup>19</sup> See Charlotte Montague, *Vampires: From Dracula to Twilight – the Complete Guide to Vampire Mythology*, London: Sphere, Little, Brown, 2010, p. 189, and Boris Perić, *Vampir*, Zagreb: Naklada Ljevak, 2006.

<sup>20</sup> Nigel Suckling, *Book of the Vampire*, Surrey: Facts, Figures & Fun, AAPPL Ltd., 2008, p. 133–135.

Lilith sexually assaults men and drinks their blood. The legends of vampirism in the Balkans show that the south Slavic vampire possesses sexual implications in the form of Mora as a psychic vampire, but also blood drinking succubus and incubus.<sup>21</sup> Stories of women claiming that their pregnancies were caused by their dead husbands were archived. In those stories it was not unusual that men represented themselves as vampires during sexual intercourse with mortal women. Also, the origin of Dhampir as an offspring of a vampire and a human can be found in south Slavic legends.<sup>22</sup>

The very act of blood drinking has sexual connotation, as it is an interchange of vital forces. Love is stronger than death and may release even the darkest of beings, break the most terrible spells and bring back peace, faith and reconciliation with God, as it was described in Stoker's novel and explicitly emphasized in Coppola's movie. The predator and his prey, villain and victim, 'a sick lion and a stupid lamb' are strong archetypes dominated by psychological forces named by Greek gods, Eros and Thanatos. They create an incredibly high dramatic tension in works of fiction, because obstacles and differences of the characters are enormous. To experience simultaneously pain – loss (death) and satisfaction – exhilaration (orgasm) is nearly impossible. The possibility of experiencing such opposite emotions is enticing. In the story of the Undead, what seems incompatible will become compatible and united by love. Such contradictory powers that dominate human existence, when joined in a fictional story, result in an activation of predominantly cathartic hormones of fear and pleasure. This is the main feature of the legend about vampires, and its very essence conveys a strong religious message. It is love or Eros that redeems and offers eternal life. Although already immortal, through love the vampire will be rewarded and the curse to feed on human blood will be lifted.

### **EROS AND THANATOS – PASSION FOR LIFE AND FEAR OF DEATH**

The metaphor of forbidden, impossible love and sexual desire is not new in vampire stories. It is the basic narrative for literature and film throughout history about immortal murderers who feed on human blood. Literature and movies transplant elements and features of worldwide vampire narrative folklore legacy into basic horror genres. Vampire myth is first used as metaphor in Romantic literature and a vampire story is an "aberration of Romantic eroticism".<sup>23</sup> The sexual connotation (although deviated) was present in the vampire genre from the very beginning. One of the first themes of undead love can be traced to the poem *Lenore*, written by Gottfried Bürger in 1773, about a man coming back from the grave to bring his loved one with him to the realm of death. This theme further evolves in the story *The Vampyre* (1819) by John William Polidori, which appeared as a result of the author's literary night sessions with Lord Byron and Mary Shelley. His vampire, Lord Ruthven, is the first vampire with sexual characteristics in fiction. This monster, unlike the horrid creatures from the legends, has evolved in terms of sexuality, which makes him the object of fascination for cinematographers of all generations. Damnation, beauty, eternity, suffering and love are distinctive features in vampire stories. Damnation for sins committed in human life, which are transferred into the immortal life, is described in *Varney the Vampire* by James Malcolm Rymer, a serial novel appeared in the mid-1840s<sup>24</sup>. In this story, a vampire kills his son accidentally, and he would be atoning for his sins in life after life. One of the important female vampires appeared in 1872 in *Carmilla* by Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu. She possessed superpowers and was able to transform into other forms and shapes such as animals and fog.

The Slavic based vampire legend has been perfected in the best vampire movie narrative ever. It features Count Dracula and is associated with the Romanian Count Vlad Țepeș who was a true historic figure. The story about him (although only borrowing the name, and not relying on actual historical facts) combined with other stories coming from the Balkans about the living dead who feed on human blood was written by Stoker as a horror fantasy. The features of the narrative, such as the curse of a woman stalker that can be broken by the purity of her love, make it a fairytale of sorts, and yet historical circumstances and folklore origins give it the seriousness of horror. The story is closely referenced with religion and enemies of the cross. Having defended the Christian land from the Ottomans, the count returned home only to find his

---

<sup>21</sup> Viktoria Faust, *op. cit.*, p. 30–31.

<sup>22</sup> Theresa Cheung, *op. cit.*, p. 181.

<sup>23</sup> James B. Twitchell, *The Living Dead: A Study of the Vampire in Romantic Literature*, Durham: Duke University Press, 1981, p. 4.

<sup>24</sup> First published as a book in 1847.

wife dead. His beloved heard that he had died and jumped off a cliff into the river. He condemns God and renounces Christ whom thus far he served faithfully. That spoken curse leads him into an eternal damnation and condemnation to feed on human blood.

A tragic hero lost his faith and by cursing God he commits the deadliest of all deadly sins for which he is punished for eternity. Only love, the pillar of Christianity, can lift the curse. What is interesting is that suicide is one of the greatest Christian sins and yet the Western literature does not speak of it in the context of a moral story, but in a context of a glorified tragedy such as *Romeo and Juliet*. He who neglects God, both in his heart and through his words, will be condemned to eternal damnation, as in the case of the legend of Flying Dutchman or the Wandering Jew who refused to give water to Jesus on his Path to the Cross. The myth of the philosopher's stone, Goethe's Faustus selling his soul to the devil, or the biblical story of Lazarus addresses the eternal life from a completely different perspective. In these examples, the eternal life is the goal, not a curse. The need for a life after life, developed in the mind of the Neolithic man along with the custom of burying of the dead,<sup>25</sup> has been reshaped by monotheistic religions into a promise. The salvation of heaven after having been through hell on earth is a reward for true believers. On the one hand, life is a curse, and on the other, eternal life is a reward and a subconscious need of all human beings, although by cursing life the vampire is condemned to seek its vital force in the blood of the living. That act brings death to the living, but continues the life of the undead.

Instinct is a hereditary pattern activated in situations when species or individuals are endangered and must be protected. Libido is the energy aimed to trigger the survival instinct and preservation of species, and according to Freud consists of Eros and Thanatos. Eros aims to preserve the continuation of species, whereas Thanatos, as a death drive, is an instinct for the preservation of the individual, not the group. It is associated with destruction; general destruction that derives from the urge of self-preservation.<sup>26</sup> Eros in Greek, or Cupid in Roman mythology, stands for sexuality, love, delight and joy. The embodiment of Eros is in the hormones endorphin and serotonin that trigger emotional states of contentment and happiness. Thanatos is induced by adrenaline. The two are always tightly intertwined in a hormonal picture and one cannot be without the other. For Freudians, Eros and Thanatos are paired and in some occasions they mimic or substitute each other. Thanatos belongs to an inanimate world and all forms of life strive to go back to the original state.<sup>27</sup> Thanatos is the only Greek god for whom no sacrifices were made, as he is the genuine personification of Death. Undead creatures are an emanation of the interlinked powers of Thanatos and Eros, because they are closely tied to the god-like beauty and passion, as well as death and fear.

Human ego is equally driven by Eros and Thanatos through fear of the future, which is nothing else but fear of death. It is the main driving force of our ego and is part of every aspect of human life. A superfluous need to prove others wrong stems from the danger of destruction, that is, fear of death. Our power over others overcomes this fear. Yearning for an eternal life, as a symbol of the greatest power, means the victory of ego and Eros. At the same time, it represents the destruction of the known world and the victory of Thanatos. Death and sex perceived as pleasure of the flesh are symbols of suffering in religious themes in which allegories and metaphors are created to explain the power of punishment for humans who take the role of Almighty God in the matters of creation and destruction.

The vampire is a rebel who has refused to accept earthly rules. He defies the laws of nature. He is a tragic character and that is the reason why we sympathize with his curse, which is the product of Eros explosion. He is Death, staying alive by consuming life itself – human blood. In vampire stories Eros is connected to suffering and killing. Feelings of repulsion or fear and attraction are evoked together. No matter how bizarre, falling in love with the carrier of one's own death is an intensive interaction of Eros and Thanatos.

Eco analyzes Schiller's definition of "the terrible as attractive", because it is in our nature that pain and suffering of others are attractive to us. Strong compassion evokes the archetype of the one who is beautiful and who suffers. This contradiction is the emanation of Eros and Thanatos, because the life passion has become the passion for living death. Eco categorizes the vampire notion as "Beautiful and Damned"<sup>28</sup> and finds them to be disturbing. Fear creates a monster. Doubt creates agitation and emerges as something

---

<sup>25</sup> See H. W. Janson, *History of Art*, New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1969.

<sup>26</sup> Boro Djukanović, *op. cit.*, p. 269.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> See Umberto Eco, *Storia della bruttezza*, Bompiani, 2007.

inexplicable and contradictory.<sup>29</sup> The idea about vampirism belongs to the sphere of fantasy, but takes place in reality where there are no wonders, which is precisely why it is disturbing and causes fear. At the same time, the world of wonders, as Eco refers to phantasmagoric, where miracles and paranormal are considered normal, does not cause fear. To that world belong fairytales which are in fact disturbing, e.g. Snow White's ripped heart, the wolf's torn stomach in Little Red Riding Hood or Beauty in a coma. These situations and descriptions may cause repulsion, but not fear. The difference between monstrous and miraculous lies in the level of perception of reality.

The idea of vampire, based on South Slavic legends, has always been ingrained in the monstrous reality of historical circumstances as well as the very notion of blood drinking, but had also hints of sexual tensions. Fear and passion, love and dying, life and death were the opposite sides of an integral feature of vampire narrative. So fairytale-like love based in the hideous reality of blood drinking is not what makes the *Twilight* story new. Only the scenery is changed. It is not plagued Bremen or the Balkan woods, nor is it London at the turn of the century. It is a 21<sup>st</sup> century high school where Cinderella and The Beast are having sex without penetration, and doing so they make hormones of Eros and Thanatos interact for a new audience. The one who renounced Christ is a rebel against faith or society norms. By letting Eros influence his actions and fighting Thanatos he becomes the hero a teen can worship.



Fig. 5 – Scene from *The Twilight Saga: New Moon* (2009).

### MIXED GENRES – DEMAND OF THE AUDIENCE

Western cinema is showing signs of crisis and lack of originality. There are two dominant genres on the big screen: romance (which has a foothold in reality with elements of the comic or is placed in historical context) and horror (which is based on the supernatural circumstances with computer-generated action scenes). Classifying *Twilight* according to the classical genre theory seems pointless: it is a romantic fantasy about superheroes with elements of horror, fairy tales, action and comedy, aimed at younger audiences. Although the dominant figure of a vampire belongs to a horror subgenre (horror about monsters), the protagonist is a being with superpowers (a superhero). He has no tragic guilt (as defined by Aristotle), meaning that he didn't choose unconsciously or by destiny to become what he is. Supernatural characteristics, such as a super sense of hearing and sight, super speed and mindreading classify him as a superhero because he uses his characteristics to protect and rescue others.

---

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 311

Vampire figures belong to the genre of horror, whose goal is to intimidate and cause feelings of fear. Horror is a subgenre of fantasy, and criteria by which a movie is categorized as *horror* is the extreme amount of feelings of repulsion, disgust, violence, dramatic tension, fear, shock, and the like that are generated. Regarding this, there are two different feelings of fear: fear of the worldly disgusting things and supernatural fear of the hideous. The latter implies that the laws of nature must be disturbed and are often characterized as a dark fantasy. Stories about vampires fall into this dark fantasy or horror of monsters.

The genre of fantasy also integrates fairy tales, as oral folklore traditions, and before the establishment of the term 'fairy tales' they were named 'folk tales'.<sup>30</sup> The quantity of fear and the quality of deteriorated reality separate a fairy tale from horror. A dominant difference is the end of the story: a happy one (fairy tales) or an unhappy one (horror). According to Glass's keen observation<sup>31</sup> there are two kinds of stories: those in which all die and it is called tragedy, or those in which all get married and it's called comedy. This thought about genres shows that the horror and romance are by nature incompatible in a single genre.

However, their elements can intertwine until a mixed subgenre is produced. These mixed genres appear after the exhaustion of certain themes in classical genres. Altman designates the "genre as process"<sup>32</sup> and explains that mixed features of classical genres come from rebellion against Classicism: that was the characteristic of Romanticism as a movement and artistic and literature genre. "What we perceive as a mixture of pre-existing genres is often nothing less than the liquid lava of new genre still in the creation process".<sup>33</sup> Mixed genre is also a consequence of the postmodern thought and not a fad.

Defining classical and mixed genres as 'restricted genre' opposing 'free genre' which is determined by the level of changes in syntactic structure, Kane suggests that free genre can be altered by "borrowing syntactic elements from other genres".<sup>34</sup> He determines three cycles of vampire genres: Malignant (1931–1948), Erotic (1957–1985) and Sympathetic (1987–now).

Altman argues that movie genres are changeable. They evolve as "capitalist need for product differentiation".<sup>35</sup> So, screaming legions of teenagers willing to get bitten are consumers that must be served according to their demands for the fantastic and mysterious based on folk traditions, with mixed features of romantic plot starring a superhero in the sympathetic vampire genre cycle. At the end of 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries hybrid genres of fiction are a dominant hit. *Twilight* is an example of such combinations intended for mass audience.

Previous stories, e.g. *True Blood* – the television series inspired by Charlaine Harris's *Southern Vampire Mysteries*, of which the first was published in 2001 – have similar structure and character features that are present in 2006 *Twilight*. In terms of character and plot, the similarities to these and also to the bestselling series *Vampire Diaries* by L.J. Smith from 1991, cause the audience to question whether *Twilight* was in fact a 'knock-off'. The extreme success of the 'Twilight phenomenon' has generated the instant popularity of bestselling novel series: *Vampire Academy* by Richelle Mead, *House of Night* by P.C. Cast and Kristin Cast, *The Morganville Vampires* by Rachel Caine, *Evernight* by Claudia Grey, *The Immortals* by Alyson Noël, *Fallen* by Lauren Kate, *The Wolves of Mercy Falls* by Maggie Stiefvater, *Hush Hush* by Becca Fitzpatrick, *Immortal* by Gillian Shields, *Darke Academy* by Gabriella Poole, *Drake Chronicles* by Alyxandra Harvey, *The Mortal Instruments* by Cassandra Clare, etc. Many of these novels have become franchise products, as they are adapted to TV series or movies. The commercial market for *Twilight*-like stories is enormous and many series are filling this gap since the *Twilight Saga* is complete.

Horror, romance and the supernatural are the distinctive features of this blossoming hybrid genre. In each of these series, the central theme is a nonhuman mysterious boy with a secret (vampire, immortal, fallen angel, werewolf) and a damsel in distress. Trouble varies from death threats to hormonal teen problems. The boy's mystery consists in his wild nature, his extraordinary beauty and the struggle with his dark side. The girl's strength lies in being ordinary, average and easy to relate to. The romantic plot is formed based on the fascination and fear of the other (attractiveness to the unknown). This new mixed or free genre epitomizes

---

<sup>30</sup> Jack Zipes, *Breaking the Magic Spell: Radical Theories of Folk and Fairy Tales* (1979), 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Lexington, Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 2002, p. 2.

<sup>31</sup> Stephen Glass, *Fabulist*, Zagreb: Algoritam, 2005, p. 231.

<sup>32</sup> Rick Altman, *Film/Genre*, London: British Film Institute, Palgrave Macmillan, 1999, p. 54–62.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 143.

<sup>34</sup> Tim Kane, *The Changing Vampire of Film and Television: A Critical Study of the Growth of a Genre*, London: McFarland & Company, 2006, p. 132.

<sup>35</sup> Rick Altman, *op. cit.*, p. 64.

Eco's 'disturbing but attractive' feature of sympathetic vampire genre cycle. What does the increased demand for the mix of love and horror say about our society today?

### CONCLUSION: ARTIFICIAL CATHARSIS – TO BE SPECIAL

Love stories on the big screen have two endings. One is the domination of death, whose tragic end is tied to a drama. The other is the domination of comic elements or melodramatic obstacles that end with marriage, meaning 'happily ever after' (romantic comedy). The classical love stories in film (as a genre in which the relationship between characters and character development are most important) are no longer popular. Only in this hybrid genre, which combines fantasy elements with romance, love stories are reviving again. Love must be dead to be eternal. Mystery, superheroes, magic, occult, apocalyptic, supernatural, historically mystic are at the moment the most popular themes in the bestselling literature and the blockbuster movies.

In a time of great social and economic crisis and/or decline of moral values, the crime novels, horror stories or melodramas with heroes and superheroes who defy social chaos are the most popular. These stories offer escapism into the fantasy world and identification with something unusual in order to repress and forget about the true horror of reality. Our age is the age of unfulfilled promises, a race against time, and personal failure where one waits for something to begin. Through the technology today everything is available, revealed and unholy. But, unreachable and unexplored exist in the fiction world. Raised in the postmodern belief that we are special, now we see that everything is identically special and thus becomes usual. There is nothing worthy of wonderment and respect. Sex, available everywhere, finds fulfillment in supernatural circumstances. With technology and speed of communication that surround us, there are few artistically relevant things that will provide a real feeling of satisfaction and moral purification. Previously reserved for art and widely exploited by religion or spiritual movements, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century the catharsis for the common human being must be the combination of exciting and impossible. It is how drama, suspense and tension keep the audience's attention and provoke emotions of fear and pleasure. Like everything in our time, in which there is no time, catharsis does not offer real purification. Tools that 'create' a bestseller make it an artificial product. Hybrid genres are those that create the artificial cathartic emotion.

But, catharsis is the inevitable consequence by which we recognize the work of art as artistic and not a pure manifestation of craft. In the context of performing arts (Greek tragedy) the term was defined by Aristotle and implies moral and spiritual purification through emotions of pity and fear.<sup>36</sup> Hormones like dopamine (stimulation), serotonin (happiness), adrenaline (fear) and enzyme endorphin (pleasure) are activated during the catharsis. However the same hormone activation can be achieved even if the work is not art (e.g. bull fights, extreme sports, TV shows, mass market production of love and crime novels and entertainment movies, amusement parks, etc.).<sup>37</sup> The difference between artificial and genuine purification through catharsis can be compared to the drug induced feelings of happiness, and the natural secretion of dopamine that mother and baby experience after labor.

Tools for creating an artificial catharsis can be the teaser dramaturgy with dominant suspense, frightful situations and melodramatic turns. Today (after postmodernism) it is very difficult to achieve originality in fiction that will make audience have a real cathartic experience. The works of bestselling 'mystery-romance-horror-vampire-young adult' genre are a mix of already existing or copied classical genre elements. So, artificial catharsis can be an attribute of the hybrid genres that are satisfying 'mass market hormones'.

According to Aristotle catharsis consists of two psychological processes: identification and pity. "Identification is achieved through the one that is similar to us... and we feel compassion for those who suffer undeservedly".<sup>38</sup> When we are identifying with the situation or character the result is our fear for the outcome in the story. The drama tension between the human Bella and the vampire Edward in *Twilight* germinates these elements of the catharsis process.

---

<sup>36</sup> Aristotle, *Poetika: O pjesničkoj umjetnosti*, Beograd: Dereta, 2002, p. 76.

<sup>37</sup> Tvrtnko Kulenović, *Umjetnost i komunikacija*, Sarajevo Veselin Masleša, 1983, p. 14–15

<sup>38</sup> Aristotle, *op. cit.*, p. 76.

The distinctive common feature in these popular vampire stories of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is the ordinariness of the main character, which in some strange parallel world of fantasy is unusual and special. Describing herself, Bella says that she was good, but never the best student and not talented for art, music or athletics: “After eighteen years of mediocrity, I was pretty used to being average. I realized now that I’d long ago given up any aspirations of shining at anything. I just did the best with what I had, never quite fitting into my world”.<sup>39</sup> But, in the vampire world she has found her true place where she can shine and be special and preferred.

Being ‘special’ in another time and place since we are ‘ordinary’ in this world is the message that makes this narrative popular today. This is the appeal of *Harry Potter*, *Percy Jackson*, *Narnia*, and other similar bestselling stories. What separates the hybrid genre of *Twilight* from these children novels is the sexual passion, through which the message of eternal love and the redemption of the superhero monster are assured. During apocalyptic times this hybrid genre offers instant catharsis – ‘Three in One’: fear, pleasure, and escapism. ‘To Be Special’ in some other world is the core imperative of the artificial cathartic feeling in the oxymoronic vampire-romance genre.

---

<sup>39</sup> Stephenie Meyer, *Breaking Dawn*, London: Atom, 2008, p. 484.