

**MARX'S VAMPIRE IN VAMPIRE LITERATURE.
A MARXIST ANALYSIS ON STOKER'S DRACULA, MARTIN'S
FEVRE DREAM AND DEL TORO'S THE STRAIN TRILOGY**

*Marx's
vampire;
Vampire
literature*

Nikodemus Yudho Sulistyو
Email: nikodemusoul@gmail.com

037

***Abstract** - There is a parallel relationship research between vampire literature and Marx's works on the theory of social class and struggle as what so called as Marx's Vampire. The obvious connection of the fictitious characters of vampires who suck blood of the victims lies on the analogy of the capitalists as the superior beings suck the workforce of the working class labours. Through the three novels, one title is in the form of trilogy, Bram Stoker's Dracula, George R. R. Martin's Fevre Dream, and Guillermo del Toro and Chuck Hogan's The Strain Trilogy, the writer found out that the vampires in the novels are portrayed as masters who literally suck the blood from the victims, the slaves, or those who have the characteristics of being ones. The master and slave relationship describes the theory of Marx's Vampire.*

***Keywords:** Marx's Vampire, vampire literature, master and slave.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Vampire literature has always been a favourite and interesting literary genre to mention. Plenty of fiction works and films receive commercial success even though the media present the vampires with their romantic and seductive attributes which do not belong to the ancient and classic vampire literature such as Bram Stoker's Dracula (Nußbaumer, 2014, p. 1), which is best represented by Meyer's *Twilight Saga* to name a few among many others. Vampire fiction is arguably more than a story of human-like creatures with fangs who suck on people's blood and mesmerise the human with their sensuality and eroticism like what people know created from the current media. It is known that vampire myth was used as the main topic for English and German romantic poets in the nineteenth century to be the experiment of metaphor for the psychology of human interactions (Twitchell, 1997, p. 103). Vampire literature covers complex conceptual aspects involving the psychological, spiritual, physical, and emotional realms and even the subjects of magnetic, astral, and psychic vampirism (Karg, Spaite, & Sutherland, 2009, p. xii).

The writer found out that during its rich history, vampire literature has been exposing social themes inside its story and characters. It is no wonder Karl Marx

used the terminology vampire for his analogy toward capital system. Marx stated that the capitalists are vampires who can live only by sucking the blood of the labours. In this research, the writer discovered that the concept of Marx's vampire in describing capital system is obviously applied to vampire literature where the generic stories and characters plainly convey the relationship between the 'Master' and the 'slave' or its victims. The vampires as masters literally suck the blood of the slaves, or at least people who are considered as having the qualities of being ones. The writer explains how Marx's Vampire as a form of social theory, theory of social class, applies to the fictional vampires. Count Dracula as the main character in Bram Stoker's *Dracula* is called as 'Master' by Doctor Reinfield who considers himself as Dracula's slave and is ready to serve his masters intention. In George R. R. Martin's *Fevre Dream*, Damon Julian, an antagonist vampire, confronts the protagonist vampire, Joshua, for the rivalry for being the 'bloodmaster', to take control vampires and humans. Julian and his fellow vampires also literally feed on black slaves' blood to satisfy their thirst and keep them alive. another 'Master' from Guillermo del Toro's *The Strain Trilogy*, one of the seven 'ancients' who takes form or inhabits the body of human named Jusef Sardu. This 'Master' also makes use of human as slave, in this case is Eldritch Palmer, and sucks on human's blood whom he considered as lower status creatures or slaves. The writer takes this three novels – with two additions of *The Strain* since it is in the form of trilogy – to show that Marx's Vampire is conveyed well in the relationship between the 'Masters' and the 'slaves.'

There are some researches on the matter of Marx's Vampire. Morrisette (Morrisette, 2013) concludes in his research entitled *Marxferatu: The Vampire Metaphor as a Tool for Teaching Marx's Critique of Capitalism*, that the analogy used by Marx can be used to teach students about the concepts of Marxist thought and idea. Another writing simply explains the concept of Marx's Vampire as the critique of political economy which entitled *The Political Economy of the Dead: Marx's Vampire* by Mark Neocleous (Neocleous, 2003). These journals show the concept of Marx's Vampire as the critique to capitalism.

In understanding the concept of this analysis, there is a need to define the connection between vampire and literature. The idea of using vampire as the main theme in literary works had been already used in fantastic or gothic fiction. It is

actually a form of realism which acts as fairground mirror where a world is transformed into the kind of monstrous shapes such as vampires, ghosts and demons (Cavanagh, Gillis, Keown, Loxley, & Stevenson, 2010, p. 144; Childs & Fowler, 2006, p. 100). Therefore, Bane strictly differentiates the definition of vampire as fictional and historical or at least cultural and mythological being. Bane (Bane, 2010, p. 3) explains that fictional vampire is, for the sake of classification, a vampire that is the creation of an author or group of creative- minded individuals.

The word *vampire* itself has a very rich connotation referring to the mythical, legendary and cultural creature or reflecting on the fictional and imaginative figure created by the creative minds of authors, poets, movie makers or media. Even though the vampire has been developed in literary and cinematic treatments evolving over the centuries into a glamorous being, its roots in folklore remain primitive and bestial. It generally is stated that vampire is one of the most unique beings in the world, surviving from the darkest times in history, existing for millennia among mortals, feeding on them and using them to create more of its own kind in order to ensure the continuation of the species, perhaps in preparation for a final struggle between the living and the undead (Bunson, 2000, p. 262). Vampire literature started from the historical horrors and mythology with the gruesome classic portrait of a supernatural being that is part human, part monster and all horrible (Hirschmann, 2011, p. 4). This haunting nightmares about bloodsucking creatures therefore appeared in the form of works of literature around two centuries ago.

Vampires are depicted for having stereotypical characteristics. Some writers are pretty creative by adding, omitting or creating other elements of fiction to their vampires. However, generally vampires represent the same thing. It is said that “Perhaps because Stoker's *Dracula* evolved into such a mythic figure, subsequent writers of vampire fiction have failed to invent a character of comparable grandeur,” (Wolf, 1999, p. 1). It means that looking at the vampire literature, somehow the readers cannot escape the portrayal of vampire as it is depicted in the novel *Dracula* by Bram Stoker.

Marxist theory also makes use of the concept of vampire in one of its analogy. In order to get understanding about vampire in Marxism, there is a need take a look a little a Marxism itself. Marxism is neither ethics nor value. Marx himself rejected

the existence of norms, values or ideals. He had not asked about what *ought* to be, as what values may focus on, but instead he claimed that he asked for what it is (Kamenka, 2015). His notion is that it is what happens in the society, what happens in the world that we live. He believes that people are forced to believe that their ideas, cultural life, legal system, and religion were the creation of human but with the divine reason, it means God – or divine being – takes part in this creation, so that human cannot question them. Instead of believing this, Marx oppositely explained that this is the formulation of mental system and the products of social and economic existence (Selden, Widdowson, & Brooker, 2005, p. 82). As the result, the concept of social class appears. The dominant social class's interests determines how people see human existence whether individual and collective. For the law, or any legal system, it is not pure manifestation of human or God's intention, but the reflection of the interests of the dominant class in particular historical periods. Eagleton explains that ideology is a set of doctrines which is just a representation of reality. It is false. It has values, ideas and images which tie people by their social functions so that they prevent them from a true knowledge of society as a whole (Bennett & Royle, 2004, p. 172). Marxism therefore in basic terms, seeks to find this state, struggle and relationship between these social classes in the society. Therefore Marxist literary theory places the literary works in the context of larger socio-political mechanisms. Here, literary texts are analysed as expressions of economic, sociological and political factors. The novel, for instance, can be analysed as the portrayal of the consequence of the economic conditions of a particular period in time. The Marxist theory is parallel to the issues of race and gender as well since it focuses on the mechanisms of class (Bertens, 2008, p. 62; Klarer, 2005, p. 92). Literature is considered does not exist in some timeless, aesthetic realm as an object to be passively contemplated. Rather, like all cultural manifestations, it is a product of the socioeconomic and hence ideological conditions of the time and place in which it was written, whether or not the author intended it so. Since human beings are themselves products of their socioeconomic and ideological environment, it is assumed that authors cannot help but create works that embody ideology in some form (Tyson, 2006, p. 66). In this case, the literary work itself described the environment of socioeconomic and ideological realm that we live in.

Therefore, the concept of *vampire* in Marxism according to Marx was used as the imagery of the capital system. He explained that the capitalists are dead labours, that vampire-like, only live by sucking living labour, and live the more, the more labour it sucks. Consequently, by incorporating living labour power in this way, capital itself becomes an *animated monster* (Fraser & Wilde, 2011, p. 38). Dead labours are the capital, living labours which means the working class. The capitalists are motivated solely by profit. They are the factory owners emerge as a form of economic vampires. They build longer hours to work, lower wages, and poorer working conditions. Capitalists are, in effect, draining away the value of their workers' labour to enrich themselves—just as supernatural vampires drains their victims' life force to grow stronger.

As Maurice Richardson said some twenty years ago, it will be only a matter of time until some Marxist tells us that Dracula is the extension of the feudal *droit du seigneur* in which the evil lord starves the peasants and the bourgeoisie while sucking the children's blood (Twitchell, 1997, p. 140). To interpret Marxist theory on vampires, it can be explained, as stated previously, that the factory owners, or the capitalists, step into the role of the vampires. They are draining the surplus value of the worker's labour to further enrich themselves. Similar to the vampires portrayed by Bram Stoker in his novel, *Dracula*, sucks blood from victims to grow ever stronger. Seduced by the capitalist's spell—the comforting distractions of religion, politics, consumer culture—the worker suffers a “loss of self” and emerges as little more than a walking corpse (Morrisette, 2013, p. 637).

Marx argues, however, that the relationship between workers and the value of their labour fundamentally changes under capitalist modes of production. When a worker sells the surplus value of his labour to a factory owner in exchange for wages paid, Marx calls it “a sacrifice of his life”. This process alienates humans from their own nature, and it is the factory owner who ultimately accumulates profit from the worker's labour. The victims of the vampires are alienated from their self. Their blood is sucked by the employers in the way the vampires do to their victims.

II. METHODOLOGY

The writer applied the qualitative method in analysing the novels through methodology of analysis proposed by Karl Marx. Marx inverted Hegel's concept of dialectic into the real social relationships (Fraser & Wilde, 2011, p. 5). It is the basis of Marx's materialist method that exposes contradictions in society to reveal its inner essence (Fraser & Wilde, 2011, p. 76). In this method, it is recognised that there is a contradiction between opposed forces and conflict. As the result, the writer dialectically found out the lordship and bondage – master-slave dialectic (Boucher, 2012, p. 18)– in the novels, to show that Marx's Vampire works on the dialectical relationship between the vampires and humans.

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

As a metaphor, Marx's Vampire is definitely not used referring to the fictional or legendary figures. Using mythological concept of vampires, Marx depicted the capitalists as dead labours who feed on the living labours so that they continue living. The prominent trait of many – if not all – vampires' social status portrayal is that they come from a higher class, aristocratic family or rich, bourgeois people. Drabble (Drabble, 2000, p. 801) mentions that Lord Ruthven, an aristocratic villain vampire evidently was modelled upon an aristocratic poet, Lord Byron. This high status vampire was written in the novel *The Vampyre*, which laid the foundation of vampire fiction. Vampire Lestat, the main vampire character in *Interview with the Vampire* – and the rest of *The Vampire Chronicles* series – by Anne Rice was also told comes from an aristocratic lineage fallen from hard times during 1780's (Karg et al., 2009, p. 161). It suggests that vampires see humans as lesser beings (Wisker, 2016, p. 109) that they can kill or use as they like to satisfy their hunger and interests.

Therefore, from the three novels the writer proposed, it is not surprising that all of the villain vampires are called as *masters* to show their strata and social class. In *Dracula*, Mr Renfield, the patient in a psychiatric hospital run by Dr Seward, is the object of Count Dracula's power. Mr Renfield acts as Count Dracula's slave who serves him in hope to be bitten and turned into a vampire to have an eternal life. He calls Count Dracula as Lord and Master, “ ..., I found myself opening the sash and saying to Him: ‘Come in, Lord and Master.’ (Stoker, 2011, pp. 337 - 338). As stated above, Count Dracula comes from a superior ethnic tribe. He is proud of it and

differentiates himself and his 'kind' as stronger beings, "We Szekelys have a right to be proud, for in our veins flows the blood of my brave races who fought as the lion fights, for lordship (Stoker, 2011, p. 34). The *role* as masters who justifies the vampires as superior beings, or capitalists according to Marx's point of view, also works for the main villain vampire in *The Strain Trilogy*. In the first series of the trilogy, *The Strain*, it is explained that the vampire is one of the seven original vampires who are called masters,

"They have always been here,' he continued. 'Nesting, feeding. In secret and in darkness, because that is their nature. There are seven originals, known as the Ancients. The Masters. Not one per continent. They are not solitary beings as a rule, but clannish. Until very recently—'recently' considering their open-ended life span—they were all spread throughout the greatest landmass, what we know today as Europe and Asia, the Russian federation, the Arabian peninsula, and the African continent ... ' (Toro & Hogan, 2009, p. 216).

When the main villain, the Master, decides to inhabit human's body, he also chooses a master known in a social strata recognised by humans named Jusef Sardu,

"He was the son of a Polish nobleman. And his name was Jusef Sardu. Master Sardu stood taller than any other man. Taller than any roof in the village. He had to bow deeply to enter any door," (Toro & Hogan, 2009, p. 1).

Joshua, the protagonist vampire in *Fevre Dream*, explains to Abner Marsh, a human he trusts for helping him to work on his plan to solve humans-vampires hostility, that the vampires have their bloodmasters, the leaders of their kind, "We have had our great leaders, Abner, bloodmasters real and imagined in ages past. We have had our Caesars, our Solomons, our Prester Johns. But we are waiting, for our deliverer, you see, waiting for our Christ," (Martin, 2012, p. 209).

The vampires feed on human's blood which is not surprising that they also suck and drink on the slaves' blood even though all humans are considered slave or even cattle by the vampires. In *The Strain*, Abraham Setrakian, one of the protagonists, explains that the Jewish people were considered slaves for the Germans back in the World War,

"At age sixteen, Abraham Setrakian was a yellow patch, a craftsman. He curried no favor; he was no one's pet, merely a slave with a talent for woodwork that, in a death camp, was a talent for living. He had some value for the Nazi Hauptmann who used him without mercy, without regard, and without end. He raised barbed-wire fences, crafted a library set, repaired the railways. He carved elaborate pipes

for the Ukrainian guard captain at Christmastime in '42," (Toro & Hogan, 2009, p. 115).

The Jewish People were murdered by the Nazi in the concentration camp, and at night, the Master joined the party by selecting the victims, the slaves of the Germans, who apparently labours, workers, who were forced to work without compensation, the Marx's labours who are sucked by the capitalists, the vampires.

"He could see hints of its blackened face as it emerged from the bundled darkness of the body—and leaned forward, smelling the neck of Zadawski, a young Pole, a hard worker. The Thing stood the height of the barracks, its head among the beams above, breathing hard and hollowly, excited, hungry," (Toro & Hogan, 2009, p. 117).

Furthermore, in *The Night Eternal*, the last novel of *The Strain Trilogy*, it is stated that the vampires rule the world as the highest class, the capitalist. The Master makes a systemised labour structure so that the vampires can live by sucking the labours' blood, "The Master had apparently calculated the right number, the exact balance, of vampires needed to establish dominance without overburdening the blood supply; its approach was methodological and indeed mathematical," (Toro & Hogan, 2012, p. 4). It is also clearly explained that the Master of the vampires acts as a capitalist of the humans who act as labours. The Master takes care of them and fulfils their basic needs in order to keep them survive only to be sucked of their blood in the end,

"The Master capitalized the societal chaos of the first few months. Deprivation – of food, clean water, sanitation, law enforcement – terrorized the populace, so much so that, once basic infrastructure was restored, once a program of food rations was implemented and the rebuilt electrical grid chased off the darkness of the long nights, they responded with gratitude and obedience. Cattle need the recompense of order and routine – the unambiguous structure of power—to surrender," (Toro & Hogan, 2012, p. 5).

This action by the Master reflects Marx's Vampire which according to Morrisette (Morrisette, 2013), the workers are seduced by capitalist's spell, where they create the comforting distractions of religion, politics, and consumer culture. It means that the workers – humans in the novels – are maintained of made comfortable while they suffer a "loss of self" and emerge as little more than walking corpses who wait for their death, "Her chin dropped then, and the stinger lashed out, the vampire

artist leaping onto Jackson's chest and shoulders and driving him back against the counter, drinking him dry," (Toro & Hogan, 2010, p. 58).

A pack of vampires led by Damon Julian in *Fevre Dream* also choose slaves, black slaves, to satisfy their thirst, "The slave girl was still shaking, but she did not resist," (Martin, 2012, p. 25). The pack kill the slave by sucking her blood, "He raised her slim arm up once more, and bent his lips to her wrist, and began to suck," (Martin, 2012, p. 25). Damon Julian, the one who considers himself as the bloodmaster in this case also justifies himself as the capitalist, the higher status being who feeds on the blood of working class, in this case is in the form of a female slave, "Julian walked across the ballroom to the slave girl Emily. He moved with a stately grace of a cat. He moved like a lord, like a king," (Martin, 2012, p. 24). Here, Julian takes a form of a superior being, a lord, a king. A lord and a king are not just leaders, they are superior to others. Julian comes to suck the blood out of the slave's body, like a capitalist sucks the blood out of the working class.

The vampires in the three novels are depicted as Masters, Lord or King, obviously portray the capitalists. They are not simply supernatural beings, monsters who suck and drink the human's blood to keep alive. The vampires in these novels are considered as superior. They come from aristocratic family or higher status of social class. They are stronger, economically better but need to connect with the humans, to feed on them to stay alive. The victims often come from low social class strata such as slaves. The slaves, and people who are considered as slave because they show the similar characteristics to slaves, work for the vampires. The vampires make use of humans to reach their satisfaction and need. The first victims of a pack of vampires led by Damon Julian in *Fevre Dream* is a female slave, a black woman. They feed on her because she is a slave, a cheap and tradeable product at that time. In *The Strain Trilogy*, one of the main characters, Abraham Setrakian, considers himself and the Jewish people who became the German Nazi's victims, as slaves since they were doing what they were told to without being appreciated at all. In *Dracula*, Mr Renfield, the patient in Dr Seward's psychiatric hospital, acts as a slave for his master, Dracula, who promises him an eternal life. The Marx's Vampire does not symbolise the blood sucking action, it more represents the master-slave

relationship between vampires and humans and how the vampires act as capitalists and humans as working class are explained in Marx's Vampire.

IV. CONCLUSION

Ultimately, the Marx's Vampire is a parallel of the vampires' stories. The concept of sucking the blood from the victims is similar to the capitalist who sucks the workforce of the working class labours. However, the main vampires known in almost all vampire fictions represent the capitalist since they come from aristocrat family, rich and higher status social class, etc. As the result, the Masters in Stoker's *Dracula*, Martin's *Fevre Dream* and del Toro and Hogan's *The Strain Trilogy* obviously represent the concept of Marx's Vampire.

REFERENCES

- Bane, T. (2010). *Encyclopedia of Vampire Mythology*. North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers.
- Bennett, A., & Royle, N. (2004). *An Introduction to Literature, Criticism and Theory*. Harlow: Pearson Education Limited.
- Bertens, H. (2008). *Literary Theory. The Basics. 2nd Edition*. Oxon: Routledge.
- Boucher, G. (2012). *Understanding Marxism*. Bristol: Acumen Publishing Limited.
- Bunson, M. (2000). *The Vampire Encyclopedia* Auckland: Random House.
- Cavanagh, D., Gillis, A., Keown, M., Loxley, J., & Stevenson, R. (Eds.). (2010). *The Edinburgh Introduction to Studying English Literature*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Childs, P., & Fowler, R. (Eds.). (2006) *The Routledge Dictionary of Literary Terms*. New York: Routledge.
- Drabble, M. (Ed.) (2000). *The Oxford Companion to English Literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Fraser, I., & Wilde, L. (2011). *Marx Dictionary*. New York: Continuum International Publishing Group.
- Hirschmann, K. (2011). *Vampires in Literature*. San Diego: ReferencePoint Press, Inc.

- Kamenka, E. (2015). *The Ethical Foundations of Marxism*. Oxon: Routledge.
- Karg, B., Spaite, A., & Sutherland, R. (2009). *Vampire Book. From Vlad the Impaler to the Vampire Lestat—A History of Vampires in Literature, Film, and Legend*.
- Klarer, M. (2005). *An Introduction to Literary Studies* (Vol. Routledge): London.
- Martin, G. R. R. (2012). *Fevre Dream*. New York: Bantam Books.
- Morrisette, J. J. (2013). Marxferatu: The Vampire Metaphor as a Tool for Teaching Marx's Critique of Capitalism. *American Political Science Association*, 10(10).
- Neocleous, M. (2003). The Political Economy of the Dead: Marx's Vampire. *History of Political Thought*, XXIV(4668-684).
- Nußbaumer, J. (2014). *The Vampire Literature. A Comparison of Bram Stoker's Dracula and Anne Rice's Interview with the Vampire*. Hamburg: Anchor Academic Publishing.
- Selden, R., Widdowson, P., & Brooker, P. (2005). *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory*. Harlow: Pearson Education Limited.
- Stoker, B. (2011). *Dracula*. London: HarperCollins Publisher.
- Toro, G. d., & Hogan, C. (2009). *The Strain*. New York: HarperCollins.
- Toro, G. d., & Hogan, C. (2010). *The Fall*. New York: HarperCollins.
- Toro, G. d., & Hogan, C. (2012). *The Night Eternal*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers.
- Twitchell, J. B. (1997). *The Living Dead. A Study of the Vampire in Romantic Literature*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Tyson, L. (2006). *Critical Theory Today. A User-Friendly Guide*. New York: Routledge.
- Wisker, G. (2016). *Contemporary Women's Gothic Fiction. Carnival, Hauntings and Vampire Kisses*. London: Palgrave Gothic.
- Wolf, L. (Ed.) (1999). *Blood Thirst. 100 Years of Vampire Fiction*. New York: Oxford University Press.