

Devan Orr

Final Paper

4/27/17

Dr. Justus

Witches and Vampires: Changes of Perception in Literature

Monsters have been apart of our world for a very long time. People tell stories of witches conjuring evil spells as they do the devil's work. Vampires have seduced women and drained them of their blood, and more recently, made teenage girls believe they are their true love. Both of these monsters are part of human's culture. It is interesting to see how culture can change over time with the influence of monsters. This can be seen through people's fashion, entertainment, beliefs, and literature. What is even more fascinating is how people can keep track of those cultural changes. The field of Digital Humanities has allowed us to open new paths of research, especially with the literature aspect of culture. Through archival work, literature can be searched through and recorded for future use. This essay is focused on the history of witches and vampires, how the they have appeared in literature, and which monster has been the most famous throughout the years with the use of Ngram.

The tool used to discover the frequency of words are Google Books Ngram Viewer. This program is free to use and very user friendly. [Ngram](#) is a website that calculates how often a word appears in books over a period of time and displays it in a line graph. The earliest date the graph can start is 1500 and it can go up to 2008.

Ngram is a good way to see what ideas were popular in that time, depending on the frequency a word appears in literature.

Witches are supposed to be very powerful and have special abilities. Some examples of their magic is flying and creating magic spells to heal someone, sounds pretty cool right? Well, many people are afraid of witches. As early as the 14th century, people were afraid of the [supernatural](#). They associated witches with the devil, the devil gave them their powers and in return, witches were loyal to him. Witches are interesting beings, they brought fear and mystery to the people in the colonies, which is why I figured they would be popular in the literature at those times. I started my research on Ngram. I set the date for 1600-2008. I typed in “witches” and below is the results.



The resulting graph was very interesting to me. During the 1600s, there are major spikes with dramatic drops in the frequency of witches in literature. One of the most famous classic stories that involved witches is [MacBeth](#). The notorious three witches represent evil and darkness. They make a prophecy that puts an idea in MacBeth's head. They put temptation in MacBeth's head that he will be king, and he

does anything to get what he wants, even becomes a murderer. According to wikipedia.com, *MacBeth* was first performed in 1606 and was published in 1623. If you look at the chart above, there are huge spikes in the frequency of witches in literature a little before and during those times. This is most likely because of the the wicked witches in Shakespeare's *MacBeth* were present during those times.

Witches were seen as evil during the 1600s, people thought they were doing the devil's work in return for their power. Many people were afraid of them. While looking at the significant drops in percentage of witches in literature, I generated the hypothesis that villagers, in times of distress of the witches, burned or destroyed copies of books or articles related to witches. A sort of censorship, if you will.

From there I thought about what actions of fear people would do in response to the witches because the graph is very inconsistent. One of the most famous events in the 1600s (where there is a lot of fluctuation in the graph) was the [Salem Witch Trials](#). The trials began in 1692 and ended in 1693. Over 200 people were accused of



performing witchcraft, 20 of which were executed. Later, the colonists admitted they were wrong, and that

the trials did not need to happen. As seen in the chart above, right after 1692, there was a significant drop of the frequency of witches in literature. It was not till the trials were well over that they were mentioned again. This could be because the colonists realized

they were wrong about the trials, they probably did not want to have embarrassing stories about them put out to the public, so people kept silent for a few years after the trials.

Fast Forward to the 20th century, witches frequency is increasing at a steady rate. This could be because the United States were growing and more stories were being written, not just articles, but for entertainment. People were no longer fearful, but fascinated. In 1900, [*The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*](#) was published. The [movie](#) came out in 1939. *The Wizard of Oz* has two main witches in them, The Wicked Witch of the West and Glinda, The Good Witch of the North. This changes the perceptions of witches. Yes, there still is a bad witch in the story, but there is also a good witch. She is beautiful and has power and kindness, something people desire. Witches in the 20th century are seen way differently than how they were back in the 1600s.

Today, witches are a popular Halloween costume and movie topic. Harry Potter is about wizards and witches and has captivated audiences for years. There is no need to censor witches from our society today. Our perspectives on them have changed, making them no longer as deviant as they were back in the 1600s. Another monster that has made a transition from malicious to desirable is the infamous vampire.

Are vampires deadly demons or lovers longing to be good? Vampires have a reputation of drawing in their prey with their lustful charm and draining the blood of innocent men and women. Below shows the Ngram chart of the frequency of “vampires”

in literature.



As seen in the graph above, vampires do not make their appearance in literature until after 1750. The first type of literature that vampires were apart of were [poems](#), but the most famous vampire, [Dracula](#). The book was published in 1897 and the movie came out in 1931. Looking at those dates in the graph, there are some increases, especially in 1931, but not huge jumps as seen in the witch's Ngram graphs. It was not till the 1980s that the line made any dramatic changes.

During the 80's, vampires were the stars of many horror books and movies, but as time goes on, the vampires become even more desirable, not just with their seducing powers, but with their charming-want-to-be-the-good-guy character.

The two most notable examples of this are in the novels *The Vampire Diaries* and in *Twilight* these books changed the culture of teenage girls. I was one impacted by that change. Girls read the books and saw that there could be some good in every bad boy, what girl wouldn't want the "bad boy" to have feelings for her? Again, this is an example of how a monster, just like the witches, became desirable and no longer a nightmare to fear.

The graph below shows how witches and vampires compare to each other.

Witches are significantly higher than vampires.



I think this is because witches are often associated to the devil, making it a real fear to people who are religious. Some people associate vampires with the devil, too. However, vampires only come out at night and are “non-living.” Witches, on the other hand, are usually regular people who practice witchcraft. This makes witches seem like they can be real and vampires are just made up stories.

Our culture has changed the perspective of monsters. As people have become more aware of the world around them, the monsters our ancestors feared seem to disappear and change into entertainment. Witches performed witchcraft in devilish ways and then became our friends as seen in books movies like *Harry Potter* and *Halloweentown*. Vampires have changed from seducing murderers to the dream boy of teenagers everywhere as seen in *Twilight* and *The Vampire Diaries*. What we are exposed to shapes our culture. The types of literature written shapes what we are being exposed to.