The divide between human and non-human, real and not-real, is a problem frequently explored in texts about toys and undead creatures. Even the term ‘undead’ is problematic, while the undead are not ‘dead’ in the truest sense, they are still not ‘alive’ (perhaps ‘not not dead’ would be a more appropriate term?). The three texts for discussion in this paper, Robin McKinley’s novel Sunshine, Hans Christian Anderson’s perennial short story The Steadfast Tin Soldier, and Margery Williams’ The Velveteen Rabbit all delineate between the real or human or living and the not-real or not-human or not-living on biological grounds; that is, the animate toy or the undead creature cannot perform the same biological acts as either their animate or not-undead analogues are able. A toy rabbit cannot jump as a real rabbit can, a tin soldier is restricted by his form to a certain predefined agency, and a Vampire cannot create a new life with another biological being'. The three texts also explore how these ‘unreal’ creatures attempt to become ‘real’, and show the results of these metamorphoses.

The Velveteen Rabbit is at its core a kind of bildungsroman of the toy world. As the story begins, the Velveteen Rabbit is a curious inhabitant of the nursery world, but as he develops an awareness of his own physical form, so too does he develop a desire to become ‘real.’

When first introduced, the Rabbit is simply a velvet casing stuffed with sawdust, but is “fat and bunchy, as a rabbit should be.” There is some initial concept of ‘rabbirdhood,’ but this is purely an imitation. The Rabbit’s own concept of self is that he is a velvet rabbit; he has not made the link between his own physical form, so too develops a desire to become ‘real.’

The Velveteen Rabbit is restricted in two ways; first, by his form, and second through his agency. He does not have hind legs, so therefore cannot hop and even if he was made to possess hind legs, he would lack the capacity to act on them and still could not hop. He need would have to be physically manipulated by the boy or by Nana to ‘hop’.

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The transferral of the Velveteen Rabbit’s agency to the manipulations of the Boy are key to understanding the transformation from Toy to Real. When the Boy plays with the Velveteen Rabbit, there is no concept in the Boy’s mind that his toy is not real. For the boy, the representation of ‘rabbliness’ is sufficient to understand his toy as ‘real.’ Once she has made him real, the Nursery Magic Fairy tells the rabbit, “‘You were Real to the boy… because he loved you. Now you shall be Real to everyone.”

Once the Velveteen Rabbit realizes his newfound ‘realness’ he displays his own agency for the first time in the story, as he jumps, leaps and twitches with the other ‘real’ rabbits. In his third form, he was rejected by the other rabbits, but now, after his ‘fleshly metamorphosis’ he is accepted as ‘Real’ by the very creatures he was made to imitate. While the appearance of the Nursery Fairy (and indeed the whole idea of ‘Nursery Magic’) could be considered a deus ex machina, the transformation shows that both the Velveteen Rabbit’s evolving concept of self and his desire for ‘realness’ are contributing factors. The fairy’s invocation of the love that the Boy has for his toy serves as a catalyst for the metamorphosis.

Both The Steadfast Tin Soldier and The Velveteen Rabbit move through the traditional cycle of toy narratives, “appearance, … arrival, … decrepitude… and transfiguring,” but differ in their resolution of the quest for ‘realness’. Like the Velveteen Rabbit, The Toy Soldier is bound by his form, and there is a sense that he develops some sort of soul, which goes on to unite with the little dancer in some sort of

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**References:**

- The Velveteen Rabbit
- Sunshine
- The Steadfast Tin Soldier
- Hans Christian Anderson
- Margery Williams
- Jeremy S. Page
Body permits erotic couplings outside of heteronormative 'human' physiology. In the veil of erotic desire still pervades the eroticism that surrounds the creatures. Even in fictions where Vampires are an accepted reality, this through a strong veneer of cultured eroticism. In feeding habits. The Vampire requires living blood to survive, and this is nearly always portrayed an intense fascination with the Vampire, specifically centered on the creatures distinctly non-human of them somewhere between human and not, living and dead. Generally, in Vampire texts, there remains a bond that develops between a Human and a Vampire. that personifies this liminal existence, and their liminal existence, either towards death or a more human way of being. The Vampire is a creature which becomes a major plot device in the third part of the novel – Rae and Con’s development or attainment of self-agency. In a text where the liminal creature is already accepted as ‘real’ the metamorphosis is a different one - some event must occur that causes them to break free of their liminal existence, either towards death or a more human way of being. The Vampire is a creature that personifies this liminal existence, and Sunset is at it’s heart a novel about the transformative bond that develops between a Human and a Vampire.

The Vampires of McKinley’s world are unmistakably real, but have lost their humanity. Indeed, until Rae’s offhand reference to the “Voodoo Wars,” McKinley’s fictional world does not seem that different from ours. The later discussions of the legalities of vampirism show that this world is so accustomed to Vampires, specialized bureaucracies have been established to deal with them. Whether McKinley’s Vampires are are ‘living’ or not is largely a question of semantics; her Vampires exist in a liminal world, which the living Rae experiences through her disembodied travels through ‘nowhereville’. While she is able to access the liminal plane easily enough, the space is clearly a ‘non-human’ space. Rae is disoriented at first and must gradually learn to navigate and exist in the Vampire realm:

“Somewhere, reaching in the dark… I was… no, I wasn’t standing. There didn’t seem to be anything to stand on, and I wasn’t sure there was any of me to stand with. If my feet had disappeared, then perhaps it wasn’t surprising that my eyes—no, my sight—had disappeared too. This wasn’t just darkness: this was what came after. This was the beyond-dark.”

McKinley’s Vampires not only exist and live within this liminal physical space, their very biology sets them somewhere between human and not, living and dead. Generally, in Vampire texts, there remains an intense fascination with the Vampire, specifically centered on the creatures distinctly non-human feeding habits. The Vampire requires living blood to survive, and this is nearly always portrayed through a strong veneer of cultured eroticism. In Sunset, this manifests as a series of underground television dramas and illicit books:

“It was illegal to write stories and make movies about sex between vampires and humans. … The stories and movies got written and made anyway, but if the government caught you at it, they threw your ass in jail. For a long time.”

In Vampire and Replicant, Hendershot hypothesizes that it is the combination of a Vampire’s fangs as a phallic metaphor coupled with the ‘confusion of fluids,’ ‘sexual acts’ and ‘gender roles’ that enforces the eroticism that surrounds the creatures. Even in works where Vampires are an accepted reality, this veil of erotic desire still pervades. In most texts, including Sunset, the androgyny of the vampiric body permits erotic couplings outside of heteronormative ‘human’ phosphorus. In Sunset, the
“I… felt him lie upon me… till our bleeding skins met with one thin sodden layer of cotton partially between. Till the new wound in him pressed down against the old wound in me.”

In a heteronormative coupling, such an intimate exchange of bodily fluid would only be possible through intercourse as a means of creating new life. Here, the non-human physiology of the Vampire permits an intercourse that renews life without creating new life. Where a human coupling would create a new individual with shared traits of the biological parents, Con’s sacrifice for Rae changes characteristics between the two participants. The exchange is further complicated by Rae’s experience of the Doe’s death; as Con is ‘dead,’ he serves as a vehicle for the life contained in the blood of the Doe. Rae’s initial reluctance at the exchange is a direct result of her unwillingness to challenge her own heteronormative ideals, a direct parallel of Mina Harker’s revulsion for Dracula in Stoker’s canonical novel. The distinctly non-human, nonliving coupling between Vampire and Human, while unmistakably erotic, is viewed as distinctly ‘wrong.’ While the very nature of Con marks his existence within a liminal world, on the border of life and death, his actions here bring Rae into her own liminal existence; not only does her very biology now contain the essence of a Vampire, which manifests in her as an ability to see in the dark, Con has physically scarred himself identically to Rae. It is not a mark that represents the ‘sexual possession by the outsider’—it cannot, as through his actions Con has brought Rae into his own liminal world—but is a physical indicator of the developing bond between the human and the Vampire.

While the first coupling between Rae and Con challenges the heteronormative, their next erotic encounter reverses the role. In the passage above, Con maintains the power, as the experience is firmly grounded in the realm of ‘vampiric’ – the non-human. When Rae invades Con’s lair through her penetration of the liminal ‘nowheresville,’ their sexual near-encounter reinforces the heteronormative attraction between male and female, while simultaneously touching on a fascination with the distended phallus - Rae jokes about the sexual fascination that human women have for Vampire males (“One of the first stories that any teenager just waking up to carnal possibilities hears about male Vampires is that they can keep it up indefinitely.”). Rae’s uneasiness at the earlier vampiric encounter is here reversed. Rae’s passionate desire for Con is clear, but Con throws her away, unwilling to engage in such a heteronormative ‘human’ act.

The combination of the ‘exchange of fluids’ between Con and Rae, and the developing relationship between the pair, show that, for them, these existential questions are becoming resolved. Con is developing more human feelings, and Rae is no longer sure of her own humanness, due partly to Con’s blood sacrifice, and the revelation that her own family bloodline may contain some Demonic heritage. In the final pages of the book, we find that Rae has come completely to terms with her new hybridized human/vampiric/demonic existence:

“I saw my hands clearly… and they did not look wrong or strange or corrupt to me; they looked like my hands.”

She has finally come to accept and possess her existence as all three parts, and embarks “into the night” on a new life with Con, who himself has come to accept his own existence between vampire and human.

In the three texts examined, there is a catalyst that occurs, which challenges the protagonist over existential questions. What is revealed from these own explorations is that creatures existing in liminal ‘in-between’ spaces can redefine their own existence into a new one, combining their previous form and their desired state. In these texts, the divide between living/not-living, alive/dead is seen as malleable, and it is entirely possible to exist in a state that exists in-between such concrete definitions. When the toy becomes real, the model becomes transformed by love, and the Vampire becomes closer and closer to human, it perhaps shows that stories about overcoming and transforming a liminal existence challenge the notion that existence is stable, and form is concrete.

References


Stevenson, John A. A Vampire in the Mirror: The Sexuality of Dracula. PMLA (1988) vol. 103 (2) pp. 139-149

1.) I use the term biological with the assumption that while a Vampire is not alive per se, it was once a living organism.

2.) The Velveteen Rabbit 75. Emphasis mine.

3.) ibid. 76. Emphasis mine.

4.) ibid. 76.

5.) ibid. 80.

6.) The Velveteen Rabbit 84.

7.) Kuznets 60.

8.) Kuznets 171.

9.) The Steadfast Tin Soldier 99.


11.) That is, death as a marker of the end of existence. Neither the Soldier nor Dancer are truly alive.

12.) Douglas, Horrors 33.

13.) ibid. 36.

14.) Sunshine 8.

15.) "People," said Con. 'I am not a person.' " ibid. 327.

Con is likewise aware of these semantic games, here exploited for comic effect.

16.) Sunshine 193.


18.) Hendershot 380.

19.) For example, Charlaine Harris' The Southern Vampire Mysteries (remade for television as HBO's True Blood) presents a world where Vampires are known to exist. In this world, 'fangbangers' are humans with a particular blood disorder making them immune to vampirism, seek out Vampires for sexual gratification.

20.) While it is made apparent that Con first feeds upon a deer to provide Rae's sacrifice (which immediately conjures ideals of innocence, purity, &c), it is unmistakably Con's blood that is given to Rae, as evidenced by her later ability to see in the dark, and the latent connection between the pair.

21.) Sunshine 156.

22.) "Mina's subsequent horror over the act [her erotic coupling with Dracula] suggests that she has understood it as a sexual experience, but one which defies "normal" heterosexual dimensions." Hendershot 380.

23.) Stevenson. A Vampire in the Mirror. 141.

24.) Sunshine 11.

In the past two-hundred years or so, vampires have transformed from a sort of worst nightmare into the charming hero of our dreams. Flashback to 1734, Oxford English Dictionary's first record of the word vampire: they were generally and, depending on geographical location, inconsistently thought to be red-faced, fat on blood... MORE >

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Then the toys began to play at visiting, dancing, and fighting. The tin soldiers rattled in their box, for they wanted to be out too, but they could not raise the lid.

The nutcrackers played at leap-frog, and the chalk ran about the blackboard; there was such a noise that the canary woke up and began to talk to them, in poetry too! The only two who did not stir from their places were the tin soldier and the little dancer. When the toy becomes real, the model becomes transformed by love, and the Vampire becomes closer and closer to human, it perhaps shows that stories about overcoming and transforming a liminal existence challenge the notion that existence is stable, and form is concrete.