

“Blood and Water and Race: Critiquing Empire through Vampirism in Gothic Young Adult and New Adult Genres”

While water carries a host of symbolic significance in literature—journey, transformation, purification, etc.—in a postcolonial context, water is also the catalyst for the violent encroachment of Empire, transferring figurative and literal ships filled with capitalism and Eurocentric ideologies to Othered shores. Furthermore, in Gothic literature, water is closely linked with blood in simultaneously sacred and secular ways, *Dracula* being an iconic example. The Count traverses watery passageways, bringing his homeland with him in coffins to England; once docked, he pollutes British blood with his undead, Transylvanian pathogens; thus, through water and blood the Count not only corrupts the holy symbols of baptism and redemption, but also represents the imperial xenophobic anxieties of miscegenation (through blood) and the return of the repressed (through water). I analyze how these themes of blood, water, and race manifest in Gore Verbinski’s *A Cure for Wellness* (2016) and Helen Oyeyemi’s *White is for Witching* (2009), arguing that each work exudes a postcolonial and decolonial critique, respectively, of Empire through its utilization of vampirism.

A Cure for Wellness is a film based on Thomas Mann’s bildungsroman, *The Magic Mountain* (1924), and *White is for Witching* is a novel directly inspired by *Dracula*, according to an author interview. Both texts employ Gothic discourse in their aesthetic as well as their intertextual allusions, enlist rich and complex references to blood and water, and are of the New Adult and Young Adult genres based on the ages of their protagonists and their target audience. Additionally, both texts appropriate the vampire figure and the act of vampirism unique to the adolescent perspective, critiquing hegemonic forces that seek to mold their young characters into citizens, consumers, the body proper (white, male, cissexual, bourgeoisie), and old-world views. More generally, this paper demonstrates how Gothic Young Adult and New Adult genres are particularly concerned and apt at addressing timely sociopolitical anxieties dredged up by neoliberal and neo-nationalist movements.