

mgr Jowita Kosiba

Summary of doctoral dissertation on

## ***The theme of vampire in Polish literature***

The dissertation is devoted to the figure of a vampire in Polish literature from the Enlightenment to the twenty-first century. It is an attempt at a cross-sectional presentation of the ways in which the vampire functions in prose and poetry, as well as showing the changes in his image throughout the ages. One of the topics covered is the convergence of individual literary characters with the folk prototype, as well as the stereotypical image established in popular culture. The discussed works refer to the motif directly or they do it indirectly, by giving the characters vampiric features, such as drinking blood or liminal existence. The vampire theme is one of the most vital in literature and mass culture. It has numerous connotations and is eagerly used by writers, poets, painters and filmmakers. The changes taking place in the image mirror the moods and postulates of a particular epoch, and the constant reinterpretations of the motif allow to maintain its vitality.

The introductory part is divided into two chapters. The first one (*Historical genesis of the figure of a vampire*) is an attempt to place the figure of the vampire in the historical and cultural context, from antiquity, through the beliefs of peoples from different regions of the world, to the present day. The particular emphasis was placed on Slavic mythology, organically linked to the figure of the vampire and on the etymology of the word itself. The dissertation presents detailed beliefs about vampirism, such as the ways of transformations and remedies, as well as the differences between its various variants. It also introduces the occurrence of vampirism from a scientific perspective.

Chapter two, entitled *From Horror to Fascination and Parody. The image of a vampire in culture*, shows in a concise way the "career" of a vampire in culture. It presents the most important works dealing with vampire themes, both literary and film, among which *Dracula* by Bram Stoker has a special place - a novel that still exerts an overwhelming influence on the common perception of the vampire. The topics covered are also computer games using the theme as well as modern understanding of the concept, including energy vampirism.

The main part of the work is divided into five chapters. In the first of them (*The Enlightenment paradoxes - voices for and against vampires*), eighteenth-century works using the theme are examined. This part raises issue of the attitude of classicism related writers and thinkers towards "vampiremania", showing various opinions on the question of faith in the existence of the dead returning from the grave. Extreme views on the occurrence of ghouls were represented by, among others, Benedykt Chmielowski and Jan Bohomolec - they reflect the approach to faith and superstition in the Enlightenment. The section on *Wieczory badeńskie* by Józef Maksymilian Ossoliński is the most comprehensive. His strategy of literary "dealing with vampires" was to build tension, and finally show a rational explanation of seemingly paranormal phenomena.

Chapter 4 (*Vampire as a metaphor or a romantic vision of the world*) is an analysis of nineteenth-century works dealing, not always explicitly, with vampire themes. The turn to folk and the rejection of the Enlightenment belief about the possibility of total cognition through scientific methods changed the approach to the ghoul/vampire, making him not only a fully fledged hero, but also a metaphor of important and often raised issues such as madness, loneliness, love and alienation, as well as, in case of Polish literature, patriotism. Vampirism became for romantics a way of expressing emotional states and, thanks to the ability of transgression, cognition unlimited by physical barriers. In the case of Polish Romanticism, the category of national independence movement, associated with the motif of love stronger than death and sacrifice, becomes important, as seen in *Dziady* by Adam Mickiewicz and *Kordian* by Juliusz Słowacki. The Vampire is connected with the concept of a "dwojedusznik" in the context of which the phenomenon of doppelganger is analyzed. The works using this theme are, among others, *Poganka* by Narcyza Żmichowska and novels by Stefan Grabowski.

The further part of the dissertation is devoted to the feminal element of the vampiric phantasm. The history of "demonic" female characters in culture was traced, starting with Lilith and her similar creatures occurring in the mythologies of different regions of the world. The starting point was the matriarchy and cult of the goddess – mother, as well as the transformation of the female role in the social perspective. The ambivalence in the perception of women was emphasized by modernism, and it was the works from the early twentieth century (*Wampir* by Władysław Stanisław Reymont and Stefan Grabiński's novels) that became the subject of considerations in Chapter 5 (*Demon Woman. Vampiric femme fatale*). The exception is nineteenth century novel *Poganka* by Narcyza Żmichowska. As a complement to the vision of literary mental vampires a male representative, Rajmund, the hero of Włodzimierz Bełcikowski's novel *Sekret wiecznego życia*, is presented.

Chapter 6 (*Literary Strigoi. Between Folklore, Fantasy and Terror*) is devoted to literary portraits of strigoi, which are one of the variants of the figure of a vampire, especially often found in fantasy and horror novels. The analysis of the texts is preceded by a brief overview of both species, as well as the characteristics of the striga and showing the connections between native beliefs and those originating in ancient Greece. The functioning of this ghost-like creature in the pages of literature is presented in, among others, *Dom na Wyrębach* by Stefan Darda and the series *Zapomniana księga* by Paulna Hendel.

The last, 7th chapter of the dissertation, entitled *Postmodern Vampire. New directions in the development of the bloodsucker figure*, discusses the changes taking place within the theme over the last fifty years. The postmodern perspective, sanctioning diversity, made it possible to refresh the phantasm and gave it new, often non-obvious and surprising features, even those considered immanent, such as daily existence or overcoming the need to drink blood. Representatives of new trends in Polish literature are, inter alia, Regis from *Wiedźmin* by Andrzej Sapkowski and the heroes of the series *Wampir z...* by Andrzej Pilipiuk. The result of the transformation of the bloodsucker figure is its humanization - a creature that was originally a threat to humans, alien and connected with the sphere of darkness, acquired human features, problems and dilemmas.

At the end of the dissertation, the most important issues raised in it are included and summarized. The presented analysis does not exhaust the topic, but is rather an outline of the issue, focusing on the most popular and, at the same time, the most representative texts dealing with vampire topics in Polish literature.

The entire doctoral dissertation is completed with a bibliography.

**Key words:** vampire, folk culture, horror, fantasy, Romanticism, transformations, striga, femme fatale

3 VI 2022 r., Jowita Kosioba  
date, signature