SUBLIME SURRENDER: CONSTRUCTING MY SELF AND NAVIGATING PATRIARCHY
USING MY VAMPIRE BOYFRIEND
Elizabeth Sherwood

A Thesis
Submitted to the Graduate College of Bowling Green
State University in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS
December 2011

Committee:
Dr. Piya Pal-Lapinski, Advisor
Dr. Lawrence Coates
Graduate Faculty Representative
Dr. Bill Albertini
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 1. MASOCHISTIC FANTASY, CULTURAL TRAUMA, AND THE NEW CONTRACT</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 2. BECOMING AND RECOGNIZING MY SELF IN UNDERWORLD AND TRUE BLOOD</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONCLUSION</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REFERENCES</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ABSTRACT

Dr. Piya Pal-Lapinski, Advisor

The plot in contemporary gothic texts such as *True Blood*, the *Underworld* series, and the *Twilight* series center around a new gothic heroine navigating through a relationship with her supernatural boyfriend. Although these texts are clearly popular, can they tell us anything else? Why are these same stories, and the action that occurs within them, repeated in an almost obsessive fashion? Not unlike traditional gothic texts that were primarily written in the late 18th Century or early 19th Century, the repetition and ritualistic nature of these tales hint at a trauma that must be worked through. The trauma that one can see in both contemporary and traditional gothic texts results from erasure of the feminine, and the continuance of pervading acts of misogyny throughout. However, many contemporary gothic texts do not stop at simply recognizing this trauma, or working through it. Indeed, these texts have begun to imagine a new social contract between the sexes—which is the very relationship in which the original trauma occurs.

The goal of this working through and formulation of a new contract is to recognize such trauma—instead of ignoring it or pretending it does not exist—and imagine a way in which women and men can move beyond thinking in terms of master/slave. The way this new contract is constructed, and the method in which the gothic heroine navigates the patriarchal powers that be, are similar to Deleuzian masochism. By utilizing this interpretation, one can see how each heroine tries to make a space for her self that moves toward the recognition of an identity in which she is free and content.
INTRODUCTION

The gothic has always resisted easy definitions, and this is particularly true with the advent of the contemporary gothic. It is notable that traditional gothic tropes have merged with other genres in the past few decades to create something that speaks quite fluently to our current moment. One mutation of the traditional gothic is the vampire-centered romance. Although these texts are quite popular, it is often assumed that they are, “…for adolescent girls or the not-terribly-intelligent” (Massé 2). Many critics have chosen to lambast this genre and show how it is teaching young women to internalize misogynistic concepts. It is not my intention to categorically refute these arguments—indeed, I agree with many of them. However, I do believe that these contemporary gothic novels have elements within them—like their predecessors—that can be extremely liberating for women.

The gothic novel ruminates on the oppression and suffering of women. While gothic texts—both traditional and contemporary—are not necessarily written by women or for women, most of these texts are preoccupied with the plight of women. However, what can be alarming is that many of these texts seem to send anti-feminist messages. They value female masochism and see a woman’s “natural” role as a submissive one. The submissive female character is then rewarded with recognition and love, and the ultimate prize, marriage. So, is it possible for a contemporary gothic text, that clearly echoes many tropes of a traditional gothic, to offer an avenue toward change or does this younger sister of the gothic continue to echo a long “suffering” feminine ideal that oppresses women? To that end, one should first look at traditional gothic texts to determine whether this older sibling can be so simply categorized as anti-feminist.

The traditional gothic novel incorporates a vast array of elements and defies easy definition. However, there are some aspects which are indicative of this genre. For one,
traditional gothic texts appeared primarily in the late 18th Century and early 19th Century, with the first notable gothic text being Horace Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto*, published in 1764. Features of this novel in particular—and most traditional gothic novels in general—include the supernatural, a haunted space or house, and a mystery to be solved. This is by no means an exhaustive list, but it offers a place to understand how a traditional gothic and contemporary gothic are both alike and dissimilar. It is true that most traditional gothic texts follow a specific formula:

The Ur-plot is a terror-inflected variant of Richardsonian courtship narrative in which an unprotected young woman in an isolated setting uncovers a sinister secret. After repeated trials and persecutions, one of the two possible outcomes usually follows: the master of the house is discovered as the evil source of her tribulations and is vanquished by the poor-but-honest (and inevitably later revealed as noble) young man, who marries the woman; the master of the house, apparently the source of evil, is revealed to be more sinned against that sinning, and he marries the woman. Strangely enough, in both scenarios the narrative is shaped by the mystery the male presents and not by the drama of the supposed protagonist, the Gothic heroine. (Massé 10)

The traditional gothic, like the contemporary gothic, is concerned with the relationship(s) between men and women. The process of courtship is one that is fraught with terror for the gothic heroine. As seen in the quote above, this terror most often comes from her potential love match, or at least a man in power who is romantically/sexually pursuing her. A noteworthy difference between a traditional gothic text and a contemporary gothic is that the traditional gothic heroine is quite passive throughout the story. She has very little power or voice, and functions as a pawn to further the goals of the men in her life. The traditional gothic heroine is
also sexually passive or demure. For the most part, this is not true in contemporary gothic texts. Although terror and sexual threat still exist in the contemporary gothic, the heroine plays a more active role and is a more developed character as a whole. The contemporary gothic heroine either refuses to be a pawn for the males in her life or the circumstance that would make her an attractive “prize” no longer exists—this is especially true when there is no inheritance or noble line to continue or fortify on the body of the heroine. She also actively pursues her potential lover, while this is clearly reversed in a traditional gothic. Another difference between the contemporary gothic and traditional is that the contemporary gothic does not take place several centuries in the past, but rather in the present. Although it must be said that these contemporary texts are firmly in touch with the past through the plot device of immortality, and the trauma that occurred, it uses contemporary modes of thought and ways of being to construct the characters and plot.

This is perhaps the most significant difference between contemporary and traditional gothic. While much of the trauma and terror happens during the plot in a traditional gothic, contemporary gothic texts either indicate that the trauma is in the past or the trauma is on a larger scale (e.g. cultural trauma). In both cases, we see more of a working through or navigating the trauma than we do in a traditional gothic text. While it will become clear that contemporary gothic texts offer a way in which to make a place for women, one should not simply discount traditional gothic texts as entirely misogynistic.

As one might expect, this interpretation is a bit too generalized. For instance, in Michelle Massé’s book *In the Name of Love: Women, Masochism, and the Gothic* she states, “Masochistic fantasy—or the gothic novel—allows the spectator to move from what Stoller calls ‘unprotected trauma’ to a place where she ‘controls the action herself’” (47). Massé, through a
psychoanalytical interpretation, sees the traditional gothic novel as a masochistic fantasy that allows women to work through cultural trauma as well as find and protect an essential core identity. Massé does see the gothic, and the female masochism that goes along with it, as one of the results of patriarchy. To her, the gothic is a reaction to the cultural trauma left by misogyny and it is a way for women to make a space for themselves when one is denied to them. It is a way for women to be recognized and valued even though patriarchy positions them to be oppressed and invisible. Massé also notes that one cannot generalize these kinds of texts, and they do deserve a close reading to establish what exactly is happening to our gothic heroine (5). In doing so, we see that not all traditional gothic texts can be lumped into one category or another. Obviously, not all aspects of gothic—traditional or contemporary—can be liberating or helpful to women.

It is hard to imagine a less likely candidate to act as advocate for women’s liberation than the gothic novel. Traditional gothic novels contain horrors that are specific to women: the threat of rape, the powerlessness of the Mother, and a claustrophobic sense of entrapment. How could texts like these—that clearly revel in misogyny—be an avenue of resistance and a means to create and secure one’s own identity? Massé analyzes the gothic novel in such a way that utilizes Freud’s beating fantasy. Not only does this fantasy teach women to eroticize pain, but it also teaches them the power can be gained through the position of masochist, the sufferer. For Massé, there are three ways in which one is able to work through the gothic, or this masochistic fantasy:

---

Freud’s beating fantasy is a drama that includes the child (beaten), the father (beater), and the spectator. According to Massé, this forces one to side with the beater or beaten, recreating the dynamics of domination and submission that organize traditional gender roles (Massé 51-53).
…aggression against the dominator that stops domination; self-conscious subversion that mimes cultural expectations of femininity to achieve the protagonist’s freedom; and a utopian alterity, always briefly hinted at, that refuses to accept the binary options of subordinated/oppressed and laughs heartily at the very idea. The last is the future, only hinted at because still unrealized; the first two are our gothic present.” (240)

For Massé, the gothic novel exists because it represents the trauma of women who are denied autonomy. Hence, the goal should be to work through and beyond the gothic. After this occurs women will no longer find the masochistic position tempting and they will no longer think in terms of submissive/dominant (274). The above quote offers some ways in which one can work through the gothic and attain some sort of enlightenment that avoids the internalization of patriarchal assumptions. Although the texts that will be discussed here are not traditional gothic novels, they do utilize the aforementioned techniques of working through. The trauma may not be spoken into being, but it still sits insidiously inside each of these contemporary stories. The gothic story needs to be retold, and acts as both recognition and working through the cultural trauma of misogyny. We still need this masochistic position. However, I do not believe that it is simply a reflection or reaction to the trauma of misogyny. I am positing that there can be real work done within the structure of a contemporary gothic text that both resists some of the traditional constructions of a gothic novel but also utilizes the main, masochistic fantasy as an avenue toward agency for the gothic heroine.

It is my contention that contemporary gothic texts, like their predecessors, offer a way in which to work through misogyny as a cultural trauma. Although many would agree that misogyny is alive and well, some point to the fact that women have overcome many obstacles, and for the most part, the trauma is in the past. However, as Michelle Massé states, “…the
heroine of the marital gothic will always reawaken to the still-present actuality of her trauma, because the gender expectations that deny her identity are woven into the very fabric of her culture, which perpetuates her trauma while denying its existence” (15). Western culture—although a dubious and general term—is saturated with trauma caused by misogyny and will always be felt in the present. I will use a variation Jeffrey C. Alexander’s definition of cultural trauma, which states, “Cultural trauma occurs when members of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their group identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways” (1). While this is a good definition to begin with, I would caution against seeing this “event” as singular, rather than plural. For instance, anti-Semitism and racism cannot be blamed on a singular event, and this extends to misogyny. There are many historical events that occur (and reoccur) to form this cultural trauma. Some symptoms that reveal this trauma are, “…rape and other physical attack, diminished pay rates, employment discrimination, abandonment with children, restricted travel and other life options, general infantilization, misogyny, a life-long low-level anxiety over her sexual vulnerability…(Roach). 2.

This trauma is at its worst when we contemplate female sexuality and how it has been constructed and (mis)read in the past. The texts I will talk about deal specifically with how female sexuality acts as a way to both produce and inhibit female agency. The trauma becomes most obvious when one looks at Freud’s interpretations of female sexuality. As Elisabeth Young–Bruehl states, “…the psychoanalytic portrait of the female as a failed male has been accepted as the deepest analysis available of the effects of patriarchy (or the nuclear family as the

2 Catherine Roach shows how the romance genre has both changed over the last few decades and posits that this is perhaps one of the most important stories in Western Culture. This particular list shows how “it’s still a man’s world out there” and Roach argues that this may be one reason why women seek the protection of a” good man to love.”
carrier of patriarchy) on men’s attitudes toward women and women’s attitudes toward themselves. Here it is not the view that is objected to, but the reality which the view reflects… (41). These views that Freud asserted as “scientific” facts about female sexuality assumed that women exhibited feminine qualities such as submissiveness, shyness, and passivity because they were, as Young-Bruehl puts it, “a failed male” and their ineptitude was something inborn. Those that dared to show unfeminine qualities—like intelligence or an active libido—were considered masculine women. Putting aside that these gender roles were obviously constructed by society rather than through some inherent nature, these women internalized these beliefs in their own inferiority and taught them to their daughters as virtues. Furthermore, this way of thinking that Freud expounded upon in his studies of female sexuality emphasizes the lack of space available for a woman. In the Freudian sense, there was no woman. She was a failed male, or a female trying to impersonate a male. This also meant that the term “true Womanhood” was defined as those individuals who sacrifice their identity and their bodies to uphold a patriarchy that refuses them a voice. Obviously, this type of thinking has lead to misogyny and trauma. Interestingly enough, a masochistic contract can be a way in which a woman can work through this trauma and make a space for her self.

As a point of clarification, when I refer to masochism, I do not mean it in the classic sense that one might imagine, but rather as an element of power relations that are prevalent in many women-centered romantic texts. This type of female masochism can involve a woman’s constant self-sacrifice for her male partner, subordination to him, a willful choice to endanger herself for her male partner, and an underlying fear of him. Obviously, this connotes an abundant level of terror and fear, which is perhaps why contemporary gothic has fit together perfectly with classic romance. In this way the powerfulness and monstrousness of patriarchy is writ large in
the body of our male protagonist. While the male is gifted with these monstrous powers, the fantasy also includes ways in which women can match him. Our new gothic heroine is provided with a power that makes her special. Not only is this used to “tame the beast”—although this gift should not be discounted, especially when considered metaphorically—but also a way in which to negotiate a role for the woman in which she is recognized and valued. In these two chapters I will be analyzing the *Underworld* series, the first season of HBO’s *True Blood* and its textual companion *Dead Until Dark*, and the very popular movie and book *Twilight*. In Chapter 1, I will examine how these three texts either follow or break the traditional social contract between men and women, and how masochism, in particular, is the device used to change some of the relationships found in these texts. In Chapter 2, I analyze how this new type of social contract is able to help the gothic heroine construct a new, free self through Jessica Benjamin’s theory of recognition.

Why do women enjoy texts like these, to the point of constant repetition? What value do self-proclaimed feminists, intelligent and thoughtful women, find in texts such as these? Although my own background has pushed me to look more at the text, perhaps some inferences can be made in regards to these questions. The questions that lead me to this analysis are varied, but will hopefully guide this expedition into these dark fantasies. Why is the female protagonist always faced with a choice, between two men, one that seemingly offers life, and the other, death? Why does she always choose death? Most—if not all—of our heroines go through a physical and mental metamorphosis, why is this so important in contemporary gothic romances? And why is it important to women, specifically? Many aspects of the traditional gothic have been changed in contemporary gothic, but many have not. Why have these persisted?
Through a close reading, I hope to offer two ways in which contemporary gothic novels like *Dead Until Dark* or the *Underworld* series are actually helpful, and not hurtful, to women’s goals. Although it is clear that the contemporary gothic still works within the patriarchy, it seeks to mutate it into a form that is not hostile toward feminist goals. A quote from *Underworld* illustrates this best when speaking of a new, hybrid species, “Have vampire, half lycan, but stronger than both.” These texts, which most times are also mystery novels, literally decode and rewrite history to offer a path toward a new future, a new contract.
Masochism, as one would expect, has a great deal to do with power and the social contract. This struggle for power and the power imbalance inherent in masochism are what many contemporary gothic novels are specifically attuned to. Moreover, these texts are explicitly dealing with relationships between a powerful male figure and a less powerful female figure. One of the main goals of many contemporary vampire texts is to reconcile this power imbalance, in such a way that promotes formulating equality inside the patriarchal system. Although these vampire texts play on gender roles and focus on ways in which they fail, in the end these texts do not seek a radical dismantling of the patriarchy. This can be seen in the first season of HBO’s *True Blood* and its written counterpart *Dead Until Dark*. This renegotiation not only seeks to establish a place for female agency, but also to recognize and work through the cultural trauma that misogyny has caused.

A woman’s role has shifted considerably in the last twenty years and much of it has to do with legal action to protect women’s rights. However, these changes have left intact many creative forms of control that can be brought to light through utilizing the insight given to us by Michel Foucault. Clare Chambers, borrowing heavily from Foucault’s notions in *Discipline and Punish*, states that, “…liberal concern to limit the repressive elements of power (explicit state laws and institutions) both ignores and leaves intact the creative elements of power (social construction of options, preferences, and subjects), which are, in fact, the most effective” (22). In

---

3 Social contract and masochistic contract are not synonymous. For most of this chapter I refer to the Deleuzian version of a masochistic contract which works to disrupt the Law by showing how it fails when followed exactly. The social contract refers to a reworking of male/female relations, based in fantasy or fiction, which allows for equality through specific requirements.
other words, Foucault noted the evolution of the penal system from that of hierarchal and repressive, to creative and all-encompassing. These ideas are elucidated when one looks at his description of the Panopticon, a prison designed by Jeremy Bentham. This prison prevented the prisoners from knowing when the guards were monitoring them and hence they internalized acceptable behavior. For Foucault, this is the ultimate example of modern discipline in that it makes the acceptable behavior unconscious and habitual. This habit of the body is very important to Foucault because it turns this internalized behavior into an action that feels “natural.” Furthermore, because this discipline comes from within us rather than a repressive Sovereign, it creates many contact points of control. In other words, one is not controlled by one ultimate power, but rather through the threat of surveillance, the repercussions of nonconformity, and through unthinking force of habit (Foucault 205-209). Using this logic, it becomes clear why female masochistic texts might still be popular, even though we have progressed as a society in terms of legal laws to protect women’s rights. The misogynistic social assumptions that uphold the patriarchy and determine how women should behave are not necessarily destroyed by liberal laws, but rather through changes in popular culture. Many of these points of control exist in popular culture, and the stories that are told through literature and film. The characters demonstrate the “ideal” woman, and even though real women have more choices, these ideals still teach modern women that they need to adhere to traditional gender norms and ways of being. These lessons are much more potent than laws or overt statements that favor feminist thoughts. However, I contend that this obsessive interest in contemporary gothic novels is not simply a reflection or the internalization of the patriarchy, but rather a way in which to work through this cultural trauma by establishing a new masochistic contract. Inside the contemporary gothic there is recognition of trauma and an attempt to work through it.
This recognition of trauma is similar to the early studies of hysteries conducted by Sigmund Freud. Although Freud reified many of the misogynistic beliefs of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, he also brought to light a very real problem that affected women during his study on hysteria in women. Elaine Showalter, in “Hysteria, Feminism, and Gender” states, “For some writers, hysteria has been claimed as the first step on the road to feminism, a specifically feminine pathology that speak to and against patriarchy. For others, the famous women hysterics of the nineteenth century have been taken to epitomize a universal female oppression” (286). I would assert that both of these views are correct, and here the terms “hysteric” and “gothic heroine” seem to be interchangeable. Although Freud did a great disservice to the most famous of hysterics, the patient known as “Dora,” he did bring forward a very real problem that was affecting the female population. Hysteria was not linked to biology, but rather it was, “…caused by oppressive social roles…and its sources [are] in cultural myths of femininity and in male domination” (Showalter 287). These hysterics were reacting to the oppression that surrounded them. The hysterics that Freud observed were intelligent, upper-class women and were unable to exist under the yoke of patriarchy and their reaction to this oppression was interpreted as hysteria. A little more than a century after Freud published *Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria*, it seems that women still find themselves in a predicament—caught inside a masculine economy that is built upon their oppression. While this system is literally built on women’s bodies, they hold no speaking role. Woman is product and object within this economy that is to be bought and sold, but never to speak and create her self. In other words, she is caught inside patriarchal language, unable to free her tongue and thus unable to create a free self. This silencing and helplessness is the trauma that faces women even today, because women are expected to listen and obey, rather than create and speak. Obviously,
there are many strides toward women’s liberation, especially in the last century, and they should not be discounted. However, the more powerful measures of control that Foucault posits are still mostly intact. It is represented in the cleaning or childcare commercials geared specifically toward women, and the way women are constructed in popular movies and books. How can woman escape this system, or at least imagine an escape through fantasy and fiction?

Julia Kristeva maps out the difficulties of Western women who are tied to Christian-Judaic concepts, as she observes the differences in Chinese women and women raised under Judeo-Christian precepts in her text Des Chinoises. How is a woman supposed to escape the binds of patriarchy? To identify with the Mother, in Lacanian psychoanalytical terms, would mean to affirm her existence and her value as the unconscious of the symbolic order. In this way, the woman aligns herself with this unconscious “truth” and jouissance. However, this also guarantees her marginality and it will deny her access to the patriarchy and power. In other words, this allows misogyny and patriarchy to continue, unhindered. The other option, to identify with the Father, is also problematic. Identifying with the father, “…not only deprives the woman of the maternal body, but also of her own” (Moi 139). She is simply reifying the very same patriarchal order that she struggles against and represses both her own womanhood and access to jouissance. Kristeva knew that, “…women must neither refuse to insert themselves into the symbolic order, nor embrace the masculine model for femininity” (Moi 139). However, in 1974 Kristeva did not see a way in which one could solve this dilemma. In her small collection of notes and impressions entitled Des Chinoises, she finally turns toward female writers who chose suicide (Woolf, Plath, and Maria Tsvetaeva). She saw these suicides as an avenue of freedom from patriarchal law, super-ego, or simply, the Word. While literal suicide seemed to be the only way in which women could extricate themselves from patriarchal law, embracing death in
literary form seems to be the way we work through this double-bind that is active in dominant society now. By reimagining social contracts between men and women, many vampire texts work through the cultural trauma of misogyny by escaping the bonds of maternity, through male recognition and shame over their complacent role in women’s oppression and victimhood, and through creating a space for her to speak. This type of working through is found in contemporary gothic texts that give women a choice between a dangerous relationship and a relatively safe one.

I often wondered why the same story has been played out so many times—especially now. The story I am referring to haunts popular thought and one can most easily see it in True Blood or the Twilight series. The heroine is faced with a choice between two men, two ways of being. One promises life and the other promises death. Without fail, our heroine chooses the death-bringer. In the first season of True Blood, the heroine Sookie is faced with a choice between Sam Merlotte, the white male bar owner and vampire Bill. Sookie chooses Bill because she cannot “hear” him, his words are silent. She is a telepath and is inundated with everyone’s thoughts, or one might say, patriarchal language. Bill offers an end to this, and he and others like him are also aligned with death. For example, when Sookie and Bill enter the vampire bar peopled by vampires and human “fang-bangers” the bartender tells them that every human that comes to Fangtasia wants to die, he goes on to say, “‘That is what we are. Death’” (Harris 103). Disturbed, Sookie asks Bill if he thinks that she wants to die because she came to Fangtasia with him. Bill replies that he believes she just wants to solve the murder mystery that is occurring in the small town of Bon Temps, however Sookie thinks to herself that she is not sure if he is being truthful (Harris 104). Characters like Sookie are seeking out death, similar to Plath, Woolf, and Tsvetaeva. However, while a death is required it is not the ultimate goal. The objective of these texts is a renegotiation or a reworking of the social contracts between men and women.
fantasize how this broken relationship can be recognized and fixed. Instead of trying to find a way around the seemingly impossible task of destroying patriarchy, women choose to rework the stories that have traditionally oppressed them and through a new contract, imagine an ideal way in which women and men become equal partners. So, the death that is sought is the death of an old contract, founded on a faulty system that continues to see women as an object that cannot speak. Before one can understand the new contract, let us take a look at the old masochistic contract.

DELEUZE’S MASOCHISM

For a closer look at the type of contracts involved in masochism, one must turn to Gilles Deleuze’s critical study of Masochism in his text *Coldness and Cruelty*. In this text, Deleuze maps out a masochistic contract in which one is able to navigate toward the masochist’s pleasure and happiness, and shows how the Law fails. The Law, for both Deleuze and my analysis, can be equated with patriarchal Law, and traditional, oppressive edict meant to control human interaction. While a sadist or sadistic relationship depends on exploding the Law or rendering it unnecessary, masochists make and adhere to the Law to the point of absurdity (Deleuze 77). Deleuze points out that by, “By scrupulously applying the law we are able to demonstrate its absurdity and provoke the very disorder that it is intended to prevent or to conjure” (88). This is the “humor” of masochistic fantasy and a way that it works within the Word to show how it fails. Masochistic language is also always the language of the oppressed, the victim, and the body. It is, “… aimed above all at confronting language with its own limits, with what is in a sense a ‘non-language’ (violence that does not speak, eroticism that remains unspoken)” (Deleuze 22). It is at the space where woman can find her voice, and speak her body, her pleasure, and her self.
As Deleuze describes the differences between a masochist and sadist, one can see other reasons as to why a masochistic fantasy might be useful for women working who are trying to rethink and reimagine a new contract:

The sadist is in need of institutions, the masochist of contractual relations. The middle ages distinguished with the considerable insight between two types of commerce with the devil: the first resulted from possession, the second from a pact of alliance. The sadist thinks in terms of institutionalized possession, the masochist in terms of contracted alliances (20-21).

Being “possessed” by the institution can be likened to Kristeva’s second choice for women, to side with the Father and paternal law: to possess this power and be possessed by it. However, masochism offers a negotiated contract. One that still includes dealing with the “devil” but in such a way that one is able to negotiate (potentially) for one’s own good. Also, it allows the one in the contract to be self-aware, she is not so deep into the institution or so possessed that she is unaware of her actions or her self. Although this is a loose metaphor, I think it holds credence when we look at the texts like True Blood. For instance, vampire Bill tries to “glamour” Sookie, which is a form of hypnotism. However, he soon discovers that he cannot possess her mind, which would have led toward a more sadistic relationship. Interestingly enough, Sookie laughs at his attempts to glamour her. This action both discredits the patriarchal power that is embodied within this glamour and also speaks “a feminine syntax.” Luce Irigaray calls both women’s laughter and women’s suffering, “a feminine syntax” that works away from this patriarchal assumption of one (masculine) sex and language (134). For all of these reasons, a masochistic contract seems to be the most auspicious way to transform a traditionally misogynistic story into one that offers a fantasy of change and progress. While this new contract does not exactly adhere
to the one set down by Deleuze, it does keep some elements of it. To get a clearer picture of how this older contract evolves, one must first look at the specifics of the Deleuzian masochistic contract that are still prevalent in contemporary gothic texts.

The Law requires a contract into which the masochist enters with the one she/he wishes to be the torturer or the dominant. For Deleuze, this contract leads straight into a ritual that makes up the masochistic existence (91). In a psychoanalytical bent, Deleuze cites three elements, or three Mothers that represent the rites in a masochistic contract. These include the woman who is already a part of the patriarchy (Oedipal Mother), the woman who hunts, but is eventually hunted down and despoiled herself (Uterine Mother), and then the woman who is responsible for the second birth, free of oppression and maker of an egalitarian commune (Oral Mother) (95). Although Deleuze indicates that Masoch’s “ideal women” are important for the male masochist’s process of becoming, strangely enough we can see elements of these women in specific contemporary gothic texts and female masochism—albeit they have been changed slightly. These types of women come to represent the process in which the contemporary gothic heroine moves from oppression to freedom. One can see some of these “rites” in Twilight, True Blood and the Underworld series.

In Twilight, Bella begins the texts as a part of the patriarchal system. She is the dutiful daughter and submissive to others (Oedipal Mother). Next, she pursues Edward, but is eventually conquered by him (Uterine Mother). These events lead to her second birth as a vampire, existing in a community in which she is equal to her husband and his family (Oral Mother). She also reproduces this equality in her child, Renesmée, a half-human, half-vampire hybrid. Perhaps through this reproduction, she is truly creating a community that will be able to sustain egalitarianism between humans and vampires. While this text is problematic for several
reasons—some of the biggest being that this contract still relies on female suffering and only allows woman’s power to speak through maternity—one can see how these ideas attempt to give woman a space and a voice. Furthermore, Bella does not see the Law as something that is absurd, but rather something she wishes to join and support. This is the most important part of Deleuze’s masochistic contract, and without it, the relationship only serves to reify traditional patriarchy rather than challenge it. So, although Twilight may at first appear to follow Deleuze’s—and perhaps even a feminist—trajectory, it ends with repetition and the reestablishment of traditional gender roles that rely on a woman being coded as a beautiful, selfless sufferer, and the man as the courageous, strong leader, teaching the woman how to be Good for society. This both essentializes gender roles and ignores the violence and trauma that is present. This is seen most specifically in Breaking Dawn when Bella and Edward finally consummate their relationship. The act thoroughly bruises Bella, and the description is akin to domestic violence, “The rest of me was decorated with patches of blue and purple. I concentrated on the bruises that would be the hardest to hide—my arms and my shoulders. They weren’t so bad. My skin marked up easily…Of course, these were just developing. I’d look even worse tomorrow. That would not make things any easier” (Meyer 95-96). Although Edward feels bad that he was the cause of her condition, it has to be said that his actions throughout the series are in line with that of an abusive boyfriend. Although Stephenie Meyer tries to “de-fang” Edward by making him a vegetarian vampire (he only feeds off of animals), and show that he is really heroic because he saves Bella from being killed, the violence he does to Bella—physically, emotionally, and mentally—cannot be sufficiently covered over. Bella is repetitively put down and treated like a child by the person who supposedly loves her. Her voice and her choices are rarely taken into consideration until she becomes pregnant. Like the character of Bella, Meyer also tries to “hide” the bruises of a
traditional relationship that features a controlling male and a submissive female who is too willing to make excuses for his abusive behavior under the guise of love.

Sookie also follows a similar route, but the conclusions we can draw from *True Blood* are very different than *Twilight*. When we first meet Sookie, she is attempting to fulfill a traditional gender role. She seems like the quintessential “dumb blonde waitress.” Sookie tries to adopt feminine qualities toward her long-term goal of fitting in, even though her mind reading abilities make this impossible. However, it should not be said that her alienation leads to freedom. She is the younger sister, living under her grandmother’s house and rules, obeying her boss and her customer’s commands. At first glance, one would expect her to carry out the traditional gothic heroine trajectory or at least something similar, à la *Twilight*. So, it is not surprising to some when she starts a relationship with a “new” master (indeed, he is an ex slave owner), Bill Compton, an old and powerful vampire. One expects Bill to save Sookie from some terrible fate and whisk her away, like a fairy tale. However, it is Sookie who first saves Bill and it becomes quite clear that she is the one who decides when and if they see each other. Like the Uterine Mother, she begins the “hunt” and Bill engages second. This sets the tone for the negotiation of their relationship. Furthermore, while Bella does not see the ritualistic nature of the Law as absurd, this is not true for Sookie.

Sookie seems to have a unique perspective of the world, because of her ability to read minds. In a way, this allows her to see cultural hierarchy as a construction. Everyone has similar thoughts, so it is hard for her to see someone as better because of their gender or social status. However, Bill and Sookie do adhere to a stylized ritual of courting that is both old-fashioned—because Bill is old—and amusing. This type of ritual is similar to what Deleuze describes and it points out the absurdity of romantic myths, thought to be truths about love, and shows how the
performance of courtship itself relies on these types of fantasies that fail in the face of reality. This is seen during Bill and Sookie’s first date in which Bill comments on her clothing, “‘I liked long skirts,’ he said nostalgically, ‘I liked the underthings women wore. The petticoats.’ I made a rude noise.” (Harris 59). Although Sookie rejects the idealization of traditional courtship, this does not mean that she totally abandons it. As she and Bill walk back to her Gran’s house, Sookie thinks, “This was just like being brought home from a first date by a new man. I actually caught myself wondering if Bill would kiss me or not” (61). Like Michelle Massé’s assertion, Sookie is able to use, “self-conscious subversion that mimes cultural expectations of femininity to achieve the protagonist’s freedom” (240). She is aware at all times that this is a performance, a game, and that Bill is not even a “real man.” However, even though it is obvious that these ideas are failing, she plays the game and mimics her imagined feminine role to achieve her goals—her own pleasure. She does not desire Bill because of any societal reason—indeed, most of her community disapproves of her relationship with him. In this way, she is navigating the system rather than actively trying to dismantle it. On the other hand, simply by following this route—which does not end with the reproduction of patriarchy, but rather the speaking of Sookie’s pleasure—should be interpreted as subversive. Sookie has elements of Masoch’s women, however she does not embody the cold and austere women that are indicative of Masoch’s work. A better candidate for this is the heroine of Underworld and Underworld: Evolution, Selene.

Selene also moves through these ideas of Oedipal Mother, Uterine Mother, and Oral Mother. She starts the first film, Underworld, as a cold-hearted Death Dealer, a vampire warrior whose sole mission is to hunt and kill lycans (werewolves). She also exists inside the patriarchy as an accomplice to her vampire father, Viktor, and—unwittingly—his victim as well. As the action progresses through the movie, Selene hunts down both people and information to solve
the mystery of her existence, resulting in the last line of *Underworld*, given by Selene, “And soon, I will become the hunted.” Selene embodies many of the elements of the Oedipal Mother and the Uterine Mother, but one can also see how she moves toward the Oral Mother as well. Transformation and the process of becoming is a very important element in the masochistic fantasy and this is true in the *Underworld* series as well. This will be discussed at length in Chapter 2, however it must be pointed out that Selene functions as both that which changes and the very “mother” of the first hybrid. Through her blood, Michael, her love interest, becomes a hybrid and transforms into a creature that defies patriarchal Law. However, it is through Selene’s own transformation that brings about a new sense of egalitarianism between the sexes.

The Oedipal, Uterine, and Oral Mother are important images and metaphors for the female masochistic fantasy, although, they are used quite differently. Instead of being part of the contract, they represent the stages that the gothic heroine goes through to process her own trauma and to formulate a fantasy of an egalitarian relationship with her lover instead of carrying on the master/slave relationship of the past. Strong traditional ideas of what “true womanhood” looks like often inform how any heroine—but especially a gothic heroine—is constructed. However, because of the gothic’s fantastic nature, it is also a perfect place to safely explore fantasies beyond the borders of what is deemed appropriate by the patriarchy in order to recognize the hurt that exists still, unacknowledged and unchanged, and imagine a way to work toward transformation and happiness.

Both Selene and Sookie use one of Massé’s techniques of working through, which was not present in traditional gothic texts, that our heroine, “…refuses to accept the binary options of subordinated/oppressed and laughs heartily at the very idea” (240). Even when faced with a dangerous vampire who held no love for her, like Eric, Sookie was able to negotiate her terms so
that her mind reading services were well recompensed. Woman is still on the market—as everyone is—but she is no longer an object, but rather a voice. In Selene’s case, her rebellion and assertion of herself is more pronounced. One can see this struggle specifically in Underworld. She is very confident in her own value as a warrior and as a person and defies those that she disagrees with, even when absolute obedience is expected. In the first film especially, we see Selene working through the past—both literally and figuratively—to attain a sense of free self. She is still loyal to what is right and good, and does not seek power for herself, but neither does she desire a new master. In the end, both Sookie and Selene refuse to accept the role of master or the role of slave.

Although some will balk at the idea of seeing a romantic relationship as a contract or negotiation, when looked at realistically, this is exactly what it is. Traditionally, women are taught to sacrifice everything for that elusive thing called true love. In other words, this means that women are taught anything but negotiation skills. Instead, what is communicated to them is that their only value is in their own suffering and sacrifice. Again, to invoke Foucault’s notion of power and control, young girls are taught these gendered expectations in religious teachings, school, entertainment, and in their family life. Good girls are expected to sit still and be “nice.” So, when it comes to speaking their pleasure or their needs, many young women are extremely reticent. Their primary role is to be receptive and giving.

One can see this especially in the Twilight series. When we first meet Bella, she is certainly in a subjugated role. She takes care of her mother to such an extent that the parent-child relationship seems to be reversed. However, Bella really does not seem to benefit from this role reversal. Indeed, Bella is rejected in favor of her mother’s new boyfriend. Bella readily sacrifices her own happiness by moving to Forks to live with her father. Forks is in the Pacific
Northwest, and Bella hates the weather and really does not want to live with Charlie, her father. This is only one of many sacrifices that Bella is expected to make. When Bella arrives, she takes care of Charlie, cooking and cleaning for him. Bella has been abandoned and ignored early in life and the only way she becomes valued and recognized through her own suffering and sacrifice.

Bella continues with this masochistic role with the main love interest, Edward Cullen. With Bella, real love cannot come without pain and suffering—at least on her part. When she chooses a love interest, she does not choose the “normal” teenager and peer Mike, nor Jacob, who is also dangerous but does not hunger for her blood. Rather, she chooses Edward, who even warns her against him. In one of the more famous quotes that appears in both the Twilight movie and written text Bella states, “About three things I was absolutely positive: first, Edward was a vampire. Second, there was a part of him—and I didn’t know how dominant that part might be—that thirsted for my blood. And third, I was unconditionally and irrevocably in love with him” (Twilight195). Once she gains Edward’s recognition and love, Bella believes she cannot live without it. To get him to speak to her when he leaves her—for her own safety—she engages in dangerous activities to hear his voice (New Moon). When she and Edward are back together in Eclipse, she hears about a tribal legend from the Quileute tribe about a Native American woman, simply called the Third Wife, who cuts herself to draw the evil vampires away from her family and save the tribe. Bella fantasizes about this often and, in the movie, she does this to help Edward and Seth Clearwater defeat two “evil” vampires, Victoria and Riley. The other large sacrifice that Bella makes is in Breaking Dawn, when she chooses to carry her unborn child, even though it is literally killing her. Bella’s only power within the Twilight series seems to be her ability to sacrifice herself. This is the only way she is able to make her own choices—Edward makes all the rest—and it is the only way that she is recognized and valued as a person.
This series follows many of the same tropes of a traditional gothic that Michelle Massé points out in her text *In the Name of Love: Women, Masochism, and the Gothic*. Scholars have criticized the *Twilight* series for being anti-feminist, and they are correct. However, the way that it is anti-feminist plays on many cultural myths that also speak to the gothic. Unfortunately for the *Twilight* series, most of the negative aspects of the traditional gothic are reified in Bella’s story, not challenged. Bella’s biological family is broken and she is unappreciated so she looks for a new family, finding it with the Cullen’s. Even though they are vampires, they come to represent a heteronormative, nuclear family and she reproduces this with Edward. She has learned to equate love with pain and suffering and so seeks this out. In this text, the vampire stands in for traditional patriarchy—which is quite unusual, since most times a vampire is metaphor for chaos and disruption, the antithesis of traditional patriarchy. Besides Bella’s choice in suffering, she allows Edward to make all of the decisions. Furthermore, he treats her like a child. He watches her sleep at night, sings her a lullaby, carries her on his back, and tells her what to do and who she is allowed to see. Most tellingly, Edward warns her to stay away from Jacob, a would-be suitor. He also refuses to have sex with her before marriage, because he wants to keep this one action “pure.” When Edward proposes marriage, he gives Bella his mother’s antique ring and talks about how she will be Mrs. Edward Cullen. In an almost meaningless gesture toward feminism Bella states that she does not know if she is willing to change her last name. This action is meaningless because he already owns her in every other sense. Through all of these actions Bella continues to be submissive and helpless. The only way she is able to find strength is through her own suffering, which is at least one avenue of self-expression and

---

4 There are multiple places in which one can find these arguments, however *Bitten by Twilight: Youth Culture, Media, & the Vampire Franchise* is an excellent anthology that looks at how the *Twilight* series is anti-feminist by relying on romantic myths and through reifying traditional gender norms.
independence, but it is also steeped in traditional patriarchal assumptions of how a “good” woman should act. Moreover, seeking position and place through women’s suffering is something that a feminist can find value when the character in question was created in the 17th or 18th Century, not the 21st. In other words, the *Twilight* series has more in common with a traditional gothic than it does with contemporary gothic texts. Even Bella’s small steps toward agency seem quite pitiful when compared to the strides of other characters.

THE NEW CONTRACT

This brings me back to the characters of Sookie in *True Blood* and Selene in the *Underworld* series. Sookie, although not perfect, makes for a good contrast to Bella. Sookie, unlike Bella, does not see Bill as superior. She does not agree with everything he says, but neither does she dictate to him. In other words, she does not adhere to or repeat the dominant/submissive binary, although it seems that she plays along with some of these traditional concepts, pointing out the absurdity of some of them along the way. This is when the new masochistic contract comes into play. Sookie is well aware that she is working within conservative, traditional patriarchy. In fact, she is hyper-aware of this because of her telepathy and she is able to see that the traditional couple dynamic is a construction and that suffering and pain are not where her worth lies. Unlike Bella and *Twilight,* Sookie and Selene do not seek out a master, one who will think for her and make her decisions. The point of this new contract is to find a way to create a space where her self is recognized and valued, however this must also include a process of working through past cultural trauma caused by misogyny. To that end, certain requirements are needed to create a workable contract. One prerequisite is a clear recognition of the past, present, and potential violence against women that is illustrated through the vampire boyfriend’s rejection of past patriarchal power. Next, a deep connection between the
two protagonists that rejects romantic myths and this relationship becomes a catalyst for the heroine’s change and freedom.

This aim of the new contract is not only to make a space for the woman, but also to expose and work through the identity of Man or Patriarch. First comes recognition of the powers that be and what pain that has wrought. As stated previously, the vampire is often coded as hyper-masculine—large, strong, and fearfully violent. Indeed, many times it seems that the vampire/human relationship simply emphasizes the dynamic between traditional heterosexual couples—bringing out the subtle violence that could always erupt and that is always there. In some texts, like *Twilight*, we can see this happening as Bella’s body is literally what the patriarchy is built upon—through her actions of sacrifice and submission and through her role as a mother. However, many other vampire texts do not try to reproduce this type of “feminine” power. For example, Sookie is able to gain a voice through her own abilities and denies the role of mother or producer of patriarchy. Similarly, Selene rejects Kraven’s advances, a vampire whose wants to make her his queen, a sort of vampire trophy wife that would function to establish his own power and continue the patriarchy that exists within the coven.

So, where does this leave the heroine’s love interest and what traits does he embody that allows for a new contract? In both *True Blood* and *Underworld* the male protagonist is significantly alienated from traditional patriarchal power. When looking at other male characters in *True Blood*—such as Sam Merlotte, Sookie’s boss and potential love interest—they often embody the patriarchy, but do not recognize the violence against women that this imposes. As stated above, the vampire/human relationship exposes the actual (violent/oppressive) dynamics that are inconspicuously at work in traditional male/female relationships. The human males in *True Blood* do not recognize the violence they do, and so they do not exhibit this shame. Jason,
Sookie’s brother, happily uses multiple women for sex. Sam pursues Sookie even though she is in a vulnerable position as his employee. These men do not feel shame for their blatant use of patriarchal power. One can also see this in the *Underworld* series in the characters of Kraven and Viktor, specifically. Both intend to use Selene for their own pleasure and strive to keep her in her place through traditional codes of conduct and patriarchal law. When Selene awakens Viktor and is found to be harboring Michael, who had been recently bitten by a lycan, Viktor tells her, “You will not be shown an ounce of leniency. When Amelia arrives the council will convene and decide your fate. You have broken the chain and the covenant. You must be judged!” *(Underworld).* Directly after this Kraven locks Selene in her room and tells her to behave so that she can eventually become his queen.

This is direct opposition to Michael, who only wishes to assist Selene and never tries to take control. Michael’s difference is coded by his humanity and his hybridity. He is the only human character in the *Underworld* series and he is the first vampire/lycan hybrid. His hybrid nature gives him a link back to past atrocities committed by the vampire patriarchy through the genetic memories of his lycan sire, Lucian. Michael sees Viktor, the leader of the vampires, kill his own daughter Sonja for mating with Lucian, a slave and a lycan. While Michael has a connection to the past, he is not bound to it and does not seek control or power, but peace. In essence, he is the symbol of coexistence, not a repetition of the master/slave relationship that is indicative of the patriarchy. In the first season of *True Blood* Bill does not hide who he is, but actually tries to mainstream and separate himself from other vampires who choose to kill humans rather than coexist. This is important because he does not try to pretend that he is a de-fanged hero, a la Edward, but rather that he exposes his flaws. This does not mean that Sookie is simply expected to accept his violent tendencies—indeed, she does not—but through this recognition,
coded by shame, Sookie and Bill are able to acknowledge and work through this dilemma, instead of ignoring it and hence, becoming complacent to it. In Underworld, Michael exists outside the vampire patriarchy and is the first male that Selene encounters who does not lie to her. This truth seeking is important because it brings about the recognition of past traumas. This recognition, yet split from the past, is important to establish a new way of being together that both works through the cultural trauma but also imagines a possibility of change.

This unique position also allows for the destruction of many romantic myths. For instance, Bill’s status as vampire gives him physical and mental power over many others. However, his vampire nature also makes him more self-aware of his own failings—that are particularly masculine—and also positions him outside patriarchal power. He, like Sookie, is an outsider and does not feel the need to hold up the patriarchy by controlling Sookie. Many romantic myths are challenged in both True Blood and the Underworld series. Tricia Clasen states in her article, “Taking a Bite Out of Love: The Myth of Romantic Love in the Twilight Series,” Twilight resonates with young women, “…because of the reliance on myths of romantic love. The themes are utilized so consistently in popular culture that couples learn to expect them both in media and in their own relationships…” (131). Clasen discusses the myths that pertains to Twilight, such as love at first sight, love is forever, love is the most important relationship, and love requires mind reading. While not every romantic myth is debunked in True Blood and the Underworld series, many of them are called into question. One of the most important ways in which we see the difference between Bella, Selene and Sookie would be the treatment of the romantic myth “love is the most important relationship.” For instance, while Sookie’s relationship with Bill is important, it does not mean that she cannot live without him or ceases to be without Bill in her life. Sookie is able to begin and end the relationship without feeling that
she lost her soul/self. Similarly, Selene’s search for the truth takes precedence over her relationship with Michael, and she is perfectly capable of functioning by herself. We find the opposite with Bella in *Twilight* who goes into a catatonic state when Edward leaves her.

Opposing Lacanian and Freudian psychoanalysis, Sookie and Selene do not exhibit a lack that can only be fulfilled by a man. Both heroines are whole beings that are developing and changing, but they do not represent something that is broken, something only a vampire boyfriend can fix. They are searching for a better life—which does acknowledge some sort of lack—but their fulfillment rests with the development of their self, not through following a romantic mythos that ends with marriage and (patriarchal) family in any sense of the term.

Destruction of a traditional romantic trajectory that ends in marriage and reproduction is also necessary for this new contract to be viable. This occurs through releasing woman from maternity or the duty to reproduce the patriarchy. In *True Blood*, maternity is replaced with women’s pleasure. Although it is true that there is clear opposition to this choice. For instance, when Bill and Sookie first get together, Sookie’s friend Arlene voices this concern: “Suppose she gets pregnant. How in the world can she nurse a baby with fangs?” (Burning House of Love). Although this line was included for comedic effect, it also points to the un(re)productive relationship that Sookie has with Bill. It does not—and will never—follow the traditional trajectory of a heterosexual couple (i.e. marriage and children). In this way, woman is able to live outside of traditional expectations that include maternity when in this relationship. She is no longer simply the body that patriarchy is built upon, but a speaking negotiator in the contract. This is not to say that she is necessarily in charge or master here, but through freeing herself from maternity, she has rejected patriarchal assumptions that condone women’s suffering and, for the most part, are fantastical. Because Sookie and Bill’s relationship does not follow this
path, it opens up an avenue for Sookie to explore and speak her own pleasure, rather than simply be a mouthpiece for patriarchy. In other words, because her end goal is not to marry and produce a child, the way their relationship develops is based on mutual pleasure and their own development. In this case, since the story is told through the point of view of Sookie, it emphasizes her pleasure and her own development. This fantasy works away from the cultural trauma that tries to shape and define “true Womanhood” because much of that definition relies on woman becoming mother. When the two terms—mother and woman—are divorced, much of the trauma that comes from expectations of self-sacrifice and working toward what is deemed to be the good of society are mitigated. This is not to say that the fantasy is to forgo motherhood necessarily, but this is the easiest way to escape the cultural binds that inscribe woman into the role of object or vessel, whose primary purpose is to reproduce the patriarchy. One can also see Selene reject her role as wife—and potentially mother—when she rejects Kraven who wishes to make her his queen. Like Sookie, Selene’s relationship with Michael does not have any normative trajectory that ends with marriage and family. Indeed, by being together, both couples insure that this becomes impossible. One, of course, sees these romantic myths and a patriarchal romantic trajectory in *Twilight*. Bella comes from a “broken” home where she is unloved and unwanted and Edward represents everything that she lacks. She is an empty shell—she actually has very little personality—without him. They fall in love, get married, and have a child. Very little changes, and the patriarchy is upheld.

Masochistic contracts, like those active in Sacher-Masoch’s *Venus and Furs*, work to simply emphasize that the Law fails when followed closely. The new contract does similar work, however, the trajectory of this contract is not the same. In Deleuze’s interpretation, the traditional contract reverses the law. The enforcer of the law is no longer the father, but the
mother, “The law now ordains what it was once intended to forbid; guilt absolves instead of leading to atonement, and punishment makes permissible what it was intended to chastise…The novels of Masoch…bring out the identity between its most modern and its most ancient forms” (102). This role reversal brings about change in interesting ways, however it is noteworthy that the masochist in Masoch’s writings and what is referred to in Deleuze’s interpretation is male. Because of this—mostly because of a man’s relation to patriarchal power—Deleuze’s reading of masochism does not necessarily work when one is referring to women. Strangely enough, one can see a sort of Deleuzian masochism in Bill’s position in the relationship, or what I refer to as his shame. Deleuze says this of the masochist, “There is no doubt that the masochist lives in the depths of guilt; but far from feeling that he has sinned against the father, it is the father’s likeness in him that he experiences as sin that must be atoned for” (101). Deleuze’s masochistic contract is concerned with remaking the man, and while this is present in True Blood and especially in Underworld, its most interesting aspect is that it tries to remake the relationship between the lovers, to the benefit of the woman. She does not simply hold power —like Deleuze’s oral mother—to benefit the man and reshape him, but rather to find a way to work through the cultural trauma brought on by a traditional couple’s relationship by establishing a way in which she can speak. By working through and beyond the past, both Sookie and Selene are able to move to a new space that they have constructed. Past history or law has been demystified and seen as untrue and for the first time they become the narrators of their own story.

The last requirement for the new contract is an act of becoming. The role of the masochist many times denotes that he or she is going through the act of becoming. With the help of her “torturer” she is prodded into an identity—although it would be wrong to assume that the masochist has a passive position here, most times it is she who pursues the contract/relationship,
and she maneuvers the relationship toward her own self/pleasure. Conversely, it should not be assumed that the torturer acts independently or against the masochist’s wishes. In traditional patriarchy, this contract allows the masochist to construct an identity that she always desired, but is unable to move toward. In other words, this is a way to subvert the construction of power that seeks to control women by using the same type of contract. This act of becoming will be discussed in depth in the next chapter.

These requirements all lead toward giving a space for a woman to speak. But, what will she say and how can she say it without using patriarchal language? This is not done, however, through any one character, but rather through the story itself. Woman is able to speak her self into being by showing her wants, needs, desires, pain, and suffering. She recognizes the world created by and for man, and knows all too well her own alienation. One of the unique things about *True Blood* is one of its most fantastical—Sookie’s ability to read minds. Because of this special knowledge, this ability to listen makes her aware that she is playing a role—she is never without a cheery smile, which she wears like armor. Patricia Ondek Laurence talks about this in *The Reading of Silence: Virginia Woolf and the English Tradition*. Laurence states, “That silent observation and listening is often a ‘ritual of truth’ for women is a perspective advanced by Virginia Woolf. That there is power in this vantage point of an observing, thinking woman—an attentive listener, a receptive reader—is a perspective that is now evolving in the critics of consciousness…” (60). This special “listening” ability not only allows Sookie to see through a veil of patriarchal fantasies, but it also allows her to *navigate* and move through her life, toward her own pleasure, her own self. This also occurs in *Underworld* when Selene reads the histories and observes the untruth of the patriarchal fathers. While Selene’s tactics are much more radical,
she also uses this uncovering and “listening” as a way to construct new meaning. This, perhaps, is the greatest way in which she can speak.

You may wonder why I still refer to this contract as masochistic. In the Deleuzian sense, this is not a misnomer. Masochistic contracts seek to change or show that the law is not something that is transcendental. Originally, as Deleuze puts it, the law was established so one could work toward the greater Good. However, since language in imprecise in nature, it is very easy for these ideas to be warped. Masochism is about showing that the incomprehensible truth is actually bound up in chaos and not certainty, and that truth is always on the move and not stagnant. Masochistic contracts work to form identities and pleasure outside the laws that attempt to bind pleasure and identity. So, this new fantasy, this new contract between woman and vampire is masochistic, in that it is a story about seeing what one should be and differentiating that from what one wants to be. For women, selfishness and narcissism are perhaps the worst sins, according to the patriarchy that depends on them being self-sacrificing and meek. However, texts like these are a celebration of this very thing—although somewhat hidden to placate the hegemony.

In *True Blood* and *Underworld*, through the choice of lovers, our gothic heroine avoids traditional romantic structures that seek to oppress her. There is always a choice between several potential lovers and the gothic heroine always chooses a specific type of male. As said previously, Selene and Sookie are both “hunters” in that they choose or pursue their respective vampire boyfriends because he meets certain criteria. Next, there are certain ways in which the relationship functions that both refuse traditional romantic myths and a trajectory that ends in maternity. The relationship brings death to the patriarchy—quite literally in *Underworld*—and to the role of woman within it, and through this she forms her self. While this new contract does not
adhere to the Law, as one sees in Deleuze’s masochistic contract, it does provide parameters in which one can imagine a way to escape the binds of misogyny that exist now and traumatize the past. Also through this relationship, the gothic heroine is able to work through past trauma that is still affecting her in such a manner that gives her a voice and a choice. Selene is no longer a mindless Death Dealer, a soldier for her vampire father, Viktor. Sookie is no longer a “dumb blond waitress.” They are moving toward what they consider to be who they really are—not a victim, but a speaking subject. In the next chapter, we will see how Sookie and Selene use their relationships to move further away from dominant cultural expectations to a truer rendering of a free self.
CHAPTER 2: BECOMING AND RECOGNIZING THE SELF IN UNDERWORLD AND TRUE BLOOD

As mentioned previously, one of the requirements for the new masochistic contract is a process of change. By their very nature, vampires offer an avenue in which to think about transformation and becoming. In even the tamest vampire text one sees a process that changes human to vampire. Most of these texts go into great detail and ruminate over this idea of killing or putting to rest an old self to make room for a new one. Obviously, not all of these transformations are positive. One has only to look at Lucy in Dracula or perhaps even Louis in Interview with the Vampire, to know that these things do not necessarily end well. However, within the last decade one sees this process of becoming as something positive rather than negative, with many liberating effects specifically for the gothic heroine that tend to offer an avenue in which to imagine an egalitarian relationship. This can be seen most poignantly in True Blood, in the character of Sookie Stackhouse and her vampire boyfriend Bill, and also in the characters of Selene and Michael, in the Underworld series. Although the Underworld series does not necessarily concentrate solely on the growing relationship between Selene, a vampire, and Michael a human turned lycan (werewolf), gothic tropes are utilized in such a way so as to offer a space for a new transformative masochistic contract. Both characters are significantly changed in the two movies Underworld and Underworld: Evolution. Interestingly enough, even though one would assume that Michael should be the center of attention—since he is destined to become a vampire/lycan hybrid and end the war between the two species—the audiences’ focus is mostly on Selene. Like Sookie, she is transformed through her interaction with supernatural figures, and the catalyst is her main love interest. Even though Sookie does not transform into a vampire, she is changed by her association with Bill. Through interactions with Bill, and the mutual
recognition that occurs, she is able develop her sense of self. This does not mean that he “educates” her or that he fills her with his own ideas, but rather that there is a mutual, transformative exchange—one which is symbolized through blood.

Both conflicts that occur in the first two Underworld films and in the first season of True Blood revolve around uncovering a hidden truth. This is to be expected in True Blood and its textual companion Dead Until Dark because Sookie is painted as a modern day Nancy Drew—with helpful mind reading abilities. When someone starts to murder young girls—all of whom are fang-bangers, a crude term for those that have sex with vampires—and Sookie’s brother is under suspicion, Sookie sets out to solve the case. Indeed, since she herself is involved with a vampire, it makes it doubly important to find the killer. On the other hand, we do not see Nancy Drew in the character of Selene. As Underworld opens, we get a short monologue by Selene in which she calls herself a Death Dealer, a vampire warrior whose sole mission is to hunt down and eradicate lycans. Indeed, the monologue ends with her lamenting that the lycans seem to be almost extinct, which will make her obsolete. About the end of this war, Selene says, “Pity, because I lived for it.” However, when her most recent mission goes awry and what her superiors tell her does not add up, Selene goes hunting for the truth. These main conflicts are important to the process of becoming because through this search the old patriarchy is torn down—in the case of Underworld, this done in the literal sense—and a new way of being is introduced.

In True Blood, mind reading allows Sookie to have a hyper-awareness of others which gives her a unique perspective about herself and the world around her. Although it may seem that she is fulfilling a traditional gender role, she—perhaps more than anyone—realizes that this is simply a masquerade. As we read Dead Until Dark or watch the first season of True Blood we see Sookie consciously forcing herself into this role in an attempt to hide the fact that she simply
does not conform to the standard definition of woman. Some may argue with this and show that, through Sookie’s dress and mannerism that she is in fact hyper-feminine. However, I would assert that this is so conspicuous as to be campy and emphasize the fact that it is purely a masquerade. While all gender roles are a form of masquerade, it is particularly obvious with Sookie because she yearns to fit in. She is aware of what is considered normal behavior—and what is not—and works toward conforming. Furthermore, one often sees Sookie in her waitressing uniform, and although this is for practical reasons, I would posit that this can also symbolize the fact that she must always wear a uniform for the general public simply to fit in. Although it appears that Sookie is adhering to gender norms, it cannot be said that she has internalized them, only that she is playing along and is still well aware of how false these constructions are. When we first encounter Sookie, it is painfully obvious that she yearns to assimilate into the society around her, while simultaneously recognizing the problems that occur in the small town of Bon Temps. She realizes that many people that should have her respect are sexist, racist, or generally ignorant. Indeed, this is the main reason she could not have significant relationships with anyone she could read. Surprisingly enough, Sookie seems to have a more egalitarian relationship with vampire Bill. Although he is physically stronger, she cannot read his mind and he cannot glamour her (a type of mind control) which makes them more evenly matched.

Sookie’s outbursts and choices really emphasize that she is not aligned with traditional patriarchy. For instance, one expects Bill to swoop in and rescue Sookie, following a fairy tale ideal. However, it is Sookie who first rescues Bill from the Ratrays, who attempt to drain him and sell his blood on the illegal drug market. From the very beginning, they begin their awkward dance of recognition. Indeed, in their first encounter Sookie realizes she cannot read Bill and he
asks, “What are you?” (Strange Love). Sookie, throughout the series, is the great un-masker, however the story is also about how she begins to lose the mask that has protected her for so long and starts to become comfortable in her own body/mind. This early in their courtship, or dance of recognition, Sookie responds to Bill’s question by stating her name and that she is a waitress. These characteristics are what she uses to hide her self from the townsfolk, and she begins her relationship with Bill by doing the same thing. However, since Bill shares her alienation from dominant society and he senses her otherness, it is easier for her to begin this process of becoming with him. This is perhaps why Bill is so seductive to Sookie, but in such a way that does not necessarily overtake her own personhood. Bill does eventually save Sookie on occasion, but he does not take over her life in the process or haunt her every moment as with Bella in *Twilight*. It is Sookie who chooses to be involved with Bill and by extension, the vampire world. The silence that he offers allows her to formulate a self without the constant murmuring of patriarchal expectations in her ear. Unlike her brother Jason or her boss Sam Merlotte, he does not try to dictate her actions. It is only with Bill that she can take her uniform off and explore the possibilities.

By navigating through patriarchal assumptions—that seem to be fixed in the human world and more fluid in the vampire world—Sookie is able construct a self that she is content with. I am not saying that she finds her essential self or that such a thing exists, but through certain processes of becoming she is able formulate a life and an identity that she is comfortable with, and perhaps most importantly from a feminist perspective, one that does not erase her will and personality in favor of her vampire lover. However, to do this, she has to have a more intense engagement with life and be recognized by others. In the town of Bon Temps she is divorced from the small town society because of her mind reading capabilities, and actually calls
the talent a disability because it alienates her from the rest of humanity. She cannot date or have significant relationships with others because of her mind reading. The townsfolk, therefore, misrecognize her as “crazy Sookie.” Both activities that must occur to solve this dilemma—recognition and an intense engagement with others—make Sookie vulnerable because she is no longer hiding behind the mask of normality. The choice to be involved with Bill and other vampires can often be seen as masochistic since she is choosing to put herself in danger, however this is the only way toward recognition and becoming.

Furthermore, there will always be necessary tension between two subjects as one can see in Hegel’s Master/Slave Dialectic and Jessica Benjamin’s theory of intersubjectivity. The struggle between master and slave is pretty pronounced in Hegel’s Master/Slave Dialectic. For Hegel, the process of becoming is riddled with conflict and opposition. The main drama that we are confronted with is that of the master/slave, in which there is a constant tension and a need for recognition to attain a sense of self-consciousness. Jessica Benjamin revises this theory in *The Bonds of Love*, and sees not a subject/object relationship, but rather a process of recognition that involves two subjects. The threat of absolute negativity or destruction is always present in both Hegel and Benjamin, however Benjamin elucidates the process of recognition in order to show how it can work to create a more egalitarian relationship between men and women, and also how it often goes awry. Although Benjamin is primarily concerned with recognition between two subjects, self-consciousness is also formed through interactions with the world. This is more obvious in Hegel, when he talks about self-certainty, or what we believe to be true, and truth, which is confirmed or recognized by others (Hegel 113). This process of recognition—of both self and about truth in the outside world—is also a process of becoming, in which it is always a product of conflict or alterity and always on the move. While some would posit that ideas such as
self and truth are stagnant, finite, or transcendental, both Hegel and Benjamin see that they are not. This also allows for a transformation and a movement away from past oppressions, where one can reinvent a self that aligns with one’s desires and beliefs. Therefore, this is how the conflict informs the transformation we see in both Selene and Sookie and that it is recognized by their lover and by the audience itself.

A way in which this transformation is finely attuned to Sookie is that it is dependent on her desires and her abilities—namely Bill and her mind reading abilities. An observation that can be made about Sookie is that she continuously sees through phallocentric constructions and the dangers that they pose. She is confronted with these ideas through her interaction with Bill and other vampires. One of them, which is the direct result of her relationship with Bill, troubles the heteronormative trajectory of romance. As stated in the previous chapter, Sookie and Bill do not follow the traditional patriarchal path of romance which leads one through courtship, meeting the “one,” getting married, and then having children. It is impossible for some to imagine anything different. Contrary to hegemonic beliefs, Sookie is able to find fulfillment and happiness within a relationship that does not follow these rules. Not only does this trouble patriarchal assumptions, but one is able to see, through Sookie, a celebration of one’s own pleasure instead of adherence and sacrifice for false hegemonic beliefs often thought to lead to fulfillment and pleasure, but often found lacking. As we see later in the series, Sookie is more than willing to move on from her relationship with Bill when it becomes destructive. Although her relationship with Bill is key to her first steps of becoming, it does not define who she is and she is able to move on to other relationships. To speak her own pleasure, to exchange dangerous experiences with Bill—and others, when this is not the best thing for her--is what creates reality and her self.
In creating an identity for herself, we also see a critique of patriarchal assumptions through Sookie’s eyes. By recognizing the truth of a situation and through her special abilities, Sookie becomes better aware of herself and her own beliefs. In establishing her place in the world, and through her special abilities, we get hyper-real relationships and belief systems. In this type of fantasy world, the power dynamics between genders are made extremely visible and, interestingly enough, we find evil inside the patriarchy rather than in the more obvious vampire. The killer in season 1 of *True Blood* was a family man who wished to control another woman’s sexuality. These ideas line up well with traditional patriarchal assumptions in which women—especially in regards to their sexuality—are to be controlled by men. The audience sees the horrific results when these beliefs are turned into the inevitable actions. In an extreme form of objectification, the killer strangles each of his female victims and then proceeds to have sex with them. Evil is found in extreme forms of patriarchy in which woman is only an object to be controlled by men. Because of this recognition of past trauma a new contract is needed between men and women, one that is able to change the traditional roles. For more transformative possibilities, one can look toward the vampires in the world of *True Blood*.

Sookie is able to see through the false sense of reality built up by the hegemony and finds a place for herself with vampires who do not follow this code. Oddly enough, even though she is at a substantial physical disadvantage when compared to vampires, Sookie can only find recognition and equality with Bill and others of his kind. This is primarily due to the idea that men—as opposed to vampires—hold the position of subject, and women of object. To move away from this, we must utilize Jessica Benjamin’s theory of intersubjectivity, and then we see a way to have two subjects interacting instead of the power struggle that traditionally occurs between master/slave, subject/object. It is no longer woman’s function to submit to her
predestined role, but rather one should move toward transcending, “the experience of duality, so that both partners are equal” (Benjamin 48). This requires both subjects to be active and refuses the binary of the doer and the done-to, passive and active. For example, even though a vampire may feed off his female partner, it should be noted that it is often an exchange—the female human takes blood from the vampire as well—and she is active in the union, rather than passive. While no one is completely in control of a situation, Sookie is certainly active in the decisions that she makes. Indeed, she is the one to pursue Bill at first, she negotiates terms with Eric when he asks her to read minds for him, and she actively searches for the killer stalking fangbangers in Bon Temps. While Sookie does put herself in danger, it would be defined as an active sort of masochism described by Giles Deleuze. Sookie does not see Bill or other men as those that she should obey passively, she actively seeks out an individual that can fulfill her needs—which is in line with Deleuze’s interpretation of a masochist. Not surprising, there is often a transformative goal to this type of masochism. In actively seeking out Bill and being a part of the vampire world, Sookie—perhaps not consciously—is able to move into a new and exciting conception of her self. Instead of being “crazy Sookie” that no one really knows and whose life is to take orders, she moves into the world of possibilities, into the world of vampires in which she is recognized and valued in a way that does not detract from her subjecthood.

Selene also (re)forms her self through the discoveries she makes. For most of Underworld, we see Selene challenging every male figure in power, even dominant history. Lucian, a major lycan leader, was said to be killed by Kraven, a vampire that wants Selene to be his queen. Selene makes it obvious that she does not care for Kraven in this fashion, to the point that she has disdain for him. She unmasks him in front of Viktor, the vampire leader and “dark father” to Selene, by providing proof that Kraven did not kill Lucian. In fact, he made a deal with
Lucian so as to gain power for himself. Selene found this out by not only finding a lycan to testify, but also by exploring the forbidden history books. She, in fact, is rewriting dominant history. Kraven is also the first patriarch that she takes down. Although Selene does not kill Kraven herself, she does strip him of power and made his death possible. However, Selene’s true transformation does not take place with Kraven, even though these events lead her to question her role and her beliefs.

As mentioned previously, when the audience first encounters Selene she is an unfeeling soldier, obsessed with her mission to destroy all lycans. Through the film, we learn that Selene’s family was supposedly killed by lycans centuries ago, and Viktor turned her into a vampire so that she could avenge them. She embodies the idea of the dutiful daughter—both to Viktor, and also her human father, whom she continues to avenge. However, this begins to change when she is confronted by Michael, a human that the lycans were hunting. Michael is special because he is a human descendent of Alexander Corvinus, the original immortal. Legend states that Alexander had twin sons, one bitten by a wolf and the other by a bat. This led to werewolves and vampires. However, the goal of the lycans is to create a vampire/lycan hybrid. Michael awakens feelings in Selene, because he shows concern for her—as opposed to Kraven, who only wants her for his own selfish needs. Through this relationship, both Michael and Selene transform. Through Selene’s bite—blood exchange—Michael becomes a hybrid, a product of both vampire and lycan, but stronger than both of them. Selene also becomes powerful. She brings death to her old life and finally avenges her human father by killing Viktor—who had actually murdered her family. Selene kills Viktor by decapitating him, a not so subtle hint toward castration and taking the power of the Father. She literally takes power from the Father of them all, Alexander Corvinus, in *Underworld: Evolution* to defeat Markus, another vampire patriarch. Alexander
offers her his blood as he lies dying—having recently been attacked by his son Markus—and Selene becomes a powerful hybrid like Michael. In both films, one can see that this process of transformation does not mean creating something wholly new, but rather becoming a hybrid, taking the old and transforming it into something better and stronger. Like in True Blood, the system is not necessarily disposed of, but reformed in such a way that allows for freedom, growth, and becoming.

In the supernatural society created in Underworld and explicated in Underworld: Rise of the Lycans, we learn that the lycans were once slaves, the daytime protectors of the vampires. The war between the lycans and vampires started when Viktor’s biological daughter, Sonja, mated with a lycan named Lucian which was against vampiric law. Obviously, this has racial undertones and can be interpreted as a metaphor for miscegenation, however if one looks at it from a feminist perspective, we can see the lycans as the oppressed/repressed feminine and the vampire as the dominating/penetrating masculine side. While both vampire and lycan can be responsible for extreme violence, it is only with the lycans that we find oppression and a close connection with nature via the moon. Nature and the lunar cycle, specifically, have been traditionally linked to the feminine. It is also noteworthy that the first lycan, William, had to be entombed because of his bloodthirst that led to uncontrollable reproduction of lycans. It was the vampire’s duty to control the lycan’s reproduction, so that their numbers could be managed and that the slave population could be controlled. All of this echoes anxieties about women that continue to exist such as uncontrollable reproduction and repressing the feminine in favor of the masculine.

Love and recognition was able to bring these two sides together not once, but twice. Earlier, one can see this bringing-together through the characters of Sonja and Lucian, which was
tragically destroyed by the Father’s Law. However, this changes with Selene and Michael, who are both hybrids. The end goal is always a hybridization of the two, feminine/lycan should not be dominant, but nor should masculine/vampire. Instead of destroying the other, the dance of recognition and co-feeling can lead toward an egalitarian sense of self and existence.

According to Jessica Benjamin, the thing that is craved most in one’s psychic life—and ignored by early psychoanalysts—is mutual recognition. Benjamin’s theory leaves many wary because it highlights the dependency on others that we all share. This type of “co-feeling” is described as, “the ability to share feeling and intentions without demanding control, to experience sameness without obliterating difference” (48). Obviously this is describing an ideal relationship that extremely hard to maintain. Benjamin acknowledges these objections and goes on to show that the theory of intersubjectivity does contain a great deal of tension, but the, “intersubjective theory sees the relationship between self and other, with its tension between sameness and difference, as a continual exchange of influences” (49). In other words, this process is neither stagnant nor linear and emphasizes a constant “dance” of two-ness. One can see this is Selene and Michael. They fight together, have common goals, but one’s will never impinges on the other. I would argue that this also describes Sookie’s relationship with Bill and with others later on. Because she does not experience a traditional romance with a happily ever after, the relationship between she and Bill defy traditional linearity. There is no one conflict that needs to be resolved, but rather many and they constantly work toward understanding and recognizing each other for what they are. The harmonious attunement between them creates an environment that resists oppression and domination, but also allows them to be fully engaged with one another. With such engagement, however, comes danger and vulnerability. Not only the obvious—in which one would kill the other—but also a threat to independence and self. This
is why the process of recognition is always mobile, a fluid process that does not allow for one to dominate the other. Furthermore, seeing the optimum relationship as being between two subjects negates Hegel’s idea of master/slave. No longer must the subject destroy the other to survive or exist.

Obviously, this type of theory or idea that can be found in *True Blood* and the *Underworld* series does not radically change how we view relationships. Indeed, this is why many would still see these types of texts as reifying traditional romantic ideas. While I can see their point—we get a romance between a beautiful woman and a handsome man in both—I would argue that that reading is too simplistic and ignores how these texts seek to trouble traditional patriarchal assumptions rather than reinscribe them. Although not perfect, the fantasy that exists which is most intriguing—at least for me—is the idea that a woman can and should develop through her self through her relationships with others without the threat of being owned or dominated by them. As Benjamin puts it, “…the issue is not how to become free of the other, but how we actively engage and make ourselves known in relationship to the other” (18). This process is a bit more radical in the *Underworld* series in which Selene takes down all of the old vampire patriarchy, however she does end up in a committed heterosexual relationship, which can be interpreted as an uncomfortably conservative ending for such a strong female character. On the other hand, this would be dismissing both Selene’s and Michael’s transformation. Selene is no longer simply a dutiful daughter and an enforcer of the patriarchy. By defying traditional values and exposing a false history that underwrote them, and through the mutual recognition that occurs with Michael, she is able to formulate a feminist self that frees her of the bonds of servitude, but also does not divorce her from her body or her desires. To speak one’s desires is to speak one’s self, and too long Selene had been possessed by Viktor’s desires and not her own.
This can also be said of Sookie, who believed that her desire was to assimilate into dominant culture. When she finds satisfaction beyond the rules of traditional romance this opens her eyes to what she really wants and what this says about her as a person.

Although these particular texts emphasize a romantic relationship between a man and a woman, I believe this still applies to other relationships. Indeed, relationships such as those between couples of the same sex, or even friends and family members also crave mutual recognition in order to formulate one’s self. For instance, one can see this going terribly awry between *True Blood*’s Tara and her mother. Both are desperate to see the self that they picture for themselves to be reflected in the other. Tara wants to be seen as a dutiful daughter and her mother wants to be seen as a responsible parent. When the reality does not fit the conception, and this is put forth by how Tara recognizes her mother as a drunk, violence ensues. Unhappily, we can point out more times when recognition fails which results in one or the other trying to force their partner into recognizing the (mis)conception of their stagnant image of their self, rather than engaging in the process of becoming. In the end, what *True Blood* leaves us with is the ability—through Sookie’s disability—to see past the phallocentric constructs and fantasize about an avenue in which a woman could construct a self that engages thoroughly with others without being dominated or oppressed by them.

It is through these relationships, formed by a new contract, and the opportunities provided by the interactions that they have that both Sookie and Selene are able to engage in an act of “becoming” not unlike what Dean Lockwood asserts in his article, “All Stripped Down: The Spectacle of ‘Torture Porn’” which relates Deleuzian masochism with becoming or identity formation. Although Lockwood deals with a slightly different subject matter, his theories—borrowing heavily from Gilles Deleuze—are not only applicable to Selene and Sookie, but also
Bella from *Twilight*. Lockwood states, “…the victims are exposed not to the possibility of death, or not *only* to the possibility of death, but to an ecstatic transformative self-altering moment which opens up a revitalized, more intense engagement with life” (46). This “intense engagement with life” is reminiscent of Benjamin’s ideas of recognition and intersubjectivity. In *Underworld, Twilight, and True Blood* our heroines are always in physical danger that leads toward transformative acts. This is different from what we see in traditional gothic texts because these acts of violence—at least in *True Blood* and *Underworld*—push the gothic heroine toward transformation rather than erasure.

Indeed, this is why I stated previously that Lockwood deals with is only slightly different genre, because torture porn is all about seeing the (female) body in pain. Both *Twilight* and *Dead Until Dark*—and their on-screen companions—end with the heroine in a hospital bed after being severely beaten. Selene is a warrior, and so we see her constantly bloodied in battle, however the movie does not end with her incapacitated. However, it should be noted that while this is heartening, violence against women is certainly more accepted in *Underworld*. For disobeying him, Kraven smacks Selene across the face and she says nothing to him about it and she does not try to retaliate. This would never happen in *Twilight* or *True Blood*. However, I would argue that *Underworld* indicts hegemonic beliefs and the patriarchal system more blatantly than both *True Blood* and *Twilight*. This violence against women is one of many catalysts that bring about change in both *Underworld* and in *True Blood*. But, what about *Twilight*?

For Bella, this intensification of life is represented by Edward. Readers are constantly reminded that Edward poses a deadly threat to Bella. In *New Moon*, Bella also starts engaging in dangerous activities to feel alive and to see Edward. This relationship, if seen in literal terms, seems obsessive and unhealthy. On the other hand, it can also be seen as an “allegory of
becoming” (Lockwood 46). If one follows Bella’s story, it becomes obvious that this is the case. For one, Bella chooses to leave her old life in Arizona and live with her father, Charlie. This is the first time—but not the last—in which she willingly submits to a situation that will cause her pain and discomfort. However, through this masochistic act she takes a step closer toward forming a new identity, one that she is happier with.

Although there are many problems with the Twilight series, one aspect that the texts has in common with both Underworld and True Blood is the heroine makes a consciously masochistic choice in involving herself with a partner who is dangerous and forbidden. In doing so, she engages life with an intensity or passion that heretofore she has not experienced, and this experience changes her life in such a profound way that it reshapes who she is and what she wants. It is important to note that she chooses her fate—as much as anyone can—and that this choice allows her to move toward a freer and happier self. This transformation does not necessarily have an end goal, but rather it is a process of becoming that resists stagnant roles and transcendental truth. The psychic need for recognition is necessary for developing a free self, which is acknowledged by both Benjamin and Hegel. This seemingly masochistic choice is a requirement for this new social contract so as to lead toward transformation of both parties involved, but especially the gothic heroine.

Benjamin goes on to describe recognition as, “…to affirm, validate, acknowledge, know, accept, understand, take in, tolerate, appreciate, see, identify with, find familiar, …love” (15-16). The way toward freedom and equality is through this dance of recognition, and while the threat of destruction is ever present—as specifically emphasized in supernatural relationships—this vulnerability is necessary for the process of transformation, becoming, and attaining a self that one is content with. As Benjamin says, this process is a “continual exchange of influences” (49).
So, how do we know when this influence from the outside is simply a requirement for the process of becoming or when it takes over the heroine to the point that she is again enslaved?

To answer this we must look at desire and whether or not her partner assists in fulfilling her desires or asserts his own ideas and wants. Obviously, when we look at *Twilight* it is quite clear that Edward dictates what desires should be fulfilled and when. He controls Bella’s actions, determining that he knows better than she what she should want. We see quite the opposite in *Dead Until Dark* and *Underworld*. For the most part, the guiding force for the action is Sookie and Selene. While they may occasionally be on a mission for another person, Selene and Sookie make their own choices and also let their voice be heard. Bella is silenced more often than not, and her will is not the driving force of the plot. Even her pursuit of Edward is put on hold until he agrees to it. When he does not, the readers get a catatonic Bella and nearly empty pages.

Selene’s and Sookie’s experiences are certainly life-altering, but it is up to them how they interpret those encounters. For instance, Selene made the choice to save Michael when she was ordered to kill him. She was promised “absolution” from Viktor if she did so (*Underworld*). Indeed, there was little reason for Selene to save Michael, except for her own desire. Some may believe that Sookie was controlled by Bill because she tasted his blood, giving Bill power over her and negating the idea that she can formulate a free sense of self. However, throughout Harris’ series and through Allan Ball’s *True Blood* we see that although Sookie is attracted to Bill and she has many interactions with him that lead her toward her own articulation of desire, she functions very well on her own. Like Selene, when she has all of the facts, Sookie makes choices that seek to change an unjust status quo rather than simply accept it or justify it in some sense.

How can we tell “real” desire from that which is constructed by society or by others? I do not think this is wholly possible—we are, for better or worse, products of the society in which we
live and those who we associate with. However, these characters are not necessarily looking for an authentic or essential identity/desire, but rather they are trying to make choices and work with the systems of power to find a space for themselves in which they can live happily. As Lauren Lacy states in her analysis of Octavia Butler’s texts, “To work with power rather than be controlled by it, Butler’s protagonists engage in a constant process of adapting and becoming” (380). This offers an avenue for contemporary feminists to imagine a way to create a sense of self through working within the power structures that be.

Just as Selene analyzed the history of vampire patriarchy and saw it as lies, many feminists are coming to terms with how one can construct an idea of a female self without reinserting themselves into a master/slave relationship. This has been the “problem” with romance. One of the most basic psychic needs is recognition, which can be read as love, but how do we change this relationship in such a way that leads to a free sense of self? Contemporary gothic texts, especially those involving vampires, are specifically attuned to this idea and seek to heighten the traditional power dynamics that exist between male and female and then the process of becoming coincides with a transformation and forming of a feminist self. However, as I noted in both chapters, this transformation occurs in both male and female. We have mainstreaming Bill, hybrid Michael, and even guilt-ridden Edward. For me, these three texts create a fantasy of change. Edward notices the violence he can bring to Bella, but does not go the extra step and see that she can—and should be—an independent person capable of making her own choices. We take another step in the fantasy with Bill. Not only does he acknowledge the violence that he and other men have perpetrated, but also seeks to assist Sookie rather than dominate her. Finally, Michael seems free of past patriarchal oppressions. Michael’s forefather is the first immortal, Alexander Corvinus, but Michael is also a hybrid. Although he does inadvertently push Selene
toward her own becoming, he does not play a specifically active role. Indeed, he is the least
controlling or dominating, and this is perhaps the couple that achieves the most equality. Neither
seeks to dominate the other, they both willingly choose to be with one another.

As both gothic heroine’s realize, “…at the very moment of realizing our own
independence, we are dependent upon others to recognize it” (Benjamin 33). Although this is an
uncomfortable feeling of dependency, it is obvious that this is true for everyone. One should not
seek the destruction of the other, or even the domination of the other, but rather a transformative
process within the relationship. This is why vampire texts, in particular, offer a way in which to
imagine an egalitarian relationship that acknowledges the brutal past of male/female encounters,
but also seeks to change it by working through that trauma via a process of mutual recognition.
Although many would deem contemporary gothic texts as silly and anti-feminist, they offer a
crucial point for women in particular, and society in general. This is perhaps why all of these
texts are in serial form—we enjoy hearing this story over and over again, and it also mirrors the
idea of becoming. First we must be capable of imagining such a relationship, such a world, and
then we can move toward enacting bits and pieces of this fantasy.
CONCLUSION

As previously mentioned, the gothic is a space in which one can safely face the most profound fears and work through past cultural traumas. In each generation, we call into being the vampire or supernatural figure that we need. The vampire, with his immortal memory, allows us to work through the cultural trauma of misogynistic atrocities of the past, as well as imagine a way to move on. Will there be a time in which we do not need the gothic to express women’s pain? For the victim, and in the case of cultural trauma the victim is an entire group of people, trauma is always in the present. And, as seen in popular culture, we have not worked past codes of conduct that seek to control woman and make her invisible.

The masochistic fantasy is the contemporary gothic, but it is also a way in which to make a space for woman within the binds of patriarchal language. These gothic heroines must be able to break away and formulate their own free self, but they also cannot be seen as anarchists. To progress toward this ideal position of equality between the genders, society as a whole is not destroyed. Instead of following the false Father or Law, it is destroyed or rendered absurd. However, many traditional values remain intact. Both Sookie and Selene want to protect the innocent, bring the wicked to justice, and formulate friendships and romantic relationships. This is why I emphasize that what is happening here is not necessarily a destruction of the patriarchy—even in the case of Selene—but rather a navigation of patriarchal assumptions and destruction of patriarchs that are not working toward the Good of society. Most of these values, that have roots in the Law, are not questioned. However, the way they have been interpreted by corrupt patriarch’s are certainly subject to interrogation.

It is important to note that these contemporary gothic texts always start out with a mystery. Indeed, Charlaine Harris’ name for series that contains *Dead Until Dark* is called
“Southern Vampire Mysteries.” This emphasizes the necessity of an active mind, and a woman who can see through the constructions of a patriarchy whose goal is to control and oppress. Both Selene and Sookie act as an active detective, rather than a passive victim, and as a feminist I believe this is cause to celebrate. If texts such as these that combine romance and the gothic, two conspicuously conservative genres, are moving toward change that rejects woman as perpetual silent victim or accomplice to the patriarchy then this is quite a step forward.

To truly loosen the ties that bind gender roles, these ideas must enter popular thought. Unfortunately, young women are more likely to be exposed to *Twilight* than *True Blood* or *Underworld* because it is considered more wholesome. Even though Edward is a vampire, he teaches abstinence, and this is a type of control that is still considered a virtue. Even though this is an aspect of power that will not be changed any time soon—one must protect the child, or preserve innocence—*Twilight* has been called a “gateway drug” for reading other vampire texts which can be considered heartening. Furthermore, while problematic in a variety of ways, it does show a desiring female body who eventually gets what she wants and transforms into an equal—at least bodily—partner to her vampire boyfriend. While the text is still rife with many anti-feminist sentiments, at least Bella is able to express her own desire in the end.

The vampire that is called forth during our own fin de siècle is one who is aware of his violent potential, but can exercise restraint. He does not try to control his lover’s actions or thoughts, but will readily offer his assistance. In the gothic heroine, we desire an intelligent, savvy woman who is able to navigate around or through those that would oppress her. However, in the end, the most pressing psychic need is that of recognition, appreciation, and love. As mentioned in Chapter 2, this need emphasizes the dependency that we have on one another, which is also something that is also being brought into the light in contemporary gothic texts.
The interactions with others and the individual characters are seen in shades of gray, rather than black and white. No longer do we have simplistic heroes and villains, champions and monsters. The Law is questioned directly by characters such as Selene and Sookie, but also indirectly by the construction—or rather the confusion—of monsters. Vampires have been constructed as villains and as killers for most of their literary existence, however that has begun to change. This also rejects the binary of good/bad, right/wrong, male/female that much of patriarchal law is predicated upon. This reveals a multitude of correct answers, instead of one Law. This is yet another way that the patriarchy is unconsciously subverted.

The contract that has led to change is only contained within a fantasy, however it seems that the fantasy is not complete. For instance, Underworld: Evolution ends when Selene kills Markus, the last patriarch. Can we not imagine what life would be like for Michael and Selene afterward? What would a society look like with no patriarch and no clear link to the past? Unfortunately, it seems that we cannot even imagine such an existence without reinstating a patriarchal society. This does not change, even if, like later on in True Blood, the patriarch turns out to be a queen. Perhaps, in our point in time, popular culture is not ready for such a move. However, recognizing the multiple powers of control and being able to work around them is no small feat. Furthermore, perhaps there is a clear message about how to obtain a more egalitarian society through emphasis on change and hybridism. Instead of electing a new entity to take the position of the Father, one should erase the position entirely. In other words, in place of a king or queen we have a cooperative group.

It is often said that gothic texts most often return to a conservative point. Perhaps this is true of traditional gothic texts that often end in marriage, however contemporary gothic texts are themselves a hybrid of other genres—romance and science fiction, to name a few. Through both
chapters, I hope it has become evident that texts like *True Blood* and the *Underworld* series try to move us past conservative notions toward a space of transformation and change. These texts do not end in marriage or family or seek to reproduce the patriarchy.

In other words, *True Blood* and *Underworld* are not simply “…for adolescent girls or the not-terribly-intelligent” (Massé 2). Although they do not require any special lens to watch or read these texts, they do offer a glimpse at a fantasy that negates the reification of many patriarchal assumptions rather than reinscribing them. Also, through the popularity and repetition of similar stories one can divine that these texts play a very important role for women who are the primary authors and readers. Whether it is simply an expression of female desire or liberation, I argue that this new type of gothic story indicates a progression for women as a group.

No longer a simple victim, or a means to an end to be utilized by men, women are narrating their own story. This is happening literally in *Twilight, True Blood, Underworld*, and *Underworld: Evolution*. The person who frames the story, and who our eyes focus on, is the heroine. She is not simply an object to be looked at, but a real person and the audience is privy to her inner thoughts and ideas. Obviously some characters can be flat, like Bella, however some can be incredibly complex with contradicting motives. Moreover, these female characters are speaking from a feminine position which entails knowingly navigating many assumptions of how they should act. Would Bella be expected to cook and clean if she were male? Rescued by Edward and told where to go and who to see? However, when this new contract is in place, what does this mean for gender roles?

In the special commentary of *Underworld* Kate Beckinsale, the actress who plays Selene said that she enjoyed the role immensely because her character, “Could have been a guy.” I both
agree and disagree with her here. I believe what Beckinsale means is that Selene is not the
typical gothic heroine. She is a warrior, not the damsel in distress and she does not need her lover
to rescue her from some terrible fate. However, the actions of Selene were specifically feminine.
The relationship she has with Viktor is that of a father and daughter, with all of the traditional
psychodynamics. Viktor’s main goal in both Underworld and Underworld: Rise of the Lycans
was to uphold tradition and control the sexuality of his biological and adopted daughter. This
would not have occurred if Selene had been male. Furthermore, the whole meaning of the movie
would have been one that followed an Oedipal triangle, rather than explode traditional
patriarchy.

Again, this is an indicator of progress. While True Blood is steeped in a great deal of
tradition, the Underworld series really moves beyond this type of thinking. While never escaping
patriarchal language, Selene does manage to shrug off much of the oppressive forces and we are
able to imagine a strong, confident woman who can be a hero. However, what parts of the story
are constantly repeated is important because it indicates a trauma that has yet to be clearly
resolved. I am, of course, talking about the cultural trauma of misogyny that is so linked with the
gothic genre. The new contract demands that these past traumas come out of the shadows and be
worked through. Unlike Deleuze’s contract, the new contract does not adhere to the Law to show
how it is absurd, but rather concentrate on ways work through trauma and establish a space for
woman that is not dictated by a patriarchy that wishes to control her.

Not all contemporary gothic texts subvert the patriarchy, as we can clearly see in
Twilight, however a new vampire is needed for a new age. Even in Twilight, we can see Bella
expressing her needs and wants in such a way never seen before in traditional gothic texts. In
both True Blood and in the Underworld series we see a woman speaking and pursuing her
pleasure even when it is taboo. Instead of being seen as horrific, like one sees in *Dracula* in the character of Lucy, it is instead seen as heroic. Perhaps, changing how a female character should be portrayed and what characteristics are considered “good” can be more revolutionary than more traditional methods, such as legislation. By simply changing the expectations of what should be valued in women is a large stride in breaking the multiple points of control that Foucault warns about. This change should be enjoyed and celebrated.
REFERENCES


