

2020

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Recommended Citation

DePaoli, Maria Teresa (2020) "A Monstrous Outbreak: Epidemics and Biology in the Creative Porcess of Fuillermo Del Toro's Symbolic Vampires," *Journal of Dracula Studies*: Vol. 22: No. 1, Article 3.
Available at: <https://research.library.kutztown.edu/dracula-studies/vol22/iss1/3>

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Cover Page Footnote

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**A Monstrous Outbreak:
Epidemics and Biology in the Creative Process of
Guillermo del Toro's Symbolic Vampires**

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Analyzing Guillermo del Toro's work during the COVID-19 pandemic is both unsettling and compelling. While I write this essay in April of 2020, this disease is ravaging the world. As we continue to socially adjust to mitigate the spread, scientists and healthcare workers cope with the devastating reality of not having a vaccine or an effective and proven treatment to stop this plague. The likelihood that COVID-19 originated from bats immediately made me think of vampires and their mythical role as

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propagators of infection as seen in Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897).¹ The vampire is one of del Toro's most captivating monsters, an archetype in his work, and *Dracula* is an influence—processed through his own Mexican cultural experience²—in his creative process. An avid reader of world literature and a film connoisseur, del Toro has underscored that the idea of originality in fiction resides in how one re-tells an old tale. For him, “synthesis” is the only original thing.³ Thus, del Toro crafts novel stories by recapturing earlier tales with his own singular expression. Keith McDonald and Roger Clark discuss del Toro's work within the notion of alchemy,⁴ underscoring that del Toro's hybrid approach to storytelling makes him almost impossible to label. He trespasses genre borders and continually blends known narratives and ideas to

¹ Although Stoker's novel has been adequately studied as a text that responds to anxieties of degeneration through metaphors of infection, Martin Willis stresses that there is still “a need to reassess *Dracula* within the contexts of disease theories that allows for a more historically rigorous analysis of the text” (302).

² “Mexican cinema (literature and art), have had a fundamental role in my career... the communion between the fantastic and everyday life is deeply Mexican.” (3rd Master Class at the International Film Festival in Guadalajara. March 16, 2018.)

³ “All that we want to say, in one way or another, has already been said. What gives an artist his own voice is the synthesis of those elements into something different, something that has a timbre, like the voice, and can become distinctive” (15th Morelia International Film Festival. March 7, 2018).

⁴ McDonald and Clark emphasize that del Toro employs the alchemic metaphor since the start of his film-making career. The alchemy allegory has been quoted in reference to an artist whose work is created of many diverse elements.

create something new; “central to this mode is hybridity which emerges from appropriation, re-contextualization and re-presentation: existing texts transformed into a new entity made up of their various components—now as a coherent whole” (3).

In this essay, I examine how *Dracula* is evoked and “synthetized” in *La invención de Cronos* [*Cronos*] (1993) film and in the television series *The Strain* (2014-2017). In addition, I explore how biology and epidemics play a fundamental role in the construction of del Toro’s vampires by including *Blade II* (2002) in my analysis. I approach del Toro’s creative process in cinema and television by considering how the vampire as a symbol has progressed over time in his oeuvre. For this purpose, I include screenwriting and sketches from his personal notebooks to illustrate the detailed rhetoric and biological anatomy behind the composition of his undead monsters. Finally, I discuss the essential similarities and differences in Del Toro’s vampire creation for each medium.

del Toro’s creativity is constantly renovating, mirroring the vampire’s continuous transformation. Therefore, I explore the vampire motif in del Toro’s work by examining this monster as a symbol that informs the everchanging nature of del Toro himself as storyteller. Critics, such as Ann Davies et al, consider del Toro an “interstitial writer/director/producer because his creativity is always evolving” (2). del Toro’s sketching, screenwriting, and directing emphasize difference and continuous transformation concepts that are held against the homogenous practices of dominant

ideologies. Nina Auerbach asserts, “since vampires are immortal, they are free to change incessantly” (5). Therefore, I focus on ceaseless mutation from one state to another in my analysis. Metaphorically speaking, being altered into a vampire does not necessarily imply something destructive. It may allow to potentially embark on a track away from the dominant ideology of being an individual in a heteropatriarchal capitalistic society, with new possibilities of self-identity. It could be a step to expanding beyond the limitations of the human into other subjectivities and identity formations. It is an ongoing and perpetual change, or what Charles Sanders Peirce describes as semiosis—the continual process of signs becoming other than what they were becoming.⁵ In the realm of Peircean logic or semiotics, the action of the sign, or the process of semiosis (sign/object/interpretant), results in interpretants that are neither ultimate nor static and are being continuously generated. Elizabeth Hirschman’s interesting analysis on the evolution of *Dracula* in cinema underscores the intrinsic malleability of vampires as rhetorical figures, their “ability to not only take on new meaning, but to assume binary meaning over time as they represent alterations in cultural norms and values” (2). Because they change to adapt as societies progress, vampires cannot remain static; Auerbach affirms that there are no archetypal vampires, “there are only vampires”

⁵ See the concept of endless semiosis in Ivan Mladenov’s article, “Unlimited semiosis and heteroglossia (C. S. Peirce and M. M. Bakhtin).”

(4). Consequently, del Toro's vampires do not fit established roles such as those in Stoker's novel. His vampires are dynamic and no longer unidimensional creatures. They play out complex configurations with full displays of good/evil and moral/immoral behaviors exhibited by both the living and the undead.

Anthony Masters explains in *The Natural History of the Vampire* (1972) that the roots of vampirism go back to the beginning of time. Blood is the key factor in the origins of the vampire myth; it is the source of life, of eternal life. This myth captures the human existential longing for immortality. The vampire has historically been one of the most notable, pervasive, and even charming "monsters" in Western popular culture. The abundance of novels, short stories, plays, movies, television series, graphic novels, comics, and media sites that feature or refer to vampires or vampire texts is constantly renovating. Echoing the assumed immortality of the vampire, these stories never die but continue to reinvent themselves, underscoring the persistent and metamorphic nature of the vampire, as well as its enduring attraction to the latest generation of consumers. In *Becoming Vampire* (2017), Simon Bacon emphasizes that reinvention and commercialism are essential elements in the vampire's never-ending path. It is possible to locate the rise in popularity of this undead character into conventional western culture at the start and development of industrialization and consumerism with the publication of *Dracula*. He stresses, "consuming and being consumed is an inherent part

of the dominant ideologies of modernity, capitalism, late capitalism, and what might now be called ‘global consumerism’” (2). However, the vampire is too transgressive a creature to remain subordinated to the master of capital and heteronormativity. Instead, the vampire suggests that change does not necessarily come from the accumulation of capital but from being different. Within the dominant systems in contemporary Western societies, the vampire offers the possibility of becoming something other than what we are becoming.

RE-IMAGINING DRACULA

In *Cronos*, there is an emphasis on reinvention and regeneration in light of transnationalism. del Toro’s fascination with vampires started early in his career. He wrote a screenplay—on the story of a vampire grandfather and his loving eight-year old granddaughter—as his thesis to obtain the degree in screenwriting and film direction from the “Research Center of Cinematographic Studies” in Guadalajara, Jalisco, Mexico in 1984. This screenplay became his first feature film, *Cronos*. In this film, Del Toro renovates *Dracula* in a modern way, featuring an atypical vampire,⁶ a grandfather, Jesús Gris, and his loving eight-year old granddaughter, Aurora. Although the release of the movie took place in 1993, the action happens three years later—during the last week of December of 1996, and the start of 1997—in Mexico City, two years after the signing of the North

⁶ Curiously, the word “vampire” is never uttered in *Cronos*.

American Free Trade Agreement.⁷ There are signs in Spanish, English, and Japanese, portraying this post-NAFTA Mexico as a multilingual city, and the film includes a mixture of English and Spanish language dialogues among the characters.

The combination of the real and the fantastic—and the notion of entomology and transformation—has an evident connection to Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* (1915). When Jesús examines the Cronos insect-powered clockwork device—found hidden in the archangel statue that is for sale in his antique shop—he is accidentally stung by it, initiating his process of transformation, becoming younger, and making his wife chuckle, although he keeps this discovery hidden from her. The Cronos device was invented by Uberto Fulcanelli, an alchemist immigrant who arrived in Mexico in 1516, and who was able to live for over 400 years by drinking human blood. Trapped in the interior of the device is an infectious insect that serves as a sort of blood recycler. Dieter de la Guardia—a rich, old, and terminally ill man who lives in perpetual quarantine because he is afraid of contagion—found Fulcanelli's notebook through an

⁷ *NAFTA* is essentially a tariff agreement designed to facilitate trade and ensure that North American producers receive preferences over goods not originating in the U.S., Canada, or Mexico. According to the International Monetary Fund, trade among the three *NAFTA* countries more than tripled between 1993 and 2007, although this agreement had many critics. The Donald Trump administration replaced *NAFTA* by signing the *USMCA* (the United States-Mexico-Canada) agreement November 30, 2018.

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estate sale and is in a frantic search for the Cronos device. He is actually the one who wants to achieve immortality like the alchemist, Fulcanelli. Jesús, as an accidental vampire, survives several attempts to be killed by Angel the la Guardia (Dieter's nephew) who tries to retrieve the device for his uncle.

Besides Jesús and the de la Guardias, only Gris's granddaughter, Aurora, shares his secret of having been infected with vampirism through the Cronos device. Avoiding the sunlight, he sleeps during the day in Aurora's toy chest—which has been turned into a coffin. She also hides the Cronos device inside her teddy bear. After Angel kills Jesús the first time, he becomes a living dead. Jesús wishes to reverse the effects of the Cronos device, thus he comes back to Dieter for help. Dieter makes Jesús realize that his vampiric skin regenerates; it peels away to reveal new, but dead, flesh underneath. However, the prospect of eternal life does not entice Jesús. He offers Dieter the artifact in exchange for his freedom from the object's curse. Yet, just as Jesús surrenders the device, Dieter stabs him. Aurora, who had sneaked out of the house during the night to follow her grandfather, hits Dieter in the head with his own cane. After a final battle with Angel, Jesús, thirsty for blood, is about to attack his own granddaughter.⁸ However, he stops when Aurora

⁸ See Francisco de Goya's famous *Saturn Devouring His Son*. My article "Fantasy and Myth in *Pan's Labyrinth*: Analysis of Guillermo del Toro's Symbolic Imagery" examines Goya's influence in del Toro's work. Behind Goya's painting and del Toro's monsters is the ancient Greek legend of Cronus, the epitome of cruelty.

pronounces the only word that she utters in the film: “Abuelo.”⁹ Aurora’s voice reminds Jesús not only of his humanity but of his love for his granddaughter. He furiously tears off the Cronos device from his chest and smashes it with a rock, repeating his name: “I am Jesús...Gris. Jesús Gris...Jesús Gris,” affirming his mortality. In the end, he lies in bed, dying, tenderly surrounded by his wife and granddaughter.

Besides his three quarreling female vampire subordinates, Count *Dracula* lives alone in his Transylvanian castle and is completely devoid of empathy towards others. *Cronos*, on the other hand, focuses on a filial relationship: a grandfather¹⁰—unintentionally turned vampire—and his little orphan granddaughter. del Toro combines various genres, such as Mexican melodrama and comedy, which according to McDonald and Clark, renders him “an alternative to Spielberg satisfying cinema. In

⁹ It is not obvious in the film that Aurora’s intention is to offer herself in sacrifice for her grandfather, as McDonald and Clark have pointed out (109). However, in the screenplay, Aurora says: “Abuelo...te quiero” (108). The screenplay, *La invención de Cronos* [*The invention of Cronos*. My translation] (1992) provides more context to understand Aurora’s character, her loneliness as a young orphan, the connection she feels to her grandfather, Jesús, and the complicated relationship she has with her grandmother.

¹⁰ In the director’s commentaries included in the *Cronos* DVD, del Toro explains that for the character of Jesús Gris, he got inspiration from Mario Bava’s “The Wurdulak” (*Black Sabbath*, 1963), based on A.K. Tolstoy’s novel *The Family of the Vourdalak* (1839).

del Toro's films the subversive triumphs over the satisfying" (5). Although the film is articulate in its use of some traditional tropes, such as vampirism, sexual potency, blood lust, and immortality, *Cronos*' intertextuality enables it to resist total assimilation to the established Hollywood conventions.

HYBRIDITY AND CONTAGION

Just as Del Toro refreshes the original tale of *Dracula* in *Cronos* by placing heavy emphasis on personal relationships and affection, he also revisits infection and transmission allegories by substituting the traditional bat with the ancient insect trapped in the *Cronos* artifact. Fulcanelli's invention is a combination of contagion and science as the device lives in symbiosis with its holder. This insect-activated relic—which looks like a gold clock, is in fact the mechanical amour of a mythical and poisonous beetle trapped inside it—stings its possessor in order to suck and replace blood, providing eternal life for both insect and bearer. Brad O'Brien has observed that "Del Toro has combined the myths of *Dracula* and *Frankenstein* to create his own legend" (173) in *Cronos*. Intertextuality resounds in del Toro's work. He draws inspiration from Stoker and Mary Shelley's characters to create his first feature film. Additionally, in his article, "Bloodsucking Bugs," Gabriel E. Rodríguez discusses Horacio Quiroga's "El almohadón de

plumas”¹¹ [“The Feather Pillow”] (1917) as another traceable influence in *Cronos*:

What del Toro recovers from Quiroga’s story is the fact that their stories are hybridizing a character that has a long and structured trajectory inside the genre, as well as within the popular imagination. The vampire, as a monster, has been understood in its connection with the vampire bat and the act of sucking blood, a dyad that is broken when the vampire bat is replaced by a parasite or compound bug that is at the same time, larvae, scarab, and scorpion. (161)

The idea of an insect stinger image connected to vampires in cinema was born in *Cronos*, but it continues to develop in del Toro’s subsequent work. Thus, his take on Stoker, Shelley, and Quiroga’s tales in *Cronos*, foreshadow novel elements that materialize in the next two projects dealing with vampires: *Blade II* and the TV series *The Strain*.

ANATOMY OF THE VAMPIRE

While *Cronos* is the genesis of del Toro’s vampire physiology, *Blade II* and *The Strain* show the evolution of entomology and the stinger in del Toro’s creative process. A combination of myth, science, and biology are essential in del Toro’s

¹¹ Alicia, a young newlywed, becomes weak and bedridden and dies shortly after her honeymoon. While washing her linens, a servant notices two small, dark bloodstains on her pillow case. The pillow—too heavy for a feather pillow—is cut open to reveal the large parasite that had been sucking on Alicia’s blood, causing her death.

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everchanging vampires. Just as Jesús Gris's skin peels and regenerates in *Cronos*, the vampires in *Blade II* and in *The Strain* develop into creatures that could be dissected and studied in a laboratory. del Toro asserts that

the design of the vampires from *Blade II* came from the same set of notes that I've been keeping since I was a kid... the same notes that I used for *The Strain*; the biology is similar. The epidemic in the film *Mimic* came from the same place, because I'm very curious about biology and epidemics, and how fast they could undermine society...".¹²

del Toro explains that for the creation of the vampire-reapers and the Strigoi in both the film and the TV series, he pulled vision from disparate sources. He saw photos of people who were shot in the face and lost their jaws during WWI and the Spanish Civil War and thought that it would be beautiful to create a vampire with a tongue that could extend two meters away. He also drew inspiration from two mythological references: mythology from the Philippines, which describes the Aswang, a vampire with a very long tongue, and the East Europe's Strigoi myth, describing vampires with a stinger under their tongue.¹³

Blade II is the continuation of the Marvel Comics blockbuster *Blade* (1998). Blade (Wesley Snipes) is half man and half vampire called the

¹² Interview with *CinemaBlend*. December 3, 2014.

¹³ 3rd Master Class at the International Film Festival in Guadalajara. March 16, 2018.

“daywalker,”¹⁴ as he is resistant to sunlight. He is consumed by a desire to take revenge on the curse of his birth and save the human race from a blood-drenched apocalypse. The biology of the vampires in *Blade II* and *The Strain* is similar; they spread contagion as disease, and their attacks are more violent and infectious compared to the vampire in *Cronos*. *Blade II* is a black vampire hunter, a hybrid creature with both human and vampiric qualities, who uses modern medicine to control his craving for blood. del Toro integrates a new menacing strain of enemy, the reapers, who have stingers on their projectile-like tongues that simultaneously suction blood while injecting their venom. This retractable tongue is a deep transformation in the vampire body, and it will continue to evolve in *The Strain*.

del Toro explains that he had to sit down with actor/producer, Snipes, to talk about the project. He did not understand why Blade kills vampires when he should be killing humans.¹⁵ Thus, del Toro told Snipes that he would take care of the vampires while Snipes takes care of Blade. It was very important for del Toro that the reapers in *Blade II* were biologically correct. Hence, he designed a jaw that opened like a flower to reveal a complex digestive system, showing how the vampire does not remain fixed but progresses and adapts to emerging challenges. These illustrations can be observed in *Guillermo del Toro*

¹⁴ A character similar to Blade appears in *The Strain*. Quinlan, another “daywalker” human-vampire hybrid, who is the Master’s accidental son. Quinlan despises his father and spends his entire life looking for the Master to destroy him.

¹⁵ Master class at the Sitges Film Festival. March 4, 2012.

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Cabinet of Curiosities (2013), a book that contains the sketches and notes for del Toro's most famous films, including *Cronos* and *Blade II*. Vampires hunger for immortality, and to achieve it, they constantly change and adapt to demanding circumstances. It is a continuous transformation from one state to another. For example, in order to survive and prevail with their predator-style mandibles and prehensile and extendable stinger-tongues, the reapers in *Blade II* can feed not only on humans but on fellow vampires as well. In *The Strain*, del Toro recycled the prehensile, extendable tongue featured in *Blade II*, but he made this organ reach farther, and the stinger releases a very infectious visible worm-like substance.

The Strain, based in the best seller book trilogy that del Toro wrote with Chuck Hogan—*The Strain* (2009), *The Fall* (2010), and *The Night Eternal* (2011)—presents the story of a vampire pandemic in contemporary terms, combining not only ancient myths but the biology that enables these monsters to come to life and transform themselves and the world around them. Auerbach underscores that “every age embraces the vampire it needs” (145). Thus, *The Strain* illustrates that the true essence of vampires is not to remain fixed in the past but to re-imagine themselves in relation to existing conditions, just as del Toro re-invents himself as a liminal and ever-changing writer and director. Situated in New York City, *The Strain* offers viewers with reconditioned vampiric bodies that reiterate anxieties of an authoritarian government and extermination. For this project, del Toro pulled

vision from older traditions of vampire stories stretching back centuries and from *Dracula*. *The Strain* is a departure from the vampire archetype established by Stoker's novel, but the TV also synthesizes *Dracula* in a contemporary way. Count Dracula's arrival on the ghostly ship to England is replaced by a plane arriving at JFK with a load of undead plague-victims and "The Master" (substituting Dracula) all ready to infect NYC with vampirism. The Master was invited to NYC by the multi-millionaire, Eldritch Palmer¹⁶—head of the multinational conglomerate, *Stoneheart*—so that he can begin his Strigoi¹⁷ invasion, destruction of the modern world. Instead of Dracula's lair in Piccadilly, near Buckingham Palace, the Master nests in the old tunnels under New York's Freedom Tower. In place of Stoker's vampire hunter Van Helsing and "the crew of light," Holocaust survivor, Abraham Setrakian, leads a mixed group of underrepresented minorities and immigrants—Ukrainians, Jews, and Latinx, men and women—who hunt and eliminate Strigoi and become the heroes in the TV series.

In *The Strain*, del Toro shows revisions to the reapers design in *Blade II*, indicating that television gives del Toro an opportunity to use the series as a type of second draft to re-examine his previous ideas. He blends the notion of outbreak

¹⁶ Eldritch Palmer is an incarnation of Dieter de La Guardia in *Cronos*. They are both terminally ill, rich, powerful old men, ready to make a pact with the devil to remain alive despite living in isolation.

¹⁷ A type of vampire in Romanian folklore. Strigoi are spirits that can transform into an animal, or some other ghostly appearance, and drain the vitality of victims through blood loss.

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storyline used in *Mimic* (1997) with *Blade II*'s reapers that are trying to obliterate humanity to achieve the blueprint for the human-vampire war waged on the streets of NYC. del Toro's reassessment of previous notes, sketching, and screenwriting to create something new emphasizes constant transformation. Carmen Serrano stresses that the filmmaker offers "hybrid monsters and environments that are highly interconnected and pathogenic, reflecting contemporary social fears regarding failing democracies and global pandemics." *The Strain* shows "how vampires, like viral strains, mutate into a more contagious creature" (98). The TV series features a form of infection that is not limited to the traditional bite. Unlike Dracula, Strigoi transmit the vampiric disease through a stinger they have in their prehensile, expandable tongues. When they feed on a victim, the stinger releases a substance that contains viral strains via capillary worms. The infectious substance can also enter through a wound, eyes, nose, or mouth. As pathogens that are not unicell living microorganisms (bacteria), viruses preserve their strain by infecting a host body, reiterating the vampire's pathogeny.

del Toro also drew inspiration from Richard Matheson's *The Omega Man: I am legend* (1971)¹⁸ for the creation of the monsters in *The Strain*. Once infection takes place, humans become Strigoi, a combination of vampire-zombie creature. The victim's skin turns pale, fangs surface, and becomes

¹⁸ 3rd Master Class at the International Film Festival in Guadalajara. March 16, 2018.

sensible to sunlight. As vampires, Strigoi develop an insatiable thirst for human blood that makes them seek their victims at night, starting with their family members. Nevertheless, Strigoi also have zombie-like characteristics, as they hunt their victims in large groups, and deteriorate during their dehumanizing transformation process, losing their hair, nose, and genitalia. This is illustrated by the character of Gabriel Bolivar, who becomes one of the Master's hosts. As human, Bolivar was a rock musician, very sexually active. In an amusing scene, during his transformation, Bolivar's penis falls into the toilet. Instead, he grows a phallic-like powerful stinger-tongue, thus his strong sex drive is replaced by ravenous blood lust.

CINEMA AND TELEVISION

del Toro considers that television allows a wider opportunity for the creation and development of characters, whereas cinema is more oriented towards creating remarkable images. For example, in an interview with Jordi Sanchez-Navarro, del Toro underscores,

in one of Kubrick's films, I can talk to you about forty very powerful and unforgettable images. On the other hand, in a great television series, I can discuss wonderful moments but, very seldom can I evoke memorable images" (my translation).¹⁹

Thus, with more opportunity to include several more characters and their development in *The Strain*, del

¹⁹ Interview at the Universitat Oberta de Catalunya in Barcelona, Spain.

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Toro advances and revises various roles, and even adds new characters, such as Dutch (the bisexual computer hacker), who does not appear in the original book series. He also allows the character of Gustavo Elizalde (Gus, the young Mexican American gang-banger) to live at the end of the series, while in the novel, Gus dies. In addition, through the TV medium, del Toro has the chance to expand and show the influence that Mexican cinema has in his work. For example, he enhances the story of “The Silver Angel,” played by Joaquin Cosío, a Mexican actor. The Silver Angel is a direct reference to “El Santo.”²⁰ In *The Strain*, del Toro recreates a videoclip of one of The Silver Angel movies, emulating one of the many “El Santo” films. He uses black and white and inflates the wrestling scene to the scale of the mythic through parody. Hence, Mexican cinema and television—and Mexican melodrama in particular—can be traced in del Toro’s oeuvre. During the masterclass at the 2012 Sitges Film Festival, Del Toro confessed that he is a “corny sentimentalist” (my translation). His work often includes a tender moment and close character interactions at the end of his stories. In *Cronos*, there is a scene when Jesús Gris is dying while Aurora hugs him, and his wife Mercedes kisses his hand. In *Blade II*, Blade develops a brief romantic

²⁰ El Santo was a famous Mexican wrestler and movie actor who appeared in movies in Mexico in the late 60s and early 70s. A popular super hero, el Santo would not only spectacularly wrestle in the ring but would also fight monsters such as witches, mummies, the wolfman, and of course, vampires.

relationship with Nyssa Damaskinos, a princess vampire who gets infected with the reaper virus. She decides to die instead. Thus, in the end, she asks Blade to take her outside to see the sunrise. As the sun rises over the horizon, Nyssa turns into ashes in Blade's arms. Finally, in *The Strain*, a reconciliation between a father and his repentant son saves humanity. A character's voiceover says, "in the end, it was love that saved us all" (*The Strain* 4– "The last Stand"). In his latest movie, the unforgettable scene of Elisa being kissed and brought to life by the amphibian man in *The Shape of Water* (2018) is a powerful love image in film history and testimony to del Toro's intertextual mastery.

The evolution of the vampire image in del Toro's work demonstrates his creative process. An auteur of page and screen, his interest expands beyond cinema, as he has co-authored a popular novel series of vampires that have been adapted to television and has also collaborated in videogame projects. In del Toro's work, *Dracula* is evoked and reconfigured with a particular emphasis placed on Stoker's knowledge of the disease theories that circulated during the 19th century and which have a part in the novel.²¹ However, del Toro's vampire projects are intertextual; he draws inspiration from multiple sources, including ancient myths and a deep interest in biology and epidemics. Since his first feature film, del Toro's evolution of his bloodsucking monsters can be appreciated, from a

²¹ See Martin Willis, "'The invisible Giant,' *Dracula* and disease."

poisonous insect-like artifact that infects its holder with vampirism in *Cronos*, to a vampiric viral pandemic spread by ravenous Strigoi in *The Strain*.

As cultural symbols that transcend borders and dichotomies, vampires are neither alive nor dead; they are undead, representing the societal anxieties of their time. del Toro's vampires are constantly developing and adapting to new cultural and economic challenges, from NAFTA in the 1990's to the current globalization context of the 21st century. By examining del Toro's vampires transitioning from cinema to television, it becomes evident that, just as the vampire itself, his creativity does not remain fixed; it continuously transforms and defies not only genres but mediums and national boundaries.

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