Genres that Suck! Why is Dracula in a Commercial Selling Car Insurance, Anyway?

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After seeing Dracula in a commercial, Wright is prompted into writer-researcher action. Exploring how and why vampires are so prevalent in so many genres, Wright probes deep into genre studies and Cultural-Historical Activity Theory for answers. As her research questions and methods evolve, Wright questions if genres that take up vampires become antecedent genres for other activity systems and finds solutions in mapping how vampires took shape as a trope in folklore told over centuries. Readers won't need a wooden stake or a clove of garlic to tackle this article—not with trusty theories like genre studies and CHAT by their side.

The Inspiration: Dracula at a Blood Drive

Do I like vampires? Okay, sure. Here and there, I have taken up quite a few vampire movies, shows, books, stories and was even kissed by a vampire once. My boyfriend and I were at a costume party; he was Dracula, and I was a gypsy/zombie/witch with fangs. Let it be said, I have a fondness for dark and kooky things. But am I a vampire expert? The answer is "no."

Yet last week while I was watching TV, a GEICO Insurance commercial caught my attention.[1] The scene takes place at a blood drive in a cafeteria, where a guy about to donate blood is being asked medical questions by someone with a clipboard, off-camera. The guy gets nervous, and the camera pans out on the man with the clipboard in front of him. This man has the characteristics of what you could call a *conventional vampire*: pale complexion, slicked-back black hair, long yellow nails—and large fangs.

Yep, the person drawing this poor guy's blood is a vampire. The vampire excitedly tosses the clipboard and says, "Let's get started, shall we?"

Right then, banjo music plays, the camera pans farther out, and two GEICO spokesmen are in the cafeteria. Ronnie, the banjo player, asks, "Jimmy, how happy are folks who save hundreds of dollars switching to GEICO?"

"'Happier than Dracula volunteering at a blood drive." Jimmy delivers the punch line.

"We have cookies!" Dracula giddily announces in the background.

"Get happy. Get GEICO."

Ha Ha. The commercial is slightly funny and, yeah, cheesy. It follows the format of all the other "Happier Than" GEICO commercials, a convention we've come to recognize and laugh at because of it. And while it did help me to remember my car insurance (I forgot to pay my bill), it also made me think about something else we've come to know—vampires—and how these bloodsuckers can appear just about anywhere.

Initial Questions: Vampires in My Cereal Bowl, Too?

It's pretty common knowledge that vampire stories are a category of fiction. Look for a vampire TV show, movie, or novel at the store or online, and you will find that they often have their own section. So vampires are common enough that they are used to organize fiction genres. However, knowing this does not explain why they are so prevalent and how they show up in other genres, such as a commercial. Why is Dracula at a blood drive selling car insurance anyway? How did he get there? Is he Dracula, really?

I mean, of course, it is an actor working for GEICO's advertisement agency, playing the part of a vampire that other actors in the commercial refer to as "Dracula," which makes me think that commercials aren't any different than other works of fiction. But then again, how can that be true? A vampire commercial is not the same as a vampire television show, vampire movie, or vampire novel. Each of these is a different type of writing situation (a different genre) that has different characteristics, formats, conventions, purposes, and contexts. No doubt, the methods and tools needed to produce a vampire commercial are different from the methods and tools needed to produce a vampire novel. So how can we come to understand the multitude of vampires out there? Their other forms? Their uses? Are vampires just that sexy?

Using Google, I began to research other vampire forms and found a black and white picture of a vampire that looked more like an evil version of Disney's *Shrek* placed alongside a photo of a pale-faced, yet seductively-posed Robert Pattinson, the star of the *Twilight* films. Googling various terms—such

as vampire forms, vampire characters, vampire creations, vampire products, old vampires, and modern vampires—revealed millions of vampire artifacts, a few of which are included in Figure 1. While I am not a fan of *Count Chocula* cereal (*Boo Berry* is more my style), it comes in a vampire cereal box of mini chocolaty bats and marshmallows. And how could I forget the one and only Count von Count, the mathematical-crazed vampire Muppet on *Sesame Street*. He was the love of my life. Okay, I was only four.

Vampires on Google included thousands of books, movies, TV shows, cartoons, graphic novels, comic books, novel and DVD covers, video games, artwork, photographs, non-fiction books, indexes, glossaries, news articles, fact sheets, mythologies, movie reviews, websites, blogs, online quizzes, social networking sites, political cartoons, commercials, print ads, bumper stickers, puppets, wine bottle labels, cereal boxes, and other merchandise, such as costumes, fake blood, and large fangs.
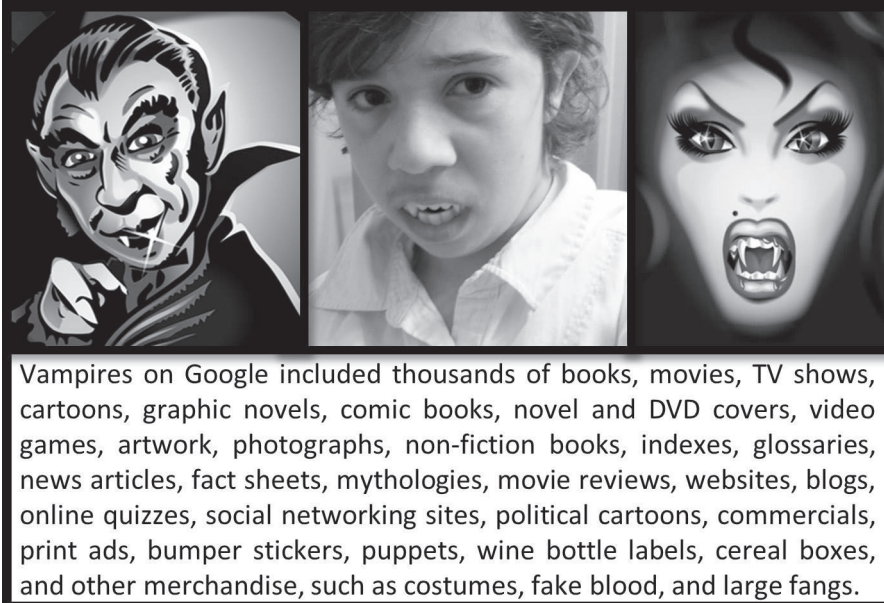
Figure 1: So Many Vampire Forms Spread Over So Many Genres (Microsoft, NVTOfficeClips.com.)

Searching the internet made me realize two things: one, our notion of a vampire consists of a web of vampire forms spread over different genres and historical periods that are never the same each time we encounter them; and two, genre is not simply a category or a way to organize types of writing. Genre has to be something more: something specific and complex.

Go for the Genre Jugular: Exposing the Actions of Writing

In class, I learned that a genre is "a dynamic social activity," and while I understood the general idea, my research showed me that I needed more concrete terms. In *Genre: An Introduction to History, Theory, Research, and Pedagogy*, Anis S. Bawarshi and Mary Jo Reiff write, "Genres are understood as forms of cultural knowledge that conceptually frame and mediate how we understand and typically act within various situations. This view recognizes genres as both organizing and generating kinds of texts and social actions, in complex

dynamic relation to one another" (4). Breaking down this complex quote, I notice that the use of "texts" seems to refer to any kind of compositional product, be it a novel, website, commercial, or political cartoon, which certainly works for this investigation. Vampires are in many texts.

Coming to know genre "as both organizing and generating kinds of texts" (4), I realize that genre is not only a text, but also influences the actions that go into creating it. Theorist Charles Bazerman refers to genres as "mental landscapes" and "tools of cognition" (290), and it is no wonder. Genre is how we make sense of composition, including not only the product, but also the methods (conceptualizations, strategies, practices, etc.) of composing. How a writer produces a genre is affected by what is usually done in that genre. In short, genre directs the routine actions of any particular composition.

Here, while referring back to my notes that "genre is dynamic social activity," I feel a bit confused. How can genre be routine actions and changing at the same time? Right as I was about to define genre as "a pain in the neck," new understanding hits me. Just because genre directs routine actions does not mean that those routine actions are always rigid. Certainly, a genre could be more flexible or more rigid depending on the standard practices of that genre, which makes sense because people are doing it. And regardless how similar two people may be, what they produce would not be identical, unless of course the genre (like a national weather advisory) requires the text to be rigid. So it is true; genre is stable and also dynamic at the same time.

At this point, I wonder if this is how genres take up these vampire forms and move them from place to place, sometimes altering them drastically, and other times not so much. I consider all the genres that use vampires. Do these genres share a similar characteristic that not only invites, but also requires, innovation and creativity, which then would allow for both routine and dynamic use of vampires? Does this particular sort of genre characteristic have a name?

Thinking about a lesson in a past English class, I recall how fictional devices that are repeatedly used by writers are called tropes. Looking up "trope" in *Merriam Webster Dictionary*, I find that my memory is correct. A trope is "a word, phrase, or image used in a new and different way in order to create an artistic effect . . . a common or overused theme or device : cliché <the usual horror movie *tropes*>" ("Trope"). So vampires and the things we've come to associate with them, such as preying on the blood of the living, are artistic effects—tropes—that people use while composing genres, particularly in genres that allow for or require such effects. And because artistic effects can vary as much as people, I wonder how we still can recognize vampires at all. In other words, what is it about a genre that allows for vampire tropes to be not only recognizable, but also overused to the point of being cliché?

I've Come to Suck Your Antecedent: Wait, What the Heck's an Antecedent?

Reflecting further on genre's definition, I focus on genre as "organizing and generating kinds of texts and social actions" (Bawarshi and Reiff 4). Here, I feel that I'm onto something that I can really bite into. In order to compose any particular genre, there are certain methods, practices, tools, which become a standard way of doing it over time. These standard ways or conventions are how an individual thinks of the genre and also how the individual continues to create it, which makes me question. So is this the same as saying familiar genres can become so ingrained in our thoughts and actions that they can show up, unannounced, anytime? For example, I remember back in high school when I tried to compose my first short story, "The Laugh Toxin." The finished text looked and sounded more like a five-paragraph essay than fiction. I didn't intend for my short story to become essay-like. It just sort of happened. Why?

In "Transferability and Genres," scholar Amy Devitt gives a reason. Devitt says that "writers use the genres they know when faced with a genre they do not know" (222). This was absolutely true. At the time, I did not technically know how to write a short story. Although I was familiar with the short story genre, I did not have experience composing it, not nearly like I did writing countless school essays. Devitt calls established genres that we already know how to do "antecedent genres" and explains that such tacit knowledge will "help writers move into a new genre; they help writers adjust their old situations to new locations" (222). This makes sense as to why my short story about strange toxins, emitting from a chemical plant and making people laugh in their sleep, read more like a paper for science class. Essays were my "old situation" and became so embedded in my mind that it became the way I approached *all* writing without even realizing it, which then negatively affected the short story, my desired "new location" (Devitt 222). Without understanding the limits of my antecedent knowledge and without considering what was different about the new genre, I fell miserably short. So it seems that while my antecedent genre helped me produce something, it also hindered me from producing the new genre effectively because these two genres are not the same.

Could antecedent genres help to explain the multitudes of vampire tropes out there? Did the use of vampire as an artistic effect become embedded in certain genre productions, creating a seeming blend of old/new vampires, yet hindering new production enough to keep them recognizable to the point of being cliché? Does an antecedent genre answer the case of Dracula selling car insurance on a commercial? What was the purpose of its artistic effect? I wonder . . .

Like Wild Garlic Growing Over Every Inch of the Earth

I return to Bawarshi and Reiff, who write, "Genres are understood as forms of cultural knowledge that conceptually frame and mediate how we understand and typically act within various situations" (4). I had written in my class notes that genre is "always mediated, always social." Now I really start to piece this together. In order to carry out composition or any literate activity (be it writing, speaking, signing, photographing, videoing, coding, etc.), we require something other than ourselves to make it happen. Languages, tools, practices, forms, formats, and modes help us carry out our communication intent and are bridges between ourselves and our social world(s). And no matter how isolated an act of composition may feel, it is always social.

This complexity deepens when we, like a video camera, begin to move back and try to take in how many separate genres go into the making of larger or more complex genres, which I find in my notes are called "genre sets" that become part of larger systems. Could activity systems explain why vampire tropes are found in so many genres?

Here, I pan out on this large activity system and see how the series of genre activities are situated in not only culture, but also a place and time in history. In this panned out view, I can observe that it isn't just one individual performing the actions of genre. Communities, institutions, worlds are too. In fact, a person's genre actions mediate and are mediated by clusters of literate doings, happenings, and situations that mediate and are mediated by other clusters of literate doings and happenings and so on and so on. (I'm picturing the underground root system of wild garlic covering every inch of the earth's surface.)

Quick, Grab a Wooden Stake: It's CHAT!

Searching through class readings, I come to understand that genre activities are part of larger and yet larger activity systems. Scholar David Russell sheds light on this and writes, "Human activities are complex systems in constant change, interactions, and self-reorganization as human beings collaboratively adapt to and transform their environment through their actions with tools (including writing)" (55). So here, the vampire trope is taken up by genres that then "re-organize" how the vampire character may look and act. I begin to question how vampire tropes are taken up by these activity systems that change them and yet keep them the same in some way. When genres take up the vampire trope, then does it become an antecedent genre for the next activity system that calls for such an artistic effect? At this point, I need a map, a specific map, one that can help me to analyze vampire tropes in various genre activity systems over time.

Referring to notes that I had just taken in class and from reading assignments, I knew that I had entered into the daunting world of Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT). Paul Prior and others write that CHAT helps us go "beyond any single setting . . . offers a new map for an expansive attention to the rhetorical dimensions of all activity" (25). Once I had a specific research question, however, this theory did not seem as intimidating. Given the scope of my inquiry, I was in need of "a new map . . . [one that allows for] expansive attention" (Prior 25). In fact, CHAT gave my research direction, allowing me to explore vampire tropes in distinct ways and from different perspectives, such as its **activity** as well as its **production, representation, distribution, socialization, reception, and ecology**.[2] While I began to understand these terms and how they could help me to answer how vampire tropes are taken up by activity systems over time, I knew I needed to focus on specific genres that used vampires.

Where in the Coffin Do I Start?

Thinking of the GEICO commercial and their giddy Dracula at the blood drive, I decided to research where Count Dracula began: Bram Stoker's 1897 novel, *Dracula*, which I had read in high school. Using my preferred prewriting research activity, I searched "Bram Stoker" and "Dracula" in *Wikipedia*, refreshed my memory about the novel's plot, and then went on to read about Stoker's life and times. I checked *Wikipedia's* references and followed a trail of research that led me to books, articles, reviews, blogs, and annotations about Bram Stoker, his novel, and the various influences that helped Stoker shape his particular vampire.

Remembering my main research question (do genres that use vampire tropes become antecedent genres for other activity systems?), I was particularly interested in Stoker's influences. I found that Stoker had written extensive notes while drafting his novel, notes that modern-day scholars Robert Eighteen-Bisang and Elizabeth Miller have annotated, that could help me learn more about versions of vampire tropes before Stoker's time. These researchers led me to John William Polidori's 1819 novella "Vampyre." I had a hunch that I was traveling back in time because of the change in spelling. But before going back, I needed to chart the things I had learned (the data) about Bram Stoker and his *Dracula*.

Putting Method to the Blood-Sucking Madness

This is where CHAT really helped. After I understood CHAT terms and the specific views of literate activity that these provided, I organized them in

a way that would best help me map my research. To answer my questions would require broad research. I would need to collect a lot of specific data and analyze it, looking for patterns on how vampire adaptations stayed the same or changed over time, and if those adaptations influenced other genres.

I began to feel overwhelmed here. Thinking it over, however, I solved this by deciding to narrow CHAT terms to their most basic meanings in order to gather the most specific tidbits of information, making it easier to chart and analyze later (Figure 2).

Production-specific author(s) and tools used to produce it	Representation-how the genre is conceptualized, including main characteristics & conventions	Activity (& Modality)-modes used to produce and distribute the genre	Time period and location	Socialization-social and cultural practices and beliefs during the time	Ecology-the physical & biological environment at the time	Reception-how the genre is taken up and/or repurposed later

Figure 2: Mapping the Evolution of Vampire Tropes, Using the Basic Meanings of CHAT Terms

Since I was looking at vampire tropes over *time*, I added one more category—"Time period and location"—which would help me track any sort of progression. I placed this category in the center of the chart because it is the most important organizational unit for my study.

While I had taken pages of notes on Stoker's *Dracula*, once I had a specific method, I found most of these notes included extra details. I went back over them, selecting only the information that would complete my chart. Mapping this digitally helped me keep my work concise, which would make for easier analysis later (Figure 3).

Bram Stoker uses paper, ink, and researches about real evil people (Vlad III) and lore about vampires	Count Dracula lives castle in Transylvania, weak in sunlight, has fangs, feeds on women, puts them in trance	Stoker's *Dracula*, written as a series of travelogues, ship logs, letters, and diary entries, and now includes vampire hunters	1897, Great Britain and Ireland	Many foreigners move to London, England; many at the time fear any sort of foreigner, viewing them as harmful "others"	People dying of contagious diseases, e.g. Tuberculosis, and sexually transmitted, Syphilis	Dracula becomes definitive model of a vampire, a major influence on movies and shows based on Dracula's traits
Production-specific author(s) and tools used to produce it	Representation-how the genre is conceptualized, including main characteristics & conventions	Activity (& Modality)-modes used to produce and distribute the genre	Time period and location	Socialization-social and cultural practices and beliefs during the time	Ecology-the physical & biological environment at the time	Reception-how the genre is taken up and/or repurposed later

Figure 3: Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, My First Entry on My Vampire Trope CHAT Map

Time Travel Logs: Interview with Vampire Tropes

Focusing on one of the main inspirations behind Stoker's *Dracula*, I traveled back to the early nineteenth century and to the young physician

John William Polidori. After some mystery, Polidori was identified as the author of the very influential novella (a short novel), *Vampyre*, that featured the first modern-day version of a vampire, Lord Ruthven. Starting again with *Wikipedia* and following the contributors' sources, I found that Polidori's novella was created at the same time as Mary Shelley's *The Modern Prometheus: Frankenstein*. During this summer, a few famous writers lived together and challenged one another to write a better ghost story. *Vampyre* was one of the many fictional results of this challenge.

Physician John William Polidori uses paper, ink, and publishes under the name of a famous author at the time; mystery about the real author until later	In Polidori's novella, an evil vampire, Lord Ruthven, lives among high society people, preying on high society women, killing them	A novella, a longer type of a short story, published as "Vampyre" that uses the 1734 spelling, which is a French-Turkish word for "witch"	1819, England, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* created and published around the same time	Gothic revival, dark, oppressive, intimidating horror; Polidori's vampire start of the modern day vampire who are said to be secretly living among us	Summer of heavy rains, floods, illnesses keeping them indoors; writers attempt to write the best ghost story to cure boredom	Plays, operas, poems are written about vampires; Bram Stoker uses the Lord Ruthven vampire to help shape his famous character and novel, *Dracula*
Production- specific author(s) and tools used to produce it	**Representation-** how the genre is conceptualized, including main characteristics & conventions	**Activity (& Modality)-** modes used to produce and distribute the genre	**Time period and location**	**Socialization-** social and cultural practices and beliefs during the time	**Ecology-** the physical & biological environment at the time	**Reception-** how the genre is taken up and/or repurposed later

Figure 4: Mapping John William Polidori's 1819 Novella, *Vampyre*

Reading these interesting facts, I eagerly sifted through details to locate the CHAT data to chart. I paid attention to the **socialization** and **ecology** of these times because they seemed to be key factors, influencing the production of the vampire trope (Figure 4). I also learned that the notion of "what is a vampyre" changed a great deal during this time. But before I could completely appreciate how significant Polidori's vampire adaptation was, I needed to learn where his production started and if he had modified it from his past. Still curious about the spelling of "vampyre," I consulted the *Oxford English Dictionary* for a word etymology that would help me trace the origins and history of this unfamiliar word.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* provided just what I needed, sending me back to the year of 1734. The word "vampyre," a French-from-Turkish word meaning, "witch," was first recorded in a travelogue, *Travels of Three English Gentlemen*. Here, I learned how vampire legends originated outside of Western Europe and were brought back by wealthy individuals who traveled to different cultures, particularly Eastern. By researching and using CHAT, I was able to see how vampires actually took shape as a trope in folklore told over centuries (Figure 5). Although the word 'vampyre' was not used, these versions from various cultures were precursors to them. Stories of devils and dead spirits who live off the flesh and blood of the living were

passed on since ancient times. Truly, these ancestors of the more modern vampire were the embodiment of evil, which interestingly, after the spread of Christianity, were given the characteristic of being able to come back from the dead. And when these wealthy Englishmen returned home, they not only shared these stories, but also modified them, saying that there were bewitching servants of evil living in these cultures, feeding off the blood (but not the flesh) of the living, in effect, specializing these dead/undead creatures, making them a bit more human, but keeping them just as threatening, calling them "vampyres."

European aristocrats travel and bring back stories of foreigners	*Vampyres* said to be sucking just the blood of the living	Travelogues written, such as *Travels of Three English Gentlemen*	1734, Eastern Europe, Balkans, and Greece	Christianity spreads and so does the belief in coming back from the dead	Belief that evil and sin resides inside the body	Travelogues bring feeling of truth of tales to Europe
People share stories, writing, even hieroglyphics	Devils and dead spirits who live off the "life essence" of the living	Folklore, oral stories passed on; Greek and Roman myths	11-13 centuries, accounts based on ancient myths	Belief in flesh-eating, blood-drinking devils	Lack of modern scientific understanding	Tales of demonic possessions believed as truth for centuries
Production- specific author(s) and tools used to produce it	**Representation-** how the genre is conceptualized, including main characteristics & conventions	**Activity (& Modality)-** modes used to produce and distribute the genre	**Time period and location**	**Socialization-** social and cultural practices and beliefs during the time	**Ecology-** the physical & biological environment at the time	**Reception-** how the genre is taken up and/or repurposed later

Figure 5: Mapping How Vampires Took Shape as a Trope in Folklore Told Over Centuries

Feel the Iron-Rich Robustness: Blood Type CHAT, Of Course

At this point, I felt grateful to have a theory like CHAT traveling with me. Websites, annotations, and books from the library captivated me with rich details, but CHAT helped to keep me focused. I was able to get information quickly because I knew what I was looking for. I used general terms and summaries, situating vampires in various cultural-historical contexts, which gave me a panned out view of how the vampire trope evolved throughout genres in history. The most interesting part was getting to view the formation of the modern-day vampire.

Coming to the twentieth century, I entered into the mode of the motion picture. Here, past vampire texts were taken up by new media forms, adding visualizations to old stories. Influences from the silent films *Nosferatu* (1922) and *Dracula* (1936) can still be seen today. I filled my research chart by selecting key movies, books, and television shows of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries (Figure 6, Top Three Sections). The finished product is indicative of a lot of research. CHAT helped me by keeping me on track with the specific data I needed (Figure 6).

Production-specific author(s) and tools used to produce it	Representation-how the genre is conceptualized, including main characteristics & conventions	Activity (& Modality)-modes used to produce and distribute the genre	Time period and location	Socialization-social and cultural practices and beliefs during the time	Ecology-the physical & biological environment at the time	Reception-how the genre is taken up and/or repurposed later
Many authors, screenwriters, collaborators, artists; vampires as a public domain to adapt	Diverse and complex plots, focus on vampire hunters, and vampires as a part of everyday society	Films, TV series, novels, video games, comics, graphic novels, commercials, ads, and products	Current Times, Global market	Some are: Marvel Comic's *Blade* films, Film and TV series, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, TV series, *Angel*, Film, *The Hunger*, Novel into Film, *Interview with the Vampire*, TV series, *Moonlight*, Film *Underworld*, Film *Van Helsing*, TV miniseries *Salem's Lot*, Novels into film, *Twilight* series, cable TV, *True Blood*, CW's TV series *The Vampire Diaries*, role-playing games, *Vampire: the Masquerade*, video games, *Castlevania*, *Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion, Fallout 3*		
W.E. Daniel Ross uses female pen names to publish thirty-three novels; Anne Rice uses mostly first-person narration over twelve novels, two films	Vampire is now romantic hero, character to feel sympathy for instead of simply embodiment of evil; featuring relationships and immorality	Multivolume epic, episodic novels and TV shows in gothic romance style, such as *Dark Shadows* and Rice's *Vampire Chronicles*	1966-2003, Canada, United States, Western Europe, and beyond	Markets expand; niche audiences become more mainstream; sex, power, politics, immortality are hot topics; vampire relationships sell!	Advances in scientific knowledge of pathogens; being healthy is more a matter of lifestyle and personal choice	Vampire romantic hero, conflicted on choosing to use powers for good or evil; vampires covens, families, and hierarchies, e.g. Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* saga
Henrik Galeen writes screenplay of *Dracula*, directed by F.W. Murnau, which was shot using only one camera, one negative	Count Dracula becomes Count Orlok, looks like an evil *Shrek*, has zombie-like curled fingers, kills his victims, dies in sunlight	The silent film, *Nosferatu,* an unauthorized adaptation, only one negative, but was distributed before law suit; film destroyed	1922, Germany	Many believe that family members are vampires; birth deformities saw to be vampire-like; *Nosferatu* based on one creator's war experience	Period of dark Romanticism; evil portrayed as devils, ghouls, ghosts, witches, werewolves, and vampires	Fans keep version alive, inspiring many other films, plays, and books, such as Steven King's *Salem's Lot*, which comes to TV in 1979
Bram Stoker uses paper, ink, and researches about real evil people (Vlad III) and lore about vampires	Count Dracula lives castle in Transylvania, weak in sunlight, has fangs, feeds on women, puts them in trance	Stoker's *Dracula*, written as a series of travelogues, ship logs, letters, and diary entries, and now includes vampire hunters	1897, Great Britain and Ireland	Many foreigners move to London, England; many at the time fear any sort of foreigner, viewing them as harmful "others"	People dying of contagious diseases, e.g. Tuberculosis, and sexually transmitted, Syphilis	Dracula becomes definitive model of a vampire, a major influence on movies and shows based on Dracula's traits
Physician John William Polidori uses paper, ink, and publishes under the name of a famous author at the time; mystery about the real author until later	In Polidori's novella, an evil vampire, Lord Ruthven, lives among high society people, preying on high society women, killing them	A novella, a longer type of a short story, published as "Vampyre" that uses the 1734 spelling, which is a French-Turkish word for "witch"	1819, England, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* created and published around the same time	Gothic revival, dark, oppressive, intimidating horror; Polidori's vampire start of the modern day vampire who are said to be secretly living among us	Summer of heavy rains, floods, illnesses keeping them indoors; writers attempt to write the best ghost story to cure boredom	Plays, operas, poems are written about vampires; Bram Stoker uses the Lord Ruthven vampire to help shape his famous character and novel, *Dracula*
European aristocrats travel and bring back stories of foreigners	*Vampyres* said to be sucking just the blood of the living	Travelogues written, such as *Travels of Three English Gentlemen*	1734, Eastern Europe, Balkans, and Greece	Christianity spreads and so does the belief in coming back from the dead	Belief that evil and sin resides inside the body	Travelogues bring feeling of truth of tales to Europe
People share stories, writing, even hieroglyphics	Devils and dead spirits who live off the "life essence" of the living	Folklore, oral stories passed on; Greek and Roman myths	11-13 centuries, accounts based on ancient myths	Belief in flesh-eating, blood-drinking devils	Lack of modern scientific understanding	Tales of demonic possessions believed as truth for centuries

Figure 6: Complete Vampire Trope CHAT Map—Top Three Sections Cover 1922 to Present

Genre Studies and CHAT: My Guiding Moonlight

With my map complete, I could analyze the ways that each genre used this trope and how these adaptations became antecedent genres for later systems. As each genre took up the trope, the actual characterization of the vampire changed, sometimes dramatically, thus affecting future productions and sometimes influencing the production of new genres. Folkloric genres in

early history manufactured grotesque vampires that were portrayed as devils feeding off both flesh and blood. Later genres, specifically in nineteenth-century England, took up this trope and transformed it, making the vampire persona more attractive and mysterious. These vampires were given the ability to blend into society, finding sustenance in the blood of the wealthy and also attractive. During this time and place in history, fear of foreigners (both people from foreign regions and foreign pathogens that caused incurable diseases) seemed embodied in the European vampire trope. Vampires were foreigners, others, like us but not like us, which gave the vampire the talent to kill or infest human beings without their victims knowing.

Bram Stoker's 1897 *Dracula* is the perfect example of this cunning sort of vampire. Dracula's high society victims, particularly his female victims, are completely unaware of his inherent evil and malicious intent. Through real-world genres of letters, ships logs, and journal entries, we come to learn the story of *Dracula*. Although these are fictional accounts and testimonies, these genres inside the novel read as if they were real. The Dracula character could not be told in a typical story format with a beginning, middle, and end, but rather it was told by many genres across time and many settings. This demonstrates how the story of *Dracula* had to be witnessed or experienced. Just as Dracula in the novel didn't come from one form, but many, Dracula as a vampire trope didn't come from one genre activity, but many genre activities that predated it.[3]

Perhaps this is why Stoker's vampire novel became one of the most influential antecedent genres for other vampire texts in our time. Researching and CHAT mapping, I discovered how modern adaptations of vampire tropes have drawn on the antecedent genres that came before, and Stoker's novel of many genres seems to invite any writer working in a medium that calls for such artistic effect to take up his vampire trope, thus keeping vampires familiar and also in the state of flux—i.e. dynamic. Fusing prior genres' characterization of a vampire as foreigner who can blend in society without detection, today's vampire characters are often portrayed as sexy, forlorn outsiders, whose desires and obsessions for blood culminates as an internal conflict. For instance, Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight Saga* employs this sort of modern vampire trope, suggesting that vampires have the choice of using their strengths and weaknesses for good or evil, giving vampires the free will to curb those deep-down desires. Just as past writers used vampires as metaphors for the fear of foreign people or pathogens, contemporary writers use vampires as metaphors for desires and obsessions, such as exploring forbidden sexual relations between vampires and humans, which seems to mimic real-life social tension about when it is okay to engage in sex and when it is not. Other modern vampire tropes still embody obsessions and

desires, but for other things. Count von Count, the Muppet on *Sesame Street*, is evidence of this kind of vampire. While portrayed like other modern vampire tropes, this Muppet is a reclusive outsider obsessed (not with the hunger for blood but) with numbers and counting, which seems to be the creators' way to say math is a mysterious but cool (cunning) subject.

Where's My Reflection?

Looking back at this entire vampy investigation, I realize I would not have been able to do it without a better understanding of genre. Looking at the actions of writing and how genre serves both as a form and an influence, which shapes not only the composition, but also how we think and act socially, helped me to identify how vampire tropes have been used by writers to say something about the culture and times in which they live. It makes sense of when Bawarshi and Reiff write that genres are "forms of cultural knowledge that conceptually frame and mediate how we understand and typically act within various situations" (4). Genres are "forms of cultural knowledge" that are reflected in the thoughts and actions of individuals as well as of societies and systems. The vampire tropes taken up by countless genres and activity systems allow for people to play out social beliefs and conditions in an artistic way that they couldn't have done otherwise, thereby both *contributing to and challenging* future forms and actions.

Using CHAT, I was able to get inside these genres and activity systems and map how, in particular, **representation, distribution, socialization,** and **ecology** affected composition, which then affected how and why the vampire tropes were used, which then influenced how overused the antecedent genre became, one that was continually written, amended, and rewritten. Messy is the business of antecedent transfer. Remembering back to my first short story and how it turned out to be more like a school essay, I realize that when relying on antecedent genres without considering the new genre, the result doesn't quite work. Antecedents can enable and constrain new productions at the same time. And while I still have many questions about vampire tropes, for now, I have solved the mystery of why Dracula was in a commercial. Overall, vampire tropes have been used to the point that older antecedents, such as Dracula, are downright cliché, becoming a cultural-historical point of reference, or a collective inside joke.

In short, why is Dracula in a commercial selling car insurance, anyway? Well, because his writer—and that particular genre, and the genre that came before, and the genre that came before that, and so on, and so on— says he can.

Endnotes

[1] The commercial "Happier than Dracula Volunteering at Blood Drive" is a part of GEICO Insurance's 2012 "Happier Than . . ." advertisement campaign by The Martin Agency, Inc. Timothy Ryan Cole plays Jimmy, Alex Harvey plays Ronnie, and Frankie Ray plays Dracula.

[2] "Resituating and Re-mediating the Canons" (Prior et al.) offers a robust explanation of CHAT.

[3] Dracula's name was inspired by a prince, Vlad III, notoriously known as Vlad the Impaler.

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