

Lauren Shafer

Professor Julia Combs

ENGL 1010-19

4 February 2013

Classical Monsters and Glittery Youngsters

It's raining outside, and the power is out. Holed up in bed, you notice the floorboards creaking outside the door. Snuggling deeper down into the blankets and ignoring the sounds, you write them off as paranoia. The doorknob turns, the door slowly squeaks open, and footsteps echo faintly, crossing the threshold. Shivers run down your spine, and you sense it: the dark monster from your darkest nightmares. Throughout the years of human existence, people have created stories of mythical creatures, or for those who believe, *real* monsters, as our coping mechanism with what's happening around us. Monsters change as society changes, and our perception of them changes as well. For instance, Dracula didn't start out as a moody teenager, and if he did I can't decide if puberty went well for him or not. Monsters like vampires, werewolves, and zombies have evolved over the centuries; this idea of evolution represents what is happening in society.

In Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, the count is portrayed as a dark, cryptic figure of a man who traps Jonathan (the protagonist) in his castle and plans on killing him when he's done using him to get to England. In *Dracula*, Stoker describes the count as "a tall old man, clean-shaven save for a long white mustache, and clad in black from head to foot, without a single speck of color about him anywhere" (15). The colors that are seen in Dracula's appearance make him seem formidable and terrifying. A figure in all black, who has white hair and is tall, has a correlation

with death. Death also dresses in black and has a dark figure. Through his appearance Dracula is being portrayed as a dangerous and sinister villain. Dracula is seductively violent. He has this master power of manipulation; call it magical compulsion or straight-out fear, people do what he wants. Dracula is *the vampire*, the master of late nights with your night light on and the covers pulled over your head.

Maybe it's just me, but when I think about vampires as they are represented now, it reminds me of the stereotypical Vegas experience: I just hope and pray that I don't remember it in the morning. Today's famous vampires are a little different in personality and in appearance than their classical counterparts. They are often seen as sexy and misunderstood. As a specific example, Edward Cullen, the glittery prize of twelve year olds all over the world, is seen as an attractive and peaceful vampire, which is definitely contradictory to Dracula. The main difference is seen in Bella's description of him: "Edward in the sunlight was shocking. I couldn't get used to it, though I'd been staring at him all afternoon. His skin, white despite the faint flush from yesterday's hunting trip, literally sparkled, like thousands of tiny diamonds were embedded in the surface" (260). The modern vampire glitters in the sun, instead of burns like its predecessors. Edward is also a vegetarian, of sorts, in comparison to Dracula. Edward doesn't want to be seen as a blood-sucking monster. He does not want to be compared to the dark, scary monsters of the world; he just wants to be the same as regular kids his age. Edward as a vampire is much different than Dracula. The two are almost polar opposites, which shows how vampires have evolved and adapted to the wants of society.

There are several reasons why one could say that vampires have become less fearsome and more present in teen romance novels. In society right now there is a movement toward the weakening of the traditional male role. In Heather Chaet's article "The Demise of the Doofus

Dad”, she states that the male role is changing from the man who used to not be able to change diapers and run households to men who do. She adds that women are becoming the breadwinners and men are the stay-at-home dads. This is demonstrating how men are changing and becoming more feminine and maternal. Also in some teen magazines men are becoming more and more fashionable and feminine. This can be seen in various articles and advertisements portraying them as soft and womanly. Social media and commercial advertising targeted towards youth is becoming more androgynous. Vampires don’t need to be scary; they can be stylish and sensitive. Female standards have also changed. Often women want men who have class, high-end jobs, and style. They are not looking for big buff cavemen who can hunt for food and fight off grizzly bears. Media has changed the outlook on men, so men are no longer needed to be regarded as burly lumberjacks. They need to be dependable and have a higher status. The ability to fight off tribal adversaries is no longer needed, and what creates the status of a man is his job and his position in society. Whatever woman can do, man can do too. Werewolves can also be seen as having changed into something more modern and very different from their traditional counterparts.

If we look at werewolves, they are classically men who have been cursed with changing into a wild monster at the full moon. They are known for tearing up villages and viciously mutilating people. Werewolves were classically viewed as being brutal, savage creatures that were meant to be feared. An example of this can be seen in *Bisclavret* by Marie de France: “A werewolf is a savage beast; while his fury is on him he eats men, does much harm, goes deep in the forest to live” (907). Many men were accused of being werewolves and killed as the paranoia heightened. The idea of the classical werewolf is that of a cursed man; he’s not evil or out to destroy the world. However, he is evil when the full moon is out and the curse is active.

As a werewolf, he no longer has control. The cursed monster does. Werewolves are the kind of monsters that cause people to stock up on silver ammunition and lock up at night.

Werewolves of today are very different from their classical counterparts. They are looked at as more of shape-shifters, who can either change at will or on the full moon. They tend to be sensitive, kind hearted, and protective of their friends, as well as fighting off the bad guys. Examples of this can be seen also in *Twilight* with Jacob, the topless wonder. He is concerned with the wellbeing of his friend Bella, and he loves her even though she loves his nemesis, Edward. Another example could be that in the MTV show *Teen Wolf*, Scott (the protagonist) is out to stop the villainous werewolves from harming the innocent. For the most part werewolves do not destroy towns and kill handfuls of people. Werewolves of today's pop culture stay with their kind and keep their identity a secret. They also are shape-shifters more than cursed men, and today's werewolves can often change at will.

Werewolves have changed in comparison to their ancestors, and this may be due to society's new perceptions and ideals. Roles and relationships are being redefined in America, and all over the world more and more things are becoming acceptable in society. As our society and generations change and evolve, so does our understanding of things, so thus new formations of old tales are created and tweaked to fit today's standards and tastes. Another point that can be brought up in this argument is that because vampires have changed, so have werewolves. A recent influx can be seen where more novels about romances with monsters and the undead are becoming popular. So thus, because one monster is generating an abundance of popularity and profit, more and more monsters are turning into the Romeos of today's pop culture.

Zombies are the other side of the spectrum. Vampires, and werewolves get more feminine, and delicate. Zombies of old were creatures that moved slowly and hungrily searched

for brains. Traditionally, they have been thought of as being slow but numerous. However, being caught inside a gang of zombies wouldn't be ideal. Thrillingly enough, one could end up becoming one of them and having a ghostly dance scene while sporting red leather. Even in more recent cases such as the film *Shaun of the Dead* (2004), the zombies are slow moving and vegetable like in their activity, they are strong however.

Zombies are coming out as more brutal and more ferocious monsters today. They form the exception to the rule that monsters are becoming more feminine. We can see this in television, movies, and literature. Zombie culture is becoming more graphic and dangerous. In *The Walking Dead*, zombies are ugly, menacing, human-hungry creatures that roam the world looking for their next snack. They are gross and not attractive or "sexy" by any means. Why has society created "sexy" monsters and excluded zombies? Why is it that society is redefining monsters so differently?

Zombies represent one way people are redefining monsters. In Dr. Kyle Bishop's lecture "Why Zombies Matter" Bishop states that zombies are our coping mechanism when dealing with pandemics and the fear that infection will wipe us out. They are relevant to pandemics because in a way they are a pandemic. Zombies are an outbreak of a virus, or a nuclear reaction, etc. This fear has increased over the years, as more hysteria about viruses like Swine Flu comes out. We look at the scariest possibility to remind ourselves that it's not as scary as it could be and that we're far better off. Zombies are a form of pop culture that is used for our own sanity. It helps us to feel safe about the chaos going on in the world.

However, new developments in the zombie genre have arisen. Recently novels have come about that depict sexy zombies. One specific example of this is the novel *Warm Bodies* by Isaac Marion. Marion's view of zombies is that although they are mean, brain-hungry monsters,

they have a redeemable quality. R, the protagonist, falls in love with Julie, and through his feelings he becomes human again. This idea of love starts generating a movement with the other zombies, and slowly they start turning human again. Are zombies becoming loving, feminine monsters as well? This could be starting a trend towards the feminizing of all the popular monsters today. Zombies could be joining the realm of Count Glitter and Viscount de Topless. Zombies are becoming romantics, which is the slippery slope that vampires and werewolves traversed as well. The top three monsters in pop culture all are becoming romantic and in some regards feminine. Will a new, more terrifying monster have to rise above the rest as the new master of the scary noises emanating from the closet?

There are new developments daily in our societies that, like viruses, can frighten us. However, there are also developments that have changed our society in other ways. It has become an instant-gratification society. We've become complacent. We don't work as hard. We are weaker. Not everyone cares for the scary monsters that keep us up at night, scared to let one's toes hang over the edge of the bed. For some, the idea of a monster that cares about their feelings, and falls in love with them, is the ideal. The idea of being scared by a creature that could kill in the blink of an eye is no longer entertaining. People are no longer curious about things that go bump in the night. Pop culture has created a new diversion in the monster genre. Society is being told that a romantic, dreamy monster is cool. This phase caught on fast. Once one book got huge, the idea grew into something more. Now there is a whole young adult phenomenon with mythical romance novels. In a way it exhibits the "monkey see, monkey do" objective when selling novels. Many saw one novel become successful and decided that by writing along the same lines they would too.

Since monsters are changing and in a sense selling out, what will happen to monster culture? Monster culture is ever changing and always evolving to fit the wants of society and the time period. The question to be asking is “Will another monster rise from the depths and turn into society’s new coping mechanism?” People need that form of monster. Society always has a scary monster that hides under the bed waiting to grab the foot that hangs just a little too far off the edge. What will the next monster be?

All that glitters is not gold; sometimes it’s teenage vampires. Monsters have changed over time to fit society’s needs. Vampires sucked the blood out of people and killed them. Werewolves were cursed men, who killed and wrecked villages. Zombies represent the part of our pop culture that needs to cling to a life preserver to stay afloat in our fears. They keep us afloat because they represent something so scary and unreal that the idea of a pandemic is less scary because it seems almost impossible. Zombies are, however, at the turning point where they can join their fearsome friends at the alter of teen romance novels. Monsters are changing as we change. They represent us, and our time’s needs and desires. The dark and daunting count has become a glittery teenager who wants to be accepted. Acceptance plays a large role in our society right now. Monsters have evolved over the centuries, and adapted to the present environment that we call today to fit our demands and represent our society. Classic monsters have been pushed aside to put “monsters” like Edward on a pedestal. Are all the good old classic monsters joining Edward at the top of Mount Imposter Monster? Will they join the ranks of becoming that which sells? I’m honestly not sure if I want a glittery, stylish member of the undead representing my generation.

Works Cited:

Bishop, Kyle. "Why Zombies Matter." Why Zombies Matter. UT, Cedar City. 31 Aug. 2012.

Lecture.

Chaet, Heather. "The Demise Of The Doofus Dad. (Cover Story)." Adweek 53.23 (2012): 16.

MasterFILE Premier. Web. 4 Apr. 2013.

Marie de France. "Bisclavret." *The Longman Anthology of World Literature*. Ed. David

Damrosch et. al. Vol. B. New York: Pearson Longman. 904-915. Print. 3 vols.

Marion, Isaac. *Warm Bodies*. New York, NY: Atria Paperback, 2011. Print.

Meyer, Stephanie. *Twilight*. New York, NY: Hachette Book Group, 2005. Print.

Shaun of the Dead. Dir. Edgar Wright. 2004. DVD. Universal, 2013.

Stoker, Bram. *Dracula*. Garden City, N.Y.: The Country Life Press, 1897. Print.

Teen Wolf. Dir. Robert Hall, Russel Mulcahy, Tim Andrew, Toby Wilkins. 2011-2013. TV.

MTV. 2013.

The Walking Dead. Dir. Frank Darabont. 2010-2013. TV. AMC. 2013.