



The Vampire Defanged: How the Embodiment of Evil Became a Romantic Hero

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Vampires first entered the pop culture arena with Bram Stoker's 1897 novel, Dracula. Today, vampires are everywhere. From Buffy the Vampire Slayer to the Twilight Saga to HBO's True Blood series, pop culture can't get enough of the vampire phenomenon. Bringing her literary expertise to this timely subject, Susannah Clements reveals the roots of the vampire myth and shows how it was originally immersed in Christian values and symbolism. Over time, however, vampires have been "defanged" as their spiritual significance has waned, and what was once the embodiment of evil has turned into a teen idol and the ultimate romantic hero. Clements offers a close reading of selected vampire texts, explaining how this transformation occurred and helping readers discern between the variety of vampire stories presented in movies, TV shows, and novels. Her probing engagement of the vampire metaphor enables readers to make Christian sense of this popular obsession.

The Vampire Defanged: How the Embodiment of Evil Became a Romantic Hero Details

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Steve says

As the book description indicates, Susannah Clements is writing from a Christian perspective. However, apart from the conclusion, where the author writes explicitly to Christians, the book is a scholarly analysis of the vampire literature from Bram Stoker to Twilight. The religious themes of the book are rooted in the fact that Bram Stoker's 1897 novel was written by a Christian and saturated in Christian themes. The argument that the vampire myth has become increasingly secularised in each of its reworking is a fascinating and persuasive perspective. However, it would have been good if Clements could have discussed alternative views of the vampire literature and responded to any criticisms of her perspective.

The book reads like a scholarly essay and doesn't have the features of what might be called a popular book. It is written with an objective voice with little (if any) rhetorical strategies that modern lay readers might expect to make the read an enjoyable one. The author, however, writes very clearly and articulately. The analysis is intriguing and, for those familiar with any of the vampire literature (book or film), the subject matter will be fascinating. For those who have not read or watched vampire stories, the book may not hold the same interest.

One explicit aim of the author is to convince Christians to be more comfortable with the vampire myth rather than avoid it. That may or may not be worth it if the author's thesis is correct - that the myth has become entirely secularised.

Christian or not, this book is a fascinating perspective worthy of the attention of anyone interested in the contemporary fascination with vampire mythology. THE VAMPIRE DEFANGED is a good introduction to the role the mythology has played, and continues to play, in society and culture.

Sarah Marie says

I liked it; however, it became very clear very quickly that she herself is a Christian and that this book is not just about the changing vampire, but her Christian viewpoint. A lot of her points seemed well supported, at times there seemed a stretch though. The Conclusion took an abrupt shift, and I felt I was reading a theology book rather than an analytical study of the vampire. I have another Vampire in Film book that I am anxious to read and see the difference in objected vs not. As I said before, she had many many valid points, but they seemed tainted by her un-objective viewpoint.

Regina Olson says

This book attempted to make theological connections between vampires and religion. It is a very far stretch to attribute Stoker's Dracula as a lesson in the seven deadly sins, and claim Buffy the Vampire Slayer is a religious series. The book, in my opinion, fabricated connections that weren't there, or showed up coincidentally. True Blood and Twilight don't really have and deep theological lessons to teach us, they are stories to entertain.

Adam Ross says

This was a delightful and interesting book tracing the decline of the Vampire metaphor as a symbol of Christian sin and guilt into a secularized, glamorous, sexy romantic lead - and as you might expect, the book climaxes with an analysis of the Twilight books. Clements is a Christian, and the book put out by Brazos Press, one of the better culturally-engaged imprints of Baker Books. The strongest element of the book was that it did not offer a "Christian" excuse or defense for analyzing Vampires, but simply treats them as though they are already worthy of study. This, to my mind, is the right approach.

Clements traces the decline of the vampire villain from Dracula through the Anne Rice novels, to Buffy, then into the True Blood series and finally Twilight, chronicling the shift in metaphor, and concludes the book with two chapters, "Vampire Sinners" and "Vampire Saints," in which she briefly examines a few other films and books on the vampire. Out of these, the chapters on Dracula and the Anne Rice novels were most interesting since they give the largest possibility of deep theological reflection. Then again, her comments on the Underworld films are completely inaccurate - she claims that they downplay the traditional forms of the vampire because there is only one instance of drinking blood in the first Underworld film, but anyone paying attention will note several other moments, including the climax of the film to produce the Vam-Lycan hybrid.

The most captivating chapter, for me, was on Dracula, because it was the first close reading of the book that really convinced me Dracula is actually a profoundly Christian work of literature. She is essentially arguing that Bram Stoker took vampire myths and legends from the Transylvania area and Christianized them, and that this has forever shaped the tone of vampire literature since. Anyone who comes after Stoker is either supporting his vision or rebelling against it. It occurred to me that this is what the 8th century monk did in transcribing Beowulf - he retold the story in such a way as to actually Christianize originally pagan categories and narratives, and in so doing, actually remakes the whole of Western literature after it. Ultimately, this is subversion - retelling familiar stories with a Christian twist, and in the long term, it is what all Christian artists are called to do.

Jocelin says

I was really impressed with this book. I had heard about it on the radio and I had seen a few articles about it online. My husband (so sweet) bought it for me and wanted me to read it and get my opinion about it. He likes for me to read certain books because I am a quick reader. He wondered what I thought and now I am going to tell you about it. The author Susannah Clements brings up an interesting premise about the vampire as being an "emodiment of evil" and how he became a romantic (lover) hero. I know that this book was written during the fanatical response to "Twilight". What she does is breaks down the pop culture phenom from the past until present. She does a good job of breaking down the story of the popular piece of work by Bram Stoker. Then she goes into detail about other authors and TV shows that have amped up the vampire story. She brings up a lot of interesting ideals about the vampire and she is very thorough in forming her opinion about how far we have come from looking at the vampire in a scope of being a bad guy to a guy who can be a great love of your life.

One of the things that she did leave out were some very popular books & movies. She did not mention the following: Dracula(starring Frank Langella), The Lost Boys, The Vampire Diaries by L.J. Smith. I was a little upset that she didn't explore the any of this last few titles in her book. For one, Dracula w/ Frank Langella introduced the notion of a vampire being a sexual being and that the bloodletting was part of the

foreplay. The movie "The Lost Boys" literally set-up the vampire genre in a new way by making the vampires "young, hot, good-looking" guys. Young vampires that want to stay young, party all night and never die. This movie (The Lost Boys) set the stage for the young vampire hero/lover. Up until then most vampires in the movies were played by middle-aged actors.

She was writing this book from a Christian context and stated that the vampire issue is one that can get people dialoguing about the nature of "immortality". She also stated that she wished there were more movies that addressed that issue. There have been some out there i.e The Addiction by Abel Ferrara(good movie). I feel this was a good book to get people to discuss the nature of the vampire and how it has changed over the years. I think this was one of my biggest drawbacks about embracing the "Twilight" craze. The vampire in its true nature is a killer. With the "Twilight" craze that was brushed under the table and the fact that someone could "love you forever" had taken precedence. Blindfolds had been placed on the literary eyes of a new generation of readers. The vampire has become a teen pop idol. I have been a fan of vampire stories since I was a young girl in my 20's. The stories are fascinating because; here you have a creature that has been around for centuries and has actually witnessed history. This is the type of vampire story that is very interesting to me. I have read paranormal romance between humans and vampires some of them are really good and some are not. I think the stories that really capture my attention are the ones where the vampires are at peace with what they are and not for who they once were.

An interesting read.

Adalie says

interesting book

T. Finley says

When I first purchased this book from a discount book store I was unaware that it was written from a Christian perspective, since this fact was not obvious from the title. Although the author presents her evaluations of the evolution of vampires in fiction in a matter-of-fact way that didn't seem overtly judgemental, at least to me, I feel it is important that anyone considering reading this book knows about the author's Christian viewpoint so they can weigh this information when deciding whether or not to read the book.

As for the book's content, I found the chapter on the Bram Stoker novel Dracula very interesting. Like a lot of people in this day and age I have never read the original novel, and my perceptions of the Dracula story have been influenced more by the various film adaptations. I was therefore unaware of the extent to which Bram Stoker used religion as a plot point in his novel.

However aside from the Dracula chapter, nothing in The Vampire Defanged really stuck with me.

Did I like it? It had at least one good chapter.

Would I reread it? Probably not.

Would I recommend it? Probably not.

Tony Breeden says

This book should be on the shelf of every Christian who reads or watches vampire books, comics, TV shows, movies, etc. Susannah Clements book does an excellent job of showing how vampire fiction has degraded since Bram Stoker's Dracula from showing something that explores the doctrines of evil, temptation, original

sin and salvation. Includes a plea for Christian authors and filmmakers to reclaim a much-neglected genre. I can't recommend this thoughtful exploration of this subject enough!

Wanda says

A very interesting analysis of the figure of the vampire from Dracula through to today. If you are put off by the author's Christian views of the phenomenon, don't let that stop you from reading this. She is first and foremost a careful reader and I found her analysis very insightful.

She is absolutely right that Bram Stoker's Dracula is rooted in religion—he is the author who anchored so many of the characteristics of the vampire into popular culture. Crosses, holy water, communion wafers, garlic, the requirement for native earth, the ability to change shape or summon demonic assistance, needing an invitation to cross a threshold—Stoker made all of these things part of the vampire mythos in the literary imagination.

As Western society has changed from a predominantly Christian society to a more pluralistic society, the literature has evolved. As Ms. Clements points out, by the time we get to Charlaine Harris' Sookie Stackhouse novels, vampirism is just a social division, almost treated as a disability rather than a curse. Making society in the Sookie universe even more pluralistic than we are currently experiencing.

Is this necessarily a bad thing? I don't think so. Harris was able to explore issues of bigotry, prejudice, and hypocrisy through the introduction of supernatural beings and that is good in my opinion.

Rachel says

meh. I think I'm not the target audience - i.e. evangelical moms who worry that their kids like Twilight.

Ellen says

If I had taken the time to read the back of this book, I would have found that it wasn't something I was truly interested in the first place. I believed that the whole book would be about how vampires have become less evil now that they are most likely romantic heroes in current vampire books and shows (the cover states "How the embodiment of evil became a romantic hero"). The book, though, was focused on how the vampires of old were primarily metaphors for Christian beliefs and have now become secularized creatures. It seemed like the author, being a Christian herself, was disappointed in how this fake character has grown and morphed throughout the years. For devoted Christians who believe that if vampires started as religious metaphors they should always stay religious metaphors, this book is probably much more enjoyable. Personally, I found instances where the author tried to insert Christian meaning into non-religious situations (i.e. stating that the unfortunate events that happen to lesbian characters in Buffy the Vampire Slayer are a way of showing that homosexuality is a sin, even though the creator of the show has called himself an atheist). Despite my disagreeing with some of her arguments and her seemingly negative impressions of "secular" vampires, some of the conclusions from this book were interesting.

Kate Scott says

Before I delve into my review of *The Vampire Defanged*, there are three things you should know about me:

1. I am not widely read in the vampire genre. In fact, the only vampire novel I've ever read is *Twilight*.
2. My limited experience with vampire fiction has been negative. I did not like *Twilight*. In fact, I find the whole idea of dead(ish) blood-sucking former humans—good looking or not—utterly distasteful.
3. Call me dense, but despite numbers one and two, I fully expected to enjoy *The Vampire Defanged*.

I should explain my reasoning for number three. I tend to like books that address popular culture from a Christian perspective, whether or not the particular aspect of pop culture that book addresses is one that appeals to me personally. *The Vampire Defanged* does this, and though I am not a fan of the vampire craze sweeping the nation, I am interested in understanding why people (including friends of mine) are so obsessed with stories that revolve around these mythological beings and what a proper Christian response is to this cultural phenomenon.

That being said, I had certain expectations for this book when I started reading it. First, I expected that it would clearly answer my question of how to respond biblically to 'vampire fever'. Second, I expected the author would analyze popular works of contemporary and historical vampire fiction in order to draw her conclusions. And third, based on Stephen Webb's endorsement on the back cover that hailed *The Vampire Defanged* as "so entertaining that you might miss how good the theology is," I expected that Clements would sprinkle her narrative with humor and perhaps a few personal anecdotes.

Continue reading this review here: <http://parchmentgirl.com/2011/04/01/r...>

Mirriam Neal says

Ask anyone; this is one of my favorite non-fiction books in the history of all non-fiction. It's an in-depth look at vampires from *Dracula* up through *Twilight*, and then some. It inspired me to 'give the vampire back his fangs' and write stories with vampires that were both moral and unafraid. I highly recommend this book to anyone either a) writing about vampires b) wondering about vampires or c) anyone who just wants to know - should Christians have anything to do with them?

The answer is yes.

I can't believe I'm only just now telling you to read this.

Probably because I just re-read it for the fourth time.

John Defrog says

A pop-academic study of how vampires in pop culture have transformed from the demonic monster of Bram Stoker's *Dracula* to the romantic, sparkly heartthrob of *Twilight*. First things first: this is written from a Christian point of view, so much of the focus is on how vampires went from Christian metaphors of sin and evil to secular, sympathetic heroes, and what this means for Christians trying to make sense of the popularity of vampires. So that's going to be a roadblock for some people. If it helps, the book is *not* a right-wing rant on the evils of vampire occult pop culture corrupting America's youth. Clements approaches the subject with reasonable objectivity, and actually does a good job breaking down the evolution of vampire portrayals over the last century via milestones such as Anne Rice, *Buffy The Vampire Slayer* and *Sookie Stackhouse*. It's

not without weaknesses, one being that it doesn't really take into account the fact that much of the evolution of vampire stories arguably owes more to writers and filmmakers simply trying to think of new ways to write about vampires – or find new ways to scare people – rather than any particular intention of de-emphasizing religious symbolism. Clements does acknowledge this, but personally I don't think she gives it enough weight. Anyway, for vampire fans who at least agree that vampires should be less sparkly and more scary, this is an interesting roadmap of how we got here, and an alternate argument for reversing that trend. A final note: it does help if you've read or watched the books, films and TV shows covered, if only because there are spoilers.

Sarah says

Excellent analysis of the currently popular subject of vampires, tracing their literary devolution through the years from Dracula to Twilight. Well-reasoned and intriguing throughout; I especially appreciated her emphasis (from a Christian standpoint, which was a pleasant surprise to me!) on critical thinking when considering such a topic, staying balanced between the ditches of thoughtless amusement and paranoid avoidance. Given the great popularity of the Twilight series, I think every parent of teenage girls should read at least that chapter in this book, in order to understand what's going on and how to discuss it.
