

Eco-Vampires: The Undead and the Environment

Simon Bacon

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Simon Bacon's *Eco-Vampires: The Undead and the Environment* reimagines the vampire as an eco-warrior, countering critical interpretations depicting vampires as supernatural beings preoccupied with unnatural consumption, violence and destruction. Instead, Bacon draws on a European tradition that imagines the vampiric figure as an agent of the natural world, arguing that they are in fact 'an essential part of a global ecosystem that can no longer tolerate the all-consuming forces of globalization and consumerism and so reacts in a manner not unlike the human body to protect itself' (1). The introduction seeks to situate the vampire alongside past, present and future ecological crisis as a creature that is intimately bound to the Earth and reacting to imminent environmental threats, rather than a monster driven by selfish and unnatural urges. Focused mostly on an impressive breadth of films, but frequently drawing on Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897) as a touchstone, Bacon extends his analysis to encompass several different manifestations of the eco-horror genre. Throughout the book, Bacon challenges the traditional image of the singular, brooding vampire and extends the concept of vampirism to include plants, animals, entire ecosystems or anything that draws 'energy, life-force, or biological jouissance' for the purposes of sustenance or reproduction (7).

The first chapter continues to refigure the vampire as almost inseparable from the environment, an essence that is incapable of being tamed and a 'representation of the "blankness" or sublimity of nature itself' (13). Bacon begins with Stoker's Count Dracula, characterized as a corporeal extension of the Transylvanian landscape and taking on the form of creatures essential to the ecosystem and known for their restraint in resource consumption. In this ecological interpretation, even the Count's telepathy is read as a form of green communication when contrasted against the enormous amount of waste generated from other correspondence in the novel (18). Bacon positions Van Helsing and Harker as 'defenders of

modernity' bent on destroying the Count and in turn the environment that he is intertwined with, while Dracula himself is preoccupied only with necessary violence that serves to restore or defend the balance of nature (16). This argument is further developed through several films, including F. W. Murnau's *Nosferatu* (1922), with each analysis offering a different facet of the vampire as an environmental defender, although some cases are more compelling than others in their contributions to the larger argument.

The second chapter moves away from conventional representations of the vampire and turns towards landscapes and environments that take on life-draining characteristics as a means of ecological survival. At times, the exuberant number of films being discussed in each chapter tends to be slightly jarring and obscures some of Bacon's more salient points. However, there are several deft analyses in this chapter that tease out the vampiric in unexpected places, such as the Allardyce estate in Dan Curtis' *Burnt Offerings* (1976) in which the 'garden requires energy, particularly blood, in order to restore itself to its former condition and more balanced ecology' (62). Additionally, a productive reading of Robert Eggers' *The Witch* (2015) maps the figure of the vampire onto the ancient woodlands that surround the exiled family's homestead. Bacon situates the titular witch and the 'the malevolence of Black Philip as a manifestation of the spirit of the forest' that is determined to systematically drain the life force of the isolated family as a means pushing back on human encroachment in the New World. (77).

Subsequent chapters delve into the vampire's role in consumerism as well as the way vampiric plagues are often deployed as a means of clearing the slate and rebooting a failing ecosystem. The latter premise is most fully realized in Bacon's reading of Richard Matheson's novel *I Am Legend* (1954) in which the planet is ravaged by unending war and disease. The resulting pollution 'mirrors the desiccation of the environment by enacting the same upon the human race itself' (84). Further complicating the initial concept of vampire as a voracious defender of the environment, the book culminates with a reading of H. G. Wells' novel *War of the Worlds* (1897), as well as several other films, to think through the myriad of ways that stories featuring invaders with vampiric qualities function as a 'mirror to illustrate either the self-protective qualities of the planetary ecosystem or as a more galactic idea of self-protection' (154).

In a world on the brink of environmental collapse 'where the most dangerous species on the planet is mankind' the vampire, appearing as bat, fungus, undead human, or seemingly

peaceful garden must do whatever it takes to defend itself (191). With this argument, Bacon pulls the vampire out of the realm of the supernatural and reconstitutes it as a being firmly grounded and invested in the natural processes of the planet. Though there were sections that could have benefited from a more focused approach to develop more nuanced and expansive arguments, particularly among some of the more compelling analyses, Bacon's approach to the topic is highly engaging and enthusiastic and draws on a wide range of sources. Opening several potential avenues for continued attention to the ecologically attuned vampire, this book will appeal to scholars interested in the ecoGothic and ecohorror, or even a casual reader with a penchant for horror films.