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INNOCENT MONSTERS. FILM VERSIONS OF THE CHILD VAMPIRE MOTIF

INTRODUCTION

Although cinema as a carrier of cultural texts is just over 100 years old, it would be impossible to give even an approximate number of films about children. It would be undoubtedly huge and even if we used digital search methods, we would have to take into account a possible incompleteness of the archives and the fact that the results would quickly become out-of-date¹. Slightly less common theme in films, though just as popular, is the vampire motif. In this case, too, it is difficult to give an accurate number of films that have used the vampire theme to date. The popularity of the bloodsucker figure – though it bears the traits of a fashion or seasonality – has led to quite a rapid increase in the number of films that more or less directly refer to vampirism. Against the background of the popularity of these two motifs we have an interesting, relatively small groups of films which combine the seemingly incompatible figures of the child and the vampire. What is more, there are very few such contaminations and it may seem that film makers are wary of combining children with vampires. This may stem from a specific concept of the child as an innocent, infantile, sinless creature who is the initial and most perfect incarnation of humanity. “Unless you [...] become like little children, you will never enter

¹ The Internet Movie Database — <http://www.imdb.com> [access: 24 June 2011] lists 4029 titles using the motif of a child, but the list is still far from complete and, in addition, it takes into account cultural texts just related to film, for example computer games, which distorts the figures.

the kingdom of heaven,” (Mt 18:3)² says the Bible. Indeed, the symbolism of the child motif seems to more or less directly stem from such an approach; the child in cultural texts often

symbolises beginning. Of the New Year, morning, spring; connection with nature; fertility; purity, pure attitude to life, innocence; ignorance, stupidity; spontaneity, irrationality; forgetfulness and forgiveness; full of possibilities, future, promise; treasure; ingratitude; worries³.

The incompatibility of the child with the world of adults, inability to assimilate, and living in a world much more beautiful and perfect than the real one can be obviously regarded both as positive and negative. In the former case the axiom is longing, in the latter – experience. Film makers seem to reach for the first option, more often; thanks to a fresh view of the world, a view without any prejudice, a child protagonist can say more about it than adults. In addition, children’s innocence also denotes an open mind, which is not without its significance either.

It is worth quoting here a short description of the vampire motif. According to the *Dictionary of popular culture*, it is

one of the most popular figures in horror literature and film, according to old folk legends, vampires are the dead rising from their graves and sucking the blood out of sleeping people. Vampires could be suicides, murderers, those who were cursed, infidels, children who died before baptism etc. We can find vampire threads in the mythologies and beliefs of all nations. In Europe, the biggest number of vampires “inhabited” Transylvania, Brittany, Styria, Serbia, Greece, Moravia, Hungary, Bohemia, Poland (especially Silesia). [...] Literary portraits of vampires included repeatedly characteristic features of their looks: pallor, thinness, great height, extraordinary strength and agility, too red lips and sharp teeth, unusually blazing eyes (sometimes red), long and sharp nails. [...] No less attractive for literature are other properties of vampires as well as their customs – night time lifestyle, consuming only blood, sleeping in a coffin during the day (often in an old chapel; vampires neither age nor decompose), cold body, sickly breath (or lack of it), ability to change form (into a bat, dog or wolf; these animals are often presented as vampires’ companions), ability to walk through walls, telepathy, hypnotic power over people and animals. [...] Literary and film vampires usually are not reflected in mirrors, they dislike garlic, are afraid of light and religious symbols – Bible, crucifix, holy water (sometimes ordinary water is sufficient)⁴.

This long and comprehensive definition reflects a broadly defined vampire stereotype and is a starting point for other versions of the bloodsucking creature that exist in culture. Moreover, after reading this description we may have the impression that the vampire motif is fuller and more tangible than the child motif, and that vampirism as such is a narrow notion which can be easily made concrete. It can also be a carrier of a variety of – often innovative – symbols. As the meaning of the

² Quoted after: *The New International Version*, <http://bible.cc/matthew/18-3.htm>.

³ W. Kopaliński, *Słownik symboli*, Warsaw 2006, p. 76.

⁴ K. Walc, “Wampir”, [entry in:] *Słownik literatury popularnej*, ed. T. Żabski, Wrocław 2006, pp. 632–633.

child motif is perforce allegorical, the vampire motif is still open to new contexts and interpretations. The appearance of a vampire in a film is increasingly seen not as an autotelic value, but as a decontextualisation of the existing status quo and recontextualisation based on a new, dynamic element. In other words, vampirism hovers over the message of the film and transforms it, extracting its characteristic meanings. It feeds on the context in which it is placed⁵.

In this perspective a juxtaposition of the child motif – seen statically and intuitively, and, thus without reflection – and the idea of the vampire, slightly different every time, dynamic, changing its meaning depending on the context, may bring interesting results. Childhood constitutes both fuel for and opposition to vampirism, traditional connotations of which include sin, lust and death. The simplest version of this opposition would thus be the vampire-murderer and child-victim model. Cinema audiences – especially in America – do not respond well to plot structures in which children are harmed, and demand deeper, fuller motivation than the structural opposition between the child and the vampire⁶. Instead of using this simple opposition, film makers propose a more difficult solution, which is far more interesting – contamination.

It might seem that the vampire and the child have generally nothing in common and that making these two motifs equal would be unintentionally grotesque. Yet it is possible to find some common ground, which makes such a combination probable. First, there is the shared context of the city and the bourgeoisie, in which both ideas have been made concrete and stereotypical. Though the source of the vampire phantasm originated in mythology and folk legends, its modern understanding is a result of the combination of the eternal fear of the bloodsucking dead and the Victorian sensitivity or aesthetics, rooted in the Romantic tradition and associated with the growth of 19th century bourgeoisie. Following Michel Vovell, Anna Gemra notes that “the vampire who had existed for a long time in Balkan or Transylvanian hideaways, was naturalised in the Western sensitivity and in the exploration of death by the Romantic fantasy, and emerges as a variety of a Marquis de Sade phantasm, combining Eros with Thanatos”⁷. The emergence of the vampire from dark and distant, half-mythical regions of modern Romania and his placement in the familiar

⁵ Of course, there are films using the vampire motif in a traditional manner, but they are either countless incarnations of Dracula made by Hammer Films or parodies – just as often based on the figure of the Transylvanian count. They should, therefore, be treated as epigones of traditional vampire horrors, rather than productions striving for innovation and thus contributing to the development of the vampire motif.

⁶ George Lucas needed 28 years to let his Darth Vader kill children, but even then he approached this with a very high degree of correctness. Cf. *Star Wars: Episode III. Revenge of the Sith*, dir. G. Lucas, USA 2005.

⁷ A. Gemra, *Od gotyczmu do horroru. Wilkołak, wampir i monstrum Frankensteina w wybranych utworach*, Wrocław 2008, pp. 101–102.

space of London were, of course, the work of Bram Stoker⁸, though this quickly became associated with the modern idea of the bloodsucking creature. It became clear that the urban space was an ideal hunting ground for a creature hunting people, a space that could ensure the necessary anonymity. Thus the vampire became part of the images inextricably associated with the city and – as a dangerous but fascinating creature – referred primarily to bourgeois sensitivity. The very same sensitivity from which stems the cultural awareness of the existence of children.

The child will appear with the domestic family, brought together by living together – limited to a small number of the closest relatives, domestic family that emerges and spreads with the urban environment and bourgeoisie as a class. The child is a product of the city and bourgeoisie⁹.

The cultural living space of children – determined by bourgeois consciousness – is thus also the space in which vampires exist. However, while children rely on the urban space and get used to it, as they approach adulthood – supporting the existing status quo – vampires want to destroy the equilibrium, contaminate the city with evil or, ultimately, to destroy it.

Another common element may be the attitude to consciousness understood as a series of experiences, lived through and realised, making up the memory and identity of every human being. And here what the child and the vampire have in common is their attitude to a broadly defined non-being. According to Carl Gustav Jung, [the child] is thus both beginning and end, an initial and a terminal creature.

The initial creature existed before man was, and the terminal creature will be when man is not. Psychologically speaking, this means that the “child” symbolizes the pre-conscious and post-conscious essence of man. His pre-conscious essence in the unconscious state of earliest childhood; his post-conscious essence is an anticipation by analogy of life after death¹⁰.

Although this psychoanalytical concept of the idea or, more precisely, phantasm of the child may arouse some controversy, it would be difficult not to notice in it similarities to the ontological status of the vampire, which, on the one hand, is based on atavistic, i.e. pre-conscious, fears accompanying humanity, and on the other represents the unconscious, i.e. the Freudian id and drives accumulated there. “The vampire forms part of the misunderstood history of humanity. He possesses a role and a function – he did not just spring from nothingness in the seventeenth or eighteenth century! He fits within a complex set of representations of life and death that has survived into the present”¹¹. Although analogies with non-being preceding

⁸ See A. Izdebska, “Gotyckie labirynty”, [in:] *Wokół gotycyzmów. Wyobrażenia, groza, okrucieństwo*, ed. G. Gazda, A. Izdebska, J. Płuciennik, Kraków 2002.

⁹ J. Le Goff, [“Czy w ogóle w średniowieczu były dzieci?”], Polish translation by H. Szumańska-Grossowa, [in:] *Dzieci*, selected and edited by M. Janion, S. Chwin, Gdańsk 1988, vol. 2, p. 194.

¹⁰ C.G. Jung, “The psychology of the child archetype”, [in:] *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious (Collected Works of C.G. Jung Vol. 9 Part 1)*, Princeton University Press 1981, p. 178.

¹¹ C. Lecouteux, *The Secret History of Vampires*, Inner Traditions 2010, pp. 5-6.

and following human life seem to be quite distant in the case of children and vampires, this does not change the fact that they are noticeable.

The last element making it possible to bring together ideas of vampires and children is the dichotomy inherent in both phantasms.

In all myths concerning childhood we encounter a strange paradox: on the one hand, vulnerable “children” are left at the mercy of very powerful enemies, are constantly at risk of destruction, and on the other – they have at their disposal powers that are beyond human measure. This mythological concept is closely linked to the psychological fact that “children” are something that is slight, insignificant, that they are “mere children”, but also divine¹².

It is, therefore, about a kind of uniqueness, harmonious union of opposites on the level of one idea. In this case the analogy with the vampire is nearly complete, though it consists in applying reverse values: the divinity of the bloodsucker lies in his physical power, immortality and supernatural abilities, in other words – ideal adaptation to hunting and fighting; insignificance – in that despite all the vampirical powers, vampirism is invariably regarded as a curse and its carriers as creatures inferior to human beings. Thus “the modern narrative, be it in novels or in films, usually makes sure that the ambiguous ontological status of vampires is maintained, though it cannot simply [...] use the folk genealogy of the vampire anymore. It introduces a number of modifications”¹³. One of these may be making a vampire a child or a child a vampire.

A CHILD WHO IS A VAMPIRE

A rather obvious example of the latter is a family comedy entitled *The Little Vampire*¹⁴, based on children’s stories by Angela Sommer-Bodenburg. The film tells a story of friendship between a 9-year-old boy, Tony, and a young vampire named Rudolph. Tony – peculiarly for his age – has visions of bloodsuckers looking for a mysterious stone, who are pursued by an evil and cruel vampire hunter. The stone is directly connected with the vampire curse, for thanks to it in favourable conditions – full moon and a comet that flies by it every 300 years – the spell can be removed and vampires can become mortal again. As a result of Tony’s prophetic dreams he becomes strangely fascinated with vampires, which attracts the attention of Rudolph, who is flying past his house. Both boys quickly become friends, with Tony helping Rudolph and his family find the stone and finally remove the vampire curse.

The typical motif of family films – children solving adults’ problems – is presented here in two ways. On the one hand, we are following Tony, who has loving

¹² C.G. Jung, *op. cit.*, p. 170.

¹³ M. Janion, *Wampir. Biografia symboliczna*, Gdańsk 2008, p. 32.

¹⁴ *The Little Vampire*, dir. U. Edel, The Netherlands-Germany-USA 2000.

but busy parents, is bullied at school, no one understands his fascination, he has no friends and the only meaningful thing in his life is help provided to Rudolph. His is a parallel story: he wants what his parents want, does not go to school, has a lot of freedom, shares the vampire curse with his siblings, which brings them even more closely together, and his only problem is how to cope with the limitations of vampire existence and deal with the unpleasant, frustrated vampire hunter. Rudolph represents unrestricted childhood freedom and in this respect he is more of an incarnation of the eponymous hero of James Matthew Barrie's *Peter Pan*¹⁵ than a vampire. In fact, he offers Tony amusements stereotypically associated with children's dreams; he transfers him to the world of dreams (after all, the boy dreams about vampires), involves him in a fight against an unequivocally negative character moving in a fantasy vehicle (the vampire hunter and his truck can be treated as a variation on Captain Hook and the pirate ship) and, first of all, enables him to fly. All this makes Rudolph a guide to this new fantastic world, in which Tony has his own – heroic, no less – role to play. Vampirism is only a distinctive feature of his world and has no separate, specific symbolism. In Tony's eyes it is, in fact, a positive phenomenon, for it allows him to experience things inaccessible to ordinary mortals. Rudolph, of course, disagrees, because he and his family want to remove the curse of blood sucking, immortality and fear of light. In this respect, however, vampirism is only a series of inconveniences and does not bear the mark of eternal anguish.

As is often the case with family cinema, its content does not provoke into asking questions, does not raise doubts or aspire to be telling the truth about the world. On the contrary, the film is dominated by conservative values traditionally regarded as positive: friendship, family life, humanity, sacrifice, ordinariness, purity, kind-heartedness. The vampires – stereotypically understood as an antithesis of humanity – want to regain mortality, so they renounce their otherness in favour of the status quo represented by Tony and his family. What wins is a well-ordered, firmly-grounded and predictable – in other words: bourgeois – image of the world, which can be seen in the final reconciliation of Rudolph's "devampirised" family with Tony's parents. The potential of the tension generated by the combination of the ideas of the child and the vampire is thus not fully used and it seems that the only aim of this decision was to make it easier for young viewers to identify themselves with the main protagonists.

Interestingly, *The Little Vampire* is the only family film featuring a contamination of the ideas of the child and the vampire. Film makers seem to realise that the dramatic potential offered by this combination is much greater and can be fully appreciated by more mature, experienced audiences. This is shown by the Swedish-Russian production of *Frostbitten*¹⁶, which presents a child vampire in a slightly

¹⁵ Cf. J.M. Barrie, *Peter Pan or the Boy Who Wouldn't Grow Up*, Polish translation by A. Brzózka, Wrocław 2010.

¹⁶ *Frostbitten*, dir. A. Banke, Russia-Sweden 2006.

different light. In this film the action takes place in a little town above the Arctic Circle shortly after the beginning of the polar night. There are three concurrent threads: of the doctor Annika, who has come to the local hospital fascinated with the achievements of the local geneticist Gerhard Beckert; of her daughter Saga, who is trying to fit in at the new school; and of a young medical student, Sebastian, who out of curiosity takes some of doctor Beckert's mysterious pills and transforms himself into a vampire. There are many more bloodsuckers around and they will soon take over the town. The whole film is based on a ironic, somewhat comic narrative and camp style. From our perspective the most important thread seems to be that of Annika, who discovers that Beckert, a former SS man – was bitten during the war by an female Ukrainian vampire, whose child, Maria, he took from her. As a vampire and geneticist he has long worked on improving his nature, conducting his experiments on Maria. Annika – who herself has started to turn into a vampire – manages to kill Beckert and save Maria, who is beginning to treat her as her mother.

Annika's motivation is in this respect purely human; she sees the harm being done to the child and reacts instinctively, irrespective of the fact that the creature she is trying to save is par excellence a threat to humanity. Maria herself – although viewers see her for the first time as she tries to get out of a coffin – is, in fact, more a child than a vampire, and in comparison with other, savage bloodsuckers appearing in the film, she is an embodiment of innocence. We may even think that although she is one of the oldest vampires around, this has not influenced her mental age and innocence implied by it. Moreover, although Annika is transformed into a vampire, in no way does this affect her maternal instinct, for she not only rescues Maria, but also saves her real daughter Saga from the slaughter carried out in the town by other vampires. Although there is nothing in the film to suggest that Maria's implied innocence is something more than just a facade (though during the confrontation with Gerhard she is not inclined to resort to violence at all), yet very soon she learns the norm of family life and begins to call Annika "mummy". The vampiric nature of this character becomes blurred or, at least, is pushed to the background; what matters most is her innocence.

We are dealing with a similar approach in Juliusz Machulski's black comedy *The Lullaby*¹⁷. The Makarewicz family living in the village of Odlotowo in the Masurian Lake District feed on the blood of their neighbours and strangers, kidnapping them and keeping them for days in a cellar under the barn. Despite their rather unpleasant and rough appearance, the vampires turn out to be quite good-natured creatures in their own way. They set their victims free (sometimes to catch them again) – having wiped out their memory – and their actions are motivated by an ordinary, even human need to feed four children (the fifth is on its way) and the father-in-law. Apart from his longevity and need to drink blood, the head of the

¹⁷ *The Lullaby [Kolysanka]*, dir. J. Machulski, Poland 2010.

family, Michał Makarewicz, is no different from a typical farmer, who has to cope with the poor health of his infant child, eccentricities of his father and the dilemmas of his adolescent son. Machulski's vampires, though they live long, are born and die like normal people. Including the four Makarewicz children.

When it comes to the plot, child vampires from *The Lullaby* are treated instrumentally, as an addition to the rural vampire family, which, in fact, does not differ much from its human equivalents. Hungry children – especially the infant Kuba, who is beginning to cut teeth – are primarily a problem for their parents and do not really play any other role, with the exception of the eldest son, Wojtek, whose dilemmas, however, are quickly resolved by Michał and are used rather to convince the audience that the vampires' family life is identical to that of people. The children themselves – apart from the fact that they drink blood – are built almost entirely on the idea of the child as such: joyful, naive, innocent.

When it comes to Eli, the 12-year-old vampire from the Swedish film *Let the Right One In*¹⁸, we cannot say that she is innocent. For years she has been forced to fight for survival, moving from place to place with her carer, who gets blood for her. One night she meets Oskar, a boy living in the neighbourhood who comes from a broken family, is bullied at school by other pupils, which increases his frustration and sense of hopelessness. Oskar and Eli are drawn to each other by their loneliness. When Eli's carer is caught, Oskar is the only person kind to her. Their relationship becomes cooler, when he discovers her true nature, but the affection they have for each other and desire to overcome loneliness ties them forever.

Eli is more of a vampire child than her predecessors, and her motivations are subordinated entirely to the need to drink blood and avoid sunshine. When her carer is unable to get blood for her, she is forced to kill a resident of the town herself and drink his blood. But she does it, because she has to, because she needs to survive. At some point she tells Oskar that she kills because she has to, but she finds no satisfaction or pleasure in it. Her state, her otherness make her lonely and misunderstood, which is all the more tragic given the fact that at her age she needs company. Evident strangeness and implied innocence are combined in Eli in a harmonious manner, making up, in a way, a new, rare quality. What comes to the fore are not features characterising the vampire (because drinking blood is justified by a natural necessity) or the child (because she is neither defenceless nor naive), but a figure whose main features are sadness, apathy and sense of constant isolation as well as desire for being close to another human being – a very human desire though often attributed to vampires. It is in Oskar's presence and then in the affection between them that Eli finds the strength to continue her existence. Thus, vampirism is a part of Eli, but also a part that prevents her from living her longed-for life – life of a child.

¹⁸ *Let the Right One In* [*Låt den rätte komma in*], dir. T. Alfredson, Sweden 2008.

A VAMPIRE WHO IS A CHILD

Interestingly, Eli's actions as a child-vampire are morally ambivalent; we can conclude very easily that the needs of the little vampire are more important and that the search for a "friend" is motivated by purely pragmatic considerations. These are conclusions drawn by Matt Reeves, who directed a remake entitled *Let Me In*¹⁹, produced by the famous studio Hammer Films. The plot is in many respects an analogy of the original. The vampire Abby meets Owen, who lives next door and who with time – and in identical circumstances – becomes her friend and carer. However, the film is focused more on the experiences and problems of its child protagonists, rarely showing the actions and motivations of others²⁰. Owen's mother is filmed in such a way that we never see her face, while his father is entirely absent from the film. It is worth noting that broken families are increasingly used as a starting point for the protagonists' stories, both in literature and in film. It seems that the traditional family values do not provide "sufficient counterbalance to a range of characters from stories of families that are breaking up or are in permanent conflict"²¹. This is also the family of the boy from *Let Me In*, but in the case of the remake, the conflict is pushed to the background. The remake is more a story of the relations between Abby and Owen. These are almost identical to those in the original, with just several details being different, for example the relations between Abby and her carer, which in the Swedish film are barely sketched. What we see in the remake is deep attachment and devotion of the older man, going far beyond ordinary friendship. This can also be seen in a parallel used here. At some point Owen and Abby take photographs in a photo booth, and shortly after that he finds similar photographs in the vampire's flat. The pictures are faded and tattered and feature Abby and another boy, who resembles her now aged carer.

What in the Swedish version was a need of the heart stemming from intense loneliness turns out to be cold calculation in the remake. Abby's existing carer turns out to be decrepit and is caught by the police, after which he commits suicide to protect the girl. The young vampire is, therefore, forced to find another carer and this role is perfectly fulfilled by Owen. All evidence of friendship and devotion, the budding bond and trust between them is thus marked by submissiveness and manipulation, by Abby using Owen's naivety and loneliness. So Abby turns out to be more of a vampire than a child, after all, she does what vampires do – she lives off people. Her monstrosity is additionally emphasised by the transformation that occurs in her during hunting and blood drinking. Her eyes begin to glow, her face

¹⁹ *Let Me In*, dir. M. Reeves, USA-Great Britain 2010.

²⁰ The exceptions include Abby's carer, played by Richard Jenkins, and the policeman, who is a kind of narrator in the film. The remaining characters play episodic roles at most.

²¹ U. Glensk, "Rodzina jako źródło opresji", [in:] *eadem*, *Proza wyzwolonej generacji 1989–1999*, Kraków 2002, p. 122.

gets pale, she begins to grow fangs. Abby is thus more of a monster than Eli and she uses her implied innocence to hunt.

Abby is not the only cinematic child-vampire who uses her appearance and existing stereotype to drink blood. There are similar vampire characters in several earlier films. First of all, it is worth mentioning here Homer, the young vampire from *Near Dark*²² by Kathryn Bigelow. Homer is a member of a gang of bloodthirsty vagrants and renegades, led by the charismatic Jesse, played by Lance Hendriksen. Though he looks young – which he ruthlessly uses, hunting people – everybody around him calls him “old man” and he himself says that he is an adult imprisoned in the body of a child. It turns out that vampires in Bigelow’s films do not age physically, but they do mature mentally. Their self-awareness is fuller than in the case of children as a result, so we cannot speak of any innocence here. That is why Homer ruthlessly uses his appearance to entrap his victims. Physically he is not as strong as other vampires, and this is the only aspect of his childish condition that is left. In all other respects he is a bloodsucker and can even turn other people into vampires, as he did with a teenage girl named Mae (who, in turn, transformed the film’s main protagonist, Caleb).

In Bigelow’s film the vampires are ruthless and cruel, they find perverse joy in cruelty and killing, and their life is reduced almost solely to a gruesome hedonism. Killing gives them pleasure, and the more savage and gruesome the crime they manage to commit, the better. Despite his child-like appearance, Homer fits in perfectly with this image.

We see a similar approach to a character in the case of Claudia, the little vampire from Neil Jordan’s film *Interview with the Vampire*²³ based on Anne Rice’s novel. As a 12-year-old girl she witnessed the death of her mother in plague-ridden 19th century New Orleans. She was on the brink of death, when she was found by Louis, the narrator and also the main protagonist of *Interview with the Vampire*. Hungry, Louis drank Claudia’s blood, against himself and his principles, but he did not complete her transformation; this was accomplished by his companion and friend Lestat. Thus, Claudia had, in fact, two creators, two vampire fathers – all three became a caricature and distortion of the family model.

Claudia is an antithesis of a child already when it comes to her place in the world. Forced to murder people to feed on their blood, she matures mentally very quickly and begins to understand what she really is. Paradoxically, her self-awareness does not see anything wrong or immoral in the vampire existence. The only thing that irritates her is the impossibility of achieving physical maturity. “Transformed by Louis, who cannot come to terms with the fact that he ‘partook of’ the 12-year-old’s blood, she exists eternally in a child’s body, conscious of the fact that

²² *Near Dark*, dir. K. Bigelow, USA 1987.

²³ *Interview with the Vampire*, dir. N. Jordan, USA 1994.

she will never become an adult. The desires awakening in her adult mind become perverse”²⁴. Like Homer, Claudia uses her looks of a 12-year-old to hunt and kill even more effectively than her vampire fathers, which Louis finds disgusting but Lestat approves of. Eventually, however, her desires get the better of humanity implied in children; she turns against Lestat to seek freedom together with Louis. Thus she begins to take responsibility for her actions, take the initiative and make her own decisions, committing a crime and an act of betrayal. Nothing remains in her of childish innocence and naivety.

The cause of Claudia’s anguish is the same as in Homer’s case. “‘Child’ means something evolving towards independence. This it cannot do without detaching itself from its origins; abandonment is therefore a necessary condition, not just a concomitant symptom”²⁵. Both Claudia and Homer (and probably also Abby and Eli from both versions of *Let Me In*) have been deprived by the curse of vampirism of the possibility of achieving their full powers, completing the maturing process, rejecting childish innocence, cheerfulness and awkwardness in favour of a conscious and individualised existence in the world. Remaining in their children’s bodies, both are deprived of independence, doomed to incapability of living as vampires and impossibility of remaining innocent children unaware of evil. This situation gives rise to a sense of frustration and being misfits in both, which proves the ultimate incompatibility of the category of the child to the idea of the vampire (at least as approached by Rice, Jordan and Bigelow). Thus child vampires, though they can exist and try to reconcile their two natures, are nevertheless ill-adapted to the world and are ultimately doomed to extinction; this is what in any case happens with Homer and Claudia – both die burned by the sun.

Sometimes a child vampire categorically rejects one of the two natures in order to find fulfilment in the other. This happens in *30 Days of Night*²⁶, based on a comic book by Steven Niles and Ben Templesmith. The situation of the main protagonists is similar to the circumstances known from *Frostbitten*. In the town of Barrow, Alaska, the polar night begins and so does an invasion of vampires. They kill nearly all inhabitants and for a month try to murder the survivors. The origin of vampirism is unknown; the attackers come from the outside and live only to drink blood in the cruellest way possible. Among the vampires there is a small, unassuming girl, who, however, very quickly turns out to be a rabid bloodsucker and attacks the protagonists. They, if they even want to think about surviving, must kill her by decapitation.

30 Days of Night is a typical slasher film, a genre featuring disproportionate amounts of blood and violence, and protagonists who have to fight against more numerous antagonists, mainly during naturalistically presented and brutal clashes. This also happens in the confrontation with the vampire child, who – despite her

²⁴ P. Ciećwierz, *Synowie Kaina, córki Lilith... Rzecz o wampirach w fantasy*, Warsaw 2009, p. 79.

²⁵ C.G. Jung, *op. cit.*, p. 168.

²⁶ *30 Days of Night*, dir. D. Slade, New Zealand-USA 2007.

slender body and plaits – does not even hide her monstrosity. “Recently, films, which in our times are usually the first to use the phantasms of collectives,” claims Maria Janion, “have included the motif of horrible invaders. They can come from outer space, they can come from within ourselves and from among ourselves. They are the ‘aliens’: some terrifying children, some insects, some monsters”²⁷. In this case we are dealing both with invaders and a terrifying child. The antithesis of humanity as presented by the vampires in Slade’s film leaves us in doubt: they are cruel, evil, brutal and ruthless. They embody everything that is inhuman. Even if they turn out to be little girls.

AN ADOLESCENT VAMPIRE

We should also mention a number of films indirectly associated with the analysed motif, but not being consistent examples of contamination of the ideas of the child and the vampire. It is about the numerous adolescent vampires in cinema, who are not based on the child stereotype, but who refer to the motif of a young man or woman who is yet to face the trials of adulthood. In this approach the figures of adolescent vampires do not strike a discordant note anymore; the transformation into a bloodsucker may be regarded as part of adolescence and the opposition to the values cultivated by human society – as an equivalent of young people’s rebellion and their stereotypically characteristic lack of approval of the existing status quo, as well as their desire for change. For the sake of order, it is worth mentioning several examples of such an approach to the idea of vampire, where we can find features of child bloodsuckers mentioned earlier.

In the context of adolescent vampires directors like to stress their transgression, crossing of the border between childhood and adulthood. By becoming infected by the vampire curse, such characters lose their implied innocence and kind-heartedness, while contact with evil represented by the bloodsuckers is a rite of passage of sorts – a test of their independence, maturity and personality. “State of childhood, state of youth – these are states profoundly pre-personal in their strangeness... Or, in other words, they are differently personal, carrying with them other, unknown concentrations of the person”²⁸, from which emerges a fully shaped adult, understood as a person. This happens in the case of the main protagonists of two films from 1987: *Near Dark* and *The Lost Boys*²⁹ by Joel Schumacher. In both we are dealing with a young protagonist who as a result of his fascination – mostly erotic – with a mysterious girl gets in with bad company that turns out to be a group of vampires. After many adventures he is forced to choose between a pack of vampires and his

²⁷ M. Janion, *op. cit.*

²⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 312.

²⁹ *The Lost Boys*, dir. J. Schumacher, USA 1987.

family, and the desire to remain with the latter leads to a conflict with the blood-suckers. In *The Lost Boys* Michael and Star, his chosen one, do not go through their transformation in the end, while in *Near Dark* the vampire Mae transforms Caleb, though he manages – with the help of his father and thanks to blood transfusion – to reverse this process in himself and in his beloved. In both cases the decision to return to humanity provokes the vampires' aggression, but also means the first step towards adulthood; the protagonists are forced to accept responsibility for their decisions.

Adolescent vampires, however, are just as often associated with youthful rebellion, irresponsibility, savagery and madness. In this context they are often regarded as antagonists of the main protagonists, creatures not knowing moderation, shocking with their hedonism and desire to destroy. They know no moderation in many respects, also when it comes to drinking blood; often they are irrationally cruel. This is the behaviour of Sebastian, Vega and other juvenile, freshly (and accidentally) transformed vampires from *Frostbitten*, who unlike the child vampire Maria, commit savage and murderous acts.

Bloodsuckers who excel at this are also those presented in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*³⁰, the original that inspired the cult series featuring Sara Michelle Gellar. The eponymous heroine is a hunter, the only person in her generation able to detect and destroy vampires. She is also a high school student and cheerleader, so her problems and dilemmas are typical of a young girl: first dates, grades, gym classes... in other words – she leads a classic and stereotypical life of a young girl. It is not difficult to guess that her opponents also come from this circle. That is why Buffy confronts young people who have been turned into vampires, with the place of the final confrontation being – a classic in films for teenagers – the ball room during the graduation prom. The vampires attacking high school students during the prom are enraged, bloodthirsty and spontaneous, and, consequently, identical. And just as identically they are slain by Buffy and her friends, serving only as the so-called cannon fodder. Although they live with the curse of vampirism, as characters they do not fully use their potential.

Other uses of adolescent vampires in the cinema occur only occasionally, for instance in *Daybreakers*³¹, which begins with a scene featuring a young vampire girl committing suicide by going out into the sun. The girl is made to look like an emo girl and leaves behind a farewell letter, in which she confesses her pain of existence and disappointment with life; interestingly, these are feelings stereotypically attributed to all representatives of the emo subculture. However, the scene does not bring much to the film, becoming only an interesting prelude to the main plot.

³⁰ *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, dir. F.R. Kuzui, USA 1992.

³¹ *Daybreakers*, dir. M. Spierig, P. Spierig, USA-Canada 2009.

CONCLUSION

The classification of films using a combination of the ideas of the vampire and the child presented in the article is by no means complete, but it is based on most contaminations of this kind, contaminations that have appeared on the silver screen. We can assume, with a high degree of certainty, that any other incarnation of this motif will use one of these categories. It could be, for example, a blood drinking child, whose otherness will imply some miraculous nature or will constitute a cover, hiding stereotypical and psychologically healthy child; or the child's innocence, inconspicuousness and even awkwardness – caused by non-ageing – will be preserved in their physical and mental form. This may also mean a vampire locked in the body of a child and as such using his appearance to kill people, though he is, in fact, old and torn between full innocence and 100% vampire incarnation, and this dilemma brings about his downfall. Finally, this may mean an adolescent vampire for whom the vampire curse (or its rejection) is a step towards adulthood or – as suggested by the stereotype of a young man or girl common in the cinema in the 1980s and 1990s – the role of an irresponsible and mad monster threatening the main protagonists.

Although the contamination of the ideas of the child and the vampire may seem difficult to bring about and, in fact, not very attractive, there is no denying that its effective application – often in combination with other incarnations of the child or vampire motifs – is an interesting and significant narrative move. The combination of two, seemingly incompatible phantasms is something on which postmodern cinema may construct new meanings and images, influence the collective imagination and introduce interpretative contexts, not applicable elsewhere. Ultimately, the development of all ideas – including those functioning on the silver screen – and the introduction into their structure of individual innovations consists in striving for “a union of opposites”³².

³² C.G. Jung, *op. cit.*, p. 173.