

## Vampires Don't Sparkle: Vampires Outside the Romance Genre

My fascination with vampires began when I was eleven, and discovered Anne Rice. I was a world-weary almost-teen with a reading ability way beyond standard for my grade level, and I was definitely ready for her. I read *The Vampire Lestat* first, even though it's technically the second in the series. It didn't matter. I was hooked.

Anne Rice is a sensual writer and she made vampires sexy. I hadn't read *Dracula* yet so I had no idea what literary baggage vampires might carry with them. As far as I was concerned they were beautiful, deadly, occasionally amoral and frequently religious, and totally fascinating. Then *Twilight* came out, and the world of vampire literature changed forever.

At the risk of sounding really hipster, I probably read *Twilight* before you. I happened to be looking for vampire books just as it arrived, so I snatched it up and read it immediately. I realized almost immediately that it was total crap and didn't compare in any way to Anne Rice. Sparkly vampires? Seriously? Even Rice, who writes pretty sympathetic undead characters, manages to make them menacing at least half the time. The Cullens just aren't scary.

This was the point where I gave up and read *Dracula*, which set the canon in 1897 for every vampire book that followed. It's an important book to read if you like vampires, or horror, or fantasy. I read it and all of a sudden my perception of vampires changed drastically. Bram Stoker's vampires are evil. *Dracula* can turn into a bat, or a fog, or a wolf/dog and he really likes nubile virgins. He's a highly sexual character but

it's bad sexuality. There's a lot of repression and Victorian stigmas about bodies and sex and fidelity that I didn't understand at the time.

Anne Rice used vampires as main characters. They were dark and occasionally scary, but they were also mostly the good guys. Bram Stoker never even suggests that redemption might be possible for Dracula. He is evil, he has no soul, and he must be destroyed. The fact that he is a highly sexualized fantasy for the women of the story just makes him worse. Mina and Lucy experience two different sides of his sexuality, showing him to be an emotionally complex character as well as a demon. The world of vampire literature had become literature for me, not just escapism and indulgence. Dracula was a complete vampire in a way that I hadn't seen before. Vampires are way more interesting when they're evil.

I love vampire literature. I think the recent pop-culture trend towards vampirism is, like the undead, both wonderful and terrible. I like that vampires are getting a lot of attention, because they're fascinating and I think they deserve a lot more serious analysis than they get, but I don't like the kind of vampire that keeps getting portrayed. We're not seeing evil we're seeing sex. I don't like flippant vamps. In my head vampires are tied up with Victorian sensuality, and I want to see that portrayed, not angsty faux-goth love affairs with eyeliner. I hope pop vamps lead people to the real meat of vampire literature. I hope at least a few get addicted and go hunting for the heart's blood of the genre. I hope they find these books and sink their teeth in. I hope they understand the struggle with evil. I hope they find the literary merit of vampires.

I would like to expand my knowledge of the vampire genre by looking into Laurell K. Hamilton, Charlaine Harris, Kim Harrison, and other recent notable vampire

writers. Much as I dislike most teen paranormal romance, I am sure there are at least a few books worth reading, and I'd like to find them. I'd also like to find vampire legends from around the world. Many cultures have stories about blood-drinkers, and understanding the genre means doing that research. I think there is real value in books about evil, and vampires have historically led to some of the most interesting morality debates in literature. Unfortunately books like *Twilight* have buried these more interesting stories in a mire of terrible love triangles. I want to find and save the gems of the genre, and put together a comprehensive list for others to refer to.

### **Annotated Bibliography**

1. Atwater-Rhodes, Amelia. *Demon in my View*. New York: Dell Laurel-Leaf, 2001. Print.

*Demon in my View* chronicles the adventures of Jessica, a teenage novelist who writes about vampires and hates high school. As her senior year begins Jessica finds herself drawn into the world she writes about when Alex, a new boy at school, turns out to be Aubrey, her favorite bad-boy from the vampire world. The book is simply written, and Jessica is clearly a stand-in for Atwater-Rhodes herself, but the characters are more nuanced than most teen romance. There's even an interesting plot twist.

As vampire books go, *Demon in my View* doesn't count as great literature, but is still miles ahead of *Twilight*. It's a good introduction for young teens who want a gentle introduction to the genre. Atwater-Rhodes doesn't skip the inherent violence and bloodshed involved in being a vampire, but she does make it appealing. Her vampires are ambiguously moral, sensual, and impulsive. Amelia Atwater-Rhodes wrote in the same vein as *Twilight* several years earlier and came up with a far better result.

2. Atwater-Rhodes, Amelia. *In the Forests of the Night*. New York: Dell Laurel-Leaf, 1999. Print.

This is Atwater-Rhodes' first book, written when she was only thirteen. It precedes *Demon in my View*, whose protagonist, Aubrey, is the antagonist here. *In the Forests of the Night* focuses on Risika, a vampire created in the first European colony on American soil. Her religious background leads to a lot of introspection and makes the book a stage for the debate between evil and survival. Risika believes that she is damned,

but wants to survive more than she hates killing. The book focuses solely on this. There is no romance, not even in a subplot.

3. Gaiman, Neil, illus. Dave McKean. *The Graveyard Book*. New York: HarperCollins Pub., 2008. Print.

I include *The Graveyard Book* in my collection because of Silas, the undead caretaker assigned to Nobody Owens, the main character. Silas is a shady character. He lives in the graveyard and can speak to the ghosts, but can also move into the world of the living. Gaiman never explicitly states that Silas is a vampire, but the situational evidence strongly implies it. Though *The Graveyard Book* is not primarily a story about vampires, Gaiman writes Silas as a complex, ambiguously moral character, which is a rarity in contemporary literature.

4. Kostova, Elizabeth. *The Historian: A Novel*. New York: Little, Brown, 2008. Print.

*The Historian* can be read as a companion piece to *Dracula*. Dracula himself is almost exactly as he appears in Bram Stoker, but Kostova focuses intently on the history of the man Vlad Drakul, the bloodthirsty Prince who actually appears in history. The Impaler is known for massacring huge numbers of people by sticking them on pointed stakes and leaving them to die slowly. This guy allegedly incurred the wrath of God and was cursed to live forever by drinking the blood of innocents. Stoker got the idea for *Dracula* from these legends, and Kostova develops the same story into a rich tapestry of history and horror. It feels true. I absolutely could tell which parts are fact and which are fiction. *The Historian* is difficult, brilliant, and absolutely what I think vampire literature should be.

5. McKinley, Robin. *Sunshine*. New York: Jove, 2004. Print.

Robin McKinley's vampires are super evil, the kind of evil that gets inside your mind and can't even speak words that reference the sun. They are also completely nonhuman. Even Dracula can pass for a human occasionally, but McKinley writes vampires that are so alien you can feel them there even when they're quiet. They have no human traits. They don't even live in the same plane of existence.

*Sunshine* doesn't neglect the sexuality of vampires either. There's a two-page kiss scene that is possibly the sexiest thing I've read in a vampire book ever, and it ends in a completely satisfying way that leaves all the ends dangling. Constantine, the major vampire character, shows definite signs of falling in love with the main character, Sunshine, over the course of the book. She is definitely attracted to him but there's an added dimension of 'this can't happen because vampires and humans just aren't compatible.' It makes for a lot of tension in the story, particularly because she also has a human lover with whom she shows no signs of falling out of love. If you've read *Dracula* you may see some serious parallels.

It also features as a main character a bitchy baker who just wants to make elaborate desserts for the rest of her life. It's more sensual than any vampire story I've ever read.

6. Meyer, Stephenie. *Twilight*. New York: Little, Brown and, 2005. Print.

*Twilight* is in this list and my collection only to provide the perfect example of bad vampire literature. It has no redeeming qualities at all. The characters are one-dimensional, the plot is asinine, the so-called romance is a perfect portrayal of an extremely abusive relationship, and the writing is mediocre at best. Unfortunately it sells really well to preteens and adolescent girls as a weird sexual fantasy, and its commercial success means that “Paranormal Romance,” my least favorite fantasy genre, now has its own section in Barnes and Noble.

7. Rice, Anne. *Blackwood Farm*. New York: Ballantine, 2003. Print.

*Blackwood Farm* was written later than most of her other vampire books. The style of writing is more polished than her early work, and the story draws together the Mayfair witch family and the tales of the vampires. It spans a shorter timeframe than most of her other vampire stories because the main character, Quentin, is human through most of the book. Like many of her other books however, it is set outside of New Orleans, and uses lush imagery to evoke a feeling of decadence.

8. Rice, Anne. *Blood and Gold, or, The Story of Marius*. New York: Ballantine, 2002. Print.

*Blood and Gold* follows Marius, Lestat’s mentor, from his origins in pre-Roman Gaul through his adventures in Egypt, to his decision to become the caretaker for Those Who Must Be Kept. Marius observes history more than Lestat, so Rice uses him as a device to tell the stories of various cultures and vampires throughout several thousand years. Marius is a scholar, and Rice uses him to wax philosophical about the morality of being a vampire, going particularly into his set-in-stone rule, “kill only the evildoer.”

9. Rice, Anne. *Interview with the Vampire*. New York: Ballantine, 1988. Print.

*Interview with the Vampire* introduces Louis, a vampire telling the story of his creation and early life in New Orleans. Louis is perhaps the most human of the vampires Rice focuses on, and his story, which introduces Lestat and their vampire child Claudia, is told from an interesting perspective of long life and strict morals. This is the first of Rice’s vampire books, and it sets the tone for all the rest. Louis’ humanity and existential angst make the book a combination of action, romance, and discussion on the nature of good and evil.

10. Rice, Anne. *Pandora: New Tales of the Vampires*. New York: Ballantine, 1999. Print.

Pandora starts life as the wealthy daughter of a Roman Senator, until she meets Marius. He falls in love with her and turns her into a vampire. *Pandora* tells her story. It is particularly notable because most of Rice’s favorite vampires are male. Pandora

lives with Marius for a long time, then goes to wander the world, providing the frame for a tale of various cultures and religions as seen through her eyes. Pandora has fewer issues with her own nature than most of the other vampires, a trend that stays constant with most of the female vampires portrayed.

11. Rice, Anne. *The Queen of the Damned*. New York: Ballantine, 1989. Print.

This is the third book in The Vampire Chronicles, and relies heavily on plot to move it along. Humans are reintroduced as main characters, and the origin of the first two vampires is completely explained. Akasha, the vampire queen, becomes an active character, and Lestat fulfills his potential as the protector of both vampires and humanity at large. It's less philosophical and more emotional than many of her other books, and is a good example of literary big-scope vampire action.

12. Rice, Anne. *The Tale of the Body Thief*. New York: Ballantine, 1993. Print.

*The Tale of the Body Thief* jumps straight back into the philosophical and mystical, with the introduction of a spirit who can steal bodies. Lestat strikes a deal with the spirit and becomes human again, but immediately regrets it. He spends a large portion of the book debating the merits of being human versus being a vampire, and eventually decides to reclaim his old, undead body, thereby damning himself to eternal life.

13. Rice, Anne. *The Vampire Lestat*. New York: Ballantine, 1986. Print.

*The Vampire Lestat* is the second book of the main vampire trilogy, and takes the form of Lestat writing his own history. He was born in pre-revolutionary France, and the story chronicles his early life as a human and vampire, and breaks off before the events of *Interview*. Lestat is a highly emotional character, and the story is as much about his two great loves as it is his struggle with loneliness. Those Who Must Be Kept and Marius make their debut, as does Armand, a religious and tortured protégé of Marius from Roman times.

14. Rice, Anne. *The Witching Hour*. New York: Ballantine, 1993. Print.

*The Witching Hour* introduces the Mayfair witch clan, and is not properly a vampire story at all. I include it in this collection because the Mayfair witches are inextricably tied to vampires throughout the books, and because like *The Graveyard Book*, it is a good example of how to include vampires in a book without making them cliché or tawdry.

15. Stoker, Bram. *Dracula*. New York, NY: Scholastic, 1999. Print.

Bram Stoker's *Dracula* is the father of the genre. First published in 1897, it tells the story of Jonathan and Mina, two humans who become involved with a mysterious Transylvanian prince. The story is filled with Victorian ideals, sensuality, and language.

It is a horror story, and what romance appears is vilified as wicked and amoral. Lucy, the fallen woman of the story, embodies a moral lesson about the evils of promiscuity, while Mina remains pure and resists Dracula's advances. Every stereotype about vampires in Western literature comes from *Dracula*, and any aficionado of the genre should read it.