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LUCIJANA ARMANDA ŠUNDOV

Uniwersytet w Splicie, Chorwacja

(University of Split, Croatia)

Vampires and Infection in Croatian Literature

Abstract

Vampire characters in Croatian literature are a rare and marginal occurrence within fantastic Gothic literature, and their main task is to undermine the existing social order. Since the late 17th century, vampires were part of folklore writings and archive documents in which they were an explanation for the spread of infectious diseases and unexplainable epidemics, while from Romanticism onwards, they moved to literature in which they became metaphors for familial violence, mental and physical illnesses of individuals and of society as a whole. The author analyses vampire characters and vampirism as presented in popular novels by Boris Perić and Robert Naprta. In these novels, vampires function as multi-layered metaphors related to, *inter alia*, war traumas. Both novels feature characters of doctors, and the writers mostly use them to criticise corruption in and disadvantages of the health system. In Naprta's case, real-life Croatian scientists Ivan Đikić and Miroslav Radman are parodied, which gives a touch of contemporaneity to those novels. The final gallery of vampire characters includes those from the novel written by Milena Benini.

Keywords: vampires, metaphor, Boris Perić, Robert Naprta, scientists as literary characters

Wampiry i epidemie w literaturze chorwackiej

Streszczenie

W literaturze chorwackiej postaci wampirów są marginalnie obecne w gotyckiej literaturze fantastycznej, mającej na celu podważanie istniejącego porządku społecznego. Od końca XVII wieku wampiry występują w tekstach folklorystycznych oraz dokumentach archiwalnych, w których wykorzystywane są do wyjaśnienia szerzenia się chorób zakaźnych, niewytłumaczalnych epidemii, a od okresu romantyzmu wchodzą do literatury, w której stają się metaforą przemocy w rodzinie, choroby psychicznej i fizycznej zarówno poszczególnych ludzi, jak i całych społeczeństw.

Autorka poddaje analizie postaci wampirów i zjawisko wampiryzmu w popularnych powieściach Borisa Perića i Roberta Naprty, w których stają się one wieloznacznymi metaforami, powiązanymi między innymi z wojennymi traumami. W dziełach obu autorów obecna jest postać doktora, wykorzystywana najczęściej do krytyki korupcji oraz słabości systemu zdrowotnego.

W utworach Naprty dochodzi również do sparodiowania chorwackich naukowców: Ivana Đikicia i Miroslava Radmana, dzięki czemu zyskują one rys współczesności. Do galerii chorwackich wampirów autorka analizy zalicza także postaci z powieści Mileny Benini.

Słowa kluczowe: wampir, metafory, Boris Perić, Robert Naprta, postaci naukowców

Introduction

The multi-layered figure of the vampire in literature has shown its durability, metaphoricity and the power of transformation with the help of which, in different literary periods, it was given different features and often ended up on the very margin of the literary canon. From their marginal position, the vampire characters pointed to social criticism with which they questioned the governing philosophical, political, and social order. In world literature, the most famous vampire is Count Dracula¹ from Bram Stoker's eponymous novel of 1897. The Count's ambition is to corrupt the identity of the allegedly developed West in the process of reverse colonisation (Punter, Byron, 2013, p. 232).² The ability to turn into a bat, a wolf and a rat is linked to infection and diseases, and the pronounced sexuality, in a work in which exchanges of bodily fluids and blood, alluding to sperm, are mentioned, almost anticipates AIDS as a disease.³ Stoker's Dracula stands for metaphysical evil as well as infection that came from the East and from the countryside to endanger

¹ Nina Auerbach thinks that Dracula is less the culmination of a tradition than the destroyer of one because he does not seek intimacy and human company like his predecessors, Lord Ruthven and Carmilla (Auerbach, 1995, p. 64). David Punter and Glennis Byron also agree with that, and they call Stoker's Dracula solitary, completely different than the contemporary vampires, who desire intimacy (Punter, Byron, 2013, p. 271).

² The historical figure of Vlad Țepeș, Voivode of Wallachia, whom Stoker used as a template for the character of Dracula, is mentioned by Maria Todorova in her study *Imagining the Balkans* (Todorova, 2009, p. 122) in which she says that it is the exoticism that turned the historical Țepeș into the immortal figure of Dracula, but the latter is less an illustration of Balkan violence than an attribute of morose Gothic imagination. In the study, the author deals with the images of the Balkans based on Western authors' travel writing, and she links Țepeș's exoticism to the barbarian practice of impaling victims, a practice which, in her opinion, horrified the Europeans. Țepeș, the Voivode of Wallachia, was presumed to be a captive of the Ottomans from whom he could have learned about cruelties such as impaling. Croatian bishop Nikola Modruški (Manea-Grgin, 2005) also had a role in spreading such stories. That practice in Stoker's book became simultaneously a symbol of fight against the mighty Ottomans, a symbol of everything which was dark in Europe itself, but also a symbol of an Eastern practice with the help of which Dracula conquers the supposedly enlightened West. That West in Stoker's novel does not use a hawthorn stake to destroy Dracula, but the weapons of empire, such as a *Kukrie* and *Bowie knife* (Punter, Byron, 2013, pp. 233–234). Although the Westerners used more sophisticated weapons, they still turned into the barbarians from which they wanted to differ (Botting, 1996, p. 151). Ljubica Matek and Sabahudin Mededović also write about reverse colonisation and ideology in Stoker's novel (Matek, Mededović, 2017).

³ According to Fred Botting, *Dracula* also features allusions to plague to which a story about Dracula's family history is linked — a history full of tribal migrations and conquests which brought plague too (Botting, 1996, p. 146).

the West and the city; the city thus becomes a great source of nourishment for the monster which survives by drinking blood. The display of suppressed sexuality is evident in *The Vampire* by John Polidori, an English author, published in 1819, while Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu in *Carmilla* (1872) plays with female sexuality and introduces the topic of lesbianism in Gothic literature. Following the publication of Anne Rice's *Vampire Chronicles* in 1976, an entire succession of novels about vampires appears. In them, the vampires are tamed with the help of a change in the narrative structure which enables them to become narrators and thus evoke sympathy in readers (Gordon, Hollinger, 1997, p. 2).⁴ Despite taming, the main features of the figure of the vampire remained attraction, sexuality and a link to infection which has hidden meaning. Modern vampires no longer live in villages, abandoned castles and far-away places; they inhabit towns, which become a part of vampire geography. Erasing borders between reality and myth, the writers and film directors made vampires inhabitants of a world which is more alluring than the everyday world. Their attraction is not based exclusively on sexuality, but also on a multi-layered semantic and on their being simultaneously old and modern; living for ages, they have collected all the wisdom of the world and managed to escape mortality and oblivion. The vampire myth in literature and popular culture remained alive thanks to its rich metaphoricity with the help of which the metaphysical evil put on a modern suit in which every person can see their own defects as well as the defects of the society they live in. In other words, a vampire may be compared to a distorted image in the mirror in which we see our own errors (Zanger, 1997, p. 23). According to Nina Auerbach (1995, p. 145), every age embraces the vampire it needs because it embodies fears, desires, and anxieties of a certain society in a certain time (Botting, 1996, p. 13); something that will prove true in Croatian vampire characters too, whose metaphorical meanings are linked to cultural, political and ethical issues of the time in which they were created.

Despite global popularity, the figure of the vampire is a relatively rare occurrence in Croatian literature, and it is partly due to that rarity that it is marked with connotative meanings. In the works of writers such as Rikard Jorgovanić, Fran Galović and Ulderiko Donadini, the figure of the vampire is but an indication, a premonition, and an implication for violence (Armanda Šundov, 2014, p. 267). Antun Gustav Matoš places a vampire in his pre-Avant-garde narrative poem "Mora" ("Nightmare") in which there is a conflict between the tragic powers of the word and the lyric *self* which suffers all the pains of civilisation (Oraić Tolić, 1986, p. 116), while Antun Branko Šimić wrote the poem "Vampir" ("Vampire") in which he presents "one of the edges on which the main metamorphosis of Šimić's poetic occurs: *'taking away own lyric Self and return to non-being'*" (Pauly, 2008, p. 488).⁵ The

⁴ According to Jules Zanger the new vampire became communal, public, secularised, devoid of religious dimension, socialised and humanised, and thus slid from metaphor into metonymy because he approached the human semantic field (Zanger, 1997, pp. 17–26).

⁵ All quotations in this article have been translated into English by Jelena Kuzmić, unless stated otherwise.

first true vampire character in Croatian literature appeared in Goran Tribuson's short novel *Ljetnikovac (Summer House)*, part of collection *Praška smrt (Death in Prague)* in 1975, but since it is a suicidal vampire who makes a philosophical narrative on the uselessness of his own existence without referencing infection, that vampire will not be the subject of this work's analysis. The article highlights two 2006 novels, directly linked to vampire infection and vampire figures; the first is Boris Perić's *Vampir (Vampire)*, a novel which is based on the legend of the first Croatian vampire, Jure Grandić; the second is Robert Naprta's *Vampirica Castelli (Vampiress Castelli)*, full of pornographic parts which somewhat alleviate an open criticism of the healthcare system and the introduction of vampirism as a metaphor for the horrors of the Homeland War. The same author penned a serialised young adult novel, *Luna* (2010, 2012), a combination of *Twilight Saga*, *True Blood*, *Vampire Diaries* and *Harry Potter*. The novel features a procession of witches, vampires, werewolves, shapeshifters, and similar creatures, and with its comical tone, it plays with and makes fun of the genre's conventions. Especially interesting are the characters of the contemporary geneticists Ivan Đikić and Miroslav Radman, who are portrayed as corrupted, fame-seeking individuals in the novel. Vampirism as infection is also the subject matter of the novel *Djelomična pomrčina (Partial Eclipse)*, 2012) by the recently deceased Croatian author Milena Benini. In the novel, the vampires are portrayed as an underground scene, linked to the healthcare system because of their mode of survival, but no serious social criticism is present. Since vampires have so far been the subject of ethnological and anthropological studies,⁶ this paper is an attempt to systematise and make a typological characterisation of the figure of the vampire in Croatian literature in which the focus is on their metaphoricality, a sign of a disease of the society as a whole. The figure of the vampire, as a metaphor, points to sexuality, power, relation of power and alienation, attitudes towards illness and the definition of evil in today's times (Gordon, Hollinger, 1997, p. 3), and the article's author, out of all mentioned implications, places the most emphasis on attitudes towards disease and infection using contemporary Gothic literature theories by authors such as David Punter, Glennis Byron, Fred Botting, Nina Auerbach, Jules Zanger.

⁶ For instance, Irena Benyovsky's 1996 work, in which the author used 18th-century material from the Historical Archives in Dubrovnik with a view to shed some light on beliefs about vampires, and especially highlighted are works by Lovorka Čoralić, Željko Đugac and Sani Sardelić from 2011 in which the subject of their analysis is a paper stored in the State Archives in Venice; the paper mentions an interesting case of mutilating the body of a man in Žrnovo, Korčula, in the 18th century because the locals believed him to be a vampire. No anthropological study analyses relationships between such documents, demonology legends of vampires and the figure of the vampire in Croatian literature. An improvement in that context is an article of this paper's author, entitled "Dokumenti o vampirima iz 1833 u Nadbiskupijskom arhivu u Splitu" ("Documents on Vampires from 1833 in the Archbishop Archives in Split"), in which the author points to a relationship between folklore, archive documents and literature.

From Folklore to Contemporary Croatian Literature: Vampire Figures and Infection

Although vampire legends are present in a number of countries, such as India, China and Tibet, Gothic literature theoreticians⁷ are of the opinion that contemporary literary vampires come from Eastern European folklore tales (Punter, Byron, 2013, p. 268). In such tales the vampire is described as a peasant who attacks his family or fellow peasants, and, as for his looks, he is plump, ruddy, and dark in colour (Barber, 2010, pp. 2–4), meaning he did not bear much resemblance to the contemporary vampires. However, the figure of the vampire known from folklore went through a number of changes as it started to appear in literature, and so the vampire became a sophisticated aristocrat, a seducer, and a demon lover in Romanticism; a pop icon and a rock star in the 20th century; and finally, an educated and sophisticated rich man in the 21st century. In folklore, vampires functioned as an explanation for occurrences such as premature deaths, the medical phenomenon of the decomposition of the body in the grave, and for infections and epidemics, starting from plague and tuberculosis, all the way to sexually transmitted diseases, such as AIDS.⁸ Globally, the most known cases of vampirism are those from 1732, involving Arnold Paole from Hungary, and from 1725, involving Peter Plogojowitz from the Serbian Danube region, who was accused that his body in the grave looked complete, not decomposed, and that he caused the death of nine people, whom he throttled in their sleep (Barber, 2010, p. 6). In addition, he had “wild signs” on his body, referring probably to his penis in erection, an occurrence explained by science as the swelling of sexual organs during the decomposition of the body (Barber, 2010, p. 9). On the Croatian soil, the most known is the legend of Jure Grando,⁹ recorded by Janez Vajkard Valvasor in *Slava vojvodine*

⁷ In her PhD thesis, *Gotički motivi u hrvatskoj književnosti (Gothic Motifs in Croatian Literature)*; 2014), this article’s author justifies in detail her choice of using the adjective *gotička* instead of *gotska* to refer to literature. The adjective *gotska* often had negative connotations because it referred to the Goths, whose life and customs have ever since the historian Tacitus been in stark contrast with Roman life and customs, and have been considered barbaric. The adjective *gotička* has positive connotations because it refers to architecture and indicates the fascination with medieval gothic, whose main characteristic are tall churches with distinctive pointy arches. In the 18th century, while Gothic literature was emerging, the adjective *gothic* in English literature referred to everything vintage and archaic, unusual, and peculiar, and it was also linked to medieval knights and thus gained positive connotations. The distinction between *gotski* and *gotički* is marked in Croatian, while it is not present in English.

⁸ In her already-mentioned article on documents on vampires in the Archbishop Archives in Split, the article’s author found an 1833 document in which Lubin, a clergyman from Trogir, states that superstitions about vampires were eradicated in Trogir vicarage when walls which created bad (non-ventilated) air and contributed to epidemics were torn down; and the people usually blamed epidemics on vampires (Armanda Šundov, 2020, p. 392).

⁹ There is also a 1403 legend about Priba, who died in Otchus, on the island of Pašman. Pavao Pavlović, the mayor of Zadar, wrote a report on her and gave the permission to desecrate her body

Kranjske (*The Glory of Kranj vojvodina*) in 1689, and it was also recorded by Hermann Hesse in *Priče o sablastima i vješticama iz Rajnskog antiquariusa* (*Stories about Spirits and Witches from the Rhein Antiquaries*; 1924/1925). According to the legend, Grando's body was alive after his death; he had a smile on his face and was accused of knocking on people's door at a late hour, with those people then dying as a consequence (Hesse, 2007, pp. 49–50). He also overpowered his widow every night — a clear indication of his sexuality. Vampire legends were also mentioned by Alberto Fortis in his 1774 *Put po Dalmaciji* (*Journey to Dalmatia*). Fortis claimed that Morlachs believed in the existence of vampires who were assumed to suck children's blood, like in Transylvania (Fortis, 2004, p. 44). He also mentioned the custom of cutting lower legs and needle piercing the deceased who was suspected of being a vampire or a werewolf, but there are no sexual implications in Fortis, although Ivan Lovrić in *Bilješke o putu po Dalmaciji opata Alberta Fortisa* (*Notes on Journey to Dalmatia by Abbot Alberto Fortis*; 1776) states that werewolves are said not to suck blood, but they rape women who are not ashamed to talk about it and that a werewolf would also satisfy himself on the husband who would catch him in the act with his wife (Lovrić, 1948, pp. 162–163).

Fortis and Lovrić mention that Morlachs use the word *werewolf* as a synonym for *vampire*, although semantic fields of these terms match only partially. According to the *Hrvatski etimološki rječnik* (*Croatian Dictionary of Etymology*), the Old Slavic word *upir* referred to a dead man who attacked humans and animals, and who could create a man driven by an evil force (Gluhak, 1993, p. 661). The *upir* was also said to leave its grave at night to kill animals and humans and sometimes to drink blood, with the dying victim turning into a vampire. The same dictionary also has an entry on *vukodlak* — a man who can turn into a wolf and then back into a human; as wolf, he kills humans and animals (Gluhak, 1993, p. 689). Marijeta Rajković Iveta and Vladimir Iveta list all the traditional names for *vampire* in Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Montenegro and conclude that the predominant name for a vampire in Croatia is *vukodlak*, followed by *vampire*. Further, they note the following names: *vukozlak*, *vukozlac*, *loroko*, *kosac*, *tenjac*, *mekodlak*, *ris*, *osuđenjak*, *mračnjak*, *krsnik*, *strigun/štriga* (Rajković Iveta, Iveta, 2017, p. 63). Studying the legends of Istria, Evelina Rudan notes that *štriga/štrigun* is used for vampires in that area and that those creatures have a specific physical appearance because they usually have human form, and their features include a tail, an intense gaze, strange eyes, old age, zoometempsychosis, bilocation, birth in amniotic sac, non-specific strangeness of appearance which causes repugnance or fear, and bruises. Their actions included various types of damage to animals, causing diseases in humans, unusual phenomena and fighting *krsniks* (the Croatian version of vampire hunters) (Rudan, 2016, pp. 217, 231). Some theoreticians distinguish a vampire from a *povratnik* (*returnee*); Peter Kreuter (after: Rajković

by driving a stake into her heart (Klaić, 1896, p. 223), all because some locals claimed that the dead woman molested them.

Iveta, Iveta, 2017, p. 10) claims that returnees do not drink blood like vampires, while Claude Lecouteux (after: Rajković Iveta, Iveta, 2017, p. 10) thinks that vampires are made up of various types of deceased humans. Jan Louis Perkowski (after: Rajković Iveta, Iveta, 2017, p. 10) defines four basic vampire types and notes, similarly to Kreuter, that returnees do not attack humans and that their actions are not limited to night time, while Rudan (2016, p. 276) highlights that the dead return due to their own guilt (whether intentional or unintentional), due to their household or community members' guilt, or for consolation, and all that can depend on the narrator's perspective, resulting in those creatures showing more similarities than differences with vampires. In this paper, a vampire is a dead man possessed by an evil spirit; wishing to quench his thirst for blood, he rises from the grave at night to attack humans and animals, and his victims also may turn into vampires.

It is the aforementioned legend about Grando that Perić's novel *Vampir* is based on. The novel takes place in present-day Zagreb and Istria, but Grando does not appear as the main or supporting character; rather, he is a premonition which acts with the help of other characters' irrational actions (Armanda Šundov, 2014, p. 272) and is materialised in the form of his daughter and successor, Alice, who infects Zlatko, the main character, with vampirism.¹⁰ Alice is described as her father's true successor because she had ripe, golden tan (Perić, 2006, p. 132), an air of mystery, and sexual energy with which she seduced Zlatko and left bites and congealed blood on his body. At the end of the novel, it is implied that Zlatko became a vampire too, because he took the infection well, unlike his friend Silvija whose blood did not accept the alien vampire fluid.¹¹ The theory of vampire infection and fluid is developed in the novel by doctors Kraljević and Bjelinski, who say:

That unknown substance is somebody's blood, I hope you understand that. Although I have never seen blood with such chemical structure, it behaves just like any other blood during transfusion: if you are compatible with some of its — as yet completely unknown to us — properties, it will rule your system completely, and if not, as it happens when mixing non-compatible blood groups, powerful chemical reactions will occur, red blood cells will congeal and the person will die. (Perić, 2006, pp. 218–219)¹²

¹⁰ *Vampir* is the first part of a trilogy of novels. *D'Annunzijevo kod* (*D'Annunzio Code*; 2007) is the second part, in which vampirism is linked to dictatorship of pleasure and sadomasochistic tendencies, while in the third part, *Povijest paučine* (*History of Cobweb*; 2018), the legend of Grando is part of the plot again.

¹¹ It appears that Silvija is punished with death for her lesbian relationship with another vampire, Ana, whom Zlatko himself calls a slut out of jealousy, while Zlatko's heterosexual relationship with Alice ends in his transformation into a vampire because his blood accepted the alien fluid (Armanda Šundov, 2014, p. 278).

¹² Original: "Ta nepoznata supstancija je nečija krv, to vam je valjda jasno. I ona se, premda nikad nisam vidio krv takve kemijske strukture, ponaša poput svake druge krvi pri transfuziji: ako ste kompatibilni s nekim njenim, nama još sasvim nepoznatim, svojstvima, ona će postupno ovladati vašim organizmom, ako niste, kao što se događa pri miješanju nespojivih krvnih grupa, doći će do žestokih kemijskih reakcija, zgrušavanja crvenih krvnih zrnaca i smrti."

The scientists go on talking about antibodies, antigens, and the urgency of finding the person who was the source of that blood, that is, patient zero, and of isolating those that s/he infected. Thus, the author anticipates today's all-present fight against coronavirus. Because it causes mild symptoms in some people, and serious in others, the virus is mystified. The infection is a leitmotif in the novel; Zlatko talks about his dream about plague, "whose minions were vermin and rats" (Perić, 2006, p. 72). This is also linked to coronavirus because the first official reports claimed its animal origin. Yet, Zlatko concludes that man is plague and says that humans act like vampires towards each other; vampires who drain energy. On a few occasions, the implicit author emerges as being familiar with the theory of Gothic literature; through the main character, he talks about vampire infection, wondering if it is just a mysterious disease, or something much more complex, such as draining one's life essence.

The character of doctor Kraljević, who works in Vrapče mental hospital, is a sort of counterpart of Stoker's John Seward because both keep a diary of unusual events, and Kraljević's patient Cernjak, who suffers from Renfield's syndrome, is named after Seward's patient. Here, the novel's author uses composition intertextuality, paraphrasing not only Stoker's statements, but his narrative actions too. At a certain point, Zlatko asks a question about Grando: "Perhaps he was a rake, and perhaps he suffered from a mysterious disease, whose symptoms medicine will describe, as well as name the disease, only three centuries later?" (Perić, 2006, pp. 140–141).¹³ That question is an example of clinical studies discourse, which the author is using to question how the Gothic and medicine discourses are linked. Discussing Gothic medicine, Meegan Kennedy explains that medical discourse on strange cases energised the 19th-century Gothic novel, while the tradition of Gothic medicine provides the novel with a model of cultural contamination and conflict in its yoking of disparate discourses (Kennedy, 2004, p. 327). Mixing those two discourses, the implicit author, through the character of Zlatko, makes an ironic conclusion which in today's times, when people are afraid of getting vaccinated and fear the pandemic, sounds almost prophetic: "[T]he Croatian people, in their unprecedented ignorance, which with small adjustments to period requirements still greatly determines public opinion, suspected everyone and everything of killing and consummation of humans. Thus, the apothecaries ground humans and made powders and pills from their dust" (Perić, 2006, p. 175).¹⁴ At the very beginning, doctor Kraljević is trying to explain the vampire infection realistically and coldly, turning Cernjak into an interesting clinical case, but as the novel goes on, his

¹³ Original: "Možda je bio razvratnik, a možda je patio od neke tajnovite bolesti, kojoj će medicina tek tri stoljeća kasnije opisati simptome i nadjenuti ime?"

¹⁴ Original: "[H]rvatski je puk u svojoj nevidenoj zatucanosti, koja uz neznatne prilagodbe zahtjevima vremena još i danas u bitnom određuje javno mnijenje, sumnjičio sve i svakoga za ubijanje i konzumaciju ljudi. Tako su apotekari mljeli ljude i od njihova praha proizvodili praške i pilule."

discourse becomes ever more similar to Gothic discourse, and Zlatko constantly makes the medical jargon ironic and fills it with metaphors, such as the following:

Disease is that black force, which with its metaphors in the general uneasiness invokes the character of vampire [...] with disease we shall shun the other showing him as a pestilential, infectious alien [...] with disease we shall blackmail our neighbours [...] It is as if all those wonderful characteristics were always rooted in the bog of filth of the so called Croatian national being [...]. (Perić, 2006, pp. 201–202)¹⁵

The whole novel is full of metanarrative comments in which the author questions the position of Gothic literature within the canon; it can be seen most clearly in the comment that the word vampire is found in the dump of metaphors (Perić, 2006, p. 20). It is a way of saying that the word is used excessively to the point of being worn out.

Just as the authors of late 19th-century Gothic novels expressed their suspicions about modern medicine,¹⁶ so Perić, in his novel, with his main character's help, talks about ambitious doctors whose actions are not in line with the Hippocratic Oath. Zlatko describes doctor Kraljević as an atypical physician, who does not ask for bribery and is intriguing. His departure from the common and the typical is also visible in books he keeps in his office, among which is Stoker's *Dracula*. Doctor Kraljević studies "the strange case" of Igor Cernjak, who suffers from Renfield's syndrome. While describing the case, he uses professional literature by Krafft-Ebing and Noll and so, again, medical and Gothic literary discourses overlap, all to criticise the healthcare system, medical research, and doctors. The criticism is best seen in the following sentences: "Igor Cernjak, I thought, was but a guinea pig of a very greedy scientist, who will shine briefly with an article on Renfield's syndrome and clinical vampirism, and then leave »the unfortunate vampire« to rot

¹⁵ Original: "Bolest je ta crna sila, koja svojim metaforama u općoj nelagodi zaziva lik vampira [...] bolešću ćemo izopćiti drugog pokazujući ga kao kužna, zarazna stranca [...] bolešću ćemo ucjenjivati bližnje [...] Sve te divne osobine kao da su oduvijek ukorijenjene u kaljuži tzv. hrvatskog nacionalnog bića [...]." On several occasions, the implicit author provides social criticism, commenting on the Croatian political reality, primitive egoism, system corruption, post-war everyday life, fake national solidarity and similar social phenomena which contribute to the appearance of political vampirism: "Every politician, in effect, is a vampire, from people's tribunes to the alleged self-conscious elite, from the primitive right, frantic about lies of blood and soil, to the seemingly polite liberals and their illusions of tolerance and political correctness" (Perić, 2006, p. 13; original: "Svaki političar u osnovi je vampir, od pučkih tribuna do tobožnje samozatajne elite, od primitivne desnice, raspomamljene za lažima krvi i tla, do naoko uglađenih liberala i njihovih tlapnji o toleranciji i političkoj korektnosti"). In one interview, the author himself confirms that he criticises the state of tradition in *Vampir*: "It is my own personal experience of life in Croatia in the past 17 years, vampirism of transition, that is, ill-fated political metaphor of draining the nation's vital resources" (Pikok, n.d.).

¹⁶ Emily Banks thinks that it is in the portrayal of doctors Maradick and Brandon that said suspicion towards practising modern medical methods is seen in Ellen Glasgow's work (Banks, 2016, pp. 353–354). In her work, the doctors symbolise patriarchal domination in modern American society, while in Perić's novel the doctors are an illustration of an attempt by the medical science to control society.

until death in the loneliness of a rubber cell and eat flies and spiders” (Perić, 2006, p. 67).¹⁷ The other physician character is Stjepan Bjelinski of the Faculty of Medicine of Zagreb. He helped doctor Kraljević kill his own patient, Cernjak, and his family, when the two realised that they no longer had control over their research. Doctor Bjelinski also mixes medical and Gothic literary discourses when formulating a theory on vampire blood group and fluid. He confirms that it borders on superstition in the following phrase: “Were I not a man of science, I should dare to say that we are dealing with enchantment” (Perić, 2006, p. 219).¹⁸ At the end of the novel, it is implied that the two doctors were killed by Grando himself; thus, the research they were conducting turned against them. The main character (also the narrator) is criticising the spiritual climate in his country. The climate reflects on both science and scientists who are motivated by tangible assets and fame and whose discourse does not differ that much from literary discourse. Thus, limits and the relationship between literature and science and their social role are questioned.

Unlike Perić, who manages to achieve a serious tone with such narrative techniques as metanarration and intertextuality, in which he proves to be an excellent connoisseur of the theory of Gothic literature who is trying to approach the literary canon, Naprta has no such ambitions. His novel *Vampirica Castelli* consists of a three-tier repetitive structure. In the foreground, there is a somewhat naïve inspector Prilika (Croatian for “opportunity”), who hunts Zoran, the vampire; in the hunt’s background there is a war going on in Zagreb mafia circles. The third part of the structure consists of explicit pornographic episodes, which make the novel closer to trivial literature, despite the social criticism present. In this novel the vampires are linked to two metaphors (Armanda Šundov, 2014, p. 281). The first refers to an exceedingly rare disease, porphyria. The daughter of the pathologist Janoš Fluckinger suffers from it. She is named Charlotte, just like one of the more important characters in Miroslav Krleža’s play *Gospoda Glembajevi* (*Messrs. Glembay*). While Krleža’s heroine, on the connotative plan of the play, manipulated everyone around her and drank their blood, Charlotte is completely harmless. When strange bestial atrocities, akin to vampire attacks, start happening in Zagreb (for which atrocities Charlotte was not responsible), doctor Fluckinger speaks to inspector Prilika about porphyria: “It is actually a serious metabolic disorder, when the body is not capable of producing red blood cells by itself [...] Those born with it must, somehow, constantly get red blood cells because their body cannot produce them itself. Therefore, they must drink blood” (Naprta, 2006, p. 44).¹⁹ Be-

¹⁷ Original: “Igor Cernjak, slutio sam, bio je tek pokusni kunić častohlepnog znanstvenika, koji će nakratko zablistati stručnim člankom o Renfieldovu sindromu i kliničkom vampirizmu, a potom ostaviti »nesretnog vampirak« da do smrti trune u samoći gumene čelije i tamo žvače muhe i pauke.”

¹⁸ Original: “Da nisam čovjek od znanosti, usudio bih se reći da imamo posla s čarolijom.”

¹⁹ Original: “Zapravo se radi o teškom poremećaju metabolizma, kad organizam nije u stanju sam proizvoditi crvena krvna zrnca [...] Oni koji se s tim rode, moraju nekako konstantno dobivati crvena krvna zrnca jer ih njihovo tijelo ne može samo proizvoditi. Dakle, moraju piti krv.”

cause of the disorder, Charlotte appeared to be a real vampire and for that reason was killed by the Demon Sanitary Inspection, led by a female inspector, Bubalo, Father Xavier and Filipović, a former UDBA (Yugoslav Secret Police Administration) member. That way they showed their domination over everything “other”; thus porphyria, in a metaphoric sense, stands for everything that makes people different in various societies, from ethnic origin, through sexual orientation and physical appearance, to rare diseases. The Demon Sanitary Inspection is made up of hypocrites for whom everything different is a disease. Just as the Westerners in Stoker’s *Dracula* turn into barbarians as Dracula is driven out of Western Europe (Botting, 1996, p. 151), so the Demon Sanitary Inspection in *Vampirica Castelli*, while driving a stake into Charlotte, turns into primitive creatures and the demons it hunts.²⁰ Despite trivial elements, Naprta manages to be contemporary, especially in the process of ironisation of the entire Croatian corrupt society, whose everyday life is based on a number of divisions.

The second metaphor in *Vampirica Castelli* refers to war devastations which, in this case, literally turn people into monsters. The main figure of the vampire in this novel is the shabby, smelly, and haggard Homeland War soldier, Zoran, who, like the vampires of folklore, feeds on cattle and pays visits to his widow Ema, who describes him thus: “Horribly, he looked horribly [...] His face was gaunt and black, knee-length dark circles, it was full of grisly scabs, and on his neck, a dressing, some kind of gauze, drenched in caked blood [...] and on his neck, there was an open tear, live wound, deep and black” (Naprta, 2006, pp. 88–89).²¹ First, the reader finds out through Ema that Zoran was a scout during Oluja (Operation Storm),²² and later on Zoran stops being an object and becomes the subject, claiming that he has all the symptoms of an infection known as vampirism, which “aspirin and tea with lemon”²³ will not make go away (Naprta, 2006, p. 125). Furthermore, he says that he was a witness to numerous beastly crimes in Oluja and was turned into a vampire by Rade, a Serbian major: “That’s when it happened; Rade raised me from the ground, weak as I was, and then drove his fangs into my jugular vein. Blood spurted everywhere, and Rade drank, like from a source. He did not stop” (Naprta, 2006, p. 128).²⁴ Zoran’s transformation into a vampire is not romanticised at all because his experience mirrors all those less attractive sides of vampire in-

²⁰ Naprta describes them as members of a cult, who believe they serve justice, alluding also to Ku Klux Klan because they had hoods on their heads and small crosses on their chests, even though they were clad in black (Naprta, 2006, p. 181).

²¹ Original: “Strašno, strašno je izgledao [...] Lice mu je bilo ispijeno i crno, podočnjaci do koljena, sve puno gadnih krasta, a na vratu povež, neka gaza, natopljena skorenom krvlju [...] a na vratu mu se ukazala otvorena razderotina, živa rana, duboka i crna.”

²² Oluja (4–7 August 1995) was a large military operation in which the Croatian army and police managed to liberate the occupied areas of the Republic of Croatia from the control of rebel Serbs.

²³ Original: “od aspirina i čaja s limunom.”

²⁴ Original: “I tad se to desilo; Rade me, onako onemoćala, podigao od poda, a onda mi je zario svoje očnjake u vratnu žilu. Krv je sukljala na sve strane, a Rade je pio, k’o na izvoru. Nije prestajao.”

fections, such as a thirst for blood, hiding from humans, social ostracism, and suicidal thoughts. The way Zoran was turned into a vampire shows the consequences war has for people, changing them forever. Like Perić's Zlatko,²⁵ Naprta's *Prilika* criticises transition ruled by corruption, golden youth which drinks alcohol and does drugs while listening to "srpske pevaljke" (a derogatory expression for Serbian turbo-folk singers), and criminals who became generals in the war and part of the new government, although they smuggled weapons and oil to the enemy. In the background, one can feel the implicit author's ironic and resigned attitude: all political systems are ruled by the same people who change sides and parties, an attitude that is typical of Croatian mentality.

As Naprta's serialised novel, *Luna*, is a young adult novel, it does not contain pornography, making the text less burdened with trivial content. However, the author keeps his comical tone, with the help of which he plays with folklore content, Gothic literature, and pop culture on the lexical, stylistic and composition level. The main character is a teenage witch, Luna, who falls in love with Alex, a positive vampire, who is a mix between Bill and Eric, vampires from the *True Blood* series and Edward from the *Twilight Saga*. *Luna* is a novel full of strange creatures who do not live in a secondary world; instead, they live in the primary world with humans in urban Zagreb. However, they are still separated from them by the net of not seeing, and the readers accept this co-existence from the very start. Apart from Alex, among the vampires there are also the antagonist Wlodimir and his friend Hasan beg, as well as Siniša, taken from Marija Jurić Zagorka's *Grička vještica* (*The Witch of Grič*), and a parodied figure of Count Dracula,²⁶ who in this novel has Alzheimer's disease and as a result has to wear diapers. It is as if by making fun of the fearsome Count Dracula and stripping him of his title of metaphysical and almost invincible evil, Naprta is making fun of modern Gothic literature, which in the process of commercialisation and merging with pop culture has lost its power because it had to adapt to the market (Armanda Šundov, 2014, p. 285).

Much more interesting than the figures of vampires are the parodied figures of contemporary Croatian genetic scientists, namely Ivan Đikić (Ivica Đukić in the

²⁵ Perić's *Vampir* also features themes of war and captivity. To twisted minds, they are an opportunity for literal drinking of blood; the main character, Zlatko, says: "I have read somewhere that in Jasenovac, that blackest stain on the muddy cheek of national dignity, there were mad brutes among the butchers who stooped so low as to sip heartily from the butchered victims' gaping wounds" (Perić, 2006, p. 41; original: "Pročitao sam negdje da je u Jasenovcu, toj najcrnijoj mrlji na blatnjavom obrazu nacionalnog dostojanstva, među krvnicima bilo sumanutih silnika koji nisu prezali od poštena srka iz razjapljenih rana zaklanih žrtava"). Zlatko then mentions that he has heard that one of those in Jasenovac used a rubber tube. These quotes imply that vampires are not demon creatures from the legends; rather, they are humans who are responsible for massive bloodbaths and crimes in wars.

²⁶ In the novel, the teenager Ivona, who turns into a vampire, calls him constantly "gramps Vlady" (original: "deda Vladek"), while the werewolf Karlo calls him "Transylvanian Radovan Karadžić" (original: "transilvanijski Radovan Karadžić") (Naprta, 2012c, p. 126).

novel) and Miroslav Radman (Miroslav Perlman in the novel), who are described as “two strange characters, in white coats, holding small, black physician bags; one tall, big and with grey curly hair, and the other, small, scrawny and bald” (Naprtá, 2012a, p. 146), as well as Radman’s daughter Marija Marta (vampiress Sofija in the novel).²⁷ They present a hypothesis that vampirism is an infection which spreads from bacteria in vampire saliva. These figures were introduced in the novel to criticise and ridicule scientists who are hungry for fame; at one moment, Perlman admits that they are led by a “hunger for facts” (Naprtá, 2012a, p. 147)²⁸ and fame, visible in the next quote:

[...] clone a shapeshifter, is not that a Nobel-worthy scientific success, huh?

— And if somebody knew about it — said Đukić silently.

— Yes, I understand your frustration, Ivica — Wlodimir was nodding — but, unfortunately, or fortunately, you will have to be happy with my verbal praise. And, of course, with a large sum that has been recently deposited to your Swiss accounts. (Naprtá, 2012b, p. 90)²⁹

In this novel, Đukić and Perlman took part in genetic research and cloning, with Perlman having a somewhat bigger role in negotiating with vampire Wlodimir, who often experimented with medicine. It is highlighted that the scientists “mixed up something in a lab” (Naprtá, 2012d, p. 84),³⁰ implying that scientists play in laboratories and that those games affect the whole of humankind, and in the coronavirus infection era, concerning which the actual Đikić regularly gives his opinion, that fact sounds prophetic and unexpected because the novel does not have a serious tone.

In *Djelomična pomrčina*, vampirism is initially described as newly found freedom for the unnamed heroine, whom, according to her own wishes, another unnamed vampire turned into a vampiress. It is possible to recognise an antihero in the figure of that vampire. He is completely different from the romanticised vampires of the past because he disappoints the heroine in a multitude of ways, introducing her to the world of urban vampirism and showing her the reverse of the medal. In that world, vampires live alongside humans, as a certain subculture with changes in blood which “are not medically obvious” (Benini, 2012, p. 52)³¹ and due to which doctors diagnose anaemia, diabetes, leukaemia, and the people

²⁷ Original: “dva čudna lika, u bijelim kutama, s malim, crnim doktorskim torbama u rukama, jedan visok, krupan i sjede kovrčave kose, a drugi, mali, žgoljav i ćelav.”

²⁸ Original: “glad za činjenicama.”

²⁹ Original: “[...] klonirati mjenjolika, nije li to znanstveni uspjeh vrijedan Nobelove nagrade, ha?”

— Još da netko za to zna — tiho je rekao Đukić.

— Da, razumijem vašu frustraciju, Ivice — kimao je Wlodimir — ali, na žalost, ili na sreću, morat ćete se zadovoljiti mojim usmenim hvalama. I, naravno, povećom svotom što vam je nedavno sjela na račune u Švicarskoj.”

³⁰ Original: “smučkali u labosu.”

³¹ Original: “nisu medicinski transparentne.”

close to them think they had caught “a nasty virus” (Benini, 2012, p. 70).³² The author admits in interviews that she is interested in vampires as a symbol of being other and alien (cf. Blog ko blog 2012), and listing these diseases refers to what is different. In the novel, there is another vampire, Ivica, who took on the role of a physician to be able to get hold of blood more easily and make an experimental serum which protects vampires from the sunshine and enables them to survive without hunting for a short period; however, in the end he is killed because of his research and experiments.

The misery and futility of the vampire world is best reflected in the character of Janko, a youth who lets the vampires drink his blood because it gives him pleasure, but after catching an infection whose “acronym they did not mention, the anglophone or the francophone either [...] his weakened blood did not serve as protection anymore,” he could not do it any more (Benini, 2012, p. 156),³³ implying that AIDS³⁴ is worse than vampirism, which is a reversible process for the heroine, despite her completed transformation. On the stylistic level, the author uses inventive poetic metaphors which are, given the presence of real and borrowed names, explicit attributive metaphors and which describe vampires’ voices,³⁵ while on the semantic level, the author shows that vampire infection, despite its charms, is a source of limitations, like every other disease; however, the novel does not offer wider social criticism.³⁶

³² Original: “gadan virus.”

³³ Original: “kraticu nisu spominjali, ni anglofonu ni frankofonu [...] njegova oslabljena krv više nije koristila kao zaštita.”

³⁴ In his *Vampir*, Perić also mentions AIDS while talking about differences between true vampires, who spread, medically speaking, an undefined infection, and self-proclaimed mental vampires, who can infect someone only with “a mundane, filthy disease like AIDS” (Perić, 2006, p. 217; original: “prizemnom, prljavom boleštinom poput side”). Thus, both authors imply that vampirism, even though it can be defined as an infection, is attractive, unlike AIDS.

³⁵ Examples: “His voice was a velvet corridor which led to a place” (Benini, 2012, p. 8; original: “Glas mu je bio baršunasti hodnik koji je vodio na neko mjesto”); “[...] small crystals of his laughter dissipated over her as an entire chandelier which falls on the marble floor of a ballroom” (Benini, 2012, p. 46; original: “[...] kristalići njegova smijeha rasipali su se po njoj kao čitav luster koji pada na mramorni pod plesne dvorane”).

³⁶ Apart from *Djelomična pomrčina*, in 2019 Benini wrote a science-fiction, vampire-themed novel, *Nocturno za krpelja* (*Nocturne for a Tick*), which takes place in a futuristic Zagreb in which vampires are pejoratively called ticks and are an elite. They transform people into vampires mostly at their request, to stop their diseases. The author refers to the well-known Gothic literature episode about events in Villa Diodati on Lake Geneva when Lord Byron, Percy Bysshe Shelley, Mary Shelley, and John Polidori narrated uncanny tales and later turned them into famous literary works. In the novel, Percy Shelley becomes Pero, Lord Byron becomes Đuro Gordon, and Mary Shelley a Catholic influencer named Marija. In the end, it turns out that Miroslav Krleža and Marija Jurić Zagorka are among the main characters, and the main idea refers to the fact that vampires no longer pose a risk for humankind which is destroying itself with climate change. The weak spots of this novel are a significantly worse stylistic level than *Djelomična pomrčina*, a simplified plot and a clichéd view of futuristic hopelessness from science-fiction literature which does not match the high mimetic mode; therefore, actions and descriptions of characters are partly caricatural representations.

Concluding Thoughts

Croatian oral literature contains legends on demon beings, called vampires, but Croatian written literature is not rich in the figures of vampires. While in world literature vampires appear as protagonists in short stories and novels in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, it is only in the late 19th century that they enter Croatian literature as premonitions and apparitions. In world literature the figures of vampires are part of the Gothic canon, and in Croatian literature they are on the canon's margins. Yet, from the not-so-rich gallery of vampire characters in Croatian literature, one could propose the following typology which would also include a diachronic view: vampires like premonitions linked to violence in August Šenoa's age and the Croatian literary modernism; a suicidal vampire (Hildesheimer) in Goran Tribuson, Croatian fantasy writer of the 20th century; in the 21st century a vampire can be a figure *in absentia* (Grando, as well as the vampire in *Christkind* by Boris Dežulović), a clinical vampire who suffers from Renfield's syndrome (Igor Cernjak), a wartime vampire (Zoran), a vampiress (Alice, Ana Cernjak, Sofija Perlman, Ivona Ledinski...), a modern vampire linked to pop culture (Alex, Wlodimir, Hasan beg), a positive vampire who does not feed on human blood (Zoran, Alex), a vampire who pretends to be a physician (Ivica), and numerous transformed vampires as supporting characters. Vampire figures and vampirism as a phenomenon in 21st-century Croatian literature are linked to disease and infection to refer to societal disease, even when we are talking about trivial literature, like in the case of Naprta's *Luna*. In the analysed novels, the figures of vampires are intricately linked to the problem of otherness, and otherness is best defined through physical and mental illnesses. That is why the figures of vampires in these novels are intricately linked to scientists, doctors, and the healthcare system. It is to be expected that the open vampire typology in Croatian literature will be expanded with new characters, who will, in a way, be linked to the current coronavirus pandemic.

Translated by Jelena Kuzmić

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