Bloodlust:
Family, Sex, Gender and Belief in the Contemporary Vampire Novel

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ABSTRACT

A central feature of contemporary vampire fiction is its concern with exposing and interrogating norms, reflecting the postessentialist milieu of the majority of its readers. By highlighting its links to psychoanalytical, feminist and Queer theoretical notions of subversive marginality, this dissertation shows how the vampire positions itself in the cultural battle between normalization and subversive redefinition, and often stands as an example of the allure and the potential of the cultural Other. This transgressive formulation of the vampire also speaks for the complex state of young people now, young people who mistrust authority and often find themselves questioning its traditional laws and structures. The dissertation presents a largely textual analysis of the fiction's interrogation of traditional notions of family, sexuality and gender, and finally investigates what the novels reflect about their readers' state of belief and ideology in a time beyond the security of traditional order.

The fact that the vampire can serve as a basis for speculation on fundamental human issues proves its importance. Vampire fiction is not an isolated expression of one quirky aspect of youth culture. It is tapped into the fundamental concerns expressed by every facet of popular culture as a whole. Contemporary vampire fiction exposes brutality in family structures, in some ways validated by patriarchal ideology, and its psychological consequences; it thoroughly investigates sexuality, leading us to question traditional normative notions; and it is well-suited to its occasional use as a platform for voicing feminist and gay political stances. The figure of the vampire facilitates this sort of questioning because it itself is an embodiment of the uncertainties which plague human psyches. While we attempt to classify the world into order and rules, our nightmares remind us that this order, these polarities, are ungrounded. The vampire is queer, living dead, human monster, and reflects a world tending toward chaos after essential belief has failed. The subversive disorder the novels present- the surrogate families, the perverse sexuality, the disruptive women- makes us question our beliefs. Some novels show us where we are; some wish to take us back, others forward, others simply elsewhere.

DECLARATION

I declare that this dissertation is my own unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of Master of Arts in the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination in any other university.

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Louis Paul Greenberg

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To hope.

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Chapter One

Introduction and Theoretical Framework

Introduction

Much social organization in Western societies is integrally founded on a normalization of gender and sexuality based on essentialist religious-political attitudes. Dominant powers are continually faced with a wide variety of sexualities and sexual practices, with challenges to conventional notions of gender identity, and with alternative ideologies. Many of these expressions are transgressive and threaten the stability of the constructed order. Normative and repressive strategies are developed in an attempt to marginalize these threats to central society and to justify their continued subordination. A central feature of contemporary vampire fiction is its concern with exposing and interrogating norms, reflecting the postessentialist milieu of the majority of its readers. The vampire positions itself in this battle between normalization and subversive redefinition, and often stands as an example of the allure and the potential of the marginal. It speaks for the complex state of young people now, young people who mistrust authority and often find themselves questioning its traditional laws and structures. The contemporary vampire novel often reflects changing attitudes toward families, sexuality and gender roles, and points towards religious and political ideologies in flux.

This dissertation presents a largely textual analysis of the fiction's interrogation of traditional notions of family, sexuality and gender, and investigates what the novels reflect about their readers' state of belief and ideology in a time beyond the security of traditional order.

This first chapter deals with the theory on which this discussion is based. I draw on the following theoretical considerations of the cultural struggle between repression and transgression: Sigmund Freud's notion of polymorphous perversity, which highlights the constructed nature of sexuality and which leads to Michel Foucault's suggestion of how and why this constructed sexuality is deployed by dominant powers, with my particular emphasis on traditional family structures; the idea of Queer transgression of conventional notions of gender and sexuality; the concept of hysteria and the hysterical woman; and Julia Kristeva's psychoanalytical notion of the abject and abjection. These together go a long way in showing which people are defined, mainly by their sexuality, as socially abnormal and seen as a threat to social institutions. They also point toward the subversive potential of existence in marginalized, eccentric spaces.

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The Construction and Deployment of Sexuality

Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytical ideas on sexuality have often been criticized, especially by feminist critics, as normative and oppressive. His theories, however, presented a radical shock to societies still in the lingering, rigid confines of Victorian morality and can properly be understood as a subversive challenge to traditional, essentialist notions of sexuality. His conception of 'polymorphous perversity' as innate, and sexual normality as a product of enculturation is an important foundation for radical shifts in thinking about sexuality, gender and their norms which follow.

Freud's "Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality"[1], first published in 1905, is a watershed in debates around sexuality. In his summary of the essays, he writes:

> ...we were driven to the conclusion that a disposition to perversions is an original and universal disposition of the human sexual instinct and that normal sexual behaviour is developed out of it as a result of organic changes and psychical inhibitions occurring in the course of maturation...[2]

According to Freud, humans start life in an unsocialized, pre-Oedipal state. Infants are polymorphously perverse: that is, an aptitude for "all possible kinds of sexual irregularities... is innately present in their disposition"[3]. Normal human infants are incestuous and bisexual. This was shocking for an early twentieth century society which rejected all notions of pre-pubescent sexuality, despite evidence to the contrary from their own children. Freud does suggest that the process of maturation and enculturation is a healthy one, but he does not see it as a process ordained by incontrovertible nature or biology. He sees the mechanisms by which the human is led to healthy sexual maturity in large part as constructs of society.

Freud argues that humans are born in a wild, natural state. We normally pass through stages of sexual development, from the 'pregenital'- oral and anal- phases, to the genital phase. Accompanied by this movement should come a departure from autoeroticism to an aim of heterosexual intercourse. The goal of this process is the production of an adult with vaginal intercourse as the primary sexual object. If people stall in one of the developmental phases,

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[1] Sigmund Freud; Freud On Sexuality, The Penguin Freud Library, Vol.7; Penguin (London, 1991); pp.31-169

[2] Freud; p.155

[3] Freud; p.109

and remain with either oral or anal sexuality as their primary sexual goal, they are 'fixated' and rezone their desire from the genital zone to another. Sexual sadism, masochism and a primary obsession with touching are other forms of fixation. Fetishists also fail to reach the normal primary sexual goal. They replace the normal sexual object with other, supposedly non-sexual parts of the body, or with inanimate objects, objects "unsuited to serve the normal sexual aim"[4]. In these terms gays, lesbians and bisexuals are seen as sexually aberrant in their choice of sexual object, and their deviation from the sexual aim.

While this all may sound like a catalogue of naturally inherent correct and incorrect sexuality, it must be remembered that Freud clearly suggests that the choice of the primary sexual goal is not natural. As demonstrated by infantile sexuality, polymorphous perversity is inherent, while sexuality channelled toward heterosexual intercourse is culturally constructed. He explains that at an early age

> the mental dams against sexual excesses- shame, disgust and morality- have either not yet been constructed at all or are only in the course of construction[5].

Elsewhere he writes,

> among the forces restricting the direction taken by the sexual instinct we laid emphasis upon shame, disgust, pity and the structures of morality and authority erected by society[6].

[4] Freud; p.65

[5] Freud; p.109

[6] Freud; p.155

Society erects structures which restrict sexual expression and channel it towards the heterosexual goal. Morality and the supposedly instinctual reactions to nonconformity it engenders, such as shame and disgust, are actually created.

Critics, especially some feminist critics[7], have attacked Freudian psychology for its supposed classification of humans into normal and abnormal, healthy and pathological, according to their sexuality and sexual preferences. They see the discourses of psychiatry and psychology and their supposed normalization of sexuality as a perpetuation of patriarchal standards and a scientistic justification of heterosexual hegemony and violent intolerance of various sexualities. Feminist critiques of psychiatric discourse are certainly illuminating and important. The patriarchal climate in Victorian Europe which gave birth to psychological discourse was based on the notion of the woman's body as an object. Elisabeth Bronfen[8], Helena Michie[9] and Elaine Showalter[10] in particular have extended the Foucauldian argument that the woman's body was medicalized, and was seen as a foreign territory open to colonization, exploration and mutilation. Psychological exploration was part of this conquest, and psychiatry was responsible for the construct of the hysterical woman, which will be discussed below.

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[7] Elisabeth Bronfen, Barbara Creed, Jann Matlock, Helena Mitchie, Lynda Nead, Marion Shaw, Elaine Showalter and others

[8] Elisabeth Bronfen; Over Her Dead Body: Death, Femininity and the Aesthetic; Manchester University Press (Manchester, 1992)

[9] Helena Michie; The Flesh Made Word: Female Figures and Women's Bodies; Oxford University Press (New York, 1987)

[10] Elaine Showalter; Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the *Fin de Siécle*; Virago (London, 1990)

Anti-Freud feminists, however, often make the mistake of merging Freud's ideas with the general processes of conventional psychiatric discourse. Rather than abetting the normative system of dominant discourses, Freud went a long way in challenging and blurring the distinctions these discourses were attempting to set up. His subversive importance is often ignored by feminist scholars when they critique the manifestations of patriarchal discourses. Freud's work is important for its contribution to a climate of post-essentialist relativity. The fact that he theorizes that humans are originally perverse and multisexual challenges the foundations of traditional Judaeo-Christian, and in fact most hegemonic religious sexual moralities. This concept was outrageous to lawmakers and religious and political leaders who were still steadfastly holding onto the idea of a correct sexuality which defined all other sexualities as incorrect and punishable. Intolerance of abnormal sexuality could no longer so authoritatively be justified on the basis of a perceived overriding truth that humans were born and intended to be heterosexuals adhering to the social and sexual norm. Freud had, in part, initiated the slow movement of sexuality out of the unquestionable realm of religion and absolute morality to a more personal and subjective arena of individual morality.

Freud, then, shows how sexual normality is socially constructed. We are now led to ask why. Michel Foucault goes some way in delineating the links between sexuality and power, why it is in the interests of dominant discourses to classify and control sexuality, and to construct sexual normality, and how family structures are an important agent in perpetuating this organization of power. He argues, in The History of Sexuality, that society since the eighteenth century, far from repressing sexuality, has done everything in its power to draw out "the truth of sex"[11]. He writes that

[11] Foucault; p.57

> our civilization... is undoubtedly the only civilization to practice a *scientia sexualis*; or rather, the only civilization to have developed over the centuries procedures for telling the truth of sex which are geared to a form of knowledge-power... I have in mind the confession[12].

In the centuries in which the religious confession has been adapted to a scientific confession of the truth of sex, it has pervaded all the most intimate parts of our lives. Lover confesses to lover, children to parents, pupils to teachers, penitents to priests, patients to doctors, and vampire narrators to their readers; all confessing their "crimes... sins... thoughts and desires... illnesses and troubles"[13]. Confession became a preoccupation of Western people in every field. The rise of the novel can be attributed to the secularization of confession, the novel being a confessional mode of narrative from its beginnings[14]. With this confession of sexual truths, among other things, came an 'archive' of pleasures of sex which was finally consolidated by medicine, psychiatry and pedagogy. People became obsessed with sexuality, particularly aberrant sexuality. Havelock Ellis's cases of inversion, for example, became the standard by which sexual abnormality would be measured. People, now with a yardstick, began to measure themselves against the norm. This was a major success in the process of the 'deployment of sexuality'.

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[12] Foucault; p.58

[13] Foucault; p59

[14] Suggested by Foucault; p.59 and by Rosalind Coward; "Are Women's Novels Feminist Novels?" in Elaine Showalter (ed.); The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature and Theory; Virago (London, 1985); pp.225-239

According to Foucault, sexuality is not a "natural given which power tries to hold in check"[15]. Rather it is an historical construct. He contrasts the 'deployment of alliance', which he sees as a logical development rising from sexual relations in any society, and which has fairly clear rules, with the 'deployment of sexuality', which

> operates according to mobile, polymorphous, and contingent techniques of power... engenders a continual extension of areas and forms of control... [and] has its reason for being... in proliferating, innovating, annexing, creating and penetrating bodies in an increasingly detailed way, and in controlling populations in an increasingly comprehensive way[16].

Dominant power structures colonize the body and deploy sexuality to solidify their position. Foucault identifies "four great strategic unities which, beginning in the eighteenth century, formed specific mechanisms of knowledge and power centering on sex"[17]: 'a hysterization of women's bodies', 'a pedagogization of children's sex', 'a socialization of procreative behavior', and 'a psychiatrization of perverse pleasure'[18]. A broad analysis of Foucault's argument is beyond the scope of this dissertation. This part of his theory, however, unites the strategies of hysterization and psychiatrization or medicalization, those on which my argument is focused, into a single power process, and explains how the family can be seen as a locus of ideological authority and influence, aimed not only at securing the dominance of the father, but of the patriarchy. It should be noted, however, that Foucault defends early psychoanalysis to some extent against charges of normalization, saying that among the "great

[15] Foucault; p.105

[16] Foucault; p.107

[17] Foucault; p.103

family of technologies of sex"[19] psychoanalysis did most to oppose political and institutional abuse of the discourse.

Foucault asserts that the creation of discourses on sexuality- "a domain susceptible to pathological processes, and hence one calling for therapeutic or normalizing interventions"[20]- was the way in which sexuality was normalized and classified. The traditional family is designed to be the place where the 'truth of sex' is confessed; aberrance monitored and dissuaded; and sexual normality taught, fostered and perpetuated. The family, argues Foucault, is a unique and important locus of power in society. He writes that

> the family organization, precisely to the extent that it was insular and heteromorphous with respect to the other power mechanisms, was used to support the great 'maneuvers' employed... for the medicalization of sex and the psychiatrization of its nongenital forms[21].

Because it is basic and nuclear, and gives the impression of being apolitical, the traditional Western family is invested with an insidious power to shape the thinking of new generations and support the values of dominant society. Foucault argues that the Western family, far from

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[18] Foucault; pp.104-5

[19] More fully, Foucault writes, "it is very well to look back from our vantage point and remark upon the normalizing impulse in Freud; one can go on to denounce the role played for many years by the psychoanalytical institution; but the fact remains that in the great family of technologies of sex, which goes so far back into the history of the Christian West, of all those institutions that set out in the nineteenth century to medicalize sex, it was the one that, up to the decade of the forties, rigorously opposed the political and institutional effects of the perversion-heredity-degenerescence system."; p.119

[20] Foucault; p.68

[21] Foucault; p.100

being an agent of repression of sexuality, actually "became one of the most valuable tactical components of the deployment [of sexuality]"[22].

The patriarchal ideal of the 'functional' nuclear family, the family with two heterosexual parents and a few children, is a fundamental unit for transference of ideology. Its latest stage of development, that since the rise of capitalism, has honed it to offer little resistance to the androcentric system. In its traditional form, the father has complete decision-making power and control over the labour capacity of his wife and children. Needless to say, this model of the family with two children, an overbearing father and a pregnant mother doing the housework has become a bloated cliché, but it is based on the real experience of millions of Western households[23]. It is this family which has been the place where ideology and belief are passed down to the next generation. Political attitudes and religious beliefs are most easily absorbed by children in this environment which often seems secure, intimate, sheltered and isolated. The comfort of the family may leave children with no thought of questioning their upbringing. Its intimacy and insularity- the modern Western family is the most socially isolated kinship structure ever- prevent children from being exposed to other styles of upbringing, or other worldviews and beliefs. They will then more easily accept that what they are being taught is truth.

The most manifest danger of the patriarchal family is the fact that in it fathers feel justified in using violence to assert their position. Rape, sexual abuse, and emotional and psychological

[22] Foucault; p.111

[23] Shere Hite; The Hite Report on the Family: Growing Up Under Patriarchy; Sceptre (London, 1995); shows in her report how prevalent stereotypical sexist gender roles are in Western families.

violence are the disastrous by-products of centuries of fathers' exclusive power. This family unit, writes Shere Hite, has developed to the point where it keeps its members in terror:

> fathers in terror lest they not be 'manly' and able to support it all; mothers in terror lest they be beaten in their own bedrooms and ridiculed by their children; children in terror of being forced to do things against their own will and having absolutely no recourse[24].

We are reminded by Hite[25] that this type of family was originally constructed by patriarchal society as a political institution, allowing men control over their wives and children. When this unit was being invented it came under pressure from neighbouring societies which did not follow a patrilinear system, and in reaction, was validated by an elaborate religious mythology which was appended to it. This mythology called women's entrapment in marriage a spiritual virtue, and at the same time changed the powerful and fertile Mother archetypes of older mythologies into disempowered virgins.

Queer Transgression

The 'Queer', as described by Sue-Ellen Case[26], is "the taboo-breaker, the monstrous, the uncanny"[27]. She does not use the term in a gender-specific way; she refers to both lesbians and gay men as queer. Queerness can be seen as a militant and practical defiance of social

[24] Hite; p.346

[25] Hite; p.357ff

[26] Sue-Ellen Case; "Tracking the Vampire"; Differences, 3 (2), 1991; pp.1ff.

norms. Dominant society constructs polarities between acceptable and unacceptable sexualities, between male and female roles. The queer challenges these distinctions, breaks sexual and societal taboos. S/he exists in the space between these polarities, in an indefinable limbo state, referred to by the terms ‘monstrous’ and ‘uncanny’. It is not within the scope of my dissertation to investigate Freud’s notion of the ‘uncanny’. It shares, however, important links with the aspects of monstrosity with which I am concerning myself. Like the notions of monstrosity and abjection, the ‘uncanny’ refers to liminal states which are psychically and ontologically destabilizing, and which are terrifying to fundamentalists who would normalize society. Because s/he exists in the space where distinctions are not clear, the queer is frightening to those members of society who would believe that the fundamentalist norms they create reflect a universal truth or reality. To them, liminal states should not exist, and to be presented with those who choose to live there is a major challenge.

The queer is, in part for this reason, marginalized and defined as Other. Case explains, however, that the queer may purposely seek out this ‘Otherization’, because, formulated as unnatural, s/he can find this to be a liberation from norms. Because s/he is defined as abnormal, the queer is in a position to revel in

> imagining sexual objects and sexual practices within the realm of the other-than-natural, and the consequent other-than-living... Striking at its very core, queer desire punctures the life/death and generative/destructive bipolarities that enclose the heterosexist notion of being[28].

[27] Case; p.3

From this, the ontological instability which challenges even the fundamental polarity between life and death (which of course is central to vampire mythology), and reflected by queerness, is clearly evident.

Case can be criticized for her generalization of lesbians and gays into the classification of militant queers. In a heterosexist society, however, being openly gay, even if not intended as defiant, delivers a strong challenge to normalizing society merely by asserting and making visible the existence of spaces other than the dominant mainstream. An affirmation of queer existence threatens to damage heterosexist conceptions of norms. It is not my intention, nor Case's, I feel, to assert that all lesbians or gays necessarily revel in transgression. It is, however, this aspect of 'queerness' which particularly interests me for the purposes of my argument. The monster and, in particular, the vampire can be seen as queer and to reflect queer desire and identity. Vampires are in a state between states, in a 'wild zone', away from normative influence. They are outsiders, yet have an immense power to frighten and to challenge. Their sexual desire is not restrained by societal norms. The vampire, in the exact words Case uses in describing the queer, is 'the taboo-breaker, the monstrous, the uncanny'. The queer as monster and the monster as queer can be seen as symbols of liberating transgression for any number of traditionally suppressed groups, among them women, gays and lesbians. Both queer and feminist theory's conceptions of the wild zone are in many ways supported by Freud's suggestion that sexuality originates in a pre-Oedipal, unenculturated space. Queer theorists and theoretical feminists concerned with ideas like *jouissance* look to this space as a subversive locus away from dominant influence where alternative discourses

[28] Case; p.4

and systems of power can be produced and introduced into mainstream society with subversive effect.

Jonathan Dollimore[29] similarly asserts the existence of subversive potential within marginalized groups. He works within a framework of opposition between dominant and subordinate cultures, particularly between heterosexuals and homosexuals in patriarchal society. He presents the notion of 'sexual dissidence'- a political and purposely subversive sort of resistance to dominant culture. Sexual dissidence, "operating in terms of gender, repeatedly unsettles the very opposition between the dominant and the subordinate"[30]. This idea of the complication of established polarities by subordinate cultures is clearly similar to Case's conception of the functioning of the Queer. Dollimore attributes this blurring in part to a postmodern loss of faith in essentialism and an autonomous self. He writes that "as the autonomous self disappears, so the dialectic between law and desire, dominant and deviant, becomes much more complex"[31].

Dollimore also adds his thoughts to the subversion/containment debate, arguing that "dissidence may not only be repressed by the dominant (coercively and ideologically), but in a sense actually produced by it, hence consolidating the powers which it ostensibly challenges"[32]. Dollimore appears somewhat hesitant about taking sides in the debate, but to me the argument that Eve, the archetypal whore, and Satan, the archetypal heretic, were created by dominant society to aid in its own delimitation and perpetuation, seems entirely

[29] Jonathan Dollimore; Sexual Dissidence: Augustine to Wilde, Freud to Foucault; Clarendon Press (Oxford, 1991)

[30] Dollimore; p.21

[31] Dollimore; p.26

[32] Dollimore; pp.26-7

credible. As the example of the hystericized woman, discussed below, shows, the creation of Others is an important part of dominant society's definition and survival. Part of the threat of women is their 'proximate' nature. To simplify Dollimore's argument, the 'proximate' is the figure which cannot be classified into polarities and places itself in the dangerous indefinable area between them, and threatens to show up the false simplicity of the binary oppositions on which dominant society bases itself. Queers, vampires and women are all proximate figures, embodying the dangerously subversive 'perverse dynamic' which "signifies that fearful interconnectedness whereby the antithetical inheres within, and is partly produced by, what it opposes"[33].

The proximate, argues Dollimore, functions in two different ways. Because it lies between the Same and the Other, it is often made Other so that it can be displaced. It can also, however, enable

> a tracking-back of the 'other' into the 'same'. I call this transgressive reinscription... If the perverse dynamic generates internal instabilities within repressive norms, reinscription denotes an anti-essentialist, transgressive agency which might intensify those instabilities, turning them against the norms[34].

Dollimore does not write about vampires, but his notion of the proximate can be related closely to the transgressive vampire figure. His use of the term 'transgressive reinscription' is particularly interesting, because taken to its roots, reinscription means 'writing back in', a process with which contemporary vampire fiction is most often concerned. The authors write

[33] Dollimore; p.33

vampires into a central place in their novels, back from a marginalized place, and the result is profound and subversive instability.

Hysteria

The term 'hysteria'[35] is used in various ways within and outside psychiatric and psychoanalytic fields. Neurologists, psychoanalysts and psychiatrists, not to mention feminists, each have different uses for the term. In psychological terms the diagnosis originated in ancient Greece, describing a multi-symptomatic disorder caused by an unanchored uterus. From these roots it is clear that it was seen predominantly as a woman's disease. More recently it has been seen as intrapsychic conflict expressing itself through 'conversion' to somatic symptomology- psychological complexes relating primarily to repressed sexuality manifested in seemingly unrelated physical symptoms. A woman's repressed or unsatisfied sexuality could sometimes lead to her whole body, except her genitals, being sexualized through somatization- to displace the anxieties her sexuality caused, she would repress her sexuality and focus away from her genital sexuality, only for her libido to express itself elsewhere, converted into seemingly non-sexual manifestations. The ideological connotations this ailment has attracted, however, and the uses to which dominant society has put it, go far beyond its psychiatric definition.

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[34] Dollimore; p.33

[35] A psychiatric definition of hysteria can be found in Jessica Kuper (ed.); A Lexicon of Psychology, Psychiatry and Psychoanalysis; Routledge (London and New York, 1988); pp.198-200

The late Victorian patriarchy found certain women becoming a threat. Many women started training themselves in professional skills, began to read political works, became interested in early feminist ideas and started encroaching on men's intellectual and political territory. These women were often diagnosed as 'hysterics'. Far from there being some coincidence between mental illness and powerful women, this diagnosis can be seen as part of an effort by the practitioners of medical and psychiatric discourse to repress women who threatened to escape their defined sexual and gender roles, and to uphold their process of colonizing the female body. Elaine Showalter focuses on the rise of the 'New Woman'[36], most often of the upper class, who began to empower herself, and who was the victim of hysterization, which was less an attack against eccentrics and more part of a process of male defence against women in general. Women's political fervour, their challenging empowerment, and their professional skill were written off as mere manifestations of hysteria, nothing more. Using the scientific façade of psychiatric discourses, men could justify their victimization of women, and again women's sexuality is used as the basis for their marginalization.

Foucault argues that

> the hysterization of women, which involved a thorough medicalization of their bodies and their sex, was carried out in the name of the responsibility they owed to the health of their children, the solidity of the family institution and the safeguarding of society[37].

[36] Showalter; p.169; and others

[37] Foucault; pp.146-7

Hysterical women did damage to traditional institutions designed to be self-perpetuating and to uphold and keep intact the family system (which in turn aided in upholding the institutions). Hysterical women were sick themselves and a sickness in society and it was the ostensible duty of male doctors and psychiatrists to 'cure' them, to make them normal again. Men, as body colonists and societal curators, hospitalized women, institutionalized them, or even gave them clitoridectomies to cure their hysteria. A mutilated woman, or a woman in fear of mutilation, would not so easily challenge society.

This brutality was legitimized by the quasi-scientific, rationalist mindset of the dominant discourse at the time. If medicine could be used to cure not only the individual but also society of its ills, all the better. Elisabeth Bronfen describes the male antithesis of the hysteric- the 'obsessional'. She explains that

> the obsessional tries to repress the real void of death by erecting clear divisions. He uses language and knowledge in an effort to exclude radical Otherness, lest it allow lacks and gaps, which make him anxious, to appear[38].

The woman whom he defines as hysterical demonstrates inherent ambiguities in his worldview and brings him face to face with the void of unknowability. This frightening concept is another reason to cure her. She makes him anxious. Obsessional men, abounding in medical and psychiatric realms, make women into case studies.

[38] Bronfen; p314

Elaine Showalter and Helena Michie discuss male 'medical' obsessions with women's bodies. Many male doctors seem to have believed in the cultural fallacy that women's bodies contained secrets and that this made them eligible for scientific 'colonialism'. Their bodies were available to be opened up and explored, ostensibly in the name of science, but actually in a sublimation of sexual and control urges. Doctors were trained with the aid of 'Anatomical Venuses', lifelike wax models of women, opened up to show internal organs. These models were perhaps the obsessional ideal of a Victorian woman- beautifully constructed, silent and willing to be explored and exploited. Showalter writes that

> if the rebellious New Woman... could be turned into a silent body to be observed, measured and studied, her resistance to convention could be treated as a scientific anomaly or a problem to be solved by medicine... Most important, the woman can be turned into a case, transformed from 'she' to 'it', so that her individual experience becomes impersonal and statistical... an object to be incisively opened, analyzed, and reassembled[39].

Women could and would be objectified into case studies. This way, doctors could depersonalize the horror they were committing, and justify it in terms of the 'general' (dominant) good to hide the fact that it was their fear of women which caused them to fight so hard for control. Would these obsessional medical men, the self-heralded saviours of civilization, be as favourably perceived if they were linked to another famous late Victorian obsessional man? The Whitechapel killer, or Jack the Ripper, is another frightening non-fictional follower of medical-rational discourse. He seems to have seen his victims as

[39] Showalter; p.128

hysterics who needed to be objectified, studied as cases, and cured. His 'cures', his mutilations, were exact and scientific, and it is presumed he had medical knowledge[40]. He was a product of the social norms and attitudes of the late Victorian period. Was his behaviour crazed deviance or a strict, obsessive adherence to evidently psychopathic Victorian rules?

The Abject

Like Case and Dollimore, some feminist critics see a paradoxical potential for empowerment in socially marginal positions. Bronfen writes that women formulated as hysterics recognize "a lack or void in the symbolic order of laws"[41]. Here she describes hysteria not as a weakening epithet, but as a sign of the deeper, more secure and liberating understanding of life which these women possess. They do not accept the validity of restricting laws. They, unlike obsessional men, do not need to protect themselves against reality with a laager of constructs. They see a deeper reality with more clarity than men. Nina Auerbach[42] argues that the myths which men construct around women, expressly for the purpose of disempowering them, can actually be seen as strengthening, offering an "underlying mythic and erotic power"[43]. The 'abject', posited by Julia Kristeva, and Barbara Creed's 'monstrous-feminine', an extension of the concept of abjection, illuminate the power which lies in wild and marginal zones.

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[40] Eerily enough, the Yorkshire Ripper of the 1980s, Peter Sutcliffe, studied displays of Anatomical Venuses in museums, displaying medical interest and training himself as a Victorian doctor would have been trained.

[41] Bronfen; p.314

[42] Nina Auerbach; Woman and the Demon: The Life of a Victorian Myth; Harvard University Press (Cambridge, Mass., 1982)

[43] Cited by Michie; p.5

Kristeva directly relates her conception of the abject to Freud's uncanny, and it can be compared with Dollimore's 'proximate' and to other queer and feminist notions of liminal states outside dominant influence. In these 'wild zones', marginalization leads to an ironic potential for independence, identity and power. Here too, female sexuality can break conventional passive roles and become aggressive and self-determined. Women, she argues, are thrust outside of society, made abject. Within this abjection, however, looms "one of those dark revolts of being... It lies there, quite close, but it cannot be assimilated. It... fascinates desire, which, nevertheless, does not let itself be seduced"[44]. She writes that

> what is *abject*... the jettisoned object, is radically excluded and draws me toward the place where meaning collapses... It lies outside, beyond the set, and does not seem to agree to the [master's] rules of the game. And yet, from its place of banishment, the abject does not cease challenging its master[45].

Seen simply, the links of the abject to the queer are clear. Women made abject, queers and other monsters meet in the space where definition, order and control are impossible. Simply stated by Marion Shaw, abjection ironically threatens the patriarchy with "a sickening collapse of meaning and of limits"[46]. Queerness and abjection are characteristics both of those defined as sexually transgressive, and of vampires.

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[44] Julia Kristeva; Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection (tr. Leon S. Roudiez); European Perspectives, Columbia University Press (New York, 1982); p.1

[45] Kristeva; p.2

[46] Marion Shaw; "'To Tell the Truth of Sex': Confession and Abjection in Late Victorian Writing" in Linda M. Shires (ed.); Rewriting the Victorians: Theory, History and the Politics of Gender; Routledge (New York, 1992); p.92

Kristeva goes on to highlight Biblical and later constructions of the woman as improper and unclean. Her menstruation is a particular societal justification for her marginalization. Creed notes that

> definitions of the monstrous as constructed in the modern horror text are grounded in ancient religious and historical notions of abjection- particularly in relation to the following religious 'abominations': sexual immorality and perversion; corporeal alteration, decay and death; human sacrifice; murder; the corpse; bodily wastes; the feminine body and incest[47].

Creed draws on the psychoanalytical work of Kristeva and applies it to fiction to support her argument. She coins the term 'monstrous-feminine' in her book dealing with female monsters. She explains why she thinks it inappropriate merely to call them female monsters:

> As with all other stereotypes of the feminine, from virgin to whore, [the female monster] is defined in terms of her sexuality. The phrase 'monstrous-feminine' emphasizes the importance of gender in the construction of her monstrosity[48].

Powerful women in society are often seen in terms of sexual stereotypes. To attain her power, such a woman has either been emotionless and frigid (the ironic by-product of pure, virginal 'maiden'hood) or seductive, having 'slept her way to the top'. Women's power is still almost

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[47] Creed; pp8-9

[48] Barbara Creed; The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism and Psychoanalysis; Routledge (London and New York, 1993); p.3

exclusively seen in terms of their sexuality. Creed argues that women, generally, are constructed as monstrous in a way similar to which queerness is made monstrous. Their sexuality, like their power, is transgressive and threatening.

Monsters, according to Creed and Kristeva, are embodiments of the most serious of religious taboos. Women menstruate, are seen by some as sexually aberrant if they display any notion of their own sexuality, are frighteningly mysterious to men in their pregnancy, and are often portrayed as smothering and murderous in their motherhood[49]. Androcentric society, provoked by fear, makes them Other and abject. Vampires, zombies, ghouls and other monsters are closely allied to women in their abjection. They inhabit a marginal zone, some are the living dead, some have the ability to change shapes, nearly all are murderers, all are perverted sexually, all are obsessed with blood or corpses. Both women and monsters seem grounded in abject corporeal substances and formulated in terms of taboos. Both threaten stability, identity and the hegemonic norm. Linda Williams recognizes the "surprising (and at times subversive) affinity between monster and woman"[50]. They both have abject bodies frightening in their sexuality.

The notion of the *vagina dentata* is a comprehensive symbol of the merging of women, monsters, especially vampires, and abjection. The fear of the *vagina dentata*- the toothed vagina- is possibly the most profound patriarchal male nightmare. Put simply, it is the fear that during intercourse, teeth in the vagina will castrate the male. Already the vagina, even without teeth, is defined as abject, a base of transgression and threat. It can be frightening to

[49] For example in Stephen King's Carrie and in Robert Bloch's Psycho.

[50] Linda Williams; "When the Woman Looks", in Re-vision; University Publications of America (Los Angeles, 1984); p.89

men, because it reminds men of castration. Women are castrated, yet survive. This demonstrates a profound and superstitious male fear and suspicion of women, at the same time as men like to believe they have power and control over women, their environment and their knowledge. This fear leads to the conception of the female genitals as a trap, and "points to the duplicitous nature of woman, who promises paradise in order to ensnare her victims"[51]. During his fundamentally symbolic act of penetration, the male is threatened with castration. This is a consummate overturning of patriarchal power structures. Under the specious guise of mythology, the concept of the *vagina dentata* is perpetuated by male-centred society to justify a continued mistrust of women, and maintained institutional inequality.

* * *

Foucault and various feminists, then, point toward dominant society's strategies aimed at perpetuation of its power and the creation of a false order based on normative processes, upheld by various dominant discourses and traditional institutions. The notions of the 'polymorphous perverse', the 'queer', the 'proximate', and the 'abject', and the interrogation of the ideological implications of institutions such as the traditional family and of the motivations of supposedly objective medical science all show up the tenuous nature of society's constructed rules. Sexual and gender-related norms are invalidated and the abnormal and marginalized can be celebrated. The vampire is an expression of the functionality, the sexual assertiveness, the allure and the liberation of the 'wild zone'. It, like persecuted humans, inhabits a liminal space, effective both in and outside culture, where even the rules of life and death hold no sway.

[51] Creed; p.106

The vampire is the creature best suited of all the monsters to reflect the transgressive and subversive aspects of monstrosity. If one were to psychoanalyse a vampire, the case would be complex and fascinating. The vampire seems to remain in a stage of polymorphously perverse sexuality and is nearly always bisexual. The vampire's feeding is nearly always a sexual act: it is the vampire's primary sexual goal. It is orally fixated, deriving its greatest pleasure from sucking. The vampire's teeth do actually offer some psychic concession to sexual normality in that they penetrate, but this act is also perverted. Psychiatrists may find hope in seeing the penetration by teeth as displaced phallic functioning, but run into more complexity in the case of female vampires. The part of the body penetrated is traditionally the neck but is often the wrist or any other part of the body, usually where blood flows freely, and this shows the tendency of a fetishist to rezone the locus of the primary sexual goal. In all, the vampire is abnormal. Part of its subversion, however, is to live a life of such perversion, and yet not search for a cure. Most often vampires are completely satisfied with their way of life, and those who do question their existence in other ways do not often wish to change the pleasure their sexuality provides them.

What makes the vampire so dangerous and alluring is that it cannot simply be written off as a subhuman creature with no relevance to humans. Zombies, werewolves and ghouls can simply be reviled and exterminated like vermin. The destruction of a vampire is a religious matter. All of these monsters are partially human, but the vampire seems most human of all. It fits most comfortably into society and is civilized, often to the extent of being far more urbane than the humans it comes across. At the same time, however, it is animal, wild and unenculturated. The vampire is seductive and sensual and offers pleasure and knowledge humans have difficulty in rejecting. It represents the return of the repressed in a form so

inviting, it makes us wonder why we needed to repress our pre-Oedipal desires in the first place. The vampire insinuates its way into society and once there shakes its laws and norms.

The vampire exists in that space occupied by the queer, the proximate and the abject- the space between polarities, where simple definition cannot exist:

> it gains its effect by continually *collapsing* the conventional polarity of 'life' and 'death', normality and the unnatural... what is familiar and what is unfamiliar[52].

It is dead, but very much more alive than many humans. It challenges the distinction between good and evil, sometimes adding to the complexity by making us sympathize with its evil. It is simultaneously frightening and alluring. It cannot completely be rejected, nor can it be accepted fully. Like other manifestations of the abject, the vampire "fascinates desire but... must be repelled for fear of self-annihilation"[53], but on the other hand must "be tolerated for that which threatens to destroy life also helps to define life"[54]. The vampire is manifest ambiguity.

In late Victorian fiction, the other high point of vampire production, the vampire was often used as a dire warning against deviance. In Bram Stoker's Dracula, a famous and representative example of late Victorian vampire stories, Dracula is the epitome of sexual deviance and its dangers to civilized society. Dracula is a foreigner who, as a vampire, threatens the moral basis of English society. His first and only successful English victim is

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[52] Ken Gelder; Reading the Vampire; Routledge (London and New York, 1994); pp.61-2

[53] Creed; p.10

[54] Creed; p.9

Lucy Westenra, who is herself transgressive, too flirtatious and aware of her sexuality, making her prone to vampirism from the start. This is similar to a susceptibility to hysteria. Stoker's alternative to hysterizing threatening women is to have them vampirized instead. The hysterized woman and the traditional vampirized woman are both weakened and suffer lapses of sanity, denying them any future credibility. Solid English obsessionality saves the other characters from Dracula. Jonathan Harker's tenacious grip on English norms allows him to ward off the lure of sensual delights in Dracula's castle, far from the moral safety of England. Mina Murray/Harker, can also be seen as a 'New Woman'. She types, has a job, and has a good memory and organizational skills. She has a threateningly 'masculine' mind. Mina survives Dracula's advances after a narrow escape, rescued by her renewed faith in her husband and Victorian society. The links between xenophobia, misogyny and a fear of deviant sexuality are clear here. The Victorian way to protect society from all sorts of deviance was to define normality and victimize the abnormal in an effort to make it go away. The vampire was a symbol of all that was wrong with abnormality.

Recently, however, the vampire has diversified in function. From a warning against deviance, its transgression now often serves as a sort of liberation. In many contemporary novels the vampire offers escape for abused children, women and gays who feel disempowered, and to whom the subversive allure and promise of pleasure appeal. The vampire seems to offer them more of an individual identity, a selfhood which their classification as homogeneous Other by the patriarchy does not give. This movement towards sympathetic vampires is relatively recent[55]. Anne Rice's Interview With the Vampire, first published in 1976, was the first vampire novel to be written in the first person from the point of view of a vampire with whom

the reader sympathizes[56]. Since then, argues Ken Gelder, the contemporary vampire novel, presenting the vampire in its queerness and abjection, has often worked

> by shifting from a conventional view of the vampire as culturally marginal (of little social significance...) to a recognition that the vampire is not only central to culture but may even be (re)constructing it in its own image[57].

Instead of polarizing the states of cultural marginalization and centrality, I would argue that the vampire confuses the two. The idea that the marginal can have a profound impact on the central, the Other on the Same, is where the monster's force lies. Interview With the Vampire, with its acceptance of the vampire's significant subversive potential, whether fitting seamlessly into society or revelling in its position exiled from humanity, is a major milestone in horror fiction. For the first time we are led to ask how the vampire, or the monster, is like us, and how we are like monsters. We are made to question our marginalization and hatred of monsters, not only fictional, but also of the members of our society we make into monsters. We question which is worse, a vampire who sucks the blood of a few victims, not always killing them, or humans who wage war, abuse their children and rape.

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[55] In "Rehabilitating Revenants, or Sympathetic Vampires in recent Fiction"; Extrapolation, 29 (3), 1988; pp.227-234; Joan Gordon gives an overview of the trend towards 'sympathetic vampires' in fiction since 1980.

[56] Fred Saberhagen's The Dracula Tape, published in 1975, the year before Interview With the Vampire, was the first vampire novel narrated in the first person by a vampire, but this narrator was Dracula, and was not sympathetic. The sympathetic character of Louis is a major aspect of his revolutionary nature.

[57] Gelder; p.142

A Note on Frame of Reference and Use of Terms

My focus in this dissertation is on United States ('American') vampire fiction. Vampire mythology is Eastern European in origin and the roots of its fictionalization are mainly British and French. More recently, the production of vampire literature has been embraced by American writers[58]. The effectiveness of the vampire story most often lies in its subversion of norms standard to these countries. The Western heterosexist, androcentric paradigm is common to the United States and Britain, and usually the novels are set in this context. The seemingly normal situation they present is shaken and destabilized by the appearance of the vampire. I would argue that the contemporary vampire has been tailored to subvert precisely these American and British norms, and it is only in this context that the meaning of the vampire in the novel can fully be apprehended.

As I have suggested, 'normality', 'pathology', 'deviance', 'perversion', 'queer', 'sexuality', 'society', 'family' and other such contestable concepts are largely culturally constructed and must be understood in the context of their construction. They mean quite different things to those who would normalize and to those who would subvert norms. I have demonstrated the relativity of these terms in my discussion of the theoretical aspects of the dissertation, and will continue to suggest to what extent these terms are constructed, whether with the goal of oppression or expression.

[58] Edgar Allan Poe wrote stories and poems with loosely vampiric characters in the mid-nineteenth century. Although American, his influence and readership were primarily French and English. Apart from Poe's work, American vampire production is a twentieth-century phenomenon.

The Selected Novels

My basic reading list was compiled from a list of recommended vampire fiction posted on the Internet by fans of the genre[59]. Most of these novels were available, but a few were out of print and unobtainable. I started by reading those which seemed generally interesting. From these I selected six novels for primary focus. These six novels- Anne Rice's Interview With the Vampire (1976), Suzy McKee Charnas's The Vampire Tapestry (1980), Nancy A. Collins's Sunglasses After Dark (1989), Poppy Z. Brite's Lost Souls (1992), Christopher Moore's Bloodsucking Fiends (1995) and Kristine Kathryn Rusch's Sins of the Blood (1995)- were chosen on the sole basis of what they said about families, sexuality and transgression of norms. Nearly all of the novels I read treat vampirism as a sexual act; many feature families, if for no other reason than as part of a presentation of average circumstances; and many note some sort of transgression of norms, if for no other reason than the innate transgression, at the least criminality, of any vampire. The six primary novels, however, combine many of these concerns in a pointed manner, leading the reader to analysis, rather than just acknowledgement of the subject matter. Family and family violence, gender and sexual roles, transgression and subversion are central to these novels. Some of the other novels, far from being irrelevant, offer significant extensions of these concerns, and I draw on them where useful.

The six primary novels happen to offer a fairly balanced chronological overview of the last two decades of vampire novels since Interview With the Vampire. Initially it seemed

[59] Various reviewers; A list of recommended vampire fiction, posted on the Internet newsgroup, alt.vampyres, originally maintained by Travis S. Casey, maintained by David C. Mudie, and contributed to by a number of Internet users.

coincidental that all the writers were American and all but Moore were women. In the light of my research, however, the links between women's writing, feminist writing and the concerns and location of the progressive elements of popular fiction and of the vampire genre specifically have become more clear. It is not a coincidence that women are using broad-based popular media to write about subversion of androcentric norms and a redefinition of families.

Chapter Outline

Chapter Two: The Presentation of Family in the Contemporary Vampire Novel

This chapter investigates the presentation of traditional families and traditional settings as the breeding-place of abuse and inherited violence. It also looks at the novels' treatment of the psychological effects of abusive upbringings, and their presentation of alternative family structures. The role of the vampire in these contexts ranges from being a symbol of abusive fatherhood, to one of liberation from oppression.

Chapter Three: Transgressive Sexuality in the Contemporary Vampire Novel

This chapter focuses on the fiction's portrayal of sexual transgression as part of its primary concern with challenging or subverting constructed norms. The post-Rice vampire is an embodiment of the subversion of sexual and ontological categories.

Chapter Four: Female Characterization and the Interrogation of Gender in the Contemporary Vampire Novel

Starting with an overview of recent feminist criticism, this chapter presents the ways in which the vampire genre and other popular fiction have been appropriated by feminist writers to express their concerns. After considering how feminist writing may be defined, I argue that some contemporary vampire fiction concerns itself with a subversive rewriting of the traditional passive woman-as-victim to an active and monstrous woman-as-aggressor.

Chapter Five: Belief, Fear and Action into the Next Decade

To draw together the themes of the dissertation, this concluding chapter investigates how vampire fiction reflects the post-essentialist condition of its young readers. The possibility for moral, religious or political conviction in a generation which is often concerned with challenging traditional norms is discussed. Some consideration on the future of the vampire is also presented.

Chapter Two

The Presentation of Family in the Contemporary Vampire Novel

Contemporary vampire novels often concern themselves with issues surrounding Western family life. The focus of this chapter is to provide an illustration of the various presentations of families and family issues in Interview With the Vampire, Sunglasses After Dark, Lost Souls and Sins of the Blood. Most of the novels place their characters directly into a suburban or semi-rural American scene, where traditional family dynamics and upbringings are the accepted norm and where the inequalities of these structures are perpetuated. This traditional milieu, with its veneer of order, is often shown to be the breeding place of psychoses and antisocial behaviour, and of cycles of inherited violence. The fiction closely examines the psychological and social effects of dysfunctional and abusive upbringings, and sometimes suggests the possibility of some sort of psychic rehabilitation. Opposed to these traditional families, the fiction also presents alternative lifestyles, self-chosen and unorthodox families, often in a purposeful attempt to interrogate or subvert traditional conceptions of family. The inherently subversive figure of the vampire acts as a catalyst for this interrogation. It plays the role, in its chameleonic fashion, of any family member, from abusive father to alluring sister, or it stands outside human society and subtly makes us compare it to ourselves.

* * *

The concept of place is important in vampire fiction. The places where the novels are set show much more than mere physical environment. The settings of the novels often serve as a

reflection of the societal, sexual, moral and ideological norms of the community the vampire affects. By presenting a 'normal', contemporary American setting, Sunglasses After Dark, Lost Souls, and Sins of the Blood attempt to expose the dysfunction beneath this veneer of stability. This is an important part in the general norm-challenging process of the books, and the presentation of place is one accessory in the social critique these novels express.

The depth of this social critique varies, however, from novel to novel. In one stream of vampire novels, the equation between human evils and analogous vampire evils is part of what I would term 'liberal' social critique. It is not radical, seeking to replace family structures with profoundly different lifestyles. Neither is it conservative. It certainly does not seek to entrench the dominance of the father, and it does investigate maladies inherent in patriarchal structures, such as child abuse and rape. It presents, however, a search for a healing within families rather than a radical revamping of current systems. The vampire, when functioning as a tool for this liberal type of social critique, is passive, a model usually of the dangers of anarchic transgression. Rather than being a catalyst for societal or ideological change, the vampire serves as a mirror reflecting the inequalities of traditional society.

In fiction written before Interview With the Vampire, this type of invocation of the vampire as mirror on society is fairly common. Through the pulp period of the 1950s and 60s, the vampire was either a monster to be destroyed with little thought, or a monster to be destroyed, but also teaching a moral lesson or two. His effect stretched little further than this. Dracula's threat, for example, like that of most pre-Rice vampires, was certainly grave on a physical level for the characters concerned, but he could not successfully challenge them where it really mattered: their ideology, their sense of moral-religious-ethnic superiority, their faith in civilization remained intact, and won out eventually. Dracula was an Other presence and his

threat to society was easily neutralized by marginalization. Seen simplistically, all it took was trust in England or America, an easy trust learned from babyhood, to defeat the abject and marginal creature.

After 1976, in the post-Rice era of vampire novels, with vampires moving to central positions, often as main characters, the aloof vampire-as-mirror has become less common. The inherently subversive vampire has been granted a voice with which to speak directly to the reader, and a body with which to threaten real change to society. The novel which centralizes the vampire, in its queerness and abjection, cannot avoid some measure of subversive interrogation of society. Only those novels, such as John Skipp and Craig Spector's The Light at the End, which treat the vampire as the flat, traditional, foreign and detached monster, can still offer a parable of good (American humans) versus evil (un-American[1] monsters). Skipp and Spector's book, written in 1986, comes as some relief to those horror fans tired by introspection and challenging subversive messages. As Christopher R. Nauta writes in his review of The Light at the End:

> ...this book is a great remedy for the new trend of 'romantic' vampires. Vampires are evil, they should be feared, loathed and destroyed. Finally, a vampire book where you root for the humans[2].

[1] The term 'un-American' deliberately recalls Joseph McCarthy's ultra-conservatism and his House Committee of Un-American activities. At its worst, this hypocritical and xenophobic ethic could be seen as a front for this type of witch- (or vampire-) burning. Fantasy and horror genres are sometimes used as vehicles for this sort of conservative expression.

The centralization of the vampire and the investigation of its psyche, which has been the trend in recent fiction, does mean that we now root for the vampires much more often. Nauta's posture recalls the swashbuckling attitude of Van Helsing and the Crew of Light in Dracula, who would, indeed, be dismayed by the new tolerance engendered by the 'romantic', introspective and sympathetic vampire. This tolerance is not only of vampires, but can perhaps be extended to the people we make into monsters.

In the novels on which I focus, the vampire is central, and the agenda is often more radically subversive. In liberal novels, the polarities on which society bases itself are not in need of erasure or even of very stringent challenging: marriage and families are good, they seem to be saying, as long as they contain some love and respect. Some post-Rice novelists present a similar liberal message regarding families, but it is as if the very centralization of the vampire in their work disallows such a simple conclusion. Even in these liberal works, we regularly find some subversive denial of meaning, and ultimately the good/evil and life/death polarities blur into confusion. The vampire, foremost, is the embodiment of this sort of blurring. There is, however, also a trend toward vampires as radical agents of change. Rather than just commenting on life, these vampires take it over and alter it. Often humans are willing accomplices of, rather than victims to, change and welcome the transgressive relief the vampires bring to suffocating rules. There is in each novel in my focus a varying mixture of liberal and radical attitudes toward families, and the scene of this concoction is the scene of the action of the novel.

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[2] Various reviewers; a list of recommended vampire fiction, posted on the Internet newsgroup, alt.vampyres, originally maintained by Travis S. Casey, maintained by David C. Mudie, and contributed to by a number of Internet users.

At the start of her novel Kristine Kathryn Rusch describes a scene of domestic regularity:

> The dining room looked the same. The new oak table was set for company- as it always was- with a lovely linen tablecloth protecting the surface. The collectibles hid in the matching china hutch, and the hardwood floor was bare[3].

This seems like the dining room of a houseproud family, hospitable and ready for company. But the room is a front, a window-dressed display ready in case anyone enters unexpectedly. It is an illusion of order, painstakingly hiding chaotic violence. The collectibles hide, as does a little girl, who watches her father confront her mother, snatch the baby boy from her arms, beat her and kill her. And when it is over, the house can be tidied, the veneer made intact again. The father knows that an orderly environment is safe, and should invite no investigation. A passer-by will see a neat house and presume that neat lives are played out behind the walls. Place here is a false reflection on the ethics and morals of the people who live there. The obsessive neatness of this vampire father- or by extension, of the abusive or violent human father- hides his evil.

The abodes of the clever, self-protecting vampires in Sins of the Blood are painstakingly normal and middle-class. They allow no shows of poverty, no open displays of opulence, no overt decadence or vice, all of which invite attention. Many careless vampires stay in ‘cow bars’, seedy clubs where they can drink the blood of willing victims, and wallow in lazy squalor. These vampires are most often discovered and destroyed within a few years. Ben, a central vampire character, learns to be sensible from his mentor, Mikos. It is important to

[3] Sins of the Blood; p.1

learn to control the overpowering sexual urge of blood-drinking and learn restraint and sense. Mikos is very wealthy, but hides his opulent home on an upper floor of a nondescript building in Seattle, laundering his operation in a Mafia-like way behind the front of a small Italian restaurant. Ben, who plans to start a family and have a powerful hereditary vampire as a son, moves into an unremarkable suburb of new houses and quiet streets. He seduces an estate-agent, Glenda, into moving in with him to bear his son. Steve, Ben's friend, who frequents the cow bars, says about the house and about Glenda: "how fucking suburban"[4]. When the vampiric lifestyle offers such previously impossible opportunities for hedonism, Steve is amazed that Ben can continue to try to live as a normal human. But Ben knows that this bland suburban scene is the perfect front behind which he can commit whatever crimes he wishes. His assimilation into mainstream middle-class society ensures that he is not marginal and thus not noticed.

It is Cammie Timms's job to eradicate vampires when they are found. Special training is needed to discover where vampires hide. She knows that the biggest danger of vampirism is in normal-seeming environments, which are described in detail: "The condos had been built in mock-colonial style- columned doorways and wide arched windows- and they had a look of understated elegance[5]"; "...the neighbourhood was silent, except for the blaring television coming from the house near her car, and had the illusion of safety[6]". Indeed, the most ordinary, safe- and pleasant-seeming places are vampire country. In this novel, scenes of apparent wholesomeness disguise ugliness. This paradox is captured by the narrator:

[4] Sins of the Blood; p.288

[5] Sins of the Blood; p.9

[6] Sins of the Blood; p.198

> The sunshine was bright, making the green lawn vibrant against the blue sky. Such a pretty place. She had wanted to believe that there were no vampires here, that she had finally discovered a place that was safe.
>
> The smell that first night should have clued her[7].

Vampires hide in these unremarkable places, using the ordinariness of their surroundings to remain undetected. Cammie knows that it is necessary to look below the illusion of safety to see what is really there. As will be seen, Cammie's search for truth below a surface closely parallels her therapeutic search for a deeper truth about her identity.

Vampirism and suburbanism are ostensibly incompatible but actually symbiotic. This relationship can be closely tied to other similar tensions. The attitude in Ben's foster-parents' household when they begin to suspect he is turning[8] is much like that of some parents facing up to the idea that their son is gay or takes drugs. He has been brought up in a caring family, in a good upper middle-class neighbourhood, is studying law. The question is posed by Cammie, "why would someone whose life seemed so good go through the changes Ben had?"[9] The presupposition is that a (materially) good suburb equals a (morally) good life, the very supposition that keeps Ben safe in the suburbs. Many deeper influences on their son's development are ignored.

The presentation of the suburban milieu in Poppy Z. Brite's Lost Souls functions somewhat differently from that in Sins of the Blood. The suburbs are seen less as a veneer than as a

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[7] Sins of the Blood; p.227

[8] The process of changing from a human to a vampire is most often referred to as 'turning'.

[9] Sins of the Blood; p.197

passionless presence, where children are neglected and misunderstood, causing them to become directionless nihilists. Nothing, a 15 year-old boy, considers his environment:

> He looked toward the window. Outside, he could see a few lights: other windows in other houses, more houses beyond; houses with well-kept lawns and shade trees, like the one he lived in; houses with swing sets and poured concrete driveways and half-baths and redwood sundecks; streets travelled by Volvos and Toyotas picking the kids up from day care, going to the supermarket, the health club, the mall, or, if they were bored enough, the liquor store. Suburbs, stretching forever or until the end of Maryland, whichever came first. Nothing shivered, then swigged from the White Horse bottle next to his bed[10].

The bland monotony of the suburban surroundings here is what distresses Nothing. The suburbs stretch 'forever or until the end of Maryland, whichever came first'. There simply seems to be no viable opportunity for change, so children like Nothing turn to drugs and alcohol and sexual experience to attempt some psychic escape. These surroundings are not portrayed as a place where violence hides, although drunkenness and the potential danger of drunk fathers are hinted at. Middle-class and depressed children with bourgeois parents seem to seek passion and pain to give their lives uniqueness and meaning. As we see, these types of children have been wasting away for decades:

> *I've got to get out of this place*, [Nothing] thought just before dawn, and the ghosts of all the decades of middle-class American children afraid of complacency and

[10] Lost Souls; p.62

stagnation and comfortable death drifted before his face, whispering their agreement[11].

Here, 'comfortable death' is a great and most feasible horror, and even a violent environment seems to some youths to be a much more attractive option. This explains in part their fascination with (uncomfortable) death, Gothic subcultures and vampirism.

There is a glaring absence in this novel of parents. Even the parental cars- dull, safe Volvos and Toyotas- seem to cruise the streets in a disembodied way without drivers, following boring parental routes. We are, however, introduced to Nothing's parents, who call him Jason. They are not his biological parents. He was left on their doorstep as a baby, and they took him in. Despite their presence, they are impotent and meaningless to Nothing. Father, Rodger, fumes in powerless and diluted rage at Nothing's habits: "he is fifteen and runs with a gang of punkers who give him a liquor habit and God knows what else. He dyes his hair that phony black that.. stains my good shirts... He smokes cigarettes... Things are going to CHANGE-"[12]. Before he can suggest any changes, unnamed 'Mother', who, it is sarcastically written, "radiated benevolence, spiritual wholeness"[13] after she has come from meditating with rose crystals, tells him he is not in trouble and allows him to have his ear pierced because, she says, "I don't want to keep you from fulfilling yourself. I certainly don't want to decrease your potential"[14]. His mother is a parody of an ex-hippie parent, and she and her husband are bewildered by their son's rebellion, which is caused in part by their very liberal, uncoordinated and uninvolved parenting.

[11] Lost Souls; p.29

[12] Lost Souls; pp.28-9

[13] Lost Souls; p.28

Nothing's adoptive parents, despite their lack of effect and the fact that they barely appear beyond this scene, are the most present of the parents in the novel. Ghost was brought up by his mystical grandmother, who has been dead for some time. He now lives with Steve, who seems to have no dealings with his family at all. We are not told when he left home or why, but he does seem to have had another normal-seeming childhood. His mother and father played "Santa Claus, the Easter Bunny, and an eccentric creature apparently designed just for him, the Haircut Fairy"[15], and his aunt and cousins took him to church, but it meant little to him. What he seemed to lack in his family was "magic"[16], perhaps a sort of real spirituality, which he found in his friend, Ghost. This is one in a series of relationships, in this and the other books, where family and developmental roles are played by chosen non-family members to fulfil the needs of the characters involved. This surrogacy will be discussed in greater depth below. Ann's father, Simon Bransby, is the only evidently abusive human father in the novel[17]. When Simon and Ann talk, they exchange tense pleasantries. One evening, when Ann was sixteen, she came home drunk. Simon, who had also been drinking, "trussed her to her own bedposts with rope and kept her tied there for seven hours, until she pissed herself and begged him to forgive her stupidity"[18]. On top of his abuse, he seems to be the embodiment of a damagingly neglectful father. Ann's mother died mysteriously years before, and Simon spends most of his time at home in his laboratory engaged in a crazed experiment with LSD and live animals.

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[14] Lost Souls; p.28

[15] Lost Souls; p.48

[16] Lost Souls; pp.48-9

[17] Wallace Creech sleeps with his daughter, Jessy, but we are led to believe, in his telling of the event, that she was completely responsible for seducing him.

[18] Lost Souls; p.262

The nameless suburban wasteland in Maryland, where Nothing is brought up, can be compared with the small town of Missing Mile, North Carolina, where much of the activity of the novel is played out. As evidenced by the name, the town is a characterless limbo, where young people wish for escape and old people play checkers all day. Some of the inhabitants, however, add life and personality to the forbidding village. These two settings are sharply contrasted with New Orleans, a third setting of Lost Souls. The French Quarter of New Orleans is the veritable homeland of American vampires. New Orleans is depicted by Brite and Rice as a city which is more welcoming and homely for vampires than anywhere else in the United States. It is where the old European culture of Paris in its eighteenth century heyday mixes with the culture of the New World, and with the ancient magic of Africa, including its mystical spirituality. Fought over by the French, British, Spanish and Americans in the eighteenth century, an important harbour and slaving centre, its heady cultural mix made it like no other place in the United States, perhaps in the world. Mardi Gras seems to go on all year, the "liquor flows like milk"[19], the town is the motherland of transgression. Gender is blurred in drag at carnival time; a large district of sex shops and shows skirts the edge of the law. The very boundary between life and death and between cultures of Africa and Europe is shaken and their intimate relationship demonstrated by the voodoo religion, a combination of African chthonic religion and Catholicism. New Orleans is often seen as a place where the social norms of Western civilization are eroded. The transgressive city parallels the lifestyle of the ambiguous vampire.

Half of Interview With the Vampire is also set in New Orleans. The vampires in it are able to live a demonstrative life of excess. Louis, a native of New Orleans while human, Lestat and

[19] Lost Souls; p.3

Claudia stay there for the first sixty years of the nineteenth century. During this period, the extravagance of the wealthy classes was quite normal, and the vampires fitted easily into society. They barely had to disguise their kills, especially if the victims were not of society. Also, the prevalent epidemic diseases such as cholera made a high death rate in the town unremarkable. Vampires in the more democratic late twentieth century have to be more careful, like those in Sins of the Blood who live in the more conservative Northwest. Even so, to Brite's contemporary vampires, the name of New Orleans is like a mantra, offering a home and safety, and we see them still living there fifty years from now.

The presentation of the traditional milieu of the American countryside as a breeding place for family violence and incest is not new nor is it unique to recent vampire fiction. I would suggest, however, that contemporary vampire fiction on the whole investigates these issues in a progressive way. I have shown how one of its aims is the exposure of family malignity wherever it occurs. In Nancy A. Collins's Sunglasses After Dark, Catherine Wheele's evil and psychosis are linked directly to her violent and abusive upbringing:

> She'd come into the world squalling white trash... the third of eight children... Her mama had named her Kathy-Mae, and she was just another snot-nosed, scabby-kneed, malnourished yard ape destined to grow up hard and ignorant in the Carolina hills[20].

Her mother was prematurely aged by hardship, repression and abuse, and her father was out of work and prone to drunken violence. His drunken tirades were "a daily occurrence- like

[20] Sunglasses After Dark; p.174

breakfast and dinner, only far more reliable"[21]. When he found out that Catherine talked to an imaginary friend, Sally, he took her to a preacher "so she could be saved proper"[22]. This Deacon Jonas did by showing her "his thing. Even though she was only six, Kathy-Mae had already seen several of them and was not particularly scared or impressed by the deacon's"[23]. Catherine reached the age of twelve and her periods started, and one night soon after, her father hit her and

> dragged her out to the toolshed behind the house and raped her on the rough plank floor until her buttocks were full of splinters. He left her huddled atop a pile of old burlap sacks, her eyes swollen and crotch bleeding[24].

At this, her mind divided. Her imaginary friend Sally returned that night, and as if in a dream, she killed her whole family and burned the house to the ground. She went through a succession of foster homes "where she was mistreated and malnourished"[25] for two years- "being an orphan wasn't too different from the life she'd known before her family was destroyed"[26]- and then joined the carnival. Here she met Zebulon Wheele who, as old and violent as her father, beat her when he got drunk and she displeased him.

Far from a mere stereotype of twisted country life, these events offer motivation and an investigation into the psychological development of a fairly rounded character. Although

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[21] Sunglasses After Dark; p.174

[22] Sunglasses After Dark; p.175

[23] Sunglasses After Dark; p.175

[24] Sunglasses After Dark; p.176

[25] Sunglasses After Dark; p.179

[26] Sunglasses After Dark; p.179

Catherine seems intended to be viewed as an almost unequivocally evil character, the description of her childhood trauma offers a sympathetic and plausible explanation for her drive for power and self-determination. The psychic dislocation and schizophrenic aspects of her response to her rape are feasible reactions, and have been documented in many fictional and non-fictional accounts by rape victims[27].

* * *

As well as interrogating the idea of 'normal' environments, the novels also concern themselves with conventional family roles. The abusive model of Catherine's father in Sunglasses After Dark is contrasted in the novel with the decent fatherhood of Denise Thorne's father, Jacob, showing that there is no simple link between traditional families and abusive and dysfunctional ones. Jacob is a fairly conventional upper middle-class father, the breadwinner, the businessman, while his wife, Shirley, does not work. He leads family decision-making and does not make a conscious effort to empower his wife or daughter. He does, however, take some part in domestic affairs. When Denise was born, he

> scandalized his in-laws by refusing to hire a nurse for their grandchild. For the first six months of his daughter's life he changed diapers, walked the floor, and administered three o'clock feedings, just like any other father would[28].

Although he does not seem to become an involved father as an ideological statement, his

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[27] Fiction including Children of the Night and Sins of the Blood and various non-fictional sources including Shere Hite; The Hite Report on the Family: Growing Up Under Patriarchy; Sceptre (London, 1995)

[28] Sunglasses After Dark; p.203

parenthood is seen positively. This part of his character may seem relatively minor, but it is important. The subtext of Collins's character sketch of Jacob Thorne is that a father who changes his baby's nappies will not be abusive, and is ultimately loving. It is not necessary to say that Thorne did not rape or beat his daughter or wife; it is implied in this passage. In the context of this characterization, it can be argued that the slightest subversion, even if not conscious, of patriarchal roles seems to interrogate the wider system and make patriarchally justified abuse almost impossible.

Catherine's mother, Hannah, and Shirley Thorne are very different but ultimately share remarkably similar roles. Hannah is beaten by her husband and lives a hard life caring for her eight children on the cusp of poverty, and doing backbreaking chores. She seldom speaks and "Catherine could not remember her mother smiling or laughing[29]. Shirley has one daughter and a rich, successful husband, does not work and lives in a wealthy neighbourhood. Both, however, are in subordinate roles to their husbands, and neither has much self-awareness or the opportunity to fulfil herself. They are both ultimately their husbands' wives, and both seem resigned to this. Shirley is not oppressed in a physical way, but also lacks selfhood and is emotionally weakened. When Denise disappears, in a token of her dependence, she sinks into melancholia which she is unable to break.

Lost Souls offers some interesting perspectives on family relationships and roles. The family dynamics of the vampire characters are very different from the abusive and negligent fatherhood of Simon Bransby and the indifferent parenting by Nothing's foster-parents. It is interesting to note that even the amoral and inhuman vampires in Brite's novel do sometimes

[29] Sunglasses After Dark; p.174

betray aspects of typical human patriarchal intra-family relations. Nothing and Zillah are, at first, lovers, then it is discovered that Zillah is Nothing's father. That they continue as lovers is not unusual to them (although of great shock value to the reader), as the vampires here are a separate race from humans and not subject to human taboos. Zillah is the embodiment of Nothing's wishes for home, identity and meaning in life, and their relationship, in many ways, seems to be a romantic ideal. At times, however, Zillah behaves just like bad human fathers. Nothing needs identity and acceptance and expresses a close empathy with Ghost, who he feels understands him. Zillah perceives this need as a weakness, and responds, "I know who you are too. You're a pretty little boy who hasn't learned his place yet. You're a pest who is going to have his throat ripped out in about two minutes..."[30]. This threat could be uttered by a drunk, violent human father. There comes a time when Nothing feels that Zillah should behave more like a good human parent:

> 'You don't treat me like your son- you treat me like I'm half sex slave and half lapdog. When I'm good, you pat me on the head, and when I fuck up you yell at me and hurt me. But you never explain anything to me. What kind of a father are you, anyway?'[31]

Nothing, raised for fifteen years as a human, cannot be unaffected by his upbringing. Although he was always uncomfortable in his suburban surroundings, he carries many human ideas about families with him into his new life. This makes him uneasy when trying to discard it all and quickly take on the alien lifestyle of a vampire.

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[30] Lost Souls; p.183

The treatment of mothers in the book is fascinating. Mothers are generally absent in Lost Souls, and part of the widespread surrogacy is a compensation for lost mothers. As is characteristic of Brite's work, there are very few female characters, and only one of these is a biological mother. This is Jessy, who was a human girl of around sixteen when Zillah seduced her and they conceived Nothing. Jessy, like all women who give birth to vampire babies, dies in childbirth, as the baby eats its way out of the womb:

> Jessy screamed until she could scream no more, and her eyes showed only the whites with their silvery rims, and great gouts of blood poured from her. When the baby slipped out of Jessy, its head turned and its eyes met Christian's: confused, intelligent, innocent. A shred of deep pink tissue was caught in the tiny mouth, softening between the working gums[32].

This is a rich image, almost a creation myth explaining and justifying violence and misogyny among the vampire race. Vampirism descends patriarchally here, and the mother is little more than an incubator to vampires. There is no female vampire in this book, and if there were, a conceptual difficulty in the context, she would be less powerful, unable to create a further vampire in the line. This can perhaps be seen as reference to the vampiric nature of inherited power structures in an ideal patriarchy, with dominant powers perpetually feeding on those they subordinate. The image of the vampire baby emerging bloody-teethed from the womb also points toward embedded psychosexual horror imagery like the vagina dentata, and alludes to the hereditary nature of violence. The male baby emerges after destroying his mother, the first archetype of power and life in his existence, and looks to the male influence

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[31] Lost Souls; p.288

of Christian for guidance. At the same time he also bears the teeth in her vagina dentata. For an uncanny moment he is an innocent killer, and simultaneously the embodiment of a glorious male victory and of a primal male nightmare.

The inheritance of violence through blood relationships is a primary concern of Sins of the Blood. Rusch's vampire society, like Brite's, is also male-dominated and misogynist. In this case, there is a clearer allegorical correlation between vampire and human misogynist violence. Opening with the vicious confrontation between Cammie's mother and father, Rusch demonstrates the bloody nature of a vampire father. Their argument is about their son, Ben, whom the father feels he owns. "My son is wearing his travelling clothes," he shouts, "...You were going to take my son"[33]. Then he makes clear his views on the power relations within their marriage: "You are my wife, Laura. You go nowhere without my permission and you go nowhere without me. Is that clear?"[34] The only part of this scene which does not directly parallel an argument in an abusive human household is the father sucking his wife's blood until she is dead. For the next few years, Cammie and Ben are raised negligently and abusively by their father, who beats them regularly. He sleeps in the day and demands that they are silent while he does. When Ben has the TV on too loud one day, he gags him and ties him up in the cellar. He rapes Cammie when she is eight years old. Cammie, by this stage, has completely taken on her mother's role of protecting Ben, and she soon feels forced to stake him to protect them both.

Normal-seeming places and traditional families, then, are presented in these novels as the

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[32] Lost Souls; pp.9-10

[33] Sins of the Blood; p.2

[34] Sins of the Blood; p.2

places where abuse and trauma hide, most often undetected. Children are neglected and misunderstood. Men beat and rape their wives and children, repress them, control them economically, and manipulate them emotionally and psychologically. Vampire malignity in conventional family and abode is often aimed to compare to similar human evil, and misogyny is presented as a mirror to reflect and condemn human brutality and hatred.

* * *

The novels often postulate serious psychological effects of traumatic upbringings. In many cases the novels use the motif of vampirism as a vehicle to raise the issue of humans scarred by abuse. The psychological effects of trauma on children are often due to the fact that their roles in dysfunctional families are almost impossible to define. In Sins of the Blood, Cammie, at the age of eight, must deal with being a mother to her brother and a lover to her father, not to mention being concerned about her own development. At this stage her father, her only parent, is her primary moral guide, and she does not have formed ideas about what he should or should not do. When her father rapes her, her initial reaction is to try to get away, but he holds her down and says, "Oh, no, sweetness. Daddy loves you"[35]. She has a mixed feeling of "fear and excitement"[36], but the fear overwhelms, along with the pain, and as he rapes her, she stares at the light fixture, which "started to spin. It whirled round and round, faster and faster, taking her somewhere else, away from all this pain"[37]. And when it was over,

> he tugged her nightgown down, and pulled the covers over her, folding them over her

[35] Sins of the Blood; p.309

[36] Sins of the Blood; p.309

[37] Sins of the Blood; p.309

> chest like they did on television. He kissed her forehead. A light kiss, barely a brush.
>
> ‘Sleep well, Camila, ‘ he said... all shadow and blackness. So big, like a monster from the dark.
>
> ‘Good night, Daddy,’ she said, then rolled over, and tried to go back to sleep[38].

This is an emblematic scene, epitomizing the utter confusion created by a sexually abusive father, who to his daughter is simultaneously a loving, nurturing father and a monstrous rapist. This complex attitude toward her father haunts Cammie throughout her life. At the very end of the novel, Cammie is about to enter a programme of rehabilitative therapy. She killed her father decades before, and spent time trying to deal with the pain and anguish, but she highlights the most confusing aspect of dealing with the legacy of an abusive father:

> The thing they never told anyone, the thing the experts never put in the books... was the love.
>
> He had been the only father she had ever had. Despite what he’d done to her, she had loved him...
>
> And she would have to live with that forever[39].

Abuse creates guilt and shame for loving. Cammie, like many rape victims, must feel ashamed because of the mixed excitement and fear, the mingled love and terror she feels. This plays itself out later in her life, when it is evident that she fears a relationship with a man. She flinches when a man makes a sudden gesture, thinking he will hit her. She considers her caring and supportive friend, Brett:

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[38] Sins of the Blood; p.310

> She glanced at him sideways, wondering what was wrong with her. He was intelligent, attractive and well off. They shared the same taste in books, films and food. They had wonderful discussions... she had never seen him do anything violent. He was safe. He was smart, he was gentle and he scared her[40].

She can only relate to men whom she sees as safe, and even a gentle one like Brett, simply because he is a man, scares her. When it comes to sexuality, however, her experience has taught her to equate sex and violence and the most visceral attraction she feels for a man is for Ben. He turns out to be as abusive as their father was, and she is seduced by him. Even he is safe to her, because he is so like their father that the patterns are in many ways familiar and comfortable. When, like their father, he intends to rape her, he uses the phrase, "we're going to have a party, just you and I"[41]. This is the same twisted phrase that her father used when he raped her. She ultimately stakes Ben, repeating yet another pattern. Even the job she has been working at since before she remembers her past, that of vampire eradication, shows how she seems almost inevitably drawn to violence, a direct result of her upbringing. As Thornton, a police officer involved in cases dealing with children, dismissively notes, "kids become their parents"[42].

The progress of Cammie's character in the novel takes her through a gradual recollection of the events of her past, to the understanding that she was born of a vampire and has a great chance of becoming one, as Ben did. In the end, she chooses to seek rehabilitation, a possible

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[39] Sins of the Blood; p.357

[40] Sins of the Blood; p.96

[41] Sins of the Blood; p.308

way to prevent full vampirism coming on, to try to stop herself from becoming her father. This is clearly comparable to an abused child's gradual understanding of the meaning of what happened in her childhood, and movement toward dealing with its consequences through a process of therapy, all in an attempt to avoid repeating the cycle, and passing the trauma down a further generation. The conflict within Cammie's character between sinking into old patterns and breaking them by way of self-awareness is reflected in the broader concern of the novel with violence in general. Violence breeds violence if it is unchallenged, and even when it is, the battle may not be won, the scars are so deep. When the novel finishes, we do not know whether Cammie becomes a vampire or whether she is successful in challenging her past.

The book is full of the wraith-like, emotionally torn and afraid victims of abuse. Some minor characters further illustrate the concerns of the novel, pressing home the important point that abuse is widespread, not an isolated occurrence. Cammie meets the young girl, Janie, on a legitimate eradication mission after staking Janie's father. The shock of seeing a little girl in the house of a vampire initiates the return of her memories. Until then, she had blocked out even the fact that vampires could have children within a few years of turning. Janie is a child from a normal-seeming environment, who seemed to have "everything a little girl could want. Pretty dresses, a nice room, toys. Everything but parents"[43]. She is another victim of a vampire father, who grieves over his death and is terrified of Cammie, his murderer. When Cammie tries to visit Janie to see how she is, Janie screams and tries to hide. Anita, Cammie's superior, explains, "don't you understand? She hates women. Her father taught her that

[42] Sins of the Blood; p.235

[43] Sins of the Blood; p.30

women are dangerous and you proved it by killing him"[44]. Similarly scarred is Mary Jo, who does not cry, and who can only explain her feelings by transferring them onto her doll. At another eradication site, a little boy, much like Ben was, "his face a mass of bruises, one eye swollen shut... his voice tight with fear"[45], warns that his daddy is asleep.

In Sunglasses After Dark, Catherine's background is perhaps not expressed as a direct cause of her evil character, but the inclusion of these details certainly allows the reader to feel more sympathetic toward her, perhaps too sympathetic to feel pleasure at her ugly demise. The psychological effects of her childhood are clearly evident. She, like Cammie, is prone to repeating abusive patterns in her life. She marries thirty-two year old Zebulon when she is fifteen, quickly replacing her father. We do see, however, that after he dies, she takes complete control of her life, breaking the cycles of harmful dependence. The first time she cedes control is decades later. She is in the process of seducing Claude, an enemy of hers. She is Real[46], and by this stage has developed powerful psychic abilities, and is able to control men with her mind. He realizes that she is trying to trick him and he almost strangles her to death before she manages to kill him with her mind. She is overwhelmed and enraged: "There was no way she could hurt him enough for what he'd done to her. No one, but *no one* treated her like that!"[47] Sally, her psychic Other, taunts her by telling her just how she has been treated: while being strangled almost to death, Catherine has just experienced her first orgasm. Catherine's experience, like that of Cammie, has taught her to equate violence and sexuality. The humiliation caused by being aroused by the attack, as well as the loss of control it has brought, angers her. Complete command of her body and sexual control are how Catherine

[44] Sins of the Blood; p.85

[45] Sins of the Blood; p.119

[46] One of various semi-supernatural and psychic beings who live among humans.

has managed to escape being a perpetual victim of violence. It is important to her to retain this at all times.

Catherine, like Cammie, is affected by repressed memories. The recollection of her past also dawns gradually upon her, and the process is frightening: "She didn't like thinking about her family... it triggered the things lurking at the corners of her eyes"[48]. Catherine is literally haunted by ghosts from her past. Her murdered family, and later Zebulon, sit in the audience at her televangelism gatherings, and wander about her rooms. This unsettles her, but she hides her distress behind a shot or two of whiskey. Like the 'monster from the dark' of Cammie's nightmares, Catherine's ghosts need to be exorcised. She does not seek therapy, but tries to rid herself of the memories by retaining total control of her mind, but when she starts to lose self-control and the memories insinuate their way back into her psyche, the results are devastating. She cannot hide from her past forever, and eventually each of the ghosts of her family physically claims its pound of flesh from her, and they leave her a desiccated corpse.

Claudia, in Interview With the Vampire, is also affected by the psychological consequences of childhood pain. Her mother died of cholera when she was five, and she was turned and adopted by Louis and Lestat soon afterwards. Physically, she remains a five year old girl for the rest of her life. She experiences natural grief for her mother, but is never able to gain closure by growing up into a woman herself. Throughout her life, she tries to find substitutes both for her lost mother and her lost womanhood, which she equates. Claudia, teased by an immortality of having womanhood just out of reach, hates Lestat for having turned her so early. She must experience her womanhood vicariously, and demands that Madeleine, a

[47] Sunglasses After Dark; p.228

mother who has lost her child, be made a vampire with whom she can spend her immortality. When Madeleine is turned, Claudia relates to her in a complex way, in part as a vicarious experience of womanhood, in part as a mother and in part as a doll, a perfect image of what she would one day have liked to be. Madeleine, in turn, seems "excited by the diminutive beauty, the awful woman's-passion knotted in the small dimpled hands"[49]. She needs Claudia because she loves "Claudia's beautiful surface, Claudia's quiet, Claudia's dominance and control"[50]. Claudia, to Madeleine, is a strong child who will not die, and a dominant reason to live.

At first, Claudia's combination of vampire and child makes a dangerous mix. As Louis relates,

> she was simply unlike Lestat and me to such an extent I couldn't comprehend her; for little child she was, but also fierce killer now capable of the ruthless pursuit of blood with all a child's demanding[51].

Claudia soon becomes an adult intellectually and emotionally, and part of the response to her afflictions is that she grows up cold and fierce, loving only Louis, and later Madeleine in a lesser way. She often hides her pain behind a detached and enigmatic veneer. Louis tells that "Claudia was mystery. It was not possible to know what she knew or did not know. And to watch her kill was chilling"[52]. The uneasy mixture of girlhood and adulthood is strangely

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[48] Sunglasses After Dark; p.171

[49] Interview With the Vampire; p.282

[50] Interview With the Vampire; p.312

[51] Interview With the Vampire; p.108

[52] Interview With the Vampire; p.111

sensual to Louis, to whom death and danger are alluring. Claudia's eyes betray her sophistication, and

> there was something dreadfully sensual about her lounging on the settee in a tiny nightgown of lace and stitched pearls; she became an eerie and powerful seductress, her voice as clear and sweet as ever, though it had a resonance which was womanish, a sharpness sometimes that proved shocking[53].

Claudia's shocking ambiguity can in some ways be paralleled with the confusion evident in a young girl like Cammie, forced into womanhood too early by abuse. Although no overt moral judgement on any form of sexual conduct is betrayed in the novel[54], inferences can justifiably be made. Claudia's hatred for Lestat could be compared to an abused daughter's hatred for

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[53] Interview With the Vampire; p.113

[54] In Michael Riley's fascinating Interview With Anne Rice; Chatto & Windus (London, 1996), Anne Rice discusses her views on incest and the eroticization of family relations:

"RICE: Another thing that fascinates me for reasons I don't know is incest... the love between people who are so close that the world really should stand back with a little respect for the way that closeness can sometimes become erotic...

"RILEY: The relationship between parents and children is one of the most persistent themes in your novels, and it's almost always highly eroticized.

"RICE: I think I go through the world seeing everything as highly sensuous and erotic... The erotic and the wholesome are not mutually exclusive... With both my children, the principal thing I felt was utterly abandoned to the pure, sensuous enjoyment of kissing them and hugging them and how sweet and cuddly and soft and silky they were. There's never been anything genitally arousing or disturbing about it. There's never been any conflict in my mind. What we have to remember when we're talking about things like this, of course, is that I'm a woman. When I say something is erotic, it's very different from a man saying it... Louis's relationship with Claudia... doesn't disturb me because I never had any feelings toward my sisters or toward my daughter that I thought were forbidden or dark or unwholesome... Perhaps I'm using the wrong word; perhaps what seems erotic to other people is not erotic to me. Perhaps it's just sensuous, truly sensuous. I loved describing Claudia's bonnets and her ribbons... from Louis's point of view. Maybe for someone else that does have a terribly transgressive overtone, but it doesn't for me." (pp.63-4)

her father for stunting her emotional growth. In Claudia we see a tortured and complex attitude toward her father-lover (similar to Cammie's) when she says, "I love you still, that's the torment of it... The measure of my hatred is that love. They are the same! Do you know how much I hate you!"[55] Complex reactions form in response to their complicated circumstances.

Many characters in the novels make the mistake of reacting to the symptoms rather than dealing with the causes of their trauma. The abused characters in the novels are often unaware of the consequences of their abuse, and are unwilling to stir up harsh memories. The message pervades, however, that the past will emerge, that the repressed will return, hardly better expressed than through the figure of the vampire which is an embodiment of revenant fears, desires and complexes. The therapeutic process is often frightening. As Maud Ellmann explains, there is a long and interesting tradition warning against the danger of the "backward glance"[56]. She explains that the art of looking to the past to understand the present is the prerogative of gods and priests, not common people. Orpheus, Oedipus and Lot's wife were all punished for the audacity of the 'backward glance'. Each has tried either to reverse the dark past, or to use the light of the past to illuminate the present. This superstition may in part have fed into the public outcry against Freud's dabbling with the unconscious and the spheres of dreams and libido. These were places where people received messages from God, and were not to be desanctified by attempts to comprehend them. The message sent by writers of contemporary vampire novels, however, is that childhood trauma will bear consequences which may well be destructive if not understood. Although risky and painful, some

[55] Interview With the Vampire; p.284

[56] Maud Ellmann (ed.); Psychoanalytic Literary Criticism; Longman Critical Readers, Longman (London, 1994); p.8

therapeutic process is necessary to heal wounds inflicted in the past.

The Oedipus complex points toward many manifestations of violence in the family, but unlike child abuse, it is mainly concerned with children's exhibition of violent and sexual urges toward their parents. The novels present many variations on the Oedipal theme, and although some may not hold strictly to the psychoanalytical delimitations of the Oedipus complex, the variations are important to note. Indeed, the fact that there are many variations on the traditional Oedipal theme points towards this branch of popular fiction's problematization and deepening investigation of families, even down to the psychological aspects of roles within traditional family structures.

Contemporary vampire fiction's major departures from conventional Oedipalism are concomitant with the prevalence of bisexuality in the novels and with the female lead characters in many of the novels. Freud argued for an Oedipus complex in both boys and girls, the boy's involved with taking his father's place and the girl's with replacing her mother. This is based on a heterosexual conception of sex. As is demonstrated in Lost Souls, the genre sometimes even questions whether a son would not rather take the place of his mother as his father's lover. Nothing, in a remarkable reversal of Oedipalism, kills his mother as he is born, and sleeps with his father. On the other hand, the novel also shocks us with the actualization of conventional Oedipal desire, when Jessy seduces and sleeps with her father. The contemporary vampire story creates its own Oedipal myth, a gender-subversive one, in which a child of either sex may choose to destroy either parent, in order to take the place of the other. Far from a mere dilution of psychoanalytical discipline, this is important evidence of the role of popular fiction in subverting and modernizing conventional cultural wisdom, which is created in part by Freudian and neo-Freudian ideas.

This subversion is abetted by the masculinization of the female characters. Strong female leads often usurp active, previously male-dominated roles in the narratives. In Sins of the Blood, for example, Cammie actively takes charge of her life by making the decision to kill her father. Unlike Lost Souls, where most of the Oedipal desires are actually enacted on real family members, most characters in the other novels sublimate their urges through surrogacy. Cammie, again repeating acquired patterns of behaviour, kills Ben once he has become an abusive father-figure to her, and in turn pre-empts Ben's own Oedipal process by staking Mikos, his surrogate father. In Sunglasses After Dark, although Catherine acts out one part of an Oedipal process by killing her real mother with the rest of the family, she then marries Zebulon, feeling what it was like to be in her mother's place, with Zebulon as a substitute father. Claudia in Interview With the Vampire sees Lestat as the more masculine of her two fathers and her hatred of him is an Oedipal variation. Louis is the caring, nurturing father, more a mother-father figure to her, as well as a lover. She is jealous of Lestat's relationship with Louis, and tries to kill him and usurp his role of husband to Louis.

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The subversion of the Oedipus complex is a reflection of the general concern within contemporary vampire fiction to question conventional notions of family. Having shown how the fiction depicts traditional places and familial roles, the abuse that often hides behind them and its psychological effects, it is useful to discuss the alternative views on family structures the fiction proposes as options.

Being born into the adversities of a violent or negligent family often leads to characters

questioning notions of home, name and identity. As discussed, in Lost Souls, Nothing's idea of home is closely tied to his developing sense of identity. He does not see Maryland as his home, and yearns for New Orleans, to which he has never travelled, where he feels he might really be at home. Nothing's name is also important to him, as if name is almost directly equated to being. When his foster parents find him on their doorstep, there is a note attached to his blanket reading, "His name is Nothing. Care for him and he will bring you luck"[57]. They rename him Jason and take him in, as Nothing observes, receiving bad luck for their trouble, possibly for the presumption of changing his name and trying to make him "one of their kind"[58]. When Nothing finds the note

> he ceased to be Jason. He became Nothing, for that was what the note named him. He still answered to Jason, but the name was like an echo of a half-forgotten life. *I am Nothing*, his mind whispered. *I am Nothing*. He liked the name. It did not make him feel worthless; on the contrary, he began to think of himself as a blank slate upon which anything could be written. The words he inscribed on his soul were up to him. He grew taller, and some of the flesh of childhood melted from his bones[59].

To Nothing, his name is a mystical path. If name is seen to predestine and define identity, Nothing's frees him to create his own. The note is like a scripture, written Truth, and he accepts the tidings, 'for that is what the note named him'. Losing the bland mantle of Jason, he now knows he does not belong in this suburban society and is not 'one of their kind'. He revels even in the act of signing his name,

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[57] Lost Souls; p.72

[58] Lost Souls; p.72

[59] Lost Souls; p.73

> the point of his *t* a dagger, the tail of his *g* an extravagant loop. This was the name Christian had given him, that undeniably belonged to him now. He would write it every chance he got. He signed the note again, then a third time, making the letters sprawl wildly across the page: *Nothing, Nothing, Nothing*[60].

Having a new name liberates him to choose his own path, and his parent's plans for him are no longer valid. This knowledge makes him grow more mature- 'taller'- and he revels in the responsibility of seeking his own destiny. This is a quasi-religious quest, Nothing perhaps playing a fisher-king role searching for the grail of self-awareness. This eclectic spiritual significance continues, down to his baptism in his mother's blood being watched over by Christian. Clearly, knowing who he is not frees Nothing to search, on his own terms, for who he is. In the spirit of Kerouac, Nothing undertakes his own Zen road trip, in a divine state of not-knowing, on the way to New Orleans, his spiritual nirvana. Once he reaches it, he feels assimilated to his real identity. He is no longer ashamed of his name or nature. When Wallace Creech challenges him and asks him who he is, "something rebelled at denying his name. It was truly his now, and he would claim it, 'My name is Nothing,' he said"[61]. Knowing his name and his home gives Nothing a serene confidence. Once he has arrived in New Orleans, in ownership of his name, he sets out to stake his claim on the city of his birth: "Now he would go out and discover the streets that were his home"[62].

Just as an adolescent's home may be found outside the household of his birth or upbringing,

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[60] Lost Souls; pp. 281-2

[61] Lost Souls; p.285

[62] Lost Souls; p.282

so can identity be formed outside the traditional family. This type of freedom of association is prevalent throughout the novels. Characters who have not been sufficiently nurtured often take it upon themselves to define their own family and their own home, often through surrogacy, a conscious or unconscious search to fulfil their frustrated needs. A family of self-chosen surrogates often proves to be a liberation from stifling norms and traditional roles, and these new families often succeed, where dysfunctional biological families fail, in providing them with a sense of belonging and identity.

The biological families in Interview With the Vampire have an interesting effect on the characters in the novel. On one hand, they show a remarkable lack of impact on the characters, but on the other, most of the vampires choose surrogates in response to losing family members. Louis's own mother reports him to the police when she wrongly suspects him of killing his brother. He related well, in fact, to his brother, who was more nurturing and supportive of him than his mother, and regularly favours the company of men, except for Claudia. In some ways, it is the loss of his brother for which Louis seeks to compensate in his choice of close friends. Both Lestat and Armand fill the role of Louis's lost brother-mother. It has already been discussed how Claudia uses Madeleine in part as a substitute for her lost mother, and, in turn, stands in for Madeleine's dead daughter.

In Interview With the Vampire, Lestat's character remains a mystery, and we are unable to perceive his psychological motivations as clearly as those of the other characters. When he meets Louis, however, his bed-ridden biological father is still alive, and is often bullied by Lestat. Lestat shouts at his father, "Don't I provide for your every want! Stop whining to me about going to church or old friends! Such nonsense. Your old friends are dead. Why don't

you die and leave me and my bankroll in peace![63]. This in an interesting inversion of the balance of economic power in the family. Lestat wields economic might over his father. The main motivation for his cruelty is revenge. His father, when his authority controlled the family, removed the brilliant Lestat from school and burned his library. He is still a young vampire, and his anger cannot remain continuously intense. Lestat's tie to his father is his last link to his humanity, and is the only sphere where he allows himself to show kindness. This he manifests alternately with his cruel bouts of taunting, which "fits were no more frequent than periods of near obsequious kindness when Lestat would bring his father supper on a tray and feed him patiently while talking of the weather and the New Orleans news"[64].

Lost Souls starts with Jessy conceiving Nothing, being cared for by Christian who hesitantly also has sex with her, and her inevitable death while giving birth to Nothing. The novel thus opens with a child-mother, a child fathered, a surrogate father-lover and an equation of sexuality, birth and death. Distorted notions of family pervade the book. Given the dearth of established family structures in the novel, which has been discussed, it is not surprising that nearly every close relationship fulfils a need for something otherwise lacking, and can be understood in terms of surrogacy. Steve and Ghost share a complex and passionately close friendship:

> Steve had thought of himself as Ghost's protector because he was a year older and because... reality was often too much for Ghost; it could puzzle and hurt him. Sometimes it seemed that Ghost consented to live in the world only because Steve was there...

[63] Interview With the Vampire; p.42

> Ghost was so damned important, so valuable. When Ghost was along, ordinary surroundings... became strange, maybe threatening, maybe wild and beautiful... [Steve] credited Ghost with saving his imagination from the death-in-life of adolescence... fearless old Steve Finn... The protector. Yeah, right[65].

When they first meet, boys of ten and eleven, Steve is captivated by Ghost's calm and the comfort he feels around him. Steve's feelings at the first meeting are described as, "not quite déjà vu; it was not so unsettling, but it was somehow *familiar*. When he remembered it now, Steve thought that it was not so much like meeting a friend as like recognizing one"[66]. Brite's italicization of 'familiar' thrusts home the point that here the boys found family. They are brothers after this moment. Steve is seen as the big brother figure of the two, but as is explained, he needs Ghost just as much. Ghost, in turn, being raised by old and distant magic-using relatives, feels the need for a close familial bond, which he finds in Steve.

The need for belonging and acceptance expressed in surrogacy is also expressed by an urge to become part of a vampire family. In Lost Souls, children are lured toward vampirism because it is both a tolerant system and a system with rules and a hierarchy. It seems to embody the best of both a traditional and non-traditional family. It imposes an order which may be lacking in negligent families, but an order that is not too harsh, offering space for individual expression and experimentation (the sexual and transgressive aspects of which will be discussed in chapter 3 below). Nothing's vampire family of Zillah, Twig and Molochai are simply an ideal-seeming family, even with the occasional flaring of father-son tension

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[64] Interview With the Vampire; p.42

[65] Lost Souls; pp.40-1

[66] Lost Souls; p.52

between Zillah and Nothing. They are vice-ridden and most often indulgent, but still offer identity and belonging. Kinsey Hummingbird is a human with more of a social conscience. He opens the Sacred Yew as a place where the teenagers of Missing Mile can gather and feel at home, and have a cheap meal and some music to listen to. He makes sure that they only drink beer. 'The Yew' is presented as the only centre of real humanity in the town.

As we have seen, the choice of substitute family members is not always a positive move toward healing and fulfilment. Catherine's choice of Zebulon as husband, and Cammie's choice of Ben as lover show how this choice is sometimes a repetition of a damaging pattern. They choose these partners unconsciously to replace their fathers and the abuse they received from them. Although Cammie knows that she could probably love and be loved by Brett, she is unable to commit herself to trying the relationship. Her psyche pulls her toward familiar patterns. The role of victim of abuse and dependant has become comfortable over time, bred into her from girlhood, and the healthy choice of a non-abusive partner is a frightening step into the unknown.

* * *

The widespread thematization of dysfunctional and violent family structures illustrates the important place of social commentary in contemporary vampire fiction. In most cases, the abusive family is not a primary concern of the novel, but rather part of a complex of thematic detail demonstrating the genre's unpreparedness simply to accept received and superficial notions of normality. Details often taken for granted as background in other genres, like heterosexual nuclear family structures and traditional settings, are foregrounded and challenged here. Each of the novels contains some radical thematic or story element, from

Rusch's denial of plot closure and Collins's smudging of the traditional polarities between good and evil, to Rice's and Brite's overt revamping of both familial definitions and, as discussed in the next chapters, notions of sexual identity. The evils committed in the family behind veneers of 'normality' are often interchangeably human or vampire. No longer is the monster Other. By centralizing the character of the vampire, writers elucidate its needs, its motivations, its desires, and make the monster one of us. The vampire is assimilated into our society, at home in our type of town, and our type of family.

Chapter Three

Transgressive Sexuality in the Contemporary Vampire Novel

Vampires and humans share a complex relationship. At times, the vampire is part of us, in us, an expression of some dark part of our psyche. At others it is aloof, a member of another race, a paradigm either to be abhorred or aspired to. A defining feature of both vampires and humans, however, is that their sexuality is central to their constitution. This is one way in which we are bound. The portrayal of sexuality in the contemporary vampire novel is most often subversive, challenging sexual taboos and polarities constructed by dominant society. This chapter will focus on transgressive sexuality and will show how the portrayal of this type of sexual expression, both vampire and human, is a further part in the genre's interrogation of traditional conceptions of normality. I will discuss how Anne Rice's presentation of the vampire and vampirism is important in creating a picture of the vampire in the mind of the modern reader, which includes its indefinable, transgressive and multiple nature. Her characterization is most often used as a basis for subsequent portrayals.

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A central feature of vampiric sexuality, and the one which most clearly links it to many human transgressive activities, is its subversion of polarities. Sue-Ellen Case's theory of queerness, Jonathan Dollimore's notions of sexual dissidence, the perverse dynamic, and the figure of the proximate have been discussed in chapter one. Case's queers are boundary-breakers. The heterosexist dominant Otherizes the queer, but simultaneously makes it a focal point of heterosexual definition. The queer uses this marginalized but paradoxically highly

visible position as a powerful platform for launching challenges on traditional perceptions of normality. Dollimore's explanation of sexual dissidence and the perverse dynamic shows how they offer a similar challenge to patriarchal polarities, and threaten to unsettle the very distinction between dominant and subordinate.

I would argue that the vampire could take Dollimore's theory one step further. Whereas Dollimore posits a blurring of the line between dominant and subordinate via sexual dissidence, I would argue that vampiric sexuality produces a blurring of definition of all sorts of sexuality, bringing into question not only those sexualities directly within the dominant-subordinate framework. Dollimore primarily focuses on the opposition between the homosexual subordinate and the heterosexual dominant. The vampire, however, calls into play various sexualities and sexual expressions which may fall somewhere in the grey area between these political contestations.

Vampires are, I would argue, primarily fetishists, as are many of the humans they relate to. Fetishism, including many types of non-genitalized sexuality, is a multi-faceted class of sexual expression and not as easily classifiable as homosexuality, either by dominant or subordinate groups, and therefore not as easily politicized. People who enjoy various fetishes may be gay or straight or bisexual, just as blood-drinkers and death-worshippers are women or men most often with no particular sexual allegiance. The fact that in terms of Dollimore's notion of sexual dissidence, we can still define what is dominant and what is subordinate, shows that the polarities are still intact, even if challenged. It can therefore be seen that politicization affords us some stability of sexual identity. The vampire novels I am discussing go further in problematizing issues of sexual definition by making us unsure of whether there are boundaries, and if there are, where they are and on which side we lie. Fetishism, because it

is so varied in motive and expression, because it is positioned in a sexual grey area, and because it is not traditionally politicized, is one important pointer to the vampire's role in profoundly confusing sexual definition.

My focus in this chapter is on transgressive sexual choices and expression. I will examine manifestations of unconventional sexuality as they are reflected in the novels and whether they are presented as politically subversive or not. Nina Auerbach[1] argues that vampire fiction has become politically conservative since the 1980s. I investigate this issue in chapter five. While sexual transgression is sometimes used as an overt political statement, it more often subverts meaning and cosmology rather than, or as well as, narrow political ideology, and I would argue that it is on this more opaque level that alternative sexualities have a greater subversive effect. As discussed in chapter two, although rape and child abuse fall outside normal sexual practice, there is little or nothing subversive about this type of sexual expression, because although it may go against widely-held conceptions of morality, it does nothing to challenge the dominant conceptions which may be seen ultimately to give rise to it. This sort of sexual expression is thus outside the scope of this chapter.

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When considering the portrayal of vampiric sexuality, one cannot forget the sensual aspects of this portrayal. In Michael Riley's Interview With Anne Rice[2], Rice differentiates between sensuality and subject matter which is genitally arousing. This is an important distinction because although vampires are most often also presented as sexually exciting and physically

[1] Nina Auerbach; Our Vampires, Ourselves; University of Chicago Press (Chicago and London, 1995)

attractive, their sensual portrayal adds another dimension to their sexually transgressive natures. They do not only transgress in terms of physical sexuality. Their hedonism and the sometimes romantic aestheticism they enjoy in the act of feeding are among other sexual transgressions they enjoy.

This melded sensual and sexual portrayal of transgression is perhaps no more evident than in Interview With the Vampire. Rice has set a standard for the contemporary portrayal of the vampire, a mixture of magnetic sexuality and a transgressive aesthetic sensibility which in many ways serves as a template for subsequent characterizations. Her vampires' often amoral aestheticism and transgression of human norms are strikingly subversive, acting as a subversive model for individuals or subordinate groups who may want to challenge dominant morality. Rice's rich focus on appearance, costume and surroundings establishes the self-indulgent milieu in which much of Interview With the Vampire is set. While choosing the best and most luxurious surroundings and clothes available, Rice's vampires also show up the superficiality of human society. Clothes are a symbol of class and ethos. It is often hazardously taken for granted that a well-dressed gentleman will not be a blood-sucking murderer. They hide their vicious natures behind a veneer of genteel style, and nobody will try to investigate deeper into their character. They challenge the very validity of human morality, showing that it may be predicated on nothing more than stylish dressing.

Vampires are well-suited to using style to their advantage, most often seeming to have an inherent elegance. In one of the contemporary reader's first meetings with a narrator-vampire, Rice's Louis shows himself to his interviewer:

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[2] Michael Riley; Interview With Anne Rice; Chatto & Windus (London, 1996); see footnote 54 of chapter two.

> The vampire was utterly white and smooth, as if he were sculpted from bleached bone, and his face was seemingly as inanimate as a statue, except for two brilliant green eyes that looked down at the boy intently like flames in a skull. But then the vampire smiled almost wistfully, and the smooth white substance of his face moved with the infinitely flexible but minimal lines of a cartoon[3].

Another common characteristic is the vampire's duality. Louis here seems genderless, posited in a space of androgynous perfection. He is white and smooth, like a marble statue or idealized woman. He is also located somewhere between reality and illusion. He is a solid being in front of the boy, but his face moves disconcertingly like a cartoon, an illusion. With his wistful smile and intent look he is alluring, but at the same time, with his eyes like flames in a skull, he is horrifying. Within every glance, even his countenance shifts and denies definition.

The representation of the other three main vampires in Interview With the Vampire is equally effective in showing their sensual mix of allure and horror. When Lestat first shows himself to Louis, the yet-human Louis's reaction is almost like that of a smitten lover, deeply and dangerously hypnotized. He describes Lestat by his bedside:

> His gray eyes burned with an incandescence, and the long white hands which hung by his sides were not those of a human being... the moment I saw him, saw his extraordinary aura and knew him to be no creature I'd ever known, I was reduced to

[3] Interview With the Vampire; p.6

> nothing... All my conceptions, even my guilt and wish to die, seemed utterly unimportant. I completely forgot *myself!*[4]

In this scene, the vitality of Lestat, the living dead, draws Louis out of his degenerative and nihilist introversion with the power of his mysterious knowledge and with his sexual vitality. His knowledge is the prohibited knowledge of death, just as his sexuality is an expression of revitalized life beyond death. The vampire's cheating of the primal and natural cycle of death and birth is one of its fundamental transgressions. The price Louis pays for being lured from his death-wish is to become selfless, in some ways a slave to his master. A large part of Interview With the Vampire deals with Louis's quest to emancipate himself from Lestat's influence.

Hedonism, often extended to hedonistic sexual expression, is one way vampires show that they feel no tie to humanity and its rules. Rice's vampires choose their sexual partners for their aesthetic rather than their physical qualities. Louis is attracted by Lestat's fine taste in clothes, household decoration and wines which seem to reflect a discerning, and therefore attractive, mind. Lestat's taste for prettiness extends to his choice of beautiful prostitutes and delicate little boys as choice meals. In some ways, however, Lestat's taste is superficial. On the night he turns, Louis is fascinated by tiny details, which he now sees and hears amplified and transformed by his new vampire senses. He is captivated by the sight of his last sunrise, Lestat's laugh, his buttons, and, he explains, "when I saw the moon on the flagstones, I became so enamoured with it that I must have spent an hour there"[5]. Lestat is not sensitive to

[4] Interview With the Vampire; p.17

[5] Interview With the Vampire; p.25

these thrills, and Louis is angry that Lestat does not teach him to appreciate the sensual wonders of vampire existence.

Armand seems more able to appreciate the passionate art inhering in vampire life. He is described as the epitome of languid style. His mysterious classiness, at first seemingly aloof, clearly becomes part of a physical sexual allure. Louis describes how he is mesmerized by Armand:

> ...he seemed to smile without making even the slightest movement. I watched him all the harder, convinced it was some powerful illusion I could penetrate with keen attention... I had the urge to reach for him, to shake him violently so that his still face would move... and suddenly I found him pressed against me, his arm around my chest... his soft tasteless breath against my skin. It *was* delirium[6].

For Louis, Armand's apparent wisdom and intellectual allure lead directly to a delirious sensual allure. The homosexual interest between Louis, Lestat and Armand is often thus portrayed in Interview With the Vampire. The male vampires are primarily presented as soul-mates and fellow aesthetes, rather than physical lovers. Louis also mentions how he "was powerfully attracted"[7] by Armand's room in subterranean Paris. Its elegant simplicity and understated beauty seem to offer a window onto Armand's mind. Louis tells of the room that he "understood all of it"[8], and he appears hereby to understand something of Armand. Rather

[6] Interview With the Vampire; p.247

[7] Interview With the Vampire; p.252

[8] Interview With the Vampire; p.252

than falling into the human propensity for superficiality, Louis is incited by their shared aesthetic sense and desires to delve deeper into Armand's mind.

Though sexual acts are seldom directly referred to in the novel, sexuality pervades it. The prime example of this is the characterization of Claudia who, as discussed in chapter two, is a seductive and tantalizing vampiric woman-child. She is the most sensual in a series of sensual characters. She is also, in many ways, the most dangerous. Claudia's relationship with Louis is intense and destructive. She is mysterious, intelligent and talented. We are reminded that "Claudia was mystery. It was not possible to know what she knew or did not know"[9]. She is an odd child-figure, often to be found curled up reading Aristotle, Boethius or some contemporary novel or playing Mozart by ear. A major component, perhaps, of Louis's passion for her is a compulsive quest to tap the secret source of her knowledge. This passion for understanding is accompanied by a sexual passion. Louis tells us that although Claudia had her own coffin, "she did not sleep in it. She slept with me"[10] long after she has emotionally become a woman. Louis is an incestuous mix of lover and father-figure to Claudia. When Louis and Claudia argue, Louis feels "estranged from her and in agony, as if she'd been my bride"[11]. Claudia uses the vampire's seductive mixture of fierceness and sex when she invites Louis out: "She turned full around and put her hands on my face. 'Kill with me tonight,' she whispered as sensuously as a lover"[12]. In some ways Claudia is like a muse to Louis. She sparks his creativity and passion, but at the same time demands his devotion. She is an embodiment of vampiric duality, a sensuous, sexual, passionate, dominant and deeply intelligent five year old living dead woman-girl, playing with dolls between kills.

[9] Interview With the Vampire; p.111

[10] Interview With the Vampire; p.115

[11] Interview With the Vampire; p.122

Rice's vampires transgress the boundaries between life and death, between vitality and sterility, between genders and gender roles and between terror and allure. Their sensual portrayal shows how the pleasures of life and the pleasures of sexuality are mingled. They disregard human laws and live life as if it were a lover, feeling and tasting as much as they can of it. These aspects of the vampire's portrayal are by no means largely Rice's invention. From their fictional origins, vampires have typically been bisexual and alluring in appearance, and have not considered themselves bound to human laws. Rice, however, does a great deal to consolidate the vampire's characterization and affirm its multiple dualities.

Poppy Z. Brite does the most, I feel, among contemporary vampire writers to rewrite the vampire. One aspect of this innovation is that while her vampires are as mesmeric and hedonistic as Rice's, they are more overtly sexual. Zillah, Molochai and Twig live in a whirl of drugs and alcohol, sweets and sex. Zillah is described as "the most beautiful of the three, with a smooth, symmetrical, androgynous face, with brilliant eyes as green as the last drop of Chartreuse in the bottle"[13]. Like Louis, he is an androgynous beauty, as if his very appearance predisposes him to blurring gender distinctions. Brite's vampires are a living dead embodiment of the bisexual polymorphous perverse. Apart from the typical pleasure they get from feeding, they enjoy all sorts of sexual experiences, whether it is with drugs or without, with boys, women, men or each other. As we have seen, there are no taboos among these vampires. After Nothing is assimilated into Zillah's group of vampires, and after he discovers that Zillah is his father, he ponders this point:

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[12] Interview With the Vampire; p.123

> He had looked at himself in the bathroom mirror, still able to meet his own eyes, and he had told himself: *For a week now you have been fucking your own father... you've swallowed stuff that could have been your brothers and sisters!*
> But he could not disgust himself. He could not make himself ashamed... In a world of night, in a world of blood, what did such pallid rules matter?[14]

The new laws of vampire existence seem so fitting and natural to Nothing that "the mental dams against excesses"[15] which Freud points out- the human constructs of shame and disgust- are simply not able to function. Nothing now sees human rules and human conceptions of excess as 'pallid'.

Brite also presents us with a set of eerie twins. This ghoulish pair is less corporeal than the other vampires in the book. They are more like ghosts who suck out their victims' life rather than just their blood. They had been incestuous twin brothers who as children had acted in chic and arty pornographic films in New Orleans. Then they grew old and jaded, and seemed to make the decision not to die but to roam on, stealing lives to keep themselves young and their passion alive. They live on for the aesthetic richness of their incest and their beauty. In some ways, the twins serve as an indictment of the type of society which would valorize child pornography in the name of aestheticism. They prey on the very humans who allowed them "every art and luxury and perversion the city held because of their overrouged lips and their

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[13] Lost Souls; p.5

[14] Lost Souls; p.232

[15] Sigmund Freud; Freud On Sexuality, The Penguin Freud Library, Vol.7; Penguin (London, 1991); p.109

sluts' eyes and the poetry of their hands"[16]. The tainted aspects of the lusts of humans and vampires are here elided.

The act of feeding is the central experience of the vampire's existence. For the vampire, it is a deeply psychological and sexual expression, and the archetypal embodiment of the vampire's oral fixation. Feeding often serves as a substitute for breastfeeding, psychologically bringing back the mother that the vampires have lost. Also, blood is pure vitality, life, regeneration and immortal youth, and its transmission is invariably experienced in sexual terms. It is sometimes related to semen, but it is free of the gender connotations, and is ultimately more copious, more pure, more vital and more important. Blood is indispensable.

To turn him into a vampire, Lestat drains Louis to the point of death, then has Louis suck his blood back into his body. Louis describes his turning:

> I remember that the movement of [Lestat's] lips raised the hair all over my body, sent a shock of sensation through my body that was not unlike the pleasure of passion... The result was that within minutes I was weak to paralysis... He pressed his bleeding wrist to my mouth... I drank, sucking the blood out of the holes, experiencing for the first time since infancy the special pleasure of sucking nourishment, the body focused with the mind upon one vital source[17].

The experience is both like an orgasm and like breastfeeding, perhaps the two most intimate human experiences, mixed in with a measure of oral-blood fetishism which is inherent in

[16] Lost Souls; p.20

vampiric feeding. Louis later explains that he believes that being fed upon by a vampire is an intimacy nobody should survive. Vampires are almost invariably motherless. They are usually humans who are given new life by vampires, and who must be estranged from their biological mothers once they turn. If they are born vampires, they often destroy their mothers in birth, as discussed earlier. A vampire, perhaps, would not be able to function with a biological mother. It could be argued that their instinct to suck to survive is driven by the urge to repossess their lost mothers.

For Christian, the old-fashioned vampire in Lost Souls, feeding is driven by a similar Oedipal mixture of sexual desire and desire for the mother, but is also laced with a quasi-religious significance. When they meet, Molochai offers his wrist to him and "Christian pressed his lips to the gash, closed his eyes and sucked like a baby, tasting the Garden of Eden in the drops of Chartreuse that mingled with Molochai's blood"[18]. He sucks 'like a baby', yearning for a mother. Also, for old and philosophical vampires, particularly the Catholic-influenced New Orleans vampires, Louis and Christian, the act of vampirism may be an only link to a divine passion, a sort of epiphanic moment. The relation of their vampirism to religion could be strengthened by the guilt of unconscious incestuous feelings, so that paradoxically, while in the very act of glimpsing salvation, they are in the process of damning themselves further. This could parallel the religiously-based sexual guilt of many humans. Rice makes it clear that Louis philosophizes about God and faith, but in Brite's novel the never-human Christian is not so evidently concerned about God. The figure of Christian, however, is enigmatic. While he is never-human and not subject to human morals, there is significance in his name, which seems to presage his far more sober habits than those of Zillah's band, his definite sense of

[17] Interview With the Vampire; p.23

personal morality, his links with human religious sensibility and the fact that he tastes 'Eden' in blood.

The other vampire characters in Lost Souls see vampirism in less sacred terms. It is still, however, overwhelmingly erotic and a seemingly visceral urge. Before he knows he is a vampire, Nothing shares heroin with a young biker, Spooky, and has the urge to drink some of his blood. He concentrates on the taste of it:

> Spooky's blood filled his mouth and ran down his chin mixed with spit and the coppery sweetness of it mingled with the sweat from the biker's skin... he wanted to *eat* Spooky, to swallow him whole. The junk-laced blood tasted so good, so pure. ...what he had done did not seem strange to him. Erotic, yes; sneaky and a little mean, yes- but not strange[19].

Nothing is slowly starting to understand his vampire nature, that his eroticism will lie in drinking blood. For the twins, feeding is similarly the primary sexual expression: "Sex was only a stopgap measure for them now, a means to an end. The usual sorts of lovemaking seemed pallid, tame. Feeding was ever so much more sensual"[20]. Vampires, as fetishists, rezone the locus of their primary sexual object. Their fetish is for blood, and their pleasure is principally obtained orally, and not genitally. They are, however, functional and well-adapted creatures, designed for survival. This is a subversive idea to those members of society who would portray all abnormal sexuality as degenerate and self-destructive. The apparent

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[18] Lost Souls; p.8

[19] Lost Souls; p.136

[20] Lost Souls; p.322

immortality of Nothing, Molochai and Twig counters the long literary tradition of punishing sexually aberrant characters with death.

In Sins of the Blood, vampirism is so overwhelmingly sexual, it is like a barely containable drug addiction. Success as a vampire relies on self-control and an ability to master this sexual urge. When Ben first enters Mikos's lair, the smell of blood is overpowering. Vampires and intoxicated human hosts partake of a night-long orgy of blood-drinking and sex. He is just starting to realize that he may be a vampire and as yet he has no control. The vampires there refer to him as a 'virgin', showing how clearly they link vampirism and sexuality. Vampires in this novel turn when they reach their sexual peak. Before he realizes he is a vampire, Ben bites his girlfriend during sex and tastes her blood. He now remembers "how nothing had tasted good after that"[21]. His first experience of feeding in the lair is with a menstruating woman. The crowd of vampires watch in excitement and amusement as

> he fell against her, his face lost in her neck. She had bite marks, and her skin was covered in blood. He licked it. The orgasm held. He had never been so aroused. He licked more, then finally bit her, the blood pumped into him as semen pumped out, and the orgasm seemed to last forever[22].

Vampirism here is seen as a mixture of arousal, debauchery and abjection. Blood is an abject substance, vampirism is an abject activity, and a menstruating woman, in her perceived abjection, is a choice target for its expression by the misogynist vampires. The portrayal of vampires and vampire sexuality in Sins of the Blood is ugly. Rusch seems to be showing a

[21] Sins of the Blood; p.46

darker side of sexual transgression, of unbridled expressions of lust. We are reminded that her book is primarily concerned with child abuse, and she equates vampiric lust with the lust of an abusive father. Both are ruthless and motivated primarily by power. Once Ben begins to know what it means to be a vampire, he learns the value of control and power. He considers that "he loved feeling a cow beneath his fingers. Political power was that feeling on a grand scale"[23]. Power and abuse, both sexual and political, are the major subjects of this novel, and Rusch warns of their danger. She presents a qualitative chasm between lust and love.

Cammie, still struggling to hold onto her humanity, experiences a mixture of utter disgust and arousal when confronted by vampirism. When Ben lures her into the lair, and she watches the vampires' orgiastic feeding, she

> felt an odd detachment, as if her mind were separate from her body. She was disgusted and lost inside a wall within herself. Yet her nipples were hard, and her body trembled. She felt arousal and tried to ignore it, thinking perhaps that it was part of the air...[24]

In many ways, her reaction to the overt sexuality of the vampires is almost as if she has been raped. Her psychic detachment, combined with arousal, recalls nothing more than her rape by her father. Her trembling is caused by a combination of fear and excitement. Another part of her fear here may be of investigating her sexuality after her abusive past, perhaps to discover that she has a vampiric sexuality.

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[22] Sins of the Blood; pp.46-7

[23] Sins of the Blood; p.112

[24] Sins of the Blood; p.284

Humans' reactions to the vampire are often comprised of a mixture of terror and pleasure. Collins introduces the prologue of Sunglasses After Dark with this extract from Shelley's 'The Beauty of Medusa':

> Its horror and beauty are divine.
> Upon its lips and eyelids seem to lie
> Loveliness like a shadow, from which shine,
> Fiery and lurid, struggling underneath,
> The agonies of anguish and of death[25].

This description, vividly recalling the depiction particularly of Louis, with his marble face and eyes 'like flames in a skull', immediately presents the multiple character of the vampire. It is both beautiful and horrific, beneath its outwardly apparent loveliness hides death, and again, it cannot be classified, controlled or fully understood. The verse also points toward the supernatural aspects of the vampire, simultaneously a divine and beautiful angel and an horrific demon from a traditionally fiery hell.

Sonja Blue, the vampire lead in Sunglasses After Dark, is caught in a control-battle between her various personalities- the insanely violent Other; Denise Thorne, the girl she once was; and Sonja, the more stable conglomerate of the two. When we are first introduced to Sonja, she is locked in an asylum. Claude, the guard, looks in on her, where

[25] Sunglasses After Dark; p.5

> like a hibernating animal... Blue crouched in the middle of the cell, her face angled toward the high, narrow window set ten feet from the floor. She was naked except for the straitjacket, her bare legs folded under her... Her filthy hair hung about her face in rattails. None of the nurses wanted to touch her after what happened to Kalish[26].

Having torn Kalish's throat open when he tried to rape her, she has been placed in the Danger Ward, and has been killing people in her sleep. She is like a frightening beast, a nightmare madwoman, both human and animal, but also neither. Soon she escapes, and Claude is surprised when he sees her in her usual clothes, a black leather jacket, tight black leather pants and boots. Her way of dressing and her character are overtly assertive and overtly sexual.

Again we see that vampires embody duality and a tight association of sex and death. Leather-clad Sonja, prone to violence, the sadomasochist's dream nightmare, is a good example of this connection. When she is threatened with rape by a gang of boys in a bar, the Other takes over and lays the boys waste. She saves the last one to feed from. "Her fangs unsheathed, wet and hard. She pulled him to her in a lover's embrace. He had an erection. They always did"[27]. As the boy is about to die, paralysed with terror, he is aroused. Sonja, emphatic and aggressive, with her 'wet and hard' phallic fangs, is the most 'masculine' person in the bar.

In Interview With the Vampire, the interviewer's reaction on seeing Louis in the light is similarly ambivalent:

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[26] Sunglasses After Dark; p.15

[27] Sunglasses After Dark; p.67

> ‘Dear God!’ he whispered, and then he gazed, speechless, at the vampire... The boy shuddered, lifting his hand as if to shield himself from a powerful light. His eyes moved slowly over the finely tailored black coat... the long folds of the cape, the black silk tie knotted at the throat... He stared at the vampire’s full black hair, the waves that were combed back over the tips of the ears, the curls...[28]

The boy is terrified, but at the same time mesmerized by the vampire’s beauty and style. He shudders, both out of fear and an excitement bordering on the sexual, presented as very similar emotions. The intense and often involuntary arousal caused by the vampire causes an uncomfortable ambivalence in those humans who come across them.

In Lost Souls, Brite deeply investigates the allure of the vampire, particularly of its combination of death and sexual pleasure. Most of the victims in the novel are teenagers, lost souls looking for lost meaning and vitality. In chapter two, I investigated Nothing’s dull suburban surroundings. Nothing’s mindnumbing boredom and his inability to respect or relate to parents or any authority figure are not unique. The circle of friends he keeps are equally lost. The way these youths deal with this is to become nihilist thrill-seekers. They have not been encouraged to consider their lives of any importance, and so engage in a self-destructive quest to find the ultimate in excitement, usually through drugs or sex. They naively equate excitement with meaning, but often find that even transgressive thrills soon become meaningless.

[28] Interview With the Vampire; p.6

Nothing's friends are all young teenagers, and already jaded with most sexual and drug-related thrills. They have already experienced heterosexual titillation and their new fad is bisexuality. Nothing, however, fails to be excited by this either. He looks around the room where

> several of the kids were groping each other ineptly, kissing each other with sloppy wet mouths... Bisexuality was much in vogue among this crowd. It was one of the few ways they could feel daring. Nothing himself had made out with several of these kids, but... none of them really interested him. The thought made him sad...[29]

Brite presents suburbia as an utterly unheroic location. There is very little here which children can do to feel special, unique or 'daring', little opportunity for them to prove themselves. In the monotone world of Volvos and shopping malls, where adults do their best to homogenize and classify their children, the children have to go out of their way to differentiate themselves from each other and to forge an identity. Nothing feels that he does not really belong in this group, but these friends come closest to understanding his sense of dislocation. He sees through their shallow quests and recognizes them as merely fashionable, while he has what seems to him a much more authentic search for his identity to consider. He feels sad that these children must feel so driven to act like adults and not children. He considers his close friend, Laine:

[29] Lost Souls; p.32

> He was one of the youngest of the crowd, only fourteen, but he cultivated arcane talents. Nothing had seen the legend *Laine Gives Killer Head* inscribed on more than one bathroom wall at school...
>
> Laine's mouth tasted delicately salty, like tears. He suddenly felt very sad for Laine, who was too young to know so much. He wanted to show Laine some gesture of tenderness, something that might make them both feel as young as they really were. But Laine's tongue was already tracing a wet path down Nothing's chest...[30]

As well as nihilist and self-destructive sexuality, the novels also investigate various fetishes as part of their portrayal of untraditional sexualities. For a time Sonja Blue, from Sunglasses After Dark, works in a Norwegian brothel catering to oil rig workers. She enjoys the violence as the drunk desperate men contend for the few women available. More particularly, she is sexually aroused by hate. One night, two workers get into a fight over Sonja:

> Waves of hate emanated from the Swede. It felt as if I was standing in front of a heat lamp. I started to get excited...
>
> The Swede's rage was exquisite. He stared directly at me and I felt a brief connection between us... He wanted to see the big man's blood. So did I[31].

The Swede proceeds to kill the large man with his bare hands. When the madam of the brothel (interestingly named Madame Foucault) shoots him and he dies, Sonja says that "the hate was gone; it was as if someone had thrown a switch, allowing me to move and think again"[32]. The

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[30] Lost Souls; pp.33-4

[31] Sunglasses After Dark; p.96

[32] Sunglasses After Dark; p.97

arousal this hatred caused had almost debilitated her. Later, in Sonja's final, almost apocalyptic, confrontation with Catherine Wheele, both women get an intense pleasure out of the hate and evil which emanate from the confrontation. Catherine, for one, "experienced a response to the vampire's evil that went beyond the sex urge"[33].

In Lost Souls, we see that part of the transgressive lifestyle of Zillah's band is their predilection for body piercing, tattooing and scarification. Often these adornments serve to intensify sexual pleasure, and sometimes the pain caused by their creation is in itself a source of sexual excitement. This is another form of alternative sexuality which questions and challenges sexual norms. Not only is the concept of heterosexual vaginal intercourse as primary sexual object rejected by these fetishists, but so too the very notion of the definition of the body. No longer is the body seen as something natural and immutable. The body is taken ownership of, now a changeable extension of sexuality. Like sexual definitions and preferences, the body can be adapted[34].

The presentation of lesbianism, homosexuality and bisexuality is a common interest in contemporary vampire novels. The figure of the vampire is, as established, a well-suited catalyst for the investigation and challenging of societal and sexual norms. The vampire is, by nature, bisexual and transgressive. Sometimes, human characters see this as a model for subversion of norms, and at other times they see it as an expression of decadence and a warning. Interview With the Vampire and Lost Souls present the vampire and the challenges to sexual norms it advances largely in a positive light. Human norms are seen as restrictive

[33] Sunglasses After Dark; p.238

and the vampire's challenge threatens a liberation from them. Both Rice and Brite present us with alternative family structures and sexualities, which are seen as more liberated than current societal norms. Rice's vampires are far removed from humans who feature generally only as background to the vampiric transgression. It is therefore difficult to suggest that Rice implies that humans should follow the lead of vampires in their sexual behaviour. In Brite's novel, however, both vampires and humans partake freely of transgressive activities, and the vampires are a more directly subversive model. Both books, however, often show alternative structures and sexualities to be more functional and satisfying than traditional human norms, and this may lead to the reader interrogating, if not actually supporting, the transgression of these norms.

We are reminded of the bisexual love complexes between Louis, Lestat and Claudia, and later Louis, Armand, Claudia and Madeleine in Interview With the Vampire. The various motivations for their need for each other, based mainly on the need to replace a lost family member, or on a sexual-aesthetic attraction, have been discussed. It is notable that there is no implied judgement on the sexuality of any of the characters. Bisexuality seems simply to be a given. The question posed about love in the novel is not 'what type of love?', but rather whether love is possible or existent at all. This is in itself an important radical innovation. The novel seems to have been written in a non-heterosexist space, as if the sexual inclinations of Rice's characters did not have to be accounted for. Rice seems to write her bisexual characters as naturally as a traditional Western author would write heterosexual characters, without needing to explain or justify. Brite's novel, on the other hand, plainly delineates some of the

[34] The idea of the mutable body raises interesting notions of cyborgianism, which unfortunately falls outside the scope of this dissertation. The cyborg is, like the vampire, an ambiguous creature, human, machine and monster together.

major enemies of liberation. As discussed in chapter two, she shows that many of them breed and perpetuate themselves in complacent and comfortable middle-class American suburbs and minds.

Chaz, the only overtly homosexual human character in Sunglasses After Dark, is presented in a negative light. He is a sleazy, mercenary character, selfish and willing to buy and sell people for his personal gain and pleasure. When he was younger, he was a "houseboy for a withered old pouf while wringing him for whatever he could get"[35]. We are told of Chaz's tastes that he liked boys "young, rough and stupid"[36]. He had also been a friend of Sonja's but betrays her for money from Catherine Wheele. He considers going to Rio with the money. He muses, "Rio was full of beautiful boys with skin the color of café au lait. He could buy any number of dark-eyed Cariocas..."[37] Interestingly, Chaz is a Cockney Englishman, and along with some other questionable European characters like the decadent mastermind Pangloss and the upper-class rapist Morgan, this could suggest an unflattering attitude toward the Old World.

In Sins of the Blood, Rusch presents vampire sexuality, including their bisexuality, as brutal and animalistic. It is an expression of power and dominance and has nothing to do with love. Part of Mikos's and Ben's power dynamics is their sexual control over one another. To prove his dominance over Ben at their first meeting, Mikos fellates him, knowing that Ben will be horrified, but that the sexual urge will be too powerful. When this happens, "Ben cried out and tried to twist away. Mikos grabbed him and held him in place, and sucked. It felt good. It

[35] Sunglasses After Dark; p.70

[36] Sunglasses After Dark; p.67

[37] Sunglasses After Dark; p.69

felt too good. Mikos was male"[38]. As with all of Rusch's other portrayals of vampiric sexuality, this is coarse and not portrayed in any way as desirable. Her focus is on the sexuality of vampires and child abusers. She does not deal directly with other human sexuality, except to show Cammie's fear of loving intimacy after her abusive upbringing.

The only possibly homosexual human character in Sins of the Blood is officer Thornton, "a tall, slender man with close-cropped black hair and deep blue eyes... the man smiled, and Cammie realized she was looking at a woman"[39]. It is not stated that Thornton is a lesbian, but Cammie and the narrator keep checking for gender signifiers. We are told that Thornton has "a low voice that some men would have been proud of"[40], that she wears "bright pink socks"[41], that she curses ("Jesus Christ, woman"[42]), but that despite this, she takes "a ladylike sip"[43] of her coffee. If Cammie does eventually come to the conclusion that Thornton is a lesbian, this does not prejudice her. The overriding feeling between the two at the end of their meeting is a mutual respect between the two strong and determined women.

Often there are quite clear parallels between vampiric and gay existence, which Case has established theoretically. In Sins of the Blood, vampires are portrayed as humans with a particular leaning rather than creatures of another race. They are viewed by the laws of some states, like those of Oregon, as people with a psychological disease, perhaps like alcoholism, and as people who need to be rehabilitated. In Wisconsin, however, where Cammie works as

[38] Sins of the Blood; p.57

[39] Sins of the Blood; p.230

[40] Sins of the Blood; p.230

[41] Sins of the Blood; p.230

[42] Sins of the Blood; p.231

[43] Sins of the Blood; p.232

an eradicator, they are not perceived in such liberal terms. Vampires are seen as monsters who must be destroyed. Rusch seems to be drawing a comparison between societal perceptions of vampires and those of gays. Some people see homosexuality as a physiological or psychological aberration, one which may be able to be cured, or perhaps rehabilitated. More reactionary others see homosexuals as seditious monsters, transgressing natural, and ultimately unquestionable religious, laws. Both of these views serve to criminalize and marginalize gays. There is something wrong with them and society can either have the patience to try to cure them or not.

To extend this comparison, Rusch shows 'coming out' as a vampire to be similar to coming out as gay. Ben's adoptive parents are distressed when they realize he is becoming a vampire. His mother describes his gradual degeneration:

> He was such a sweet boy- quiet, never complaining. He did his homework, had nice friends, and graduated at the top of his class... We were so proud of him. We thought he was going to do great things... He started to change in college. He didn't visit or write often, and when he did he would stay out all night and party... towards the end, his grades started to slip...[44]

These words could have been said about a child who had come out as gay. Ben had been a good boy, embodying his foster-parents' middle-class values. When his lifestyle changes, his parents are devastated, referring to it as 'the end'. He is no longer considered their son, he seems to have died to them. We are reminded of Cammie's thoughts about Ben after meeting

[44] Sins of the Blood; p.168

his parents. Ben had got into law school, had a beautiful girlfriend, had a successful future ahead of him. Cammie asks herself, ”Why would someone whose life seemed so good go through the changes Ben had?”[45]. A similar question is often asked about people who reveal that they are gay. There is sometimes the preconception that people only become gay in response to bad experiences, or if they are unable to find a mate of another sex. Here vampirism, like homosexuality as viewed by conservatives, seems to be a social disease or a strange sexual choice, incomprehensible to most people.

* * *

Vampires, most often, are amoral. They live with no regard for human morality or taboos. This amorality is expressed and the taboos broken most demonstratively in their sexual life. Sexuality has always been seen as a battleground between constructed normality and abnormality, between human civility and animalism, and between life and death. Sex is an expression of primal urges and an embarrassing attestation to the animal beneath our superior veneer. The orgasm is a temporary loss of the safety of rationality and has been seen as a little death. Where then would the vampire, itself civilized beast and living dead, feel most comfortable in sharing human behaviour if not in sexuality? Vampiric and human sexuality are strongly bound. Their transgressions necessarily reflect on us; it is our psyches which are responsible for the creation and the effect of those violations. We either draw back in disgust at the nakedness of the vampire’s unconscious, or we draw strength and inspiration from its suggestion of a functional subversion.

[45] Sins of the Blood; p.197

Chapter Four

Female Characterization and the Interrogation of Gender in the Contemporary Vampire Novel

A primary concern of feminist criticism is the interrogation and revision of established, and often insidious, normative discourses and ideologies. As is already clear, the figure of the vampire, an embodiment of duality, and the contemporary vampire genre, with its emphasis on challenging and obfuscating simplistic polarities, seem an excellent vehicle for this sort of revisionary and even subversive questioning. The focus of this chapter is firstly to investigate the uses to which the genre is being put by feminist writers, considering how 'feminist' writing may be defined and whether and how it differs from writing which demonstrates an understanding and acceptance of popularized feminist sensibilities. Secondly, by drawing fairly eclectically from the vast and varied field of feminist critical theory, I will propose the argument that some contemporary vampire fiction concerns itself with a subversive rewriting of the traditional passive woman-as-victim to an active and monstrous woman-as-aggressor.

To illustrate these discussions I will introduce Suzy McKee Charnas's The Vampire Tapestry and Christopher Moore's Bloodsucking Fiends to the dissertation. Charnas's text can be seen in strict terms as the most, or perhaps the only, characteristically feminist novel among the six primary texts. I will investigate both the features which differentiate her work from the others and those characteristics which it shares with them. Moore's text raises questions around the mainstreaming of awareness of feminist issues. These, like the other primary novels, are feminist to different degrees, and to highlight these variations I will discuss characterization, questions of gender, and the presentation of feminist concerns.

* * *

A thorough synopsis of feminist literary criticism would, of course, not be possible within the scope of this dissertation, but a simplified (indeed necessarily over-simplified) outline will prove helpful in showing the various threads of feminist criticism I draw on, and how my theoretical stand is positioned in the context of the various feminist criticisms[1].

Politically focused feminist critique burgeoned in the 1970s. Although women had been investigating issues of gender and related oppression since at least the eighteenth century[2], and early twentieth century writers, such as Virginia Woolf, were investigating the challenges to women artists, feminist criticism, as an academic wing of a newly invigorated political and philosophical movement seems to have firmly established itself in 1970. Groundbreaking works by Betty Friedan, Tilly Olsen and Mary Ellmann, among others, had been published in the 60s, but Kate Millett's Sexual Politics, Eva Figes's Patriarchal Attitudes and Germaine Greer's The Female Eunuch, all first released in 1970, seemed to dedicate the decade to challenging and political feminist thought.

Elaine Showalter[3] has noted two distinct modes of feminist literary criticism since 1970. The first concerned the woman-as-reader, taking a revisionary look at male-centred canonical

[1] Elaine Showalter's "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness" in her The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature and Theory; Virago (London, 1985); pp.243-270 and Mary Eagleton's Introduction to her Feminist Literary Criticism; Longman Critical Readers, Longman (London and New York, 1991) were very helpful in illuminating, simplifying and clarifying the various feminist approaches discussed in this section.

[2] Miriam Schneir (ed.); The Vintage Book of Historical Feminism; Vintage (London, 1996)

[3] Showalter; "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness"

writing and illuminating the stereotypes and misconceptions embedded in its discourses. This mode suggests that the canon is produced, maintained, upheld and critiqued by readers from a dominant, patriarchal perspective. The dominant discourses involved have for so long been culturally central and perceived as a norm that the attitudes they convey appear natural and not open to interrogation. The often sexist (along with racist and elitist) stereotypes and attitudes embedded in canonical fiction simply appeared to be normal. Until recently there had been no oppositional critique which would investigate, highlight and de-naturalize insidious, repressive and marginalizing discourses. Feminist critique, like post-colonial criticism, was a major threat to the authority of the canonical norm.

Revisionary feminist criticism has been very important in highlighting the misconceived images of women in male-centred writing, and in demonstrating how, far from being 'natural', the images it perpetuates are a part of an unequal power dynamic. Women are disadvantaged in a practical way by the perpetuation of dominant stereotypical images, just as men's positions of authority and dominance are upheld. The validity of dominant discourses is a given unless successfully challenged from the margins, while subordinate discourses must prove themselves valid against naturalized preconceptions which saturate dominant society. Revisionary criticism seeks to disclose what has been hidden, so that dominant discourses can made as open to question as any other. Sandra Gilbert calls this the 'revisionary imperative' of feminist criticism, which seeks to

> decode and demystify all the disguised questions and answers that have always shadowed the connections between textuality and sexuality, genre and gender, psychosexual identity and cultural authority[4].

Revision, however, can only go so far. It is a reaction, and is still based on male-centred writing. Although challenging the canon, purely revisionary critique uses androcentric and canonical works as its central texts. Although important, it can only be one part of the feminist programme. The second distinct mode of feminist criticism Showalter highlights is what she calls 'gynocritics'. This type of women-centred criticism came about when feminists recognized the importance not only of investigating structural and political inequalities within the canon, but also of defining and creating a feminist or feminine voice, and rediscovering repressed and lost women's writing and history. Now, instead of focusing solely on the woman as revisionary reader, feminist criticism concerned itself with the woman as writer, and it no longer defined itself according to, or against patriarchal texts.

It is from this involvement in attempting to define the feminine and female difference that much fascinating theory and practice have evolved. Two broad schools within gynocritics have developed. The school followed largely by British and American critics, often termed the Anglo-American school, is predominantly textually-based and pragmatic, inferring messages from and into the writing which may be applied to practical everyday life. The French school, on the other hand, is concerned with developing complex and often utopian theories around a unique feminist language and form of expression among other things. What all gynocritics share, however, is commitment to looking at the difference in women's writing

[4] Cited in Showalter; "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness"

and to shifting their concentration from revision to discovering a unique women's voice and space, separate from male-centred critical schools and texts. This space, Showalter explains, is sometimes referred to as a 'wild zone'[5], and can be thought of spatially, experientially and metaphysically. It is the delimitation of those areas of women's life and thought which are off-limits to men, and not subject to influence or control by their language and ideology.

The concept of *l'écriture féminine*, a specific formulation of 'feminine writing', is central to the French school's highly theoretical branch of feminist critique. Whereas earlier revisionist theory was often part of an anti-theory expression against 'high', androcentric and supposedly objective critical discourses, such as structuralism, post-structuralism and deconstructionism, French feminist critics now created their own oppositional theoretical model. *L'écriture féminine*, a utopian vision of the inscription the female body in a new language and new texts, "provides a way of talking about women's writing which reasserts the *value* of the feminine and identifies the theoretical project of feminist criticism as the analysis of difference"[6]. Among the foremost scholars of this school are Julia Kristeva, Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray. They expose the phallogocentricity- the fundamentally oppressive centrality of phallic, or simplistically, patriarchal, language- in Western religion, philosophy and institutions. Simply stated, they propose the subversion of this oppressive control through *jouissance*, "the direct reexperience of the physical pleasures of infancy and of later sexuality, repressed but not obliterated by the Law of the Father"[7]. That is, the acceptance and

[5] Showalter; "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness"; p.262ff.

[6] Showalter; "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness"; p.249

[7] Ann Rosalind Jones; "Writing the Body: Toward an Understanding of *L'Écriture féminine*"; in Elaine Showalter (ed.); The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature and Theory; Virago (London, 1985); pp.361-377

reassimilation of unique women's experiences can lead to a unique women's creativity, which rejects control by the male-dominated centre.

The idea of *l'écriture féminine* has come under attack from other feminist critics[8]. The major objections come from those who seek to make feminist criticism an extension of the pragmatic political movement. French feminists' highlighting of the biological and psychological difference of women may be seen to play directly into the hands of dominant discourses which would marginalize them. Also, the notion of *l'écriture féminine* is seen as elitist, not practical enough, and too academic and theoretical, working within the structures it opposes. French feminism is accused of ignoring social conditions, race and class in its foregrounding of the ethereal concept of body. Pragmatic critics aspire toward a holistic criticism which incorporates elements of psychoanalytical, biological and linguistic theory as well as socio-economic and historic considerations such as class and race. I would argue, however, that some less pragmatic and more experimental work keeps the field alive and engaged with debate even if it is from within. This fresh input is important because feminism would, I think, want to avoid the orthodoxy it opposes in dominant structures. Rarefied and even eccentric theory should remain justified as long as there are still a majority of feminists who remember the practical battle and conditions which they are contesting. The work of Julia Kristeva on abjection, and that of Elisabeth Bronfen, Barbara Creed, Helena Michie and Lynda Nead, which draws on French criticism, remains as important to this dissertation as more pragmatic approaches, because it opens up entirely new and illuminating ways of looking at women's bodies and monstrosity in popular fiction and culture.

[8] Detailed by Jones; "Writing the Body: Toward an Understanding of *L'Écriture féminine*"

Since Showalter wrote her synopsis of the first decade of feminist criticism, a great deal has happened. Black feminist criticism has become a school of its own, and debate has arisen over the position of men within feminism. The relationship between feminism and popular culture has shifted and is under scrutiny. Popular fiction is being used as one medium of this investigation. Characterizations of women and men which challenge traditional stereotypes appear in bestsellers, in horror fiction, and in television advertisements. Notions of masculinity and femininity are being reconsidered everywhere in mainstream media. Men appear to be washing the dishes and raising the children, women are apparently running corporations. Is this popular, central acceptance of the instability of gender constructions a sign that the 'feminist battle' has been won, as some would believe? Or is it a limited assimilation and dilution of a threatening emergent discourse by dominant ideology? The dangers of being lulled into comfortable apathy are clear. There are differences between strictly feminist writing, writing which shows a progressive grasp of feminist issues, and writing which uses gender concerns merely because they are currently marketable.

How, then, can feminist writing be defined? Rosalind Coward's "Are Women's Novels Feminist Novels?"[9] is a good foundation for this discussion. Written in 1980, her article goes some way in showing what specific characteristics can be said to make a feminist text. According to Coward, reading and writing are political activities, which involve

> the contesting of natural attitudes, the challenging of agreed definitions... even novels which have a surface commitment to feminism should be interrogated as to by what

[9] Rosalind Coward; "Are Women's Novels Feminist Novels?" in Elaine Showalter (ed.); The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature and Theory; Virago (London, 1985); pp.225-239

> representations of sexuality, of maleness and femaleness, they achieve their version of reality[10].

Feminist writing, according to Coward, should be an extension of feminist political motivations. She shows that woman-centred writing and writing by women are by no means necessarily feminist. They often serve to support traditional constructions of masculinity and femininity. She draws attention to the economic aspects involved in production and publication of writing and to the difficulties of having subversive writing published. Feminist novels, however, are not necessarily overtly political in style. Often their allegiance to feminism is not made clear, "yet the encounter with the milieu and aspirations of feminism often forms a central element in the narrative of these novels"[11]. The feminist novel is an exercise in consciousness-raising, not just expressing a 'feminist consciousness' on the part of the writer, but "a propaganda device towards such a consciousness"[12] on the part of the reader. The feminist text shows an awareness, and a willingness to spread an awareness, of the effect and ideological content of images and language.

Coward highlights some characteristics which often appear in feminist works. Among these she mentions that the narrative is often quasi-autobiographical and confessional, and often tells of some early and formative sexual experience. Coward questions whether a novel can be popular entertainment while at the same time being seriously oriented toward feminism. Popular fiction may be seen as not challenging enough to entrenched discourses. I would question, however, her fairly strict distinction between popular fiction and 'serious' feminist

[10] Coward; p.228

[11] Coward; p.231

[12] Coward; p.232

work. As is evident, much contemporary vampire fiction, while for the most part not even intending to be feminist, does deeply challenge traditional constructions of gender and sexuality, often in a quasi-autobiographical framework. An important question, and one that is difficult to answer or assess, is whether popular vampire fiction goes beyond demonstrating an authorial feminist consciousness, and actually raises a subversive consciousness within its readers. Popular fiction, especially horror, is notorious for feeding traditional adolescent fantasies and not provoking much thought. Can a reader read Brite and Rice, for example, merely for the sex and blood and not consider the subversive content? There is a lot of contemporary vampire fiction available which sustains traditional characterizations and does not challenge received notions, and while Brite and Rice could no doubt be read superficially, the least bit of engagement with the books will start to uncover the challenging messages they contain. Ultimately, I would argue that a fair proportion of contemporary vampire fiction has the potential to assist in raising subversive consciousness to varying degrees. Popular fiction by no means necessarily embraces dominant ideology. The Vampire Tapestry may be the only novel I discuss written by an established feminist writer, but the other fiction shares many characteristics of feminist writing, and, I would argue, cannot so easily be excluded from a body of popular feminist texts.

Critics writing after Coward have begun to look more carefully at the interface between popular and feminist fiction. Although critics are now seeing more trenchant examples of feminist work in popular fiction than they previously acknowledged, they have not allowed this to make their definitions of feminist writing too broad. Lorraine Gamman[13], for example,

[13] Lorraine Gamman; "Watching the Detectives: The Enigma of the Female Gaze" in Lorraine Gamman and Margaret Marshment (ed.); The Female Gaze: Women as Viewers of Popular Culture; The Women's Press (London, 1988); pp.8-26

discusses characterization in popular fiction, and shows how feminist characterization must be more than a simple role-reversal. For a female character to be designed according to traditional 'masculine' roles, and a male to be made 'feminine', is hardly challenging. This sort of simple role-inversion seems to support stereotypes of masculinity and femininity, instead of interrogating them. Gamman also considers the 'female gaze', and defines and investigates the difference in women's perspectives. Traditional perspectives have portrayed the world seen through male eyes, and the female gaze subverts this by validating and spreading alternative perspectives. Gamman takes a more pragmatic and relatively anti-theory approach to criticism, arguing that

> the destabilising of the 'language' of popular narrative conventions and the encoding of feminist meaning through *mise-en-scène* seem to offer a far more practical route for feminist intervention than releasing the 'pre-Oedipal' repressed[14].

Gamman is one of those critics who contest the validity of what she sees as impractical French theory. She argues that encoding meaning accessibly within textual detail is far more effective in publicizing a feminist consciousness and subverting dominant preconceptions. Effective feminist intervention, argues Gamman, occurs most successfully from a position of centrality, not from the margins.

Popular fiction is seen as an important vehicle for this process of intervention from within, mainly because of its very popularity. If the intention is to spread feminist propaganda, a good strategy is to use fiction which will reach the widest audience. Sometimes, by making its

[14] Gamman; "Watching the Detectives: The Enigma of the Female Gaze"; p.17

assumptions visible and open to question, feminist discourse, including that in popular fiction, challenges the ‘naturalized’ aspects of dominant discourse- those cultural presumptions that are taken so much for granted that they are often seen as natural and ‘common sense’. Popular fiction also characteristically foregrounds its conventions, so while it is often used to uphold traditional stereotypes, it can similarly be used openly to subvert them. There is no doubt that originally oppositional feminist ideology has seeped into mainstream popular culture and its media images. While this does raise a justifiable fear that the message is being diluted, it does seem to hold some advantages. If more and more people were to question the validity of traditional conceptions of masculinity and femininity just as a start, the perpetuation of essentialist beliefs would become that much more difficult. This can be seen as one positive popular result of the radical political discourse. Beyond that, of course, there are many deeper considerations around the relationship between mainstream and oppositional cultures.

In summary, then, I would argue that popular fiction is eminently capable of being feminist in that it can demonstrate and spread a subversive feminist consciousness. Where popular, less polemical writing is concerned, the ‘feminism’ of any text is relative, and can only be defined according to the narrowness or breadth of individual interpretations. Nonetheless, a conglomeration of traits of feminist writing can help to decide whether a text, written by a known feminist or not, has a political motivation and effect. Feminist writing generally looks at women’s experience, is concerned with the discovery and development of women’s voices, considers how women write and look and how this differs from men’s way of writing and seeing. It often investigates the difference of women’s language and use of language from that of men and dominant cultures, sometimes positioning itself in the ‘wild zone’ outside masculinist influence. It sometimes interrogates traditional linear narrative, which is seen as a feature of rationalist and patriarchal thinking, and destabilizes conventional notions of identity

and gender. In its content, it tends to highlight sexist attitudes and language, and issues of family violence, abuse and rape in an effort to foreground what has been disguised.

Apart from looking at the texts in this more general light, however, I intend to posit the argument that subversive contemporary vampire fiction is often concerned with a transgressive rewriting of the woman character from victim to aggressor. As discussed in chapter one, Victorian vampire fiction, for example, was generally used as a place where women characters were marginalized as victims or hysterics. Obsessional male-centred medical discourses exploited the female body for its supposed secrets, as if the body were a passive political terrain open to colonization. Monstrous and aggressive women did appear in Victorian horror, but they were most often seen from a male point of view, as a threat to established, patriarchal order. Monstrous women were soon defeated by representatives of patriarchal order, who tended to be from one of the medical professions, for instance doctors or psychiatrists. They were seen as titillating and dangerous aberrations, their bodies and minds open to the harshest application of the male cure. The phallic staking and decapitation of Lucy in Dracula is the archetypal example of Victorian horror's treatment and cure of women. It is equivalent to rape and lobotomization of the dangerously over-aggressive woman by the patriarchal order to assert both its sexual and intellectual dominance.

In contemporary vampire fiction, there are also female monsters and aggressive women characters. Here, however, they are often written by women or men with a feminist consciousness and instead of concluding with a return to patriarchal order, their aggressive subversion is celebrated and its threat allowed to survive. More than this, their very monstrosity is now sometimes seen as an asset. Kristeva, Creed and Linda Williams note a strong connection between women and monsters. Although otherized and defined as abject by

dominant discourses, they work on building and asserting their "power-in-difference"[15]. Archetypes which were used to justify men's exploitation of the abject and monstrous female body have now been inverted and are used as an expression of challenging strength. The eccentric woman is now able to acknowledge the threat she poses to dominant cultures and makes it more real. The female body becomes active and off-limits to male investigation, and the aggressive sexuality which used to be seen as a sign of mental illness now becomes an expression of psychic wholeness. What used to be hysteria is now *jouissance*, due in great measure to a radical shift in point of view. The envisioning and representation of the female body are no longer the sole prerogative of dominant male-centred discourses. For some time already, the very act of a woman writing subversive texts has been similarly collapsing old-fashioned archetypes of female authorship, female knowledge and prerogative. Contemporary genre fiction, and particularly vampire fiction, is a popular expression of this process of rewriting. Women vampires with their monstrous bodies and aggressive sexual expression are now successful, functional and satisfied with their existence. In their acceptance and integration of their monstrous, subversive and threatening womanhood, they no longer are passive victims to, but active players in society.

* * *

Suzy McKee Charnas's The Vampire Tapestry, written in 1980, is a very good example of a feminist rewriting of a traditional generic story. On one level it can be seen as a narrative

[15] Linda Williams; "When the Woman Looks", in Re-vision; University Publications of America (Los Angeles, 1984); p.89

about the demise of the traditional figure of the patriarch, and of the patriarchal text[16]. The vampire, Dr Edward Weyland, is an anthropology professor and symbolizes the archetypal patriarchal academic. He seems civilized, is aloof, highly competent and mentally and emotionally inflexible. He has, according to a student assistant he has occasionally slept with, "the face of everybody's dream-father"[17]. On the surface, he looks like a stern but benign authority, not inviting or expecting question. Canonical literature, similarly, appears to be a 'dream-father'; it is set up to be incontrovertible and to be the source of all contemporary inspiration. In this particular incarnation of Weyland's, however, he comes across two women who profoundly affect him. The first is Katje de Groot, an ex-South African widow, working at the same New England college as Weyland. She is the first to recognize that Weyland is a vampire, and sets out to hunt him. The second is Floria Landauer, a psychologist, who has deep insight into Weyland and whom Weyland starts to love, despite his urgent need for detachment. These two women fundamentally challenge the order of Weyland's universe, the order which allows him to continue his ways unflinchingly.

Katje[18] is a white woman from a South African farm, and as a girl was taught to shoot and hunt by her Uncle Jan. Throughout her life, she understands what it is to be both hunter and hunted, persecuted as a woman and suspected of racism because she is a white South African who does not openly condemn racist laws. The thrill of hunting Weyland reminds her of her African home which is now lost to her and changed forever. She has recently begun to miss the old hunting rifle she had brought from Africa

[16] For an illuminating reading, see Anne Cranny-Francis; Feminist Fiction: Feminist Uses of Generic Fiction; Polity Press (Cambridge, 1990); esp. pp.94-99

[17] The Vampire Tapestry; p.233

> because, she realized now with a nervous little jump of the heart, she had become engaged in stalking a dangerous animal. She was stalking Dr. Weyland... Creatures stalking each other over time grew a bond from mind to mind[19].

When she stalks Weyland, she feels a bond between herself and her prey, a bond which she cannot feel with anyone else at the university. Most of the staff there are middle class, comfortable and share no common experience with Katje. Her husband had been on the faculty and after he died she took a job catering at a university club. This threatens the faculty. A strong woman should not be serving tea. As Miss Donelly explains to Katje, "some of the faculty are a little scared of you; they'd rather have a giggly cocktail waitress or a downtrodden mouse of a working student"[20].

At a lecture, Weyland talks of what conditions a modern vampire would have to confront to survive. His talk is taken by everyone but Katje to be pure fanciful theory. In this way the academic world is a perfect hiding place for a vampire. Academics may demonstrate uncommon sensibilities and eccentric behaviour, and they will be put down to imaginative open-mindedness. Katje can see through Weyland's civil veneer because of the empathy she feels for him. Both are strong, but in hiding and fear, both mourn a seemingly utopian past:

> [Katje] thought about home now. She recalled clearly all those indicators of change in Africa, and she saw suddenly that the old life there had gone... Reluctantly she

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[18] The characters are predominantly referred to in the text as 'Katje', 'Floria' and 'Weyland'.

[19] The Vampire Tapestry; p.34

[20] The Vampire Tapestry; p.24

> admitted that one of her feelings while listening to Dr. Weyland talk had been an unwilling empathy: if he was a one-way time traveller, so was she[21].

Empathy is central to this novel. It is empathy which eventually destroys Weyland. It is crucial for his survival that he does not recognize how human he is, and how like him his prey is. Katje and Floria teach him about empathy. Katje is far from a feminist, she is privately conservative and publicly apolitical. She does not evangelize about the merits of sensitivity and tolerance, not to mention equality, to Weyland. She initiates his humanization by her similarity to him. Elsewhere she asserts, "*But I am myself a hunter!*"[22]. At times she thinks she is just imagining his monstrosity. She chides herself:

> Where does it come from, this nonsense of mine? My life is dull since Hendrik died; so I make up a drama in my head, and that way I get to think about Dr. Weyland, a distinguished and learned gentleman, being interested in me[23].

She asks herself why such an important man would be interested in drinking her blood anyway. Weyland is well disguised on his campus and everyone else believes he is who he presents himself to be. Weyland does not kill when he drinks, and there is nothing to prove that he is a vampire. She may be fantasizing about him merely to feel the validation of a hunt again. In another way, it could be argued that Katje does not fully admit her discovery of Weyland's vampirism because she feels that the hubris of challenging the authority of his position as leading academic (and also as patriarchal subject and as incontrovertible canonical

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[21] The Vampire Tapestry; p.42

[22] The Vampire Tapestry; p.47

[23] The Vampire Tapestry; p.45

text) is not for her. After all, she states, "I never talk politics"[24]. She does not accept that she could be a partial cause of the downfall of old-fashioned values which she so idealizes.

Floria Landauer is quite different from Katje, but enhances and extends the dangerous effect of empathy on Weyland's existence. She is a New York psychologist, far from a world where animals were hunted in the veld. She is a professional woman who automatically corrects sexist language, and who has self-belief and is self-assertive. To get his job back, Weyland must undergo therapy, and Floria manages to draw more out of him than he would have liked. In their first session, Floria manages to go some way in seeing beneath Weyland's façade: "she watched him diminish from the dignified academic who had entered her office to a shamed and frightened man hunched in his chair, his hands pulling fitfully at each other"[25]. Their therapeutic process goes a far way in breaking down traditional structures of power. After many sessions their relationship becomes almost ideal; Floria describes it as a pas de deux. Neither partner has control, in fact each must consciously cede some control.

For Weyland, learning the pleasures and benefits of relating without being in control is profoundly destabilizing. At first he reacts strongly and fearfully against the process, warning Floria, "You shouldn't seduce me into quarreling with the terms of my own existence!"[26] This is in some ways what she proceeds to do. In her understanding and empathy, she makes him question the fundamental tenets of his existence. She makes him ask why control and brutality are necessary to keep him alive. Extrapolated, these are some of the same questions a successful feminist challenge will make men and dominant discourses ask of themselves. As

[24] The Vampire Tapestry; p.24

[25] The Vampire Tapestry; p.118

[26] The Vampire Tapestry; p.143

the therapy continues, Weyland admits his occasional longing for a partner, and his fascination with art. Dance, he says, "puzzles and pleases"[27]. He starts to accept his human traits. Whereas Katje tried to prove him a vampire when by all appearances he was a human, Floria now tries to prove his humanity when he steadfastly insists that he is a vampire. To accept humanity threatens the functionality of his predator nature. Weyland admits, "I fear for the ruthlessness which keeps me alive"[28].

Floria also cedes control in her part of the relationship. As his psychologist, she is supposed to discover the underlying causes of Weyland's fantasy that he is a vampire, and cure him, so that he can go back to work. Gradually this becomes less important to her, and she starts believing Weyland's story. She sees him as a unicorn, a creature pursued for its mystery, which offers to take people to a utopian place, but which people would destroy because it is unknowable. This, the middle part of the novel, is entitled 'Unicorn Tapestry'. At The Cloisters in New York, the original Unicorn Tapestries are on display. Dating from around 1500, they depict the quest after and capture of the mystical unicorn. By entitling her novel The Vampire Tapestry, Charnas foregrounds her consideration of the almost colonial construction, mythologizing, oppression and eventual destruction of the Other, whether woman, vampire or unicorn. The woman is closely related to the monster. While Weyland tries to assert his predator nature, Floria identifies him as a victim. His persecution is related to that of women, otherized and plundered for secrets. This confuses the polarities on which Weyland, as the patriarchal subject, founds his existence. The traditional ideological roles of women and men are merged and blurred. Floria does not use the power afforded her by her position of medical authority. Eventually, and against her professional training, she asks

[27] The Vampire Tapestry; p.146

Weyland to sleep with her, knowing the dangers she opens herself and her autonomy to, and recognizing that they will both be made exceptionally vulnerable. Weyland may even kill her so that she will tell nobody he is a vampire. For her to seduce him is a dramatic rewriting of the traditional vampire story. This is, however, no simple role-reversal. Floria does not take on an aggressive masculine role. They make love in a utopian separate space, away from power struggles and inequalities. Floria considers that according to old legends

> hunters set a virgin to attract the unicorn by her chastity so they can catch and kill him. My unicorn was the chaste one, come to think of it, and this lady meant no treachery. No, Weyland and I met hidden from the hunt, to celebrate a private mystery of our own...[29]

This short relationship disturbs centuries of ingrained patterns in Weyland. Having always espoused detachment and brutality, he finds that an empathetic woman teaches him that his strict definitions are not so clear. Even within himself, the distinctions between prey and predator, between animalism and humanity, between otherness and sameness are confused. He is both horrible vampire and graceful unicorn, and Floria is a real woman, fitting somewhere between virgin and whore. Weyland is amazed by this disruption. He asks Floria, "How did you grow so real? The more I spoke to you of myself, the more real you became"[30]. By sharing empathy and vulnerability, old preconceptions are replaced with deeper understanding. After this Weyland, like ideology under similar stresses, cannot so easily continue in the same way as before.

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[28] The Vampire Tapestry; p.162

[29] The Vampire Tapestry; p.177

[30] The Vampire Tapestry; p.175

An antidote to this romantic reading of the relationship between Landauer and Weyland is provided by Nina Auerbach, with the authoritative support of Charnas herself, who spoke to Auerbach's class in 1991[31]. Auerbach and Charnas stress the destructiveness of Floria's compromise of her professionalism, and likewise the danger to Weyland of his loss of autonomy. In a revision of the novel for a proposed dramatization, Charnas told Auerbach's class, she intended to present "Floria's unprofessional embrace of the vampire [as] unequivocally destructive, not the hinted-at release through romance it almost becomes in the novel"[32]. This hardening of position comes perhaps in part as a reaction to the conservative backlash against feminist progresses in the 1980s.

I would, however, continue to assert the novel's important challenge to patriarchal behaviour and constructions. Floria's treatment of Weyland when he is under her power, for example, is subtle and sensitive. This is in stark contrast to Alan Reese's behaviour toward him. After Weyland is shot by Katje, he is found in New York by Roger, who keeps him in a barred room and feeds him small rations of blood while he waits to see if some profit can be made from his rare find. Roger's associate Alan Reese, a vicious and cruel Satanist cult leader, then becomes involved. Reese profits from the weakened Weyland by charging cultists an entrance fee to see the vampire. He starves Weyland before these displays to force him to drink on demand, and shows off his anatomical differences. Reese is symbolic of the obsessional and pseudo-scientific Victorian medical discourses. He makes a freak show (a Victorian obsessional delight) out of Weyland's prison, ostensibly for some sort of education, but

[31] Nina Auerbach; Our Vampires, Ourselves; University of Chicago Press (Chicago and London, 1995); esp. pp.150-1, 215

[32] Auerbach; p.215

actually out of perverse delight in exposing his differences and defining him as Other, and asserting the dominance of his norm. Reese and Roger dramatically lead the crowd down the passage, and acknowledging that it is a show, Roger tells Weyland, "Drink, vampire. The people are waiting to see you"[33].

As Cranny-Francis notes[34], Weyland's otherization, like that of women, is predicated largely on his deviance from the phallic norm. Weyland obtains his primary sexual pleasure from drinking, through an adapted sting on the underside of his tongue. Weyland is orally fixated and his functional phallus is in his mouth, and Reese, as the representative of normality, therefore feels justified in objectifying and making a freak out of him. Reese is also interested in tapping Weyland's supposed evil, and making contact with Satan through him. He plunders his body in a obsessional way to get at mystical knowledge which he has invented. Mark, Roger's teenage nephew, sympathizes with Weyland. Weyland tells him of the dangers of being discovered, even by people with perhaps purer scientific motives than Reese. Weyland would not be able to tell the doctors or scientists how he lives for so long and, he says,

> eventually they would lose patience and cut me apart to see whether they might find the answer in my body- in the brain, the heart, the gut, the bones. Science would be as cruel as the mob[35].

In some ways, Weyland feels luckier to be under the control of someone as selfish as Reese, who would not care to share the knowledge he thinks he will gain from Weyland, and will

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[33] The Vampire Tapestry; p.87

[34] Cranny-Francis; Feminist Fiction: Feminist Uses of Generic Fiction

[35] The Vampire Tapestry; p.94

bide his time until it is expedient to destroy him. Either way, discovery leads to his being objectified and medicalized.

Eventually, Mark helps Weyland to escape, and it is after this that he goes to Floria for therapy. He is well aware of the dangers of medicalization in relation to the otherized body, and when Floria suggests that vampires reproduce through their bite, he snaps, "Nonsense. I am not a communicable disease"[36]. This irritated response speaks both for his frustration with his own and others' lack of understanding of why he is what he is, and for his anger and fear at the possibility of being objectified again. He learns, however, that Floria does not intend to uphold the traditional behaviour of medical discourses. By ceding control, and moving with Weyland to the 'wild zone', the unicorn's utopia where androcentric conceptions of power and influence do not apply, Floria subverts and disposes of the intentions of patriarchal discourses. When they are about to make love, she says gently, "No more speaking, Weyland... This is body work"[37]. The importance of language and masculine rationality is refuted, and the 'body work'-driven motivations of *l'écriture féminine* and *jouissance* are invoked.

The Vampire Tapestry, then, subverts and ultimately disposes of many of the intentions of patriarchal discourses, whether literary or medical. In her rewriting of the traditional vampire genre, Charnas does not present a simple role reversal between masculine and feminine characters, feminizing male characters and masculinizing females. In her characterizations, she blurs established roles and questions their validity. Women characters escape the passive roles traditionally assigned to them in the genre's conventions, and become active and

[36] The Vampire Tapestry; p.141

effective players in the novel. Traditional power dynamics break down, as do constructed polarities. The narrative is also cyclical in many ways. There is no resolution, no linear climax, and the story thus challenges the primacy of temporal narrative. The main characters go back to where they started- Katje goes home to Africa, Floria stays in her practice, and Weyland goes into a cave to hibernate, knowing only that he has done it before.

* * *

The contemporary female vampire is often an overt subversive reinscription of traditional vampire- and horror- characterization. Her body, once forcefully pacified by obsessional discourses, is now often allowed to remain active and aggressive. Exemplified by Stoker's Lucy, the Romantic or Victorian female vampire was soon 'cured' of her vampirism and returned to her rightful passive position, even if at the cost of her life, heart and head. Female vampirism, even with its accompanying monstrosity, is now sometimes expressed as a functional and self-determined lifestyle alternative for a woman. The woman-as-vampire has become a well-adapted predator, blending into her violent urban surroundings. As a vampire, as a monster, she appears to be no more marginal than a woman. By denying and subverting the constructions around her human femininity, and accepting and expressing her monstrosity, she often frees herself from self- or socially-imposed restrictions, and is able to express and discover herself.

Jody Stroud in Christopher Moore's Bloodsucking Fiends is a woman recently turned vampire. When considering her changes, she is mainly impressed by how liberating

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[37] The Vampire Tapestry; p.175

vampirism is. Before she turns, she is a twenty-six year old working woman, caught up in the rush of life in San Francisco. Making her way home after work, she is concerned about her sheared stockings, her tangled hair, and what her boyfriend will think of her appearance when she arrives home. When she turns, however, she suddenly gains superhuman strength, extra senses, and a confident bravery. She sums up what has just happened:

> A man attacked me, choked me, bit my neck, burned my hand, then stuffed my shirt full of money and put a dumpster on me and now I can see heat and hear fog. I've won Satan's lottery[38].

Not only has Jody become extra-perceptive, rich and immortal, but she starts to gain great self-confidence. She discovers that her unsupportive boyfriend, Kurt, is just a weak and inflexible man, throws a potplant at his head and drinks some of his blood. The blood-drinking experience is overwhelming, orgasmic but laced with deep feelings of loss. She relates it to the hurtful loss of her virginity. This time she feels she has lost her humanity. Also, when she is turned, the old vampire violently attacks her in an alley and she experiences the assault as akin to rape, with a feeling of dislocation similar to those discussed in chapters two and three. While he drinks her blood, Jody sees "a soda can and an old *Wall Street Journal*, a wad of bubble gum stuck to the bricks, a 'No Parking' sign: details, strangely slowed down and significant"[39]. The trauma of the turn is becoming quite characteristic even within the anti-tradition of the contemporary vampire novel.

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[38] Bloodsucking Fiends; p.17

[39] Bloodsucking Fiends; p.14

Soon, however, she does start to understand and enjoy the new freedoms in her life. She looks at herself in the bathroom mirror in the dark. Her childhood scars, the wrinkles around her eyes, her split ends are all gone,

> She was- as far as she could allow herself to believe- perfect. A newborn at twenty-six... Fuck curling irons and blow dryers and high heels and mascara and control-top panty hose. Fuck those human things[40].

She is emphatic about rejecting cosmetic camouflaging of the body, feeding into and fed by feelings of inadequacy. She rejects this characteristically Western trap. She now has the confidence not to worry about what she looks like, trusting that she is fine as she is. At this stage she also understands that she is a vampire, but questions whether that makes her a monster: "I am a vampire... A vampire. A monster. But I don't feel like a monster"[41]. It could be argued that as a self-possessed woman, she is already a monster to dominant society. She breaks the bones of would-be rapists without losing her train of thought, stares down a flasher, wears a little black dress she "wouldn't have been caught dead in"[42] before, and even deals confidently with her disapproving mother. These challenges to her established roles and gender-related restrictions are examples of the vampire's monstrous subversion. Jody, however, does not jump to the traditional comparison between vampirism and monstrosity. As a vampire, Jody is still very much like a human, and is not murderous or terrifying. Her monstrosity lies more in her rejection of previously upheld norms than in any vampiric activity in which she does engage.

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[40] Bloodsucking Fiends; p.28

[41] Bloodsucking Fiends; p.28

[42] Bloodsucking Fiends; p.215

Overall, her characterization is an odd mixture lying somewhere between parody and some serious intent. In one way she can be seen as a symbol of the important liberation, especially for a woman, from restrictive and often violent social norms, which comes with vampirism. This self-awareness is, however, only gained through a formative and traumatic sexual experience. On the other hand, it is difficult to sustain a serious reading of Jody's character. The relationship between friendly, sexy, redheaded, twenty-six year old Jody and nineteen year old aspirant writer Tommy Flood, the other main character of the novel, is a little too ideal to be taken seriously and aids the comedy of the novel. They talk for hours, have unbridled sex and eventually want to spend immortality together. It seems like the dream relationship of a nineteen year old aspirant writer. I would argue that Moore, rather than pandering to traditional adolescent fantasies, is parodying the notion of a perfect heterosexual relationship. The presentation of this relationship highlights the amusing ironies inherent in this type of idealized partnership. Both the partners need to be living dead for their love to have a chance of success.

Tommy's character, like that of Jody, is also used as a vehicle for challenging traditional gender definitions. He is raised in Indiana, in the heart of the midwest, a state known for its conservative values. Moore satirizes these traditional values and presents the striking difference between the lifestyles of conservative Indiana and San Francisco, with its hippie remnants, and large artistic and gay populations. Tommy is amazed by San Francisco. Madame Natasha, a male fortune teller, tells gloomy Tarot fortunes in benefit of Aids research and gay couples walk everywhere. What symbolizes this exciting difference most for Tommy, however, is a demitasse spoon. A very camp waiter is teaching him how to use the cutlery, and Tommy considers the significance of the tiny spoon:

> ‘Demitasse,’ Tommy repeated, feeling reckless. In Indiana the use of the word ‘demitasse’ was tantamount to leaping out of the closet in scandalous flames. San Francisco was a great city! A great place to be a writer![43]

Tommy’s father has difficulty accepting that Tommy wants to be a writer. The first clue he discovers is a copy of *The New Yorker* under his mattress. He ruefully tells this to his bowling friends and adds, having drawn the wrong conclusion, “I’ve got to face it; my son’s a pansy”[44]. Tommy’s father’s friends, “bowed their heads in sympathy, all secretly thanking God that the bullet had hit the next soldier in line and that their sons were all safely obsessed with small block Chevys and big tits”[45]. Mr Flood and his friend, Harley Businsky, then interrogate Tommy and he eventually manages to convince them that “Yes, [he] did like girls and cars. No, he was not, nor had he ever been, a member of the Communist party. And yes, he was going to pursue a career as a writer, regardless of the lack of AFL-CIO affiliation”[46]. After this, they lend Tommy what moral support they can, and suggest that he go and starve in a city, which is what writers do.

This sort of upbringing, along with the fact that he recognizes his sensitivity, leads him to have to affirm his masculinity at times. In one episode, Tommy starts receiving flowers mysteriously. After four days,

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[43] Bloodsucking Fiends; p.61

[44] Bloodsucking Fiends; p.34

[45] Bloodsucking Fiends; p.34

[46] Bloodsucking Fiends; p.34

> they were beginning to bother him. It wasn't the flowers themselves that bothered him: gladiolas, red roses, and two mixed bouquets with big pink ribbons. He sort of liked flowers, in a masculine and totally non-sissy way, of course[47].

Although he tries to assert his 'non-sissy' appreciation of the flowers, he does perhaps spend a little too much time describing them to be a traditional 'masculine' man. When he finds out that his five Chinese male roommates have been sending him the flowers, he is upset. Troy Lee, his workmate, speaks to them and explains that "They heard somewhere that in San Francisco men marry men. They figure that if they can get you to marry them they can be citizens"[48]. Troy finds this very amusing and Tommy snaps, "You're cleaning garbage cans tonight, Troy. I'm in charge, you know?"[49] After this challenge to his masculinity, Tommy must quickly reassert it, more to placate his own insecurity than out of any anger. He is sensitive enough to realize that traditional midwestern constructions of gender are false, but that now without the stability of those preconceptions, his attempts at self-definition are made that much more difficult. Moore uses the figure of Tommy to satirize various conceptions of gender and sexuality, and to highlight how constructed definitions are confused when faced with those who transgress them.

Is Moore's text feminist? Athough comparisons can be drawn between characteristically feminist writing and Bloodsucking Fiends, I think the answer to this question is ultimately unimportant. It does not serve to define and classify simply for the sake of ordered classification. One of the pleasures of the current decade is that it has not been cemented into

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[47] Bloodsucking Fiends; pp.30-31

[48] Bloodsucking Fiends; p.56

[49] Bloodsucking Fiends; p.56

history yet, despite the media's attempts to do so. It could be that in the 1990s feminist concerns are becoming the naturalized norm in certain emergent cultures, among them the type of student or twenty-something youth culture that might produce and consume a book like Bloodsucking Fiends. More often, in a wider variety of writing, but by no means in a majority of texts yet, it is becoming customary to reflect flexible notions of gender and sexuality, for example. In many of these books, this is not the primary concern; it is more of an accepted background understanding. Moore's book, then, may be seen as an example and a result of more holistic feminist, gay and other progressive forms of conscientizing. It may also be seen as a postvampire book for a postpolitical generation. He turns horror into comedy, parodying the foregoing myths' every convention. Tommy reads Dracula and Anne Rice's novels to Jody and tests some of the myths on her. He finds that she can enter uninvited, she can cross running water, she does not have to sleep in a coffin or in her native soil, she tries but cannot turn into a bat- she becomes a designified vampire.

* * *

The issues around gender roles, particularly in family structures, and sexuality in Interview With the Vampire, Sunglasses After Dark, Lost Souls and Sins of the Blood have been discussed above. As has been seen, each of these novels concerns itself with patriarchal attitudes toward women, particularly manifested in the use of violent and sexist language. These novels also investigate abusive relationships, whether between parents and children, or between partners, which often seem to be fostered in a patriarchal society. The growth and experience of a woman tend to be central, with vampirism often providing the formative sexual experience. Anne Rice follows the growth of Claudia to self-awareness as she recognizes the damage that her turning so young has caused her. Sonja Blue is also turned

young, and this event is portrayed as a rape. She, like Cammie in Sins of the Blood, struggles for identity and to attain a sense of psychic wholeness after her trauma. In all and to differing degrees, these novels demonstrate a trend toward the naturalization of a subversive aesthetic, including an assimilation of feminist concerns, within popular culture.

The characters of Sonja Blue, Jody and Claudia serve as a good basis for a discussion of the reinscription of the female vampire from pacified to activated body. Instead of having their otherness quashed by patriarchal agents as happened to Victorian female vampires, Sonja Blue and Jody live on and succeed on their own terms. They seem to have escaped the sphere of patriarchal influence and are apparently untouchable by androcentric norms. Their greatest dangers are from other vampires or supernatural beings- the old vampire who made Jody, or Catherine Wheele for example- not from human purveyors of law or science. They escape human norms, however, without escaping the human world. They are both well-adapted city dwellers, violent when necessary for self-defence, and streetwise. The cities where they make their home assimilate and hide them. The violent and degenerate backdrop of the city is an easy place for a vampire to disguise herself. This dynamic helps to show up the speciousness of these human laws. The city, the human stronghold, is the place where transgression most easily hides. Instead of being marginalized and destroyed, the prey of obsessional discourses, the female vampire is now often centralized and presented as a functional predator. This shift illustrates a century of changing attitudes toward notions of gender, sexuality and civilization itself, fundaments of social organization.

Chapter Five

Belief, Fear and Action into the Next Decade

Vampires in the late twentieth century reflect a society in which essential belief and trust in authority and law has failed. Nina Auerbach[1] describes the decline of the Reaganized vampire in the 1980s, diminishing under the pressures of determinism, domestication and disease. The struggling 1990s vampire reflects the fears and concerns of young people, a shocked and wary generation. To draw together the themes of this dissertation, I will look at the vampire as it is presented now, and at the current generation of young vampire readers, and where they might be heading into the next millennium. The condition of the current vampire reflects the condition of its readers now, their millennial fears, the centrality of Aids in their sexuality, their struggle (or lack of it) within a vacuum of moral, religious and political conviction.

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In Our Vampires, Ourselves, Nina Auerbach closely charts the evolution of the vampire, from the roots of its English-language incarnation in Britain during the Romantic period through to the struggling American vampire of the early 1990s. She focuses on the links between the fears expressed by horror fiction and contemporaneous ideology, writing that "no fear is *only* personal: it must steep itself in its political and ideological ambience, without which our solitary terrors have no contagious resonance"[2]. Vampires are a barometer of ideological climate. They also seem to thrive where politics is vital and dynamic; they "go where the

[1] Nina Auerbach; Our Vampires, Ourselves; University of Chicago Press (Chicago and London, 1995)

power is"[3]. In the nineteenth century, the British century of colonialism and expansion, the vampire was primarily produced in Britain, while early in the twentieth century it translocated to the United States. I imagine that if vampires survive into the twenty-first century, they will reflect the trend from national to globalized politics. They may perhaps be found roaming the streets of a megalopolis in cyberspace, their implants allowing them to feed on the psyche of virtual humans.

Auerbach argues that there is a similarity between the vampire fiction of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In the middle of the century, she writes, both from 1830 to around 1880 and from roughly the 1930s to 1970s, vampires are at their most subversive. Geraldine[4] and Carmilla[5] in the nineteenth century, and Christopher Lee's Hammer vampire[6] in the 1960s and Frank Langella's revisionist Dracula of 1979[7], subverted notions of family and intimacy, authority and law. In the 1880s and 90s, however, and since 1980, Auerbach argues that vampires become moral agents, a seemingly more conservative comment on family, sexuality and society, and that in the unstable end-of-century milieu, both of the nineteenth and twentieth century, authority is yearned for and upheld rather than undermined. Although this trend to conservatism is evident in certain strands within contemporary popular fiction, I would suggest that it is unjustifiable to generalize about this process. As I argue, contemporary fiction is currently in a very interesting phase, reflecting a great variety of attitudes about ideology and belief, and attempts to adapt progressive values to contemporary

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[2] Auerbach; Our Vampires, Ourselves; p.3

[3] Auerbach; Our Vampires, Ourselves; p.6

[4] Samuel Taylor Coleridge; "Christabel"

[5] Sheridan Le Fanu; "Carmilla"

[6] Lee starred in a series of Dracula-based films produced by Hammer studios from 1958-1970.

[7] John Badham's Dracula (1979)

conditions. Auerbach's argument is, however, important in drawing links between popular culture and political ideology, and her review of major periods of vampire production is thus illuminating.

Auerbach explains that the Hammer films of the 1960s went a long way in crystallizing a picture of the vampire in the popular imagination. Although produced in England, their primary audience was American students whose culture they effectively complemented. What most people think of when they consider a vampire is a Hammer vampire in his cape, frightened of crucifixes, garlic and holy water. The Hammer films were the first fiction to formalize vampire lore, to the extent that the vampire was oversignified. By the later films, it was so restricted by lore and laws that it almost became a parody of itself. Its mystique disappeared. Stephen King's young vampire hunters in 'Salem's Lot are equipped to destroy vampires simply because they have watched a lot of television. Christopher Moore's designification of the vampire is an interesting sequel to the Hammer construction, and shows how the vampire has become less and less supernatural over the century. Already the Hammer studios were the first vampire producer to rid the vampire of its metaphysical potency. An unsanctified crucifix, knocked together from two pieces of wood, is no less potent than that of a faithful Catholic priest. Also, vampires are not repelled from light because of its goodness, they are allergic to it![8]. Interestingly, a seemingly archetypal myth about vampires, that they burn up in the sun, was invented by Hammer studios. Previously, vampires were often weakened, or lost their special powers, in the light, but Lee was the first vampire to burn to ashes in the sun. This shows how much more potent television was than books in spreading and instilling images of the vampire in the popular imagination.

[8] Auerbach; Our Vampires, Ourselves; p.121

The 60s in America were a decade of political and social upheaval. The students who consumed vampires were affected not only by the destabilization caused and reflected by the assassinations of the Kennedys, Martin Luther King and Malcolm X, but also by the Vietnam war and their mobilization against it. Also, writes Auerbach, who was one of those students, women were starting to feel the first stirrings of feminism, reflected in some of the more subversive adaptations of Lucy- and Mina-figures in the Hammer films, who urged autonomy from male influence and even hinted at lesbianism. When this wave of feminism had reached its peak by the late 70s, John Badham's Dracula, the 1979 film version starring Frank Langella, was there to summarize these tendencies[9]. Feminist revisionary readings such as those by Christopher Craft and Elaine Showalter were presaged in this film version. It made the Victorian heroes undoubtedly unsympathetic, showed the women characters embracing vampirism as an escape from patriarchy, and exposed the danger of obsessional medical discourse.

The 1970s were also a decade when vampires became leaders in a leaderless society. Particularly in this decade, the authoritative vampire to American readers and viewers was "an alternative to mass society, a cultivated remnant of a stately past our country never had, a forbidden lover in times that claim to forbid nothing, the king Americans are not supposed to want"[10]. Presidents like Ford and Carter were arguably impotent enough to bring back illicit yearnings for a monarchy. The aloof vampires, Langella's Dracula, Rice's Louis and Lestat, and Chelsea Quinn Yarbro's Count Saint-Germain[11], were the bluebloods who filled this void.

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[9] Auerbach; Our Vampires, Ourselves; p.140

[10] Auerbach; Our Vampires, Ourselves; p.112

[11] Chelsea Quinn Yarbro, The Count Saint-Germain series, starting with Hotel Transylvania (1978)

Their sagas were like the never-ending exploits of an American royal family; watching their progress was like having the fun of a monarchy with no threat to their democracy. They also offered escapism from daily political concerns. For a time, readers just wanted to relax and let their leaders take control. The appeal of Rice's vampires, for instance, is that being amoral aesthetes (except for Louis), "they are beautifully devoid of social consciousness, another major attraction for disaffected readers"[12].

In 1980, Ronald Reagan ascended to the American presidency and soon surprised most Americans by becoming the patriarch they had missed. His decisive reassertion of conservative 'family values' and belief in God was accepted by the Americans who elected him, and his legacy lasted past 1992, Bush's last year in office. He also successfully aided in marginalizing disaffected and disbelieving youths and their vampires. Reagan symbolized and enacted a hardening of official attitudes towards emergent and subordinate cultures: any that did not conform to normative laws that were being defended in the face of an uncertain future. The cold war still smouldered, Aids began to rage, new global enemies were being defined in Africa and the Middle and Far East, and new bouts of racial hatred were brewing in America. Patriarchal values, which had been under severe stress in the 60s and 70s, were now reaffirmed, and scholarship of the 80s followed suit. Radical thought no longer led to tenure, and scholars turned to safer, less pragmatic theory. Foucault dominated the 80s, denying the possibility of rebellion, arguing that even "apparent ideological alternatives are mere offshoots of the tyrannical dominant discourse"[13]. This non-revolutionary scholarship would far more easily lead to government funding and state-sanctioned tenure. Americans now had a

[12] Auerbach; Our Vampires, Ourselves; p.154

[13] Auerbach; Our Vampires, Ourselves; p.171

king and council to make the political decisions, and believed that political action was beyond them.

Some vampires of the 80s reflect this determinist ideological environment. Auerbach rightly notes that many vampires retreated from the sphere of macropolitics. This, however, is not the same as becoming conservative. I would argue that many vampires' transgressive potential was now focused elsewhere, to smaller spheres where change was still seen as a possibility. Family structures needed reform, and were a place where feminist ideals could still be expressed without seeming too threatening to mainstream politics and academia. If one couched a naturalized feminist militancy against rape and abuse in terms of 'family values', the message would still be spread and read, not obstructed. The vampire becomes domesticized, its social comment arising from the issues around family and personal relationships it raises. The 80s also show the first emergence of mortal vampires and diseased vampires. Also, many vampires, like the later incarnations of Lestat, become so spectral they seem to have lost their effect on humans. I would not support Auerbach's view that this context reflects the vampire's decline into irrelevance and ineffectiveness (even if she argues that it probably will emerge strongly again). I would argue that, as always, the vampire is a reflection of its time and its producers and consumers and that what it now reflects is a pragmatic adaptation of progressive ideals, a functionalizing redefinition of subversion. The reflection of more conservative concerns by writers such as Rusch by no means shows that the current generation of vampire readers is only conservative. The continued popularity of Rice's novels shows that now there is just as much interest as in the 70s in the epic, subversive and vital vampire. The mixture of the two points toward the complex condition of 90s youth, their struggle between idealism and fearful caution. 90s readers are not only mirrored by 90s fiction, but by all the fiction they still relate to and enjoy. Auerbach seems to have given up

on the current generation of young thinkers and doers, and their will or ability to question dominant paradigms. Is she justified? What are the assumptions and concerns of this generation of vampire-readers?

Neil Howe and Bill Strauss investigate the phenomenon of the 13th generation[14], the generation of young Americans born between 1961 and 1981, in their book 13th Gen: Abort, Retry, Ignore, Fail?. This generation is the primary readership of contemporary vampire fiction, and I would extend its formulation to include people worldwide born in this period and who primarily consume American and Americanized mass culture. Although specific conditions in the United States do differ to varying degrees from those in other westernized countries, and while it is not within the scope of this dissertation to investigate these complexities, the common affinity toward the same mass culture does point toward many important similarities. Popular culture not only reflects the concerns of its producers and consumers, but creates them. South African or Australian children brought up primarily on American books, films and television will share many of the concerns and understandings of their American counterparts, even if on a less specific and broader idea-based level. Now, more than ever, ideas are being compared and exchanged extremely rapidly and directly. It should be remembered during the discussion that follows that for most young people, intellectualization and philosophy are still a less pressing need than their struggle for survival in a climate of violence within and without their homes, from fathers, peers, strangers and themselves.

[14] Neil Howe and Bill Strauss; 13th Gen: Abort, Retry, Ignore, Fail?; Vintage (New York, 1993)

The 13th generation is defined by ambivalence. It is a generation caught between fear and hope. Young people seem too afraid to postulate what will come next until the millennium is safely negotiated, but hope it will be. They are terrified of Aids, environmental devastation, cloning and aliens, technology and dehumanization, but are often engaged by the challenges they present. They are afraid that there is no God, but some wonder if there is. Fear can be seen to be proof of belief, and fear for the future is proof of hope. Presenting this generation's fears and hopes, vampire novels and other popular forms also reflect their beliefs. This generation often seems to know its enemies, but not its allies, knowing enough to distrust traditional authority, but not knowing whom to trust. They say, "We are lost between doing for ourselves and doing nothing at all"[15], and "We are clueless yet wizened, too unopinionated to voice concern, purposely enigmatic and indecisive"[16]. On one hand they demonstrate an anarchic distrust of authority, and of media- and advertising-led constructions of fashion, but, on the other, fashionable status symbols like CD players and designer clothes seem to give their users identity and purpose. Shopping is "something to do when there is nothing else to do. And there is nothing else to do"[17]. One young commentator writes, "It's okay to be selfish, as long as you're up front about it.... We trust ourselves, and money. Period"[18].

Specifically in America it seems, at first glance, an apathetic and materialistic generation. Only 30% read newspapers regularly[19] and only 23% have discussed the existence of God or the meaning of life with friends[20]. National politics is seen as irrelevant or completely

[15] Lynnelle Drezler, student, quoted in Howe and Strauss; p.8

[16] Bret Easton Ellis, quoted in Howe and Strauss; p.9

[17] Christine Tako, 18, quoted in Howe and Strauss; p.128

[18] David Leavitt; "The New Lost Generation" in Esquire; quoted in Howe and Strauss; p.114

[19] Howe and Strauss; p.128

[20] Gallup poll, cited in Howe and Strauss; p.187

ineffective in bringing about change. Protest demonstrations at universities are barely attended. Richard Linklater, director of the cult youth film Slacker, says "We don't want to get involved in futile activity"[21]. Sometimes this apparent apathy is actually an attempt to move from what is now seen as futile activity to activity that will make a difference. A student, Claire Epstein, says, "I don't see myself influencing a political election. I feel so removed from it. But when I go to a neighborhood and work with a child, I can see an improvement. I've done something"[22].

This last statement demonstrates the trend toward micropoliticization of action. Certainly, there may be a lot of young people who are driven only by materialistic ideals, but, as is clear in the self-analysing nature of the statements above, there are many who feel the need to question and to act. These people are in a dilemma. What is the basis of action when previous forms of authority and causes, including radical and progressive movements of the 60s and 70s, seem untrustworthy and hypocritical? The 13th generation reacts against their parents' generation which, especially in America, in many cases had a hippie outlook, taking 'mind-expanding' drugs, making free love and experimenting with their children's upbringing. This rift is succinctly portrayed in a cartoon in which a broadly grinning ageing hippie with a white T-shirt stands next to an angry- and paranoid-looking twentysomething in a black T-shirt. The hippie's shirt reads 'Sex Drugs Rock & Roll'; the youth's reads 'Aids Crack Punk & Rap'[23]. Sex, drugs and rock 'n roll are not what they were in the 60s. What used to be youthful exuberance is now laced with death. Sex is dangerous, drugs are life-threatening and contemporary music mirrors a violent society not acknowledged in the folk idylls of the 60s.

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[21] Quoted in Howe and Strauss; p.166

[22] Quoted in Howe and Strauss; p.132

[23] Cartoon by R.J. Matson in Howe and Strauss; p.42

Woodstock is not symbolic of idealism and aquarian community to everyone. One young man fumes, “Woodstock... Never in human history has one generation been so narcissistic.... The self-righteous, preening attitude is infuriating”[24]. A woman, raised in the 60s, ponders her upbringing:

> I remember wallpapering my younger brother’s room with *Playboy* centerfolds.... I remember bongs and pipes and art and music among my parents’ greatest artifacts and my mother’s vibrator and reading my father’s *Penthouse* Forums.... Sometimes I wonder if their experiment backfired[25].

This context can serve as an antidote against overly glamorising the politically expressive 60s and 70s. Although America’s militant and communal political expression of previous decades is no longer in evidence, there is still the possibility that some sort of social action can have an important role in the next decade. It is, however, being adapted to changing conditions. Macropolitics, I would argue, always relies in some measure on an essentialist foundation. There is an accepted Right people mobilize to defend or assert. The 13th generation and its global counterparts are the first to feel the full force of postmodern fragmentation. Belief in any widely-held truth is profoundly difficult. Globalizing cultures offer such a variety of truths and realities that they aid depoliticization. There are no longer Causes, there may only be causes. This process is sometimes expressed among the youth in growing conservative reaction against the advances of progressive race-related, feminist and gay politics. Often, however, the principles of these movements have been naturalized into their personal philosophies, and new forms of social action are being developed from them. An ambivalent

[24] John Cunningham quoted in Howe and Strauss; p.42

generation, looking to follow no leader, yet cautious and pragmatic, rather than idealistic; its future is difficult to project.

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The vampire novels themselves reflect an underlying concern with issues of moral, religious and political belief. The vampire's innate interrogation of life and death is being employed to investigate life and death issues unique to the end of this century. We, and vampires who reflect our culture, find ourselves in a postmodern, postessential, postpolitical, postreligious and postexistential, sometimes even postvampiric, condition. To investigate the extent to which these concerns are portrayed in the novels already discussed, I will present the different approaches to morality and belief taken by Anne Rice and Kristine Kathryn Rusch, writing two decades apart. I will also compare Lost Souls and Bloodsucking Fiends, books by 13th generation writers, and the interesting differences in their treatment of contemporary concerns.

In Interview With the Vampire, Rice's vampires all but ignore human morality, except for Louis, who struggles under the immense weight of the considerations his new existence has raised. He philosophizes about love, about killing, and about the existence of God. The idea of morality is central to Louis's development in the novel. For the first decades of his vampire existence, he fights against losing his humanity, and with it, his human morality. His moral inability to kill and his need to love and be loved are remnants of his human emotions. When he kills a human for the first time, and when Claudia dies and with her his last real love, he

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[25] Adriene Jenik; "Family Ties" in the L.A. Weekly; quoted in Howe and Strauss; p.63

loses the two fundaments of his humanity. Ultimately, he becomes a cold and emotionless vampire, and sees that amorality is a vampire's defence against himself. It simply does not serve him to worry about his every kill, and to want love instead of lust; he must come to terms with who he now is, he must kill. He must, as Lestat exhorts him, "Do what it is your nature to do"[26]. In Interview With the Vampire, amorality is not an inherent part of the vampire's make-up, it is something which must be fought for. Vampires do not lose their humanity overnight.

As discussed, Interview With the Vampire can be seen as a watershed in the vampire's evolution. An aspect of Rice's novelty is that her vampire is no longer anthropomorphized evil; he himself raises philosophical questions of good and evil and the concepts themselves are merged. Barbara Frey Waxman, in her article "Postexistentialism in the Neo-Gothic Mode: Anne Rice's *Interview With the Vampire*"[27], shows how this is an aspect of Rice's innovative updating of conventional Gothic themes. Gothic fiction is traditionally concerned with a philosophical quest after the meaning of human existence. It raises ontological questions, interrogates the nature of reality by presenting the surreal, and investigates moral and ethical issues. Existentialism is characterized by an interweaving of the notions of good and evil, an illustration of the amoral nature of human sexuality and a revolt against traditional authority. Church, State, and Society are seen as fabricated barriers which come between the individual and real experience and as false justifications for action. In the face of a world devoid of absolutes, an individual's own system of authority must be constructed based on the notions of freedom of choice and the ethic of responsibility, which "empower

[26] Interview With the Vampire; p.98

[27] Barbara Frey Waxman; "Postexistentialism in the Neo-Gothic Mode: Anne Rice's *Interview With the Vampire*"; Mosaic, 25 (3), 1992; pp.79-97

one to choose actions, to shape a meaningful moral life, to judge oneself, and to take responsibility for the consequences of one's actions"[28]. Clearly there are shared concerns between Gothicism and existentialism.

Cynical postmodern thought, however, challenges the foundations for existential action- the notions of freedom of choice, responsibility, morality and justice. No longer is the existentialist ideal of a Nietzschean life based purely on action possible; we are incapable of independence, we are bound to circumstance and our postmodern, postexistentialist understanding that our lives are made up of reaction to it. Waxman argues that Louis is an idealist who struggles to confront the postexistentialist outlooks of his fellow vampires. She suggests that this postmodernization of the traditional Gothic form makes Interview With the Vampire an example of postexistential neo-Gothicism. Rice's presentation of fundamental human traits in Louis, the vampire, leads to a profound rethinking of the concepts of good and evil. Louis is deeply concerned with religious and ethical questions, and yearns after community and love. He is simultaneously a bloodthirsty demon and a quester for sanctity.

When Louis first turns, he wonders whether he is damned. Over and over, he asks himself

> Am I damned? Am I from the devil? Is my very nature that of a devil... And if it is, why then do I revolt against it... turn away in disgust when Lestat kills? What have I become in becoming a vampire?... Am I damned? If so, why do I feel such pity for [Claudia], for her gaunt face? Why do I wish to touch her tiny, soft arms, hold her now

[28] Waxman; p.83

> on my knee as I am doing, feel her bend her head to my chest as I gently touch the satin hair?[29]

He thinks that as a vampire he should be damned, but his feelings of disgust against evil and of love confuse him. Evil creatures, he thinks, should not be able to feel righteousness or love, or to hate wrong. In his quest to believe in God or Satan, and in divine Good and Evil, he commits the ultimate sacrilege of killing a priest in a church. He does this to bring down divine judgement, to force God to show himself and exact heavenly punishment. In the final moments before he kills him, Louis demands of the priest, "Do you see what I am! Why, if God exists, does he suffer me to exist!... You talk of sacrilege!"[30] The priest cannot reinspire Louis's faith, God does not strike him down, and Louis's doubt is compounded. After this, he loses hope that he may find transcendent meaning, and, he says, "neither heaven nor hell seemed more than a tormenting fancy. To know, to believe, in one or the other... that was perhaps the only salvation for which I could dream"[31].

When Louis meets Armand, his hopes are raised again. Armand is wise and old, and Louis hopes that he can teach him of vampires' relationship to the divine, and how vampires can find their meaning. Unfortunately for Louis, Armand cannot help him. Armand derives no power from Satan, admits no belief in powers beyond the world. He has no knowledge of God's existence, and knows no vampire that has discourse with God or the devil. Armand's agnostic position is profoundly disappointing to Louis, who seeks to know. After Armand has told him these things, Louis narrates, "it began to sink in. It was as I'd always feared, and it

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[29] Interview With the Vampire; pp.81-2

[30] Interview With the Vampire; p.162

[31] Interview With the Vampire; p.177

was as lonely, it was as totally without hope. Things would go on as they had before, on and on. My search was over"[32]. The idea that there is no meaning to seek for is devastating to Louis- the quester's reason for existence is no more. He tells that at that moment, "something was broken inside me"[33], and he sums up the confusing state of his existence to Armand:

> We stand here, the two of us, immortal, ageless, rising nightly to feed that immortality on human blood... and you ask me how I could believe I would find a meaning in the supernatural! I tell you, after seeing what I have become, I could damn well believe anything!... And believing thus, being thus confounded, I can now accept the most fantastical truth of all: that there is no meaning to any of this![34]

Under the challenge of a universe that does not seem to want to punish his evil, and of Armand's authoritative agnosticism, Louis realizes that the only truth he will find is that there is no truth, no meaning.

In this godless universe, one can believe in nothing, or in anything. Vampires can become gods. In their Romantic and Victorian manifestations, vampires functioned primarily as a marginalized opposite, a symbol of the deep fears of a 'civilized' and 'God-fearing' society. Now, however, they are able to function as culturally central, because there is no longer a universalist framework denying their existence. Faith in God and the notion of civilization have faltered, and there is relatively as much evidence to support a belief in vampires as there is to prove the existence of God. As described earlier, when Lestat turns Louis, Lestat drains

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[32] Interview With the Vampire; p.258

[33] Interview With the Vampire; p.258

[34] Interview With the Vampire; pp.258-9

him to the point of death, then revitalizes him by making him drink his blood back. The inverted Christian imagery is clear here. Taking of the blood brings immortal life. It is also a rewriting of the Judaeo-Christian creation myth, with Lestat's fangs replacing the finger of God, and his blood replacing God's vitalizing breath. Lestat is a Promethean figure, bestowing life, and usurping God's right. In the further novels in Rice's *Vampire Chronicles*, Lestat starts to become more god-like and metaphysical, transcending time and space, taking God's space in the void which is left in a world after belief.

The grand scale of Interview With the Vampire may be contrasted with the enclosure of Sins of the Blood. Louis and Lestat fit in well with Auerbach's conception of the 70s vampire: a leader, a demi-god, transgressing on a large scale, asking big questions. Also, barely interested in the human mundane, they point the way forward to the spectral 80s vampire, which Lestat becomes. Sins of the Blood, written 19 years later, is a case of domesticized vampirism, vampirism on a micropolitical scale. Rice's novels, especially the later novels in the *Vampire Chronicles*, stretch over thousands of years, while Rusch's is confined to action over a few years, one young woman's life. In some ways, Rusch's novel is conservative, seeking to heal families and make them more stable. She also clearly presents us with a moral message regarding the evils of uncontrolled lust, whether it is exercised on children or on adults. Although strict and condemning, Rusch's morality is still clearly contemporary. It is an anti-patriarchal moral stance, not abetting existing power systems, one aim of entrenched moral codes. It many ways it can be seen as a uniquely 1990s novel. It does not seek to be feminist on a sweeping scale, but turns naturalized feminist concerns to domestic issues. It is not a transgressive novel, and, published in 1995, well reflects the mixture of newly-assimilated postpolitical concerns and a measure of conservatism.

Although supporting the notion of a grounded family, and presenting a moral message, Sins of the Blood is also untraditional in some ways, and claims for its conservatism are confused. Rusch shows up the hypocrisy inherent in traditional families and neighbourhoods, and criticizes traditional patriarchal power structures. Also, although presenting a firm moral message, she does not present us with a clear polarity between right and wrong. Through her varying narrative perspectives, she shows that Cammie's view, the view through which much of the story is narrated, is just one of many possible perspectives. Although most of the vampires in the novel are presented as base creatures, with misogyny, sex and power-lust their central motivations, it is evident that this is Cammie's belief, informed by her fear for her brother and herself, and by her traumatic upbringing at the hands of a vampire, and we are made to question its universality. Officer Thornton, for example, suggests that vampirism is viewed far differently in the Northwest than in the Midwest, where Cammie works. Thornton sees vampire eradication programmes as state-sanctioned murder: "I've watched this stuff on television. It's obscene. You barge into people's homes and slaughter them..."[35]. She sees eradication, largely led by children of eradicated vampires, as an expression of inherited violence. The ending too denies closure or a vindication of any particular moral stance. It becomes unclear whether Cammie is becoming a vampire herself. We wonder whether she will change dramatically when she has turned fully, and it becomes less easy to condemn vampires so sweepingly.

Unlike Rusch and Rice, Poppy Z. Brite and Christopher Moore are 13th generation writers. Writing in the 90s, they are the most likely of the novelists I have discussed to reflect the concerns of their generation. Brite and Moore approach these in very different ways, showing

[35] Sins of the Blood; p.231

again that generalizations are not entirely valid. Lost Souls is concerned with moral and religious questions: like Interview With the Vampire it presents a neo-Gothic quest for meaning on a broad scale. Bloodsucking Fiends, on the other hand, is most involved with the pragmatic concerns of living in a large city, and denies the potency of metaphysics. They present their ideological messages in different ways, and both together indicate a complex set of attitudes.

Lost Souls is neo-Gothic on more than one level. One of its major stories is Nothing's quest for meaning and identity in a world which has refuted meaning. Along the way he, like Louis, must struggle with the loss of his humanity and human beliefs, and accept that he is a vampire. When he so readily accepts his amoral relationship with his father, he has already made peace with his vampire nature. Before he discovers his roots, he does not feel as if he fits into human society. He befriends other dislocated suburban youths, who express their disillusionment through nihilist subculture. Nothing's friends are Goths, but perhaps should be called naive neo-Goths. They have already given up on finding meaning in this life, and look to death as the only salvation. Their philosophy, however, is not as sophisticated as that of other Gothic questers, and they often seem to be caught up in the fashions of their peers and popular media. Members of the Gothic subculture cultivate an emotionless exterior, dress in black and whiten their faces, listen to mournful music with twisted religious imagery or depressing messages, and are often fascinated by death. It is clear why they are such perfect victims for modern vampires. They will invite death from a vampire, even enjoy it, but often in their final moment they will be surprised that this death is real and not reversible, like their fashions. Ghost considers some young people he has come across in a local school:

> kids smoking Marlboros and Camels, kids trying to look jaded and managing only to look bored. Kids with wide-open innocent faces and easy smiles, kids with long dark hair and eyeliner, kids with razor scars on their wrists, kids already sick of life, kids happy to be alive and drunk and younger than they would ever feel again[36].

The fact that these are children is repeatedly pressed home. They are mostly aimless children trying to destroy themselves with cigarettes, drugs, alcohol or razors, and they are everywhere. It is not a problem isolated to a few strange or troubled boys and girls. When Steve and Ghost meet Nothing, a symbolic lost child, they sense "the essence of childhood lost... baby powder and cigarette smoke, forgotten toys and eyeliner... the distilled essence of all that was lost forever"[37].

Christian goes into a dark club in New Orleans where young death worshippers go to believe they are somewhere beyond the grave. Here he meets a boy who invites him outside. As they kiss, the boy notices Christian's fangs, and instead of drawing away in horror, he pleads, "Make me into one too... Please? I want to be one. I want to walk at night with you and fall in love and drink blood. Kill me. Make me into a vampire too. Bite me. Take me with you"[38]. As Christian drinks, the boy perhaps experiences what he would class as love for the first, and last, time. The boy's understanding of vampirism comes from popular fiction like Interview With the Vampire, in which a vampire can bestow the dubious gift of immortality. Brite's vampires, however, cannot make new vampires by drinking, and "if the boy had died thinking he would rise again as one with Christian, that could not be helped. It was kinder to let the

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[36] Lost Souls; p.196

[37] Lost Souls; p.186

[38] Lost Souls; p.67

children die believing as they did"[39]. These children have been disillusioned enough in life not to have their last fantasy destroyed. It is important to Christian that his victims die happy if possible, which is why he preys on this type of drifting child. To these children, the vampire is a lost god, offering eternal and meaningful life. In their last moments, they believe that their faith is justified. Christian kisses the boy's forehead, puts the body into the river and watches it sink.

To these young people, vampires are not an unknown. The boy is hardly surprised when he sees that Christian is a vampire. Some of them have been glorifying death, and its popular symbol, the vampire, for all their adolescence. They make death, vampires and their subcultures their surrogate religion. The horror-inspired music they listen to and the books they read are perhaps in part responsible for the blunting of their fear of death. These manifestations of the media's portrayal of death reduce death to a fantasy pop collage. Death becomes the unreal pictures of war on the news, the splatters of blood on the screen, the graphic descriptions in the novels and chants and invocations in the music. Their nihilism is popularized into an exciting sexual expression. The novel's spectral twins are archetypal youthful death idolizers, and as singers, are two of popular culture's image-makers. They chant the words which these young people would like to believe: "Death is dark, death is sweet... Death is all that lasts forever. Death is eternal beauty... Death is a lover with a thousand tongues... Death is easy... Death is easy..."[40] Death is easier than a life of passionlessness and lovelessness. Death is easier than the burden of living.

[39] Lost Souls; p.68

[40] Lost Souls; p.47

Brite's presentation of moral issues is complex. She offers no strict polarities between good and evil. The vampire characters vary, much as humans differ from each other. Christian and Nothing are sympathetic characters, while Zillah, Molochai and Twig are more menacing. Even they, however, are not presented as purely evil. The different narrative perspectives in the novel are important in creating this flux. Ghost, for example, sees the vampires as evil and frightening. Seeing and feeling the twins' malice with the intensity of his psychic vision nearly destroys him. Nothing, though, in many ways almost as sympathetic a character as Ghost, sees Zillah's band as his family, a welcoming and vital family, and is still with the band, leading it, fifty years later. Brite seems to yearn for some sort of stable family system, even if it is not based on traditional models, but at the same time does not automatically espouse 60s non-traditionalism. In her satirization of Nothing's foster parents, she reflects neatly the 13th generation distrust of New Age, hippie and unstable parenting.

On the other hand, though, she looks favourably on the mystical upbringing of Ghost. He was raised by Miz Catlin, his grandmother, and Miz Deliverance, traditional practitioners of white magic. They use herbal medicine and teach community and broader family values. For Brite this seems to be the sound roots of what is adulterated in hippie and New Age ideas. Ghost is the most sensitive and peaceful character in the novel, and his ideals seem most closely to mirror the central narrator's perspective. His empathy, his faith, his ability to feel people's pain, and the fact that these are uncorrupted by twenty two years in modern America, are presented as an ideal. When it seems that Brite is presenting a yearning, not for constructed family values of 1950s America, but for a fantastical, mystical past, we are again confused by what seems to be the most overt insertion of narratorial comment, which indicates a cynical, 90s mistrust. The narrator writes, "when you have too much faith in something, it is bound to

hurt you. Too much faith in anything will suck you dry"[41]. Added to this, her presentation of orthodox religious characters is unfavourable. Wallace Creech is a bitter hypocrite and a religious zealot who nonetheless sleeps with his daughter, Jessy. He tries to kill Christian, because by doing so, "He would eradicate his damnable sin. He would redeem himself"[42]. Kinsey Hummingbird's mother is a similar Christian hypocrite: "the truth was that Mrs. Hummingbird had always disliked her only son and had never troubled to hide it... The Bible she spent all her free time reading said to love your neighbor..."[43].

Interestingly, although Lost Souls is a book in which unsafe sex practices are widespread, there is no mention of Aids, though there is blood drinking, heterosexual and gay sex, and Nothing shares a heroin needle with Spooky. When a condom is mentioned, it is to prevent pregnancy, not disease. Christian criticizes Zillah for getting Ann pregnant: "Had Zillah grown up not at all...? Had he never heard of *condoms*?"[44] Brite creates a fantastic milieu where her characters seem to exist in a pre-Oedipal, polymorphously perverse and bisexual state, and where daily worries about disease seem petty and are not relevant. The characters are unconcerned about daily logistical issues like rent, sleep and transport. The larger questions about existence and meaning are not obscured by them. Brite's fiction is escapist, inviting her readers out of the world of everyday fears, into a sphere of more metaphysical terror.

In this way, Brite's vampires are like the Ricean demi-gods, and Moore's Jody is their designified contemporary counterpart. As suggested earlier, Moore consciously satirizes the

[41] Lost Souls; p.161

[42] Lost Souls; p.80

[43] Lost Souls; p.128

over-signified traditional vampire. By making some aspects of popular lore apply to Jody and others not, seemingly randomly, and by overtly parodying the concept of this lore, Moore suggests the insignificance of these rules. The one important way in which he has designified the vampire is by making her persona a comic one. Removing the frightening aspects- psychological, emotional and physical- from its character is the way Moore brings the vampire down from any transcendent sphere and posits it inescapably in the urban milieu. The contrast between the old vampire, who lives more strictly according to confining vampire laws, and Jody, who wants to continue to live as far as possible like a human, is striking. The old vampire is eventually outwitted and cast in brass, while Jody and Tommy seem to live happily into the future. Moore seems to be killing off the old-fashioned epic vampire, literally making a memorial of him, acknowledging his role in the evolution of vampires, but presenting the non-violent, humanized vampire as the new type of vampire for his generation. Moore rejects old-fashioned archetypes and foregrounds socio-political comment. For him, the potency of the vampire lies in the fact that it can serve as a medium through which to present current social issues. Brite's vampires are transcendent, inhuman and supernaturally potent, while Moore's are very human and live in the human world. Brite and Moore are two 13th generation American writers; they have two very different approaches to their vampires.

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Vampire fiction produced in the 80s and 90s is characteristically different from that which came before. It is laced with angst. Uncertainty about the current state of being and the future is expressed, whether in attempts to transcend it in escapism, or in attempts to face the

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[44] Lost Souls; p.246

worrying issues directly. The consumption of vampire fiction across all periods, however, continues. Current works like those of Brite, Moore and Rusch, slightly older texts like Interview With the Vampire, a groundbreaker in modern vampirism, and old archetypes like Dracula, constantly reinvestigated and reappropriated in film and writing, remain popular. This mixture of retrospection and reinscription defines vampire fiction's predominantly young readership drawing close to the millennium.

Some of the newer fiction demonstrates what I would term a postfeminist, and by extension, a postpolitical ethic. The struggle to conscientize those to whom feminist and progressive concerns and presumptions have already become the norm- although often in a simplistic, uncritical way- is no longer relevant. This leads to a dilemma among the already-politicized youth. Will some see this as a signal to end their engagement with social and ideological matters and turn to an uninterested lack of involvement? Will some become socially active and push toward spreading their understandings to people who are not yet aware of the progressive paradigm-shifts of the last few decades? Will some start to consider new and important ideological concerns?

Probably all of this will happen. Many young people believe that broad-based social, as opposed to individual, action is outdated, and that there is no more purpose for political expression. Others see that there is still a significant amount of conscientizing to be done. While domestic and interpersonal manifestations of patriarchal abuses such as rape still occur, and while the media broadcasts their insidious presumptions without being seriously challenged, there is still a lot of political work ahead. Meanwhile, other young people may move on to considering new perspectives on issues of the next century. The environment has up to now been seen as of less social importance than political concerns, and of course it is

becoming imperative that a revolution in thinking occur on this matter. Genetic engineering over the next decades will raise ethical questions, as will our increasing engagement with virtual reality and artificial intelligence. Many young people fear becoming cyborgs in cities which will become technological machines, running themselves and the humans in them. They fear a loss of individuality, a loss of humanity, a loss of love. Some of this generation will give thought to religion, philosophy, morality and existence in this new climate.

The fact that the vampire can serve as a basis for such speculation on fundamental human issues proves its importance. Vampire fiction is not an isolated expression of one quirky aspect of youth culture. It is tapped into the fundamental concerns expressed by every facet of popular culture as a whole. One area of its effect on which I have focused in this dissertation is its primary preoccupation with exposing and interrogating norms. Contemporary vampire fiction exposes brutality in family structures, in some ways validated by patriarchal ideology, and its psychological consequences; it thoroughly investigates sexuality, leading us to question traditional normative notions; and it is well-suited to its occasional use as a platform for voicing feminist and gay political stances. The figure of the vampire facilitates this sort of questioning because it itself is an embodiment of the uncertainties which plague human psyches. While we attempt to classify the world into order and rules, our nightmares remind us that this order, these polarities, are ungrounded. The vampire is queer, living dead, human monster, and reflects a world tending toward chaos after essential belief has failed. The subversive disorder the novels present- the surrogate families, the perverse sexuality, the disruptive women- makes us question our beliefs. Do we want order, and if so, is it the old order? Can we find some belief that will calm the chaos around us? Some novels show us where we are; some wish to take us back, others forward, others simply elsewhere.

This is what vampire fiction has done. Its continued relevance is under debate. Will it continue to make us think in the next millennium? Is the vampire dead or alive? Nina Auerbach suggests that it is time for the vampire to hibernate for some time. She points toward the designification of vampires, their recent enervation and argues that they have become too closely involved in human domestic affairs, too much like humans. Indeed, now vampires can sometimes even turn back into humans! She proclaims

> the end of the vampire cycle that began with revisionist éclat in the 1970s. In 1987, vampires were already suffering the loss of will that accompanied the dominance of Reaganism and AIDS... The reversibility of vampirism in the 1980s movies... suggests that at the end of the twentieth century, vampirism is wearing down and vampires need a long restorative sleep[45].

Even though she suggests that they will awaken in years to come, she sees no immediate future for the vampire. In Interview With the Vampire, Lestat seems to agree. After seeing a desperately weak Lestat in 1970s New Orleans, Louis tells Armand of his decline: “He’s dying, dying of rigidity, of fear. His mind cannot accept this time... I think he is dying as clumsily and grotesquely as humans often die in this century... of old age”[46]. Perhaps the vampire is an old-fashioned relic unable to compete with life, death and fear in the late twentieth century.

Norine Dresser disagrees. She argues that vampires are potent symbols of contemporary capitalist American desire. She explains:

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[45] Auerbach; Our Vampires, Ourselves; p.192

> While on the surface it at first seemed incongruous that vampires were so prominent in this technologically advanced society, after carefully examining and analyzing the data, I believe one can see that they seem to exemplify American ideals and values. Sexuality, power, and immortality were listed as the top attractive qualities of the creature by fans. This is congruent with the interests often attributed to the larger American society[47].

She also suggests that the vampire's appeal lies in the fact that it transcends daily human affairs. Vampires, she argues, "have magically bypassed the struggles that Americans face on a daily basis"[48]; struggles for work, pay, food, security, and love and appeal. As has been shown in the analysis of Bloodsucking Fiends for example, this is not true in all cases. Dresser's thesis may also be faulted in that she does not seem to analyze recent vampire fiction as closely as Auerbach does. She states that "power, sex and immortality... are sentiments that are echoed in all the film and book variations"[49], which Auerbach has shown is certainly not true of all texts. She writes, however, of the unspecialized image of the vampire in many people's minds. The archetypal vampire still has powerful allure to the consumer of popular imagery.

Is the vampire going to live? The fact that the 70s are gone and 70s-style vampire fiction is arguably no longer being produced does not mean that people no longer read or watch 70s vampire fiction. All it takes is a highly-publicized vampire film, like Francis Ford Coppola's

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[46] Interview With the Vampire; p.358

[47] Norine Dresser; American Vampires: Fans, Victims, Practitioners; Vintage (New York, 1990); p.202

[48] Dresser; p.206

Dracula (1992) or Neil Jordan's Interview With the Vampire (1994), to reinspire popular interest in vampires, old and new. The conservative streak in vampire fiction in the 80s and 90s is a reflection on vampire-consuming society, but not as total as Auerbach argues. There is always a market for epic, subversive and escapist fiction. The production of fiction with domesticated, fearful and cautious undertones both harks back to paranoid and enclosed Romantic Gothic fiction, and reflects another sphere of popular cultural concerns. As the very different vampires of Moore and Brite show, new vampire fiction is not going just one way. My prognosis, therefore, is vampiric in its duality. The vampire, I think, will continue to be the consummate living dead.

[49] Dresser; p.206

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