

Introduction

Why is the vampire so popular? Why has the vampire been so often seemingly dead and so often revived in literature and drama? Tony Thorne in his study *Children of the Night: Of Vampires and Vampirism* (1999) is astonished to realize that, today, a survey of world cultural history reveals “the constant presence of a Vampire or vampire-like monster in our narratives—both grand and humble—and our popular culture.” He concludes that the creature survives by its “uncanny” ability to mutate into “whatever our society shuns, but secretly demands” (4). In our society, the vampire, much like its Eastern European and Greek folkloric antecedents, usually manifests itself as a dead human who rises from the grave and behaves as though he is living, more or less. My question is: what hidden void is modern Western society trying to fill with this fantasy? What is it trying to tell itself? What does it “secretly demand”?

In *Reading the Vampire* (1994), discussing Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* (1897), Ken Gelder says that “a veritable ‘academic industry’ has built itself around this novel” (65). He provides an extensive, though not exhaustive, review of differing critical interpretations of vampire literature from relatively early ethnographic studies of vampire folklore—like John Lawson’s comparison of Greek folklore and ancient Greek religion (1909)—to his own postmodern approach to recent vampire films. These lead him to conclude, like Thorne, that the vampire will not die for the reason that it is so “highly adaptable” that it can appeal to fundamental urges like desire and fear and respond to cultural and societal issues (141). And, we might add, because of its unique bipolarity—both human and supernatural, alive and dead—the vampire leads us to a larger consideration of the nature of the individual and his search for significance in a vast and terrifying universe.

Both folkloric and literary, ancient and modern vampires are various and difficult to sum up with a single set of characteristics. Folklore vampires are often mixed up in various ways with other supernatural beings, such as nereids, morae, witches, werewolves, and ghosts, so that observers are forced to make arbitrary choices as to what they will or will not classify as a *vampire*. We face the same problem today: for example, is Keats’s “Belle

Dame sans Merci” a vampire or a demon lover? Are the creatures in *Night of the Living Dead* (1968) zombies or vampires? I have chosen to include as vampires only those figures—folkloric, mythical, or literary—who are dead humans who are still capable of behaving as though they are alive. I will not consider creatures like various incubi and succubae or lamias or mindless, lurching zombies simply because they can take human form. Nor will I consider living humans who drink blood or avoid sunlight, no matter what they call themselves.

My discussion of folklore vampires will stick to those of Eastern Europe and the Mediterranean because they are the ones that have provided the “germ” for vampire literature and the modern mania for vampires in Western Europe and the Americas. Recognizing, too, that even modern literary vampires may vary in form and function from culture to culture, I will limit my focus primarily to those in England and America, with the aim of discovering what the vampire *does* for those who engage with it. What are vampires good for? What do the critics think? What do I think?

The Function of Vampires

Criticism of Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* explains its popularity through many theories going in various directions—psychological, Marxist, social, feminist, queer, Gothic, historical, and archetypal, to mention a few. Dracula is said to represent the tyranny of the patriarchy, the power of the corrupt aristocracy or of the nouveau bourgeois capitalists; he represents decadent foreigners, Slavs or Jews; he is a homosexual, a social outcast, even a mother; and he is dangerously erotic. Summaries of these and other interesting approaches to vampires occur in Ken Gelder’s *Reading the Vampire* cited earlier and in Milly Williamson’s *The Lure of the Vampire* (2005).¹ Many of these are convincing interpretations justifiable in the context of a complex, ambiguous, and multileveled work. Dracula, at least, fulfills more than one modern need.

A rather unfortunate approach, I believe, derives from those theories that interpret the works in terms of some sort of latent or repressed content that the writer was supposedly unaware of—and that appeals to the reader’s unconscious desires or fears. Many of these are psychoanalytic: the unconsciously sexual vampire appeals to our unconscious sexual urges or anxieties. There is indeed a good deal of sexuality in much vampire literature, often quite overt (although not necessarily explicit), beginning as early as Heinrich August Ossenfelder’s short poem “The Vampire” (1748) in which the vampire promises to “come creeping” to the young lady’s chamber and kiss her “life’s blood” away. One does not need psychology to find sexuality in a similar scene in James Malcolm Rymer’s² *Varney the Vampyre or The Feast of Blood* (1847), or

in modern movie vampires like Anne Rice's *Vampire Lestat* (1985). However, although the repressed sexuality explanation may fit many vampires, from Dracula to Buffy's Angel, it hardly explains the popularity of vampire toys, vampire jokes, vampire ballets, operas, breakfast cereals, cartoons, including good vampires, bad vampires, child, adult, male, female, geriatric vampires, vampires from space, from next door, dog and bunny vampires, psychological and psychic vampires, ugly, beautiful, happy, sad vampires, vampire punks, detectives, cab drivers, travel agents, artists and art collectors, even clergymen and obstreperous adolescents. Not *all* vampires are sexy.

But all vampires are living dead—and therefore supernatural and mythical. Because vampires survive across the impassable boundary, even the puniest of them have an aura of mystery and transcendence that, coming from the land of the dead, takes us beyond the mundane. When vampires *are* sexy, they are so because they are powerful, dangerous, and forbidden, and not the reverse, although their erotic attractiveness may be a lure into danger. True, in early stories like the anonymous "The Mysterious Stranger" (1860), the message seems to be to young ladies: Beware of infatuation with attractive strangers. This is the same moral we find in many modern serial killer movies. But, as with the serial killer, the danger itself is not forbidden or quirky sex, but death. If the killer enticed children with shiny toys, we would not say that the story was about shiny toys. Although there may be (intentional or not) a comment on the dangers of sexuality, as in ballads of the demon lover, the erotic vampire seducer may say more about the attractiveness of danger and death than about sex.

Possibly, vampires like Dracula allowed nineteenth-century writers and readers to explore (supposedly) forbidden topics while pretending to be frightened, but modern audiences certainly have no such need. Even on television commercials, we see tampons waved about and enthusiastic touting of products to cure male impotency. We see talk shows in which the guests tell about their lives as prostitutes, their incestuous abuse as children, and their strange plastic surgeries. We have nearly inescapable internet porn. What do we need vampires for? Yet they survive and even flourish, suggesting that they must offer something besides sex or even danger that is uniquely their own.

To take another example, even though Stoker's Dracula may be a foreigner in England, not all literary vampires incite a fear of foreigners or other outsiders.³ Not all vampires *are* foreigners. John Polidori's Lord Ruthven in his story "The Vampyre" (1819) is only a Scotsman; the English Varney the Vampyre and the Styrian Carmilla are not foreign within the context of their stories. For exotic nefariousness or even seductiveness, poor Varney, for example, seems so inadequate that one must look elsewhere to find the source of his popularity in the nineteenth century. This popularity must lie

in the fact that he is a living dead. For from folklore to modern films, if we take away the vampire's essential quality, its *undeadness*, the character becomes considerably less compelling. Imagine Dracula, for example, as nothing more than a seductive and insidious foreigner. On the other hand, imagine Dracula as entirely supernatural, a mere ghost with no bodily presence. In short, the fascination of the vampire lies in his being both human and supernatural. When the possibility for revival seems most hopeless (when it has been decapitated, ashed, drowned, and eaten by worms), it can still pop up again, as much a nuisance as ever, almost as good as new, and significantly, with its individual identity intact.

True, one appeal of certain vampires lies in their breaking of various cultural taboos and their warnings about assorted dangers to the community. But we can and do have sensuality, brutality, arrogance, selfishness, intolerance, insidious evil, and even aristocratic bad manners in many Gothic villains like Ann Radcliffe's Montoni in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) or Hannibal Lector in the film *Silence of the Lambs* (1991), who seem very much like vampires but lack the essential element that distinguishes the vampire—that of being living dead. To some critics, vampire literature offers a means to understand the world we live in and to formulate our own identities or sense of identity within this world. In *Terrors of Uncertainty: The Cultural Contexts of Horror Fiction* (1989), Joseph Gixti argues that, to some degree, horror fiction defines reality for us by providing models and modes of thinking that form a “component of our culturally determined intersubjectivity” (7). The vampire, for example, embodies (so to speak) our response to “the horrors of death and corruption as well as those of earthbound immortality” (14).

However, Gixti regards horror literature negatively, as an inadequate response to the fear and uncertainty in the modern world, which is assuaged by a form of magical, as opposed to realistic, thinking. He generally regards it as a harmful “game” we are enticed into by commercialized horror literature (148) that exacerbates our fears and anxieties by mythologizing them in the form of various superstitions and then “proffering magical solutions and soothing (if ostrich-like) cures for the horrifying and disturbing states which they invite us to consider” (176). That is, rather than regarding these fears as innate to humankind and merely expressed in fiction (from *Gilgamesh* to the present), he regards them as *created* by a greedy corporate hegemony for the purpose, apparently, of driving us into the magical safety zone of escapist fantasy and superstition also for sale by that hegemony (182–83).

His solution would be for us to reassert our sense of rational control. But death (real and inevitable death—so unfair) seems to be the very area of experience that stymies rational thought. Gixti's approach contains two mistakes, in my thinking, which I hope to avoid. First, like a number of other

critics, he assumes that whatever falls under the general rubric of “horror literature” (which is not so easy to define) is inevitably horrible and fearful to the reader or audience rather than, like most vampire literature, eerily and interestingly uncanny (or even funny). Second, he also apparently believes that the average reader has little self-awareness or sense of reality and is very easily led to respond to fantasies like the vampire with terror and anxiety rather than as a stimulus to speculation and understanding.

In contrast to Grixiti, I prefer to take the approach that most people—peasants and scholars—pretty much know what they think and believe. This position is argued by the sociologist Kathy Charmaz, in an essay in the third edition of *Death and Identity* (1994). She regards human beings “as reflective, creative, and active” (30), who have, Charmaz says, “selves and minds” (32). Through conscious interactions, they construct a (more or less) stable reality shared by a social community. Changes in this constructed world occur as a result of individual choices and influences, generally based on a “rational and pragmatic bias,” according to which “meaning is related to *utility* and to the *practical* aspects of experience” (34–35). A particular element of belief—about the meaning of death, for example—persists through cultural changes and diversions because it fulfills a significant function at least for some people (29). However, because individuals are free to make choices, we cannot expect everyone to think the same way. These choices will be reflected, for example, in the images by which they decide to represent death, as, say, an angel song, a violent struggle, or a vampire.

Writers like Nina Auerbach, Carol Senf, and Gregory A. Waller are concerned with how literary vampires, even Dracula, modify to reflect changing environmental circumstances and cultural assumptions, from the nineteenth century to the present. The vampire’s most human quality—its infinite adaptability to people, place, and time—is a major reason for its persistence. This, along with its very un-human and ambiguous position between the flesh and the spirit, its mysterious comings and goings, and its variable forms and faces, allows it to be continually revived in different guises in our differing worlds. But as diverse as they may be, from the bloated peasant of folklore to the opera-caped Dracula to the bratty *Lost Boys* (1987), vampires address issues and attitudes about death and immortality that are meaningful in all times and places. However much the contexts and ideologies of death may have been modified over the years, the fact of death remains the same, inevitable, irrevocable, and final.

Death, these days, however, is not often clearly constructed or even discussed. We do not see dying people interviewed on Oprah or cheered up by Dr. Phil. We do not see dying old people at all if we can help it. We do not see death explained. Advertisements for “funeral parlors” or “homes” come discreetly in the mail; the word *die* is replaced by the phrase “when

your time comes.” For many today, especially the young, the only place even to find out about death is in the movies and on television, where there is plenty of it, mostly of the violent and thus preventable kind—car crashes or serial killers, for example. Apparently, we do not *have* to die. Death always has causes that can be treated and cured if we just know how. Thus Elisabeth Kübler-Ross shocked America with her book *On Death and Dying* (1969, 1997) based on her conviction that the denial of death, the refusal to acknowledge its inevitability and even its actual occurrence in family and friends, is a commonplace of modern living.⁴

A different kind of denial was manifested in John Edwards’s weekly series *Crossing Over* (1999–2004) in which he supposedly communicated (in a very general way) with deceased relatives of audience members. In HBO television series like *Six Feet Under* (2001–2005), the dead appear as ghosts, asserting their continued existence somewhere and their continuing influence on the living as though they were not dead at all. Obviously, many people are fascinated with death, and almost everyone fears it, although most of us do not care to acknowledge it just yet. In the popular media, too, death is treated (when it is treated at all) either as a vague and mysterious existence in another world or as a horrifying and unfortunate mistake—one which, however, with healthy living, the right exercise, the right neighborhoods, or the right faith (sincerely held) might be avoided. We seldom admit that deaths, even among the very old, are unavoidable; someone must be to blame.

The vampire provides a fictitious and mythical focus for universal concerns about death and its reasons—as well as for a good deal of wishful thinking. In the first place, the vampire is often a bringer of death, even a personification of death itself—a mortal danger to the protagonists. And like the popular literature of natural catastrophes or serial killings, vampire stories and films offer means and methods by which this danger can be averted. More important, the vampire overcomes death and, in doing so, promises eternal life on a somewhat earthier and more comprehensible level than most religious faiths. It posits, at least, the *renewal* of life, very much like the archetypal dying god (very likely its remote ancestor). Possibly, it fulfills for some of its enthusiasts, on some level of consciousness, the role of this mythical figure, the vegetation deity, which dies and is reborn each year. Or it is itself a kind of goddess or god of the dead, or Death itself. As such, it is also the source of fecundity and new life, and its sexuality is that of the force that makes the dead nature bloom. Stoker’s *Dracula* and many others like it can be regarded as retellings of the Hades and Persephone story or other pagan myths of underworld gods. Whatever it is, the vampire has mythical significance as an in-between creature of this and the “other”

world, hinting to us that such a world might exist, for the very reason that the vampire refuses to go there. The vampire is popular because it will not die, and, however monstrous it may seem, unlike other monsters, it remains a human—who, by virtue of its immortality, becomes a god.

The primary effect of vampire literature is not to threaten readers with death, but to provide a symbolic and metaphorical means to apprehend, contemplate, and deal with death within the larger context of life. Dealing with death and the dead, moreover, involves thinking about the past. The literary vampire often comes out of an imaginary past more or less Gothic in nature, peopled with impressive mythical and supernatural figures, impossibly virtuous maidens, dauntless heroes, satanic villains, and fantastic monsters that we are familiar with from traditional stories, fairy tales, and Arthurian legends and that remain alive in the modern imagination. Because of this association and because popular Gothic literature found early expression in the Graveyard School of poetry, Gothic critics seem more likely than others to find in vampires various messages about death.

The Western vampire also has a tradition of its own that begins with folklore vampires of Greece and the Slavic countries. And in spite of seemingly vast differences (bloated peasant versus suave aristocrat), there is a surprising consistency in vampire behavior and function from these beginnings to the present. Folklore vampires provide important clues to understanding the meaning of vampires in modern popular literature. We are not, after all, so very far advanced from our own village origins of a few hundred years ago that we no longer need the comfort and solutions to life's mysteries that folklore and mythology provide. Nor, as we have noted, are our lives destitute of folklore figures, who survive and multiply in the myriads of fairies, ghosts, alien invaders, mad scientists, aerobic superheroes, and, recently, angelic visitants, and other denizens of the New Age that fill the media. The modern literary vampire—although superficially advanced from his folklore peasant origins—arose, one might say, and flourished along with many other rather unorthodox supernatural beings, that, if not the objects of firm belief, at least allow the mind to dwell on possibilities beyond those offered by conventional religion or rational empiricism.

Sources

Unfortunately, before the twentieth century, reliable accounts of vampire appearances from people who claim to have actually seen them or experienced their effects are very scarce. Most folk accounts are either old but well-crafted tales or second- or third-generation retellings of village traditions. This is the

case with the outburst of vampire activity in Eastern Europe in the eighteenth century that first aroused literary and scholarly—and theological—interest. Particularly, a lengthy report on this phenomenon by Augustine Calmet (1746)—a biblical scholar appointed to investigate its legitimacy—quickly became a best seller in Western European countries, primarily France, Germany, and England. This, along with other reports like that by Giuseppe Davanzati (1744), aroused interest in vampire folklore that—combined with appropriate mythical and literary figures, like Faust, Milton’s Satan, and the Byronic Hero—eventually gave birth to the modern literary vampire, which now has a mythology of its own. Calmet’s survey became a source for Romantic writers like Southey, Byron, and Stoker, and although many of his accounts are highly questionable, they provide considerable information about folk beliefs.

In addition, some Slavic and Greek villagers living until recently in isolated areas have preserved vampire folklore, which has thus been available for study in its own environment by modern folklorists and anthropologists aiming at some degree of objectivity. It is on their accounts that I have chosen to rely for the organizing principle and basis of my discussion, especially those who have gleaned their information from direct personal contact with the people they have studied. I have tried to avoid sources about folklore vampires that seem to be aimed primarily at creating sensational effects by tossing together all the “lore” they can come across, frequently citing questionable sources or none at all. This means I will be cautious in using *information* from the famous vampire expert Montague Summers, although I cannot resist commenting on his motives and influence.

Instead, in addition to Calmet, I have chosen to rely primarily on scholars like Jan Perkowski or Richard and Eva Blum, who show familiarity with the people and cultures that produced the vampire folklore we know, and who are objective enough to draw attention themselves to possible biases in their studies. For example, in *The Dangerous Hour: The Lore of Crisis and Mystery in Rural Greece* (1970), Blum and Blum recount the responses by Greek peasants and shepherds to a systematic survey designed to call up unusual or uncanny stories related to illness and death. Thus the responses may suggest a stronger role for these beliefs than actually exists (3–4). Gail Kligman’s study *The Wedding of the Dead: Ritual, Poetics, and Popular Culture in Transylvania* (1988) derives from her firsthand observations while living among the people of the isolated area of Maramures in northern Transylvania. Her analysis of rituals and laments from weddings and funerals may be colored by her own feminist dismay at the position of women in this male-dominated culture. But she has clearly endeavored to report their beliefs and practices accurately and sympathetically.

Persistence and Belief

Accuracy is important because I began my study trying to figure out what the belief in vampires *meant* for these villagers. What good did vampires do? The folkloric accounts support my conviction that human nature, human motives, and needs remain very much the same across time and across cultures. This is not to dispute that vampires or other folk or literary figures modify with the times. Twenty-first-century vampires are often quite different from their Victorian precursors—but also strikingly similar—and just as undead. My discussion focuses on the similarities, moving freely among vampires of various kinds, times, and places. I include folklore accounts of ordinary, relatively unsophisticated people in those communities where vampires, along with other supernatural beings, make up part of the general worldview, particularly in regard to ideas about death and immortality. I do not regard these views as “primitive” or wrong or superstitious or magical simply because they do not concur with our own. (And, after all, what could be more superstitious or magical than wearing a lucky hat or expecting Jesus to help us win the lottery?)

In any case, because there are always skeptics in any culture, I will not be concerned with whether or not all individuals actually *believe* in every element of this worldview. Blum and Blum, studying Greek folkloric beliefs related to death, found extremes of belief and unbelief even within one family. It will be enough that, in general, they conform to community values and practice. Vampires also appear, even in rural cultures, as characters in suspiciously literate and familiar fictions (oral or written) that are obviously not intended to be taken as true, although they may have some effect on the social reality as expressions of a popular mythology.⁵ Van Helsing’s famous conclusion to Deane and Balderston’s play *Dracula* (1927)—“remember that after all *there are such things*” (150)—may express the secret wish of many modern storytellers that their creations become real in the minds of their audience.⁶

And a few, like John Polidori and Bram Stoker, have had some success. Through them and other writers, vampires belong to a modern popular folklore that few will admit to believing but that has become part of a way of thinking about and ordering our vision of the world around us. Our modern vampires, too, fall into a rather loose popular mythology that offers meaning in those areas of life that are inadequately explained by more organized, institutionalized systems of science, psychology, or religion. For example, we may act as though black cats or broken mirrors can bring bad luck, or use the expression “an angel is passing over” to explain a pause in conversation, regardless of whether we actually believe this or not. This popular folklore comes to us not only through oral traditions (knocking on wood, crossing our

fingers, ghosts, the tooth fairy), but also in written and literary sources like children's stories and Disney films that include such figures as Santa Claus and Cinderella, Peter Pan, Superman, ET, Darth Vader, the Big Bad Wolf, and now Harry Potter. Even the highly educated and sophisticated among us share in this vast, various, and complex folklore that helps to form and determine contemporary attitudes, ideals, and behavior—sometimes, often covertly, in regard to death.

According to most reliable accounts, the original vampire folklore occurs almost entirely in connection with rituals and beliefs about death and the soul. These concerns are no less vital today than in the past. Science, for all its accomplishments and its success in prolonging the *average* life expectancy, has not extended the *possible* life span beyond what it has always been. Moreover, moderns share with the folk a healthy skepticism about the explanations and solutions offered by institutionalized religion concerning death—if not open skepticism, then a certain inner fear or reluctance to embrace the peace or paradise promised as the rewards of dying. Yet open speculation about death has often been taboo either because it might offend a powerful public opinion or religious institution or because it is too appalling to contemplate.

To sum up: Setting out to focus on the undeadness of the vampire, I thought it might be fruitful to start my research with a look at the folklore studies to find out, if I could, what meaning the vampire had for the folk. How did they come up with this idea anyway, and what good did it do them? In taking this approach, I was led to a number of assumptions: (1) that (almost) all human beings share the same needs and fears and hopes, modified, of course, by their particular culture and circumstances; (2) that these are revealed in their various cultural productions; (3) that all people, even we educated and sophisticated moderns (or postmoderns, for that matter) have a folklore, even though we might be incognizant or incredulous of it, which also fulfills some function; (4) that a particular folklore, such as vampire folklore, persists because it satisfies some need or answers some question for those who repeat it and who may even believe it. Thus, (5) the vampire as living dead belongs to and has meaning in the culture in which it appears, whether this is a Slavic village or the cities of modern America; and (6) this meaning lies in the one characteristic that persists through all its various manifestations—that it is a human that does not die.

From Them to Us

Like us, the folk whose lore produced the vampire were not necessarily concerned to develop a coherent system. Their stories and examples are full

of unaccountable inconsistencies and contradictions. Nor, apparently, did they specify or codify the relationships between vampires and other supernatural creatures. Moreover, vampire and similar folklore generally remains distinct from the accepted theology predominant in the area, whether Christian or Moslem, Roman Catholic, Orthodox, or Protestant. The folk know what they can tell the authorities and what they cannot—just as we do. They feel themselves under no obligation to regularize their beliefs into a consistent theology or even to write them all down in one place. Like those of the ancient Greeks, their beliefs may be diverse, contradictory, and chaotic—and still perfectly satisfactory to them. Thus, in discussing folk ritual and belief, I use the term *system* very loosely, to attempt to impose, from the outside, a kind of unity on a rather disorderly hodgepodge. In regard to modern folklore, we are no more consistent or rational than the Slavic peasant, no matter what we may tell ourselves. We all carry with us a whole array of literary and mythical figures that are part of our lives—that we refer to in everyday speech, tell stories about, try to emulate (the Western hero, for example), produce countless images of, and even include in our own rituals (Santa Claus, the Easter Bunny).

Folklore scholars like Blum and Blum argue that we should not study folklore only as an artifact of a lost culture that retains echoes and parallels in the present but should apply it to understanding our own ways of dealing with anxiety, misfortune, illness, and death. For “We too have our priests and healers, our magic and rituals, our omens and prophets, and our religions with their immortals and extraordinary dead” (376). But unlike the Greek peasant, we are ashamed of our superstitions or demonologies, or belief in magic. We must conceal our uncertainties and fears in order to maintain the pretense of rationality. Repressed, they become aberrant and perverse even leading to “fellowships of the irrational” like the many cults that have flourished in the twentieth century (377).

Although “our own irrationality is denied elevation to a dramatic folklore since few dare speak it and few dare listen,” it still exists, Blum and Blum argue, “inherent within our psychological structure, and clearly emergent in response to life stress” (377). After all, we cannot always control the world we live in or even our own lives. Our fears of sudden and catastrophic failure, sickness, suffering, disaster, and death and our inability even to comprehend their meaning cannot be alleviated by some sort of rational stoicism or insistence that this is “the best of all possible worlds.” Thus, many of “our cultural offerings” cater to these irrational but realistic fears and desires, even though in disguise or by purporting to counteract them (377–78). The modern literary vampire is one of those cultural offerings whose effect is pervasive and far-reaching through the network of imaginative and mythical experiences offered by the modern media.

What do vampires do in Greek folk culture? Vampires are people, citizens of a community, who, usually as the result of some failure in the complicated rituals surrounding burial and death, did not die but became living dead. These rituals are designed to protect and encourage the deceased while he is making the dangerous transition from the world of the living to the world of the dead. According to Loring M. Danforth (1982), the vampires help to bridge the chasm between life and death “by asserting that death is an integral part of life,” for the funeral rituals emphasize “the continuity and meaning of life itself” (6). To Danforth, the vampire is one element of a symbolic system that endeavors to reconcile the desire to deny death through belief in a transcendent other world and the “common-sense perspective” that forces us to accept it (32). The commonplace idea that the dead hear and sometimes communicate with us is simply an elaboration of this same need to find continuity between the worlds of the living and the dead.

Gail Kligman, too, in her discussion of Romanian death weddings, reminds us that, even today, death remains “the consummate vampire who thrives on the bodies and blood of humans” (247). In Romanian beliefs and rituals surrounding death and burial, the human, the material, and the spiritual worlds are interrelated in “a culturally comprehensible framework” that gives them meaning and a sense of control (247–48). The weddings of the dead, she says, bring together themes of desire and death that moderns must find other ways to express. One way is through art, as in the popular figure of Dracula—both sexy and dead. To Kligman, to consider the meaning of desire (sex) and death is actually to consider the meaning of life—a meaning that modern science does not provide for us (247). However silly it may sometimes seem, the folklore vampire is not merely an expression of fear or ignorance or lack of scientific knowledge. Neither is the modern popularity of the vampire simply an egocentric masturbatory fantasy of power and rape or cultural superiority or even just irrational wishful thinking. The vampire implies an effort to explain and deal with the quandaries of life and death, however ineffective it may sometimes seem.

In this study I propose to apply these insights about folklore vampires, so far as makes sense, to the vampire in the modern world to show how and why the vampire has become part of a kind of general, culturally approved and accepted mythology. My sources cover a rather broad range: (1) folklore and folklorists such as those cited earlier; (2) vampire literary works including novels, stories, films, and television series; (3) literary critics who have been concerned with similar issues; and (4) some social and historical studies that provide relevant background and insights into the culture that has produced and responded to the vampire figure.

Organization

Folklorists have attributed to the vampire an assortment of *functions* related to beliefs and practices about death. These I found could be grouped into four general areas that provide the overall outline of my discussion. I should make it clear that these are not separate kinds of vampires but functions that vampires—folk, literary, past, and present—fulfill or at least seem to try to fulfill. Few vampires can be pigeonholed under one label or another. I am concerned with general uses and meanings attributed to vampires by their context or their authors. In some cases, one vampire—like the ubiquitous Dracula, for example—might illustrate all four of these meanings or functions. And we will find him discussed in every section of the book along with others. In other cases, a vampire might illustrate one approach more thoroughly than others and will be discussed only once in relation to, say, its social function—that is, its social function in relation to death and immortality, and not, say, to child rearing or good manners.

Perhaps I should call these, not functions, but promises, illustrations, or solutions related to issues of death and immortality—or manifestations of various approaches we might take or meanings that we might attribute to death. It is possible to do so because of the vampire's double nature, both alive and dead. References to or warnings against vampires or other revenants no longer appear in the public contexts of funeral rituals or shared formulas of belief. But they persist nevertheless as expressions of our underlying anxieties and fears—but also hopes—about death and eternal life. In surveying vampire literature, I found that these areas of experience could fall into four categories: scientific, social, psychological, and religious.

(1) Scientific: The folklore vampire often provides a practical understanding of aspects of life that simply do not seem to have any reasonable explanation—that is, illness and death—and provides practical means of dealing with them. As a scientific phenomenon, vampires no longer fill an explanatory function in relation to death. This is provided by science—at least in a limited way: this death was caused by this virus. Yet the vampire's ability to overcome the virus or bullet or whatever, to prolong life—or life expectancy—has had great appeal for modern readers and writers. Vampires have inspired some scientific speculation for a kind of science fiction “what if” scenario of both wishful thinking and serious thought.

(2) Social: Even in the modern world, death has social and community ramifications that vampire lore addresses. In both folklore and in modern literature, the vampire's existence reinforces a sense of community identity and of historical continuity with the past. The folklore vampire is usually an undead *ancestor* or *relative* who insists on maintaining relationships, usually

unwanted, with the living. In modern literature, the vampire embodies the not-so-dead past, insisting on the interconnectedness, for better or worse, of our origins and our present selves. As a living representative of history, the vampire tells us that we are not alone, that our past is not gone, our dead have not disappeared.

(3) Psychological: Vampires and the beliefs surrounding them provide a means of exploring and possibly dealing with personal loss and acceptance of death. In regard to the death of the self and others, vampire-related folklore consoles and comforts the individual by directing personal attitudes and providing a source of relief from personal guilt and sorrow that often accompany the loss of a loved one. In doing so, vampires assert the persistence of the individual and the unique self into the afterlife. The vampire's rebellious assertion of personal identity—of Self—against society, nature, and God was one reason for its appeal to the Romantics (as they saw it) who handed it on to us.

(4) Religious: Perhaps most important, the vampire, by its supernatural origins and godlike powers and its frequent identification with Satan (and sometimes God), makes a religious statement. It raises questions about the meaning of the soul and the existence of an afterlife; about the nature and existence of a god and the relation of this god to the created world; and about the nature of evil and the power of a devil or devils. It carries about with it its own mysterious and divine aura that derives from its origins in gods of nature and the underworld. The last three chapters of the book explore the religious and mythical functions of vampires that explain their popularity, particularly in regard to the persistence of dualistic thinking, the promotion of Christian beliefs, and more important, the urgent human desire for immortality and transcendence. This is the longest discussion, including the final three chapters (chapters 4, 5, and 6).

The fourth chapter reviews the implications of the early literary vampires from the Romantics to Bram Stoker and Montague Summers in regard to their pagan origins and to established Christian and popular theologies. The fifth chapter focuses on “Christian vampires” (or “Vampires for Christ,” as I call them) in the twentieth century, whose stories promote a primarily dualistic version of Christianity. In the rage for order, for clear divisions and boundaries, this viewpoint entails a rather rigid division of the cosmos—and human nature—into spirit and body, dark and light, good and bad, angel or devil. Yet, whichever side they are on, these vampires speak for the immortality of the soul and the existence of an afterlife in more or less Christian terms.

And finally, the sixth chapter is concerned with the desire of much vampire literature to convey a sense of a transcendent reality, of religious awe and wonder, of sacredness—a sense of the numinous, as it has come to

be called—that accompanies the appearance of this supernatural figure out of the ancient past. For the vampire still trails behind him the aura of the ancient god of the dead that was very likely his predecessor. He is Death itself, Ruler of the Underworld, but also, like almost all gods of the underworld, a fertility deity, a giver of Life. He is beautiful, powerful, active. If nothing else, he brings a kind of glory (or at least attention) to death that rescues it from the anonymity and disgrace into which it has fallen in the modern world. In short, I am primarily concerned, in chapters 1 through 3, with what *our* vampires (as Nina Auerbach calls them) have to tell us about the practical science, sociology, and psychology of death—and finally, in the last three chapters, with what they imply about the meaning of death in the universal order.