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Vampire Darcy: The Impossible Romantic Hero

Eric Parisot

In recent years, two of the most popular literary fandoms of the new century have converged: the cults of Jane Austen and the vampire. No doubt spurred by the runaway commercial success of both Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* series (2005-08) and Seth Grahame-Smith's *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* (2009), as well their cinematic adaptations, a number of paranormal Austen mash-ups hit the market this last decade or so. Zombies, aliens, vampires, and werewolves have all invaded the previously polite and (mostly) chaste literary terrain associated with the name Jane Austen. Vampires in particular have appeared in different stories and guises: Austen's Emma Woodhouse is recast as a vampire slayer in Wayne Josephson's *Emma and the Vampires* (2010); John Thorpe is refashioned as a hunted vampire in Colleen Gleason's novella "Northanger Castle" (as featured in the collection *Bespelling Jane Austen*, 2010); Austen herself is reimagined as a Georgian vampire hunter in Janet Mullany's *Jane and the Damned* (2010) and as a modern vampire living in upstate New York in Michael Thomas Ford's *Jane Bites Back* (2010); and the imagined threat of vampires lingers in Val McDermid's rewriting of *Northanger Abbey* (2014). But it is the paranormal retelling of Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), with the irrepressibly alluring Fitzwilliam Darcy rewritten as a vampiric romantic hero, that has proven the most popular approach, as seen in Amanda Grange's *Mr. Darcy, Vampyre* (2009); Regina Jeffers's *Vampire Darcy's Desire* (2009); Susan Krinard's "Blood and Prejudice" (*Bespelling Jane Austen*, 2010); and Colette L. Saucier's *Pulse and Prejudice* (2012).

To some observers, Austen's most cherished romance might seem like an incongruent choice for the basis of Gothic vampire fanfiction. What's love got to do with the Gothic, one

might ask, where feelings of terror, horror, and disgust typically dominate amidst imaginary castles, graveyards, and other darkened corners of the world? But, as Joseph Crawford suggests, the formulation of Gothic fiction as—to invoke David Punter’s seminal study—a “literature of terror” obscures the central place romance has always held in the history of Gothic fiction; from this perspective, the recent rise of paranormal romance, including Meyer’s *Twilight* and the Austen/vampire mash-ups, “may be less an aberration than a return to form” (Crawford 5). What’s more, the merging of *Pride and Prejudice* and vampires was already a proven formula by the time these adaptations were published: Meyer, an avowed Austen reader, has widely acknowledged *Pride and Prejudice* as an inspiration for her teenage romance between Edward Cullen and Bella Swan.

The vampiric transformations of Mr. Darcy, rather than Austen’s villains, might also initially surprise. While the vampire of European folklore was a ghastly demon, a waking corpse that haunted and preyed upon local villagers seeking only their blood for sustenance, the vampire of European literature has been a sexual predator from the outset. The first literary vampire, as depicted in Heinrich’s August Ossenfelder’s short poem “Der Vampir” (1748), is an eloquent fiend, promising to visit the sleeping maiden Christiana and kiss her across death’s threshold as he drains her life-blood away. In the English literary tradition, the most developed early portrayal of the vampire is Lord Ruthven of John Polidori’s *The Vampyre* (1819), likewise depicted as a sadistic aristocratic seducer, luring Miss Aubrey into marriage and deadly consummation. In Nick Groom’s terms, these erotic beings are “powerfully attracted to the virtuous and the virginal,” and the “theme of sexual violence and the dazzling power dynamics that it conjures up produced a decisive shift in depictions of the vampire, and is the critical literary bequest to the figure” (109, 99). Consequently, those well versed in the libidinous and predatory nature of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century literary vampire might expect to see Austen’s bad boys, not Mr. Darcy, reimagined with

fangs. As Janet Mullany observes, “There are characters in Austen’s novels who are clearly vampires—Willoughby, the Crawfords, and Wickham . . . They exploit and feed off others, they’re amoral and handsome and they wreak havoc” (Leal). Indeed, some Austen critics go so far to identify Wickham and Willoughby as “sex offenders” (Looser). Framed in Austen’s England, all of these characters represent ordinary rather than paranormal threats to the virtue of the young women of Austen’s novels, but they are no less sinister. Willoughby’s clipping of a lock of Marianne’s hair in *Sense and Sensibility* (1811), for instance, signifies much more than an innocent desire for a romantic keepsake when read with Alexander Pope’s *The Rape of the Lock* (1712) in mind (Bristow 31-33; Greenfield 96)—let alone his (and Wickham’s) serial seduction of teenage girls. Furthermore, John Thorpe’s trapping of Catherine Morland in *Northanger Abbey* has been noted for its parallels with the more vexing abductions of contemporaneous Gothic fiction (Ty 251; Fuller 96-97), a resemblance from which Colleen Gleason has obviously taken her cue in “Northanger Castle.” As one Austen blogger suggests, to “close our eyes” and imagine these characters as vampires “is not too far of a stretch,” and neither is “a Jane Austen’s gentleman’s vampire club!” (Nattress).

The apparent delight with which this blogger imagines a bevy of Austenian vampires speaks indirectly to Mr. Darcy’s sexual appeal as a vampire. As Saucier explains, Darcy represents a different breed of vampire: he is “a Byronic figure—intelligent but arrogant, sophisticated and cynical, introspective and conflicted,” qualities that lend themselves well to vampiric transformation (Saucier, *Jane Austen’s World*). Saucier draws a direct lineage from the Byronic hero to the new, sympathetic vampire of Anne Rice’s *The Vampire Chronicles* (1976-present) and Meyer’s *Twilight*, who have “the added appeal of being sensual, dark, mysterious, and complicated” and are often “romanticized as fighting the temptation of succumbing to their desires,” ultimately unsuccessfully. “Sound familiar?” Saucier asks: “Those are some of the same qualities that have caused women to fall in love with the

enigmatic Mr. Darcy for two hundred years” (qtd. in Grazia). For Jeffers, the new, sympathetic vampire opens new horizons for lovers of Austen and romance: the new vampire exhibits self-control, is more sympathetic to the plight of humans—inverting, I might add, the human perception of vampirism as an accursed existence—and is, indeed, more human than ever before. “Romance with the undead is intense and forever and perfect,” she adds, surpassing “the limits of mortality” (Jeffers, “Jane Austen”). The convergence of these two literary cults appears to focalize what modern readers value in Austen *and* the vampire tradition: undying love and desire. Together, they promise an eternal love of a different sort, not one that endures death and persists into an incorporeal afterlife, but one that can be enjoyed physically forever. The merging of Austen’s greatest romantic hero, Darcy, with the new vampire promises to produce the modern ideal of the romantic lover: handsome, virile, protective, noble, affluent, forever young yet wise with experience, and, most notably, immortal. As one blogger exclaimed in anticipation of Grange’s *Mr Darcy, Vampyre*: “Mr. Darcy as a Vampyre? I am so there!” (Katie).

The emergence of the new vampire as a supreme romantic hero is, however, problematic. On one hand, the vampire’s transition into a masochistic object of romantic desire can be viewed as the fulfilment of a female sexual fantasy; Meyer’s Edward Cullen muses on this very reversal of power: “and so the lion fell in love with the lamb . . . What a sick, masochistic lion” (240). It also enables the central triumph of the romantic heroine, where, in Penelope Williamson’s terms, “The savage beast is tamed by love: such is the allure of the [romantic] fantasy” (128). For some, however, this evolution is not as neat as others would suggest. Critics, such as Sarah Seltzer and Anthea Taylor, have observed that the new vampire’s sadistic impulses have not been entirely eradicated in figures such as Edward Cullen, whose stringent and obsessive control over Bella is reminiscent of “abusive

relationships” (Seltzer; cf. A. Taylor 35-37). Perhaps the vampire’s sadist mechanisms have evolved, but the instinct remains.

There is also, one suspects, a degree of cultural amnesia coinciding with the emergence of the new vampire and his further refinement as Mr Darcy. For instance, Amanda Grange cites Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* as “the most intriguing vampire” outside of her own reimagining of Darcy, stating that she “love[s] the theme of deathless love that permeates the book, it adds depth to the whole novel” (qtd. in Monique). The problem, of course, is that this theme of eternal love does not belong to Stoker’s novel but is one superimposed by Francis Ford Coppola in his 1992 film adaptation of *Dracula*; Stoker’s *Dracula* is a fiend obsessed with power, without a hint of any redeeming motivation like love. McDermid artfully alludes to this forgetting of the traditional literary vampire in her retelling of *Northanger Abbey*, where a modern-day Cat Moreland, who has been “schooled only in contemporary vampire romance,” finds listening to an abridged audio version of *Dracula* “a curious and unsettling experience. It reminded her of the first time she’d tasted an olive. It was unlike everything that had crossed her palate before; strange and not quite pleasant, yet gilded with the promise of sophistication” (12). The analogy of the olive is an ambiguous one, perhaps foreshadowing the passage from innocence to experience, or perhaps as something quintessentially foreign, from Old Europe, as the early literary vampire typically was. One might even speculate that the olive, with its longstanding ties to Greece, represents a taste of what Ken Gelder argues are the Hellenic origins of European vampiric folklore and literature (24-41). Regardless, each interpretative possibility signifies the forgetting, or repression, of the menacing nature of the early literary vampire necessarily concomitant with the rise of the new vampire. But, as we all know, the unpredictable, uncanny irruption of what has been long forgotten or repressed is a hallmark of the Gothic.

Returning to Darcy: one questions, then, whether the sadistic, predatory impulses of the old literary vampire can be completely eradicated in his transformation into this new romantic idealization of the vampiric lover. Moreover, is the romantic ideal of physical, eternal love made possible in these vampiric adaptations of *Pride and Prejudice*? These the concerns frame my examination of the four novels.

Love Bites: Trouble with Vampire Darcy

In Krinard's "Blood and Prejudice" and Saucier's *Pulse and Prejudice*, we find two examples of the ways in which the vampiric transformation of Darcy facilitates the fantasy of the eternally youthful lover. But with each adaptation, we also see emerging complications that disrupt both the monogamous, heteronormative ideal of romantic love and the paranormal ideal of two immortal lovers, forever entwined in heart, body, and soul.

Krinard's story, which Lizzy Bennet narrates in first person, is primarily set in modern-day New York. The Bennet family are facing a financial crisis—the collapse of the family business, Bennet Laboratories. Enter corporate highflyers Bingley and the English-born Darcy to further investigate their interest in Bennet Laboratories as a business venture. But when Darcy meets Lizzy, he becomes less interested in a corporate takeover and more interested in a corporal one, and Lizzie's self-determination begins to wilt in his presence. Not typically "the girly type" to "fall over [her]self when a good-looking guy" looks her way, this time she is stunned by Darcy's features—"Tall, dark and handsome. Check, check and check" (178). As one who never believes in love at first sight—"it really just comes down to sex"—she later notices Darcy "staring at me with his piercing indigo eyes as if we were the only two people in the room and he was about to eat me for lunch" (180); indeed, the simultaneous vampiric pun and sexual innuendo of being "eaten" by Darcy clearly reveals what's on Lizzy's mind.

Lizzy learns about Darcy's vampirism when out clubbing one night with Wickham, who rescues her in a dark alleyway from "three unpleasant looking guys of indeterminate age wearing hoodies and low-slung jeans. They definitely weren't clubbers; in fact, they looked like they'd rather do some 'clubbing' in the more traditional sense of the word" (205).

Wickham saves Lizzy on this occasion with bone-crunching ferocity, preternatural speed, and, to Lizzy's horror, sharp, bloodied fangs. With the threat of sexual violence still ever-present, Wickham ultimately proves to represent the lesser of two evils here, a sophisticated and further evolved predator than the hoodlums in hoodies. But in confessing to his own vampiric nature, Wickham also reveals Darcy's; Darcy, he warns, is a superior beast, an advanced specimen able "to wield unusual influence over mortals and even other[s]" of their kind, a power that (according to Wickham) Darcy uses unscrupulously (209). Consequently, the question that plagues Lizzy from thenceforth is whether her instant attraction to Darcy is a genuine, human connection, or whether she is being entrapped in his supernatural thrall.

After a series of encounters, where Darcy wards off an indecent proposal from the vampire Mr. Collins and rescues Lizzy from the vampire stronghold Rosings and the malevolent intentions of Lady Catherine, Lizzy is finally convinced that she is not being compelled by Darcy's supernatural charms but instead is falling in love. The last of Lizzy's resistance and fiery independence is eroded by Darcy's noble intentions; she herself laments how "her legs had gotten into a bad habit of buckling, which was getting downright embarrassing" (283). The novella concludes with the two settling into their relationship, discussing "arrangements" as any sensible couple would.

But it is here that problems emerge to disrupt the idyllic romance. In a conversation about their future, Lizzy is troubled by Darcy's ongoing need for blood. She seems to recall Wickham's confession that both he and Darcy feed on consenting "groupies" (214), and that the experience "can actually be very pleasurable for both parties" (208). Moreover, she seems

perturbed by her sighting of a bloody-mouthed Darcy at Rosings, surrounded by “young, very pretty women” who, in Wickham’s description, “enjoy exchanging their blood for the sexual pleasure his bite—and other skills—gives them” (216). The vampire’s penetrative bite and the exchanging of bodily fluids has long been associated with coitus, and it is no different here—much to Lizzy’s tortured delight. However, Lizzy warns Darcy that she is “not going to be able to live with a harem,” asking Darcy instead to promise to tell her should he “have to *see* someone else”: “It’s all right, Darcy. I know you can’t live on me alone. I won’t be jealous . . . Well, maybe just a little” (285, author emphasis). The association of feeding with sex, coupled with the implied assumption that Darcy will feed exclusively on women, suggests that while this might be an undying love, it is one that Lizzy will have to physically share with other women or risk being consumed to death. Darcy needs to be polyamorous, while Lizzy must remain monogamous, for this relationship to work. This is a potentially toxic arrangement, one susceptible to jealousy and resentment, and one that arguably exploits Lizzy’s loving dedication. In this arrangement, her status, one might say, is as the head of the harem that she nervously jokes about. This is less a female romantic fantasy than a male sexual fantasy.

Before long, an alternative arrangement emerges. Lizzy remains troubled by their shared future, “A future in which I would grow older, and Darcy would stay exactly the same” (287). Confident of his fidelity during *her* lifetime, she is still disturbed by the thought of Darcy with another lover after her death, by “the idea of giving him up, ever . . .” (287). Consequently, she invites Darcy to bite her for the first time. Darcy explains that while he can typically control the process of feeding to prevent conversion, his vampiric “instinct can be very strong” (287). Lizzy, however, reassures him: “Is that such a bad thing? . . . I don’t want to have you for one lifetime, Darcy. I want you for an eternity” (287). The question of whether Lizzy’s conversion into a vampire is just a mere possibility or a decided course of

action is left tantalizingly open by her hesitation to tell Mr Bennet “just what kind of proposal” she had agreed to with Darcy (288). But what if she is converted by Darcy? The alluring promise of everlasting youth and eternal sexual love awaits, but it is a sexual love they will have to share—to a degree—with others in order to be sustained. Moreover, Lizzy would also be sacrificing her very humanity to do so. As two devoted yet polyamorous beings, this sexually liberated, supernatural union might yet prove an appealing prospect for some, but it is a somewhat imperfect version of the heteronormative, monogamous romantic ideal the convergence of Austen and vampires arguably promises.

Saucier’s adaptation follows Austen’s original plot more closely, told in third-person narration focalized through Darcy’s perspective. As Saucier elaborates, this shift in perspective reveals the complexities of Darcy’s character (Saucier, *Jane Austen’s World*)—one might add for better or worse. As a result, Darcy’s noble struggle is brought to the surface of the narrative; he is acutely aware of his vampiric frailties and tormented by his (mostly unavailing) desire to rise above them. But he is a man of principle and sensibility: he is an abolitionist (98); admires his horses for their utilitarian power as well as their aesthetic beauty (123); and abhors bear-baiting (123). He also enjoys reading William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge (156-58) and loathes Lord Byron, not as a poet but as a dishonourable man and brother; “as I was rescuing my sister from her seducer,” he scoldingly quips, “Byron was seducing his own” (99). In a further testament to Darcy’s character, he also resolves to “never wed,” marriage being “a luxury even with all his wealth he could ill-afford” with “his affliction” (22).

This honorable resolution is tested, of course, by his growing desire for Elizabeth Bennet. Darcy confesses to being “bewitched” by Elizabeth in a way he had never experienced before, a term that highlights the parallel between the preternatural vampiric thrall and love’s seemingly otherworldly magic (42), a comparison exploited elsewhere in

this novel and in the other adaptations. For much of the novel, however, Darcy sees no future with Elizabeth Bennet, unable to see past the “agonizing truth”: “She was human, and he was not,” and hence, “Reason must prevail” (138)—for her sake.

Darcy’s thirst for blood is also used as a trial and measure of his integrity. Unlike Wickham, Darcy finds the act of feeding on live, non-consenting humans “unconscionable” (90) and almost exclusively drinks the blood of animals from fine chalices supplied by his ever-reliable valet and vampiric sire, Rivens (314). This he does to his obvious detriment. The nature of Darcy’s sacrifice is revealed by his rejuvenation when drinking human blood temporarily sourced by Rivens from a discreet surgeon’s assistant; the blood “sends shivers of delight through every cell of his being,” every sweet drop leaving him “clenched in ecstasy” in a way that animal blood never does (89). It is also laid bare by Wickham’s goading: “You really have aged, Darcy. That’s what comes of limiting yourself to the four-legged variety” (61). Abstaining from human blood and consequently succumbing to human ageing is, contrarily, something Wickham is loath to do (277-78). As such, Wickham’s and Darcy’s respective attitudes to sourcing human blood helps to illustrate their divergent moral codes and offers another example of Darcy’s striving to demarcate the boundary between man and monster. Darcy gives obvious credence to Rivens wise counsel: “Humanity is not a species, sir. It is a state of mind” (279).

Wickham’s and Darcy’s moral standards are, most tellingly, further exposed in their interactions with women. Saucier’s novel, which diverges from Austen’s original plot in an erotically charged extra-textual volume that explores Darcy’s and Elizabeth’s early sexual encounters, invests heavily in the commonplace connection between the vampire’s bite and coitus. And this has a significant bearing on the earlier actions of both vampires in the novel. Saucier’s Wickham is a sexual fiend. As with Austen’s hypotext, Wickham is revealed to have seduced Darcy’s fifteen-year-old sister Georgiana, who in this case is supernaturally

enthralled by Wickham. In a critical detail, victims who are enthralled by a vampire in this novel also appear to have no recollection of the experience; consequently, Georgiana has no memory of the event. While Darcy implies in his recount that Georgiana's virgin skin remains intact as Wickham only had designs for her fortune, the danger of vampiric rape—Wickham's non-consensual feeding on Georgiana—is alarmingly close. This is coupled with the disturbing patriarchal suppression of the victim's testimony; while Wickham is responsible for erasing Georgiana's memory of the event, Darcy is primarily responsible for its continuing personal and public repression, "keeping her ignorant" for psychological and social convenience (179). But the alarming potential for rape is fulfilled elsewhere in Saucier's novel: Jane Bennet's convalescence at Netherfield is discovered by Darcy to be the result of Wickham's satiating bite; in Wickham's own words, "Miss Bennet is quite beautiful. I could not resist. I have always found the stronger the attraction, the sweeter the taste" (60). Jane has no knowledge or memory of Wickham's despicable act, nor is it one to which she has consented. Once again, testimony is silenced, by both Wickham (who supernaturally suppresses the possibility), and Darcy (who does not wish to expose Wickham for fear of exposing himself as a vampire). Wickham's supernatural assault on Georgiana Darcy and his raping of Jane Bennet are concealed and subsumed within social custom in Saucier's novel, with both Wickham and Darcy's true vampiric natures left unexposed.

While Darcy makes every attempt to distinguish himself from Wickham's malevolent nature, the distinction is ultimately exposed as a precarious one. On a moonlit November night, Darcy "glanced around until assured they were alone" and "pierced [Elizabeth] with his gaze," before being tempted to pierce her flesh (75). Aroused by the warmth of her body, he contemplates untying her bonnet:

to reveal her throat and take that for which he hungered. He loosened the ribbon to expose her pulse and held his open mouth against it, allowing his

tongue to lather along the beating flesh. His body trembled with desire. He sucked gently and pressed his teeth into her neck without breaking the skin.

(75)

Soon, however, the “repulsive thought” that he “was no better than Wickham” arrested him, vowing to remove himself forever from Elizabeth’s company (75). Saucier obviously attempts to showcase Darcy’s self-control in resisting the very same wicked temptation that Wickham could not. But Darcy’s moral sense only returns after molesting Elizabeth, after simulating (dental) penetration. The line demarcating Wickham’s behavior from Darcy’s is finer than Saucier would have us believe. This is confirmed by Darcy’s encounter with a prostitute in the shadows of Drury Lane: hiking up her skirt and expecting a more typical sexual transaction, she instead swoons under his thrall—just as Elizabeth had—before he sinks his teeth into her neck, “savouring her very vitality” (116). A few moments later, “She had already forgotten him” (117). This precisely mirrors Wickham’s assault and silencing of Jane Bennet, irrespective of the victim’s lowly social status.

These vampiric assaults are, admittedly, only metaphors for rape. Likewise, the traditional vampire arguably exists as a metaphor for sexual malice, as Elizabeth reminds us. After Darcy reveals his true self to her, Elizabeth muses: “Perhaps Mr. Darcy did not mean vampire in the literal sense but rather as a metaphor, that Mr. Wickham preyed on young girls . . . Then why would Mr. Darcy say the same of himself? It was so strange” (183). Living in the Regency period, Elizabeth knows of no other literary vampire than the sexual fiend of the eighteenth-century and Romantic literature—an apt metaphor for Wickham, she believes, but not for Darcy. “*If Mr. Darcy truly were a vampire, why did he not use this ability to force me to accept his proposal?*” (183, author emphasis). As we know, Darcy *does* use his preternatural control over Elizabeth, coming perilously close to gratifying his bloodlust. But when it comes to his rejected marriage proposal, he nobly refuses to wield his undue powers

to claim what he wants; when Rivens asks Darcy whether he intends to take any further action on the matter, Darcy replies, “Indeed I do, but do not distress yourself, Rivens. I was rejected as a human, and I shall respond as a human” (166). Ultimately, Elizabeth sees Darcy the man over the monster, and they agree to wed.

However, the slippage between the literal and figurative is evident in the final, erotic volume detailing the premarital beginnings of the couple’s sex life. The first of their sexual encounters is restricted to a bite, but the parallels between dental and sexual penetration are evident: as Elizabeth feels Darcy “penetrating her flesh,” a “flood of delirium” pours over her, at once paralyzed and wanting to “pull him deeper into her” (341). Soon, she voraciously kisses his blood-stained mouth, her lips “swollen and smeared with blood—her *own* blood” (341, author emphasis). Later in the volume, Darcy feels remorseful, ashamed that their first kiss descended into “such savagery” (345). Elizabeth gives him the opportunity to replay the kiss as he would’ve preferred, with tenderness, but to this she responds with a frown, declaring, “I believe I preferred savagery” (346). To reprise Williamson’s formulation of the romantic fantasy, Elizabeth does not want the “savage beast” to be tamed entirely. Passion ensues, and this time Darcy’s bite literally coincides with sex, “the sweet metallic taste of blood, *her* blood, on both their lips” (348, author emphasis), a taste she comes to find “exquisitely erotic” (362). Elizabeth here resembles the young Anastasia of E. L. James’s *Fifty Shades of Grey* (2011), who also tastes “the faint metallic tang” of her own hymeneal blood during her first sexual encounter (120). A question that arises, then, is: which Darcy is Elizabeth’s ideal lover? The man, the monster, or indeed, both? It would appear that Elizabeth’s masochistic desires can only be satisfied by a combination of man and monster: Darcy the upstanding man of society and the demon in the sack. But marrying such a model of hyper-masculinity carries great risk, as the image of Elizabeth with swollen and bloodied lips might suggest; removed from this context, this is an image of domestic violence rather

than sexual pleasure. Later still, after days of separation, Darcy is resolved “to take [Elizabeth], body and blood,” all restraint disturbingly dissolved to the point that, “Had she not invited him in, he would’ve taken her still” (352). This is no longer a metaphor—his intentions of rape are real. Despite his noble ambition, Darcy is unable to separate man from monster. And while Saucier’s Darcy may well be presented as a perfect combination of rectitude, restraint, and passion, the malevolent and deep-seated literary roots of the vampire as a sexual fiend evidently cannot be entirely concealed. The risk of violent abuse remains ever-present, a latent, unpredictable threat to contented, eternal love. As with Krinard’s problematic formulation of vampiric love, the promise of idyllic, immortal romance arguably remains tantalizingly out of reach.

The Power of Love: Darcy Restored

Krinard’s and Saucier’s retellings of *Pride and Prejudice* explore and celebrate the kinds of love made possible by Darcy’s transformation into a vampire, while attempting to conceal the difficulties and risks that clouds the luster of a paranormal romantic ideal. Amanda Grange and Regina Jeffers adopt a different approach: instead, these authors use vampire Darcy to reinforce the magic of human, mortal love. For Grange and Jeffers, it would appear that there is no truer love than that which exists within our mortal grasp.

Grange’s *Mr. Darcy, Vampyre* is a sequel to Austen’s novel. Elizabeth and Darcy are married and are about to embark on a European honeymoon, but something appears to trouble Darcy throughout their journey. Unbeknownst to Elizabeth, Darcy is, of course, a vampire. Throughout their pan-European adventures, the passive and demure Elizabeth is confused by Darcy’s refusal to consummate their marriage. Like Saucier’s Darcy, Grange’s Darcy is tormented by the tension between his physical desire for his beloved wife and the violent threat that this poses to her safety. But unlike Saucier’s Darcy, this Darcy exerts much

more restraint—to the detriment of his marriage. At one point he wrenches himself “savagely” *from* a kiss (149), the notable lexical parallel highlighting the act as a counterpoint to the “savagery” of Darcy’s passionate kiss in Saucier’s novel. Elizabeth leaves Darcy convinced that her husband does not love him and despairs over his mistaken marriage, only to find herself entrapped by an ancient vampiric prince who comes to claim *droit de seigneur*, his feudal right to sexual relations with Elizabeth before Darcy consummates the marriage. To save Elizabeth, Darcy must fight with all his preternatural strength and reveal his true self. Darcy reveals to Elizabeth that his abstinence was indeed an act of love, for fear of hurting her. A conversion, it would appear, is needed before consummation.

The point of difference in Grange’s story is that Darcy is to be converted back into a human. After a subterranean Roman adventure where they risk life and limb, Darcy and Elizabeth come to realize that human love is the force that can effect Darcy’s transformation. Darcy the mortal is restored, as “for the first time since she had known him there was no tension in him, no aloofness, no painful restraint. There was only a man without burdens and curses. Free” (306). The immortal Darcy is not the fulfilment of her romantic ideal, but an obstacle. This is reflected in the novel’s short epilogue, in which Elizabeth writes to Jane “that to know another *human being* absolutely, and to love them, is the greatest adventure of our lives” (307, emphasis added). Elizabeth is also circumspect about newfound sexual pleasures in her missive, deliberately concealing them from Jane, but unlike Krinard’s and Saucier’s adaptations, they are also tellingly hidden from the reader. The novel ends as they set their course for “England and Pemberley,” or as Elizabeth declares, “home” (308). Elizabeth’s romantic ideal is not a sexualized fantasy of immortality. Her desires, instead, are met by normality, a physically mortal and monogamous relationship enjoyed in a comfortable, albeit luxurious, domestic setting.

Jeffers explores a similar romantic ideal in greater depth. Set in Regency England, her adaptation is loosely based on Austen's plot, culminating in a Darcy and Elizabeth's union part way through before launching into a vampire slayer adventure as the couple hunts the demonic Wickham. Darcy is not quite a vampire in this story, but a *dhampir*—half vampire, half human. The origin of this curse, and the burning sense of revenge that accompanies it through the generations, is a complex one, and is tied by Jeffers to the Scottish ballad "Lord Thomas and Fair Ellender" (56-57); suffice to say, as firstborn in his family, Darcy has inherited vampiric tendencies from his descendant Ellender D'Arcy. The Darcy family is also plagued by Seorais Winchcombe, once Ellender's suitor and now a vampire hellbent on extracting revenge on every generation of the Darcy family; in this story, he is more commonly known by his pseudonym, George Wickham. Furthermore, it is also revealed that Ellender D'Arcy's lover—Arawn Benning, the supposed historical figure behind the ballad's Lord Thomas—is Elizabeth's ancestor. Darcy, Elizabeth, and Wickham are "bound in a twisted fate" centuries in the making (57).

As a *dhampir*, Darcy "has the right to choose his destiny"—however, none before him have been able to break free from their vampiric nature (57). Darcy does not drink human blood, or blood of any sort, having "never succumbed to the noxious hunger that consumes" vampires like Wickham (358). He largely abstains from using his preternatural powers and as a result ages like an ordinary human (430). Although tormented by the curse and the potential future it brings, the choice of a human life is immediately available to Jeffers's Darcy—but he cannot achieve this alone. Enter Elizabeth: witty, cunning, sexy, every bit the "Vixen" that Darcy playfully calls her (see 73). Drawn to each other, they often "dueled for supremacy" (15), with Elizabeth often the aggressor in their flirtatious play. And when Darcy and Elizabeth are caught in a compromising situation following a violent but covert battle with Wickham, it is Elizabeth who proposes to Darcy (153). This Elizabeth is not a passive,

swooning, demure partner, as seen in various combinations in the other adaptations; Elizabeth intervenes in Darcy's life and predicament, much to his advantage.

On the first occasion in which Darcy and Elizabeth's growing intimacy threatens to blossom into a sexual encounter, we are reminded of the vampiric monster that lurks within Darcy. As Elizabeth reluctantly rolls away from Darcy's lying embrace during an afternoon picnic, her hand lands on his rapier, cutting her palm. The figurative parallel between Darcy's rapier and his phallus are palpable, and interpretative possibilities emerge. On one hand, Elizabeth's accidental handling of the phallic object and the painful cut she receives can be read as a physical warning against transgressive, premarital sex—a providential reminder, “do not touch.” On the other hand, it foreshadows their potential sexual union, with the phallic rapier penetrating Elizabeth's flesh and drawing (hymeneal) blood. But the troubling aspect of this metaphorical reading is that it is achieved unwittingly, without Elizabeth's will or assent. The wound is, perhaps, a warning against a different form of sexual transgression: rape at the hands of vampire Darcy. This possibility actualizes almost immediately, as Elizabeth's bloodied hand triggers Darcy's bloodlust, turning a tender attempt to kiss away her blood into a cold, blood-sucking trance. Elizabeth struggles against the assault, “trying to dislodge her hand from his mouth, but he held her fast, his tongue washing over the gap in her skin” (77), before striking him with the butt of the sword and standing ready to strike again. Elizabeth intuits what is sexually at stake here, actively seizing control by commanding the rapier, the phallic symbol; without it, Darcy is impotent, and the threat he momentarily poses to her innocence is defused. Darcy's lucidity returns and is accompanied with deep remorse. As instructive as this episode might be, it represents an aberration in Darcy's conduct towards Elizabeth. This Darcy is a kind lover: his erotic dreams are filled with tender sensuality (16), and he promises to “be gentle” when the couple finally consummate their marriage (437).

Indeed, it is Wickham that poses the greatest threat to Elizabeth's virtue. Women are mere objects to satisfy Wickham's desires, whether for blood, sex, or revenge. When he seduces and feeds on an anonymous woman he does so with sadistic brutality, ripping away her flesh as he feeds on her blood to the point of erection before "laying her on the ground to ravish her completely" (85). The woman's body is left to rot in a ditch for Elizabeth to stumble over while she, in turn, flees from the demonic Wickham (90). This monstrous ferocity is no aberration but an almost ritualistic violence repeated later in the novel: the "snap of her neck" followed by his voracious feeding; the onset of his "erection"; and his "copulation with her lifeless body" (280). But above all, Wickham relishes the "exhilaration of absolute power" (280). So, when Wickham entraps Elizabeth in the bedroom of the manor House at Netherfield, stripping her down to her chemise and tying her to the bedposts, the obvious danger to Elizabeth's virtue and life is doubled—not only does her nubile body tempt Wickham sexually, but it also embodies control over Darcy. To simultaneously claim her body and his revenge would indeed be a euphoric pleasure. But in a rare display of his vampiric powers, Darcy rages with all his preternatural might to fend off Wickham, save his beloved, and ultimately win the bedroom battle for sexual privileges with Elizabeth. Once again, the character of Wickham is used as a foil to highlight everything Darcy could—and chooses not—to be.

However, the real force that repels Wickham, as is later revealed, is Elizabeth's love for Darcy. During the bedroom battle, Elizabeth believes a bejewelled crucifix given to her by Darcy helps to keep Wickham at bay until help arrives. But an intrigued Wickham knows it is not the "insipid" trinket that wields power but Elizabeth's belief in the man that presented it to her (175); "Its magic lay in their connection," a force that Wickham cannot overcome, neither here nor in subsequent battles (176).

Like Grange's Darcy, Jeffers's romantic hero needs Elizabeth to restore him to human life and to enable his fullest human potential. But Darcy's need for Elizabeth is much more potent and convincing in Jeffers's novel, precisely because in Jeffers's Elizabeth he has the perfect romantic foil. Darcy's haughtiness is disarmed by her sassiness; his erudition is matched, and bettered, by Elizabeth's wit; his skill on horseback and with a rapier—decorous signs of his physical virility—are accomplishments to which Elizabeth aspires rather than merely admire; Elizabeth packs a punch to keep Darcy's incipient sexual demons in check; Darcy's preternatural brawn is matched by her knowledge and courage; and, most significantly, all of Darcy's anxieties about his curse and doubts over a future together are countered by her unwavering faith. Jeffers's Elizabeth is not the cipher waiting to be imprinted with Darcy's desires as seen in the other adaptations. Here, Elizabeth is a fully-formed, independent character, and Darcy cannot be the human he wishes to be without her—and this is Jeffers's romantic ideal. As Darcy attests in the final lines of the novel, "You changed my life, Elizabeth. You made me whole" (440). This romantic ideal culminates in a final vision of Darcy and Elizabeth married with two children, a domestic idyll that fulfils "the hunger of a lifetime" for not only this couple, but presumably, for many of the novel's readers (440). Moreover, it is a denouement that reaffirms Austen's very human romance over its paranormal possibilities. As Darcy avows, the supernaturally-cursed love of Ellender and Arawn, and its enshrinement into Scottish balladry legend, belongs to the past; instead, as *Pride and Prejudice's* enduring popularity confirms, the unlikely human romance of Darcy and Elizabeth is the stuff of a "new legend" (439).

Dreamboats and Nightmares

The merging of two significant literary cults—that of Jane Austen and the vampire—promises much for Gothic romance, and this is especially so with vampiric retellings of *Pride*

and Prejudice. The transformation of Mr. Darcy into a vampire heightens all of the qualities that made Austen's original Darcy a veritable dreamboat in popular culture: "handsome, brooding, utterly devoted, protective, a bit mysterious, and rich" (Miller et. al.). This description is, in fact, of Meyer's Edward Cullen, but as Laura Miller claims, Meyer's sparkling vampire is just a reincarnation of Austen's Darcy (amongst others). If Meyer's *Twilight* series indirectly gestures towards the romantic potential of Darcy as a vampire, authors Susan Krinard, Collette L. Saucier, Amanda Grange, and Regina Jeffers reclaim and explore this potential in their own works of fanfiction. Subsequently, other titillating romantic fantasies also emerge: the empowering desire to domesticate the savage hero; the promise of otherworldly sexual ecstasy; and the hope for a new kind of immortal love, one enjoyed in the physical rather than spiritual realm.

But with these tantalizing possibilities comes considerable risk. What if the savage beast—the monstrous, literary vampire of old—cannot be tamed? What if the unworldly pleasures of a vampire bite and/or sex are precisely that because they are attendant with death? And what if immortal love is really a curse rather than a blessing (as Jeffers's tortured and vengeful Wickham exposes)? These incipient dangers are implied and sometimes realized through the portrayal of Darcy in Krinard's and Saucier's adaptations. Both arguably culminate in male sexual fantasies rather than romantic ideals: while Krinard's immortal Darcy looks set to enjoy an open but loving relationship with Lizzy Bennet, free to indulge in the pleasures that other blood "donors" bring, Saucier's Darcy is given dangerous license to "savage" Elizabeth. Krinard's Lizzy is left to choose unreciprocated monogamy or to sacrifice her humanity to join Darcy as a vampire. Saucier's Elizabeth, like Sookie Stackhouse in Charlaine Harris's *The Southern Vampire Mysteries* (2001-13) and Bella Swan in Meyer's *Twilight* series, is left bloodied by the man she loves. Neither retelling culminates

in the romantic fantasy promised by merging Austen and vampires; instead, they expose the fine line between dreamboats and nightmares.

These novels, of female romantic and sexual fantasies turned sour, serve to remind us of the incipient dangers, both fictional and real, attached to the cultural erasure or repression of the monstrous origins of the literary vampire. The new-age vampire, epitomized by Meyer's Edward Cullen, has given the literary vampire a new lease of life with readers of romance. That the novel widely regarded as the most romantic in English literature—Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*—and its dashing hero—Mr. Darcy—have been appropriated as vehicles for this new alluring vampiric hero is an obvious demonstration of the traction this figure has gained in popular culture. But Krinard and Saucier, whose novels include incidences of fictionalized violence, metaphorical rape, and silenced testimony, demonstrate how their fanfiction provides a critical space to explore, however inadvertently, the inherent risks associated with the erasure of the sadistic, hypersexual vampire from cultural memory. As a form of feminist practice, these vampiric retellings of *Pride and Prejudice* reaffirm and refashion Austen's female perspective for more overtly sexualized purposes, but in doing so, they also concede the symbolic potency of the vampire as a coercive hypermasculine force hungry for sexual agency, no matter the cost. The vampiric otherworldliness of Krinard's and Saucier's Darcy offers an imaginative space “for behaviour that is not only unacceptable for human males to exhibit, but also unacceptable for women to desire” (J. Taylor 393). And with this, they raise age-old anxieties—as old as the Gothic novel itself—about their very real and pernicious influence on young, female readers and the normalization or fetishization of sexual and gendered violence.

Grange and Jeffers, conversely, reinforce conventional romantic fantasies. Darcy's vampiric nature is exorcised by the magical power of human love in both examples. Here, Darcy's vampirism is represented as a hurdle along the path to true love, rather than a

romantic ideal in itself. And what does true love look like in these adaptations? It's a vision of matrimony, monogamy, domesticity, children, growing old together—and not of sex, which is decorously withheld from the reader's view. This is a female fantasy of a different kind, where sex is subsumed by romantic love and the vampire's sexual and symbolic potency is subdued. This is not a new, posthuman refashioning of love, but instead a very familiar, earthly bliss.

Collectively, these adaptations struggle to attain a new idealization of Darcy as a vampiric romantic hero, who is presented as either permanently flawed or restored back to his human form. Furthermore, each in their own way ultimately labors to construct, or consciously rail against, the paranormal romantic fantasy of a highly sexualized, physically eternal, monogamous love. Perhaps, after all, they serve as reminders that what we really desire in Gothic romance is not the impossible made possible but an affirmation of existing values and ideals set securely within our own sense of reality.

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