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SYMPATHY FOR THE DEVIL:
FEMALE AUTHORSHIP AND THE LITERARY VAMPIRE

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate
School of The Ohio State University

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1999

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ABSTRACT

For nearly two centuries, the vampire has been a popular character in Gothic literature. Most of the vampire fiction produced during this time has been written by men, with Bram Stoker's Dracula emerging above all other vampire characters as the prototypical vampire for countless subsequent novels and films. However, within the last few decades, women writers such as Anne Rice, Susy McKee Charnas, and Jewelle Gomez have turned with increasing regularity toward the vampire as a protagonist, and their portrayals of vampire characters are often radically opposed to those of their male counterparts. Vampire characters in fiction by men tend to be portrayed as evil Others who threaten existing patriarchal standards of "normal" behavior and must therefore be destroyed. Vampire characters in fiction by women, while retaining their Otherness, tend to become sympathetic centers of the plot who merit survival. The shift in vampire fiction from an emphasis on characters who are victimized by and/or seeking to destroy the vampire to an emphasis on the vampire and/or characters who sympathize with the vampire may be understood as an important shift in narrative focalization.

The impact of this shift in focalization is explored at length using several thematic concerns which include: how concepts of the body are manipulated in women's vampire fiction; the degree to which vampires are used to problematize gender issues and the expression of sexuality, as well as the calibration of domestic
space; how women's portrayals of vampire characters reflect their understanding of
the experiences of birth and motherhood; how women describe the compulsion for
and acquisition of blood; how both blood-drinking and vampire-killing serve as
metaphors for rape and reflect individual as well as cultural politics of dominance
and submission; and how the concepts of liminality and taboo function in vampire
fiction by women. Donna Haraway's cyborg theory is used as the primary critical
model for understanding vampire hybridity as women construct it.

Despite female authors' revisions of numerous tropes of vampire fiction, key
questions remain: Have women writers "reincarnated" the vampire, so to speak, as an
emblem of the subversion of the status quo? Or are they merely using the image to
reinscribe the very forces of oppression for which the Gothic as a whole was
supposedly so powerful an outlet? This study strongly suggests that they do both,
producing vampire characters whose embodiment of contradictory impulses opens
possibilities for the construction of individual subjectivity which merit further
exploration.
Dedicated to my parents, who first instilled in me a sense of wonder.
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Thanks to Les Tannenbaum, whose graduate course in Gothic Literature officially introduced me to the genre.

A special thanks to Anne Rice, Jewelle Gomez, Suzy McKee Charnas, Jody Scott, Tanith Lee, and all of the other women writers whose unique characterizations of an old monster will continue to inspire both popular and scholarly fascination.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The literary Gothic tradition, wherein the vampire has thrived for well over a century, holds special significance for women. Feminist critics like Eugenia C. DeLamotte have observed that during the late eighteenth and much of the nineteenth centuries, "most writers and readers of the genre, like most of its protagonists, were women" (DeLamotte 150). Yet, while writers like Emily and Charlotte Bronte included human characters with vampiric traits in their works, female authors in general avoided using the vampire itself. Men, on the other hand, found repeated use for the vampire in their fiction as a supernatural force that was both deeply threatening and irresistibly compelling. Among male authors, Bram Stoker attained the most lasting recognition via Dracula, a character which has served as the prototypical vampire for countless subsequent novels and films. But despite the vampire's burgeoning presence in print, and despite its undeniable appeal in popular culture, it is not until relatively late in the twentieth century that women writers begin to turn with any regularity toward the vampire itself as a protagonist. Among these women, Anne Rice has inspired the most extensive/intensive attention from both scholars and popular audiences. In her series of novels known as The Vampire Chronicles, the voices of Louis and Lestat work to reinvigorate the vampire as a character who is familiar—yet strikingly new.

It is impossible to read Bram Stoker and Anne Rice in succession without being immediately confronted by their radically opposed treatments of their vampire protagonists. On one level, these might be dismissed as manifestations of different
writing styles or even expressions of the philosophical angst of two different centuries. However, further reading into other women's vampire novels suggests otherwise. In some fundamental ways, the writings of Anne Rice, Suzy McKee Charnas, Jewelle Gomez, Nancy Collins, Tanith Lee, and others constitute a significant appropriation and revision of the vampire as a symbol which resonates deeply with the dominant culture. Knowing this, it seems all the more imperative that a serious inquiry be made regarding the manner in which many of the most prominent contemporary women writers of the fantastic have used vampires as a venue for self-expression. The question must not only address itself to why women choose to write about vampires, but investigate the implications of the ways in which they write about them.

Such a broad, complex question defies a single, absolute answer, and this project will make no pretense of stating one. However, the absence of any extended investigation into vampire characters as they are used and understood by women writers leaves a wealth of important questions untapped. For instance, according to Eugenia C. DeLamotte, "women's Gothic after Radcliffe" is a place "in which the 'region of make-believe' is also a picture of 'the known world,' but in the form in which women 'know' it" (DeLamotte 12). How, then, are twentieth-century women writers using the vampire as a symbol for their own experiences of how the world works? To what end have they adopted such violent and, very often, male, figures and placed them at the sympathetic hearts of their messages? To answer these questions, one must make still further, more focused inquiries. With this in mind, the following questions will direct my investigation into the portrayal of vampires in the primary texts I have chosen:

1). How are concepts of the body manipulated in women's vampire fiction? (Curiously "de-gendered," the vampire can delight in the beauty and power of his/her body without fear of rape or other forms of punishment. There is a certified appeal in the concept of a body which is not a liability, but an asset.)
2). To what degree are vampires used to problematize gender issues and the expression of sexuality? the calibration of domestic space? How are such tensions created? Are they ever resolved? What might the answers to these questions tell us about women's attitudes toward sex and sex roles in a broader socio-political spectrum?

3). How do women's portrayals of their vampire characters reflect their understanding of the experiences of birth and motherhood? Of the relational dynamics between mothers, fathers, and their children?

4). How is the compulsion for blood and the act of acquiring it described in vampire fiction by women? In what ways does it differ from parallel descriptions in vampire fiction by men? To what extent is vampirism— and the destruction of vampires— a metaphor for rape, and how are corresponding portrayals of dominance and submission related to women's understandings of bodies and sexual politics?

5). What is the role of liminality/border-dwelling in women's vampire fiction? How do vampire protagonists utilize the limen, or threshold, as a site of possibilities/ fluid means of identification (and therefore a site of power, as well as anxiety)?

6). Have women writers "reincarnated" the vampire, so to speak, as an emblem of the subversion of the status quo? Or are they merely using the image to reinscribe the very forces of oppression for which the Gothic as a whole was supposedly so powerful an outlet?

These thematic questions, which describe vampire behavior and vampire status, will be used to address the larger question of how literature may provide transgressive models through its characterizations of the construction of individual subjectivity. The issue which concerns me here is the relationship between vampire fiction and the vampire figure— specifically, how fiction has configured the vampire, and how the gender of those who write vampire fiction may be observed to impact that configuration.
Ever since its 18th-century inception, Gothic literature has been fraught with socio-political tensions. Central to these tensions are the writers' understandings of and attitudes toward their cultural status quo, in which everything white, Western, patriarchal, and heterosexual is naturalized as the "correct"/ideal standard for existence and invested with a superior degree of power and privilege. Through Gothic conventions and their emphasis on the dark, the mysterious, and the Other, writers interrogate the stability of that status quo and present their findings in ways which tend to resist any absolute distinction between the dominant value system and that which threatens it. Some works of Gothic fiction appear to raise dominant cultural standards to a pinnacle of virtue, while others emphatically cast those same established values and codes of behavior aside. Often, both of these conflicting tendencies exist within a single work. Fred Botting describes "the moral, political and literary ambivalence of Gothic fiction" as "an effect of the countervailing movements of propriety and imaginative excess in which morality, in its enthusiasm to identify and exclude forms of evil, of culturally threatening elements, becomes entangled in the symbolic and social antagonisms it sets out to distinguish" (Botting 9). The contradictions resulting from this confusion of opposing value systems serve to "undermine the project of attaining and fixing secure boundaries and leave Gothic texts open to a play of ambivalence, a dynamic of limit and transgression that both restores and contests boundaries" (Botting 9).

The Gothic's dual tendencies toward reification and rebellion gained momentum during the nineteenth century as writers responded to the radical changes which industrialization, urbanization, and shifting bases of political power (embodied primarily by the rise and gradual decline of the British empire, as well as the decline of the Church) wrought on the British social consciousness. As societies and empires began to evolve beyond the realm of any clear, established controls, boundaries of all sorts were fundamentally de-stabilized. In the words of Eugenia C. DeLamotte, "Gothic terror has
its primary source in an anxiety about boundaries, and...Gothic romance offers a symbolic language congenial to the expression of psychological, epistemological, religious, and social anxieties that resolve themselves most fundamentally into a concern about the boundaries of the self" (DeLamotte 25). When concentrated at the level of the self, such anxiety compels an ongoing interrogation: Who am I? Who are they? Where do they stop, and where do I begin? Does such a boundary exist and, if so, how am I to find it? Will they concur with my assessment if I do find it? To what degree am I even permitted to seek it? It is the individual identity which is at stake, and the individual's corresponding concern with the politics of transgression comes to the fore.

For any given character in a work of fiction, the dangers inherent in establishing a territory for the self are twofold. By expanding outward, an individual risks stepping into areas which Others have already claimed. Additionally, that same individual risks having whatever personal boundaries s/he has already established intruded upon by "others" who are seeking to establish territories of their own. The difficulties inherent in such an endeavor are compounded by the fact that understandings of both "self" and "other" are always culturally relative and therefore subject to perpetually shifting criteria for identification. In the midst of such confusion, however, there is a recognizable constant: sooner or later, that which a given individual or society has defined as Other may begin to assert itself, to challenge the limits which have been externally imposed upon it. In Gothic fiction, the assertion of such an Other is inevitable. During the nineteenth century, a particular Gothic character type—the monster—became markedly associated with this concept of a resisting "other." The monster's rise to prominence was a direct consequence of the destabilization of cultural boundaries inherent in a society founded upon generations of imperial conquest. According to Judith Halberstam,

The Gothic novel . . . establishes the terms of monstrosity that were to be, and indeed were in the process of being, projected onto all who threatened the interests of a dwindling English nationalism. As the
English empire stretched over oceans and continents, the need to define an essential English character became more and more pressing. Non-nationals, like Jews, for example, but also like the Irish or Gypsies, came to be increasingly identified by their alien natures and the concept of "foreign" became ever more closely associated with a kind of parasitical monstrosity, a non-reproductive sexuality, and an anti-English character. (Halberstam 16)

As a representative of the foreign, the deviant, and the repressed, the monster symbolized forces which the dominant civilization had designated as Other and endeavored to either control or excise. Such efforts, of course, were doomed to failure. By the late 1800s, those renegade Other forces remained very much alive. Moreover, they tended to crystallize into various monstrous forms. Among the most popular and compelling of those monsters was the vampire.

The introduction of the vampire into nineteenth-century English literature was presided over and subsequently dominated by men, including John Polidori, Lord Byron, Joseph Sheridan LeFanu, James Malcolm Rymer, and Bram Stoker. In the twentieth century, their inheritors have included Richard Matheson, Stephen King, Whitley Strieber, Brian Stableford, Kim Newman, and a host of others too numerous to mention. Clearly, for men as well as women, the vampire has remained a compelling figure. Prior to the 1970's, however, not a single woman's name rises to prominence in connection with vampire fiction. Then, in 1976. Anne Rice published *Interview with the Vampire* and established a vital new trend in the portrayal of vampires with a bloodsucking protagonist who possessed, of all things, a conscience. While Stoker's Dracula and LeFanu's Carmilla both speak for themselves and their interests, we are never privileged with a view of their thoughts or permitted to experience the world by means of their extraordinary senses. In these works—and in subsequent male-authored vampire fiction, generally—the vampire psyche remains closed and alien. What is told, or "known," of vampire life is recorded by outsiders who can only presume to comprehend the supernatural drives behind it. Attuned to Mary Shelley's example, Rice dared to give her
monster a voice, and, through the strength of that voice, a soul. In doing so, she has
drawn a multitude of readers into an intimacy with vampire characters which has resulted
in heightened sympathy.

The shift in vampire fiction from an emphasis on characters who are victimized
by and/or seeking to destroy the vampire to an emphasis on the vampire and/or characters
who sympathize with the vampire may be understood as an important shift in
focalization. In Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics, Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan
describes focalization as the presentation of a story within a text "through the mediation
of some 'prism,' 'perspective,' 'angle of vision,' verbalized by the narrator though not
necessarily his" (71). Rimmon-Kenan goes on to clarify that "focalization has both a
subject and an object. The subject (the 'focalizer') is the agent whose perception orients
the presentation, whereas the object (the 'focalized') is what the focalizer perceives" (74).
Under this model, vampire fiction by men tends to construct vampires as focalized
Others who are perceived by other characters, or focalizers, as evil threats to existing
patriarchal standards of "normal" behavior. Vampire fiction by women often maintains
the vampire as a focalized Other, but introduces an important twist to the genre by letting
the vampire be perceived by focalizers who are primarily sympathetic towards its
Otherness as an embodiment of their own estrangement or liberation from those same
patriarchal standards. In The Vampire Chronicles of Anne Rice, the vampires themselves
become narrators and focalizers in a political move which turns their monstrous
perception of the world into an experiential norm. As Rimmon-Kenan explains, "the
ideology of the narrator-focalizer is usually taken as authoritative, and all other
ideologies in the text are evaluated from this 'higher' position" (81).

In order to comprehend the significance of what Anne Rice accomplished through
her vampires, it is helpful to have a rudimentary understanding of the literary vampire's
history. The evolution of the vampire from its folk roots into a literary subject is a tale
fraught with border crossings. The legendary folk vampire was a bestial, decaying corpse which inspired horror and revulsion. It came from the common people and preyed on the same, respecting no boundaries—least of all that between life and death. When Polidori took hold of that image in 1819, he turned it from a mindless, reeking parasite of the peasant class into a suave, aristocratic socialite with wealth, good looks, and tremendous sexual appeal. Lord Ruthven is still a parasite at heart, but the aesthetic veneer given to him by Polidori transforms him from a crude, openly vicious folk image into a sophisticated monster who crosses easily from the crypt to the drawing room to seduce his victims in full public view. He is rendered all the more dangerous because of his attractiveness, which allows him to blend with the rest of society, and his status as a transgressive force is thereby enhanced. He moves freely not only between life and death, but across class and marital boundaries as well. LeFanu's *Carmilla* breaks sexual boundaries in her homoerotic pursuit of Laura, while Stoker's *Dracula* effectively invades England and usurps sexual control over women everywhere he goes. The literary vampire is thus established as a breaker of taboos, a threat to the social, political, and moral status quo who possesses no respect for preconceived human notions of what constitutes proper behavior. S/he pursues life in accordance with his/her own laws, which are often nebulously defined at best.¹

The literary vampire's traditional victims of choice are women. True to patriarchal presumptions, women in these male-authored texts are portrayed as being especially vulnerable to the sexual temptation and ravishment the vampire offers. As

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¹ These early works of vampire fiction established a pattern of shared conventions rooted partly in folklore and partly in the writers' imaginations. These conventions were picked up and repeated, with varying degrees of alteration or embellishment, by later authors of both sexes. What is interesting, and what this study will proceed to illustrate, is the regularity with which contemporary female authors tend to reject many of these conventions.
with Eve, their inherent weakness—which is rooted in their gender—makes them prone to breaking male-established disciplines regarding knowledge and behavior. In doing so, they imperil not only themselves but the sanctity of their entire race. Like the plague, vampirism is subject to contagion. By permitting the vampire access to their bodies, women risk becoming vampires themselves and spreading vampirism through the rest of the populace at an exponential rate.

In most works of vampire fiction, once an individual becomes a vampire he or she can no longer produce children, and the survival of that individual's race is thereby threatened. And while most fictional vampires cannot reproduce in the conventional biological sense, women who do not become vampires but are nonetheless "tainted" by drinking the blood of a vampire are often presented as having the capacity to pass that blood on to any children they may bear, along with whatever dark and dangerous traits it carries. Women are therefore in need of protection, and this "need" provides sanction for masculine aggression in both the exploitation and the defense of female vulnerability, which extends beyond mere weakness into the realm of actual complicity. Indeed, most

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2 The term "race" as it is used here refers not so much to individual family lineages (though the vampire certainly threatens these) as to ethnic identity. In its initial literary incarnations the vampire is a monster who comes from the East with an exotic heritage of its own. In particular, critics have noted parallels between nineteenth-century authors' descriptions of vampires and popular stereotypes surrounding European Jews.

3 See Rosemary Jackson, *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion* (London: Methuen, 1981) 122. According to Jackson, within the fantastic, "The shadow on the edges of bourgeois culture is variously identified, as black, mad, primitive, criminal, socially deprived, deviant, crippled, or (when sexually assertive) female. Difficult or unpalatable social realities are distorted through many literary fantasies to emerge as melodramatic shapes: monsters, snakes, bats, vampires, dwarfs, hybrid beasts, devils, reflections, femmes fatales. Through this identification, troublesome social elements can be destroyed in the name of exorcising the demonic." Jackson's discussion of the dominant culture's association of sexually assertive women with the demonic builds on observations made by Tzvetan Todorov in *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell UP, 1975) 127-128. Todorov discusses how the fantastic often constructs desire incarnate as woman, which it then proceeds to link
female characters are portrayed as though they *invite* the vampire's attentions. Numerous critics have established a connection between the penetration of the vampire bite and sexual penetration, and this conflation lends the typical male vampire/female victim scenario a disturbing element of rape. Perhaps even more troubling is the evidence that from the male authors' perspectives, when it comes to being bitten by vampires, women are always already "asking for it," and as victims they possess a disturbing degree of sympathy for their attackers. In *Art of Darkness: A Poetics of Gothic*, Anne Williams presents this portrayal of women as typical of "Male Gothic plot and narrative conventions," which tend to

focus on female suffering, positioning the audience as voyeurs who, though sympathetic, may take pleasure in female victimization. Such situations are intimately related to [the Male Gothic's] delight in sexual frankness and perversity, its proximity to the "pornographic." In early Gothic this usually takes the form of female virtue threatened and often violated, echoing Bluebeard's strategy for implicitly blaming the victim . . . The Male Gothic heroine is, like Bluebeard's wife, caught in the ideology of a culture that reifies her "female nature" as curious, inconstant, disobedient, weak, and that places her in a situation where those qualities will lead her into danger. The "key" to this pattern is clear: her role is inseparable from her identity as a sexual being, either as subject or object. (104-105)

Within the worldview of male vampire fiction, women are trapped by their bodies and by the desires/presumptions which those bodies evoke in the men—and the monsters—surrounding them.

Intriguingly enough, some critics have argued that a woman's perceived alliance (compliance?) with the vampire "other" in these texts enables the release of her inner strength. From this vantage point, the vampire does not exploit women so much as provide them with means to break the restrictive patriarchal codes of behavior under which they are compelled to strive for virginity, marriage, and motherhood as supreme—

with the devil so that the identities of woman and devil are merged.
and often *sole*—sources of personal fulfillment. By "seducing them to his way of life, he causes them to abandon passivity and to become sexually aggressive and demanding.

This altered behavior is perceived by the other characters as a defiance of religious tenets, social custom, and traditional masculine authority" (Senf 60). The vampire and the women are thus, once again, sympathetically linked in accomplishing the same end—the shattering of the sexual status quo. The emphasis here on how such women are focalized or "perceived by the other characters" is of particular importance, since those "other characters" are the white male protagonists with whom the reader is supposed to most strongly identify. The men are the heroes, united in their self-assigned responsibility to protect the purity of their race, their culture, and the bodies of their women. Hence, they view the vampire's unrestricted access to women and his/her association with unrestrained, aggressive sexuality as a threat to the traditional family unit, as well as to the purity of bloodlines which that unit was intended to preserve. By wrestling sexual control of women from husbands, fathers, and lovers, the vampire replaces their biological progeny with his/her own unnatural spawn, interrupting the line of descent and promoting the spread of his own race at the expense of that of the dominant culture. The resultant anxiety which the dominant culture experiences is effectively chronicled in Stephen Arata's "The Occidental Tourist: *Dracula* and the Anxiety of Reverse Colonisation":

> If in this novel blood stands for race, then women quite literally become the vehicles of racial propagation. The struggle between the two camps is thus on one level a struggle over access to women's bodies, and Dracula's biological colonization of women becomes a horrific parody of the sanctioned exploitation practiced by the Western male characters. (Arata 633)

In such a context, it is hardly surprising that both the vampire and the women who are "liberated" by his/her attentions are considered unredeemable monsters. As white men of Western European ancestry, the heroes of these male authors' works—and many
twentieth-century male-authored works as well—ardently pursue the destruction of the
vampire and his/her female converts. But from Anne Rice and the other women whose
works I will explore, the vampire compels a very different reaction. Indeed, for a
striking number of female authors, the vampire is a creature which must endure. These
women write about vampires who affect our sympathies to such a degree that we begin to
believe they merit survival. By doing so, they lend credence to the male suspicion that
women are, on a fundamental level, "in league with the Devil"—a fatal alliance in the
Western tradition, since the efforts of devil and woman combined result directly in the
Fall of Man. Through their use of vampire characters, both male and female, women
writers embrace qualities and choices of individual human subjectivity which the
patriarchal tradition deems corrupt in their sex. The selection of such protagonists is
both deliberate and subversive, and women writers enact this "monstrous communion" by
delving into the vampire's mind.

Anne Rice is the most significant writer of vampire fiction to give the vampire a
first-person voice. This is important because traditionally, for all his/her transgressive
power, the vampire has been portrayed as an outsider. S/he dwells on the fringes of
society, observing, interacting when s/he has to feed, but never truly participating in what
s/he witnesses. S/he is a creature whose motives are evil by default, since s/he is never
permitted to tell his/her own story. Instead, s/he is spoken for by the likes of Van
Helsing, by those who oversimplify his/her motives, actions, and desires, thereby making
it easy to demonize him/her. Mina, too, has lost her voice by the end of Dracula—a fact
not lost on Marie Kiraly, who describes how

Mina's first-person accounts are abandoned and her feelings about
her ravishment by the vampire never described save by the men.
Perhaps Stoker was uncomfortable dealing with the musings of the
damned. Perhaps he was attempting to convey the notion that Mina
was being lost to the men as Lucy had been earlier in the story. In any case, Mina's voice, so strong through the early parts of the novel, is abruptly silent. (Foreword)

Kiraly then sets out to give Mina a voice with a novel of her own. Women, themselves marginalized and often portrayed as monstrous in the expression of their sexuality, seem to find the vampire an especially poignant—if violent—symbol of freedom. In cases in which female authors elect not to give their vampires a first person voice, they take pains to keep them at the center of the plot through omniscient narration and detailed interaction with other characters designed to reveal the vampires' thoughts and feelings to advantage. By creating "sympathy for the Devil," they affirm the vampire as a complex Other with whom interaction is not only possible, but desirable. By nature (or supernature?), the vampire lacks the weakness traditionally associated with figures which mainstream society has marginalized and can negotiate with that society on terms of his/her own choosing. With immortality and prodigious strength on his/her side, the vampire doesn't need others to sanction his/her behavior. S/he is free to be him/herself and to act on his/her desires in ways of which humans can only dream. Furthermore, s/he can extend that capacity for self-assertion to those who survive his/her most intimate attentions. In Susy McKee Chamas's *The Vampire Tapestry*, Floria describes Weyland as a creature of "secret singularity, not the busy hum of the herd" whose "strength, suited to that nonhuman life, had revived her own" (178). Viewed in such a context, the vampire is a mechanism for individual empowerment—and hence of tremendous appeal. When issues of race, gender, and culture are involved, as they inevitably are in vampire fiction, the vampire's perpetual ability to break barriers at will is even more highly prized (by those for whom such barriers constitute restricted potential)—or more deeply threatening (to those who view such barriers as protection from the undesirable intrusion of the Other).
Given the interest women have shown in portraying the vampire's psyche, it is logical to acknowledge the relevance of psychoanalytic perspectives to Gothic literature in general. In *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion*, Rosemary Jackson devotes a chapter to the subject. She refers extensively to Freud's essay on "The Uncanny" and defines fantasy as "a literature of absences" which throws back on to the dominant culture a constant reminder of something 'other,' thereby 'indicating the vanity of notions of limit and discrimination . . . making that vanity its subject.' It is opposed to institutional order. Freud is well aware of the countercultural effects of a literature of the uncanny, and its transgressive function in bringing to light things which should remain obscure. The uncanny expresses drives which have to be repressed for the sake of cultural continuity. Freud regards anything uncanny, or anything provoking dread, as being subject to cultural taboo. A resurfacing of long familiar anxieties/desires in uncanny incidents constitutes "a return of the repressed." (70)

It is this association of the uncanny with that which has been socially, sexually, or culturally repressed, together with its *challenge* to that repression, which this study will endeavor to address in greater detail. Specifically, the vampire may be viewed as an *incarnation* of the uncanny. By this, I mean that within the frame of the Gothic text, the vampire character is an actual, physical manifestation of repressed anxieties and cultural taboos. As a monster, it is "an economic form in that it condenses various racial and sexual threats to nation, capitalism, and the bourgeoisie in one body" (Halberstam 3, italics my emphasis).

In literature, the uncanny is often manifest whenever there is an encounter with difference, with that which is perceived or asserts itself as "Other," and is therefore regarded as threatening. Such an encounter evokes heightened anxiety for an individual character because it involves a challenge to the boundaries (social, political, cultural, sexual, psychological) which that character has established for him/herself. This challenge exists in three degrees of severity, listed here in order from lesser to greater:
a). perceived threat of transgression, b). genuine threat of transgression, and c). actual transgression. While the first two may exist in concert and involve an unpleasant destabilization of the aforementioned boundaries, the third involves direct submission along terms dictated by a conquering "Other." For those subjected to re-inscription, the result is often a radical dissociation of identity, a fundamental splintering of self from culture, self from society, self from self which necessitates, on the part of the violated individual, a strenuous effort toward some form of personal resolution.

All of the primary texts which I will examine address one—sometimes both—of the consequences of externally imposed actual transgressions. On one hand, such transgressions compel the protagonist to exist in a limbo state, or borderland. On the other, they compel the protagonist to acknowledge an already extant border existence. In either case, the subsequent behavior of these protagonists stems from a very real act of transgression which undermines their capacity for self-definition and socio-cultural integration. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick addresses this phenomenon as the Gothic spatialization of self, in which the self becomes "massively blocked off from something to which it ought normally to have access" (12). She later positions that "something" as external to the self, but my analysis will show that such is not always the case. In the twentieth-century vampire novels which I will examine, the protagonists internalize the violations they experience. This internalization often creates breaches at a very personal, intimate level, as well as at a broader, socio-cultural one. Correspondingly, the plots revolve around the protagonists' struggles to survive within these breaches, to discover means by which they can relate to their surroundings on terms which permit them to accept—even relish—their existence on the fringe.4

4 See Jackson 58, where she discusses "two kinds of myth in the modern fantastic: 1. source of otherness, of threat, is in the self; 2. fear originates in a source external to the subject, the self suffers an attack of some sort which makes it part of the other. This is
To better understand the significance of vampire border-dwelling and its corresponding identity politics as they are played out in fiction by women, Victor Turner's elaborations on the concept of *liminality* should prove useful. According to Turner,

*Liminal entities are neither here nor there, they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial. As such, their ambiguous and indeterminate attributes are expressed by a rich variety of symbols in the many societies that ritualize social and cultural transitions. Thus, liminality is frequently linked to death, to being in the womb, to invisibility, to darkness, to bisexuality, to the wilderness, and to an eclipse of the sun or moon. (95)*

In the realm of the symbolic, the vampire is a fitting addition to Turner's aforementioned list of liminal states. Not only does s/he exist between life and death, but s/he defies patriarchal conventions regarding sex roles and the "proper" orientation of sexual desire. S/he is a creature of blended genders, capable of "penetrating" both sexes, attractive and often attracted to both men and women. S/he is most active at night, the time of darkness and shadows, when distinctions are blurred, systems of easy identification break down, and unseen threats to order abound. It should be noted, however, that the bulk of Turner's discussion depicts liminality as non-transgressive

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the type of appropriation of the subject found in *Dracula* and tales of vampirism: it is a sequence of invasion, metamorphosis and fusion, in which an external force enters the subject, changes it irreversibly and usually gives to it the power to initiate similar transformations."  

5 It should be noted that Turner's concept of liminality is in itself non-transgressive within cultural contexts where it is an established and often ritualized transitional stage in the cycle of life. In such contexts, however, it is a temporary state. Vampire liminality is unique because it is *not* temporary. Indeed, the element of immortality renders vampire liminality as a state which does not participate in the cycle of life, but which interrupts that cycle indefinitely. The temporal dimension of liminality is thereby removed and replaced with a kind of *spatial* liminality which is consistent with Turner, yet different. This spatial liminality is articulated through the vampire character's permanently marginalized position in relation to the dominant society as well as through the vampire character's body itself.
within cultural contexts where it is an established and often ritualized transitional stage in the cycle of human life. Typically, it is a temporary state of being which precedes a ritualized re-entry into the dominant culture. While useful as a concept for understanding the vampire as a character which exists "in between" a host of culturally constructed categories, liminality alone fails to encompass the full range of vampire subjectivity as authors construct it. In the works of fiction included in this study, vampirism is not a temporary state, and it most certainly does not serve as a culturally accepted prelude to reintegration with the dominant society. To this extent, it more closely approximates what Turner later discusses within the context of religious life (as it exists in the world's major religions) as "institutionalized liminality":

What appears to have happened is that with the increasing specialization of society and culture, with progressive complexity in the social division of labor, what was in tribal society principally a set of transitional qualities "betwixt and between" defined states of culture and society has become itself an institutionalized state. But traces of the passage quality of the religious life remain in such formulations as: "The Christian is a stranger to the world, a pilgrim, a traveler, with no place to rest his head." Transition has here become a permanent condition. (107)

Though permanent, liminality in this context remains non-transgressive, describing a state of being which is both acknowledged and sanctioned by the dominant society in direct connection with that society's religious institutions. The vampire, as a character who must drink the blood of others in order to survive, can claim no such sanction. In the words of Judith Halberstam, "blood, in Gothic, is always overdetermined—it signifies race as well as sex, gender as well as class and to have blood on your hands is to be implicated in the blurring of essential boundaries of identity" (77). The dominant society tends to construct these blurrings as dangerous and therefore forbidden. Hence, the centrality of bloodshed in the vampire's existence pushes the character beyond a form of institutionalized liminality and into the realm of the taboo.
In *Totem and Taboo*, Sigmund Freud defines the word "taboo" as meaning on the one hand, 'sacred,' 'consecrated,' and on the other 'uncanny,' 'dangerous,' 'forbidden,' 'unclean' . . . taboo has about it a sense of something unapproachable, and it is principally expressed in prohibitions and restrictions. (24)

Within a given cultural context, taboos function as a series of "rules" established to preserve the cultural status quo. Individuals who violate taboos by breaking prohibitions are rendered taboo themselves. Such individuals are perceived as dangerous primarily because they tempt others to follow their example, and it is this risk of imitation, described as "contagion," which threatens "the dissolution of the community" (Freud 42-43). In vampire fiction, the concept of contagion via the breaking of taboos is linked explicitly with the act of drinking blood—an act symbolically constructed as a sexual moment which literally transforms the individual whom the vampire bites. Through its use of oral penetration, the vampire enacts a form of transgressive sexuality which, in its ability to incorporate homosexuality, incest, sado-masochism, and paedophilia, de-prioritizes the "correctly" adult, heterosexual orientation of desire as patriarchal culture constructs it and shatters a host of sexual taboos in the process.

In Western culture, blood itself is strongly connected with taboo. In *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*, Mary Douglas observes how, in the traditions of Judaism and Christianity, "The idea of pollution by blood . . . seems to have been a long time dying" (61). For the purposes of this study, it is significant that among many tribal societies "the feminine principle is linked with and through blood" (Turner 123). In addition to being associated with violence and death, blood is also connected with menstruation, birth, and the rupturing of the hymen during initial sexual intercourse. Centered on the female reproductive cycle, these last three elements are rooted in the perpetuation of life, not death. The boundaries broken are those between girlhood and womanhood, between the womb and the outside world, and
between sexual innocence and sexual experience. Thus, as a life force, blood and its loss acquires added dimension from a female perspective. Its release can be viewed as a symbol of new life given as well as existing life threatened, and both of these possibilities intertwine in the experiences of pregnancy and motherhood. However, in male gothic

motherhood is an anomalous condition (like the vampire's "Un-Death"), a state not accounted for by the patriarchal definition of women as either "virgins" or "whores" according to their sexual experience. Giving birth is the one female function which society cannot entirely sublimate or deny, though patriarchies have traditionally repressed this truth by strict regulation of the conditions under which women have access to maternity. "Good" women become mothers only within a patriarchal marriage, but their power, Dracula seems to say, remains disturbing and potentially subversive. (Anne Williams 128)

Accordingly, in male vampire fiction it is the sinister aspects of blood which are emphasized. The association of blood with pollution and taboo, and of the female principle in general with all that is dangerous and evil, is a distinctly masculine notion. Through blood and the enigmatic power it symbolically confers, vampire fiction by men contextually links vampires and women in conspiracy against the cultural status quo. Within this hostile environment both groups are forced into secrecy, compelled to live beyond the scope of recognized (and therefore legitimated) channels of power and influence. Yet it is precisely within this liminal space that the literary vampire thrives, insinuating him/herself into society-at-large by virtue of the traits which set him/her apart from that society in the first place: immortality, genderlessness, amorality, the love of darkness, communion with animals, and the lust for blood.

The grafting of all these traits onto a single vampire body is most constructively explored as a manifestation of what Donna Haraway has theorized as a "cyborg myth." According to Haraway, the cyborg is a late twentieth-century phenomenon which appears at precisely the places where human-animal and human-animal-machine distinctions
have broken down. It is a figure intimately attuned to the permeability of boundaries, a figure of "potent fusions" which "embrac[es] the possibilities inherent in the breakdown of clean distinctions structuring the Western self" and thereby becomes an embodiment of taboo (Haraway 174). The fictional vampire as women construct it is just such a being. It is my contention that by turning vampires into cyborg focalizers and/or allowing vampires to be focalized by characters who are sympathetic to the vampire's cyborg subjectivity, female authors of vampire fiction create a kind of "oppositional consciousness" within their texts. Haraway discusses Chela Sandoval's concept of oppositional consciousness as an awareness "born of the skills for reading webs of power by those refused stable membership in the social categories of race, sex, or class" (155). Vampires as both male and female authors have constructed them are typically refused the aforementioned "stable membership," but it is the women who most consistently express interest in the vampire's consciousness of that refusal and its role in the construction of individual cyborg subjectivity. By appropriating the literary vampire from an almost exclusively male authorship and altering the conventions associated with it, female authors enact a form of "cyborg writing." As defined by Haraway,

\[\ldots\] Cyborg writing is about the power to survive, not on the basis of original innocence, but on the basis of seizing the tools to mark the world that marked them as other.

The tools are often stories, retold stories, versions that reverse and displace the hierarchical dualisms of naturalized identities." (175)

Accordingly, vampire protagonists in fiction by women are aware of vampire stories that have gone before—stories which they deliberately subvert in a political move which celebrates rather than condemns their experience of the "partiality, irony, intimacy, and perversity" of their cyborg subjectivity. Under the terms of these women's counternarratives, that which is labeled an aberration becomes an asset, and that which dwells in anonymity surges forward and claims a name. For women, the vampire
represents a positive assertion of individual subjectivity, a "potent myth for resistance and coupling" capable of piercing the veil of "rational," patriarchal repression and standing alone as a subject to be both reckoned and sympathized with, if not necessarily completely understood.
A great deal has been written of vampires within the past three decades, much of it concerned with gender and sexuality. To date, however, there has been no in-depth inquiry into how the sex of the writer may influence his or her portrayal of vampire protagonists. This study is intended as a first step toward remedying this gap in existing scholarship, with emphasis in subsequent chapters placed on the modifications which women have made in their adoption of the vampire as a character central to their fiction. To understand the extent and significance of those modifications, however, requires a primary step: a study of the vampire as he/she is portrayed in key works of vampire fiction written by men. This initial chapter will serve as a basis for contrast to which the rest of the dissertation will refer in an effort to illumine and interrogate the forces/philosophies which drive vampire characters created by women.

The earliest works of vampire fiction written in English were produced in the nineteenth century. By this time, the vampire was already a creature with a lengthy folk tradition crossing multiple cultures and languages. During the eighteenth century it had captured the imaginations of German writers, including Berger and Goethe, who incorporated it into their Gothic fictions¹. These vampire stories then spread in book form from their birthplace in eastern Europe to England, where they proceeded to

¹ Burger's *Lenore* was published in 1773, and Goethe's *The Bride of Corinth* appeared in 1797.
fascinate British writers as well. Vampiric characters and imagery appear in the works of John Keats, Percy Bysshe Shelley, Lord Byron, and Robert Southey, to name a few. Female novelists such as Emily and Charlotte Bronte also incorporated characters with vampiric traits into their work. From the beginning, however, the literal vampire—the pale, murderous, immortal, night-loving, blood-drinking, figure that has become a staple of Western popular culture—appeared destined to be the province of a predominantly male authorship.

The first piece of British fiction to set forth a vampire as a central character was "The Vampyre," published by John Polidori in 1819. Many of the traits with which Polidori endowed his vampire, Lord Ruthven, were perpetuated and embellished by various authors throughout the rest of the nineteenth century—among them Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu and Bram Stoker, who produced "Carmilla" and Dracula respectively. These three works played a crucial role in establishing the vampire as a distinctive character type, and set the trend for a majority of the fiction which followed. Although a few women, such as Mary Elizabeth Braddon and Mary Wilkins-Freeman, produced stories in the genre, the realm of vampire fiction was wholly dominated by men for over 150 years prior to the arrival of Anne Rice's Interview With the Vampire on bookstore shelves in 1976. Patterns in the portrayal of the vampire established in the nineteenth century carried over into the twentieth century and were (and continue to be) recycled time and again in the fictions of authors such as Richard Matheson, F. Paul Wilson, Kim Newman, Brian Stableford, Whitley Strieber, and Stephen King. This is not to say that male inheritors of the vampire's literary legacy were creating nothing new, nor is it meant

2 In Wuthering Heights, Heathcliff is described by another character as a "vampyre" (and various details re: his character support the image, such as his death scene, where he lies with a frozen white smile, the way he "feeds off of" Catherine, his gypsy associations, and his dark, violent nature. In Jane Eyre, Bertha Rochester is also described in vampiric terms.
to imply that all works of vampire fiction by men utilize the exact same trends. Rather, I wish to illustrate how a significant number of major writers carried certain themes and motifs through with a consistency that compels further critical inquiry, not only in terms of its own merit but also with reference to the evolution of and divergence from those themes later displayed in vampire fiction by women.

"The Vampyre" of John Polidori

The concept of the vampire as a colonizing force has been central to vampire fiction from the very beginning. John Polidori's Lord Ruthven is an aristocratic outsider who insinuates himself into uppercrust London social circles by virtue of his exotic looks and his "winning tongue." Polidori never names a country of origin for his "vampyre," but his omniscient narrator announces in the very first sentence of the story that Ruthven is "more remarkable for his singularities, than his rank" (7). He has dead gray eyes and very pale skin—in short, he is quite visibly alien. But rather than being a hindrance, his foreign aspect becomes a source of intrigue. His presence at any social gathering becomes a kind of social coup de grace—hence, his "peculiarities [cause] him to be invited to every house" (7). His aristocratic status, combined with the fascination which his appearance inspires, results in his being given free access to his victims. Those who admire him do so uncritically, succumbing both to his beauty and to the aura of romance and mystery in which he cloaks his darker motives. This is especially true of the story's primary focalizer and protagonist, Aubrey. An orphan whose guardians have indulged him from birth, Aubrey has an overdeveloped romantic sensibility and an overactive imagination and is therefore easily seduced by the debonair figure that Ruthven presents, "determined to observe the offspring of his fancy, rather than the person before him" (8).

By means of his ill-considered admiration, Aubrey permits himself to become an agent of the vampire. Ruthven uses both Aubrey's fortune and his company to promote
his own ends: the seduction of women and the financial and psychological ruination of men (9). Both are accomplished repeatedly and with ease, right under the nose of Aubrey—a fact which emphasizes his impotence in counteracting the threat of the vampire. This is particularly true with regard to one of Aubrey's primary responsibilities as a cultured British gentleman: the defense of womanly virtue.

Lord Ruthven displays no typical colonizer's ambition to rule society outright, but he excels at creating social havoc through his lack of moral restraint in his relationships with women. He is supremely skilled in the art of seduction. In addition to his "beautiful" appearance, he possesses a very high degree of verbal dexterity. His conquests are achieved primarily through speech, through a mastery of words designed expressly to control the way others—especially women—perceive him:

Who could resist his power? His tongue had dangers and toils to recount—could speak of himself as of an individual having no sympathy with any being on the crowded earth, save with her to whom he addressed himself;—could tell how, since he knew her, his existence had begun to seem worthy of preservation, if it were merely that he might listen to her soothing accents;—in fine, he knew so well how to use the serpent's art, or such was the will of fate, that he gained her affections. (23)

As a consequence of Ruthven's remarkable mastery of words, he leaves a trail of debauchery in his wake. Subsequent to his leaving London, it has been discovered that his character was dreadfully vicious, for that the possession of irresistible powers of seduction, rendered his licentious habits more dangerous to society. It had been discovered, that his contempt for the adulteress had not originated in hatred of her character; but that he had required, to enhance his gratification, that his victim, the partner of his guilt, should be hurled from the pinnacle of unsullied virtue, down to the lowest abyss of infamy and degradation: in fine, that all those females whom he had sought, apparently on account of their virtue, had, since his departure, thrown even the mask aside, and had not scrupled to expose the whole deformity of their vices to the public gaze. (10)
The women Ruthven victimizes are virgins—young girls who, by their exemplary behavior, symbolize all that is fine and beautiful in Western society. They are potential wives and mothers, those whose children will be the strength of Britain in decades to come. Their bodies are their primary source of value, and maintaining the purity of those bodies is of vital concern to both sexes—to the women, because marriage and motherhood are the primary venues through which most of them can hope to attain/maintain any acknowledged social significance, and to the men, because the continuity of family bloodlines and corresponding issues of inheritance are paramount to their desire for social esteem and political influence. Control of female sexuality and of the channels via which women are sexually initiated and permitted to become mothers is a staple of the patriarchal system. By conducting his affairs out of wedlock and circumventing those "legitimate" patriarchal channels for female sexual expression, Ruthven usurps the role which British men have allocated exclusively to themselves. By awakening women to sexual pleasure and encouraging them to become sexually aggressive, he removes them from consideration as suitable wives and mothers. From a patriarchal standpoint, he is reducing the breeding population among the bourgeois elite—among the people who, in terms of established political and cultural ideals, "count."

The story gives no indication that Ruthven's victims become immortal blood drinkers such as he, but they do become monstrous in the eyes of society as a consequence of their lewd behavior. In that respect, at least, Ruthven turns them into creatures like himself. He is a threat to morality, as well as to the sanctity of future

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3 See Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (New York: Routledge, 1966) 126-127, where the author discusses double moral standards as they are applied to sexual behavior. In particular, she states: "In a patrilineal system of descent wives are the door of entry to the group . . . Through the adultery of a wife impure blood is introduced to the lineage. So the symbolism of the imperfect vessel appropriately weighs more heavily on the women than on the men."
generations. The fidelity of the women he has corrupted can never be assured, so the legitimacy of any offspring they might produce is thrown into question. The purity of female bodies and of the bloodlines which those bodies perpetuate in childbirth is at stake, not just in England, but everywhere Ruthven goes—including Italy and Greece. And Aubrey, the representative of British manhood, is powerless to stop him on no less than three occasions.

In Italy, Aubrey learns of a planned assignation between Ruthven and the daughter of their mutual host. When confronted, Ruthven replies "that his intentions were such as he supposed all would have upon such an occasion; and upon being pressed whether he intended to marry her, merely laughed" (11). Disgusted, Aubrey immediately disassociates himself from his traveling companion and warns the girl's mother, only to discover several months later that "the lady he had attempted to snatch from Lord Ruthven's seductive arts" has not been seen since his departure (18).

Aubrey's second failure occurs in Greece. While in Athens, he grows deeply infatuated with Ianthe, the daughter of his host. Ianthe is a beautiful young girl who follows him about the countryside—the very picture of pastoral innocence, untrammeled by formal education or the jaded influences of city life. The narrator waxes poetic in his description of her virtues:

As she danced upon the plain, or tripped along the mountain's side, one would have thought the gazelle a poor type of her beauties... The light step of Ianthe often accompanied Aubrey in his search after antiquities, and often would the unconscious girl, engaged in the pursuit of a Kashmere butterfly, show the whole beauty of her form floating as it were upon the wind, to the eager gaze of him, who forgot the letters he had just decyphered upon an almost-effaced tablet, in the contemplation of her sylph-like figure... But why attempt to describe charms which all feel, but none can appreciate?—It was innocence, youth, and beauty, unaffected by crowded drawing-rooms and stifling balls. (12)
lanthe is presented very much in terms of an idealized female body here, a body that Aubrey clearly notices and desires. She is the rarest of finds—a truly innocent girl—and Aubrey finds in her behavior a sharp contrast to "all the affected virtues of the women among whom he had sought for his vision of romance . . . and while he ridiculed the idea of a young man of English habits, marrying an uneducated Greek girl, still he found himself more and more attached to the almost fairy form before him . . . lanthe was unconscious of his love, and was ever the same frank infantile being he had first known" (13). The description of lanthe as "infantile" and "unconscious" is suggestive not only of a lack of worldly experience, but also of limited mental development and an innate vulnerability. Significantly, it is Aubrey who sees her this way. Her status as a young woman—and an "uneducated" Greek one, at that—makes her a ripe target for his patronization. Both her sex and her cultural background, which Aubrey considers backward in comparison with his own English breeding, are handicaps in her efforts to be taken seriously. As a consequence, the folk wisdom she tries so earnestly to impart is met with open scorn. Nowhere is this more evident than in the scene in which she attempts to warn Aubrey against vampires. Aubrey is suitably horrified to discover in lanthe's account a fairly "accurate description of Lord Ruthven" (13). Nonetheless, he is a "rational" Englishman to the core and refuses to accept any possibility of truth in her stories.

Aubrey's dismissal of lanthe's warnings illustrates yet another pattern which will be repeated in subsequent male-authored texts: the rational male character's attitude of superiority/disdain toward beliefs/fears expressed by women and members of non-British cultures. The arrogance of these leading men has a way of getting them into trouble, and Aubrey is no exception. His disdain for the folk knowledge of lanthe and her parents produces tragic consequences. Ignoring their warnings and his own instincts regarding Ruthven's sinister behavior, he sets out alone on a journey and finds himself trapped in
the depths of the forest at night, lost in the pouring rain. Seeking shelter, he approaches a hovel, only to be startled by the scream of a woman, coupled with triumphant male laughter. He rushes inside and scuffles with an unknown assailant, who is quickly frightened off by the glow of approaching torches. When the torch-bearers search the rest of the hovel, they find the lifeless body of lanthe:

There was no colour upon her cheek, not even upon her lip; yet there was a stillness about her face that seemed almost as attaching as the life that once dwelt there:—upon her neck and breast was blood, and upon her throat were the marks of teeth having opened the vein:—to this the men pointed, crying, simultaneously struck with horror, "A Vampyre! A Vampyre!" (15)

A bloody dagger found at the scene later proves that it was Ruthven who assaulted and murdered lanthe. The reader is never told what the girl is doing in the woods in the middle of the night. There are two possibilities. She has either been seduced by Ruthven (which is questionable due to her understanding of vampire nature; in this sense, she is far less naive than her London counterparts), or, overcome with concern, she has gone out in search of Aubrey, whom she fears has come to harm. Either way, it is Aubrey's reckless disbelief in vampires that has kept him in Ruthven's company long enough for the vampire to plot an attack on lanthe. Through his own ignorance, he facilitates Ruthven's access to yet another victim and thereby enhances the agency of the vampire.

If Ruthven has a corrupting influence on the bodies of women, he has an equally devastating impact on the male psyche. Following lanthe's murder, Aubrey is bedridden in a fever of delirium. Aubrey knows, subconsciously, that Ruthven is the vampyre who murdered lanthe, but when Ruthven comes to him in his sickness and makes a grand pretense of devotion, Aubrey's suspicions are allayed and he once again welcomes the vampire into his confidence:

When [Aubrey] recovered from his delirium, he was horrified and startled at the sight of him whose image he had now combined with that of a Vampyre; but Lord Ruthven, by his kind words, implying almost
repentance for the fault that had caused their separation, and still more by the attention, anxiety, and care which he showed, soon reconciled him to his presence. (15)

Again, we see the power of Ruthven's voice to seduce men as well as women, to subdue the fears and manipulate the perceptions of his victims. Tormented by memories of lanthe and suspicions of Ruthven, "Aubrey's mind was much weakened, and that elasticity of spirit which had once so distinguished him now seemed to have fled for ever" (16). He can offer no resistance when Ruthven, wounded and on his "deathbed," extorts from him a strange oath—a set of words to which he knows Aubrey's sense of honor will hold him bound:

"Swear! . . . Swear by all your soul reveres, by all your nature fears, swear that for a year and a day you will not impart your knowledge of my crimes or death to any living being in any way, whatever may happen, or whatever you may see." (16)

Shortly after the oath is sworn, Ruthven's body vanishes under mysterious circumstances, and Aubrey resolves to return to England. Along the way, he makes discoveries concerning Ruthven's murderous nature and his own failure to counteract it which further weaken him psychologically, until his mind has been "almost broken under so many repeated horrors" (18). His experiences subsequent to befriending Ruthven have destroyed his spirit, his youthful vigor, his virility, his "high romantic feeling of honour and candour" (8). As a consequence, he is ill-equipped to defend himself or anyone else.

Aubrey's third and most spectacular failure to protect female virtue occurs after he returns to England, where he is entrusted with the care of his eighteen-year-old sister. Miss Aubrey is a girl of unquestioned breeding and integrity who is about to enter into the "busy scene" of the London social arena. Once there, she quickly draws the attention of Ruthven, who has returned from the dead and re-named himself the Earl of Marsden. Aubrey distrusts his own senses when he first notices Ruthven at drawing-room gatherings, but the vampire immediately commands him to "Remember your oath!" (19)
By making that oath, Aubrey has willingly surrendered his primary means of agency—his voice. Ruthven understands all too well the power of speech, and by compelling Aubrey's silence, he further "emasculates" him in terms of his capacity to actively influence his society. Aubrey knows what Ruthven is and what Ruthven is capable of doing. Furthermore, he has the potential to expose the vampire to the rest of society—yet he cannot. His sense of honor holds him to his oath, and he realizes that even if he were to break it, no one would take him seriously. He is no longer in Greece, where his convictions regarding Ruthven's identity would be believed and, perhaps, acted upon. He is in London, immersed in a "civilized" Western society which prides itself on its rational and scientific understandings of how the world works. Forced to confront his own impotence, Aubrey turns his anger and frustration inward as Ruthven repeatedly accosts him with the memory of his oath. Each encounter is another blow to Aubrey's crumbling mental reserves. He becomes totally distracted until finally, unable to endure his solitude,

he left his house, roamed from street to street, anxious to fly the image which haunted him. His dress became neglected, and he wandered, as often exposed to the noon-day sun as to the mid-night damps. He was no longer to be recognized; at first he returned with the evening to the house; but at last he laid him down to rest wherever fatigue overtook him. (21)

At this stage it is Aubrey, not Ruthven, who exemplifies the "walking dead."

Eventually, Aubrey resolves to re-enter society and warn anyone who will listen of the threat Ruthven poses, "but when he entered into a room, his haggard and suspicious looks were so striking, his inward shuddering so visible," that his sister begs him to stay away, for her sake (21). This is highly ironic—Ruthven, the true menace, is afforded access to society by virtue of his winning words and looks. He is a monster who knows how to play the part of a gentleman. Aubrey, once a handsome gentleman admired in society, is now denied access to his former circles due to his poorly groomed
appearance and his seemingly irrational words. From the perspective of society, he has become the monster, the threat to be barred from the drawing-room. His demands that his sister postpone her wedding to Ruthven are ignored as symptoms of a disordered state of mind. When he tries to intervene in the ceremony, Ruthven is the first to see him, and the vampire drags him from the room by force, saying, "Remember your oath, and know, if not my bride to day, your sister is dishonoured. Women are frail!" (23) The statement is not only an assertion of the innate vulnerability of women to sexual temptation, but a taunting reminder that there is absolutely nothing Aubrey can do—or say—to prevent Ruthven's designs. Aubrey's pent-up rage causes him to burst a blood-vessel, and he dies of blood loss shortly after midnight when, the terms of his oath having expired, he relates his terrible story. His lack of agency and inability to speak have literally caused his death, and that of his sister. Those who rush to protect Miss Aubrey arrive "too late. Lord Ruthven had disappeared, and Aubrey's sister had glutted the thirst of a VAMPIRE!" (24)

By the end of the story, Aubrey has become a kind of vampire who feeds on and ultimately destroys himself. Though he has never been bitten, or "penetrated," by Ruthven, he is made to appear monstrous and is subsequently destroyed from within by the contaminating impact Ruthven has on his mind. He dies of blood loss, just as Ruthven's female victims do. His demise, together with that of his sister, marks the destruction of a family bloodline.

Polidori's vampire is drawn by the weaknesses of those around him and capitalizes on them. He uses Aubrey's English convictions of superior reason and his romantic tendency toward hero-worship. In similar fashion he is drawn to the weakness of women, which is clearly presented as sexual in nature. Women around him are always already potential victims, and the men are totally impotent when it comes to protecting them. Despite his exotic appearance, Ruthven has the ability to blend into the intrigues
of bourgeois society. Everyone save Aubrey is oblivious to the threat which Ruthven presents. When he re-appears in London after his "death" on the Continent, no one recognizes him with his "new" identity. In relation to the vampire, Aubrey has been forced into a neuter, even feminized, role, incapable of acting to protect himself or others. There is no defense against Ruthven—not even foreknowledge of who/what he is, as both Ianthe and Aubrey prove. Contact with him is merely a prelude to inevitable assimilation. The story emphasizes this through the vampire's absorption of Aubrey's mind and of his sister's blood. In the case of Miss Aubrey Ruthven has, quite literally, made her a part of himself, and he has done so violently. His marriage to her is horrifying because it serves as the legal venue for that assimilation. As her husband, he acquires a socially recognized/sanctioned right of access to her body, despite the fact that he is a monster who will exploit that body for his own murderous ends. Moreover, he is gone, presumably to continue his socially devastating patterns of behavior. There is no comfort to be taken from an ending in which the "VAMPIRE," emphatically exclaimed in capital letters, literally has the last word.

Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu's "Carmilla"

Unlike Polidori's tale, which takes the vampire into London and the heart of Western civilization, Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu's "Carmilla" takes Western civilization to the East and places it, in isolation, into the heart of vampire country. The events of the story take place in Eastern Europe, in the wilderness of Styria. Laura, the protagonist, and her father, who is English, live in a forest schloss that is miles from the nearest inhabited village. Immersed in a foreign environment, they speak English every day out of a combination of patriotism and fear of losing the language. Language in this context becomes vital as a means of keeping British/Western identity and cultural values alive—particularly for Laura, who has never seen England. Her father's efforts to preserve an
essential "British-ness" in the household are complicated by the presence of Madame Perrodon, Laura's caretaker, who speaks French and broken English, and Mademoiselle De Lafontaine, Laura's governess, who speaks French and German, the combinations of which result in "a Babel" (73). Language, a staple of national identity, is thus problematized even prior to the arrival of the vampire.

A further challenge to the stability of Western values comes from Laura herself. While her father is English, her mother was maternally descended from the Karnsteins, an old Hungarian family line that has fallen into decay. Moreover, as revealed by General Spielsdorf in the ruins of castle Karnstein, "It was a bad family, and here its blood-stained annals were written... It is hard that they should, after death, continue to plague the human race with their atrocious lusts" (126). The continuing plague to which the General refers is Carmilla, who is herself a Karnstein, and who bears a startling resemblance to a woman in an old family portrait which belonged to Laura's mother. In terms of bloodline, Laura is a cultural hybrid. Her father's English blood has been diluted—and, in a very real sense, polluted—by the Hungarian blood of her mother, which carries a long history of violence and perversion. That history is embodied in the vampire Carmilla, who represents the antithesis of "civilized" Western values through her distaste for Christian rituals, her homoeroticism, and her lust for blood. The fact that Carmilla and Laura are related—and that Laura is half English—suggests a fluidity to British cultural identity/integrity which is fundamentally disturbing in its potential to literally "incorporate" or be incorporated by the Other. In addition, the fact that Carmilla is a Karnstein and that Laura's maternal line of descent from the Karnsteins is emphasized suggests that it is the women who perpetuate the evil of the bloodline.4

4 Carmilla's highest-ranking companions are female, including the woman who poses as her mother and the black woman whom Madame Perrodon spies in Carmilla's carriage as it drives away.
Laura's first encounter with Carmilla occurs when she is only six years old. One night, while in her bed in the nursery, she sees a very pretty face looking at me from the side of the bed. It was that of a young lady who was kneeling, with her hands under the coverlet. I looked at her with a kind of pleased wonder, and ceased whimpering. She caressed me with her hands, and lay down beside me on the bed, and drew me towards her, smiling; I felt immediately delightfully soothed, and fell asleep again. (75)

Up to this point, the intruder is perceived as a gentle, comforting, mother-figure—one to which Laura, whose mother has died, readily responds. It swiftly becomes apparent, however, that Carmilla is anything but a nurturing mother. Laura describes how she was wakened by a sensation as if two needles ran into my breast very deep at the same moment, and I cried loudly. The lady started back, with her eyes fixed on me, and then slipped down upon the floor, and, as I thought, hid herself under the bed. (75)

Within moments, Carmilla is transformed from the object of most fervent childhood desire—"the mother"—into the object of greatest childhood fear: "the monster under the bed." Her ability to evoke these conflicting emotions of fear and desire in her victims carries over into her relationship with Laura as a young woman, and is a staple trait of vampire characters in general. In the words of Franco Moretti, "Vampirism is an excellent example of the identity of desire and fear" (Moretti). Indeed, vampires constitute a literal embodiment of the conflated fear/desire that is a standard trope of Gothic fiction. As Frank Botting explains, "The emotions most associated with Gothic fiction are similarly ambivalent: objects of terror and horror not only provoke repugnance, disgust and recoil, but also engage readers' interest, fascinating and attracting them. Threats are spiced with thrills, terrors with delights, horrors with pleasures" (9). This fragment of genre analysis encapsulates quite succinctly the conflicted allure which Carmilla and vampires in most works of fiction hold for their victims.
Although the encounter leaves no visible mark on Laura, her recounting of events sparks reactions among the occupants of the household which differ along lines of class, culture, and gender. The nurse, nursery-maid, and housekeeper, all female and members of the local peasant class. As such, they recognize the supernatural agency behind Laura's story and are visibly anxious for her safety. They even go so far as to bring in "a venerable old man, in a black cassock," who kneels with them and teaches Laura how to pray (75). Her father, by contrast, dismisses the whole affair as a childish nightmare:

I remember my father coming up and standing at the bedside, and talking cheerfully, and asking the nurse a number of questions, and laughing very heartily at one of the answers; and patting me on the shoulder, and kissing me, and telling me not to be frightened, that it was nothing but a dream and could not hurt me.

But I was not comforted, for I knew the visit of the strange woman was not a dream; and I was awfully frightened. (75)

Laura's father possesses the same "rational" English convictions regarding the nature of "reality" and the superstitions of the peasants that led Aubrey to disaster through his misapprehension of Ruthven's identity. Even when Laura is older and Carmilla is in their midst, he refuses to let his opinions be altered by the strange events which follow her arrival. Two local young peasant women have died of a mysterious wasting sickness, and the health of another is in decline after she experiences what she describes as "an attack." Rumors of vampirism are spreading through the countryside, yet he remains convinced that "All this...is strictly referable to natural causes. These poor people infect one another with their superstitions, and so repeat in imagination the images of terror that have infested their neighbours" (94). When Carmilla's absence from her room is discovered in the middle of the night, a thorough search of the house reveals nothing—yet when Laura goes upstairs at one o'clock the next afternoon, she discovers Carmilla seated at her dressing table. Carmilla's explanation of how she just awakened on the dressing room sofa, in a room that had already been searched, is unsatisfactory to Laura, who
expresses her doubts to her father. Her father, however, is resolute in his conviction that Carmilla has merely indulged in an elaborate episode of sleepwalking. Laughing, he tells their guest that he "wish[es] all mysteries were as easily and innocently explained as yours, Carmilla" (110). His ignorance is both willful and glaring, since the mystery of Carmilla is far from innocent and far more complex than a mere sleep disorder—something which Laura has intuited since her first encounter with Carmilla as a child, when the kisses of her father failed to comfort her.

Carmilla, like Ruthven, is an arch-seducer who contrives access to her victims through a combination of exquisite physical beauty and a captivating voice. These attributes assure that she will be perceived as both charming and ingenuous, and that she will be readily welcomed into the households of her victims. Her presence is so powerfully compelling that she inspires a kind of "love at first sight," as General Spielsdorf indicates in his recollection of Carmilla's introduction to his niece at a masquerade ball:

She introduced herself by saying that her mother was a very old acquaintance of mine. She spoke of the agreeable audacity which a mask rendered practicable; she talked like a friend; she admired her dress, and insinuated very prettily her admiration of her beauty. She amused her with laughing criticisms upon the people who crowded the ballroom, and laughed at my poor child's fun. She was very witty and lively when she pleased, and after a time they had grown very good friends, and the young stranger lowered her mask, displaying a remarkably beautiful face. I had never seen it before, neither had my dear child. But though it was new to us, the features were so engaging, as well as lovely, that it was impossible not to feel the attraction powerfully. My poor girl did so. I never saw anyone more taken with another at first sight, unless, indeed, it was the stranger herself, who seemed quite to have lost her heart to her. (119)

Laura, her father, and the rest of their household are likewise impressed when Carmilla is deposited at their doorstep. Her beauty and her "sweet voice" make her an appealing companion, and her cosmopolitan, aristocratic bearing is intriguing to those whose
hospitality she exploits. In their isolation, they hunger for the colors and gaiety of mainstream European society which, on the surface, Carmilla represents. In acknowledging her flair for words, General Spielsdorf remarks that "Her gossip, without being ill-natured, was extremely diverting to me, who had been so long out of the great world" (123). Laura, in addressing future readers of the events she has recorded, asserts "You, who live in towns, can have no idea how great an event the introduction of a new friend is, in such a solitude as surrounded us" (84). The arrival of Carmilla fills a social void in the lives of her victims, and they willingly ignore her eccentricities in order to retain her companionship—a mistake which, in the case of Mademoiselle Rheinfeldt, results in death.

Despite her cultured speech and her physical beauty, there are immediate signs that Carmilla is not the innocent young girl she pretends to be. The company she travels with is described in distinctly unsavory terms, and those terms are rooted in racial difference. As Carmilla's entourage drives away from the schloss, Madame Perrodon describes a figure she observed in the carriage as

a hideous black woman, with a sort of coloured turban on her head, who was gazing all the time from the carriage window, nodding and grinning derisively towards the ladies, with gleaming eyes and large white eyeballs, and her teeth set as if in fury. (83)

This portrait exaggerates physical features along a racist bias and is more suited to depicting a demon than a human woman. Carmilla's male servants fare little better with faces that are described as "lean, and dark, and sullen" (84). Clearly, dark skin is a socially and politically charged cultural signifier. From the Western perspective, it represents the primitive, the uncivilized, the criminal—the Other. The descriptions in this sequence equate dark flesh with dark, sinister character. No distinction is made between the external appearance of an individual and his or her internal motivations. Ironically,
the same rationale which rouses suspicion toward characters with dark complexions allays initial doubts about the beautiful, pale-skinned Carmilla. She uses this prejudice to her advantage.

Once she has been invited into a bourgeois household, Carmilla commences the seduction of her young female victim. Her aggressive pursuit of Laura is presented in terms which masculinize her sexually in both speech and manner, leaving Laura to speculate:

... was there here a disguise and a romance? I had read in old story books of such things. What if a boyish lover had found his way into the house, and sought to prosecute his suit in masquerade...? (91)

Laura recognizes the folly of such a hypothesis, yet is deeply troubled by Carmilla's erratic and intensely passionate behavior. She describes at length how

Sometimes after an hour of apathy, my strange and beautiful companion would take my hand and hold it with a fond pressure, renewed again and again; blushing softly, gazing in my face with languid and burning eyes, and breathing so fast that her dress rose and fell with the tumultuous respiration. It was like the ardour of a lover; it embarrassed me; it was hateful and yet overpowering; and with gloating eyes she drew me near to her, and her hot lips traveled along my cheek in kisses; and she would whisper, almost in sobs, "You are mine, you shall be mine, and you and I are one for ever." Then she has thrown herself back in her chair, with her small hands over her eyes, leaving me trembling. (90)

Later, during a midnight walk, Laura prompts Carmilla to learn the object of her affections, with the following results.

"I am sure, Carmilla, you have been in love; that there is, at this moment, an affair of the heart going on."

"I have been in love with no one, and never shall... unless it should be you."

How beautiful she looked in the moonlight!

Shy and strange was the look with which she quickly hid her face in my neck and hair, with tumultuous sighs, that seemed almost to sob, and pressed in mine a hand that trembled.

Her soft cheek was glowing against mine. "Darling, darling," she murmured, "I live in you; and you would die for me, I love you so." (98)
Le Fanu has rendered these scenes and several others like them explicitly homoerotic.

Carmilla's behavior is unfathomable to Laura:

In these moods I did not like her. I experienced a strange tumultuous excitement that was pleasurable, ever and anon, mingled with a vague sense of fear and disgust. I had no distinct thoughts about her while such scenes lasted, but I was conscious of a love growing into adoration and also of abhorrence. This I know is paradox, but I can make no other attempt to explain the feeling . . . . "Are we related," I used to ask; "what can you mean by all this? I remind you perhaps of someone whom you love; but you must not, I hate it; I don't know you—I don't know myself when you look so and talk so." (90)

Clearly, Laura is disturbed by Carmilla's advances which are both attractive and repulsive at the same time. Carmilla arouses these conflicting emotions from the moment she first enters the house, and Laura admits:

. . . the truth is, I felt rather unaccountably towards the beautiful stranger. I did feel, as she said, "drawn towards her," but there was also something of repulsion. In this ambiguous feeling, however, the sense of attraction immensely prevailed. She interested and won me; she was so beautiful and so indescribably engaging. (87)

Laura is eighteen years old, a virgin adolescent girl who has led a very isolated life. She has attended no balls, no social gatherings where she might be introduced to young men. She has no suitors, and there is no indication that she has been exposed to anything like romance in reality, beyond the stories she has read. In the absence of a broader social environment, she has had no chance to achieve a sexual identity for herself. She has grown up without a mother who, through her enactment of sexual attraction to her father, could have shown her what her heterosexual role should be. Her reaction to Carmilla suggests a lack of definition to her sexual orientation which makes her vulnerable to the female vampire's seduction. Although Carmilla is never directly labeled a "lesbian," the desire she expresses so openly for Laura is presented as a threat to Laura's underdeveloped heterosexual identity. The ability of the vampire to blur what constitute "appropriate" sex roles is part of her danger here, part of what sets her up as a monster.
whose enacted desires will pervert those of her victim. Through the homoerotic character of her seduction, she undermines patriarchal privileging of heterosexual relations as a behavioral "norm" and threatens to turn Laura into a monster/lesbian like herself. The presentation of Laura as a willing victim further complicates this relationship. It is she who exhorts her father to allow Carmilla to stay with them at the schloss, and despite the fact that Carmilla is secretive, eccentric, and openly deceptive, Laura never seeks to avoid her. If anything, her curiosity about Carmilla's background, about who she is and where she comes from, is roused to progressively greater levels of intensity. In vampire fiction by men, curiosity is a literally damning/deadly weakness for female characters. Carmilla portrays the irresistible appeal of knowledge withheld, and Laura responds to her allure just as Eve responds to the apple and Bluebeard's third wife responds to the locked door. She must discover the answers. In the process, she passively endures Carmilla's declarations of love, becoming more intrigued by her companion until finally Carmilla begins to feed on her at night. Laura experiences the encounters as strange, erotic dreams in which

... there came a sensation as if a hand was drawn softly along my cheek and neck. Sometimes it was as if warm lips kissed me, and longer and more lovingly as they reached my throat, but there the caress fixed itself. My heart beat faster, my breathing rose and fell rapidly and full drawn; a sobbing, that rose into a sense of strangulation, supervened, and turned into a dreadful convulsion, in which my senses left me, and I became unconscious. (106)

Significantly, this begins to occur only subsequent to the passionate "courtship" scenes delineated above. Laura's description of her physical reactions to the dreams—racing heart, rapid breathing, sobbing, and convulsing—resembles nothing so much as a sexual act culminating in orgasm. Moreover, it is an orgasm caused not by a man, but by another woman, a female vampire who assumes/usurps the sex-role of a male in her aggressive advances and her ability to physically penetrate her victims with her bite.
Carmilla's ability to dominate and exploit those around her, irrespective of their gender, is not solely a by-product of her vampire nature. It is also a reflection of her social status as an aristocrat. Carmilla is highly conscious of that status, along with the privileges it confers upon her. Her disdain for the lower classes is blatant in both her careless attitude toward a peasant girl she has killed ("She? I don't trouble my head about peasants. I don't know who she is.") and her desire to witness a hunchback who dares to notice that she has sharp teeth "tied to the pump, and flogged with a cart-whip, and burnt to the bones with the castle brand" (92,94). The peasant girls upon whom she feeds are mere cattle to her. She saves her time and seductive talent for her upper-class conquests, like Laura and Mademoiselle Rheinfeldt. This selective treatment of her victims along class lines is a reflection of Western social values. The upper-class girls have higher social standing and are perceived as having greater social worth. They are approached accordingly, aggressively wooed into sympathy with the vampire and her desires, lured into a moral and psychological "fall" designed to mold them into creatures like her even before death transforms them into literal vampires.

Inevitably, Laura begins to display physical symptoms of her nightly encounters with the vampire. In her own words, "I had grown pale, my eyes were dilated and darkened underneath, and the languor which I had long felt began to display itself in my countenance" (106). Confronted with this evidence of her decline, her father at last grows concerned and sends for a doctor, to whom Laura reveals her disturbing dreams. When the doctor and her father examine her, they observe "a small blue spot, about the size of the tip of your little finger" on her breast, just below the collarbone, precisely where she has felt the sensation of being pierced by needles. The doctor then addresses her father: "You see it now with your own eyes" (112). This visual proof, combined with the diagnosis of the physician, knocks him out of his complacency. Science and personal observation succeed where folk rumors and his own daughter's testimony have failed, and
his rational conviction that everything has a natural, scientific explanation is shaken—so much so that he is determined to travel to Karnstein and bring Laura with him.

Along the road to Karnstein, they encounter General Spielsdorf, who has his own story of Carmilla to tell. He is reluctant to do so in the presence of Laura's father, however, accusing him thus: "... you believe in nothing but what consists with your own prejudices and illusions. I remember when I was like you, but I have learned better" (115). He then asserts that he has "not been led lightly into a belief in the marvellous," and describes how he was persuaded to take a beautiful young woman named Millarca under his protection. Shortly after this woman's arrival, the health of his niece begins to fail. As he describes her symptoms (the frightening dreams, the figures of a woman and a black beast witnessed at the foot of the bed, the sensation of her breast being pierced with needles, and the sensation of being strangled), Laura recognizes herself. Further, she recognizes the description of Millarca as well: "You may suppose... how I felt as I heard him detail habits and mysterious peculiarities which were, in fact, those of our beautiful guest, Carmilla!" (125) The General calls upon a physician from Gratz, who examines his niece and informs him that "no natural disease" has caused her symptoms. The physician entreats him to send for the nearest clergyman, because Mademoiselle Rheinfeldt is "suffering from the visits of a vampire" (128). Dissatisfied with this explanation, the General hides in his niece's bedroom at night, where he observes "a large black object, very ill-defined, crawl... over the foot of the bed, and swiftly spread itself up to the poor girl's throat, where it swelled, in a moment, into a great, palpitating mass" (130). When he pulls his sword, the dark thing retreats and resolves into the figure of Millarca, who vanishes when he tries to strike her down. His niece dies the next morning and, having witnessed the cause of her death with his own eyes, he is compelled to believe in the existence of vampires.
Both the General and Laura's father require *proof* before they will consent to believe in vampires. They must hear the opinions of respected men of science, medical personae whose knowledge is deemed valid because it is based upon Western principles of research and analysis. These opinions alone, however, are insufficient to do more than make them question their own skepticism. Ultimately, both men refuse to accept the supernatural truth until they have witnessed it with their own eyes. The delays caused by their lingering disbelief prevent them from fulfilling their patriarchal responsibility to protect the young women in their charge. By inviting Carmilla/Millarca into their households and permitting her to stay, they facilitate her access to new victims. Like Aubrey before them, they enhance the vampire's agency by bringing her into direct proximity with the women she desires most. As a result, Mademoiselle Rheinfeldt and several peasant women are murdered in their beds, and Laura herself begins to waste away.\(^5\)

Like their counterparts in Polidori's "The Vampyre," the women of "Carmilla" are presented by the narrator and perceived by the men around them as being wholly incapable of protecting themselves. Both Laura and Mademoiselle Rheinfeldt are utterly captivated by Carmilla. Despite her own misgivings about Carmilla's behavior, Laura never seeks to avoid her. When it comes to the nature of her illness, Laura is deliberately sheltered by her father. Her condition is always discussed among the men in secrecy:

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\(^5\) In "Carmilla," the pattern of male ineffectualness against the vampire has a history which extends over centuries, dating back to the 1600's when a Moravian nobleman/vampire hunter was given permission to remove the tomb of Mircalla, Countess Karnstein. In younger days, the nobleman "...had been a passionate and favoured lover of the beautiful Mircalla, Countess Karnstein" (Le Fanu 136). As such, he could not bear to see her horribly destroyed as a vampire, so he moved her remains to a safe place. Although he kept careful note of the spot and those notes, which were passed down to Baron Vordenburg, enable the ultimate destruction of Carmilla/Mircalla, they do not change the fact that his failure to act when he had the chance has cost the lives of countless young women.
My father led [Baron Vordenburg] aside, and the General followed. I knew that he had led them out of hearing, that he might relate my case, and I saw them glance often quickly at me, as the discussion proceeded. (133)

In such exchanges the woman is the object of discussion, never a participant. From a patriarchal standpoint, she is being protected from knowledge which might distress her, shielded from that which the men have decided her female nature is too frail to withstand: namely, the truth about the vampire Carmilla. In reality, she is being denied access to information about her own welfare, about the state of her own body and the source of her illness. Lack of knowledge results in lack of agency, and she is prevented from defending herself. She must rely on the men to act in her behalf, and her status as a dependent within the patriarchal social system is thereby maintained.

In male-authored vampire fiction, protecting the women is never an easy task. No single man is capable of challenging the supernatural strength of Carmilla. The General goes after her on two separate occasions, once with a sword and once with an axe. In the second encounter,

he struck at her with all his force, but she dived under his blow, and unscathed, caught him on her tiny grasp by the wrist. He struggled for a moment to release his arm, but his hand opened, the axe fell to the ground, and the girl was gone. (131)

It takes the concerted effort/presence of no less than five men—the General, Laura's father, Baron Vordenburg, and two medical men—to destroy Carmilla. The procedure is extraordinarily violent:

The body,...in accordance with the ancient practice, was raised, and a sharp stake driven through the heart of the vampire, who uttered a piercing shriek at the moment, in all respects such as might escape from a living person in the last agony. Then the head was struck off, and a torrent of blood flowed from the severed neck. The body and head were next placed on a pile of wood, and reduced to ashes, which were thrown on the river and borne away . . ." (134)
The image of the impaling stake is highly phallic, and numerous critics, including Anne Williams, have referred to such attacks on vampire women as metaphors for rape.\(^6\) Carmilla is not merely a vampire—she is a sexually aggressive, powerful woman whose influence over young bourgeois females exceeds that of the men who are supposed to instruct and watch over them. Moreover, she is portrayed as a lesbian, and as such she is a threat to patriarchal heterosexual relations in which men are afforded dominance. The sexual overtones to Carmilla's destruction may therefore be taken as an excessive assertion of the "rightful" supremacy of men over the bodies of women. They are also a severe negation/reversal of both homosexual desire and the open expression of female sexuality. The utter thoroughness with which Carmilla's body is destroyed is not merely a means of preventing her vampiric return. It also attests to the level of fear and hatred she inspires among the men. She represents a serious threat—a challenge to their authority over the minds and, especially, the bodies of women. Le Fanu makes it emphatically clear that such a threat will not be tolerated.

Like "The Vampyre," "Carmilla" lacks closure. The male characters have gone to extremes to destroy Carmilla's body, but despite their best efforts, she is still capable of haunting her final female victim. In the last line of the story, Laura describes how to this hour the image of Carmilla returns to memory with ambiguous alternations—sometimes the playful, languid, beautiful girl; sometimes the writhing fiend I saw in the ruined church; and often from a reverie I have started, fancying I heard the light step of Carmilla at the drawing-room door. (137)

It is through Laura's eyes, through her first-person written account, that the reader views Carmilla, and by her own admission, her response to the vampire is still ambiguous. Through memories, Laura is still capable of sympathy for/with Carmilla. Her final words

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\(^6\) In discussing the staking of Lucy in Bram Stoker's novel *Dracula*, Williams observes that "Arthur's act of 'love' with the 'mercy-bearing stake' is at least as suggestive of brutal rape as of marital consummation" (Williams 125).
are telling—she fancies she hears "the light step of Carmilla." The reaction she describes is not that of a woman terrified by the advance of a monster, but that of a woman stimulated by the approach of a beloved friend. The suggestion that Carmilla's influence over Laura continues, contrary to the most strenuous masculine efforts, is a source of patriarchal anxiety. There is nothing the men can do to erase the impact of the vampire's seduction, and Laura's memories link her to Carmilla in a female bond which defies male-oriented channels of social control.

**Bram Stoker's Dracula**

The novel *Dracula*, by Bram Stoker, is the touchstone of nineteenth-century vampire fiction. Following "The Vampyre" and "Carmilla," Stoker's contribution to the tradition of vampire literature has been the most lasting and influential, incorporating elements of those earlier works along with twists of its own and turning the vampyre from an intermittent Gothic curiosity into an archetype of the genre.

As a vampire, Dracula is first and foremost a colonizer/colonizing force and the structure of the novel emphasizes this element of his persona. When the novel opens, Jonathan Harker is traveling from West to East, and distinctions between the two are made explicit. According to Edward Said, it is the East, or Orient, from which Western Europe derives "its deepest and most recurring images of the Other" (1). In keeping with this sentiment, Harker's journey is a move from civilization to barbarism, from a world in which the English/Western European ego dominates into a realm dominated by the non-English/Eastern European ego, from a place where a British *self* is in control to a place where the Other rules. Dracula's castle is situated on the border of three states: Transylvania, Bukovina, and Moldavia. Moreover, it is not located on any map. The whole area is poorly mapped, considered wild and unexplored—presumably because no westerner has spent sufficient time there to learn the lay of the landscape. The trains are
increasingly unpunctual, and the Slovaks are described through Harker's British sensibilities as "more barbarian than the rest," resembling nothing so much as "some old Oriental band of brigands" (Stoker 19). The roads are deliberately left in disrepair to discourage thoughts of invasion from surrounding regions, and generations of instability, of conquering and living under the threat of conquest, have hardened the people. As Harker travels through the mountains, even the air around him turns alien and hostile. In his own words, "It seemed as though the mountain range had separated two atmospheres, and that now we had got into the thunderous one" (19). Harker's knowledge of Transylvania comes only from the books he has read, as does Dracula's knowledge of England—but Dracula is far more competent in his grasp of Harker's culture than vice versa, and Harker is made disconcertingly aware of that fact. His German is poor, whereas the Count's is excellent. The Count also has an excellent grasp of English—and of British customs. Harker observes that "For a man who was never in the country, and who did not evidently do much in the way of business, his knowledge and acumen were wonderful" (40). Already, the vampire is proving himself more at ease with what is "foreign" to him than Harker. Indeed, he subsequently blends into London far better than Harker ever blends into Transylvania, and his mobility sets him up as an even greater threat.

Dracula makes it clear to Harker that he is in a world very different from that which he is used to—a world that poses distinct dangers for one unacquainted with its ways: "We are in Transylvania, and Transylvania is not England. Our ways are not your ways, and there shall be to you many strange things" (30). Harker is unnerved by the unstable, multicultural character of his surroundings. It is a place where incredible stories abound, and he recalls reading "that every known superstition in the world is gathered in the horseshoe of the Carpathians, as if it were the center of some sort of imaginative whirlpool" (12). Harker has entered a world which is perpetually threatening
to dissolve into chaos around him, a land that has successfully fended off invaders from the outside for hundreds of years. Harker may be the son of an imperialist, conqueror nation, but he is in a place that England does not control. He is confronted not by an Other whom he can dismiss as inferior, but by an Other who is his superior in both rank and bloodline. Dracula is a descendent of those who ruled the East, who were conquerors in their own right, and Harker comes to him not as an agent of the British Empire, but as a solicitor's clerk—a liaison whose duty is to serve and facilitate the Count's journey to the West, to London. Immersed in a world and subject to an authority that is utterly foreign, Harker's self-assurance begins to evaporate: "I doubt; I fear; I think strange things, which I dare not confess to my own soul" (28).

As a noble, like Ruthven and Carmilla, Dracula possesses the combination of wealth, power, education, and class standing to go wherever he wants (in other words, he possesses a superior degree of personal agency)—and he wants to go to London. He takes boxes of his native soil with him, so it is not just his physical presence he brings to Britain, but a part of his own foreign landscape. His strong sense of history and of his own dominance leads him to expound at length on the history of his family/people as a conqueror race:

We Szekely's have a right to be proud, for in our veins flows the blood of many brave races who fought as the lion fights, for lordship. Here, in the whirlpool of European races, the Ugric tribe bore down from Iceland the fighting spirit which Thor and Wodin gave them, which their Berserkers displayed to such fell intent of the seaboard of Europe, ay, and of Asia and Africa too, till the peoples thought that the werewolves themselves had come. Here, too, when they came, they found the Huns, whose warlike fury had swept the earth like a living flame, till the dying peoples held that in their veins ran the blood of those old witches, who, expelled from Scythia had mated with the devils in the desert. Fools, fools! What devil or what witch was ever so great as Attila, whose blood is in these veins?...Is it a wonder that we were a conquering race; that we were proud; that when the Magyar, the Lombard, the Avar, the Bulgar, or the Turk poured his thousands on our frontiers, we drove them back?...Who
more gladly than we throughout the Four Nations received the 'bloody sword,' or at its warlike call flocked quicker to the standard of the King? . . . Who was it but one of my own race who at Voivode crossed the Danube and beat the Turk on his own ground? This was a Dracula indeed!" (38)

Born into the strength of the British Empire, Harker is familiar with the pride and self-assurance of an imperialist. But as Dracula moves west, it will be Britain's turn to be on the receiving end of a colonizing force. Critics like Stephen Arata have discussed this "reverse colonization" aspect of the novel as a reflection of the decline of the British Empire during the late 1800s. With that decline came a growing anxiety over racial and cultural stability as immigrants flooded into London, throwing the home soil into chaos and compelling the British to seek to identify and promulgate an essential Englishness which defined itself most emphatically against the Others who were intruding upon it. According to Judith Halberstam, "The vampire Dracula...is a composite of otherness that manifests as the horror essential to dark, foreign, and perverse bodies" (90). From this angle, Dracula's desire to go to London, to be "in the midst of the whirl and rush of humanity," represents nothing short of a foreign invasion (29). His obsession with the city marks his recognition that it is a highly unstable place where class/race boundaries are easily blurred. In *The Politics & Poetics of Transgression*, Peter Stallybrass and Allon White discuss how "the promiscuous blending of races, classes, and sexes on city streets led . . . 'contagion' and 'contamination' [to become] the tropes through which city life was apprehended" (135). Their description echoes Harker's own impression of the Carpathians as a cultural "whirlpool," and suggests that London may not be all that dissimilar, despite its claims as a hub of Western civilization. *Both* are dangerous places where boundaries are transgressed and cultures, races, classes, and sexes are allowed to mix in a fluid space.
Unlike Ruthven and Carmilla, Dracula is not handsome. He does, however, possess striking features which set him apart racially. Harker finds him of "a very marked physiognomy":

His face was a strong—a very strong—aquiline, with high bridge of the thin nose and peculiarly arched nostrils; with lofty domed forehead, and hair growing scantily round the temples but profusely elsewhere. His eyebrows were very massive, almost meeting over the nose, and with bushy hair that seemed to curl in its own profusion. The mouth, so far as I could see it under the heavy moustache, was fixed and rather cruel-looking, with peculiarly sharp white teeth; these protruded over the lips, whose remarkable ruddiness showed astonishing vitality in a man of his years. For the rest, his ears were pale, and at the tops extremely pointed; the chin was broad and strong, and the cheeks were firm though thin. The general effect was one of extraordinary pallor. (27)

Coarse hands, hairy palms, pointed nails, and foul breath complete the striking portrait.

Several critics, including Judith Halberstam and Ken Gelder, have noted the similarity of this description of Dracula's physique with anti-Semitic stereotypes current in the Europe of Stoker's day. Yet despite his alien appearance his noble rank, together with his manners and his modes of dress and speech, allows him to blend perfectly into his London surroundings. This is precisely what he both requires and desires to accomplish his ends:

... a stranger in a strange land, he is no one; men know him not—and to know not is to care not for. I am content if I am like the rest, so that no man stops if he sees me, or pause in his speaking if he hear my words... I have been so long master that I would be master still—or at least that none other should be master of me. (30)

Dracula's unstated goal is the conquest of Britain, and he intends to accomplish this end through the seduction of British women.

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7 According to Gelder, "anxieties caused by the influx into London of Eastern European Jews" led to the perception that there was an "'alien invasion' of Jews from the East who...were 'feeding off' and 'poisoning' the blood of the Londoner. The Eastern Jew [was] vampirised in order to be recognized and, it follows, restricted" (15).
Like Carmilla and Ruthven, Dracula will pursue women as his victims of choice. Stoker's fiction far outstrips its predecessors, however, in the number and variety of its female characters. The three women in Dracula's castle, often referred to as his "wives," are clearly "fallen" from whatever state of virtue they might have once possessed. They are hungry, seductive, sensual—and Jonathan Harker experiences the full impact of their desire, which both thrills and horrifies him:

There was something about them that made me uneasy, some longing and at the same time some deadly fear. I felt in my heart a wicked, burning desire that they would kiss me with those red lips . . . . I lay quiet, looking out under my lashes in an agony of delightful anticipation . . . The girl went on her knees, and bent over me, simply gloating. There was a deliberate voluptuousness which was both thrilling and repulsive, and as she arched her neck she actually licked her lips like an animal, till I could see in the moonlight the moisture shining on the scarlet lips and on the red tongue as it lapped the white sharp teeth. Lower and lower went her head as the lips below the range of my mouth and chin and seemed about to fasten on my throat. Then she paused, and I could hear the churning sound of her tongue as it licked her teeth and lips, and could feel the hot breath on my neck . . . I could feel the soft, shivering touch of the lips on the super-sensitive skin of my throat, and the hard dents of two sharp teeth, just touching and pausing there. I closed my eyes in a languorous ecstasy and waited—waited with beating heart.

The blend of desire and disgust which Harker so vividly expresses echoes the sentiments described by Laura as she is progressively seduced by Carmilla. Harker is deeply aroused by the female vampire's attentions, which constitute a raw, animal—and hence, forbidden—sexuality. Moreover, despite overt references to the throat as the site of heightened sensitivity in this scene, there is a subtext of fellatio driven home to the reader through Harker's fixation with the female vampire's mouth—where it's at, what it's doing, and how it feels on his skin. The vampire's act of feeding thus becomes an exquisite metaphor for oral sex. Here is a sex scene in which the female is the aggressor and the male lies prone, waiting, wanting to be penetrated by her bite. In her reversal of
traditional sexual roles the female vampire is presented as bestial and perverted, yet she is also intensely desirable, and Harker reacts to her with far greater passion than he ever expresses toward Mina Murray, the woman who will become his wife. As Gail Griffin so aptly puts it, "The vampire women in Dracula represent the worst nightmare and dearest fantasy of the Victorian male: the pure girl turned sexually ravenous beast" (143).

The vampire women of Dracula's castle are also the antithesis of another patriarchal feminine ideal: motherhood. After preventing them from taking Harker's blood Dracula flings a bag at them, and Harker is horrified to hear "a gasp and a low wail, as of a half-smothered child" (48). Their attitude is clearly predatory as they close around it. Far from nurturing this child in distress, they will feed upon it. Instead of protecting future generations, they destroy them. This goes hand-in-glove with their sexual aggression, since within the patriarchal system women who openly express and enjoy their own sexuality are decried as perversely seeking to gratify themselves at the expense of their duties toward spouses and children. Self-sacrifice, not self-interest, is the "correct" womanly demeanor.

The perversion of Western sexual and domestic ideology embodied by Dracula's "wives" is perceived by the other characters—the men in particular—as a threat to that ideology. Therefore, these women cannot be allowed to exist. As a corollary to the pursuit of Dracula, Van Helsing assumes the task of destroying them. Like Carmilla, all three will be attacked as they lie prone in their tombs, staked, their heads severed in what Van Helsing freely describes as "butcher work" (375). Before he can strike, however, he finds himself utterly captivated by their appearance. Their bodies are so beautiful they give him pause—especially the "fair" one, whom he describes as "so radiantly beautiful, so exquisitely voluptuous, that the very instinct of man in me, which calls some of my sex to love and protect one of hers, made my head whirl with new emotion" (374). Like Jonathan before him, he is tempted by desire. She appeals to his "instinct," but thoughts
of Mina, the woman he is truly protecting, push him to complete his "wild work." He is convinced that the violence he commits has a higher purpose (i.e., the preservation of Mina's purity of body and soul), and he "endure[s] the horrid screeching as the stake [drives] home, the plunging of writhing form, and the lips of bloody foam" as a necessary step toward achieving it. In the process, the bodies of the vampire women are utterly violated, reduced to piles of dust. Without their bodies they lack the potential for evil via seduction; hence, their souls are freed of corruption. The entire scenario can be read as a furious reproach against female sexuality.

Further injunctions against female sexual precocity are presented through the character of Lucy Westenra. Lucy is a beautiful, naive, flirtatious young woman who finds herself pursued by no less than three suitors, all of whom she finds attractive. She wonders openly in her letters to Mina: "Why can't a girl marry three men, or as many as want her, and save all this trouble?" She recognizes immediately that "this is heresy, and I must not say it" (68). Still, her ambivalence about the necessity of selecting a single husband suggests an underlying vulnerability to sexual temptation which Dracula will not hesitate to exploit. Likewise, her willingness to respond to the desire of more than one man reflects an openness toward sexual relations which casts doubt on her capacity for long-term fidelity to her husband. A further foreshadowing of her fate lies in her reaction to the adventure stories told her by her American suitor, Quincey Morris. His words impress her to such a degree that she asserts: "I sympathise with poor Desdemona when she had such a dangerous stream poured in her ear, even by a black man" (67, italics my emphasis). Her infatuation with Morris, a foreigner, and her identification with a woman who met her doom through the turmoil surrounding an interracial marriage is an ironic presage of her own fate at the mouth of Dracula, who is himself depicted as racially Other.
Like the women who attract the vampire’s attentions in "The Vampyre" and "Carmilla," Lucy is young, virginal, and ripe for marriage. She is also upper-class—an accident of birth which, nonetheless, enhances her perceived value to British society. Her restlessness at night may be read as a kinship with other creatures that are active in the dark. Hence, within three days of Dracula’s arrival in England, she has already become his first victim. When Mina discovers Lucy missing at 3 a.m., she finds her outdoors sprawled across their favorite seat overlooking Whitby harbor, but she is not alone.

I could see the seat and the white figure, for I was now close enough to distinguish it even through the spells of shadow. There was undoubtedly something, long and black, bending over the half-reclining white figure. I called in fright, "Lucy! Lucy!" and something raised a head, and from where I was I could see a white face and red, gleaming eyes. (101)

By the time Mina reaches Lucy, the black figure has vanished, and Lucy is still asleep. The strong juxtaposition of black on white deserves mention here, particularly in connection with the earlier Othello/Desdemona allusion which Lucy herself makes. The emphasis on color makes the underlying racial dimensions of the vampire’s threat explicit by casting the vampire as a black Other which menaces a helpless white female. Moreover, Lucy’s half-reclining posture is at least as suggestive of acceptance as it is of vulnerability. From a patriarchal standpoint, this hint of female complicity makes the scene doubly horrific.

Over the weeks following this strange, sleepwalking encounter, Lucy gradually succumbs to a mysterious wasting sickness—a sign of her contamination by the vampire. In an effort to save her, Van Helsing, Godalming, Seward, and Morris all undergo transfusions, giving her their blood by turns. Given her previous indecisiveness about which one to choose for a husband and her expressed willingness to have them all (with the exception of Van Helsing), the exchange of blood acquires sexual overtones. Indeed,
sex itself involves an exchange of bodily fluids, and blood is persistently conflated with those fluids within the scope of vampire fiction. Godalming supports this interpretation himself when, contemplating Lucy's "dead" form, he expresses his feeling that since the transfusion he felt "as if they two had been really married." None of the other men reveals that he, too, made a similar sacrifice for Lucy's sake. In an aside to Seward, however, Van Helsing observes that, if Godalming's sentiment is true, "Then this so sweet maid is a polyandrist, and me, with my poor wife dead to me, but alive by Church's law, though no wits, all gone—even I, who am a faithful husband to this now-no-wife, am bigamist" (182). The reference to transfusion as a form of marriage and Van Helsing's allusions to Lucy as a "polyandrist" and himself as a "bigamist" make the sexual connection explicit. The determination of the men to keep their own donations secret from Arthur reinforces the notion that they, too, have had intimate contact with Lucy which would defile her memory in the eyes of her intended husband. Being bitten by Dracula has freed her from the obligation of choosing a single partner. In a sense, she has gotten her wish, and been able to "marry...as many as want her." These oddly displaced "sexual" experiences through which various male figures "enter" Lucy precede dramatic changes in her behavior. On her deathbed, she possesses "a soft, voluptuous voice, such as [Dr. Seward] had never heard from her lips," and calls to her fiancé, Arthur Holmwood, to kiss her—a bold request wholly out of character (167). In death she is surpassingly lovely, as Seward observes: "God! how beautiful she was. Every hour seemed to be enhancing her loveliness" (176). The allure she held in life has been magnified in death (or undeath) through the penetration of Dracula's fangs. Indeed, her "death" is the final stage in a sexual metamorphosis which transforms her from a curious girl into an aggressive woman who will use her beauty as a seductive weapon.

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8 Stoker 181. In Gothic (New York: Routledge, 1996), Fred Botting notes that in this particular scene "Blood, indeed, is linked to semen" (150).
When the men observe Lucy in her tomb, she has become like the women Harker encountered in Dracula's castle, her "sweetness . . . turned to adamantine, heartless cruelty, and the purity to voluptuous wantonness" (217). Seward further describes how by the concentrated light that fell on Lucy's face we could see that the lips were crimson with fresh blood, and that the stream had trickled over her chin and stained the purity of her lawn death-robe . . . . When Lucy—I call the thing that was before us Lucy because it bore her shape—saw us she drew back with an angry snarl, such as a cat gives when taken unawares . . . With a careless motion, she flung to the ground, callous as a devil, the child that up to now she had clutched strenuously to her breast, growling over it as a dog growls over a bone. (217)

This animalistic, vampire Lucy will never be wife to Arthur or mother to his children. The blood which stains her lips and her white burial garments is a perverse reflection of both the hymeneal blood which should have stained her bridal bed and the birthing fluids of children she will never bear. The emphasis has shifted from organs which generate to an orifice which devours, and Lucy's primary female function as giver of life is reversed when she becomes a creature that is compelled to take life.9 The men react with a combination of horror and outright hostility toward this new being who bears Lucy's shape, but who no longer behaves in a manner which they recognize or deem suitable in a woman. According to the testimony of Seward, "At that moment the remnant of my love passed into hate and loathing; had she then to be killed, I could have done it with savage delight" (217).

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9 There's a good case for mentioning the whole *vagina dentata* concept here, especially re: critical insights into the vampire's physical displacement of the sex act from the genitals to the mouth and the aggressive nature of female sexuality in male-authored vampire fiction. According to critic Alan Johnson, "Stoker's lurid rendering of Arthur's driving a stake through [Lucy's] heart suggests that a lustful woman must be shown her place with a vengeance. The intensity of the imagery strongly supports speculation that Stoker wrote under the grip of an Oedipal fantasy or saw female sexuality as what Phyllis Roth calls the "pre-Oedipal threat" of the *vagina dentata* of folk lore."
The destruction of Lucy is indeed savage, very strongly reminiscent of the fate of Carmilla. The task of driving the stake falls to Arthur, her rightful husband, and he acts at the urging of Van Helsing, Seward, and Morris, all of whom observe and participate in the deed.

The Thing in the coffin writhed; and a hideous, blood-curdling screech came from the opened red lips. The body shook and quivered and twisted in wild contortions; the sharp white teeth champed together till the lips were cut, and the mouth was smeared with a crimson foam. But Arthur never faltered. He looked like a figure of Thor as his untrembling arm rose and fell, driving deeper and deeper the mercy-bearing stake. (222)

As with the staking of Carmilla, this scene has been subject to various Freudian interpretations linking it with both rape and an especially violent orgasm. Burton Hatlen, for instance, states that "sexual intercourse is here seen as an act of brutal aggression which results in death" (86). Christopher Craft describes the passage as enacting a "murderous phallicism" in which "violence against the sexual woman...is intense, sensually imagined, ferocious in its detail" (122). Clearly, there is no avoiding the fact that a female body is being violated. Dracula used his fangs, and Arthur uses a stake. Both males penetrate Lucy, but while Dracula seduces his victims and makes blood loss pleasurable, Arthur's repeated poundings bring only agony and gore. There is a real question here as to who is worse in his treatment of the female body—the vampire or the human male? After being bitten by Dracula (the foreign, the Other), Lucy becomes a creature of the damned, contaminated and threatening to spread her condition to others. After she is staked by Arthur, her human fiancé and a representative of the British cultural status quo, she finds redemption. This may be interpreted as a critical statement re: the consequences of appropriate vs. inappropriate sexual congress. The underlying condemnation of interracial marriage and the mixing of bloodlines is clear.
The final effect of Arthur's violation of Lucy's body is a return to conformity:

There, in the coffin lay no longer the foul Thing that we had so
dreaded and grown to hate that the work of her destruction was yielded
as a privilege to the one best entitled to it, but Lucy as we had seen her in
her life, with her face of unequalled sweetness and purity. (222)

Ironically, Van Helsing informs Arthur that it is now "safe" for him to kiss Lucy. Twice
before, after Lucy has been bitten by Dracula and shows signs of actively desiring Arthur,
Van Helsing thrusts him away from her kisses with some force. It is only "safe" to kiss
her when she is truly dead, properly subdued by the phallic stake of patriarchal authority.
True death transforms her into a complete object—something utterly passive which no
longer behaves contrary to the desires and expectations of the men. As a result, she may
once again be regarded as "sweet" and "pure."

The character of Mina Murray contrasts sharply with that of her best friend Lucy.
The two are similar in that their youth, virginity, and social standing mark them as ideals
of British femininity. But while Lucy is tainted by sexual curiosity and egocentric
tendencies, Mina is pure in her devotion to a single man (Jonathan Harker, whom she
marries) and her strong patriarchal sense of a woman's responsibilities, which revolve
around home and husband. Her letters to Lucy reflect these convictions, and she is
thoroughly saccharine in her descriptions of what it is like to be married:

... what could I say? I could only tell [Jonathan] that I was the happiest
woman in all the wide world, and that I had nothing to give him except
myself, my life, and my trust, and that with these went my love and duty
for all the days of my life... I want you to see now, and with the eyes of
a very happy wife, whither duty has led me, so that in your own married
life you too may be all happy as I am. (115, italics my emphasis)

Mina's emphasis on duty in this passage is worth noting, as she willingly surrenders
herself entirely to the role of wife. Her own desires are irrelevant, either suppressed or
presumed nonexistent beyond this preordained scope. She travels to Budapest to attend
Jonathan in his illness, and when they return to England she busies herself "arranging
things and housekeeping" (161). These details, when combined with her original profession as an assistant schoolmistress and, later, the birth of her son, set her firmly on a pedestal in the eyes of the men surrounding her. Within one woman they find an embodiment of all four ideal female roles: nurse, teacher, wife and mother. Van Helsing, the vampire expert and eldest man (and, hence, the authoritative patriarchal figure), addresses Mina thus:

... good women tell all their lives, and by day and by hour and by minute, such things that angels can read, and we men who wish to know have something of angels' eyes . . . . there are good women still left to make life happy—good women, whose lives and whose truths may make good lesson for the children that are to be. (190-192)

Mina is a truly "good woman"—and more. She represents the quintessential virtuous Englishwoman whose industriousness and selfless purity must be protected at all costs.

What sets Mina apart from heroines which have preceded her is her intelligence. In the words of Van Helsing, she has a "man's brain—a brain that a man should have were he much gifted" (241). It is she who exhorts the need for telling the whole story of Dracula, "because in the struggle which we have before us to rid the earth of this terrible monster we must have all the knowledge and all the help which we can get . . . we need have no secrets amongst us; working together and in absolute trust, we can surely be stronger than if some of us were in the dark" (229). The fact that a woman is saying this gives it even more weight since, historically and socially speaking, women are typically sheltered or "kept in the dark." It is her meticulous record-keeping which enables the men to piece together the story of Dracula and trace his movements, and it is her memory for important details, such as train schedules, that enables them to plot their offensive. But when it comes to the business of active vampire hunting, the men are determined to exclude her. Despite her "man's brain," she has a "woman's heart"—and a woman's body. Both are considered weaknesses, liabilities which will interfere with the men's ability to
carry out their dangerous quest. As a result, like her predecessors Laura and Ianthe, she is persistently infantilized by the men around her. Morris calls her "Little Girl," and Jonathan repeatedly depicts her in his journal as "sleeping like a child" (330, 331). Additionally, as "the archetypal Good Woman," Mina also finds herself treated like a medieval Madonna, forever sitting idle and inspiring noble quests but never permitted to go out and actually accomplish something on her own (Griffin 145). Once again the men quell the woman's agency, preventing her from taking steps to protect herself because her "inherent" vulnerability makes her incapable of doing so. Mina's defense is a privilege/duty the men reserve unto themselves. They expound at length on their rationale for excluding her:

Van Helsing: "When we part tonight, you must no more question. We shall tell you all in good time. We are men and are able to bear, but you must be our star and our hope, and we shall act all the more free that you are not in danger, such as we are." (248)

Jonathan Harker: "I am truly thankful that she is to be left out of our future work, and even of our deliberations. It is too great a strain for a woman to bear. I did not think so at first, but I know better now." (260)

Dr. Seward: "Mrs. Harker is better out of it. Things are quite bad enough for us, all men of the world and who have been in many tight places in our time; but it is no place for a woman, and if she had remained in touch with the affair, it would in time infallibly have wrecked her." (262, italics my emphasis)

If men are "of the world" and women are not, then where, exactly, does that leave women? By implication, they are—and ought to be—sheltered. Moreover, to not be of the world is to be a nonparticipant, to be utterly devoid of agency and hence at the mercy of those with the power to act, i.e. men. For the women trapped in it, that protected domestic space is far tighter than any of the "tight places" to which Seward so proudly lays claim. In Gothic fiction, however, domestic space all too often "becomes a prison
rather than a refuge, a restricted space confined by a system of values that privileges the male and active world beyond the family" (Botting 58). Mina's memoir records her response to the protective urges of the men, and her confusion and resentment are clear. She admits that "though it was a bitter pill for me to swallow, I could say nothing," and "it is strange to me to be kept in the dark as I am today" (248, 262). She is determined, though, that her husband will not witness her distress, and ends up resigning herself to the idea that "it is one of the lessons that we poor women have to learn" (263). Overtones of self-pity aside, Mina finds herself compelled to accept the men's assessment of her capabilities. She complies because she hasn't the authority to do otherwise— but her description of nonparticipation as a lesson she must learn suggests that it defies her natural inclinations and, hence, her own desires.

The efforts of the men to shelter Mina within a kind of domestic sanctuary will prove fruitless, because in vampire fiction generally, domestic space is unsafe. The plot of Dracula reveals that "the monster will find you in the intimacy of your own home; indeed, it will make your home its home (or you its home) and alter forever the comfort of domestic privacy" (Halberstam 15). Hence, in a supreme patriarchal irony, Mina's compulsory isolation from the men is precisely what enables Dracula to gain access to her. Immersed in their own vampire hunting fraternity, the men remain blind to what is happening to her. Left alone in her room, she dreams of a "pillar of cloud," a "livid white face bending over [her] out of the mist, and "two red eyes," but refuses to inform the others because "Such a dream at the present time would become woven into their fears for me" (264-265). Her husband observes her increasing pallor and weakness, but is quick to attribute these symptoms as proof of the men's accuracy of judgment regarding her inability to cope with the horrors of Dracula:

Mina is fast asleep, and looks a little too pale; her eyes look as though she had been crying. Poor dear, I've no doubt it frets her to be kept in the dark, and it may make her doubly anxious about me and the others. But it
is best as it is. It is better to be disappointed and worried in such a way now than to have her nerve broken. The doctors were quite right to insist on her being kept out of this dreadful business. (268)

Jonathan Harker's diary entries repeatedly mention how pale and ill Mina looks. At one point, when he attempts to leave her to meet with the others, he describes how "The dear girl was more affectionate with me than ever, and clung to me as though she would detain me; but there was much to be talked of and I came away" (273). Mina's unusual display of affection may be interpreted here as an early stage of vampire-induced female sexual aggression. Jonathan, focused on his own concerns and those of the other men, fails to notice. The men use the pretext of "harmful" knowledge to leave Mina out; as a consequence, they deny themselves access to her critical awareness of what the vampire is doing. By pushing Mina into the background, they fail to see her accurately. By failing to see her accurately, they remain ignorant of her victimization and of the fact that, unheeded, she may become a genuine threat to them.

An especially striking scene (and one that has been subjected to intensive critical inquiry, especially from the Freudian camp) occurs when the men break down the door to the Harkers' room and discover a shocking tableau:

On the bed beside the window lay Jonathan Harker, his face flushed and breathing heavily as though in a stupor. Kneeling on the near edge of the bed facing outwards was the white-clad figure of his wife. By her stood a tall, thin man, clad in black. His face was turned from us, but the instant we saw all recognized the Count . . . With his left hand he held both Mrs. Harker's hands, keeping them away with her arms at full tension; his right hand gripped her by the back of the neck, forcing her face down on his bosom. Her white nightdress was smeared with blood, and a thin stream trickled down the man's bare breast which was shown by his torn-open dress. The attitude of the two had a terrible resemblance to a child forcing a kitten's nose into a saucer of milk to compel it to drink. (288)

The element of force in this scene has overtones of rape/fellatio on which critics have expounded at length. According to C.F. Bentley, "Stoker is describing a symbolic act of
enforced fellatio, where blood is again a substitute for semen, and where a chaste female suffers a violation that is essentially sexual" (30). Christopher Craft concurs, and makes the additional observation that the scene resembles "a lurid nursing" (125). Once again, blood is conflated with other bodily fluids (semen, milk) to blur vampire sexuality, turning Dracula simultaneously into a rapist and a perverse mother-figure whose breast offers gore instead of nourishment. Intimacy with Dracula in all his perverse polymorphousness carries inevitable contamination, as witnessed when Van Helsing presses the Eucharist to Mina's forehead. The sacred wafer burns her, and she cries, "Unclean! Unclean! Even the Almighty shuns my polluted flesh! I must bear this mark of shame upon my forehead until the Judgment Day" (302). This is noteworthy, because while both sexes are tormented (albeit in different ways) by the vampire, only women are actually polluted by him. Harker is trapped in a castle with Dracula and his bloodthirsty brides for weeks and does not emerge "unclean." Sexual double standards are again at work in the concept that multiple partners/liaisons are acceptable for men, but not for women. Mina's disgrace is more horrifying even than Lucy's because of her status as a paragon of English female virtue. The men put her on a pedestal and devote themselves to guarding her, yet their own best efforts and her strength of character are no match for the will of Dracula. Mina succumbs with notable ease. Once again, a white dress is

10 In Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo, Mary Douglas explains this sexual double standard at length:

Since place in the hierarchy of purity is biologically transmitted, sexual behavior is important for preserving the purity of caste. For this reason, in higher castes, boundary pollution focusses particularly on sexuality. The caste membership of an individual is determined by his mother, for though she may have married into a higher caste, her children take their caste from her. Therefore women are the gates of entry to the caste. Female purity is carefully guarded and a woman who is known to have had sexual intercourse with a man of lower caste is brutally punished. Male sexual purity does not carry this responsibility. Hence male promiscuity is a lighter matter. A mere ritual bath is enough to cleanse a man from sexual contact with a low-caste woman (126).
stained with blood. With loss of blood comes loss of purity, a contamination of the body and mind. Recalling the encounter, Mina repeats the Count's words to her:

"... you, their best beloved one, are now to me, flesh of my flesh; blood of my blood; kin of my kin; my bountiful wine-press for a while; and shall be later on my companion and my helper. You shall be avenged in turn; for not one of them but shall minister to your needs."

(283)

These words are an echo of the wedding ceremony, indicating that a "marriage" of sorts has taken place. The vampire Other has assumed rights over Mina's body analogous to those of her husband, just as Ruthven did over Lady Aubrey; yet the blood exchange which binds him to her is a perversion of the marital sex act—a union that will result in death, not life. Also of interest in this passage is Dracula's promise of vengeance for Mina. Clearly, he believes she has been treated in a manner that demands retribution. Dracula's words imply that an alliance with him will place her in authority over her male companions, who will be compelled to sacrifice themselves in her service just as she, up to this point, has sacrificed herself in theirs. The promise suggests that sympathy between vampire and woman can run both ways, and that women have the potential to play an active role in the reversal of the dominant cultural status quo. Expressed through the medium of the vampire, this possibility is viewed as both a perversion of and a threat to the existing social order.

Despite the violation she has endured, the fundamental aspect of Mina's character—her selflessness—remains intact, enabling her to express sympathy for Dracula:

"That poor soul who has wrought all this misery is the saddest case of all. Just think what will be his joy when he, too, is destroyed in his worser part that his better part may have spiritual immortality. You must be pitiful to him, too, though it may not hold your hands from destruction."

11 Stoker 314. See also Linda Williams, "When the Woman Looks" in The Dread of Difference: Gender and the Horror Film Ed. Barry Keith Grant (Austin: U of Texas P, 65
With the exception of her red scar, she is still a "sweet, sweet, good, good woman in all the radiant beauty of her youth and animation," and the men are more determined than ever to destroy Dracula and save her soul (313). After witnessing Dracula's attack upon her, they re-admit her to their confidence. However, her growing silences and physical traits of vampirism (pallor, prominent teeth) are disturbing to them. The changes cast a shadow on her integrity, and the men begin to doubt whether they can trust her. The diary of Dr. Seward is most revealing on the matter:

... we shall all have to speak frankly; and yet I fear that in some mysterious way poor Mrs. Harker's tongue is tied. I know that she forms conclusions of her own, and from all that has been I can guess how brilliant and how true they must be; but she will not, or cannot, give them utterance... I suppose it is some of that horrid poison which has got into her veins beginning to work... One thing I know: that if my instinct be true regarding poor Mrs. Harker's silences, then there is a terrible difficulty—an unknown danger—in the work before us. The same power that compels her silence may compel her speech. I dare not think further; for so I should in my thoughts dishonour a noble woman! (327)

The notion that Mina remains under the Count's influence and may serve, albeit unwillingly, as his informant, drives them to exclude her once again. This time she concurs. Prior to learning of their intentions, she herself implores them to leave her out of their counsels so long as she bears her scar—the symbol of her "fall" into the vampire's embrace. Her fear of her own complicity with Dracula suggests both recognition and
acceptance of patriarchal presumptions regarding female weakness and the potential for utter socio-political chaos should information fall into the "wrong" hands. Knowledge, it seems, is dangerous in the keeping of a woman. Pure or violated, Mina is not to be trusted with handling information about the vampire. The men decide that she is a liability, and she is relegated to the status of observer every time her participation in the search for Dracula is deemed too active. It is ironic that while Seward worries about whether or not the Count is behind Mina's silences, he neglects to remember that she was also silent after the men excluded her the first time (268-269). They, too, have exerted power over her speech by controlling the circumstances under which she receives knowledge and under which she can expect to be heard. The sole difference is that their influence is legitimated under patriarchal authority (and is therefore "safe") while that of the Count, who represents the foreign, the Other, is not (and is therefore "dangerous"). Through all of this manipulation, Mina refuses to be critical of her "protectors." Any contradictory feelings she has are overwhelmed under by cloying convictions of the generosity and chivalry of the men:

I am crying like a silly fool, when I know it comes from my husband's great love and from the good, good wishes of those other strong men. (263)

Oh, it did me good to see the way that those brave men worked. How can women help loving men when they are so earnest, and so true, and so brave! (359-360)

Mina appears to have purchased wholesale the patriarchal notion that whatever men do "on behalf of women" is for the good of those women, and should be borne with an air of grateful stoicism. She never questions their motives. Instead, she presumes that they will act for her—moreover, she presumes that they are correct in doing so. Concern for her own agency never reaches a level that compels her to challenge their decisions to exclude her.
Ironically, as the group pursues the Count across Europe trying to prevent him from reaching his castle, the men grow desperate and decide to bring Mina into their confidence yet again. While they are asleep she gathers all the maps and records together and formulates her own conclusion as to the route the Count will take. As it turns out, her instincts are correct, and Van Helsing asserts:

"Our dear Madam Mina is once more our teacher. Her eyes have been where we were blinded. Now we are on the track once again, and this time we may succeed." (357)

It is thus through Mina—and her "man's brain"—that the men are able to track and destroy Dracula. Yet the fact that her brain has been specifically gendered undercuts this critical achievement by the central female character of the novel. Intellectual capacity is presumed male, so if Mina shows signs of superior intelligence her brain must be masculine by default. As a woman she is denied social recognition of the power of her own mind, the strength of which is deemed by implication as "abnormal" for a woman (otherwise, why was it necessary for Stoker to gender her brain?). The only part of her that grants her any agency whatsoever in the quest to kill Dracula is labeled "male" by those whom patriarchy has empowered to grant such a label: the men. As a result, the worldly pursuit of vampire hunting (not to mention "worldly pursuits" in general) remains a strictly "masculine" endeavor and the sexes maintain their "proper" spheres of activity.

Once the vampire/foreigner/Other is destroyed and his influence removed, the scar fades from Mina's forehead and her body is "purified" anew. The final page of the novel emphasizes the re-institution of proper sex roles and relationships through its emphasis on births and weddings. Within seven years Seward and Godalming are both married, and the Markers have a son. The last line stresses Mina as the catalyst for the men's actions, with Harker observing how "some men so loved her, that they did dare much for her sake" (382). The entire conflict is thus reduced to a single controlling factor: the sanctity of a woman's body.
In addition to its emphasis on female victimization by a vampire, *Dracula* also includes its own cast of questionably competent Western males. Jonathan Harker, like Aubrey before him, has his sanity threatened by prolonged contact with the vampire. By the time he escapes Dracula's castle, he is "suffering from a violent brain fever" that takes weeks to dissipate (109). He is also effectively "emasculated" by the vampire, stripped of his youthful vigor and appearance. In a letter to Lucy, Mina describes his condition as follows:

> I found my dear one, oh, so thin and pale and weak-looking. All the resolution has gone out of his dear eyes, and that quiet dignity which I told you was in his face has vanished. He is only a wreck of himself... (113)

The bizarre, supernatural events he has experienced have forced him to question his perception of reality to such a degree that he feels "impotent, and in the dark, and distrustful" (193, italics my emphasis). Later in the novel, after Dracula's victimization of Mina has been discovered, Dr. Seward describes further changes in Harker's looks:

> Last night he was a frank, happy-looking man, with strong, youthful face, full of energy, and with dark brown hair. To-day he is a drawn, haggard old man, whose white hair matches well with the hollow burning eyes and grief-written lines of his face. (307)

Dracula, meanwhile, has grown younger and stronger during his sojourn in London. His hair has turned from white to black, and he is observed in active pursuit of a young woman (179). It is as though he and Jonathan have made an exchange; with his new white hair and his "hollow burning eyes," Jonathan is an echo of the aged Dracula encountered in the early pages of the novel. Arthur Holmwood [Lord Godalming], too, is stripped of his strength via the actions of the Count. Devastated by Lucy's death, he is described by Dr. Seward as looking "sad and broken; even his stalwart manhood seemed to have shrunk somewhat under the strain of his much-tried emotions" (175). Both men are sharply affected by the same thing: the vampire's usurpation of the bodies of the
women they love—bodies over which they, through accepted social channels, are supposed to have sole right of access. As husband and husband-to-be, Harker and Godalming also bear primary responsibility for protecting "their" women. Both fail miserably, as Lucy ultimately dies and Mina is forced to drink Dracula's blood while Jonathan is lying right next to her on their bed. The insult to Harker is doubly severe, as his wife's body is violated in his very presence.

A further indication of the vampire's ability to sap the strength of men involves the series of transfusions given in an effort to save Lucy. By turns, Godalming, Seward, Morris, and Van Helsing all give their blood, only to see the girl they love continue to slip away. Seward notes, "It gave me an idea of what a terrible strain Lucy's system must have undergone that what weakened Arthur only partially restored her" (132). In a series of shocked whispers, Morris interrogates Seward:

... that poor pretty creature that we all love has had put into her veins... the blood of four strong men. Man alive, her whole body wouldn't hold it... What took it out? (159)

Through the medium of Lucy's body, Dracula consumes the strength of her would-be saviors. The fact that the blood of four men is insufficient to prevent Lucy's "death" and subsequent metamorphosis is a testament to Dracula's overwhelming powers of colonization and a further signal of male impotence against the vampire's invasive, corrupting foreign presence.

Following in the footsteps of Aubrey, Laura's father, and General Spielsdorf, the men of Dracula enhance the vampire's agency through a combination of arrogance and ignorance. Unaware of what Dracula is, Jonathan Harker facilitates the vampire's journey to London through letters, legal documents, and instruction in English speech and customs. Renfield lets Dracula into the asylum, where he preys on Mina. By ignoring Renfield's warnings and isolating Mina from their counsel Harker, Van Helsing,
Godalming, Seward, and Morris make it easy for Dracula to victimize her—literally under their noses. For much of the novel they are complete dupes, and Dracula doesn't hesitate to taunt them with the fact:

> You think to baffle me, you—with your pale faces all in a row, like sheep in a butcher's. You shall be sorry yet, each one of you! You think you have left me without a place to rest; but I have more. My revenge is just begun! I spread it over centuries, and time is on my side. Your girls that you all love are mine already; and through them you and others shall yet be mine—my creatures, to do my bidding and to be my jackals when I want to feed. (312)

In a repetition of the "Eve/Pandora syndrome" witnessed in Polidori and Le Fanu, it is the women who are presumed most vulnerable to temptation and who threaten to spread the vampire's contagion. Hence it is through the women that Dracula has launched his offensive, and he has successfully gained access to the two women whom this group of men hold most dear. The contest between men and vampire revolves around such access and who has—or does not have—exclusive rights. At stake are issues of sexual fidelity, racial purity, and the perpetuation of bloodlines, all of which hinge upon a woman's body and what she does—or what society permits her to do—with it. Her supreme value rests in her ability to bear children; denied that potential, she becomes a monster like Lucy or the brides of Dracula. Should she lose her children (or her potential to bear them), she loses her reason to exist. When Harker is trapped in Dracula's castle, a woman comes to the gate in search of the "monster" who took her child. He recalls the squirming bag that Dracula tossed to his brides and watches with notable passivity as the woman is torn apart by wolves: "I could not pity her, for I knew now what had become of her child, and she was better dead" (55). True, the child is irrevocably lost and the woman is distraught.

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**12** In "Your Girls that You All Love are Mine: Dracula and the Victorian Male Sexual Imagination," Gail B. Griffin supports this observation when she states that "As a Victorian Satan, Dracula attacks, like his Edenic forefather, at the weakest spot, womanhood, in order to infect the whole" (Griffin 147).
But why is the woman "better dead"? Was motherhood her sole purpose in life? Harker's callous disregard for her fate suggests that this is so. By patriarchal standards, it is through childbirth and child-rearing that a woman fulfills her responsibilities to husband, family, and society. Hence the novel concludes with Mina, the ideal of British womanhood, giving birth to a child—specifically a *son* who, as a male, will inherit his British father's name and social status and who will one day perpetuate that name through British children of his own.

Despite their initial lack of prowess, the men eventually do prevail over the vampire. Just as it was Arthur's duty to save Lucy from damnation, it is Jonathan's responsibility to save Mina. As Mina's husband, it is both his right and his obligation to defend her honor by destroying Dracula—or, failing that, by killing *her*. Mina crystallizes her own status as a trophy teetering between the two camps by exhorting her husband to

> Think, dear, that there have been many times when brave men have killed their wives and their womenkind, to keep them from falling into the hands of the enemy . . . It is men's duty towards those whom they love, in such time of sore trial! (336)

Ultimately, it will be Harker's knife which shears through Dracula's throat while Morris's bowie knife pierces the vampire's heart. It is worth noting that the passing of Dracula—supreme colonizer and monstrous threat to Western values—is shockingly anticlimactic. While the reader is treated to a graphic play-by-play account of gnashing teeth and spurting gore in the stakings of Lucy and the three "brides," Mina describes Dracula's demise as follows: "It was like a miracle; but before our very eyes, and almost in the drawing of a breath, the whole body crumbled into dust and passed from our sight" (380). The sense of extreme violation which so vividly characterizes the deaths of the female vampires is absent in this scene. Readers may perceive a strand of didacticism in the stakings of the women, an attempt to illustrate in graphic detail the punishment women are destined to suffer if they pursue sexual gratification/personal fulfillment beyond
patriarchally proscribed bounds. It is their bodies which provoke desire (and its corresponding vulnerability) in the men and threaten an exponential spread of vampirism, not Dracula's. In the long run, perhaps it is they who pose the greatest threat. As Gail Griffin observes, "Stoker's Gothic is quintessentially Victorian: the worst horror it can imagine is not Dracula at all but the released, transforming sexuality of the Good Woman" (148). The lack of detail could also be due to the fact that Stoker has a man describing the former events and did not deem a similarly carnal emphasis appropriate to the voice of Mina. Still, it is striking that the novel's namesake and primary evil catalyst is put down in only a single sentence. Nonetheless, the true death of Dracula marks the victory and reassertion/perpetuation of Western social values over an aggressive foreign Other, and is a testament to the nobility and bravery of Western men in defense of women and domestic space/soil. The novel concludes with the vampire's threat of invasion supposedly neutralized and a new male, the Harkers' son, entered onto the rosters of British society. The future of the British empire appears reassuringly stable...

... Or does it? Like "Carmilla" and "The Vampyre," Dracula has been discussed by critics as lacking closure. Indeed, upon closer examination, there appear to be several loose ends. Mina and Lucy are the only two British women who are known to have been victimized by the Count, but it is not unreasonable to assume that there were others. When Jonathan first glimpses Dracula in England the vampire is staring intently at a pretty girl, whom he subsequently follows. Her fate is never established, and the possibility that other vampire women spawned by Dracula may remain on British soil is quite real. Additionally, though the scar on Mina's forehead disappears with Dracula's demise, the purity of her body is left oddly problematic. Mina has tasted the blood of Dracula. Dracula took the blood of Lucy, who in turn received blood from Seward, Godalming, Morris, and Van Helsing. By virtue of a chain reaction, Mina has ingested
the blood of every significant character except her husband. Harker, presumably, has contributed a different substance toward the creation of the child through "legitimate" sexual intercourse within marriage (there's a blood/semen connection here). Even so, the purity of the child's bloodline is thrown into doubt by his amalgam of names which, according to Harker, "links all our little band of men together" (382). Some of Dracula's blood, too, may have found its way into his veins—a fact suggested by Judith Halberstam in Skin Shows: Gothic Horror and the Technology of Monsters:

Monster, in fact, merges with man by the novel's end and the boy reincarnates the dead American, Quincey Morris, and the dead vampire, Dracula, as if to ensure that, from now on, Englishness will become, rather than a purity of heritage and lineage or a symbol for national power, nothing more than a lost moment in Gothic history.13

The works of Polidori, Le Fanu, and Stoker establish the nineteenth-century literary vampire as a monstrous outsider whose ability to mimic social graces enables him/her to move freely through the dominant society. The vampire uses that mobility to gain access to virtuous women of the dominant society, who are portrayed as inherently vulnerable to—even complicit in—the vampire's efforts at seduction. The vampire's bite harbors sexual overtones which make it akin to sexual penetration, and it has a corrupting influence, turning women into wantons or "perverting" the course of heterosexual desire toward lesbianism. In either case, it breaks existing patriarchal controls over women's bodies, thereby posing a threat to the stability of family lineages which the men in a patriarchal society will not tolerate. Because the women in these stories are considered "weak" it is the duty of their male relatives or companions to protect them, and this is not an easy task. The vampire destroys many women despite the protective efforts of the men around them, and his/her success functions as a symbolic emasculation of those

13 Halberstam 106. Englishness, in the context of Dracula, is being lost the vampire's invasive Otherness and the hybridization that comes with it.
men. Typically the men respond to the vampire's challenge with violence of their own, the most graphic of which is reserved for female vampires. In an act symbolic of rape, they viciously stake and behead vampire women, thereby reasserting their control over female bodies and re-establishing their social dominance. Male vampires, however, are less readily dispatched. Lord Ruthven vanishes, presumably to continue his trail of debauchery. Dracula, though dead, has given his blood to Mina, who may or may not have passed it to her son as well. Even Carmilla, whose body is so thoroughly destroyed, haunts the memories of Laura. Thus, despite concerted male efforts against it, the vampire proves a lingering presence at the end of these works, threatening the patriarchal status quo and reflecting a host of cultural anxieties which extend into the twentieth century.

The Twentieth Century

The twentieth century has witnessed a tremendous surge in the popularity of the vampire as a key character in fiction. In addition to countless short stories and novels, books like Radu Florescu and Raymond MacNally's *In Search of Dracula* have anchored vampire legends in reality by establishing links between the vampires found in nineteenth century fiction and actual historical personages like Vlad the Impaler and Elizabeth Bathory. Films, too, have ensured the survival of the contemporary vampire as an icon of popular culture. Many people who have never read a vampire story are nonetheless familiar with the conventions, thanks in no small part to Dracula portrayals by Bela Lugosi, Christopher Lee and others. Acknowledging such media saturation, a majority of the vampire fiction which has emerged since *Dracula* can hardly be considered "great" literature. There *are* exceptions, however, and it is to several of these that my attention now turns.
The first novel-length work of male-authored vampire fiction to garner any
noticeable literary attention is *I Am Legend*, by Richard Matheson. First published in
1954, it pits a solitary man against a host of vampires in a post-atomic war world. In the
year 1976, Robert Neville is the sole survivor of a terrible plague that has turned the rest
of humanity, including family and former friends, into nocturnal creatures thirsting for
his blood. Barricaded in his home, he spends most of his time drinking, pining for his
dead wife, and trying to devise as many methods for killing vampires as possible. In this
novel, vampirism is not a supernatural curse but a consequence of biological warfare—
i.e., a new strain of bacteria for which there is no known cure. It is worth noting,
however, that just as "rational" Western thinking allows vampirism to spread via disbelief
in nineteenth century works like "The Vampyre" and "Carmilla," so it is permitted to
blossom out of control in the world of Robert Neville. As Neville observes upon putting
down his own copy of *Dracula*,¹⁴

... no one had believed in [vampires], and how could they fight
something they didn't even believe in?

That was what the situation had been. Something black and of the
night had come crawling out of the Middle Ages. Something with no
framework or credulity, something that had been consigned, fact and
figure, to the pages of imaginative literature. Vampires were passé,
Summers' idylls or Stoker's melodramatics or a brief inclusion in the
Britannica or grist for the pulp writer's mill or raw material for the B-film
factories. A tenuous legend passed from century to century.

Well, it was true.

... True, he thought, but no one ever got the chance to know it.
Oh, they knew it was something, but it couldn't be that—not that. *That* was
superstition, there was no such thing as *that*.

And, before science had caught up with the legend, the legend had
swallowed science and everything. (Matheson 135)

¹⁴ Twenty-first-century vampire fiction by both men and women tends to refer back to
earlier works of vampire fiction with notable regularity. The better writers of the genre
are highly conscious of their participation in a literary tradition, and they are not above
using that tradition to lend a sense of depth/historicity to their own work.
The capacity of legend to anticipate truths of science before science is capable of accepting the truth behind legend is an irony with drastic consequences for the world, and Neville knows it. By setting up vampirism as a disease and providing "rational" explanations for the success of traditional defensive measures against vampires, such as garlic and staking, Matheson replaces superstition and the supernatural with science—a trend which many twentieth-century writers will subsequently mimic.

In addition to rooting the vampire in science, Matheson also de-stabilizes the efficacy of the cross as a defensive weapon. His protagonist, Neville, observes quite matter-of-factly that "as far as the cross goes—well, neither a Jew nor a Hindu nor a Mohammedan nor an atheist, for that matter, would fear the cross" (135). Christianity and its iconography can achieve only limited success in a world populated by diverse faiths, and by acknowledging that the cross is a symbol that does not carry universal weight, Matheson makes vampires more global, less predictable—more threatening.

Another trend in *I Am Legend* involves the emphasis which the novel places on race. Robert Neville is very Caucasian, described by Matheson as "a tall man, thirty-six, born of English-German stock," complete with bright blue eyes. The hatred Neville directs toward the vampires is couched in xenophobic terms, as evinced by his personal reflections during a bout of heavy drinking:

> Why, then, this unkind prejudice, this thoughtless bias? Why cannot the vampire live where he chooses? Why must he seek out hiding places where none can find him out? Why do you wish him destroyed? Ah, see, you have turned the poor guileless innocent into a haunted animal. He has no means of support, no measures for proper education, he has not the voting franchise. No wonder he is compelled to seek out a predatory nocturnal existence.

> Robert Neville grunted a surly grunt. Sure, sure, he thought, but would you let your sister marry one? (29)

Neville's association of vampires with those who have been socially and politically disadvantaged, combined with his remark about interracial unions, creates a subtext
within the novel which makes racial difference and vampirism synonymous. It also coats Neville's efforts to exterminate vampires, though ostensibly acts of self-preservation in what he perceives as a world gone mad, with an air of genocide.

Women, too, are focal points for male aggression. Like the pages of its nineteenth century predecessors, *I Am Legend* is littered with the bodies of murdered female vampires. From the earliest chapters, Neville seethes as he watches them from within his heavily barricaded house. They appear to exist solely to rouse his lust—and they succeed. In repeated passages, he observes that

> It was the women who made it so difficult, he thought, the women posing like lewd puppets in the night on the possibility that he's seen them and decide to come out. (14)

> The women were out there, their dresses open or taken off, their flesh waiting for his touch, their lips waiting for— My blood, my blood! (29)

Like Harker before him, he is both tempted and horrified by the bodies and the lips of female vampires, who do not trouble to hide their lusts. Unlike Harker, however, he channels his frustrated sexual desire into a very practiced form of misogyny. In his quest to isolate the bacteria which causes vampirism and discover various methods by which vampires may be destroyed, his test subjects are always female. In scene after scene, he violates their bodies every way *but* sexually. On one occasion, he steals a vampire woman from her bed, ties her to a chair, and attempts to force her to look at a cross. When she fights him, he kills her (the implication is that he beats her to death) and throws her body out the front door as spoils for the other vampires. In another instance, he goes into a house, finds a young woman with blood on her mouth asleep in her bed, turns her over, lifts her skirt, and injects one of his experimental vampire-killing concoctions into her buttock. Another woman is pulled from her bed and dragged down the stairs of her home. When she starts to resist him, he drags her the rest of the way
outside by her hair and throws her onto the sidewalk. At this point, the reader is told that "Usually he felt a twinge when he realized, but for some affliction he didn't understand, these people were the same as he. But now an experimental fervor had seized him and he could think of nothing else" (36). Under the glare of the sun, the woman

... lay twisting helplessly on the sidewalk, hands opening and closing, lips drawn back from red-spotted lips. Robert Neville watched her tensely.

His throat moved. It wouldn't last, the feeling of callous brutality. He bit his lips as he watched her. All right, she's suffering, he argued with himself, but she's one of them and she'd kill me gladly if she got the chance. You've got to look at it that way, it's the only way. Teeth clenched, he stood there and watched her die. (36)

At one point, pricked by conscience, he even asks himself, "Why do you always experiment on women?" (59) He never satisfactorily answers that question, because every time his conscience rises to challenge the motives behind his actions, he crushes it under the conviction that he is ensuring his own survival. The only positive emotions he displays toward women are reserved for his dead wife, Virginia, and daughter, Kathy, whose memory evokes longing for an idyllic female warmth and companionship he can no longer have. Yet late in the novel, the reader learns that even Virginia, whose name Neville repeats with the regularity of a mantra, had earlier fallen victim to his self-appointed task of vampire-killing. Like Arthur Holmwood before him, he has pounded the stake into his own beloved's breast to "free" her from the curse of vampirism:

"I put her away again... I had to do the same thing to her I'd done to the others. My own wife." There was a clicking in his throat. "A stake," he said in a terrible voice. "I had to put a stake in her. It was the only thing I knew to do." (149)

In the final chapters Neville meets Ruth, a woman whom he is shocked to encounter abroad in daylight. It is now 1978 and he is desperately lonely when he spies

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15 Given the racial and sexual subtexts present in male vampire fiction, it is interesting that the names of both Neville's wife and daughter mean "pure."
her across a field, chases her down, and brings her home with him in true caveman fashion. But he is stubborn in his refusal to trust that she is what she appears to be—a living, normal human woman. When she awakens, he puts a plate of crushed garlic under her nose and she recoils. He excuses his rough behavior by asserting that "You're on trial, not me," (130) and she turns on him with an accusation of her own:

"I've had a weak stomach all my life... I saw my husband killed last week. Torn to pieces. Right in front of my eyes I saw it. I lost two children to the plague. And for the past week I've been wandering all over. Hiding at night, not eating more than a few scraps of food. Sick with fear, unable to sleep more than a couple of hours at a time. Then I hear someone shout at me. You chase me over a field, hit me, drag me to your house. Then when I get sick because you shove a plate of reeking garlic in my face, you tell me I'm infected!" (131)

Neville makes no apologies, instead taking the opportunity to ask for a sample of her blood. As time passes and the two converse, he softens toward her somewhat. But despite the fact that he values her companionship, he still views her with intense suspicion—not to mention sexism. When she arranges the folds of her robe and he catches a glimpse of her thigh, he describes it as "a typical feminine gesture... an artificial movement," (141) and is irritated by it. The implication is that women are all deceit/surface/body and will unfailingly call attention to themselves as such. Meanwhile, Neville himself falls into the stereotypical niche of a male spectator who, in his careful appraisal of Ruth's physical attributes, proves incapable of directing his gaze beyond the female body.

The conversations between Ruth and Neville at this stage are crucial in terms of highlighting how narrow Neville's understanding of the world truly is. For instance, during dinner he confesses:

"I don't understand it... almost three years now, and still there are some of them alive. Food supplies are being used up. As far as I know, they still lie in a coma during the day... But they're not dead. Three years and they're not dead. What keeps them going? (133)
It is interesting—and profoundly disturbing—that he makes no exception for these people who are still, by his own admission, alive and clearly not relying on blood for sustenance. If he finds them in a coma during the day, he murders them. In his one-man crusade, it is Neville who has become the solitary monster who stalks his victims in their sleep—and he cannot see it. Even Ruth, lucid though she is, is not safe from the extremity of his prejudice against plague victims. His thoughts leave little doubt as to what her fate will be should he find the bacteria in her blood:

Neville felt only a small satisfaction that she was going to let him check her blood. He was afraid he might discover that she was infected. In the meantime he had to pass an evening and a night with her, perhaps get to know her and be attracted to her. When in the morning he might have to... (134)

Neville refuses to complete the thought, but it is clear that despite her human appearance and human behavior, he is ready to kill her based solely on what he sees in her blood. When Ruth questions him about the nature of the vampire bacteria and about his progressive "studies" of vampires, she is treated with very clinical descriptions of how he has killed vampires by various means. When she shows signs of distress, he smiles and says, "One gets used to these things... One has to" (146). Still, she questions him:

"But you said a lot of them are— are still living... How do you know they're not going to stay alive?"

"I know," he said. "I know the germ, know how it multiplies. No matter how long their systems fight it, in the end the germ will win. I've made antibiotics, injected dozens of them. But it doesn't work, it can't work. You can't make vaccines work when they're already deep in the disease. Their bodies can't fight germs and make antibodies at the same time. It can't be done, believe me. It's a trap. If I didn't kill them, sooner or later they'd die and come after me. I have no choice; no choice at all." (146)

Or so he tries to convince himself. For the first time in years he must consider a viewpoint at odds with his own, and he finds the experience disconcerting.

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It was strange, he thought, to find himself vaguely on the defensive for what yesterday was accepted necessity. In the years that had passed he had never once considered the possibility that he was wrong. It took her presence to bring about such thoughts. And they were strange, alien thoughts.

"Do you actually think I'm wrong?" he asked in an incredulous voice. (146)

By her very presence, Ruth has begun to undermine Neville's myopic presumptions about the world and his self-appointed role in it. Only later, after learning that Ruth's blood is, indeed, contaminated, does he begin to understand just how wrong his assumptions have been. In the note she leaves behind, Ruth reveals that she was indeed sent to spy on him:

I know now that you were just as much forced into your situation as we were forced into ours. We are infected. But you already know that. What you don't understand yet is that we're going to stay alive. We've found a way to do that and we're going to set up society again slowly but surely. We're going to do away with all those wretched creatures whom death has cheated. And, even though I pray otherwise, we may decide to kill you and those like you. (155)

As it turns out, there is a drug that controls the bacteria. Ruth and those like her are hybrids, existing at a level between human and vampire, and their numbers are growing. Eventually they will dominate the planet, and there is nothing Neville can do to stop them. Along with the vampires, he has been murdering innocent people like Ruth—including Ruth's husband—with no comprehension, no sympathy, no remorse.

When the hybrids finally come for Neville, he watches as they exterminate the vampires that have so long been the focus of his hatred—and is horrified.

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Did they have to do it like this, with such a black and brutal slaughtering/
Why did they slay with alarum by night, when by day the vampires could
be dispatched in peace?

Robert Neville felt tight fists shaking at his sides. He didn't like
the looks of them, he didn't like the methodical butchery. They were more
like gangsters than men forced into a situation. There were looks of
vicious triumph on their faces, white and stark in the spotlights. Their
faces were cruel and emotionless. (162)

The irony here is that he makes no connection between his own previous crusade of
butchery against vampires and what he sees now—yet he was every bit as ruthless, and the
daylight deaths he caused were far from "peaceful." He remains stubbornly blind to his
own hypocrisy and to his own kinship, however unwanted, with both the killers and the
killed. Ruth confronts him with this fact:

"Did you ever see your face . . . when you killed? . . . I saw it—remember?
It was frightening. And you weren't even killing then, you were just
chasing me." (170)

But Robert Neville, "the last of the old race," will not listen. Aware of his impending
execution, he goes to his window to look out on the street full of people, who
all stood looking up at him with their white faces. He stared back. And
suddenly he thought, I'm the abnormal one now. Normalcy was a
majority concept, the standard of many and not the standard of just one
man.

Abruptly that realization joined with what he saw on their faces—
awe, fear, shrinking horror—and he knew that they were afraid of him.
To them he was some terrible scourge they had never seen, a scourge
even worse than the disease they had come to live with. He was an
invisible specter who had left for evidence of his existence the bloodless
bodies of their loved ones. And he understood what they felt and did not
hate them . . . .

Robert Neville looked out over the new people of the earth. He
knew he did not belong to them; he knew that, like the vampires, he was
anathema and black terror to be destroyed. (173-174)

Finally, in that moment, Neville understands—and accepts—the monster he himself has
become. He swallows the poison pills which Ruth has given him and as he dies, he
acknowledges how, through him, the vampire has come
Full circle. A new terror born in death, a new superstition entering the unassailable fortress of forever.

I am legend. (173)

This displacement is the ultimate irony of the novel. Via Neville and his legacy, readers are left with a story in which the white Western male has become the monster, the "legend" to be feared. The old world (symbolized by Neville, his barricaded house, and his singular convictions of moral rectitude) must give way to the new world (symbolized by Ruth, the other hybrids, and their restructuring of society). The inevitable shift in power comes, in no small part, because of Neville's incapacity to change. Though Ruth warns him of danger well in advance, he refuses to leave his house:

"I... couldn't... I almost went several times. Once I even packed and... started out. But I couldn't, I couldn't... go. I was too used to the... the house. It was a habit, just... just like the habit of living. I got... used to it." (169)

In this unstable post-apocalyptic landscape, it is Neville who has become stagnant, "passé," a persistent stereotype that refuses to die. In line with the racial subtext of the novel, he is the white male whose battle to preserve the status quo, to remain in the house where his truths and his values dominate and where, through violence and exploitation, he has managed to keep out everything he designates as Other, is doomed to failure. He was once part of a ruling majority, but in the end the novel situates him as a minority who finds himself surrounded and systematically beaten down by a race he is erroneously convinced he "knows". This dexterous bit of race reversal is concretized by Matheson's closing juxtaposition of color—namely, the sea of "white faces" that look up at Neville and see him as a "black terror." The imagery is especially intriguing in connection with the novel's 1954 publishing date, when the nascent Civil Rights movement was beginning to cohere and challenge the complacent dominance of white America.
'Salem's Lot, by Stephen King, was first published in 1975. The novel brings the vampire into small-town America, and its parallels with Stoker's Dracula are both deliberate and unmistakable. The vampire, Kurt Barlow, is a German—a foreigner bent on colonization who, in a parody of Dracula's speech to Harker, explains his fascination with the tiny community of Jerusalem's Lot:

"Do you know how beautiful the people of your country and your town are? . . . .

They have never known hunger or want, the people of this country. It has been two generations since they knew anything close to it, and even then it was like a voice in a distant room. They think they have known sadness, but their sadness is that of a child who has spilled his ice cream on the grass at a birthday party. There is no . . . how is the English? . . . attenuation in them. They spill each other's blood with great vigor. Do you believe it? Do you see?

. . . . This country is an amazing paradox. In other lands, when a man eats to his fullest day after day, that man becomes fat . . . sleepy . . . piggish. But in this land . . . it seems the more you have the more aggressive you become . . . like a child at a birthday party, who will push away another baby even though he himself can eat no more." (King 235)

The America of 'Salem's Lot is a society ruled by a single impulse: self-gratification. Its citizens are free to pursue their own desires with a hunger fed by material abundance, socio-political naiveté, and undercurrents of moral decadence. America has never suffered invasion, has not borne the terrible losses of two World Wars on its home soil. It is a country of consumers, fattened on the success of capitalism and yearning to be fatter still, and it is this aggressive consumer impulse with which Barlow identifies. Moreover, it is not the cities but small-town America that he desires to infiltrate. In a parody of Dracula's speech to Harker in praise of cities, Barlow tells a young resident of 'Salem's Lot that

"I might have gone to one of your great and teeming cities. Bah! . . . What do I know of cities? I should be run over by a hansom crossing the street! I should choke on nasty air! I should come in contact with sleek, stupid
dilettantes whose concerns are . . . inimical to me. How should a poor rustic like myself deal with the hollow sophistication of a great city...even an American city? (King 234-235)

In this novel it is not anonymity but intimacy that the vampire seeks. In a town the size of Jerusalem's Lot, with fewer than 1,400 residents, everyone knows everyone else—and everyone else's business. People feed off of each other's gossip just as the vampire feeds on blood, and the strong, recurring image of humming telephone wires which crisscross the town like a network of veins reinforces both the town's insularity and its susceptibility to the evil contagion which Barlow brings (King 102-103). According to the narrator, "Being in the town is a daily act of utter intercourse, so complete that it makes what you and your wife do in the squeaky bed look like a handshake" (210). A closed network of well-established relationships is already present to assure that by touching one resident, Barlow will ultimately touch them all.

Enhancing Barlow's image as an invading conqueror is his link with Hubert Marsten and, through Marsten, with Adolf Hitler. Marsten, a contract killer suspected in the disappearances of several local children, killed both himself and his wife in their home in 'Salem's Lot in the summer of 1939. References to Marsten indicate that "In the ten years between the fall of the market and the rise of Hitler, [he] and his wife lived in their house like hermits," and that by virtue of the horrors that took place there "the Marsten House . . . gained its proper noun status for all time even before Hitler invaded Poland" (25, 27). Additionally,

Minella Corey said . . . there are evil men in the world, truly evil men . . . She said she had been cursed with a knowledge of two such men in her lifetime. One was Adolf Hitler. The other was her brother-in-law, Hubert Marsten. (111-112)

Barlow, who met Marsten in Germany and learned of 'Salem's Lot through him, takes over the Marsten House when he arrives. His companion, Straker, announces that the two "hope to make a reputation in the area . . . perhaps even throughout your so-beautiful
New England region" (99-100). This openly expressed desire to spread influence, combined with the Hitler connection and the legacy of conquest, brutality, and genocide which accompanies it, leaves little doubt as to Barlow's motives.

Whereas the nineteenth century vampire's victims of choice were women, Barlow strikes first at the children of 'Salem's Lot. After Ralphie Glick disappears and his brother Danny "dies," vampirism begins its inevitable spread throughout the population. Men and women are targeted equally. Like Ruthven, Carmilla, and Dracula before him, Barlow is an arch-seducer. He uses the combination of his voice, his eyes, and his exotic appearance to undermine victims' resistance. Unlike his predecessors, however, he does not limit his attentions to women. In fact, the most graphic seduction sequences in 'Salem's Lot occur between Barlow and other men (146, 236). His ambiguous gender identification is reflected in his features, which are a blend of masculine and feminine attributes. As seen through the eyes of one of his male victims, Barlow's face is high-cheekboned and thoughtful. The hair was white, streaked with oddly virile slashes of iron gray. The guy had it swept back from his high, waxy forehead like one of those fag concert pianists. (144)

Another male victim describes the vampire's face as "strong and intelligent and handsome in a sharp, forbidding sort of way—yet, as the light shifted, it seemed almost effeminate" (352). Moments later, the same victim notes the vampire's "red, sensual lips." Within the scope of this novel, the vampire's capacity to blur gender distinctions is emblematic of his perversion, of his threatening ability to contaminate.

Regardless of who is biting who, the sexual dimension of a vampire's bite is clear in 'Salem's Lot. Ann Norton, Susan's mother, succumbs easily to Barlow's charm and actively desires his return, not because she wants to be with her daughter, but because "it was him she wanted to please, so he would give her the thing she craved and needed: the touch; the penetration" (357). When Jimmy Cody is bitten by Marjorie Glick, he is horrified by his own reaction:
"For a couple of minutes there, I thought I was going to go nuts. Really, clinically nuts. Her lips on me... biting me... And when she was doing it, I liked it... That's the hellish part. I actually had an erection. Can you believe it?" (270)

Barlow undermines traditional sex roles by creating a world in which both sexes desire and submit to penetration, and in which both sexes are capable of penetration.

Additionally, Cody's fixation on the female vampire's mouth hearkens back to the fellatio imagery encountered in Dracula. King ultimately surpasses Stoker on this point, however, by choosing to make the connection between vampire women and oral sex explicit. Later in the novel, as Cody looks down on the sleeping Susan Norton,

"Something in her face—not stated but hinted at—made [him] think of the young Saigon girls, some not yet thirteen, who would kneel before soldiers in the alleys behind the bars, not for the first time or the hundredth" (337-338).

Portrayals of women in Salem's Lot remain firmly within the narrow band of possibilities established in prior works of vampire fiction. Susan Norton, the sole female character treated to any extended development, suffers the same fate as most of her female predecessors: the stake. Matt Burke, the "Van Helsing" of the novel, tells Ben Mears that he must perform the task himself because he has had a sexual relationship with her:

"... you must pound the stake... You are the only person in this little party who has been hurt personally. You will act as her husband. And you mustn't falter. You'll be releasing her." (321)

In a sequence reminiscent of Lucy Westenra's true death, Ben drives a stake through Susan's breast. It takes a full page of small print for King to describe her bloody end, which is witnessed by the other male protagonists. Yet again, the prostrate body of a sleeping woman is violated by a man who is given sole right to that body by virtue of his status as her "husband."
Like Stoker before him, King makes use of "newspaper clippings" to lend an aura of authenticity to the bizarre events taking place in 'Salem's Lot. Once again, the question of belief in vampires becomes crucial for the protagonists' survival. This particular novel, like *I Am Legend*, refers back to previous vampire literature on numerous occasions. Matt Burke, the English teacher, knows this literature and because he knows the tradition, he is among the first to consider and accept the presence of vampires in 'Salem's Lot. Still, he acknowledges the gap between "fiction" and what the contemporary world accepts as "fact":

One was taught that such things could not be; that things like Coleridge's "Christabel" or Bram Stoker's evil fairy tale were only the warp and woof of fantasy. Of course monsters existed; they were the men with their fingers on the thermonuclear triggers in six countries, the hijackers, the mass murderers, the child molesters. But not this. One knows better. The mark of the devil on a woman's breast is only a mole, the man who came back from the dead and stood at his wife's door dressed in the cerements of the grave was only suffering from locomotor ataxia, the bogeyman who gibbers and capers in the corner of a child's bedroom is only a heap of blankets. Some clergymen had proclaimed that even God, that venerable white warlock, was dead. (164)

Despite all this, Burke knows that the events in 'Salem's Lot following the arrival of Barlow and Straker cannot be so easily rationalized away. Like his nineteenth-century predecessors, Barlow clearly possesses supernatural origins. Via Straker's prayer to the Lord of Flies, he is linked with Satan and ancient forces of evil which pre-date Christianity and which, as a consequence, cannot be expelled by the mere presence of Christian iconography.\(^\text{17}\) The cross no longer carries automatic efficacy as a weapon against evil, as it does in nineteenth-century vampire fiction. Indeed, the Catholic Church, in particular, has lost its sensitivity to EVIL with a capital 'E.' According to Fr. Callahan, the Church's representative in the novel,

\(^{17}\) In the words of Barlow himself, "I was strong when this simpering club of bread-eaters and wine-drinkers who venerate the sheep-savior was weak" (King 334).
The Catholic Church has been forced to reinterpret its whole approach to evil—bombers over Cambodia, the war in Ireland and the Middle East, cop-killings and ghetto riots, the billion smaller evils loosed on the world each day like a plague of gnats. It is in the process of shedding its old medicine-man skin and re-emerging as a socially active, socially conscious body. The inner city rap-center ascendant over the confessional. Communion playing second fiddle to the civil rights movement and urban renewal. The church has been in the process of planting both feet in this world. (304)

Without its old emphasis on the spiritual dimensions of human existence and the primacy of faith in God as the first, best defense against very real, supernatural evil—its "medicine-man skin"—the Church of the modern Western world is ill-equipped to deal with the demonic force personified in the vampire Barlow. Even Fr. Callahan, who disdains what he sees as the petty, everyday social evils of humanity and yearns "to see EVIL with its cerements of deception cast aside, with every feature of its visage clear...to slug it out toe to toe with EVIL," (150) cannot withstand Barlow's challenge. Confronted with the fulfillment of his desire to do battle against real EVIL, he fails the test of faith that is the only true weapon against the vampire. As Barlow observes,

You have forgotten the doctrine of your own church, is it not so?
The cross . . . the bread and wine . . . the confessional . . . only symbols.
Without faith, the cross is only wood, the bread baked wheat, the wine sour grapes. (355)

It is the absence of Fr. Callahan's faith which allows Barlow to pluck the crucifix from the priest's fingers and force him to drink his blood—to "take his communion" in a scene which functions as a homoerotic re-enactment of the encounter between Dracula and Mina. The fact that the victim is a priest (a "false priest," as Barlow names him) significantly undercuts the power of "official" Christianity that was once an unfailing ally of the heroes of vampire fiction. The priest's role as Christ-figure is usurped by Barlow, whose blood also replaces that of Christ and brings damnation instead of salvation. Ultimately, those who destroy Barlow must be empowered by a force for good

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which King describes as "not in the least Christian," (408) but something far more raw and elemental.

Within the scope of *Salem's Lot*, all vampires are unequivocally evil, unredeemable, and the male protagonists are driven by a firm conviction that they must be destroyed. To that end, Matt Burke functions as a modern "Van Helsing," and Ben Mears, Jimmy Cody, and Mark Petrie openly recognize him as such from their own knowledge of *Dracula* (322). Together, the four men become this novel's "Crew of Light," determined to hunt down and destroy Barlow. Once again, it is the men who recognize the vampire as a threat and actively pursue him. Barlow is more threatening than Dracula, however—his goal of colonization is far more successful, and neither Burke nor Cody survive their quest. When Ben and Mark eventually do find and stake Barlow, all that remains of him are his teeth—yet when Ben picks them up, "they [twist] in his hand like tiny white animals, trying to come together and bite" (418). The evil force which animated Barlow is neither easily nor completely destroyed, and his death does not automatically free those whom he has contaminated. His Undead progeny remain, along with the narrator's cryptic announcement that "Their time [is] on the world" (413).

Although Ben and Mark ultimately burn the town at the end, they are forced to acknowledge that some of the vampires will survive, and that those survivors will seek them out. The vampire hunters will themselves be hunted, and Mark surveys his old home town, struck by the conviction that "They're in those houses . . . Right now, in all those houses. Behind the shades. In beds and closets and cellars. Under the floors. Hiding" (426). In this novel, as in *I Am Legend*, the small town and the family home are no longer bastions of safety against the evils of the outside world. They have replaced the Gothic castle/deserted Abbey as repositories for the ultimate evil—an evil made all the more frightening by its familiarity. In *Salem's Lot*, King returns to the folk roots of vampire legends by letting the vampires *come home*. Just as the vampires of folklore
supposedly returned to victimize those who were close to them in life, those bitten by Barlow return to contaminate their families and friends. They shatter the sanctity of domestic space (or expose its already extant lack of sanctity) by revealing that vampires are not strangers—they are those we know and love. The threat which remains in the final chapter is epitomized not by Kurt Barlow: foreign invader, but by Charlie Rhodes: local bus driver.

Whitley Strieber's *The Hunger*, first published in 1981 is one of the relatively few contemporary vampire novels to place a female vampire at the center of the plot. Taking Matheson’s cue in terms of giving vampirism a natural/scientific foundation, Strieber introduces Miriam Blaylock as a member of a different species which exists alongside and preys upon humanity. She possesses many of the attributes of her vampire predecessors, including wealth, immortality, prodigious strength, and a hunger for blood. She is also extraordinarily beautiful, possessed of a powerful sex appeal which she does not hesitate to utilize. She is an irresistible seductress, capable of freeing human desires with an inhuman finesse. Her most recent lover, John, recalls the first time he saw her two hundred years ago:

There was no word to describe her.
Skin could not be so white or features so perfect, surely. Her eyes, as pale as delft, as pellucid as the sea, flickered to him . . .
He was shocked by the power of that glance, so shocked he turned away in confusion . . . as if to tease him, she looked at him again in that shameless, wild way. Never before had he encountered such brazen effrontery, not even from the most primitive scullery or back-street whore.

To see it in such an extraordinary and obviously refined beauty made him shake with excitement. (Strieber 8-9)

Yet Miriam's is a thoroughly predatory sexuality, and she inspires fear/revulsion in equal measure with desire. Only moments after he bends to embrace her, John is startled by the sound of her laughter, which
... sprang out of her like a hidden blade. He jerked his head up, dropped his arms. In her eyes there was something so lascivious, so mocking and triumphant, that his passion was at once replaced by fear. Such a look he had seen—

Yes, in a panther some East Indians had been displaying at Vauxhall Gardens. (8-9)

The image of the panther, combined with later references to a tiger and a shark, connects Miriam firmly with the realm of the animal or, patriarchally speaking, the feminine realm of body and instinct, as opposed to the higher, human/masculine realm of the mind. She is strong and compelling—far more powerful than her male lover—and she thoroughly controls the life which she and John enjoy over the course of two centuries. As Miriam's attention begins to drift away from him, in the direction of a young girl named Alice, he finds it "infuriating to realize to what small degree Miriam belonged to him" (16). His resentment of her builds, as does his desire to control her until, in a pattern now long familiar, a prone female vampire is viciously assaulted by the man who has been designated as her mate. Unlike his predecessors, however, John does not choose the stake as his weapon of choice. When he approaches Miriam during her Sleep, he finds that

There was something pleasing about her helplessness, something that excited him... He looked into her stillness, feeling rapacious. The thought that he could do his will on her—even murder her—made sweat pop out all over his body.

... He made a nervous decision. He was feeling powerful sexual needs, an urge almost to steal something from her. Thus, in guilty secrecy began a most awesome and terrible experience. He lay down on her and began to make love to her entranced body. (27)

The rape is a desperate attempt to subdue that which is beyond his control—a powerful, predatory woman who will not conform to his will and who cannot be choked into submission. When Miriam wakes it is John who lies helpless in her grasp, and her dominance remains intact. When she withdraws to the bathroom "he [finds] himself
wanting something from her, a scream of anger, a threat, any sign of relationship. But he heard only the water being turned on" (29).

Miriam follows the tradition established by previous literary vampires in her utter disregard for Western codes of sexual behavior. She is aggressively, unabashedly bisexual, and when she encounters Sarah Roberts, the sexual tension between the two becomes central to the plot of the novel. The parallels between Miriam and Sarah and their nineteenth-century counterparts, Carmilla and Laura, are intriguing. Miriam's desire for Sarah is evident in several scenes, and she manipulates Sarah both physically and psychologically with no regard for Sarah's lover, Tom. Moreover, she follows the model of Dracula by carrying out her seduction of Sarah while Tom lies asleep beside her in the same bed. Miriam does not take Sarah's blood, but she does touch her with her hands and mouth in explicitly sexual ways, and she interprets Sarah's eager responses as "hunger, raw and unfulfilled, for a truly passionate lover" (86). This sequence illustrates, once again, the susceptibility of woman to temptations of the flesh and the impotence of the man who is supposed to protect her which is a staple theme in male-authored vampire fiction. Like Carmilla, Miriam begins to usurp sexual control over a young woman from her male companion, to divert Sarah's desires away from their accustomed (and socially accepted) heterosexual expression toward a homosexual union which the human world of the novel, embodied by Tom and Sarah, considers perverse.

Unlike the nineteenth-century Laura, Sarah is no sexual innocent. Her relationship with Tom is a torrid one, and the two are often depicted in the throes of passion. Nevertheless, by the novel's end Sarah has Miriam's blood flowing in her veins and her love for Tom has shifted away from sexual passion to the love one might feel for a child. "His sexual significance . . . [has] dwindled to nothing," (233) and once again, a heterosexual Western male finds himself effectively emasculated by a vampire who can play the role of the sexual aggressor far better than he can. It takes only the briefest
encounters with Miriam to arouse within Sarah what, to her, are profoundly disturbing homosexual longings. One moment Sarah delights in Miriam because she "had not felt this sense of intimate female friendship since she was a child" (147). The next, she sees Miriam as a menace. When Miriam picks her up and sets her on her knee, "her heart [is] soaring, yet her mind [is] filled with shame" (109). As Sarah struggles with her conflicted emotions, she acknowledges that Miriam is both "frightening and dangerously seductive. She had the power to call up desires best left sleeping" (137). This double-edged attraction/repulsion which Miriam inspires in the female object of her desire is a contemporary echo of the mixed emotions felt by Laura as she endures the advances of Carmilla.

Sarah's responses to Miriam are complicated by her profession. As the book jacket describes her, Sarah is "a brilliant young sleep researcher who has discovered the blood factor that controls aging and thus may possess the secret of immortality." Her obsession with blood mirrors that of Miriam in that it compels her to exploit other living creatures for her own benefit—including, possibly, Miriam. Viewed from Miriam's perspective,

Sarah's was a ruthlessly predatory personality. She, the one who had so indifferently destroyed Methuselah and no doubt dozens of other primates, would capture Miriam. Intelligence might or might not convey rights in the mind of such a person. If their curiosity was intense enough, their ambition sufficiently excited, Miriam had no doubt that Sarah and her colleagues would not hesitate to commit her, or simply confine her as an experimental animal "for the good of humanity and the furtherance of science." (112)

Once Sarah discovers the anomalies in Miriam's blood which set her apart as a different species, Miriam becomes fascinating to her on a scientific level as well as a sexual one. In their mutual, self-serving desire for each other, the lines separating the human female from the monstrous female become increasingly blurred.
Miriam's personal experiences with humans and the history of her race attest to the relativity of the designation, "monster." As a child, she witnesses her three sisters being roasted alive and eaten by fear-maddened villagers. She recalls persecution during the Inquisition, when ancient families of her kind are dying and "all Europe is inflamed against them. Idiots creep about with crosses and garlic, spouting bad Latin" (160). Ever since that time of superstition and genocide, "the remaining members of her race lived solitary lives, each wrapped in his own longings and tragedies, an autumnal species too frightened of persecution to dare to foregather" (43). Miriam kills to feed the hunger which is as natural to her as any human craving for meat or bread. She makes no apologies for doing so, affirming instead that her race is "not evil . . . we also are part of the justice of the earth" (43). What makes her so terrifying is that she looks human. Moreover, the fact that she is female enables her to exploit gender biases in Western culture to advantage. In the midst of capturing a female victim, Miriam notes that "There were a few people on the street, but women in the human culture are shielded by their position from any expectation of violence, so she was only mildly concerned that she would raise suspicions by assisting her woozy "girlfriend" into a cab" (208). Because she is a "woman," she is not perceived as a threat. Her motives are presumed innocent—and such presumptions only serve to make her more insidiously dangerous.

Miriam's racial Otherness echoes that of Dracula, and her blood is clearly presented as a contaminant. Over the centuries she has kept her human lovers alive by giving them some of her blood. Her blood transforms them, enabling them to live much longer lives and instilling within them a thirst for blood akin to her own. When Miriam injects Sarah with some of her blood, it begins to consume Sarah's blood "and reproducing cells of its own kind" (178). Subsequently, Miriam's blood is treated by Sarah's colleagues as "an invasive organism"—a "parasite" which has contaminated Sarah's system and which threatens to overwhelm it (197). For Sarah, "it was as if
somebody else was living in her body, some wild being, driven by needs of which she herself was ignorant" (170). She fights her growing hunger, her impulse to do violence, because "after all, [it] was not her own. It belonged to the creature's blood" (226). Yet her struggles to maintain a strict separation between "Self" and "Other" are doomed to failure, because within her own flesh the two are already literally commingled.

The colonization motif found recurrently through vampire fiction written by men works at a very personal level within the scope of this novel. Whereas male vampires tend to seek the conquest of nations, female vampires in the tradition of Carmilla and Miriam seek to conquer individuals. Loneliness drives them to endeavor to create companions for themselves, but without success. Carmilla is destroyed before Laura can become a vampire, and the effects of Miriam's blood transfusions never last. Eventually, the blood hunger of her lovers eats at them until they age rapidly and waste away, trapped in the crippled shells of bodies that cannot die. Toward the end of the novel, Sarah kills Tom by stabbing him with a scalpel in the midst of their lovemaking—a self-gratifying gesture of reverse/perverse penetration that is the hallmark of vampire sexuality. The latter is presented as a sterile sexuality rooted in death, not life—and Sarah rejects it utterly. Horrified by what Miriam's blood has made her become, she slices her own wrists, ridding her body of its contaminated blood and thereby denying herself the world of Miriam's vampire existence. She cannot die because Miriam's blood has changed her too much, so she is placed in a box like the rest of Miriam's old lovers, doomed to exist in a state of eternal death. Still, she is capable of remembering

... what she had done to Tom and what she would do if she did get out. She was glad she was here. At least she could call herself a human being still. No matter what she must suffer, this was better than being Miriam's thing. (244)

To be "Miriam's thing" is to succumb utterly to desire, to be driven not only by a lust for blood, but by lust for another woman, and this is an existence which Strieber will not
allow Sarah to accept. He "redeems" his human female protagonist by permitting her "grand memories, and . . . a great love as well. Tom [is] with her in spirit" (244). In doing so, he reasserts the primacy of heteroerosexual love—a love which Tom had, in a final irony before his death, correctly convinced himself was his only weapon against the powerful allure of Miriam (228). In the end, it is her memories of love for Tom which compel Sarah to reject Miriam and her world. Miriam herself acknowledges that she "had never imagined the heights that could be reached by a human being who was groping toward the truth of love" and that "the gift she could confer was not above one such as Sarah, but beneath her" (245). By endowing his vampire with such feelings, Strieber endeavors to de-centralize and disempower the hunger which has been the driving force of the novel. The attempt fails, however, because despite these melodramatic reflections on the dignity and strength of heterosexual human love, it is Miriam who survives. Her hunger is undiminished and, in the lack of reassuring closure characteristic of male-authored vampire fiction, she remains a powerful Other who will continue to slip easily through society and into the company of countless future victims.

The final novel to be examined here will be Anno Dracula, by Kim Newman, which was published in 1992. This work is representative of a much larger pool of male-authored vampire fiction which places vampires at the heart of evil empires bent on overrunning human (i.e., Western) civilization. Typically, such novels explore the broad-ranging socio-political conquests of vampires through the appalled eyes of their human antagonists, and Anno Dracula is no exception. The novel opens with a lengthy quote from Stoker's Dracula in which the archetypal vampire himself asserts, with full pride of ancestry, "We Szekleleys have a right to be proud, for in our veins flows the blood of many brave races who fought as the lion fights, for lordship" (Newman 1). Thus, the stage for conquest is set.
*Anno Dracula* blends actual historic elements with literary ones to establish a late nineteenth-century world in which Dracula has succeeded in conquering England and sits on the British throne with the official title of Prince Consort to Queen Victoria. Bram Stoker’s Dr. Jack Seward is transformed into Silver Knife ("Jack the Ripper"), a powerful voice of racism and misogyny who targets and viciously assaults the vampire prostitutes of Whitechapel. In addition to Dracula, Seward, and the other characters from Stoker’s novel, Newman incorporates a veritable "Who's who" of vampires from other works of literature and film. Lord Ruthven, Carmilla, Orlok, and Lestat, among others, are all given active roles or cameos. His reliance upon such pre-existing characters carries with it the presumption of a literate readership capable of recognizing who those characters are and thereby appreciating the roles they play in the development of his own plot. It also continues vampire fiction’s twentieth-century trend of referring back upon its own tradition, as previously witnessed in the works of King and Matheson.

Newman’s roster of vampire characters is not limited, however, to those created by other authors. Alongside Dracula and his allies are other vampires, at least as old and equally powerful in their own right. Newman creates distinctions between Dracula and these other vampires along the basis of bloodlines. Dracula’s bloodline, which comes from the East, is "dreadfully polluted," as opposed to the bloodlines of Western vampires like Geneviève Sandrine de l'Isle Dieudonné, who is "of the pure bloodline of Chandagnac" (112, 73). In effect, then, there are different vampire families: those of Dracula’s tainted bloodline and its concomitant sinister leanings, and those like Geneviève, whose motives are as honorable as her blood. This sets up the dichotomy of East/dark/polluted/evil vs. West/light/pure/good noted in earlier vampire fiction, but with the added twist here that the West already has vampires of its own. Vampirism in itself is thus no longer an automatic signifier of evil—nor is it perceived by the main characters as a supernatural phenomenon to be countered by crucifixes, garlic, and holy water. The
Van Helsing of Newman's world is dead, a victim of his own "outmoded, almost alchemical faith in folklore," and Seward now knows that "vampirism [is] primarily a physical rather than a spiritual condition" (104). Geneviève herself acknowledges, on behalf of all vampires, that "We are natural beings, like any others . . . there is no magic" (199).

By attributing vampirism to natural causes and illustrating the devastating impact of its indiscriminate spread through London, Newman equates vampirism with plague. As in I Am Legend, though, this plague does not necessarily kill—it transforms, creating a whole new race of beings who undermine the stability of the existing imperial order. United with a tremendous influx of immigrants, themselves racially "Other" as far as the British are concerned, the vampires turn London into a nexus of corruption—a place where racial distinctions blur and vampires of all nationalities, classes, genders, and ages roam. When Charles Beauregard, the novel's human protagonist, returns from abroad, he discovers "a city more strange, dangerous, and bizarre than any in his experience. No longer the heart of Empire, it was a sponge absorbing the blood of the realm until it burst" (65). The radical hybridization being enacted on the streets of London starts to unravel the cohesion of British society by exploding the neat little categories of difference that allowed British citizens a clear means of distinguishing "Self" from "Other." With the advent of Dracula's reign, the foreign "Other" infiltrates the British "Self" and produces a horrific environment in which vampires dwell in growing numbers among the "warm" (i.e. humans), on whom they literally feed.

In the world of Anno Dracula, vampires replace other minorities as the focus of racial hatred. One scene describes how "John Jago was a wild-eyed fanatic but some of the crowd listened to him. A few years ago, he would have been preaching against the Jews, or Fenians, or the Heathen Chinee. Now, it was vampires" (35). Speculation surrounding the identity of Silver Knife (a.k.a. "Jack the Ripper") reveals a populace
largely convinced that he is "certainly not an Englishman" and that "Whitechapel is a notorious nest of foreigners" (147). Moreover, a majority of those foreigners are "Jews, y'know. Can't trust an Ikey" (172). This conviction that the murderer must be foreign and is probably Jewish results in a conflation of the categories of murderer/monster/vampire/foreigner/Jew that literalizes and reflects the latent xenophobia observed in the original Dracula.

When it comes to portrayals of women, Newman's novel makes use of several of the now-familiar stereotypes found in male-authored vampire fiction. The three female vampires whom Dracula brings to London with him from the East are described as "appetite[s] on legs, mindlessly preying" (17). When Dracula first arrives in England women succumb easily to his foreign charm, and the bitter voice of John Seward recalls the fate of Lucy Westenra:

In this world of titles, a Wallachian Prince trumps an English lord. The Count, having come ashore from the Demeter, fixed his sights on Lucy and began to make a vampire of her. No doubt the fickle girl welcomed his advances. In the course of an examination, when she was brought to London and Art called me in, I ascertained that her hymen had been ruptured. I deemed Art a swine of the first water to so pre-empt his marriage vows. Having kicked about the world with the future Lord Godalming, I'd no illusions as to his respect for the sanctity of maidenhood. Now I can find it in myself to feel sorry for the Art of those days, worried sick over his worthless girl, made as big a fool as I by the Light of the West, who would submit by night to the Beast of the East. (103)

The sexual nature of Dracula's assault upon British womanhood is explicit here, as is Seward's contempt for that womanhood and what he perceives as its inherent sexual weakness. Even Mina, the paragon of British female virtue in Stoker's novel, becomes a "new-born wanton, her night clothes shredded away from the voluptuous white of her body" (132). As a vampire she drinks the blood of her dead husband offered to her by Dracula and turns on the remaining four members of the Crew of Light. Instead of
leading the Crew to the vampire, she leads Dracula and other vampires to the Crew, "wearing trousers and an old tweed jacket," with her "hair done up under a cap" (133). Contact with Dracula has freed her from Victorian constraints upon sexuality and dress and vampirism, to her, is "a liberation. In life, she had been stronger than her husband, stronger than most men. As an un-dead, she was stronger still." She proves this by taking the established Western male authority figures from the original Dracula and handing them over to the forces which seek their destruction. In doing so, she furthers the ongoing tendency of male-authored vampire fiction to present active, assertive women as a genuine threat to the patriarchal status quo—as "devil's advocates," so to speak.

Kim Newman's Dracula not only usurps the bodies of women who "belong" to British men through engagement or actual marriage—he kills or converts those men, thereby rendering them impotent against him both in the bedroom and in the political arena. Dead, Jonathan Harker can neither plot Dracula's destruction nor father a son by Mina to carry on his legacy. Converted, Lord Godalming becomes a vampire eager to curry favor with Dracula in order to preserve his own existence. Significantly, Dracula's triumph in the bedroom is a necessary prelude to his triumph over the throne. Women are the key to his power in England. Lucy, Mina, and Queen Victoria are the only

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18 See Newman 133. A lesser female character, Bearegard's human fiancée Penelope, "[vows]...never to submit to a man's lusts, never to bear children" (281). She actively seeks to become a vampire, and when she does she follows Mina's example and dresses like a man. As she walks down the road in her new garb, she is conscious of the fact that "Nobody even stare[s] or passe[s] comment on her unusual dress. Men had kept the convenience of their clothing to themselves. She felt somewhat piratical, like Anne Bonney" (283). For Penelope, as for Mina, vampirism means freedom from patriarchal constraints and access to social and political advantages which men had previously maintained exclusive. She is well aware that she is breaking convention, and she revels in her newfound power to do so.
individuals whom he turns into vampires, and it is only through Victoria that he is able to assert the legitimacy of his rule. When Victoria commits suicide, that legitimacy is removed and the seeds of revolt are sown.

Among the forces for good in *Anno Dracula*, the vampire woman Geneviève stands out as a character whose strength is more than a match for the decadent male vampires of Dracula's lineage. Yet along with her intelligence and physical strength, she possesses fundamental uncertainties about her own status as a woman. In one instance, she reflects that she "could not become pregnant or give birth. Did that mean she was not truly alive? Not truly a woman? It was said that vampires were genderless, the sex of their bodies as functional as the eyes on the wings of a peacock" (214). On another occasion, she observes that "vampire females...do not menstruate. That curse was lifted forever. As a woman, she was dead..." (276). Both quotes reveal her conviction that menstruation and childbearing are crucial to female identity. This tendency of the novel's strongest female character to believe that her value as a woman rests solely in her body's capacity to perform purely biological functions is striking. She has survived centuries of persecution as a vampire and stands ready to challenge Dracula himself, but the swiftness with which she devalues her own ingenuity, courage, and endurance against her inability to reproduce suggests her wholesale complicity in patriarchal assumptions re: what a woman must accomplish in order to be "fulfilled." Instead, it is Geneviève's human lover, Beauregard, who values her self-assertiveness:

Geneviève was unlike any of the women, warm or undead, he knew. Whether by choice or from necessity, women seemed to stand to one side, watching, passing comment, never acting... Geneviève Dieudonné was not a spectator. She reminded him a little of Pamela. Pamela had always wanted, *demanded* to be involved. (187-188)

The fact that Beauregard's human wife, Pamela, died in childbirth and Geneviève bemoans her own inability to bear children lends this connection between the two women
a bitter irony. The fates of both suggest strongly that, for women, the only way to escape the strictures of patriarchally defined sex roles is to die or become a vampire. Indeed, all of the active, interesting women in the novel are either vampires or dead—they’re not *human*. The underlying message is that strong females are aberrations who must be killed off, made monstrous, or both in order to preserve male supremacy.

Misogyny has a powerful advocate in *Anno Dracula* through the voice and deeds of Jack Seward, whose identity Newman has merged with that of Jack the Ripper/"Silver Knife." According to Beauregard, the latter "[gets] his jollies cutting up vampire women," and "although the victims [are] not conventionally violated, it [is] obvious the crimes [are] sexual in nature" (151). Seward is obsessed with the dead Lucy—specifically, with his memories of her rejection of his suit. While he could have accepted her surrendering her body to Arthur Godalming, a friend and fellow white British male of the upper class, he cannot abide her submission to Dracula, the vampire/foreign invader. From Seward's perspective Dracula has polluted Lucy, and Seward's contempt for her willing participation in her own corruption is clear. Even so, he desires her. He dreams of her as a vampire, and his frustrated lust is channeled into hatred—of her, for inflaming and rejecting his passion, and of himself, for feeling such passion toward a woman who could consort with a foreign monster (165). In his mind, the openly expressed sexuality of Lucy and, later, of vampire women generally, is a disease from which it is his righteous duty to "deliver" them (197). His chosen method of "deliverance" is a silvered blade with which he penetrates their bodies in graphic, murderous detail. Just as Dracula stalked and violated human women, Seward stalks and violates vampire women in a grim parody of his adversary's lust for blood. In the process, like Robert Neville before him, he is transformed into a monster who kills, as the vampire does, without remorse.

Finally, by the end of the novel, the existing British empire is beginning to crumble under the weight of Dracula's corrupt reign. "India [is] in open revolt, and there
[are] stirrings in Africa and points east" (382-382). Within Britain itself, Dracula's efforts to subdue the populace are failing. According to the novel's omniscient narrator, "the heavier the hand of authority became, the more people resisted. The latest fashion was for warm Londoners of all classes to black their faces like minstrels and call themselves "natives" (382). Indeed, thanks to Dracula, they now know what it feels like to be on the receiving end of a foreign invasion, and their act of blacking their faces symbolizes a recognition of kinship with the colonized, with the native populations in lands which they themselves had once exploited. Stephen Arata has described the threat of Dracula's reign as "a terrifying reversal" in which

the colonizer finds himself in the position of the colonized, the exploiter becomes the exploited, the victimizer victimized. Such fears are linked to a perceived decline—racial, moral, spiritual—which makes the nation vulnerable to attack from more vigorous, "primitive" peoples. (623)

While the original Dracula presents the ruling white Western patriarchy as living in terror of being racially "Othered" by vampire contamination, Newman's ironic revision has that same patriarchal British citizenry openly claiming for themselves the identity of the minority, of the racially Other, in an effort to tap into the subversive potential that a united embrace of such a position can convey. Just as Dracula has proven the permeability and subsequent fragility of the British imperium to forces which are Other to it, so Dracula's own usurped power over that imperium proves vulnerable to those whom it designates as Other. By the novel's end, the reader is left with only one certainty: the utter instability of empire promoted by the collapse of the national, cultural, and racial boundaries that perpetuate it. In Anno Dracula and similar male-authored twentieth-century vampire novels, socio-political chaos is the vampire's legacy.
CHAPTER 3  
Carnal Pleasures: Race, Gender, Sexuality, and the Politics of Gothic Seduction

Like their counterparts in male-authored vampire fiction, vampire characters in works by women tend to be quite attractive creatures. Their bodies combine incredible beauty with equally incredible strength—traits which allow them to move easily and often with impunity through human society. Seductive and compelling, they survive by exploiting humanity's reliance upon surfaces/appearances as signifiers of truth, as well as triggers for sexual desire. Herein lies an intriguing aspect of the connection between women and the vampires they create.

In Western society, women are encouraged to be extremely conscious of their bodies. "How do I look?" is the perpetual question fostered by a worldview which stresses looks/physical beauty/sex appeal as a primary venue through which women may hope to achieve status/recognition. Small wonder, then, that women should find a certain appeal in a character which has eternal—and effortless—youth and beauty at its disposal. The vampires of Anne Rice, for instance, are creatures who can be seen in mirrors, and who openly confess that they enjoy looking at their own reflections. This quality of stereotypical female vanity is given a deadly twist, however, because the beauty of vampire characters created by Rice and other women is neither passive nor ornamental. It is an aggressive, predatory mask that conceals often deadly intentions while sparking sexual desire in humans of both sexes, rendering them vulnerable to whatever designs the vampire has in mind. To this degree, it mimics the beauty of vampires created by male authors. Female authors tend to carry the attraction of the vampire further than their male counterparts, however, by romanticizing it. In other words, vampire beauty in
novels by women incorporates but typically surpasses pure sex appeal and enters the realm of aesthetics and interpersonal relationships. These vampires are driven by more than just a lust for blood or power—they are driven by love, by empathy, by a desire for communion with humans, with each other, and with their own unwritten history. Fundamentally, all of these drives are pointed toward one goal: survival.

In *The Vampire Tapestry*, Susy McKee Chamas has created in Weyland, the novel's vampire protagonist, an urbane, educated monster who acquires access to his victims via his respectable status as a college professor and his cultured good looks, which are so pronounced that they set him apart as "Other." His sex appeal is apparent to all who encounter him. One female faculty member observes that "half the faculty—of both sexes—are in love with the man," while another female character notes that Dr. Weyland is "kind of cute, in a gloomy sort of way . . . When he smiles you'd be amazed how good he looks; he could really turn a girl on" (Chamas 18, 30). Chamas makes it clear, however, that this attraction is far from supernatural. Like other predators, Weyland is "kind of cute, in a gloomy sort of way . . . When he smiles you'd be amazed how good he looks; he could really turn a girl on" (Charnas 18, 30). Charnas makes it clear, however, that this attraction is far from supernatural. Like other predators, Weyland is a product of evolution, a separate species, and his appearance is not a gratuitous endowment. Katje de Groot, the human female protagonist in the first segment of the book (entitled "The Ancient Mind at Work"), is well aware of this fact. She herself has a hunting background, acquired from the years she spent growing up in colonial Africa, and she observes how others on the campus around her behave in the presence of Weyland. From her perspective, "these people were spellbound, rapt under his rule, enjoying his domination of them. They saw nothing of his menace, only the beauty of his quick hawk-glance and his panther-playfulness" (38). She also notes that "For overcivilized people to experience the approach of such a predator as sexually attractive was not strange . . . the great cats were all beautiful, and maybe beauty helped them to capture their prey" (41). This type of dangerous attraction is an element of
Weyland's character which persists throughout the novel, and he uses it to disarm the humans around him. To this extent, it is a vital hunting tool.

Given the established trend of endowing literary vampires with beautiful bodies, Weyland's appearance is not a striking convention by itself. What is more intriguing about this vampire, body-wise, is his vulnerability. In a state of health, Weyland is "astonishingly, appallingly strong"—but not supernaturally so (106). His body proves as prone to damage by ordinary weapons as that of any living creature. As he moves aggressively toward Katje de Groot her thoughts, her actions, and their immediate consequences illustrate the extent of this vampire's mortality:

Weyland . . . was an animal, not an immortal monster out of legend—just a wild beast, however smart and strong and hungry. He had said so himself . . . . She shot him twice, two slugs in quick succession, one in the chest and one in the abdomen. He did not fall but bent to clutch at his torn body, and he screamed and screamed so that she was too shaken to steady her hands for the head shot afterward. She cried out also, involuntarily: his screams were dreadful. It was long since she had shot anything. (48)

This scene is striking in its reversal of the traditional hunter/prey encounter between a vampire and a woman as established in vampire fiction by men. Instead of swooning or surrendering, Katje de Groot refuses the vampire's penetration, and she does so violently. It is Weyland's body, not Katje's, which is ultimately penetrated. Crucial to Katje's ability to resist Weyland's advance is her own, intuitive recognition of his Otherness. On an entire campus full of people, only she is capable of seeing/understanding Weyland for what he truly is. In her article, "De-fanging the Vampire: S.M. Charnas's The Vampire Tapestry as Subversive Horror Fiction," Anne Cranny-Francis expounds on this connection between woman and vampire at length:

Mrs. de Groot recognises the identity of difference, of alienation, between herself and Weyland; each feels like 'a stranger in a strange land' . . .
identification between the woman and the vampire is also an
identification of power, of strength. Having made that recognition de
Groot is able to defend herself. (159)

Contact with Weyland compels Katje de Groot to remember her childhood experiences in
Africa, to recall, as she sits trapped in the vampire's car, that "I am myself a hunter!" 1

This recognition is both emphatic and enervating, forcing her out of her role as
housekeeper and into the role of a strong, self-reliant woman, capable of acting in her
own defense. Yet when she shoots Weyland, she herself cries out in the midst of his
screams, horrified by the pain she has caused. In that instant she identifies with Weyland
the victim as well as with Weyland the hunter, and the scope of their intimacy deepens.
Through the intensity of this brief encounter, the vampire proves not to be an irresistible
monster and the woman proves not to be a ready-made victim. Both characters thereby
shatter the molds established for them in vampire fiction by men.

Subsequent to the penetration of his body by Katje's bullets, Weyland's character
becomes thoroughly feminized. In the second section of the novel, "The Land of Lost
Content," Weyland has been transformed from a self-assured, predatory male into a
victim held captive by other aggressive, self-serving males. During his tenure trapped in
Roger's apartment, "Bereft of power, Weyland is placed in the traditional female role.
Restrained in a cell-like room, he is put on display, an object of gaze, his subjectivity
denied" (Cranny-Francis 162). In one scene Alan Reese, a Satanist who wants to exploit
Weyland's vampirism to enhance his own sense of power, is described as "grip[ping] and
twist[ing] the passive body of the vampire brutally" (74). Weakened by his wounds,

1 See Charnas, Vampire Tapestry, p. 22. Since her husband's death Katje herself has
been alone in the American landscape, isolated on campus, an alien out of place who
dreams of saving enough money to return home to Africa. The outsider in her recognizes
kinship with the vampire, Dr. Weyland, and her repeated associations of his behavior
with that of predatory animals echoes memories of her own "long-ago girlhood spent
prowling for game in a landscape of yellow grass."
Weyland is compelled by hunger to partake in blood feedings staged for the amusement of select groups on onlookers, and that amusement is couched in sexual terms. These voyeurs watch and wonder: "Didn't you get shivers watching him press against a person the way he did and suck on their necks like that? That was worth the money. Was it like sex for the vampire?" (90). Mark, the young boy who shares the apartment with his uncle, Roger, observes this peep-show mentality and is highly conscious of the degradation Weyland is suffering. In a conversation with the vampire, he says "It isn't just eating to the ones who come here. They make it dirty" (92).

The connection between the vampire's act of feeding and sex is nothing new in vampire fiction, but what makes this sequence different is the vampire's subordinate position. He is compelled to act not on terms of his own choosing, but on terms dictated by those who have captured and tormented him "like a chattel" (152). It is a deliberate reversal—one Chamas herself acknowledges when discussing her vampire's development:

One way that my vampire became sympathetic in the novel was through the imposition on him—by me as author, for the fun of it and to see what happened—of the victim (or "feminine") role. In fact, this has led Joanna Russ...to declare that Weyland is as much feminine as he is masculine—perhaps even more so. He is wounded, imprisoned, controlled, pursued—to some extent "feminized"—which is how he learns to act not just as a predatory male but as a human being.²

The key word here is "sympathetic." Charnas clearly wants her readers to relate to her vampire not as an evil monster, but as a fellow being, deserving of certain basic rights,

² Charnas, "Meditations" 63. Charnas further states that
...I find that in my more specifically feminist work the only male characters who are worth a damn are those who have had their own security, supposed superiority, and arrogant presumptions of privilege shattered by experiences of powerlessness and victimization which are, unfortunately, quite normal for many women in the real world. The inference is that if you walk a mile in my high heels, you won't be so quick to trample me again with your societally-issued hobnailed men's boots afterward.
including freedom, personal dignity, and survival. The capacity for sympathy in this context is specifically associated with a female subject position, and it is only when Weyland himself is compelled to endure such a subject position that his character begins to acknowledge that it, too, is a part of his identity.

The conflation of feeding/sex/rape in *The Vampire Tapestry* is explored on several other levels as well. For instance, while Weyland works as a professor at Cayslin College, there is a campus rapist stalking victims by night. The vampire and the rapist are two separate entities, but they are linked by the fact that they are both predatory males who exploit the bodies of others to satisfy their own appetites. At one point, Katje de Groot acknowledges that "Weyland was using the rapist's activities as cover" (47). By juxtaposing the vampire and the rapist in this "collusion" of sorts, Chamas emphasizes the threat of penetration latent in all male bodies and connects that penetration not with a mutually gratifying aspect of sexuality, but with violence. When Katje successfully refuses to be "violated," the reader understands the exact nature of the male power she has thwarted/usurped.

In another interesting twist, Weyland does not possess the trademark fangs with which fictional vampires are typically endowed. Instead, he has "a sort of sting on the underside of [his] tongue" which "probably erects itself at the prospect of dinner" (74). The phallic imagery here is unmistakable, and the mouth replaces the genitals as the primary erogenous zone. Seduction, for Weyland, is merely a necessary prelude to the ultimate goal of feeding, and "once [his] hunger is active, sexual arousal is impossible" (137). Though he can engage in sexual activity for the sake of appearances, his "sexual equipment is clearly only detailed biological mimicry, a form of protective coloration," useless for reproduction (142). His victims of choice are typically women and homosexual men, and he prefers the latter for reasons which are worth quoting at length:
I take what is easiest. Men have always been more accessible because women have been walled away like prizes or so physically impoverished by repeated childbearing as to be unhealthy prey for me. All this has begun to change recently, but gay men are still the simplest quarry. . . . no doubt you see me as one who victimizes the already victimized. This is the world's way. A wolf brings down the stragglers at the edge of the herd. Gay men are denied the full protection of the human herd and are at the same time emboldened to make themselves known and available.

On the other hand, unlike the wolf I can feed without killing, and these particular victims pose no threat to me that would cause me to kill. Outcasts themselves, even if they comprehend my true purpose among them they cannot effectively accuse me. (136-137)

Although couched in purely practical survival terms, Weyland's commentaries on both the historical state of women and the current subject position of gay men in Western society reveal his awareness of oppression and its consequences—an understanding seldom expressed in vampire texts authored by men. Furthermore, the vampire's use of the phrase "outcasts themselves" indicates his awareness that he, too, is a fringe-dweller compelled to negotiate his existence according to the terms of a society which fails to include him. As a predator of humans he is at the top of the food chain—a "superior" being. Yet he is also one of a kind, and because he is alone (a minority) he must conform to human expectations in order to survive. Charnas herself acknowledges that "he is alien to the forms of social exploitation of which he makes use. They are inventions of ours, not his, and he has to teach himself how to use them" (Charnas, "Meditations" 61). Hence, Weyland learns how to "work the system" to his own advantage. It is a system he doesn't believe in—in fact, he hates it. But he knows what he must do to make a place for himself, and he does it, claiming a name (Dr. Edward Lewis Weyland) and with it an identity (anthropology professor) and a subject position (highly educated and respected

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3 See Charnas, _Vampire Tapestry_ p. 143. In one especially revealing moment with Dr. Floria Landauer, he states: "Humans are my food. I draw the life out of their veins. Sometimes I kill them. I am greater than they are. Yet I must spend my time thinking about their habits and their drives, scheming to avoid the dangers they pose—I hate them."
white professional male) from which he is able to exert influence of his own. To this extent, he is much like any woman/minority/Other who achieves success as it is defined within the bounds of a patriarchal society.

It is important to recognize, however, that Weyland's "assimilation" is a camouflage, rather like the spots of the leopard to which he is often compared. His contempt for his human prey, whom he refers to as "cattle" and "livestock," is obvious. When therapist Floria Landauer poses the question, "How did he feel about the victim as a person?" his response is merely, "She was food" (148). Utterly self-absorbed, the vampire uses and discards his victims without regret. Weyland refuses to describe an encounter with another man from the man's point of view because he "must draw the line at erasing the necessary distance that keeps predator and prey distinct" (138). It is precisely this "necessary distance," or lack of empathy, which permits Weyland to maintain his position of power, his ability to exploit those upon whom he feeds. As a hunter enacting the values of a dominant patriarchal society, the vampire is emblematic of standard male attitudes/behavior toward women, toward minorities—toward any groups or individuals whom that society has designated as Other. It is also the aspect of Weyland's character which Charnas persistently critiques, first by having Weyland shot by a woman, then by placing him in therapy sessions with a female clinical psychologist who asks penetrating questions.

The relationship between Weyland and Floria Landauer is best described as an extended seduction. Once again, however, there are some important distinctions between this vampire/woman connection and those typically portrayed in vampire novels by men. The first involves Floria's position of authority. Weyland has placed himself under her scrutiny, and it is her recommendation re: his mental stability which will determine whether he can resume his position at Cayslin College. She herself is a doctor, and the questions she poses compel the vampire to reveal his most secret thoughts and feelings.
Instead of a reclining female victim who submits to the vampire's bite, the reader is presented with two characters seated opposite each other who relate to each other as equals. Weyland never uses Floria for "food." Rather, the two engage in behavior which closely mirrors Weyland's analysis of the chemistry between a pair of dancers: "... when a man and a woman dance together, something else happens. Sometimes one is hunter, one is prey, or they shift these roles between them" (157). This shifting of roles is an acknowledgment of the fact that individual self-expression within human relationships is not so easily reduced to one-dimensional binary roles like masculine/feminine or predator/prey. Weyland and Floria express this complexity of interaction as Weyland's therapy progresses and the balance of power shifts back and forth between them.

Given the traditional fate of women as portrayed in vampire novels by men, it is interesting that Chamas has Floria respond to Weyland in a "typical" romantic fashion. The character finds "something attractive in his purely selfish, predatory stance—the lure of the great outlaw" (144). After a number of sessions, she starts to see him as a "dark angel... a predator" whose "basic animal integrity" she "long[s] for... in the higgledy-piggledy hodgepodge of [her] life" (161). Such responses suggest that she will easily submit to the vampire's appetite—but this does not happen. Instead, as an intelligent, self-aware woman, she makes a fundamental recognition regarding Weyland's outlaw mystique and her own reaction to it:

... anyone leans toward him sexually, to him a sign his hunting technique has maneuvered prospective victim into range, maybe arouses his appetite for blood. I don't want that. "She was food." I am not food, I am a person. No thrill at languishing away in his arms in a taxi while he drinks my blood—that's disfigured sex, masochism. My sex response in dream signaled to me I would be his victim—I rejected that, woke up.4

4 Charnas, *Vampire Tapestry* 158. Floria's rejection of aggressive male sexuality is foreshadowed by Mark, the boy who frees and subsequently feeds Weyland. From Mark's perspective, the vampire's hunger is fearsome when experienced firsthand:
Floria's absolute rejection of the status of "victim" echoes that of Katje de Groot, but without the necessity of violence, and the vampire/woman connection moves beyond mere identification into the realm of relation. Weyland, meanwhile, is troubled by Floria's seductive influence on him:

What will this work that you do here make of me? A predator paralyzed by an unwanted empathy with his prey? A creature fit only for cage and keeper? . . . Do you see? The more you involve yourself in what I am, the more you become the peasant with the torch! (162)

Within the context of the novel, this image of the torch-bearing peasant combines with the legend of the virgin who draws the unicorn to its death to establish Floria herself as a threat. Both the woman and the vampire are potentially dangerous to each other, but that danger is pushed into the background as they begin to establish a relationship and to accept each other as unique. The therapy sessions create an environment in which empathy between vampire and woman is achieved and acknowledged by both characters. In no scene is this more evident than when Floria takes Weyland to her bed. The idea is hers, not his, and the encounter is not one of rape, but of mutual pleasure and consent. Moreover, from the vampire's perspective, this particular sex act is not conflated with eating. It is a merging, a communion of equals/Others elegantly expressed in Floria's postcoital reflection: "Your mind grappled with my mind, my dark leg over your silver one, unlike closing with like across whatever likeness can be found" (177-178). Charnas deliberately chooses to move beyond the depersonalized and often sordid appetites which so often characterize vampire/woman interaction in fiction by men. Additionally, having established earlier that Weyland dislikes sex and prefers to satisfy himself through

To have someone spring on you like a tiger and suck your blood with savage and single-minded intensity—how could anybody imagine that was sexy? He would never forget that moment's blinding fear. If sex was like that, they could keep it (110).

This description clearly conflates the vampire's act of feeding with an act of rape.

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masturbation, Charnas makes his desire for intimacy with Floria a striking move toward empathy. "How did you grow so real?" he asks her. "The more I spoke to you of myself, the more real you became" (175). Communication (in this case, the shared knowledge of Weyland's secret existence) enables mutual respect and trust, allowing woman and vampire to revise the old stories of the virgin and the unicorn. After Weyland leaves, Floria notes that she has been dancing...[i]n a clearing in the enchanted forest with the unicorn...but not the way the old legends have it. According to them, hunters set a virgin to attract the unicorn by her chastity so they can catch and kill him. My unicorn was the chaste one, come to think of it, and this lady meant no treachery. No, Weyland and I met hidden from the hunt, to celebrate a private mystery of our own... . . . (177)

In their celebration of this "private mystery," the vampire and the woman transform the roles laid out for them in vampire fiction by men and make those stories their own. This appropriation of an old legend to serve a new purpose is precisely what occurs throughout the novel as a whole. Bodily boundaries are transgressed and sex is a key element of the interaction between vampire and woman, but in Charnas's novel the consequences of these plot devices are critically different from their counterparts in the works of Stoker, Strieber, and other men. Charnas replaces contamination with communication, weakness with strength, rape with love, and self-gratification with self-

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5 See Charnas "Meditations," p. 67. Given the stereotypical male preoccupation with sex, Weyland's distaste for the act is worth noting. Charnas deliberately uses this detail to allow her vampire to move beyond the human male tendency to view women's bodies purely as aids to self-gratification. Her message seems to be that when sex is deemphasized, love can achieve prominence:

So when I write about a vampire who generally finds sex disgusting and is mostly impotent anyway, what happens? He cannot help but incline, ruinously for himself, toward those who have taken the enormous risk of putting themselves into his power knowingly and, in some sense, lovingly. With the courage of love, the hopefulness of love, they reach across the immense gap between species, and what is brave and hopeful in him is awakened and responds.
sacrifice as she moves her vampire beyond purely predatory male impulses and allows him to show vulnerability, thereby making him more "human." In effect, the author has written her own version of "Beauty and the Beast." On one level, her appropriation and re-characterization of these stock fairy tale figures within the context of a contemporary vampire narrative functions as an exploration of the deployment of power in heterosexual relationships. More specifically, it naturalizes "male" predatory impulses (embodied by Weyland) which it then proceeds to neutralize via Floria's "female" capacity for sympathy. In *From the Beast to the Blonde: On Fairy Tales and Their Tellers*, Marina Warner explores this dynamic, stating

> When women tell fairy stories, they also undertake this central narrative concern of the genre—they contest fear; they turn their eye on the phantasm of the male Other and recognize it, either rendering it transparent and safe, the self reflected as good, or ridding themselves of it (him) by destruction or transformation. At a fundamental level, 'Beauty and the Beast' in numerous variations forms a group of tales which work out this basic plot, moving from the terrifying encounter with Otherness, to its acceptance, or, in some versions of the story, its annihilation. In either case, the menace of the Other has been met, dealt with and exorcized by the end of the fairy tale; the negatively charged protagonist has proved golden, as in so many fairy tales where a fierce bear or loathsome toad proves a Prince Charming. The terror has been faced and chased; the light shines in the dark places. (276-277)

At the end of their encounter Weyland leaves and Floria is thereby "rid" of her "beast." Both characters are transformed by their psychological and physical intimacy with each other, through which they learn not only about each other but about themselves. The

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6 Recall the previous mention of Weyland's "feminization" in the second chapter. The vampire's vulnerability here is likewise explicitly linked to his capacity to identify with the female subject position within a patriarchal society. According to Charnas, "the only "good" male is a feminized male; or, the only male with any likelihood of behaving like a decent human being is a male who has been deprived of his automatic swagger-privileges and so has some insight into what it means to live in the world without them, that is, to live like a woman (or child or animal, etc.)." See Charnas, "Meditations," p. 63.
mutual aspect of change is worth noting here, particularly when Charnas has her female protagonist pondering whether that change should be constituted as "damage." At the end of the chapter, Floria stares out her window at the city and indulges in a lengthy reverie:

... There's your enchanted forest, my dear, all nitty-gritty and not one flake of fairy dust. You've survived here, which means you can see straight when you have to. Well, you have to now.

Has he been damaged? No telling yet, and you can't stop living while you wait for the answers to come in. I don't know all that was done between us, but I do know who did it: I did it, and he did it, and neither of us withdrew until it was done. We were joined in a rich complicity—he in the wakening of some flicker of humanity in himself, I in keeping and, yes, enjoying the secret of his implacable blood hunger. What that complicity means for each of us can only be discovered by getting on with living and watching for clues from moment to moment. His business is to continue from here, and mine is to do the same, without guilt and without resentment... the aim is individual responsibility. From that effort, not even the lady and the unicorn are exempt.

... Maybe I'll try just existing for a while, and letting grow in its own time my understanding of a universe that includes Weyland—and myself—among its possibilities.

Is that looking out for myself? Or am I simply no longer fit for living with family, friends, and work? Have I been damaged by him—by my marvelous, murderous monster? (180-181)

Floria's thoughts here are remarkable for a number of reasons. First, complicity between woman and vampire is not implied, but stated directly and linked with a strong awareness of the self as individual and independent. The word "damage" in this context implies harm, but within a very specific parameter. Both characters are "damaged" in terms of their capacity to continue behaving strictly in accordance with what the dominant culture has established as "natural" for their respective genders. For instance, Weyland begins to respond emotionally to Floria as an individual. He starts to care about her, becoming more "human" in the process. As noted earlier in this chapter, Charnas explicitly links "humanity" with the female subject position, which she constructs in opposition to Weyland's predatory "male" instincts. Prior to meeting Weyland, Floria is a
psychotherapist who devotes all of her time and energy to her patients and thereby serves as a model of the patriarchal ideal of "feminine" self-sacrifice. After her encounters with the vampire, she learns to be more "selfish" (181). In particular, she transfers her practice to another therapist for an unspecified period of time and refuses to continue serving as mother-figure to an overly dependent adult male patient. In this relationship between woman and vampire, Otherness is not exorcised but mutually incorporated as part of the self. Weyland is no Prince Charming, but he does represent a terror which the female protagonist has faced and learned to accept as a very real possibility in the world.

By the start of the fourth chapter, "A Musical Interlude," Weyland has had his body penetrated by the bullets of one woman and his mind penetrated by the psychological treatment of another. Both experiences de-stabilize his strictly predatory attitude and leave him sensitized to the subject position of his prey as well. His reaction to viewing a live performance of the opera, *Tosca,* reveals the extent of this conflicting identification.

Within the scope of Puccini's opera, the role of Scarpia mirrors that of the vampire. He, too, is a "monster," and it is his wholehearted devotion to his male sexual appetite which makes him so. Yet it is precisely this embodiment of aggressive male sexuality and its threat of forced penetration to which the female spectators are drawn. Watching Scarpia, they feel a romantic attraction akin to the fascination which Floria Landauer felt for Weyland. As one woman in a tailored suit explains,

I know Scarpia's an awful monster . . . but he has such wonderful music, so mean and gorgeous, it makes the old heart go pitapat. I'm always a bit ashamed of loving Puccini's operas—there's that current of cruelty—but the melodies are so sensuous and so lyrical, your better judgment just melts away. (199)

Another woman in the balcony concentrates her attention on Scarpia, noting that

Now he had wrung from Tosca assent to her own rape, he was deceitfully arranging Cavaradossi's supposedly mock execution in exchange. This
was worth coming all the way from Buffalo. Scarpia was such a nasty brute, but so virile—better than Telly Savalas. (210)

These images of female assent to their own domination and violation have strong roots in Gothic literature as a whole. In her book-length study on the subject, *In the Name of Love: Women, Masochism, and the Gothic*, Michelle Massé asserts that such

[m]asochism is the end result of a long and varyingly successful cultural training. This training leaves its traces upon individual characters and upon the Gothic itself, which broods upon its originating trauma, the denial of autonomy or separation for women, throughout the centuries. Women's schooling in masochism, the turning inward of active drives, seems to naturalize that denial and makes it appear to spring from within rather than without. (3)

Charnas herself seems to support this analysis, indicating further that "the predator-male identity is endowed with romantic trappings by women to make life in the world that is run by and for this identity bearable."7 She also recognizes, however, that such romanticism is potentially dangerous, and she voices that recognition through Floria Landauer when she allows the character to see her own fascination with the vampire for what it is: "disfigured sex, masochism." Floria then actively rejects her potential status

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7 Charnas, "Meditations" 62. Note also *In the Name of Love* (p. 3 and p. 26) where Massé observes that "Girls who, seeking recognition and love, learn to forget or deny that they also wanted independence and agency, grow up to become women who are Gothic heroines. The ideology of romance insists that there never was any pain or renunciation, that the suffering they experience is really the love and recognition for which they long or at least its prelude." In the process of romanticizing her male partner, the Gothic heroine typically ignores her own desires and her own pain at their lack of fulfillment, concentrating instead on the needs of her partner. This culturally constructed gendered behavior in which a woman willingly submits herself to a domineering man often produces "physical and psychological destruction as [the woman] fail[s] to merge [her] identity entirely" with that of her partner.

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as victim—a sign that she has achieved what Massé has termed "the spectator's active knowledge," through which a female character witnesses the suffering of other women and understands that victimization happens but that her real identity is not as a victim. Her self-definition points to the next steps in escaping the Gothic: personal responsibility, the knowledge that her own plight is common to other women, and identification of the systemic forces that help to make masochistic Gothic women. (240)

For astute readers Floria's self-aware and ultimately self-assertive vantage point is clearly not evident in the broader female populace as the novel portrays them. Although these women are never shown to be victimized, their responses toward aggressively sexual males reveal an internalized acceptance (even desire) for their own submission. Again, parallels between Chamas's novel and "Beauty and the Beast" are evident. The romantic attachment which these women feel for Scarpia (and even, by extension, Floria's continued fascination with Weyland as her "marvelous, murderous monster") is illuminated at length by Marina Warner:

The disenchantments of the Beast take many forms, not all of them benign; women have remained consistently intrigued. As Karl Capek has commented: 'The same fiction of evil which quickens events in fairy stories also permeates our real lives.' It would be easy to dismiss these visions of the Beast's desirability as male self-flattery, and female collusion with subjection, or, even more serious, as risky invitations to roughness and even rape. But to do so misses the genuine attempt of the contemporary versions of the fairy tale, in certain metamorphoses of its own, to face up to the complicated character of the female erotic impulse... what threatens women consumers—and makers—of fairy tales above all is the identification of the Beast with some exclusively male positive area of energy and expression.

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8The clothing detail of the one woman in particular—the tailored suit, a sign of corporate status/success in a male-dominated environment—suggests that despite her own authority, she still desires to be dominated by a powerful male.

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The journey the story has itself taken ultimately means that the Beast no longer needs to be disenchanted. Rather, Beauty has to learn to love the beast in him, in order to know the beast in herself. (312)

Under this interpretation, the fascination which the vampire and other aggressive males hold for female characters in *The Vampire Tapestry* is inextricably bound up with the open expression of female desire and the self-knowledge which such expression promotes. Warner continues:

In popular versions, 'Beauty and the Beast' offers a lesson in female yielding and its satisfactions. The Beast stirs desire. Beauty responds from some deep inner need which he awakens... The Beast, formerly the stigmatizing envelope of the fallen male, has become a badge of the salvation he offers; Beauty used to grapple with the material and emotional difficulties of matrimony for young women; now she tends to personify female erotic pleasures in matching and mastering a man who is dark and hairy, rough and wild, and, in the psychotherapist Robert Bly's phrase, in touch with the Inner Warrior in himself.

In her encounter with the Beast, the female protagonist meets her match, in more ways than one. If she defeats him, or even kills him, if she outwits him, banishes or forsakes him, or accepts him and loves him, she arrives at some knowledge she did not possess; his existence and the challenge he offers is necessary before she can grasp it. (318)

The emphasis here is on an encounter between equals which has the potential to transform not only the Beast/vampire, but the heroine as well. Moreover, the presence of the Beast/vampire is characterized as "necessary" to this female transformation, in which knowledge of the Beast/vampire becomes equivalent to knowledge of the self.9

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Traditionally, the hero is the Byronic type—dark and brooding, writhing inside with all the residual anguish of his shadowed past, world-weary and cynical, quick-tempered and prone to fits of guilt and depression. He is strong, virile, powerful, and lost. Adept at many things that carry with them the respect and admiration of the world (particularly the world of other males), he is not fully competent in the arena where women excel—the arena of his own emotions, which are violently out of control.
Under this paradigm, Charnas continues to interrogate the exercise of power in gender roles and women's apparent complicity in their own victimization.

Sexual aggression aside, Scarpia is also interesting in terms of his androgyny. Like the vampire, he is feminized, but this is accomplished primarily through Charnas's descriptions of his clothing. Despite his large, imposing male body, he is almost daintily resplendent in silk brocade: over knee breeches and lace-trimmed shirt, a vest and full-skirted coat of a delicate pale blue. From this Dresden figure came a brutally voluptuous voice. The words... were about women: What I want I take, use, throw away, and then I go after the next thing I want. (201-202)

Scarpia is literally beautiful—but as is the case with Weyland, his beauty serves as a distraction from his deadly nature. His words, however, leave no doubt as to his agenda. In a voice described earlier as "mean and gorgeous" and here as "brutally voluptuous,"10 Scarpia asserts his own predatory attitude toward women. By reducing them to "things" which exist solely for his appetite, to be used and discarded at whim, Scarpia turns the bodies of women into commodities. Earlier, Weyland does the same when he refers to the woman he accosts in a taxi as "food." It is this aggressive impulse toward self-gratification which Weyland recognizes and with which, at first, he most strongly identifies.

Is this really the sort of man most women want? Of course not. Even as a young adolescent reading my first romances, I can't remember ever feeling that the fictional representation I was encountering had much to do with the real external world. I didn't expect to meet and marry the man of my fantasies; indeed, the warm, loving, even-tempered man I did marry has little in common with the brooding hero of romance. Instead, almost from the beginning, I identified with the hero. I saw him as Self, not Other. And I dimly recognized him as one of the archetypal figures in my own inner landscape.

The romantic hero is not the feminine ideal of what a man should be. The romantic hero, in fact, is not a man at all. He is a split-off portion of the heroine's own psyche which will be re-integrated at the end of the book.

10The conflation of beauty and violence is deliberate here, furthering the connection between Scarpia and the vampire.
As Weyland watches Scarpia and Tosca interact with each other on stage, "the pattern of the hunt [stands] vividly forth in terms that [speak] to [him]" (203). Scarpia's declarations of desire progress in intensity until "resonances from the monster's unleashed appetite [sweep] over Weyland, overriding thought, distance, judgment" (206). Yet almost immediately, as Scarpia strides toward Tosca, Weyland finds himself identifying with her subject position as well:

The breath strained shallowly in Weyland's throat. His hands ached from clenching. Tosca's cries drew from him a faint whining sound: he too had been pursued by merciless enemies, he too had been driven to the extremity of desperation. (207)

Unprepared for such an intense level of empathy, Weyland loses control of his vampire instincts. When he flees the audience and ends up killing a young actor backstage it is clear that his predatory urges still have the upper hand; however, his conflicted identification with the roles of both predator and prey are further evidence that his status as a single-minded hunter has been undermined. On stage, meanwhile, Tosca has stabbed Scarpia in yet another of the novel's key reversals. Like Katje de Groot before her, she violently rejects the penetration of her male attacker by penetrating his body with a weapon. Another male "monster" is thwarted by the actions of a strong female, and it is no coincidence that Tosca's first name is "Floria." What makes this reversal most interesting, though, is not the stabbing itself, but a conversation which takes place afterwards between an art gallery dealer named Albert McGrath and one of his female clients. When McGrath expresses his distaste for Tosca, calling it "a vulgar thriller," the client responds:

11 Prior to viewing the opera, Weyland recalls that Floria Landauer was named for this character—a fact which no doubt enhances his sensitivity to Tosca's status as potential victim. Moreover, Tosca's success in the immediate aftermath of Weyland's awkward, inefficient kill significantly undercuts the vampire's image as a supremely powerful, invincible hunter.
Other people [think so], too; they honestly feel that Tosca's just a vulgar thriller . . . I think what shocks them is seeing a woman kill a man to keep him from raping her. If a man kills somebody over politics or love, that's high drama, but if a woman offs a rapist, that's sordid. (215)

McGrath's response is to think to himself how he "hate[s] smart-talking women," but what he really means is that he hates smart women who talk. Charnas has allowed this unnamed female character an astute observation of Western hypocrisy regarding gender and aggressively self-interested behavior. She acknowledges the patriarchal presumption that it is acceptable—even admirable—for a man to kill in the interest of his own desires; for a woman to kill in the defense of her own body, however, is depraved. Here again, Charnas interrogates prevailing social attitudes which promote male violence and female submission to that violence via de-valuation of the female body.

The final chapter of The Vampire Tapestry, entitled "The Last of Dr. Weyland," contains further reversals of gender roles as the dominant culture has constructed them. The first of these involves Dorothea Winslow, a woman who has kept an eye on Weyland since his arrival as a new faculty member on a college campus in New Mexico. In a conversation with the vampire, she tells him:

I've paid attention to you, Dr. Weyland. You have a stylized, streamlined quality, as if you were already a drawing rather than a man . . . the range of variations in the human form—that must be the explanation. But then, suppose it isn't? I like a world with wonders in it. (256)

Dorothea's insight unnerves Weyland at first, until he learns that she and her friend Letty are lesbians. Once again, patriarchal prejudices against same-sex unions will work to his advantage:

Whether a person slept with partners of one sex or the other was one of those distinctions humans invented and then treated as a tablet of the law. In this case, his own purposes were served. These women lived too eccentric a life to threaten him, no matter what they might know or guess about his own—"eccentricities." (261)
Weyland's observation clearly implies that the lesbians' marginal subject position in relation to the dominant society will prevent that society from responding to their concerns. It also reveals Weyland's sense of kinship with these women as individuals whose sexual behavior within the dominant society has been categorized as Other. Vampire eccentricities are thus, once again, linked explicitly to homosexual "eccentricities."¹²

Despite her own marginal status, however, Dorothea is a threat which Weyland cannot afford to dismiss. When Weyland's colleague, Irv, commits suicide, she confronts the vampire with his lack of feeling:

He turned to you for the support one man should be able to give another. But you're not a man, and you gave nothing. You were no goddamn good to him. (268)

Dorothea's tenacity in seeking answers to her friend's death combines with her repeated insight that Weyland is "not a man," threatening to pierce the shell of the vampire's Weyland identity and expose him to the world. Thus, yet another strong woman follows the model of Katje de Groot and drives the vampire into retreat.

A second gender reversal occurs when Weyland encounters Alan Reese. As observed in the second chapter of the novel, Weyland is "feminized" in relation to Reese, and this pattern continues with Reese having stalked Weyland across the country and broken into his home. As an aggressive, gun-wielding male intruder who plans to use drugs to turn Weyland into "a willing zombie" whose body can be manipulated according to his own designs, Reese becomes the monster who threatens "rape." This time, however, he is in Weyland's territory, and the vampire is able to challenge Reese's dominance by using what he has learned about predator-prey relationships in human

¹² Charnas's use of quotation marks around the word "eccentricities" is worth noting here, because it designates Weyland's awareness (and through him, that of the reader) that it is a label which has been externally imposed.
society. Significantly, he tempts Reese with the notion that he, too can become a vampire, stating "You came here to declare yourself my master. I want you to become my kin (277). Weyland knows that he has something which Reese wants, and he suggests that the best way for him to get it is not through an assertion of individual power, but through an establishment of equal relations which will make them both "family." By making a counter-offer, he takes his "female" subject position from mute consent into active bargaining and thereby challenges Reese's claims to authority. Moreover, Weyland continues to speak, tempting Reese with images which warrant closer examination:

The child is lost in the woods, is taken in by wolves, becomes the leader of a mythic pack ranging the forest forever.

A stranger emerges from a great star vessel to say, "Come, you are not one of these wretched little mammals, this has all been a mistake. You are one of us, mighty, wise, and immortal."

Magic reveals that the dirty peasants around one are not family; one's real father and mother are immaculate king and queen of an enchanted land . . . . All along ran the subtext, the fairy tales his lies were shadows of, so that he spoke both to the man and to the boy in the man. (278)

The aforementioned reference to fairy tales is both deliberate and subversive. Feminist critics have long interrogated the passive dependence of popular fairy tale heroines such as Snow White, Rapunzel, and Sleeping Beauty, noting their corresponding impact upon the behavior and expectations of the girls and women who have taken their stories to heart. Stripped of their agency, these heroines must rely upon others, typically males, to "save" them—a pattern of behavior which women in patriarchal societies are encouraged to follow. Here, using similar stories, Weyland achieves the same insidious effect upon the psyche of his aggressive male tormentor. By the time the vampire is

13 It should be noted here that Weyland's current academic project is a book about "predator-prey relation among human populations, and how those relationships influence human attitudes toward animal predators and prey" (Charnas 237).
finished speaking, Reese is quite literally disarmed, his "gun dang[ing] in his slack grip." Weyland is then able to attack and feed on Reese in a reversal of the male threat of penetration which, given the nature of their past relationship, is not unlike those achieved by Tosca and Katje de Groot. The act is "a perfect climax and vindication of his Weyland life," from which he can now walk away "without regret" . . . or can he? (281)

In the final pages of The Vampire Tapestry, it becomes clear that Weyland is no longer a coldly self-sufficient predator. When he realizes that word of his disappearance will ultimately reach Floria Landauer, he is shocked at his own reaction:

I care about this, he thought, alarmed . . . I care. What will happen to her? . . . The thought of her innocent and unaware in the power of Reese's creatures was intolerable. She must be told so she could have the chance to save herself . . . He spread his fingers, studying his hands with keen night vision: not the hands of a man, but the talons of a raptor. A raptor does not care. I used not to care. (282)

He remembers Mark, Floria, Irv, and Dorothea and how they have touched his life, and can no longer dismiss these humans as "cattle." Moreover, he is forced to acknowledge that for some time he has "cared enough to preserve when it was no longer secure his Weyland identity and all its ties and memories"—a decision which has placed his life in peril (283). His progression toward this moment of extended empathy has been gradual yet inevitable ever since the moment when "Katje de Groot with one utterly unlooked-for, devastating stroke . . . rent him open, body and mind, and left him vulnerable to these others" (283). In the end, he realizes that it will be futile for him to attempt to change his Weyland identity because

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14 Charnas, Vampire Tapestry 279. The gun in this passage is remarkably akin to a limp phallus, suggesting that Reese has been literally emasculated/rendered impotent by Weyland's use of fairy tale imagery.
He could not leave that which he carried with him—these people, bright as flames. For how long would they dance in his memory even after they died in the world? Time was said to fade such visions. Suppose this was untrue for him—suppose other visions were added? Crippling damage had been dealt him, and all his plans were irrelevant. He could not hunt successfully among prey for whom he might come to care. His life had been broken into, anyone might enter. (284)

Here, then, is the core image of the novel: the predatory patriarchal male body, mind, and ego (a.k.a. the vampire) penetrated by the aggressive response it provokes from a woman who refuses to become its victim. The shots of Katje de Groot turn the male power of penetration back on itself, forcing the vampire who embodies that power to experience for the first time the subject position of the penetrated/the victim/the "female." As Weyland himself observes, "his life has been broken into," and his convictions of superiority are shattered by his newfound vulnerability. The experience corrupts his predatory integrity by enabling him to identify with the thoughts and emotions of his prey, to empathize with individuals whom he subsequently encounters until, finally, he can no longer bring himself to exploit them without care. This sensitized/"feminized" vampire is thus rendered incapable of behaving as a vampire/predatory male—a loss of advantage which he rejects, stating "I am not the monster who falls in love and is destroyed by his human feelings. I am the monster who stays true" (284).

The novel closes with the vampire entering another indefinite period of hibernation, using his long sleep to forget the feelings he has learned, secure in the conviction that when he wakes he will "rise restored, eyes once more as bright and unreflective as a hawk's and heart as ruthless as a leopard's" (285). On the surface, this may seem like a victory for patriarchy and its corresponding predatory male behavior. At a deeper level, the ending is less simple. There are still powerful "reservoirs of feeling" lurking in Weyland, and his vampire identity has been neutralized, made dormant via the
power of human relationships/love. What is perhaps most striking here is the notion that, in the long run, the vampire is not to be overcome by stakes (violent, physical penetration) but by what Charnas has constructed as his own latent capacity to love. Emotional bonds, which are typically characterized in patriarchal society as "weak/feminine," are endowed with a power which equals and ultimately outlasts the male drive toward self-gratification at the expense of others. Charnas uses her vampire character to illustrate how that which the dominant society has labeled a weakness can be turned into a resisting strength.¹⁵ This constitutes a significant revision of plot conventions as established in vampire fiction by men.

_The Gilda Stories_, by Jewelle Gomez, is yet another excursion by a female author into vampire territory. Aside from being one of the few vampire novels to place a female vampire at the heart of the plot, _The Gilda Stories_ further complicates issues of race, gender, and sexuality by presenting a worldview from the perspective of a primary character who is not only a woman, but who is black and lesbian as well. From the beginning, the Girl (or "Gilda," as she is later called) possesses a highly complex identity in which every facet of her being has been labeled Other by the dominant culture even before she becomes a vampire. Vampirism, then, is merely one of a series of identity signifiers which set her apart from the mainstream/place her outside the existing power structure, and it is not even the one which attracts the most notice from Western society as Gomez portrays it. As a result, the emphasis of the novel is not so much on Gilda's vampirism per se, but on the various people she encounters and societies she lives in throughout the course of her immortal lifespan. Through Gilda's eyes, which witness

¹⁵ Earlier in the novel, Weyland gives Mark the following advice: "You live in a culture that treats childhood as a disadvantage; make a strength of that weakness" (109). Ironically, this vampire character openly advocates the subversion of the patriarchal status quo in which his own predatory activities blend so well.
200+ years of American history, the reader is privy to a unique awareness of who is empowered vs. who is not, who survives/endures vs. who does not, and whose cultural values prevail vs. whose do not. Gilda and the other vampires around her (those whom she considers "family") are astute observers of these dynamics within Western society and of their own existence within yet always on the periphery of that society. In particular, they are conscious of their own absence in terms of Western society's understanding of itself.16

Otherness is not simply a category which the dominant culture applies to Gilda and other vampire characters within the novel. It is also a quality which the vampires reflect back outward to the dominant culture. From Gilda's perspective, for instance, whites—especially white men—are Other and are cast in terms of the vampire mold so familiar from novels by Stoker and other white men. From her childhood as a slave, she recalls her mother saying that whites are "just barely human. Maybe not even. They suck up the world, don't taste it" (11). In keeping with this imagery of indiscriminate white greed, the novel opens with the Girl, an escaped slave, being pursued by a white man who threatens rape. Her body is doubly commodified in this scenario—first via her status as a black slave who is literally "owned," and second via her status as a female over whose body a male intends to assert his sexual dominance/"ownership."

Significantly, the Girl is trying to recall her mother's stories about their world before

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16 This "absence" is due as much to race, gender, and sexual orientation as it is to vampirism, since for most of the novel the dominant society remains unaware of that facet of these characters' identities.
slavery (i.e., Africa), and she perceives her white male attacker as "the beast from this other land" who is bent on "invading" her (11, italics my emphasis). What follows is a rape reversal:

He started to enter her, but before his hand finished pulling her open, while it still tingled with the softness of her insides, she entered him with her heart which was now a wood-handled knife . . . . Warmth spread from his center of power to his chest as the blood left his body. (11)

The "center of power" here is clearly phallic, linked directly with aggressive male sexuality. Like Katje de Groot and Tosca in Charnas's The Vampire Tapestry, the Girl rejects the male threat of penetration by turning that threat back on itself and surprising her attacker with an aggression to match his own. In doing so, she rejects the traditional role/status of female as victim and successfully defends the integrity of her own body—without the cumbersome "aid" of an all-male Crew of Light. The racial element lends further dimension to this scene. With the white male cast as an invading foreign beast, the Girl's body becomes a microcosm of Africa which articulates with the knife its rejection of colonization (specifically, of the power driving colonization). Male sexual desire in this context is strictly proprietary, concerned solely with claiming "ownership" of the female body and exploiting that body for its own gratification. However, instead of meekly submitting to that desire, the women in this novel use their understanding of it to their own advantage.

Women, both human and vampire, are the central characters of The Gilda Stories. It is their voices and experiences to which the reader is made privy and with which the reader is intended to empathize. This first becomes evident when the Girl is picked up by

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17 The reader should recall that in novels like Dracula and other works of vampire fiction written by men, it is usually the vampire who is portrayed as an evil invading force. Gomez takes the traditional hero of such works—the heterosexual white male—and sets him up as the true monster in this sequence. Immediately afterward it is Gilda, a female vampire, who saves the Girl's life.
Gilda (her mentor, later to become her namesake) and taken to work in the kitchen at Woodard's. Woodard's is a brothel—a place where women sell their bodies, where they "work hard hours being what others imagined women should be" (14). It is important to recognize, though, that their conformity to their patrons' fantasies is artificial. Typically, one thinks of a brothel as a place where men exploit the bodies of women. Yet Woodard's is both owned and run by women. Gilda dictates what can occur and what can be discussed in the house, and in rebuking male patrons whose conduct displeases her, she does not hesitate to assert that "the only name on the deed to this place is mine" (25). The girls who work for her "all [have] the manners of ladies, [can] read, write, and shoot." In addition, they have a passion for discussing politics and economics, spending a great deal of time in the kitchen "debating topics the Girl had heard spoken of only by men" (20). Far from being mere objects of lust, the women of Woodard's are educated, strong-willed individuals for whom the brothel represents not the permanent surrender of dignity and dreams, but a temporary means of acquiring financial security—i.e., the economic independence necessary to pursue their own goals. They sell sex, but they don't sell themselves—a critical distinction in the midst of a culture which posits sexual desirability and its corresponding commodification of the female body as a primary source of identity for women. They do not surrender to male sexual desire; instead, they exploit it by assuming full control over the circumstances in which it can be expressed. At Woodard's, sex occurs only on female terms. Violence and rape are strictly forbidden. Male power/privilege and the sexual nature of its manifestation is undercut in this place where the primacy of sexual desire in male lives and their incessant pursuit of satisfying it makes them malleable to the demands of women. The Girl learns that strong women who assert ownership over and control access to their own bodies rather than presume male rights of ownership to the same are capable of manipulating men instead of being manipulated by them. In the brothel, therefore, Gomez has constructed heterosexual
male sexual desire as the Achilles heel of male power. The women recognize this fact and typically speak of their patrons "with a tinge of indulgence as if they were children being kept busily playing while the women did important things" (30). This statement is particularly worth noting in light of the manner in which male-authored vampire fiction tends to infantilize women. In *The Gilda Stories*, it is heterosexual male characters who are often viewed with condescension by the female characters around them.

In addition to decentralizing the heterosexual male, whose views are typically at the heart of male-authored vampire fiction, *The Gilda Stories* decentralizes whiteness and European culture by focusing on the Girl/Gilda, who is black. A strong awareness of racial and cultural differences is with the Girl/Gilda from the earliest pages of the novel, often evincing itself in the form of persistent memories of her childhood as a slave, her mother, and her mother's stories of Africa. As an escaped slave living in the nineteenth-century south, she is also sensitive to the role of race in determining social status. When she meets Bird, a Lakota Indian woman working at Woodard's, she notes that Bird is the only Indian woman in the vicinity and that consequently "townsmen ranked her among their local curiosities" (14). Both characters are conscious of their own Otherness in relation to the dominant culture. In the process of teaching the Girl how to read,

Bird gazed into African eyes which struggled to see a white world through words on a page. Bird wondered what creatures, as invisible as she and the Girl were, did with their pasts . . . Bird taught Girl from the Bible and the newspaper. Neither of them could see themselves reflected there. (21)

Similarly, when the two go shopping in New Orleans, the Girl observes the behavior of the quadroons, who pretend not to see her, and of people in general who "tried to look through Bird as if she were glass and simply dismissed her as a slave" (28). Their invisibility in both scenarios is worth noting here. With their brown skin, they have no place in the acknowledged power structure of a society which privileges the fair and banishes the dark. It is only when the Girl has been educated and transformed into a
vampire that she takes a name—"Gilda"—and begins to move beyond the boundaries which society has established for her based upon the color of her skin.

Within the context of this novel, education (wisdom) combines with vampirism (physical strength/immortality) as a means of acquiring individual empowerment. As the Girl develops a fuller understanding of the Western world and of the place which it has allotted her, she acquires the psychological and physical stamina to effectively begin to challenge that placement. One way in which she defies the privileging of white skin is by looking at herself in the mirror and taking pride in what she finds there. In one instance she focuses on her hair and finds that "The kinkiness of it reassure[s] her—not at all the look of a ha'nt or spook as many thought her and her kind to be." Another time, she marvel[s] at her body's firmness. Her brown skin shone like a polished stone, the rounded stomach and full legs were unchanged from those of her ancestors. Her teeth gleamed against soft lips, and through the fog her dark eyes looked back at her as alive and sparkling as they had been when Gilda first saw herself in a looking glass 150 years before. (197)

Unlike the quadroons, who are ashamed of their African blood, Gilda affirms her African heritage throughout her life and draws strength from that affirmation.

Gilda's ability to value what the dominant society does not—i.e., her blackness—transcends the category of race to include gender as well. A strong sense of female pride is evident throughout The Gilda Stories, where women in general are portrayed as powerful individuals, capable of both drawing strength from and giving strength to each other via mutual respect and a sense of community. The protagonist's most important relationships are with other women, and their interaction reveals the extent to which Gomez believes women rely on each other for identity development, as well as for

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18 Gomez, Gilda 56. The word "spook" has a double meaning here, used both as a reference to a supernatural being and as a racial slur. Likewise, Gilda's "kind" can refer to both blacks and vampires. The statement essentially conflates blackness with vampirism.
survival and empowerment. The Girl/Gilda's strongest memories of her early life are centered on her mother and sisters, whose faces are with her in times of stress. When she encounters aggressive white men, when she moves to new places, when she is hunted for the secret of her immortality, her recollection of her female relatives' struggles during slavery gives her confidence in her own ability to endure. When she looks in the mirror, she takes pride in observing that "the dark comfort of her mother's Fulani face" lives on in her own features. Additionally, as the span of her life lengthens, she maintains close personal contact with the female generations of another black woman: Bernice, the only other African American who worked in the kitchen at Woodard's while she was there. These aspects of Gilda's character affirm the vitality of matrilineal bonds by exposing the continuity of those bonds over time. Such connections are an important carryover from the world of slavery, in which families were often separated and fathers were often either absent or unknown. As a result, black women became the cornerstones of black families, and Gomez uses Gilda's persistent recollections of her mother as a tribute to the dignity and endurance of those women.

In addition to her mother, the Girl/Gilda establishes strong bonds with other women as the novel progresses. In the first chapter she is rescued by a Creole woman named Gilda, who protects her from white men who would seek to return her to slavery. Together with Bird, Gilda educates the Girl/Gilda and initiates her into vampirism, thereby giving her the knowledge and strength she needs to survive in a world run by white men. The Girl/Gilda develops a strong attachment to Bird, with whom she shares a rich tribal heritage and a sense of racial and cultural alienation from the rest of American society. Subsequently, however, it is with black women that Gilda finds real communion. This is most evident in places within the novel where black women are gathered in significant numbers. In the 1950's Gilda's beauty salon in the South End of Boston is described as "a woman's place, open and intimate, utilitarian like a kitchen but
so easily transformed by heat and laughter. Women came [there] to be massaged by other women, made beautiful by other women" (195). Gilda enjoys her intimacy with the women on Massachusetts Avenue, whose "comradeship and energy always strengthen[s] her" (133). It is there that she is reunited with Bird, and with the help of a prostitute named Savannah, they conspire to save another young prostitute named Toya from her abusive male pimp, who is also a vampire. Later, in Riverside, New Jersey, Gilda sings at clubs and at the parties of her friend Ayeesha, where she takes pleasure in being surrounded by "enchanting women who [are] so full of ideas and plans" and finds herself "enriched" by "the women's tender hands on her back [and] the dazzling smiles they [shower] on her" (195). Mutual support and affirmation are of primary importance among these women, and though her status as a vampire sets her apart from them, Gilda consistently seeks their company, which connects her with her identity as an African-American, as a lesbian, and as a woman. To her, they represent "the substance behind the rhetoric" of the Black Power Movement:

Ayeesha . . . wrote plays and collected musicians, poets, and painters around her like the colorful beaded bracelets from West Africa that climbed halfway up her arm. Gilda looked into Ayeesha's face and those of her friends and saw Aurelia, Bernice, her mother and sisters. It was a link she searched for in each new place she lived, one she regretted breaking when she moved on. (196)

The strength of black women when they gather together is a continual source of empowerment for Gilda wherever she goes. It is also a resource that was largely neglected by the Black Power movement, and Gilda does not hesitate to critique the narrow-mindedness behind that neglect. In conversing with a male friend, she observes how

[m]ost of the men we marched with ran out of liberation ideas. They had a big dream about black men being free, but that's as far as it went. They
really didn't have a full vision—you know, women being free, Puerto Ricans being free, homosexuals being free. So things kind of folded in on top of themselves. (170)

From Gilda's perspective, by continuing to privilege a single race (black), a single gender (male), and a single form of sexual expression (heterosexuality), black men are unwittingly imitating the repressive power structure of the dominant society. Through her emphasis on the life experiences of a black lesbian vampire, Gomez speaks for the Others who have traditionally been excluded from this vision of black empowerment.

Gilda's lesbianism is a vital and active part of her identity, and her encounters with other women are an important part of her development as a character. For Gomez, desire and empowerment are inextricably linked. Through the free expression of her own sexuality, Gilda learns to value her body as an instrument capable of giving and receiving pleasure on terms of her own choosing. She also learns about the deployment of power in sexually charged relationships. This is especially evident when Eleanor, a white vampire woman described as loving "the thrill of conquest," gives Gilda a passionate kiss which awakens the first intense stirrings of her own lesbian desire (78). In controlling that desire and refusing to be bent to Eleanor's will, she rejects the white woman's presumption of an existing mistress/slave imbalance of power between them and affirms the strength of her own will.19 On subsequent occasions throughout the novel Gilda experiences free expression and fulfillment of desire with three other women: Bird, Effie, and Ermis. The pleasures of mutual exchange in these encounters in which both partners give and take from each other is quite different from the sexual aggression and manipulation so often displayed by vampires in works by male authors. Rather than instilling shame and fear in the female characters who experience it, the active

19 In refusing Eleanor's demand that she kill a white man named Samuel, a vampire of Eleanor's own making, Gilda states: "I'm no longer a servant, Miss Eleanor. We been freed" (Gomez 99).
acknowledgment of lesbian desire is a source of personal liberation and completion. In one scene, Gilda "luxuriate[s] in the weight of Effie's lean body on her own fuller one," and her appreciation of the beauty of the female body—her own, as well as the bodies of other women—is an affirmation of female sexuality which contrasts sharply with the violent censorship of female desire and sexuality common in vampire novels by men. In addition, homosexuality in this novel is never linked with pollution of bloodlines or corruption of the bodies of white females. The latter, in fact, are utterly de-emphasized as Gilda finds her greatest fulfillment with other black women.

For both male and female characters in *The Gilda Stories*, homosexuality is privileged over heterosexuality. Heterosexual relationships as Gilda witnesses them are always male-centered, based on violence and/or exploitation. With the exception of a young black man named Julius, heterosexual males are portrayed as predatory antagonists against whom the women must assert their rights of self-possession. By contrast, homosexual males like Sorel and Anthony are friends—even teachers and father figures, supportive and non-threatening because their sexual orientation prevents them from directing their desire toward and thereby objectifying women. Gay and lesbian characters act to undermine what Gomez understands as a fundamental problem in the bulk of existing vampire literature:

> Traditional vampire fiction, both black and white, has been just that—traditional. Women are victims or objects of desire. Typical male fiction naturally continues the mythology: desire equals destruction; men can have desires, women cannot; men desire women; men destroy women. (Gomez, "Recasting" 89)

By making the bulk of her vampires homosexual, Gomez places them outside the existing gender-based constraints and power plays of the dominant society. Thus liberated, vampire characters establish relationships with each other and with the humans who surround them which are mutually nurturing rather than destructive. Under these
circumstances aggression is reserved for self-defense—not conquest. The novel follows established trends of portraying homosexuality and vampirism as intimately linked, but the connection is presented as neither a problem nor a threat. Vampires do not "pollute" the dominant society; rather, they expose the spectrum of possibilities for human existence which already exists within it.

Homosexuality aside, another means by which Gilda challenges gender boundaries is by cross-dressing. In California in 1890, prior to going out to hunt at night, Gilda dons a heavy knit sweater and a man's cap. Gomez describes her as "comfortable returning to the guise of boyhood that had cloaked her during her travels west, releasing her from the pretenses and constrictions of womanhood." In explaining her clothing to a male friend/vampire, she states:

I realized before I left home there would be no place for me on the road, alone. Even with my advantages I'd be fair game for every male passerby. It seemed easier to simply keep to myself and let people make presumptions. A funny thing, though...at least four times—four times—on the road, even in a small town just east of here...four times I met others just like me. I mean women dressed like boys. Just going around from place to place trying to live free. (66)

The mere appearance of masculinity is enough to ensure that Gilda will be accorded certain freedoms—in particular, the freedom to walk the road without fear of being raped. In an era of corsets and Victorian sensibilities which stress the frailty and restriction of female bodies, mobility is a luxury denied to most women. Gilda and the other women she encounters use the dominant society's "presumptions" regarding male strength and independence to leave home and find their own way in the world. Cross-dressing enables Gilda to subvert existing codes of gender behavior and sets the stage for subsequent public assertions of her individuality by compelling others—specifically men—to recognize her as an equal. As her confidence grows, she walks alone at night, hiding neither her race nor her sex,
Gilda is clearly an oddity. She is black and female, but she is neither a slave nor a helpless victim, and her open defiance of these categories which the dominant society has assigned to her race and her sex (a defiance bolstered by her vampirism)\(^{20}\) has a powerful effect: it silences the men around her. Moreover, as a vampire in search of blood, it is \textit{she} who is the predator. In an article entitled "\textit{The Gilda Stories: Revealing the Monsters at the Margins}," Miriam Jones notes that Gomez has "spoken about the meaning of constructing a black protagonist, who because of her race has historically been hunted, as the hunter" and "characterize[d] such an inversion as 'terrifying'" (157). Terrifying indeed, for those whose power and privilege will be challenged—namely, whites. Jones emphasizes race in this predator/prey dynamic, but it must also be noted that a similar dynamic exists between men and women in Western society. Hence, those most deeply threatened by Gilda and others like her are white \textit{men}, who can no longer presume their dominance will remain unchallenged. The novel makes a poignant articulation of this fact when Gilda, alone, encounters two white men on the road at night who identify her only as a "niggah gal." Armed with a whip and leering faces, they prepare to "teach her a lesson" in submission. It is they, however, who will learn from the encounter. After breaking the neck of one of her attackers, Gilda takes the other's whip and proceeds to use it on him. The reversal of roles between "slave" and "overseer" is a shock, articulated concisely in a line which states: "That she hit him with his own whip seemed to startle him more than the pain" (113). Vampirism has endowed Gilda

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\(^{20}\) When Gilda goes out walking, "a subtle aura surrounding her usually [keeps] troublemakers at a distance so she rarely experience[s] the harassment that be[falls] most women on city streets" (203). Vampirism, which has made her physically strong and enhanced her social confidence, is certainly a key component of that "aura."
with the physical strength to resist immediate threats to her own body. Just as she usurps the male power of penetration by stabbing her would-be rapist in the novel's opening scenes, she usurps the brute bodily strength which promotes that power and turns it back on itself, preying on those who seek to prey upon her. Her repeated and successful refusal to be a victim challenges the expectations of the dominant society and establishes her as a force which members of that society may only ignore or underestimate at substantial risk to themselves.

An essential part of Gilda's vampire life is her reliance upon blood for sustenance. While she shares this need with her counterparts in works of vampire fiction by men, the symbolism of blood itself and its means of acquisition is radically different and far more complex. In *The Gilda Stories*, blood is not primarily associated with violence, pollution, or corruption. The emphasis is not on racial purity and the perpetually unstable sanctity of white female bodies, and the vampire's act of feeding is not a vicious assault akin to rape. Gomez is emphatic in distinguishing her vampires' understanding of blood and blood-drinking from the violent self-interest typical of vampire characters in fiction by men. From the perspective of Gilda and most of the other vampires she encounters, blood represents communion and exchange. When hunting, they do not terrify and drain their human prey of life. Instead, as Bird explains to Gilda,

As you take from them you must reach inside. Feel what they are needing, not what you are hungering for. You leave them with something new and fresh, something wanted. Let their joy fill you. This is the only way to share and not to rob.

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21 See Gomez, *Vampire Tapestry*, p. 114. So successful is Gilda in her usurpation of "masculine" strength in this sequence that one of her victims even begins to think that he has made a mistake, that she is really a man.

22 Gomez, *Gilda* 50. The taboo against selfishness and violence runs strong in Gomez's vampires, illustrated in numerous scenes. The original Gilda stresses to the Girl/Gilda that "the blood is a shared thing. Something we must all learn to she or simply spill onto battlefields" (44). Bird cautions her that "some [vampires] are said to live through the
There are several specific encounters between Gilda and the humans whose blood she takes which illustrate the mutual "nourishment" of both parties. One of the most memorable occurs with a young prostitute who has "lost her ability to dream":

Gilda put her lips to the trickle of blood and turned it into a tide washing through her, making her heart pump faster. Her insistent suckling created a new pulse and filled her with new life. In return she offered dreams. She held the girl's body and mind tightly, letting the desire for future life flow through them both, a promising reverie of freedom and challenge. The woman absorbed Gilda's desire for family, for union with others like herself, for new experience. Through these she perceived a capacity for endless life and an open door of possibility. (123)

This scenario clarifies that for Gilda, the blood is indeed the life—but it is not life destroyed or corrupted. Instead, it is life given.

Reinforcing the connection between blood and life is the author's persistent use of birth imagery to describe the exchange of blood which results in the creation of new vampires. In vampire fiction by men the spawning of new vampires is often treated as a contagion—an indiscriminate plague driven by uncontrolled lust for blood. In cases where individuals are deliberately chosen to become vampires, it is typically the vampires who choose. Their victims are confused, seduced by strange new desires and sensations which they cannot control and which often lead to their destruction. In *The Gilda Stories*, Jewelle Gomez makes it clear that vampirism is a choice which must be carefully pondered and mutually arrived at by vampire and human prospect. The original Gilda describes it to the Girl/Gilda as an act of love, stating that "when we feel it is right, energy of fear. That is their sustenance more than the sharing. The truth is we hunger for connection to life, but it needn't be through horror or destruction. These are just the easiest links to evoke. Once learned, this lesson mustn't be forgotten. to ignore it, to wallow in death as the white man has done, can bring only bitterness" (110). Both quotes are noteworthy for the connection they establish between blood and racially motivated violence, as well as between blood and unity with the rest of humanity. Gomez emphasizes the connection between blood and life, but she does not ignore the former's darker associations.
when the need is great on both sides, we can re-create others like ourselves to share life
with us." The language is not that of a monster plotting the expansion of an empire,
but that of a pair of human parents planning the birth of a child. Both sides have a say in
what the outcome will be. Prior to her own initiation into vampirism, the Girl/Gilda is
told that she must "choose [her] path again just as [she] did when [she] ran from the
plantation in Mississippi" (45). When she decides to offer the gift of vampirism to Julius
she introduces him to other vampires first because she does not want to "trick" or
"seduce" him, telling him "I need an ally, a brother. If you want it, life can be yours, and
we will be sister and brother throughout time" (191).

Once the choice of vampirism is accepted, the exchange of blood which follows
is literally described as a "birth." When the original Gilda takes the Girl/Gilda into her
arms and the two exchange blood, the Girl/Gilda hears "a soft humming that sound[s]
like her mother" and "curl[s] her long body in Gilda's lap like a child safe in her mother's
arms" (46). When she takes the vampire's blood she drinks from a slice in the skin of the
vampire's breast and is described as a "suckling girl." Gilda later transforms Julius the
same way, telling the other vampires when she is finished that "We finally delivered a
brother for me" (194). Life is not stolen in these encounters—it is given in a very
nurturing manner, in language which emphasizes the establishment of familial
relationships.

A final element worth considering with regard to vampire acquisition of blood in
this novel is the method of feeding itself. It has already been acknowledged that

23 Gomez, Gilda 45. A male vampire named Anthony states further that "to choose
someone for your family is a great responsibility. It must be done not simply out of your
own need or desire but rather because of a mutual need. We must search ourselves and
the other to know if it is really essential. To do otherwise is a grave error, the result of
which can only be tragedy" (69). Here again, the language describes potential parents
considering the wisdom of bringing a child into the world, and the folly of doing so
without careful planning.
vampires feed their "children" from slits they make in their own flesh. In a similar
fashion, they make slits in the flesh of their prey (typically the neck) from which they
drink. Further, Gomez's vampires heal the wounds they have made, leaving only the
dreams and ideas they give in exchange for the blood. The stereotypical phallic fangs
and penetrating bite are absent, as are the telltale bite marks which brand the person a
"victim." The connection between feeding and rape common in vampire fiction by men
is thereby de-emphasized, and vampirism itself is no longer portrayed as an exercise of
distinctly "masculine" power.24

In the final chapter of *The Gilda Stories*, which is set in the year 2050, the bodies
of vampires themselves are in danger of exploitation. Humans have discovered that
vampires exist, and Gilda and her vampire "family" have been forced into hiding to avoid
being victimized by those who would steal their gift of immortality. As Gilda observes,

> The full transfusion of [vampire] blood gave eternal life to the hungry
rich, who now sent out the Hunters to capture them. Once transformed,
however, the wealthy broke the one commandment held by her kind:
never kill one's creator. (235)

Once again, those in power within the dominant society pose a threat, and it is a threat
which Gilda recognizes. She recalls her escape from the plantation and the white man
who almost raped her, noting that "Those who came now were more silent, more expert,

24 It is also worth noting here that from a Freudian standpoint, by replacing hard, white
fangs with a narrow slit, Gomez is taking the vampire's masculine power of penetration
and "feminizing" it. Discussing the scene in which Dracula feeds Mina from a slit in his
own breast, Christopher Craft theorizes that such a wound is yet another of the sexual
displacements pervading Stoker's novel: "We are back in the genital region, this time a
woman's, and we have the suggestion of a bleeding vagina" (See Christopher Craft, "'Kiss
Me With Those Red Lips': Gender and Inversion in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*."
*Representations* 8 (1984): 125). Considering two key factors, a). the emphasis which
Gomez places upon women's bodies and female sexuality, and b). her description of
vampire reproduction via blood exchanged through similar wounds as a "birth," Craft's
interpretation may be applied to *The Gilda Stories* as well.
but essentially the same...This horror was slavery come again" (234-235). To escape she emigrates south into Mexico, heading toward Machu Picchu—"a site resonant with the history of indigenous people" where she will establish a "tribe" of her own with other vampires, including (as Miriam Jones observes) "two black lesbians, a straight black man, two gay white men, and a Native American lesbian. Barnabas Collins is pointedly not invited" (Jones 165). One might add, perhaps more accurately, that "Barnabas Collins" (i.e., the heterosexual white male) never expresses any real desire to be included. In other words, his exclusion from the new society the vampires will create is more self-imposed—a result of his own habitual dominance (and its corresponding "blindness" re: the value of difference) in a culture accustomed to the commodification and/or exclusion of women, homosexuals, and members of other races—than the result of any overt prejudice advocated by the others. Samuel, the only heterosexual white male vampire in the novel, is a tormented character driven by "childish cruelty" and the desire to manipulate others—particularly Gilda, whom he stalks. Though Anthony describes him as an unpredictable being who possesses "no real understanding of our world," the other vampires are tolerant of his excesses in the hope that one day he will embrace "the opportunity to learn to live our life" (208, 214). His absence among the vampires in the final chapter suggests, at the very least, that he continues to resist such an education.

More than any other recent works of vampire fiction by women, *The Vampire Chronicles* of Anne Rice have garnered the attention of both the public and of literary critics. The popularity of the series (*Interview With the Vampire* and *The Vampire Lestat* in particular) has led to the publication of numerous books and articles devoted to Rice's life and work, including interviews and a full-length biography by Katherine Ramsland. As a consequence, readers enjoy an opportunity for intimacy with the author which has resulted in a continued symbiosis between available biographical data and critical
insights into her fiction. This is particularly true when the latter revolve around Rice's portrayals of gender, sexuality, and body politics.

The world in which Rice’s vampires move is characterized by what critics have referred to as a "global exotic." In *Interview With the Vampire*, Louis describes New Orleans at length:

There was no city in America like New Orleans. It was filled not only with the French and Spanish of all classes who had formed in part its peculiar aristocracy, but later with immigrants of all kinds, the Irish and the German in particular. Then there were not only the black slaves, yet unhomogenized and fantastical in their different tribal garb and manners, but the great growing class of the free people of color, those marvellous people of our mixed blood and that of the islands, who produced a magnificent and unique caste of craftsmen, artists, poets, and renowned feminine beauty. And then there were the Indians, who covered the levee on summer days selling herbs and crafted wares. And drifting through all, through this medley of languages and colors, were the people of the port, the sailors of ships, who came in great waves to spend their money in the cabarets, to buy for the night the beautiful women both dark and light, to dine on the best of Spanish and French cooking and drink the imported wines of the world. Then add to these, within years after my transformation, the Americans, who built the city up river from the old French Quarter with magnificent Grecian houses which gleamed in the moonlight like temples. And, of course, the planters, always the planters, coming to town with their families in shining landaus to buy evening gowns and silver and gems, to crowd the narrow streets on the way to the old French Opera House and the Theatre d'Orleans and the St. Louis Cathedral, from whose open doors came the chants of High Mass over the crowds of the Place d'Armes on Sundays, over the noise and bickering of the French Market, over the silent, ghostly drift of the ships along the raised waters of the Mississippi, which flowed against the levee above the ground of New Orleans itself, so that the ships appeared to float against the sky. (39)

The exotic, multicultural environment of the place where Louis is born, first as a human and later as a vampire, is vividly presented in these lines. Lestat, too, favors a life spent in cities—most notably Paris and Miami. In *The Tale of the Body Thief*, he describes how

The men and women of many nations and different colors live in the great dense neighborhoods of Miami. One hears Yiddish, Hebrew, the
languages of Spain, of Haiti, the dialects and accents of Latin America, of the deep south of this nation and of the far north. There is menace beneath the shining surface of Miami, there is desperation and a throbbing greed; there is the deep steady pulse of a great capital—the low grinding energy, the endless risk. (10)

Both Louis and Lestat are drawn to major cities—not because they wish to conquer them and build an empire, but because of the heterogeneity and the carnival atmosphere. As discussed in the preceding chapter, this heterogeneity is presented as a threat to what Allon White and Peter Stallybrass have termed "the clarity of... segregation" which exists between social classes in a patriarchal society (135). White and Stallybrass further describe city streets as "shockingly promiscuous" places where people of all races, creeds, and cultures swirl. Yet while the narrators in vampire fiction by men tend to find this instability problematic, Louis and Lestat revel in it, describing the diversity around them as a beautiful phenomenon of human existence. They are cosmopolitan monsters who return again and again to the cities, not simply to satisfy their lust for blood or power, but because of their love for all things human, and because of their fascination with the dangerous possibilities inherent in such a "promiscuous" environment.

There is an intensity of feeling within Rice's vampire novels that is fostered largely by her use of the first-person voice for her vampire protagonists—in particular, Louis and Lestat. Her use of "I" enables readers to experience the world through her vampires' eyes, as well as through their other senses. Thus, sensuality is centered on the individual self and on validating that individual self's unique physical experience of the world. For Rice, identity/self-knowledge and wisdom in general is inextricably tied to the materiality of the body, to the experience of living "in the flesh." She makes this belief central to her vampires' philosophical outlook and allows Maharet, one of the strongest female vampire characters in the Chronicles, to voice it in The Queen of the Damned. As she transforms Jesse into a vampire, Maharet teaches her, stating "In the flesh all wisdom begins. Beware the thing that has no flesh. Beware the gods, beware
the idea, beware the devil" (Rice, *Queen* 241). She elaborates on these concepts and their significance as she and the other vampires prepare to face Akasha, the ancient Mother of all vampires:

We have seen in the human animal a resistance finally to the miraculous; a skepticism regarding the works of spirits, or those who claim to see them and understand them and speak their truths. We have seen the human mind slowly abandon the traditions of law based upon revelation, to seek ethical truths through reason; and a way of life based upon respect for the physical and the spiritual as perceived by all human beings.

And with this loss of respect for supernatural intervention; with this credulity of all things divorced from the flesh, has come the most enlightened age of all; for men and women seek for the highest inspiration not in the realm of the invisible, but in the realm of the human—the thing which is both flesh and spirit; invisible and visible, earthly and transcendent . . . . The word has been made flesh at last, to quote the old biblical phrase with all its mystery; but the word is the word of reason; and the flesh is the acknowledgment of the needs and the desires which all men and women share. (Rice, *Queen* 423)

Maharet's insistence upon the body as an essential aspect of the human condition is an articulation of the author's own conviction that the body is fundamentally inescapable, and that one cannot gain access to the spiritual unless one is first immersed in the physical. The vampire as Rice portrays him/her is a highly physical monster housed in a beautiful human form, and it is this form, or body, which makes the vampire an apt vehicle for Rice's ongoing interrogation of Western body politics. In her introduction to *Writing Horror and the Body: The Fiction of Stephen King, Clive Barker, and Anne Rice*, Linda Badley observes that

horror betrays an almost mystical fascination with flesh as inner space, microcosm or medium in which consciousness is transformed: the body as subject. This is the body the French feminists have valorized. The same issues that tear the body asunder, rendering it problematic or profane, also lend the flesh in transformation its own power and turn innerspace into a polysemy of subjectivities and languages. (9)
In vampire fiction generally, when a human being becomes a vampire, his/her flesh is literally torn prior to being transformed into something Other than what it was. As Rice establishes it, this transformation enhances the body and opens the possibility for transformation of consciousness via senses which interpret the world using a much broader spectrum of awareness. Through its ability to penetrate skin and to transfer blood between itself and individuals of all races, sexes, classes, ages, and sexual orientations, the vampire body plays havoc with culturally constructed categories through which subjectivity is typically affirmed. It may therefore be argued that Rice is using her vampire characters to interrogate "the body as subject." This interrogation is linked directly with her use of first person narration, which provides the reader with an intimate understanding of the individual vampire's experience of living in his/her body. The ramifications of this "personalization" of the vampire body are suggested by Diana Fuss in *Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature, & Difference*. Citing "Notes Toward a Politics of Location," by Adrienne Rich, Fuss establishes a clear distinction between the body and my body as subjects of critical discourse, stating:

*The* body connotes the abstract, the categorical, the generic, the scientific, the unlocalizable, the metaphysical; *my* body connotes the particular, the empirical, the local, the self-referential, the immediate, the material. The simultaneous nearness and distance between the definite article "the" and the personal pronoun "my" carries all the weight and tension of the essentialist/constructionist antagonism, for whereas the determiner "the" essentializes its object through universalization, the possessive "my" de-essentializes its object through particularization. A politics of location, such as Rich proposes, must begin both from "the geography closest in--

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25 See Peter Stallybrass and Allon White. *The Poetics and Politics of Transgression* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1986) 113. As a transgressive force, the vampire functions as "a grotesque hybrid right at the social threshold, a neither/nor creature, neither up nor down, which repels and fascinates . . . and which guards, like the hydra, the pathways and meeting-places between high and low." The hybridity of the vampire body is what keeps it perpetually on the threshold of culturally constructed categories through which subjectivity is established. 150
the body," and from the effort "to locate myself in my body." The
difficult but necessary mediation between "the" and "my" also brings
us back to the centrality of subject positions, to "recognizing our
location, having to name the ground we're coming from;" such a naming
cannot ignore the role social practices play in organizing and imaging "the
body," but nor can it overlook the role "my body" plays in the
constitution of subjectivity. (52)

Rice's use of "I" throughout The Vampire Chronicles makes the material immediacy of
the vampire body an integral part of her vampire aesthetic. She has created a dialectic in
which the voice of the Other is expressed as the voice of the self, and the experiences
conveyed by that voice are expressive of an individual subject with whom the reader is
encouraged to sympathize. Because that subject has been constructed as a vampire it is a
monstrous subject and, as such, possesses what Judith Halberstam has discussed as "a
remarkably mobile, permeable, and infinitely interpretable body" (21). In Rice's vampire
novels, the potential for reader identification with a body which simultaneously locates
Self within Other and Other within Self problematizes the construction of individual
subjectivity to a degree not witnessed in vampire fiction by men. Moreover, the intimacy
couraged by the protagonists' first-person narration leads readers to perceive vampire
subjectivity as heroic and therefore intensely attractive.

On a more strictly superficial level, Vampires in the Chronicles follow the long-
established conventions of the genre in their physical beauty and the compelling impact it
has not only on their human victims, but also on fellow vampires. Rice stretches the
bounds of convention, however, by thoroughly immersing her vampires in a world driven
by aesthetic values which stress materiality and which privilege the body and its various
ways of experiencing that world. Beauty, perceptions of beauty, and actions based upon
those perceptions are the controlling principles which dictate the vampires' understanding of and relationship with the rest of society. Lestat summarizes this value system in *The Queen of the Damned* when he says

"I can't help being a gorgeous fiend. It's just the card I drew. The bastard monster who made me what I am picked me on account of my good looks. That's the long and short of it. And accidents like that occur all the time... We live in a world of accidents finally, in which only aesthetic principles have a consistency of which we can be sure." (6)

In keeping with this emphasis on beauty, the vampires Rice creates are self-described sensualists, intensely aware of their surroundings. The first sensations of newly made vampires are best described as a kind of "rapture with the real," a thoroughly in-body encounter with the world made possible via amplified senses which transform existing physical modes of perception into thresholds for an ecstatic experience of the minutiae of everyday human life. In *Interview With the Vampire*, Louis is "rapt...with the world, fallen into the senses of the vampire, in love with color and shape and sound and singing and softness and infinite variation" (69). In *The Vampire Lestat*, Lestat approaches four black mares after being newly made a vampire and "kise[s] their smooth flanks and their long soft noses," describing himself as "so in love with them I could have spent hours just learning all I could of them through my new senses" (112). As he continues into a nearby village, he realizes that he has "an eternity to be drunk on the poetry [he is] hearing, drunk on the singing and the sweep of the dancer's arms, drunk on the organ throbbing in the great cavern of Notre Dame and drunk on the chimes that counted out the hours to [him], drunk on the snow falling soundlessly on the empty gardens of the Tuileries" (123). Rice's repeated use of the word "drunk" is worth noting here as a deliberate emphasis on the body's senses as being both overindulged and overwhelmed. Her vampires exist in a state of perpetual enervation, more capable of finding beauty in the world than they ever were as living human beings—indeed, their standards of beauty...
expand to embrace that which the dominant society has labeled *abject*. In the middle of the street Lestat snatches up a rat and stares at its feet before astonished onlookers because, in his own words, "I wanted to see what kind of little toenails it had, and what was the flesh like between its little toes, and I forgot men entirely" (Rice, *Lestat* 120). His fascination with that which society-at-large tends to ignore or revile extends to people as well, whom he perceives as universally "beautiful...even the old and the diseased, the downtrodden that one doesn't really 'see' in the street. They are all like that, like flowers ever in the process of opening, butterflies ever unfolding out of the cocoon" (134). Clearly, vampire aesthetics as Rice establishes them are not bound by the dominant society's standards re: what may be classified as beautiful or desirable. While vampires like Louis, Lestat, Marius, and others have a deep affinity for art, literature, theatre, music, fine clothes, and elaborately furnished dwelling spaces (hallmarks of the upper class, of 'high' culture) they also embrace death, disease, rats, blood, bodily orifices, slums, crypts and a host of other elements which represent the taboo/forbidden/low dimension of culture. In their capacity to extend and blur these aesthetic boundaries, Rice's vampires may be viewed as literary incarnations of what Mikhail Bakhtin, exploring the cultural dynamics of the medieval carnival in *Rabelais and His World*, has termed "the grotesque body." According to Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, "The grotesque body...has its discursive norms too: impurity (both in the sense of dirt and mixed categories), heterogeneity, masking, protuberant distension, disproportion, exorbitancy, clamour, decentred or eccentric arrangements, a focus upon gaps, orifices and symbolic filth (what Mary Douglas calls 'matter out of place'), physical needs and pleasures of the 'lower bodily stratum', materiality and parody" (23). Many of these "discursive norms" resonate strongly with what Rice has emphasized regarding vampire bodies and sensuality, and they are crystallized in Lestat's perception of the world as a Savage Garden.
Rice's immersion in sensuality has been characterized by her biographer as a reaction against her Catholic upbringing and its insistence on transcending the body via denial of the body and its desires. According to Katherine Ramsland, Anne herself was intensely aware of her surroundings and experienced a strong sense of her own sexuality at an early age. She had a "great feeling of sensually and sexually responding to things" and was "an independent, sexually aroused young woman at a time before a formal feminist movement encouraged such traits" (Ramsland 31, 70). At the same time, by her own admission, she was well aware of

all those dreary Catholic rules . . . that you weren't supposed to let boys do anything or they'd think you were cheap. There was not a thing in it [Catholic sex education] geared to attending to what women were feeling; it was all about how to play your cards right so boys didn't think you were a whore. No one ever said anything about whether you were entitled to any kind of pleasure, or whether your desires represented anything other than something you weren't supposed to give in to. (52)

Conflict between the physical intensity of the world as Rice experienced it and the education provided by the Church, which taught her that such intensity was "not an acceptable experience for girls," persisted into her adolescence (Ramsland 52). The Church's position was reinforced by the absence of any positive discourse or public validation regarding active female sexuality, and it was obvious to Rice that when it came to sexual matters, "women weren't entitled to do what men did and get away with it"—a double standard which frustrated her deeply (Ramsland 51-52). Although the Church ultimately failed to convince her that sex was 'dirty,' her sense that her desires and her refusal to deny that she had them made her 'monstrous' in the eyes of the dominant society became ever more acute. Her sexual self-awareness combined with her active, independent intellect to set her apart, and "[a]s she watched girls around her mature, she became aware of social standards against which she came up short and which amplified her sense of being different. She had identified with the "masculine" trait of
intelligence, and as she developed it, a gap widened between her inner and outer worlds" (347). Ramsland's use of quotation marks around the word "masculine" affirms Rice's awareness that intelligence is not the exclusive province of either gender while simultaneously acknowledging that, nonetheless, the dominant society has designated the well-developed intellect (in addition to the well-developed libido) as a distinctly "male" attribute. Rice possesses a female body, but with an active mind and an active sexuality that runs counter to the dominant society's equation of femininity with submission and self-denial. The author is highly conscious of the contradiction, which has become a primary influence in the characterization of her vampire protagonists.

The gendering of vampire bodies as Rice has portrayed them has been a focus of ongoing critical debate, particularly where her two male protagonists are concerned. Although the bodies of Louis and Lestat are sexually male, it has been observed that their emotions and actions persistently shift among patterns that have been patriarchally designated as both "masculine" and "feminine." Such blending and blurring of gender(ed) qualities is consistent throughout the Chronicles, and like the author's emphasis on vampire sensuality, it is inspired by her own sense of gender confusion.

Katherine Ramsland quotes Rice at various points in her biography:

I think I have a gender screw-up to the point that I don't know most of the time what gender I am, in terms of anybody else's thinking. (149)

I felt that the terrific response I had to men physically must mean that I'm a gay man trapped in a woman's body. (105)

I'd be a man in a minute. I would cheerfully be a six-foot, blond-haired man wearing a size thirty-eight. (222)

The physical traits of the man which Rice describes above closely mimic her descriptions of Lestat, whom Ramsland identifies as the "man" in Anne . . . He had the physical appearance she desired for herself, his characteristics were motivated by repressed assertive
impulses that she expressed best in fictional form, and she made him do things that she longed to do. She empowered him with erotic energy that coursed through her as she wrote. (245)

On another occasion, while condensing her novel for use in a film version of Interview With the Vampire, Rice recalled "suggest[ing] we make Louis a woman. It works. It's all the same passivity, the same philosophical ideas, the same inability to fight Lestat's domination. It's fine for Louis to be a woman because he is a woman—he's really me." 26

The author's male vampire characters function, in part, as an externalization of her self, and they do so to a much greater degree than their female counterparts. This privileging of the male body is part of a complex exploration of individual identity as it exists in conflict with codes of social behavior which are predetermined, patriarchal, and gender-specific. Under the aforementioned codes the body (especially the female body) is constructed as an anatomical trap which cannot be escaped—a dilemma with which Rice consistently grapples, both personally and in her writing. By choosing to make her protagonists male, Rice lends the most significant/powerful voices in her vampire fiction the use of what patriarchal society has designated as the most significant/powerful bodies. She is interested not in countering existing male-authored vampire literature with a feminist utopian vision, but in showing how her vampires would live in the Western world as she perceives it truly is. In that world, a white male body automatically entitles

26 Ramsland 269. Linda Badley throws an interesting twist to this statement with her own interpretation that "Louis is a woman trapped in a man's predatory sexuality, an inversion of Rice as she viewed herself—as a man trapped in a female body" (129). Given the strong emotions expressed by both Louis and Lestat, these characters may be read as twentieth-century incarnations of the "man of feeling," a figure first made popular in fiction (esp. Ann Radcliffe) of the late eighteenth century. In Art of Darkness: A Poetics of Gothic ( ), Ann Williams indicates that "Though one might tend to assume that in terms of gender codes [the "man of feeling"]] is a "feminized male," it is more useful to see him as a "masculinized female": that is, a projection of female definitions of the self into the realm of masculine endeavor. This hero is attractive (and reassuring) because he shares feminine ways of seeing the world."
an individual to a certain amount of power, mobility, and freedom. He does not have to struggle to get into a position to act or worry unduly about what the rest of society will do to him afterwards—he just acts. His body assures that his right of public self-assertion is pre-endowed, and it is that right which Rice assumes through the bodies of Louis and especially, Lestat. In focusing on the experiences of these male vampires she seeks not an erasure of her "feminine" qualities, but a means of openly expressing her "masculine" ones. Linda Badley describes Rice’s literary attempts at reconciling the "masculine" and "feminine" elements of her own identity as follows:

Uncomfortable in "woman's role" as it had been presented to her, openly divided against her female self, Rice seems to have found her way to the feminine only first through a complicated masquerade, by identifying with homosexuals and transsexuals in their equally self-divided gender switching . . . [w]omen empowered are women in drag. Bodies are discursive territories, and when Gabrielle or Rice wear the stolen male body, they steal the language that goes with it. (136)

Lacking social venues which would permit the expression of her "masculine" intellect and desires, Rice uses her protagonists to create a literary venue instead. In *The Vampire Chronicles*, Louis and Lestat function as Rice’s "stolen male bod[ies]." By writing "in drag" she attempts to transform the female body and thereby escape the limited roles which the dominant society assigns to women purely on the basis of that body.27 Her choice of male bodies as the models for this effort at transformation is both interesting and problematic. On the surface, Rice seems to be falling into the trap of equating

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27 The notion of escape here is itself problematic, since Rice is not actually breaking down the existing cultural construction of gender roles. True escape, in the sense of discovering a utopian null space "outside" the realm of cultural construction, is not possible (hence the absence of an object for the death drive); however, it may be argued that Rice is using her vampire characters to manipulate and redeploy the categories which are used in this construction. The act of manipulation itself implies the inadequacy of existing gender categories and may therefore be interpreted as a destabilizing move.
anatomy with social destiny and thereby perpetuating the very binary codes of behavior which she finds so repressive. Her biography encourages this interpretation, which can have the unfortunate effect of leading unwary readers of her fiction to conflate the bodies of her vampire characters with actual human bodies. Indeed, due largely to the strength of their first-person voices, it can be easy to forget that while Louis and Lestat have bodies which are anatomically male, they are not men—they are monsters masquerading as men. Their interaction with the human world consists of constant and complex acts of performance designed to fool the human majority with an illusion of conformity. In *The Vampire Lestat*, Lestat himself makes numerous references to this effect, including the following:

I talked to mortals at bus stops and gas stations and in elegant drinking places. I read books. I decked myself out in the shimmering dream skins of the fashionable shops. I wore white turtleneck shirts and crisp khaki safari jackets, or lush gray velvet blazers with cashmere scarves. I powdered down my face so that I could "pass" beneath the chemical lights of the all-night supermarkets, the hamburger joints, the carnival thoroughfares called nightclub strips. (11)

. . . try to envision my beauty and my power. Try to see the evil that I am. I stalk the world in mortal dress—the worst of fiends, the monster who looks exactly like everyone else. (228)

As he looks at his mother Gabrielle, whom he has transformed into a vampire, he notes that "she was not really a woman now, was she? Any more than I was a man. For one silent second the horror of it all bled through" (Rice, *Lestat* 172). In the world which Rice creates there is no such thing as a stable subject, and the bodies of her vampires articulate this instability (characterized here as "horror") which situates vampires in an ill-defined liminal state somewhere between the culturally constructed categories of "male/masculine" and "female/feminine." The question then arises, as Judith Butler so aptly puts it: "How do we understand the being "between," the two possibilities as
something other than a spatialized entre that leaves the phallogocentric binary opposition intact?" (Butler, Bodies 36)

At this point, a discussion of Rice's apparent phallogocentrism is warranted. Part of what makes the bodies of her male vampires monstrous is the fact that they are incapable of sexual intercourse. Male vampire bodies are sexually (if not sensually) dead bodies, but they are still bodies which possess a phallus and all of the culturally symbolic weight with which that organ is automatically endowed. Rice draws specific attention to the phallus on several occasions throughout The Vampire Chronicles. One of the most notable references occurs in The Vampire Lestat, during a conversation Lestat holds with his ailing mother Gabrielle:

She talked for a long time. She said things I didn't understand then, about how when she would see me riding out to hunt, she felt some wondrous pleasure in it, and she felt that same pleasure when I angered everyone and thundered at my father and brothers as to why we had to live the way we lived. She spoke in an almost eerie way of my being a secret part of her anatomy, of my being the organ for her which women do not really have.

"You are the man in me," she said. "And so I've kept you here, afraid of living without you, and maybe now in sending you away, I am only doing what I have done before."

She shocked me a little. I never thought a woman could feel or articulate anything quite like this. (62)

It is clear from this passage that Gabrielle associates possession of the phallus with the ability to go out into the world, with the ability to assert oneself and challenge men on an equal footing. In her reluctance to let Lestat go, she displays a form of "castration anxiety" which betrays her own reliance upon the phallus as what Judith Butler has termed a "privileged signifier." Although Butler's discussion of the phallus in Bodies That Matter is focused on investigating lesbian sexuality, it offers intriguing insights into what Rice is doing not only in this literary encounter between mother and son, but in her own admission that Louis and Lestat are vampire incarnations of herself:
... precisely because it is an idealization, one which no body can adequately approximate, the phallus is a transferable phantasm, and its naturalized link to masculine morphology can be called into question through an aggressive reterritorialization. That complex identificatory fantasies inform morphogenesis, and that they cannot be fully predicted, suggests that morphological idealization is both a necessary and unpredictable ingredient in the constitution of both the bodily ego and the dispositions of desire. It also means that there is not necessarily one imaginary schema for the bodily ego, and that cultural conflicts over the idealization and degradation of specific masculine and feminine morphologies will be played out at the site of the morphological imaginary in complex and conflicted ways. (87)

If the phallus is in actuality "a transferable phantasm" as Butler suggests and if, as I am postulating here, Rice is attempting an "aggressive reterritorialization" of the phallus through her focus on the experiences of male vampire characters with whom she strongly identifies herself, then the male vampire body as portrayed in the *Chronicles* becomes the "site of the morphological imaginary" upon which the author's perceptions of gender, the individual ego, and the individual expression of desire circulate in a constant state of play. Under this interpretation the male vampire's phallus may be viewed as part of the masquerade, an anatomical surface feature which is part of the "drag" Rice adopts as she writes (or, within the context of the novels, as part of the human masquerade in which her vampires participate). Her selection of male bodies is not simply an uncritical construction in which she reiterates sex-role stereotypes. The phallus itself is problematized in *The Vampire Chronicles* by its reduction to the status of a dysfunctional ornament. Lestat recalls the myth of how the Egyptian god Osiris is dismembered and

All parts of his body are found save one... As for the missing part of the body, the part that Isis never found, well, there is one part of us not enhanced by the Dark Gift, isn't there? We can speak, see, taste, breathe, move as humans move, but we cannot procreate. And neither could Osiris, so he became Lord of the Dead.

Was this a vampire god? (Rice, *Lestat* 330)
This passage simultaneously marks the phallus (patriarchally constructed symbol of aggressive heterosexual "masculine" desire and self-assertion) as an organ which is disempowered in relation to the rest of the vampire's body and, where Osiris is concerned, as a missing signifier made all the more obvious by its absence. By implication, the phallus of Osiris is still "out there" somewhere, a "transferable phantasm" literally dislocated from the male body waiting for an unspecified "someone" to find and possess it. The uncertainty of ultimate ownership here reinforces the gender confusion which Rice enacts through her vampire characters. For her male vampires, the phallus is a mark of either absence or dysfunction. They are aware of the cultural and sexual significance of the phallus in human society; however, within vampire society anatomical possession of the phallus is irrelevant to both the arousal and the enactment of desire.

Central to expressions of vampiric desire as Rice portrays them are blood and an intense fascination with flesh. For Louis, Lestat, and the other vampire characters of the Chronicles, blood drinking is "the ultimate experience," much more intense and satisfying than sex, though it is described in very sexual terms. The personal testimony

28 In discussing the uses of violence in Monique Wittig's Les Guérillères, Judith Butler specifically addresses dismemberment as a form of "textual violence" involving "the deconstruction of constructs that are always already a kind of violence against the body's possibilities." She then inquires: "What is left when the body rendered coherent through the category of sex is disaggregated, rendered chaotic? Can this body be re-membered, be put back together again? Are there possibilities of agency that do not require the coherent reassembling of this construct?" (See Judith Butler, Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity (New York: Routledge, 1990)126-27.) Rice seems to be exploring all of these questions in her portrayals of the male vampire's phallus and Lestat's equation of the male vampire body with the body of Osiris.  

29 See Rice, Interview 210. When Claudia asks Louis, "What was it like...making love?" Louis responds, "It was something hurried. And...it was seldom savored...something acute that was quickly lost. I think that it was the pale shadow of killing."
of the vampires themselves contains numerous references to the sensations involved in both drinking and sharing blood, of which the following constitute a sampling:

Louis recalls feeding on Armand’s human boy companion: "He was pressing the length of his body against me now, and I felt the hard strength of his sex beneath his clothes pressing against my leg. A wretched gasp escaped my lips, but he bent close, his lips on what must have been so cold, so lifeless for him; and I sank my teeth into his skin, my body rigid, that hard sex driving against me, and I lifted him in passion off the floor. Wave after wave of his beating heart passed into me as, weightless, I rocked with him, devouring him, his ecstasy, his conscious pleasure. (Rice, Interview 231)

Louis recalls feeding on Madeleine prior to transforming her into a vampire: "She gasped as I broke the flesh, the warm current coming into me, her breasts crushed against me, her body arching up, helpless, from the couch." (Rice, Interview 270)

Lestat recalls his own transformation into a vampire, drinking from the vampire Magnus’s throat: "I was against him and I could feel his sinews, his bones, the very contour of his hands. I knew his body . . . . Love you, I wanted to say, Magnus, my unearthly master, ghastly thing that you are, love you, love you . . . ." (Rice, Lestat 90-91)

Lestat recalls drinking blood from the ancient vampire Marius: "I felt his heart swell, his body undulate, and we were sealed against each other." (Rice, Lestat 363)

Clearly, from these vampires’ perspectives, blood-drinking does not represent pollution as it typically does in texts authored by men. Instead, it represents ecstasy, intimacy, and transformation. It is simultaneously a surrender to intense desire and an act of control over life and death which induces a state of rapture. The desire involved in these vampiric transactions may be read as an articulation of both forms of the death drive which Freud develops in Beyond the Pleasure Principle and which Linda Ruth Williams, in Critical Desire: Psychoanalysis and the Literary Subject, discusses specifically in the context of gothic literature:

Both the first and second form of desire here are forms of return, routes backwards, toward the abolition of subjective unities which prevails
before and after life. One (erogonic sadism and masochism) prioritizes in its desire the rending and tearing of the self from its dignity and sense of control, whilst the desire of the other (that of the primary masochist) looks straight to the moment of disintegration. This primary masochism is central to desire: desire is the desire for radical non-agency, for discharge, for the dissolution of the ego—that exquisite moment of 'letting go' when the subject ceases to grasp its boundaries, ceases to be as a subject. (173)

The images of "rending and tearing" and of loss of control are evident in the blood-drinking encounters described above, as is the masochistic element of pleasure-in-pain and the blurring of subjective boundaries between vampire and victim in an act which conflates sex with death. However, because the vampire never truly "dies," vampire subjectivity in the Chronicles is never completely lost no matter how radically a vampire protagonist "lets himself go." Williams explores the significance of this paradoxical in/stability at length:

Vampires . . . never die—that is what is disturbing about them . . . Eternally committed to the liminality of the undead state, a soul sleep from which one never awakens, vampires act out a myth of the death drive. For just as vampires never die, so the subject of the death drive as such never experiences reaching its goal. The death drive thus becomes the drive par excellence, in that it is entirely and explicitly predicated on lack. Unlike, say, forms of sexuality (for which a love-object will be designated), the death drive has no achieved goal, it is fundamentally objectless; when the goal is reached, there is no subject. Thus, unlike other drives which can fantasize some sort of arrival in satisfaction, the death drive is only ever understandable or experienceable in its 'driveness.' It is a drive which can only be 'present' in its flight towards rather than its arrival in its goal . . . The vampire never arrives: objectless, unsatisfied, the undead, like the living, do not rest. (182)

Because the vampire "never arrives" at the complete fulfillment of its desire, that desire continues to circulate as a powerful and pervasive force throughout the Chronicles.

Vampiric desire as Rice constructs it is rooted in an aesthetic which privileges the body's intensely sensual experiences of the surrounding world. Within that aesthetic, the repeated and highly eroticized surrender of the self in the act of blood-drinking is cast as
the ultimate experience. The death drive, deployed as the vampire's thirst for blood, becomes the prime motivation behind a subjectivity which is perpetually destroying and re-creating itself (and others, if one includes victims who are transformed into vampires). As Williams indicates, the death drive has no clearly designated object—a fact which helps to explain its polymorphously perverse freedom of expression in terms of who Rice's vampires choose to bite.

The eroticism of the vampire's bite is a well-established convention of the genre found in literary works by both men and women. Critics have discussed the bite, as well as the vampire's mouth in general, as an important contributing factor in the vampire's performance of a polymorphous sexuality. In vampire fiction by men, such destabilization of sex roles and gender-oriented behavior patterns as they have been naturalized by the dominant culture is typically characterized as an "evil" threat to the privileged status of heterosexual desire. Blood drinking is described by a third person human narrator who is both distanced from the event and predisposed to judge the event's significance according to narrowly defined patriarchal standards. The Vampire Chronicles stand as an important revision of these conventions. Utilizing the autobiographical stance she adopts for her vampires, Rice exploits their polymorphous experiences of the death drive with a regular intensity and attention to detail unrivaled by

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30 See Christopher Craft, "'Kiss Me With Those Red Lips': Gender and Inversion in Bram Stoker's Dracula, Representations 8 (1984): 109. According to Craft, As the primary site of erotic experience in Dracula, [the vampire's] mouth equivocates, giving the lie to the easy separation of the masculine and the feminine. Luring at first with an inviting orifice, a promise of red softness, but delivering instead a piercing bone, the vampire mouth fuses and confuses . . . the gender-based categories of the penetrating and the receptive. Although Craft is focusing on Dracula, his discussion of the vampire's mouth applies very well to The Vampire Chronicles and other vampire texts in which the vampire literally bites his/her victims.

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any of her male predecessors. Moreover, the voices of Louis and Lestat present these experiences not as unpleasant aberrations to be denied but as powerful and extremely beautiful expressions of an active, individualized form of desire which is no longer informed by social mandates or by the biological necessity of sex. Vampires in the Chronicles display a freedom in the direction of their appetites which considerably expands the challenges to heterosexuality and conventional behavior that have inhered in the fictional vampire from its earliest incarnations. Their victims are both male and female and range in age from the very young to the very old. Even biological relatives are not immune, and the eroticism involved in all of these encounters shatters a host of sexual taboos. For instance, the intense relationship which Louis shares with the child vampire Claudia in Interview With the Vampire hovers between fatherly affection and paedophilia. In the early years of their companionship the two share the same coffin, and Louis recalls how

she lay with me, her heart beating against my heart . . . . I thought of that singular experience I'd had with her and no other, that I had killed herBut she lived, she lived to put her arms around my neck and press her tiny cupid's bow to my lips and put her gleaming eye to my eye until our lashes touched and, laughing, we reeled about the room as if to the wildest waltz. Father and Daughter. Lover and Lover. (101-102)

Lestat shares a similarly complex relationship with his mother Gabrielle. Scenes from The Vampire Lestat which describe their interaction after he transforms her into a vampire are rife with details like the following:

We came together again and I took her in my arms and I felt her heat and she felt my heat. And we just held each other, even the thin covering of our garments seeming alien, two burning statues in the dark . . . . I went to kiss her again and she didn't stop me. We were lovers kissing. And that was the picture we made together, white-faced lovers, as we rushed down the servants' stairs and out into the late evening streets. (168-169)

Given the biological relationship which existed between these two characters when they were human, the eroticism of these scenes is charged with incest. In both of the
aforementioned scenarios and others like them throughout the Chronicles, the categories of "mother," "father," and "child" as they are interpreted within the heterosexual framework of the dominant society are multiplied and overlaid to such an extent that they are utterly de-stabilized. Notions of "family" also persist but this category, too, is rendered open to multiple configurations by the vampires' polymorphous expressions of desire and the radically new "blood ties" they create.

Another sexual taboo which is central to Rice's vampire fiction is homoeroticism. Homoerotic tension has been central to vampire fiction from its earliest roots. As we observed in the preceding chapter, it is present in several of the most notable works of vampire fiction written by men. Within the scope of the latter, it is typically portrayed as a perversion—a sign of the vampire's evil threat to the patriarchal status quo. For Rice, however, the homoerotic element is far more compelling and complex.

Within The Vampire Chronicles, homoerotic desire between human and vampire males is both intense and widespread. Expressed through the vivid sensuality of vampire aesthetics, it characterizes most of the male relationships throughout the entire series of novels (Louis and Lestat, Louis and Armand, Lestat and Magnus, Lestat and Nicholas, Lestat and Marius, Lestat and David Talbot, Marius and Armand, Daniel and Armand, Louis and Armand's boy-consort, etc.). In cases where the attraction is between human males, sexual intercourse is an active part of the relationship. When Magnus kidnaps Lestat, for instance, he snatches him from the bed he shares with Nicholas. When the attraction is between a human male and a vampire male or between two vampire males, sexual intercourse is removed from the equation. Even so, the interaction between such males is described in highly sensual terms. When Louis is with Armand, he describes a situation in which "suddenly I found him pressed up against me, his arm around my chest, his lashes so close I could see them matted and gleaming above the incandescent orb of his eye, his soft, tasteless breath against my skin. It was delirium" (Rice, Interview
When Lestat describes Nicholas prior to transforming him into a vampire, he focuses on Nicholas's body with a romantic fervor:

The scent was rising from him like incense, like the heat and the smoke of church candles rising. Heart thumping under the skin of his naked chest. Tight little belly glistening with sweat, sweat staining the thick leather belt. Blood full of salt. I could scarce breathe. (Rice, *Lestat* 237)

Not all such attractions culminate in a vampire bite, but in the cases of those that do, the bite functions clearly as a metaphor for sexual intercourse. Both males are curiously "feminized" during the experience. The one who performs the initial bite assumes the masculine role of penetration, but in allowing his chosen companion to drink his blood in turn, he assumes a more "maternal" role. When drinking from Lestat's wrist, Louis describes the sensation of "sucking the blood out of the holes, experiencing for the first time since infancy the special pleasure of sucking nourishment, the body focused with the mind upon one vital source" (Rice, *Interview* 19). Combined with the erotic sensations which precede it, this imagery establishes Lestat as a "mother," a "father," and a "lover" all at once. Louis is likewise feminized in this experience, first by allowing himself to be penetrated, and second, in the sensations he experiences while being penetrated. He recalls Lestat's "lips moving against [his] neck" and that "the movement of his lips raised the hair all over [his] body, sent a shock of sensation through [his] body that was not unlike the pleasure of passion" (Rice, *Interview* 18). Lestat experiences similar sensations when he is bitten by Magnus: "... a great noise was echoing all around me, enveloping me, the sound of a deep gong perhaps, being struck very slowly in perfect rhythm, its sound washing through me so that I felt the most extraordinary pleasure through all my limbs" (Rice, *Lestat* 81). Pleasure in these instances is not localized, but is something that the entire body experiences. In *Prism of the Night*, Rice indicates that she "meant to imply that the nature of the kill was sexual but not in an immediate genital way. I think I swapped the male orgasm for the female. The pleasure
he gets in killing was an overall swoon like women probably feel, a surrender” (Ramsland 148). Occasionally, such scenes further problematize gender subjectivity by incorporating elements which are strongly suggestive of fellatio. In Interview With the Vampire, when Louis transforms Madeleine into a vampire, he describes what occurs after he forces his torn wrist into her mouth:

I gathered her close to me, the blood pouring over her lips. Then she opened her eyes, and I felt the gentle pressure of her mouth, and then her hands closing tight on the arm as she began to suck. I was rocking her, whispering to her, trying desperately to break my swoon; and then I felt her powerful pull. Every blood vessel felt it. I was threaded through and through with her pulling... I all but cried as it went on and on, and I was backing away from her, pulling her with me, my life passing through my arm, her moaning breath in time with her pulling. (272)

A parallel event occurs between two male characters in The Tale of the Body Thief when Lestat makes David Talbot a vampire:

I tore my wrist. Here it comes, my beloved. Here it comes, not in little droplets, but from the very river of my being. And this time when the mouth clamped down upon me, it was a pain that reached all the way down to the roots of my being, tangling my heart in its burning mesh... The heat and the pain grew so strong in me that I lay down slowly with him in my arms, my wrist sealed against his mouth, my hand still beneath his head... On and on he pulled... (423)

In both of these descriptions, the torn white wrist substitutes for the phallus in a displaced act of fellatio. While the fellatio metaphor has been encountered before in works of vampire fiction by men (recall the scenes between Jonathan Harker and the vampire women in Dracula's castle and between Mina and Dracula discussed in the preceding chapter), the act typically involves a heterosexual pairing of characters. Moreover, it is an act which marks the female partner as a creature who is either already damned or who is in imminent danger of being so. Mina is more shamed than transformed by her surrender to the vampire's compulsion, and the reader is never made privy to Dracula's thoughts. Rice is the first author to describe these blood-drinking
experiences from the perspectives of the vampires themselves. She is also the first to introduce an encounter between two male characters which is explicitly homoerotic in detail. Within the scope of these vampires' bodies, penetration and the sensation of being penetrated commingle with the sensations of sucking and being sucked upon to create a sexuality which is neither wholly male nor wholly female, but a bloody blur of the two. Such blurring is presented neither as pollution nor perversion, but as an ecstatic sign of transformation.

In keeping with her emphasis on transformation, Rice calls on her Catholic upbringing and its influence on her sensibilities to make repeated references to transubstantiation throughout the *Chronicles*. Lestat in particular is prone to using the words, 'This is my Body, this is my Blood'—direct quotes taken from the liturgy of the Eucharist, the Catholic sacrament through which ordinary bread and wine are believed by members of the faith to be transformed into the Body and Blood of Christ. Such references place the vampire characters' fascination with flesh and blood in a ritual context and call attention to the vampire's act of feeding as a parodic re-enactment of the Last Supper. In *The Queen of the Damned*, Rice makes this connection explicit as Lestat performs as a rock star on stage:

... Lestat was Christ on the cathedral cross. How describe his overwhelming and irrational authority? . . . The final message behind all Lestat's lyrics was simple: Lestat had the gift that had been promised to each of them; Lestat was unkillable. He devoured the suffering forced upon him and emerged all the stronger. To join with him was to live forever:

This is my Body. This is my Blood. (230)

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31 Lestat is not alone in establishing this connection. In *The Vampire Lestat*, Armand thinks of "the carnal rapture of the kill...In that act the spiritual and the carnal aspects came together, and it was the spiritual, he was convinced, that survived. Holy Communion it seemed to him..." (303).
Suborning the language of the Church, the vampire replaces Christ and touts the beauty and immortality of his own body and the pleasures of earth, not of heaven. This is significant because Christianity is the primary religion of the West, and Christian iconography (esp. the crucifix) is traditionally part of the defense against vampires. In vampire fiction by men, we have witnessed two types of worlds: a world in which Christian symbols function successfully as methods of defense against vampires, and a world in which Christian symbols fail to function. When Christian symbols succeed, they serve as a comforting reinforcement of the dominant society's convictions re: its own power and righteousness, as well as the degenerate evil of the vampire Other. When Christian symbols fail, they signify the dominant society's disturbing recognition that its influence is not universal. By implication, the Others who are capable of resisting its influence constitute a genuine threat to its continued dominance. In *The Vampire Chronicles*, Christian symbols and rituals are actually usurped by the vampire characters. By taking these symbols out of their original context and highlighting their significance from the vampire's point of view, Rice de-stabilizes the Church and its teachings—particularly where the body is concerned.\(^{32}\) While the Church advocates denial of the body and its desires (which are characterized as "weaknesses") in favor of individual

\(^{32}\) The *Vampire Chronicles* includes numerous scenes in which vampires flaunt their immunity to Christian iconography. In *Interview With the Vampire*, Louis informs Daniel that "I can look on anything I like. And I rather like looking on crucifixes in particular" (22). In *The Vampire Lestat*, Lestat goes into a church, crosses the Communion rail, and touches the hosts and the tabernacle, affirming as he does so: "No, there was no power here, nothing that I could feel or see or know with any of my monstrous senses, nothing that responded to me. There were wafers and gold and wax and light..." (113). He also brags about taking victims "under the very roof of Notre Dame" and, together with his mother, disrupts a mass in the middle of the veneration of the Eucharist by bursting out from beneath the altar itself (188, 193). Tied as it is to the monstrous senses and bodies of the vampires in question, this blatant disregard for Christian ritual (specifically, the Catholic sacrament of the Eucharist) undermines the power of the Church in favor of the power of the individual.
strength found through spiritual transcendence, the vampires advocate the body itself and its incorporation of the spirit as a powerful and potentially transcendent mode of experience. The sacrificial connotations of flesh and blood as established in the Christian faith are carried over into the lives of vampires as Rice portrays them, lending an overt ritual significance to the act of blood-drinking as the vampires themselves perceive it. In keeping with Rice's aforementioned emphasis on sensuality and aesthetics, it is the body and blood of the vampire, not the Body and Blood of Christ, which emerges as the "true" sacrament in these novels.

As we have seen in works of vampire fiction by both men and women, the centrality of blood to the vampire's existence necessitates repeated transgressions of bodily boundaries. Works by male authors tend to present the female body as the focal point of these transgressions, which either involve or result in excessive violence directed against that same body. Typically, such violence involves penetration. Whether the instruments used are vampire fangs or sharpened stakes, rape becomes the prevailing metaphor. Chamas and Gomez have revised this tradition, allowing their female characters to successfully resist such threats of bodily violation. Rice, however, denies her readers any similarly comforting reversals. Indeed, The Vampire Chronicles are persistently disturbing in their portrayals of violence against women—a fact which has led many feminist critics to condemn Rice for what they perceive as her unquestioned complicity with patriarchal misogyny. But is this what the author is really doing?

Rape at both literal and metaphoric levels is a recurrent force in The Vampire Chronicles. For Rice, as for the other female authors included in this study, all men are potential rapists. Male sexuality is portrayed as fundamentally aggressive, and the male rape impulse is naturalized as both unpredictable and irresistible. However, an important distinction is made between human males and vampire males: regarding the literal act itself, only human males rape. In The Queen of the Damned, Khayman is human when
Enkil orders him to rape both Maharet and Mekare before the Egyptian court "to show that they have no power and are not great witches, but are merely women." Later in the same novel, when a Mediterranean man held captive by women who serve the vampire Queen Akasha is offered to Lestat as a victim, Lestat observes how

... a savage hatred of the women rose out of him, replete with images of rape and retribution that made me smile, and yet I understood. Rather completely I understood. So easy to feel contempt for them, to be outraged that they had dared to become the enemy, the enemy in the age-old battle, they, the women! And it was darkness, this imagined retribution, it was unspeakable darkness, too. (375)

When Lestat finds himself trapped in a human male body in *The Tale of the Body Thief*, he is incapable of controlling that body's desires and ends up raping a young waitress. Afterward, he notes that there was "[n]o pleasure in it for her, only fear. I saw her again at the moment of my climax, fighting me, and I realized it was utterly inconceivable to her that I could have enjoyed the struggle, enjoyed her rage and her protests, enjoyed conquering her. But in a paltry and common way, I think I had" (190). While it is true that female bodies are being violated, it is also true that there is a running commentary within the texts themselves which attempts to contextualize that violence as it relates to the dominant culture. The aforementioned quotes reveal clearly that rape is an act of specifically male power and control, that it is often sparked by what men perceive as female attempts to challenge male desires and/or patriarchal authority, and that the urge itself stems from an "unspeakable darkness." It is presented as an urge that women recognize but cannot fully comprehend. It is also a form of violence against which

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33 Rice, *Queen* 343. Significantly, this story is told from the perspective of Maharet—a very old and powerful female vampire. Her reflections reveal the conviction that the capacity for rape is latent in all men: "I think, as he came towards us, I believed he could not do it, that a man could not feel the pain which he felt and still sharpen his passion for this ugly work. But I knew little of men then, of how the pleasures of the flesh can combine in them with hatred and anger; of how they can hurt as they perform the act which women perform, more often than not, for love" (343).
women too often cannot defend themselves. By admitting the reality of rape instead of attempting to reverse it, Rice confronts her readers with a very real contemporary horror that cannot easily be pushed away. Her naturalization of sexual aggression as a fundamentally "masculine" trait mirrors that of the dominant society and thereby reifies that gender category. However, when the male body is vampirized (made monstrous, in part, by its purely ornamental phallus) the rape impulse is sublimated as part of a much broader aesthetic of desire and power which is neither symbolized nor enacted by a single organ, but spread throughout the entire body. Stripped of a functioning phallus, male vampires in the Chronicles are simultaneously stripped of the naturalized sexual proclivities accorded to their gender by the dominant society. As Rice portrays them, they stop viewing mortal women primarily as sex objects but remain aware of the distinctly sexual threat posed to those women by mortal men. Consequently, they express concern about the safety of mortal women for whom they come to care. In The Queen of the Damned Mael worries about Jesse like a father or an older brother:

How could she dare to go with young men alone in automobiles or to their apartments? Didn't she realize they might kill her? She had almost laughed. No, but seriously, that could happen, he insisted. He worked himself into a state over it. Look at the papers. Women of the modern cities were hunted by men like deer in the wood. (156)

In Memnoch the Devil, Lestat displays a similar solicitude toward Dora, whose response upon first spotting him is "Fearless, quiet, having seen a male intruder. I mean, next to a vampire, what in the world is as dangerous to a lone woman as a young human male?" (117). Later he describes how "with her little cap of black hair she looked extremely dramatic and fragile, and horribly vulnerable in a world of mortal males" (149). The repetition of such sentiments by male vampires makes it progressively clear that it is the

34 Unlike their counterparts in The Vampire Tapestry and The Gilda Stories, human female characters in the Vampire Chronicles are not conveniently endowed with guns or knives so that they can defend themselves against larger, stronger male attackers.
human male, perhaps more than the vampire, who constitutes a real threat to women in the *Chronicles*.

In *The Tale of the Body Thief*, the human male body is described in monstrous terms by Lestat. His first reaction to finding himself back in the body of a human male is "Dear God, I'm in it" (165). While he wants to find beauty and wonder in being human again, he is thoroughly disgusted by his body's natural functions. Some of the sharpest expressions of distaste are reserved for his "organ," which he describes as a "flaccid, disgusting thing" (172). The act of urination repulses him, and he later finds himself utterly bemused by the physical aspects of his sexual arousal:

> But how curiously local was this feeling, this hardening and swelling, and the odd way that it consumed all my thoughts. *The need for blood was never local.* (182, italics my emphasis)

This statement draws a clear distinction between the human male's desire for sex (which Lestat later categorizes as "paltry") and the vampire male's desire for blood, in which the presence or absence of male sexual organs is irrelevant. Once again, the functioning phallus is de-valorized as part of a weak body which is driven by an "endless cycle" of bodily functions, pains, and illness. Significantly, Lestat recalls

> ... [a]n image... from an old film—of Frankenstein's monster lumbering about, swinging his hands as if they didn't belong at the ends of his arms. I felt as if I were that monster. In fact, to say that I felt entirely monstrous as a human is to hit the perfect truth. (222)

From the perspective of the vampire, with whose first-person voice the reader has become accustomed to sympathizing, the human body is too narrow a restriction for all that he perceives himself to be. His vampire body sets him apart as Other, and in doing so, it frees him from having to act in accordance with the dictates (sexual or otherwise) of the dominant society. That freedom, together with all of the possibilities it allows, is the hallmark of vampire subjectivity as Rice portrays it.
Violence against women in *The Vampire Chronicles* is not limited to literal rape scenarios. In *Interview With the Vampire*, for instance, Louis describes over the course of several pages how Lestat torments a young prostitute whom he has drained of blood almost to the point of death (77-78). In another drawn-out sequence, he describes the exploitation of a beautiful young blonde on the stage of the Théâtre des Vampires. With painstaking detail, she is stripped of her clothes, taunted, and mesmerized by a male vampire before being bitten. Her suffering and violation is highly eroticized:

... he was lifting her, her back arching as her naked breasts touched his buttons, her pale arms enfolded his neck. She stiffened, cried out as he sank his teeth, and her face was still as the dark theater reverberated with shared passion. His white hand shone on her florid buttocks, her hair dusting it, stroking it. He lifted her off the boards as he drank, her throat gleaming against his white cheek. (Rice, *Interview* 225-226)

The girl is then "passed from one [vampire] to another and to another before the enthralled crowd" in what functions as a kind of vampire "gang rape." Maharet is blinded and Mekare has her tongue cut out by order of the vengeful Akasha, and Akasha herself is subsequently beheaded. Claudia and Madeleine are burned to ash by the rays of the sun. The graphic nature of these scenes and others like them seems to support contentions that Rice is anti-female. It should be noted, however, that male bodies are also subjected to a great deal of violence throughout the *Chronicles*. Lestat is snatched from his bed and carried off in the middle of the night by Magnus, who bites him and turns him into a vampire against his will. Lestat himself attacks his old friend David Talbot and transforms him into a vampire, ignoring David's pleas to the contrary. Akasha inspires the human women who follow her to murder the men around them in mass numbers. Armand tortures Daniel by withholding the gift of vampirism Daniel so desperately desires. At the same time, Daniel is reduced to the status of a virtual sex slave, compelled to act on the desires which Armand inspires in others:
Armand's power to seduce was almost beyond his control. And it was Daniel who must bed these unfortunates, if Armand could possibly arrange it, while he watched from a chair nearby, a dark-eyed Cupid with a tender approving smile. Hot, nerve-searing, this witnessed passion. Daniel working the other body with ever greater abandon, aroused by the dual purpose of every intimate gesture. Yet he lay empty afterwards, staring at Armand, resentful, cold. (Rice, *Queen* 94)

These scenes are a sampling of how both male and female bodies are violated, exploited, destroyed, and transformed by both male and female characters throughout *The Vampire Chronicles*. Aggression and dominance are not exclusively male, and passivity and submission are not exclusively female—particularly where vampire subjectivity is concerned. Yet despite this diffusion of patriarchal concepts of gendered behavior, Rice follows the general trend established by male authors of vampire fiction in piling up greater numbers of female bodies and presenting the violation of those bodies in frequently lurid detail. Her portrayals of issues surrounding "the female" and "the feminine" therefore remain problematic. To understand why, a closer examination of several of the key female characters in the *Chronicles* is warranted.

The most thoroughly developed female character in *Interview With the Vampire* is Claudia, the little girl who first becomes the victim, then the "daughter" of Louis and Lestat. As a child vampire she lures her victims to their deaths with her appearance of helpless innocence. Yet while vampirism has endowed her body with strength and immortality, it has also made that body changeless. As the years pass her mind continues to mature, but her body remains that of a child. The persistent repetition of doll imagery used in connection with Claudia's appearance serves to illustrate how her body literally becomes a trap. According to Louis, both he and Lestat "played with her as if she were a magnificent doll" (Rice, *Interview* 100). Lestat gives her dolls, he and Louis dress her as a doll, they educate her—essentially, the two male vampires "play house" with her for decades, assuming the roles of "fathers," their treatment of her designed to
simultaneously reinforce her dependence and their control. In *Prism of the Night*, Rice refers to Claudia as "the embodiment of my failure to deal with the feminine. She is a woman trapped in a child's body. She's the person robbed of power" (Ramsland 154). Yet though her body is small, her mind is strong and sharp. Over time, Louis finds himself distressed by the increasing contrast between her looks and her essence:

She was to be the demon child forever... But her mind. It was a vampire's mind. And I strained to know how she moved towards womanhood. She came to talk more, though she was never other than a reflective person and could listen to me patiently by the hour without interruption. Yet more and more her doll-like face seemed to possess two totally aware adult eyes, and innocence seemed lost somewhere with neglected toys and the loss of a certain patience. There was something dreadfully sensual about her lounging on the settee in a tiny nightgown of lace a stitched pearls; she became an eerie and powerful seductress, her voice as clear and sweet as ever, though it had a resonance which was womanish, a sharpness sometimes that proved shocking. (Rice, *Interview* 102).

Claudia's mind outgrows her body, and the discrepancy makes her monstrous not only to her fellow monsters, but to herself. Louis responds with bemusement, while Lestat does not hesitate to taunt her about the womanly "endowments [she'll] never possess" (133). Significantly, her reaction to her situation within this patriarchal household where the will of the fathers is law is not one of mute acceptance. From the moment of her "birth" as a vampire, she defies the authority of her vampire fathers. When Lestat refers to her as his daughter she responds with a clear denial: "I'm not your daughter... I'm my mamma's daughter" (95). Lestat corrects her, but her resistance of him persists, at one point reaching a state of apparent indifference.35 Ultimately, however, Claudia's most

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35 See Rice, *Interview* 106. According to Louis, She grew cold to Lestat. She fell to staring at him for hours. When he spoke, often she didn't answer him, and one could hardly tell if it was contempt or that she didn't hear. And our fragile domestic tranquility erupted with his outrage. He did not have to be loved, but he would not be ignored; and once he even flew at her, shouting that he would slap her,
intense feelings regarding her treatment at the hands of both males are rage and frustration. At one point she screams at Louis, accusing him and Lestat of

"Snatching me from mortal hands like two grim monsters in a nightmare fairy tale, you idle, blind parents! Fathers!" She spat the word. "Let tears gather in your eyes. You haven't tears enough for what you've done to me. Six more mortal years, seven, eight...I might have had that shape!" Her pointed finger flew at Madeleine... "Yes, that shape, I might have known what it was to walk at your side. Monsters! To give me immortality in this hopeless guise, this helpless form!" (263-264)

Compared to her "fathers," Claudia is neither big enough nor strong enough to survive on her own. Still, unlike Louis, she is not afraid to defy Lestat. Her response to Louis's conviction that Lestat will never let them go is an archly stated "Oh... really?" (119) It is she who acts to free them both from what she perceives as Lestat's stifling authority, observing to Louis that "we've been his puppets, you and I; you remaining to take care of him, and I your saving companion. Now's time to end it, Louis. Now's time to leave him" (119). After poisoning Lestat, she slashes his throat and stabs him in the chest. Her actions result in Lestat's apparent death and free her and Louis to travel to Europe in search of other vampires. While the two of them are together it is Claudia's turn to be the dominant member of their little family—a paradoxical arrangement of authority which she herself acknowledges, telling Louis "Would that I had your size...And would that you had my heart" (186). Yet despite her inner strength, she must still conform to the world's preconceptions regarding the behavior of a child. Even Louis, who has witnessed her

and I found myself in the wretched position of fighting him as I'd done years before she'd come to us...What's the matter with her!' he flared at me, as though I had given birth to her and must know.

Enraged by Claudia's indifference toward his authority, Lestat vents his frustration at Louis, who functions as the wife/mother figure in this triangle in terms of both his submission to Lestat and his nurturing of their "daughter." There is a good case to be made that, despite his male body, Louis never exerts genuine patriarchal authority. That role clearly falls to Lestat.
psychological torment and her violent defiance of Lestat, cannot help referring to her as "a beautiful child." Her response to the label is chilling:

"A beautiful child... Is that what you still think I am?" And her face went dark as again she played with the doll, her fingers pushing the tiny crocheted neckline down toward the china breasts. "Yes, I resemble... baby dolls"... And then I saw what her still childish figure was doing: in one hand she held the doll, the other to her lips; and the hand that held the doll was crushing it, crushing it and popping it so it bobbed and broke in a heap of glass that fell now from her open, bloody hand onto the carpet. (209)

Claudia's impotence, her rage at having no control over her body's size and appearance and how those factors will cause others to treat her, is a distinctly female condition within the bounds of patriarchal society. In "Undoing Feminism in Anne Rice's Vampire Chronicles," Devon Hodges and Janice L. Doane describe her relationship with Louis as an embodiment of "the father's desire for the girl child, the infantilized woman who is a perfectly obedient and dependent object of desire" (160). Yet while Claudia is often dependent upon Louis for agency outside their home, she is most certainly not obedient. In fact, it is Louis who bows to her wishes. This is especially evident in the scene in which she brings Madeleine to him and demands that he transform the woman into a vampire to serve as her "mother":

"Do it, Louis," she commanded. "Because I cannot do it." Her voice was painfully calm, all the emotion under the hard, measured tone. "I haven't the size, I haven't the strength! You saw to that when you made me! Do it!" (Rice, Interview 262)

Louis submits to her will, but in the end neither he nor Madeleine can protect Claudia from her fate. Lestat resurfaces, having survived Claudia's attempt at patricide, and based on his testimony, the vampires of the Théâtre capture her and condemn her to burn.
to death in the light of the sun. By the time Louis reaches her, there is nothing left of her body but ash—a grim testament to the futility of defying the father and attempting to break free of the patriarchal system.\(^{36}\)

On the surface, Lestat's survival and Claudia's demise may be read as an uncritical validation of the status quo. Indeed, Claudia's fate seems to support such a conclusion. It would be a mistake, however, to forget how Claudia behaves prior to her death. Her defiance of the labels assigned to her purely on the basis of her outward appearance is a mark of strength. The fact that her defiance is insufficient to alter those labels does not lead the reader to dismiss her as weak; at the very least, the cold subservience to patriarchal law displayed by both the male and female vampires who condemn her may itself be viewed as a weakness fostered by an uncritical mob mentality. Certainly, it is presented as an injustice—an injustice which awakens a critical consciousness within Louis and compels him, though he has been thoroughly passive and "feminized" up to this point, to finally act. The utter destruction of the Théâtre des Vampires and all of its inhabitants, who were agents of Lestat's patriarchal law, by one who was once submissive to that law himself, may be read as a political act—a reversal worth noting, particularly when one considers that according to Rice, Louis is basically a woman (herself) "in drag."

The second major female vampire character in *The Vampire Chronicles* is Gabrielle, the mother of Lestat. As a mortal woman, Gabrielle is the strongest influence on Lestat during the human portion of his life. It is Gabrielle who gets him his first dogs, his first flintlock musket, and his first good riding horse, which he uses to do what she cannot: get away from the house and become a great hunter. When he is twelve and has

\(^{36}\) The fact that Claudia's newly acquired vampire "mother" Madeleine is burned along with her promotes the interpretation that women's most strenuous efforts at independence and empowerment are insufficient against the centuries-old resilience of patriarchy.
an opportunity to go to school at a nearby monastery, it is she who fights for his right to attend—against his father's wishes. In a household dominated by men she is the only one who possesses any education, yet her strong, cultivated mind is not sufficient to free her from her domestic responsibilities as the only woman in a family of what Rice portrays as ignorant, self-serving males. Dissatisfied with the limitations imposed upon her life by patriarchal authority, she longs to "get out of the house," to escape the domestic trap which stifles her true identity. When Lestat confesses to dreams of murdering his father and brothers, Gabrielle understands his feelings: "I know how it is... You hate them. Because of what you've endured and what they don't know" (Rice, *Lestat* 36). Her emphasis on personal suffering in the face of patriarchal ignorance is clear. Indeed, she has a dream of her own which is worth quoting at length:

> You know what I imagine... Not so much the murdering of them as *an abandon which disregards them completely*. I imagine drinking wine until I'm so drunk I strip off my clothes and bathe in the mountain streams naked...And then I imagine going into the village...and up into the inn and taking into my bed any men that come there—crude men, big men, old men, boys. Just lying there and taking them one after another, and feeling some magnificent triumph in it, some absolute release without a thought of what happens to you father or your brothers, whether they are alive or dead. In that moment I am purely myself. I belong to no one. (Rice, *Lestat* 39, italics my emphasis)

Despite the imagery this is not so much a dream of decadence and debauchery as it is a dream of freedom, a dream of owning her own body and her own sexuality and being able to express herself in whatever manner she chooses without obligation to any man.

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37 See Rice, *Lestat* p. 31. Gabrielle prevails over her husband in this case. According to Lestat, "My father was angry and reminded her that if this had happened before he went blind, his will would have prevailed surely." The blindness of the father/head of the patriarchal household and his corresponding weakness functions on a metaphorical level as well. He is incapable of "seeing" (and thereby appreciating) either his wife or his son as individuals whose goals and dreams are legitimately different from his own. Gabrielle takes advantage of this weakness, and when she chooses to assert herself, it is she who becomes the real strength within the household.
As a mortal woman, Gabrielle has surrendered her claim to her own body through the institutions of marriage and motherhood. When she describes Lestat as "the man in me" and provides him with the means to go to Paris, she acts to symbolically free herself. Her freedom will remain symbolic as long as her body remains human—Rice's implicit acknowledgment that within patriarchal society only males are truly able to go out into the world and "be themselves" beyond a domestic frame of reference.

When Lestat visits the dying Gabrielle, he offers her a choice: Does she wish to join him as a vampire or not? This is significant, because as witnessed in vampire fiction by men, mortal women approached by vampires are typically either seduced or bitten and transformed against their will. Gabrielle recognizes what her son has become and freely chooses to enter the world of vampirism. When Lestat bites her and gives her his blood, he witnesses her utter transformation: "Her heart and soul split open. There was no age to her, no single moment. My knowledge dimmed and flickered and there was no mother anymore, no petty need and petty terror; she was simply who she was. She was Gabrielle" (Rice, Lestat 157-158, italics my emphasis). For the first time, Gabrielle's identity is not defined in terms of her relationship to a man as "wife" or "mother." As a vampire, she sets out to redefine herself according to her own tastes and desires. As she explores her surroundings with Lestat, she is most enthralled by her realization that

the darkest corners of the metropolis held no danger for us. She remarked on that. Perhaps it was that which enchanted her most of all, that we could slip past the dens of thieves unheard, that we could easily defeat anyone who should be fool enough to trouble us, that we were both visible and invisible, palpable and utterly unaccountable. (Rice, Lestat 170)

With the strength of her new vampire body, Gabrielle is truly free to go wherever she wishes to go, without fear. Now a hunter herself, she is no longer condemned to living vicariously through Lestat and therefore no longer regards him as "the organ for her which women do not really have" (Rice, Lestat 62). As Linda Badley observes,
When she realizes she no longer covets the phallus, Gabrielle no longer needs Lestat, who in making her a vampire has given her the means to become herself. She outgrows her human identity, and the vampire network offers her a gender-unspecific space in which to construct new bases for relationships. This myth has enormous appeal to women who have turned away from patriarchal models to reconstruct their lives. (134) Indeed, vampirism does enhance Gabrielle's independence and her ability to construct a subjectivity which expands to include both "masculine" and "feminine" attributes. When Gabrielle and Lestat are out seeking blood together, he describes her as "a pure predator, as only a beast can be a predator, and yet she was a woman walking slowly towards a man—a lady, in fact, stranded here without cape or hat or companions, and approaching a gentleman as if to beg for his aid. She was all that" (Rice, *Lestat* 165). Though a monster, Gabrielle still resembles a beautiful woman, and her appearance in these scenes creates false expectations regarding both her motives and her strength which she is able to turn to her advantage. She further problematizes her appearance and her gender identification by cross-dressing, and Lestat is frequently startled by her resemblance to "an unearthly young boy, an exquisite young boy" (Rice, *Lestat* 187). Eventually, as she becomes accustomed to the freedom which vampirism has given her, Gabrielle distances herself from Lestat and from the rest of civilization. Lestat's final account of her before she heads off into the wilderness alone describes her as a "[b]old young Frenchman who moved with the grace of an Arab through places in a hundred cities where only an alleycat could safely pass" (Rice, *Lestat* 354). Gabrielle's exodus may be viewed simultaneously as a rejection of the human patriarchal society and its expectations which had so stifled her when she was a woman and as a desire to explore the world with a freedom typically denied women of the eighteenth century.38 Whether her avoidance of

38 Critiquing Gabrielle's departure, Katherine Ramsland refers to the scene when "Gabrielle tries to cut her hair, it grows back, and she realizes that she has little control over her gender-specific appearance. Unable to avoid social expectations altogether, she
civilization is interpreted as a positive or negative attribute in terms of challenging the societal status quo, one thing is clear: vampirism allows her the choice to come and go as she sees fit, with regard to the desires of no one but herself. It thereby accomplishes a significant feat: it gets her out of the house.

The third major female character in *The Vampire Chronicles* is Akasha, the primary antagonist of Lestat and his fellow vampires and title character from *The Queen of the Damned*. The first and oldest vampire in existence, she is an ancient, elemental force who functions as an embodiment of matriarchal power in its narrowest, most hostile extreme. In ancient Egypt when she is attacked by assassins, a powerful evil spirit named Amel enters her body through her wounds and transforms her into the first vampire. She is the vampiric equivalent of Eve, her violated body serving as the conduit for an evil force which she passes first to her husband, then to others. For this reason vampires refer to her as the Mother, but she is a mother figure who embodies death, not life. When Lestat awakens her, she destroys Enkil and travels the earth immolating her own vampire "children" (Rice, *Queen* 430). Both actions may be interpreted as a violent rejection of the roles of "wife" and "mother" as they are understood within a patriarchal framework. Significantly, this rejection is portrayed not as a positive step toward individual female freedom, but as an extremist backlash against everything male.

Akasha equates masculinity with global aggression—aggression she seeks to overturn through a coldly mathematical process of elimination. Lestat is caught up in her vision as she incites the women and children of a small Greek island to "to rise, and to slay all moves away from society. She recedes somewhat from the story and merges with an inner darkness represented in the earth and trees with which she becomes obsessed" (253). This interpretation de-emphasizes Gabrielle's success at cross-dressing and gives her departure an air of retreat rather than freedom. It has the effect of turning her into a sort of "earth mother" figure who leaves not in a quest for knowledge and experience previously denied her, but in response to an inability to cope with the patriarchal world around her.
males within [their] village" (303). For Akasha, a world of peace is a world almost entirely devoid of men. Her desire to erase the attributes of one sex in order to promote the attributes of the other is rooted in a purely binary understanding of gendered behavior which Lestat recognizes as "a terrible lie" (305). Moreover, Akasha's power is itself very phallic in nature—an interpretation supported by her textual reference to Lestat as her "instrument."^39 Oblivious to her own hypocrisy, she overwhelms those who follow her with her physical beauty and with the strength of her words. Yet, as Maharet observes when she recalls what the Queen was like centuries beforehand, "her loveliness [overcomes] any sense of majesty or deep mystery; and her voice contain[s] still a childish ring to it" (331). Akasha is fundamentally a creature of surface ideals without substance, a powerful ego bent on molding the world to her own narrow concept of utopia. Her desire for conquest mimics that of her forebears from male-authored vampire fiction like *Dracula*, and the global scope of her threat to both humans and to other vampires is potentially devastating. Devon Hodges and Janice Doane capture the essence of her character when they state that "As a matriarch finally identified with the symbolic, Akasha turns out to be, what else? a feminist monster, a woman more interested in

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^39 Rice, *Queen* 259. The echo of Gabrielle is unmistakable here, but with a vital distinction. As the true biological mother of Lestat, she gives her son the means to go out into the world and build a life for himself. Her assertion of herself through him ultimately brings freedom and new vampire life to them both. Akasha, on the other hand, is a false mother-figure who seeks to keep Lestat pinned at her side. Her smothering embrace represents both stagnation and control—the antithesis of Gabrielle's emphasis on rebellion and independence.

There is also a scene in which Lestat, after helping Akasha to assert her power on the Greek island, studies his nude reflection in a mirror and notes "the organ, the organ we don't need, poised as if ready for what it would never again know how to do or want to do, marble, a Priapus at a gate" (Rice, *Queen* 357). Given the purely symbolic role of the phallus on the male vampire's body, and given the fact that this "arousal" only happens to Lestat after he has drunk Akasha's blood and participated in the mass killings of men which she has ordered, it is clear that Akasha herself possesses the very "masculine" tendencies which she professes to despise.
maternal theories than in real people" (168). By privileging ideas over flesh, Akasha disrupts the vampire aesthetic which dominates *The Vampire Chronicles* and emerges as a significant threat to human and vampire bodies alike. Her rejection by all of the other vampires, Lestat in particular, is a political move driven by their recognition that "It is not man who is the enemy of the human species. It is the irrational; it is the spiritual when it is divorced from the material; from the lesson in one beating heart or one bleeding vein" (Rice, *Queen* 448). Repetition of the word "one" here valorizes the individual human body as a site of wisdom, without regard for gender. Akasha, incapable of such valorization, is characterized as an irrational extreme which must be destroyed. Her demise, which involves decapitation and the cannibalism of her brain, literalizes the split between ideas and flesh for which she is damned.

Maharet is arguably the strongest female vampire in the Chronicles. As a human woman, she survives the horrors of rape and mutilation; transformed into a vampire, she remains an active part of the world down through the centuries. Her primary concern is maintaining the records of the Great Family, human descendants of her human daughter, who was born after her rape. The Great Family is matrilineal because, as Maharet asserts, "It was not possible to know if the children of the men were truly of my blood, and of my people's blood" (Rice, *Queen* 425). This statement articulates the patriarchal rationale for maintaining strict control over women's bodies and women's sexuality—a rationale which, as observed in the preceding chapter, is behind much of the sexual anxiety and sexually charged violence found in vampire fiction by men. Here, however, it undergoes an important shift of focus. Instead of functioning as an excuse for female repression, Maharet's observation affirms the centrality of women in establishing, controlling, and maintaining family ties—tasks to which she willingly devotes herself, tracking the spread of her descendants into every nation on earth over the course of six thousand years. Her description of the Great Family reveals the extent of her influence:
I myself was within the family; and the family knew me; and I knew the family's love. I became the writer of letters; the benefactor; the unifier; the mysterious yet trusted visitor who appeared to heal breaches and right wrongs. And though a thousand passions consumed me; though I lived for centuries in different lands, learning new languages and customs, and marveling at the infinite beauty of the world, and the power of the human imagination, I always returned to the family, the family which knew me and expected things from me. (Rice, Queen 425)

This passage makes it abundantly clear that Maharet, not Akasha, is the great Mother figure of the novel. Human life branches out all over the world because of her, and she is empowered by that life. She is a cohesive force among both humans and vampires, and all of the major vampire characters of the Chronicles—including Mekare, who has become a largely mindless, elemental force40—are drawn toward her prior to the final conflict with Akasha. Akasha herself is the antithesis of the maternal, taunting the twins with the remembrance of their own desecrated mother's body: "I don't look for my mother's heart and brain in the dirt!" (Rice, Queen 440) It is Akasha's body, however, which is finally destroyed, and Mekare devours her heart and brain, thereby completing the funeral feast that was disrupted so long ago and replacing the impersonal idea of the Mother with the solidity of the Mother's flesh and blood.

In comparison with their vampire counterparts, human women fare much worse when it comes to negative portrayals of the feminine in the Chronicles. Babette Freniere, who scandalizes her neighbors in eighteenth-century New Orleans by taking over the family plantation after her brother's death, fascinates Louis with her apparent strength. Babette Freniere, who scandalizes her neighbors in eighteenth-century New Orleans by taking over the family plantation after her brother's death, fascinates Louis with her apparent strength.

40 See Rice, Queen 452. Mekare, who literally claws herself out of the ground to seek vengeance on Akasha, resembles nothing so much as an ancient earth goddess. As Lestat describes her,

A thin layer of soil encased her all over, even the rippling shape of her long hair. Broken, peeling, stained by the rain even, the mud still clung to her, clung to her naked arms and bare feet as if she were made of it, made of earth itself. It made a mask of her face. And her eyes peered out of the mask, naked, rimmed in red.
Yet when he reveals himself to her as a supernatural being, she is psychologically incapable of dealing with his existence and ultimately sinks into insanity. Gretchen, the masochistic, self-sacrificing nun in *The Tale of the Body Thief*, literally loses herself in her religion. As both a Catholic and a woman she accepts the notion that her own needs and desires must be denied in the process of serving others. Lestat accuses her sharply:

"No, there's some fierce self-denial in you. You're hungry for love the way I starve night after night for blood. You punish yourself in your nursing, denying your carnal desires, and your love of music, and all the things of the world which are like music. You are a virtuoso, a virtuoso of your own pain." (249)

Gretchen can accept the idea of Lestat's vampirism when she is nursing the human body he inhabits back to health, but when he reacquires his own body and appears to her later in the novel, she rejects him and suffers what appears simultaneously to be a mental breakdown and a religious transfiguration. The utter success of her abnegation of self is revealed in this scene by the appearance of stigmata in her palms.

Yet another intensely religious woman, Dora, is found in *Memnoch the Devil*. She is unafraid of Lestat who, impressed by both her strength and the fervor of her faith, allows her to order him around. He comments repeatedly on the strength of both her voice and her gaze, describing her as "owl-like, with such a white face and big dark eyes, and she was actually slightly scary herself" (118, 125-126). Though she is not a vampire, she resembles one, and in the strength of her religious convictions she becomes monstrous in her own right. She is determined to create her own religious order, distinct from all others as harboring preaching women! Nuns have been nurses, teachers for little children, servants, or locked in the cloister to bray at God like so many boring sheep. Her women would be doctors of the church, you see! Preachers. They would work up the crowds with personal fervor; they would turn to the women, the impoverished and the depotentiated women, and help them reform the world. (86)
Locked in this quote is a recognition of how traditional secular religion has stripped women of their potential to become voices for conversion. Dora is a compelling speaker, and Lestat notices how "Smart females who want to hear smart females listen to her. But she's beginning to attract everyone. You cannot make it in this world if you speak to only one gender" (82). The fact that Dora speaks to both genders sets her apart from Akasha, the other female voice in the Chronicles determined to build a new religion. She is also set apart by her very human body—a body which acquires dimension as a sacrament in its own right when Lestat returns from hell and, having rejected both God and Memnoch, buries his face in her skirts, "near to the blood between her legs, the blood of the living womb, the blood of Earth, the blood of Dora that the body could give" which he then proceeds to drink:

I lapped at the blood... just coming from the mouth of her womb, not pure blood, but blood from her, blood from her strong, young body... blood that brought no pain, no sacrifice, only her gentle forbearance with me, with my unspeakable act...

"Unclean, thank God, unclean," I whispered, my tongue licking at the secret bloodstained place, taste and smell of blood, her sweet blood, a place where blood flows free and no wound is ever made or ever needs to be made, the entrance to her blood open to me in her forgiveness. (322)

This scene is cast as a monstrous celebration of the female body and of the parts of that body which the dominant society has historically constructed as "unclean." The womb, the vagina, is recognized by Lestat for the first time as a site where blood may be shared without injury, pain, or fear. Rape metaphors are absent in this encounter, which stresses instead the woman's consent and the vampire's gentle consideration for her well-being. Sensuality dominates in Lestat's description, but the entire event is strangely deroticized. Dora's response is far more maternal than sexual as she comforts the weeping Lestat when it is over, lending the sequence a powerfully Oedipal slant. The concept of a womb "open in forgiveness" carries a host of questions and possible interpretations, most
of which center around Dora’s status as a mother-figure. On one level, Lestat is enacting a kind of monstrous return to the womb which, for the vampire, proves life-giving through menstrual blood rather than birth. The experience is couched as a revelation of the power and fertility of the female body, yet it is an ambiguous revelation at best. For what, precisely, is Lestat being forgiven? His past exercises of a naturalized male rape impulse? And what of his simultaneous celebration and reification of the dominant society’s labeling of female sexual organs as “unclean?” In discussing the use of pornography in Male Gothic, Ann Williams speaks of patriarchal assumptions which label female sexuality which is even “partly removed from male control” as “beyond the pale, indecent, and, if not ‘unspeakable,’ not to be spoken” (107). Within a pornographic context, that uncontrollability is constructed as justification of male violence against the female body. Clearly, the paradoxes involved in Lestat’s account of drinking Dora’s menstrual blood are manifold. The scene constructs female sexuality as beyond Lestat’s control, but not beyond his access. Moreover, his access is not gained through rape, but through mutual consent. Although he categorizes the act as “unspeakable,” he speaks it nonetheless, in graphic detail. His use of the words “Unclean, thank God, unclean” reflects patriarchal anxieties about both female sexual organs and menstrual blood while simultaneously expressing intense gratitude for them. He is, in effect, thanking God for the materiality of a woman’s body—yet it is not Dora’s individual sexuality which he celebrates but an archetypal female body which, endowed with mysterious and maternal power, serves as a gateway to the flesh. The abject and the taboo achieve a newly perverse configuration here in this merging of the vampire’s mouth with female genitalia, in this act of sex which is not one, which pulls Lestat away from the spiritual chaos of hell and makes him conscious once again of the power of the flesh. Despite the intimacy between woman and vampire, from Lestat’s perspective Dora remains a largely enigmatic force. Though human, she and the women who precede her are marked as Other to such
an extent that neither the male vampire protagonists nor the reader who views the women from those vampires' perspectives can fully comprehend or sympathize with them.

Other statements uttered at intervals throughout The Vampire Chronicles reveal additional problematic views of women. For instance, when The Vampire Lestat opens and the reader is presented with a newly awakened Lestat who has been dormant underground for several decades, the vampire observes the freedom modern women exercise in terms of presenting themselves in public and delights in noting that, "For the first time in history, perhaps, [women] were as strong and as interesting as men" (7). In The Vampire Lestat, Marius asserts that "most women are weak, be they mortal or immortal. But when they are strong, they are absolutely unpredictable" (470). In The Tale of the Body Thief, Raglan James mentions having tried to exist in a female body and "[doesn't] recommend that at all" (127). Dora's mother, Terry, is described by her husband's ghost as "mammalian... Instinctive; nursetlike; antiseptic" in her treatment of their daughter. These statements and others like them reveal Rice's ongoing struggle with female bodies and with the roles which society permits women to adopt. From a patriarchal perspective, human female identity is a conundrum at best; at worst, it is a very narrow range of traits into which Rice herself never believed she fit. Her resultant sense of her own "monstrosity" is translated into the minds and bodies of her male vampire protagonists and culminates, in Memnoch the Devil, in the voice of the Devil himself. After watching humans evolve, Memnoch observes: "There they stood, male and female, He created them, and except for that, ... except for—that one was male and one was female, they were made in the Image of God and of His Angels! It had come to this! To this! God split in Two! Angels split in Two!" Infuriated, he rushes to confront God and cries, "'Is this what you wanted! Your own image divided into male and female! The spark of life now blazing huge when either dies, male or female! This grotesquerie; this impossible division; this monster! Was this the plan?'" (199) Memnoch's anger at
sexual division is rendered intriguingly problematic by his own incorporation of attributes which are labeled "male" and "female." When Lestat describes him he notes that "he did embody the empowered feminine is ever a creature could. He was as marble angels, as the statues of Michelangelo; the absolute preciseness and harmony of the feminine was in his physique" (199). Yet in discussing his own choice of a male body when he enters the material realm of Earth, Memnoch admits that he could have selected a female body because "The females resemble us more, truly. But if we are both, then surely we are more male than female. It is not in equal parts" (220). Memnoch, God, and the angels may coalesce male and female attributes into a single form, but the aggregation is still defined in gendered terms which reify the patriarchal privileging of the "masculine." Indeed, Memnoch may "embody the empowered feminine," but one cannot escape the fact that he is referred to with exclusively masculine pronouns. Rice has entered a dangerous territory here where slippage occurs between the "masculine" and the "empowered feminine," where the vigorous "she" gets translated as "he" in a body (the Devil's and, by extension, the vampire Lestat's) which is constructed as both monstrous and damned.

In this final novel of The Vampire Chronicles, there are no easy answers to the dilemmas posed by naturalized concepts of gender within the dominant society. There is no "mercy-bearing stake" which dispatches the vampire and thereby re-validates the status quo. Narrator and reader alike continue to grapple with language which warps the construction of individual subjectivity and produces the vampire, along with all of the polymorphously perverse expressions of desire which such a cyborg monster embodies. The only certainty amid the confusion of flesh, gender, and spirit is the endurance of the vampire body and the identity forged via that body's aesthetic experiences of the world—experiences which dramatically expand the possibilities for individual subject
construction but which are still limited, in the end, by the body itself. As the narrator
reveals: "I am the Vampire Lestat. This is what I saw. This is what I heard. This is
what I know! This is all I know" (Rice, Memnoch 353).
Like their male counterparts discussed in Chapter 1, contemporary female writers of vampire fiction are conscious of their position in a literary tradition that extends back into the early nineteenth century. Their novels acknowledge and occasionally even critique the vampire fiction that precedes them, with particular emphasis on Dracula. Both Anne Rice and Suzy McKee Charnas, for instance, use the voices of their vampire protagonists to deride Stoker's novel. In The Vampire Tapestry, Weyland expresses distaste for Dracula as "meandering" and "inaccurate" with its emphasis on "those absurd fangs" (159). Lestat, meanwhile, refers to his Victorian predecessor as a "big ape" and a "hirsute Slav" whose penchant for crawling down walls borders on the ridiculous (Rice, Lestat 500). These barbs are not insignificant. Throughout most of the twentieth century, Dracula has been the dominant popular cultural model of the vampire in films and in fiction produced by men. Within the last three decades Rice, Charnas, and other women writers have countered that model with vampire characters of their own—characters who speak extensively on their own behalf and who state, unequivocally, that Stoker 'got it wrong.' Such statements are part of a rhetorical strategy designed to establish these women's novels as "corrections" of the "inaccuracies" promoted by their most famous male predecessor. Their vampire characters function as revisionist historians, claiming vampire history for themselves and asserting their right to revise it. In essence, they are laying claim to authenticity in the genre of vampire storytelling, and it is a claim that warrants further investigation.
What lies behind this drive, on the part of female authors, toward the creation of "authentic" (i.e., "correct") vampire stories? In attempting to address such a question, one need perhaps look no further than the silence and/or absence of women throughout much of the history of Western literature as a whole. Within the dominant culture, women exist as a class of Others whose experiences have tended to be either recorded inaccurately or not recorded at all. In terms of representation, their voices have been either silenced or edited as a means of maintaining the dominant cultural status quo. As Marina Warner observes, fostered largely by the Christian tradition, "The interdiction on female speech tolls down the years, one of those insistent refrains of misogyny that has acquired independent life, regardless of context, of the times, or the speaker's own circumstances" (30). It is therefore not surprising to find women writers responding rather strongly to a character whom Joan Gordon and Veronica Hollinger describe as "that fatal silence at the heart of Stoker's novel" (2). Dracula's "fatal silence" can be understood in two ways. On one level, it represents the threat of the unknown/unknowable Other as that Other is perceived by the dominant culture. On another level, it represents an absence of voice which ultimately proves deadly to the one who is silenced or whose motives and desires are interpreted solely by outsiders (i.e., the vampire). Vampire novels by women venture toward correcting that silence by embracing the vampire and flaunting its Otherness in such intimate detail that it is no longer an unknown entity, but a being with whom the reader may actively sympathize. They do this by allowing their vampires to speak on their own behalf or by establishing an omniscient narrator who is privy to the innermost thoughts and feelings of the vampire protagonist. The formerly silent center of the vampire story is thus rendered vocal, and with the vampire's newly acquired voice comes an identity that moves beyond what is described in folklore and in fiction by men. Just as "[t]he speaking woman . . . refuses subjection, and turns herself from a passive object of desire into a conspiring and
conscious stimulation," the speaking vampire refuses his/her history of subjection within the genre of vampire fiction and emerges as a newly vibrant character (Warner 30). The authors are highly conscious of the revision taking place. Charnas describes in detail her deliberate "imposition on [Weyland]...of the victim (or "feminine") role" in *The Vampire Tapestry* as a means of making the vampire more human (Charnas, "Meditations" 63). Meanwhile, Jewelle Gomez admits an even broader agenda. In an essay entitled "Recasting the Mythology: Writing Vampire Fiction," she characterizes her writing of *The Gilda Stories* as an effort toward "re-cast[ing] the mythology of vampirism to fit [her] own lesbian/feminist philosophy" and describes her motivations at length:

> The challenge for me was to create a new mythology, to strip away the dogma that has shaped the vampire figure within the rather narrow Western, Caucasian expectation, and to create a heroic figure within a broader, more ancient cultural frame of reference. . . . I was very surprised as I read more and more vampire fiction to see that so little of it featured women vampires. Even the famous *Carmilla* is about a young girl rather than a motivated adult . . . . I don't perpetually equate sex with violence against women, and I felt that in exploring the sensual nature of vampires I could re-cast it in a less exploitative mode. That seemed fairly easy to do once I stripped away the Christian trappings and modern cultural assumptions. . . . We need to be able to accept contradictions—such as the fact that women are both powerful and victimized—in order to visualize beyond our own immediate experience. (87, 88, 91)

These observations factor directly into the creation of Gilda, a black lesbian vampire who brings dreams instead of death and whose strength, independence, and confident sensuality are portrayed as positive attributes rather than aberrations.

Anne Rice, too, is very deliberate in her efforts to transcend previously existing images of the vampire. In an interview with Stanley Wiater, she describes her motivation for writing *Interview With the Vampire* as follows:

> I wrote the vampire novel I wanted to read. That's what I did— I wrote the book that I had never been able to find. That really told me what the vampire did in his "off-hours." What he really felt. That's all I was doing. But obviously, if I wanted that, somebody else is going to want to be
drawn into his living room at four o'clock in the morning and learn what
he has to say in argument to his fellow vampires. And that's what the
reader got, that kind of intimacy . . . Whether you think it succeeds or not,
the attempt was sincere. I wanted to transcend the genre—but I also
wanted to write the best damn vampire novel within the genre that has
ever been written. (165)

While each of these authors is aware of how her work revises existing tropes in
vampire literature, it is perhaps even more interesting to note how this awareness is
manifested within the texts themselves. The vampire characters in these novels by
women are highly conscious of how their own lived realities contrast sharply with the
stories of vampires which they encounter in folklore and in other fiction. "Untruths" and
"inaccuracies" in conventions from the latter skew not only the popular cultural
understanding of vampires, but also the vampires' ability to understand and define
themselves and their role within that culture. For instance, in The Vampire Tapestry,
Floria Landauer refers to Weyland as "Dracula" until she progressively learns his story
from his own lips and begins to see him as something other than a stereotype. While
addressing a lecture hall, Weyland confronts his audience with his own "hypothetical"
account of "how . . . nature [would] design a vampire" (35). His description runs for
several pages and includes the following segment on human representation of vampires:

Primitive men first encountering the vampire would be unaware that they
themselves were products of evolution, let alone that he was. They would
make up stories to account for him and to try to control him. In early
times he might himself believe in some of those legends—the silver bullet,
the oaken stake. Waking at length in a less credulous age he would
abandon these notions, just as everyone else did. He might even develop
an interest in his own origins and evolution. (39)

Weyland's observation here makes a clear distinction between vampire "legend" and
vampire "reality" as the vampire himself has experienced both. Moreover, it introduces
the concept of how external human representations of the vampire might distort his own
understanding of who/what he is—especially since he lacks any texts of his own with
which to contradict those representations.
Similar concerns with cultural representation are present in *The Gilda Stories*. When the original Gilda reveals her true vampire nature to the Girl, she addresses her thus: "There are only inadequate words to speak for who we are. The language is crude, the history false. You must look to me and know who I am . . . " (43). Gilda's insistence upon being recognized as an individual whose story is no less unique than that of anyone else coincides with her acknowledgment that the language which the dominant culture has used to describe her and her kind is both "crude" and "inadequate." The history, too, is acknowledged as "false," presumably because none of it has been written by the vampires themselves. Given the added dimensions of race, gender, and sexual orientation which are central to vampirism as it is constructed within this novel, the statement is a broad-ranging indictment of the dominant culture's portrayals of those whom it has cast as Other. Gilda speaks not only for vampires but for women, homosexuals (esp. lesbians), and racial minorities as well.

Anne Rice addresses problems of vampire representation on numerous occasions throughout the Vampire Chronicles. Many of these are concentrated in *Interview With the Vampire*. In an early exchange between Louis and the boy to whom he tells his story, the vampire devotes himself to correcting a number of popular "misconceptions" about his kind:

"Oh, the rumor about crosses!" the vampire laughed. "You refer to our being afraid of crosses?"
"Unable to look on them, I thought," said the boy.
"Nonsense, my friend, sheer nonsense. I can look on anything I like. And I rather like looking on crucifixes in particular."
"And what about the rumor about keyholes? That you can... become steam and go through them."
"I wish I could," laughed the vampire. "How positively delightful. I should like to pass through all manner of different keyholes and feel the tickle of their peculiar shapes. No." He shook his head. "That is, how would you say today...bullshit?"
The boy laughed despite himself. Then his face grew serious. "You mustn't be so shy with me," the vampire said. "What is it?"
"The story about stakes through the heart," said the boy, his cheeks coloring slightly. "The same," said the vampire. "Bull-shit," he said, carefully articulating both syllables, so that the boy smiled. (22-23)

Louis’s amused dismissal of several of the key tropes of the vampire legend as it appears in popular culture (which has derived the bulk of its ideas from folklore, films, and fiction by men) establishes a clear distinction between the latter, which is classed as "rumor," and the "truth" of his vampire life as he has experienced it.

At issue in these female authors’ texts is the central question of who owns the truth, and it is a question connected directly with who is permitted to speak. All three women are appropriating the speaking/representation problem as a means of revealing "true" vampires, and this is a move which warrants further investigation. In an essay entitled "Ventriloquist Folklore: Who Speaks for Representation?" Susan Ritchie discusses how folklore uses "ventriloquist strategies of representation" in which it "presumes to speak on the behalf of some voiceless group or individual" (3). According to Ritchie, these strategies tend to be highly problematic because they ignore the impact of context on both performance and the scholarly products which result from it. Moreover, ventriloquism "establishes the folklorist as a kind of medium or channeler who presents the true voices of those otherwise lost to an audience so eager for diverse articulations that they fail to note this 'diversity'—these signs of another world—issue from folklore's single disciplinary throat" (Ritchie 5-6). In other words, the cultural representations of the folklorist inevitably alter the material which he or she represents, and the notion that folklore somehow captures previously silenced "authentic" folk voices and presents them intact to a broader audience is always already a delusion.

What happens when similar ventriloquist strategies are appropriated for use in works of fiction? As this study has revealed, the character of the vampire functions as the silenced Other within the masternarrative of vampire fiction as the genre was created
and first promoted by men. Rice, Charnas, and Gomez permit their vampires to speak for themselves, and in doing so these women re-invent the vampire. Their vampire protagonists are no less fictional constructs than their predecessors in vampire texts by men—hence, the fictional vampire is always already a representation for which there exists no "authentic" original. Circulating within the realm of the literary symbolic, it becomes a figure which individual authors appropriate as a vehicle for expressing their own interpretations of social, cultural, and political "truths."

Vampire protagonists in novels by women are highly conscious of the relativity of "truth" in representation, especially with regard to the vampire archetype spawned by Stoker in Dracula. As a consequence, they seek their own individual understandings of what it means to be a creature which Western culture has labeled "vampire," thereby valorizing the importance of self-knowledge and self-construction. According to Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, "For all literary artists . . . self-definition necessarily precedes self-assertion: the creative "I AM" cannot be uttered if the "I" knows not what it is. But for the female artist the essential process of self-definition is complicated by all those patriarchal definitions that intervene between herself and herself" (17). In their own way, each of the vampire protagonists in these women's novels represents an appropriation of this dilemma, which becomes a new trope of the genre as they work to uncover the "real" history behind existing vampire myths. Weyland establishes an identity for himself as an anthropology professor, but he still wonders about his roots as a vampire. Unlike the vampires of Rice and Gomez, Weyland is truly alone. His vampire existence as Charnas constructs it is punctuated by periods of hibernation which last several generations, during the course of which he forgets the details of his past. He has no memory of parents or of a childhood, nothing aside from his predatory instinct to help him define who or what he is. When he seeks therapy from Floria Landauer, he admits to her that "there are limits on my methods of self-discovery, short of turning myself over to a
laboratory for vivisection. I have no others like myself to look at and learn from. Any
tools that may help are worth much to me, and these games of yours are—potent''
(Charnas, *Tapestry* 158). Without a role model, Weyland must construct his identity on
his own. Moreover, he must do so within a framework of human language and cultural
values which runs counter to his own innate sense of self.

In *The Gilda Stories*, Jewelle Gomez establishes individual storytelling and
recollection of the past as crucial aspects of vampire identity. The importance of both is
clear from the novel's earliest pages, when the Girl listens while Gilda and Bird tell their
stories and "hear[s] in the passion of their voices the truth of the stories [they] had
lived." Unlike Dracula, who seeks to impress Jonathan Harker with tales of his descent
from a race of conquerors, these vampire women seek to educate the Girl by emphasizing
the importance of their own individual female experiences. In Bird's case, her Native
American roots establish her voice as one of *resistance* to conquest. Both she and Gilda
are clearly focalized not as threats, but as role models whose words evoke the Girl's own
vivid memories of her mother and sisters as slaves in the cotton fields, and of the distant
African home which her mother had told her about. Though Africa seems largely
"unreal" to her, she can still envision the dancing:

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1 Charnas, *Tapestry* 38. See also Warner 35. In addition to the stories which Bird and
Gilda tell each other, there are also the stories which the women at Woodard's exchange
in the kitchen, along with stories which Gilda later shares with the female patrons of her
beauty shop and the women who listen to her sing. Warner's discussion of gossip
describes how, historically, "Gossipy gatherings of women together were the focus of
much male anxiety about women's tongues in Reformation as well as Catholic Europe." She
further indicates that "Of all the professions, official and unofficial, those which
allowed women to pass between worlds out of the control of native or marital family
seemed to pose the greatest threat to apparent due order." The women at Woodard's are
prostitutes, as are several of Gilda's beauty shop clients. Gilda herself is a lesbian, and a
majority of the women who listen to her sing in clubs and share her life are also lesbian—
clearly outside accepted social controls and potentially sources of male anxiety.
The Girl could close her eyes and almost hear the rhythmic shuffling of feet, the bells and gourds. All kept beat inside her body, and the feel of heat from an open fire made the dream place real. Talking of it now, her body rocked slightly as if she had been rewoven into that old circle of dancers. She poured out the images and names, proud of her own ability to weave a story. Bird smiled at her pupil who claimed her past . . . . (39)

For the Girl, who later assumes Gilda's name, the mingled pride and pain of history is a valuable source of empowerment. Decades later, despite her long existence as a vampire, her recollections of the struggles of black history still strongly inform her sense of self.

The inattention of her contemporaries to some mortal questions, like race, didn't suit her. She didn't believe a past could, or should, be so easily discarded. Her connection to the daylight world came from her blackness. The memories of her master's lash as well as her mother's face, legends of the Middle Passage, lynchings she had not been able to prevent, images of black women bent over scouring brushes—all fueled her ambition. She had been attacked more than once by men determined that she die, but of course she had not. She felt their hatred as personally as any mortal. The energy of the struggles of those times sustained her, somehow. (180)

Gilda's reflections in this passage emphasize her refusal to prioritize her vampirism over her racial heritage. Before she was a vampire, she was a young black woman who witnessed firsthand the oppression of slavery. Within the context of the novel, her memories of those times lend her the strength to survive as both a black woman and a vampire in a world which has cast those identity positions as Other.

Gilda's confident awareness and affirmation of her own history is notably absent in Interview With the Vampire, which may be read as an extended account of a vampire's quest for self-knowledge. When Louis starts the interview, he expresses his desire "to tell the real story" of his life as a vampire (4, italics my emphasis). His story, however, is fraught with confusion. Lestat, his maker, is a poor teacher who never provides a satisfactory answer to his question: "What am I?" (64) Still, he confesses to remaining in Lestat's company because
I was afraid he did know essential secrets as a vampire which I could not
discover alone and, more important, because he was the only one of my
kind whom I knew. He had never told me how he had become a vampire
or where I might find a single other member of our kind. This troubled
me greatly . . . . (63)

Louis works on the assumption that an inept role model is better than no role model at
all, but only for a time. Ultimately, he confronts Lestat with his doubts and desires
regarding his vampirism, stating "I am interested in my own nature now, and I've come to
believe I can't trust you to tell me the truth about it. You use knowledge for personal
power . . . ." (81) His sentiments are later echoed by Claudia, who is convinced that she
and Louis will "know [the] answers when we find those who can tell us, those who've
possessed knowledge for centuries, for however long creatures such as ourselves have
walked the earth. That knowledge was our birthright, and [Lestat] deprived us . . . . I
want no more orphans like ourselves! . . . I want answers, knowledge" (166, 199).

Claudia's reference to herself and Louis as "orphans" is significant. In relation to them
both, Lestat's role is that of a patriarchal father-figure—a father-figure who has failed.
Within this broader cultural context, their accusations directed toward Lestat become an
indictment of the patriarchal male's monopoly over historical "knowledge." Such a
monopoly is maintained at the expense of women and minorities, whose cultural and
individual experiences are typically devalued and/or distorted by that "history" and who
often suffer identity crises as a result.

Deprived of the knowledge that they believe will help them better understand
their vampire nature, both Louis and Claudia are desperately in search of communion
with "[their] own kind" (150). However, the only information they have to guide their
search comes from books of Eastern European vampire lore, and all they discover in that
part of the world are mindless, animated corpses. Confronted with the inadequacy of
existing literature, Louis comes to the realization that they should have started with
"[their] language, [their] people," in Paris (202). This is a relatively minor plot detail, but its message is significant: in an effort to better understand themselves, these characters must look not to books or to exotic foreign lands, but to their own human cultural roots. Yet even these may prove problematic.

While in Paris, Louis and Claudia do encounter other vampires. Louis is immediately disenchanted by their uniformly white skin, black clothes, and dyed black hair, complaining that they have "made of immortality a club of fads and cheap conformity" (255). Indeed, the vampires of Paris have thoroughly commodified themselves and are content to perform stylized acts of vampirism in their Théâtre des Vampires before crowds of jaded Parisians who are oblivious to the reality of what occurs on stage. They appear utterly unconcerned about their history, or about discovering other possibilities for constructing their own identities. At first Louis is convinced that Armand, their compellingly beautiful leader, is different. He sees Armand as "the teacher which Lestat had never been. Knowledge would never be withheld by Armand, I knew it. I would pass through him as through a pane of glass so that I might bask in it and absorb it and grow" (256). Eventually, however, Armand also disappoints. While he and Louis share an intense attraction toward one another, Claudia's murder forces Louis to realize that Armand holds no secrets, no great enlightening truths about what it means to be a vampire. All he learns from Armand is a kind of cold resignation to death and destruction as the essence of vampire existence, expressed in a final address to his failed "mentor:"

. . . when I came to Paris I thought you were powerful and beautiful and without regret, and I wanted that desperately. But you were a destroyer just as I was a destroyer, more ruthless and cunning even than I. You showed me the only thing that I could really hope to become, what depth of evil, what degree of coldness I would have to attain to end my pain. And I accepted that. And so that passion, that love you saw in me, was extinguished. And you see now simply a mirror of yourself. (340)
By the novel's end, Louis is left alone to salvage for himself what he will of his own vampire identity. Predictably, that identity has been strongly influenced by his ineffectual father-figures, Lestat and Armand. When a younger vampire, "Lestat's latest child," seeks Louis out and begs him "to tell him all [he] knew of the world, to become his companion and his teacher," Louis refuses and threatens to kill the younger vampire if he ever sees him again, thereby becoming part of the novel's well-established cycle of failed role models (341). The underlying message is that those to whom we are accustomed to turn with high expectations don't hold the answers we seek. In this novel, those disappointing authority figures are consistently male.

Despite Louis's unsuccessful efforts, the vampire quest for historical "truth" and a correspondingly strengthened sense of identity is continued in The Vampire Lestat. Lestat himself is a character whose male role models fail him. When he is mortal, his real father is a distant and ineffectual influence. The vampire Magnus, who kidnaps and transforms Lestat into a vampire against his will, destroys himself in flames before he can teach Lestat anything of value. Lestat's immediate response to his transformation is an uneasy blend of exultation at his newly heightened sensory awareness and despair at his realization that he is alone. His need of guidance is evident even in minor situations, such as when he approaches his coffin for the first time:

...There were Latin words inscribed around the rim, and I couldn't read them.

This tormented me. I wished the words weren't there, and my longing for Magnus, my helplessness, threatened to close in on me. (102)

Still, Lestat is far more independent than Louis. Without a teacher, he does his best to survive on his own—and succeeds. Even so, he expresses a deep respect for knowledge and an insatiable desire to learn more about the history of vampires. After he and Gabrielle encounter Armand's vampire coven, he is distressed when the coven's aged queen walks into the fire and takes all of her knowledge with her (243). Gabrielle shares
his need for answers, as well as his skepticism about whether or not Armand can provide them. She presses Armand: "What have you really learned besides devil worship and superstition? What do you know about us, and how we came into existence? Give that to us, and it might be worth something. And then again, it might be worth nothing." Compared with Claudia and Louis, Gabrielle and Lestat possess a much stronger appreciation of their own individual power and are much more assertive in the presence of other vampires. They openly reject the coven's "wretched existence" in the filthy catacombs below Paris, which is rooted in misguided acceptance of old human superstitions regarding what vampires are "supposed" to be. Lestat challenges the coven:

"What are you meant to be? . . . The images of chain-rattling ghosts who haunt cemeteries and ancient castles? . . . My childhood nurse many a time thrilled me with tales of such fiends . . . Told me they might at any moment leap out of the suits of armor in our house to carry me away screaming . . . IS THAT WHAT YOU ARE?" (Rice, Lestat 228-229)

Lestat does not yet fully understand himself what it means to be a vampire, but he has a very strong reaction against what he believes it is not. Most emphatically, it is not an enforced conformity to outdated superstitions and representations created by humans, in relation to whom vampires are wholly Other. Lestat has carried his flamboyant actor's personality with him into vampirism, and he refuses to abandon it. In comparison with the vampires of the coven he is a pioneer among his kind, and he acknowledges his status with a blend of pride and defiance:

"Don't you see? . . . It is a new age. It requires a new evil. And I am that

2 Rice, Queen 289. See also Gilbert and Gubar 134. In their discussion of Jane Austen's Northanger Abbey, Gilbert and Gubar observe that "Ignoring the political and economic activity of men throughout history, Austen implies that history may very well be a uniform drama of masculine posturing that is no less a fiction (and a potentially pernicious one) than gothic romance. She suggests, too, that this fiction of history is finally a matter of indifference to women, who never participate in it and who are almost completely absent from its pages." Gabrielle clearly echoes this sentiment.
evil... I am the vampire for these times... try to envision my beauty and my power. Try to see the evil that I am. I stalk the world in mortal dress—the worst of fiends, the monster who looks exactly like everyone else... There is no bedchamber, no ballroom that I cannot enter. Death in the glow of the hearth, Death on tiptoe in the corridor, that is what I am. Speak to me of the Dark Gifts—I use them. I'm Gentleman Death in silk and lace, come to put out the candles... The old mysteries have given way to a new style. And who knows what will follow? There is no romance in what you are. There is great romance in what I am!" (228-229)

In comparison with the vampires in fiction by men he literally is a new vampire, a new representation of evil. There is no romance in Dracula but there is intense romance throughout Rice's Vampire Chronicles, where the protagonists are motivated not by desire for conquest, but by the fiercely aesthetic experience of desire itself.

Despite his apparent confidence, Lestat still desires a more complete understanding of what he is. When Armand tells him of Marius, he becomes obsessed with thoughts of this ancient vampire and travels from Paris to Cairo seeking traces of him. Along the way he carves messages for Marius into stone walls out of a combined desire to tell Marius that he is searching for him and to leave a lasting sign of his own presence. As he travels "alone among humans" he is struck rather forcefully with an awareness of "[his] own monstrosity" (Rice, Lestat 331). He intensely desires to be a part of the world around him, but his vampirism precludes such a connection, and he finds himself horrified by his own Otherness. In despair, he buries himself in the earth, where he wastes away until Marius comes and literally raises him up. It is only through establishing a connection with Marius, a vampire "ancestor" who has managed to maintain his own connection to humanity, that Lestat acquires the strength to once again

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3 This is the first instance of vampire graffiti in the Vampire Chronicles. Graffiti also appears in the opening chapter of The Queen of the Damned. In both instances the graffiti writer's purpose is to communicate not with the dominant culture, but with other vampires.
move through the world as a vampire. Marius teaches him what he has learned in his
thousand years of existence as a vampire and introduces him to Akasha and Enkil, also
known as Those Who Must Be Kept, the Mother and Father of all vampires. Knowledge
of these ancestors invigorates Lestat, and it is his re-awakening of Akasha which sets the
stage for the third novel of the Vampire Chronicles.

Pieces of vampire history continue to fall into place in The Queen of the Damned,
which incorporates a number of ancient vampires including Akasha, Maharet, Mekare,
and Khayman among others. Within the scope of this novel, the past holds the potential
for both destruction and salvation. In Gothic America: Narrative, History, and Nation,
Teresa A. Goddu discusses a similarly paradoxical awareness of the power of history as it
is articulated in Toni Morrison's Beloved:

> For Morrison . . . looking back to the past in order to make the present
> coherent is a necessary act; however, it is double-edged. Resurrecting
> one's history may be crucial to any forward movement, but it can be
> debilitating as well. There is never any assurance that the horrors of
> history can be assimilated or transformed. Once recognized, the abject
> history that Beloved represents may refuse to be exorcised and subsume
> both the present and the future.\(^4\)

Lestat, like the characters in Morrison's novel, also finds it necessary to look into the past
and he, too, finds that past to be "double-edged." He encounters Marius, who enlightens
him about vampire history, but he also resurrects Akasha, the horrific Mother of all
vampires whose impulses cannot be controlled and who defies the other vampires'

tries to dissuade her. Dormant for countless centuries, Akasha is detached from
history and trapped in her own narrow understanding of the past as nothing more than a

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\(^4\) Teresa A. Goddu, Gothic America: Narrative, History, and Nation (New York:
Columbia UP, 1997)155. Goddu further states that the solution which the novel offers to
"the abject history that Beloved represents" is "the act of community." Rice offers a
similar solution in The Queen of the Damned by gathering the novel's numerous vampire
protagonists together into one "grand coven of the wise, the enduring, the ancient, and the
careless young" (2) which confronts Akasha and cooperates in her destruction.
chronicle of "male" violence. She plans to "correct" that history by exercising her formidable power to literally dictate new terms of existence to humans and vampires alike:

"I shall make the rhyme or reason...I shall make the future; I shall define goodness; I shall define peace. And I don't call on mythic gods or goddesses or spirits to justify my actions, on abstract morality. I do not call on history either! I don't look for my mother's heart and brain in the dirt!" (Rice, Queen 440)

Her final reference is directed toward Maharet, who with her sister Mekare was prevented from devouring her mother's organs in a funeral feast. When human, the Twins belonged to a culture in which the bodies of the dead were eaten by their families as a gesture of deep respect. Significantly, it is by order of Akasha that Egyptian soldiers interrupt the funeral feast and trample their mother's heart and brain into the earth. It is also by Akasha's orders that the Twins are separated and Mekare is lost for thousands of years. The Mother of all vampires is, in truth, an anti-Mother who destroys family ties—particularly those which exist between women.

By contrast, Maharet is a living past who has maintained records of and contact with several hundred matrilineal generations of her own human descendants. She has woven herself into the world as a teacher and storyteller among both humans and vampires, without ambition to conquer either. It is she who gathers all of the primary vampire characters together and who tells the Story of the Twins—the story of herself and her sister, Mekare, which unifies them all against Akasha. Marius may have sketched a rough outline of vampire origins for Lestat, but it is Maharet who completes the details of the beginnings of vampire existence, and it is she and Mekare who ultimately defeat Akasha. Their victory functions as an illustration of the power which shared knowledge of a shared past can provide. Significantly, it is a vampire woman, a mother-figure, who possesses and distributes this "missing" knowledge.
Imagery associated with Maharet and Mekare links both women closely with the mythical figure of the Sibyl, the wise woman who pronounced her oracles from her hiding place within a cave. In The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination, Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar have explored literary uses of the cave at length. In particular, they mention Mary Shelley's story about a cave in her introduction to The Last Man, noting that

... the cave is a female space, and it belonged to a female hierophant, the lost Sibyl, the prophetess who inscribed her "divine intuitions" on tender leaves and fragments of delicate bark. For Mary Shelley, therefore, it is intimately connected with both her own artistic authority and her own power of self-creation. A male poet or instructor may guide her to this place, but, as she herself realizes, she and she alone can effectively reconstruct the scattered truth of the Sibyl's leaves. (96-97)

Within the context of The Queen of the Damned, "the scattered truth of the Sibyl's leaves" resonates strongly with the scattered body parts of the twins' mother. The missing "truth" is cast as both female and maternal, and it is the twins who reconstruct it—Maharet by telling the Story of the Twins and keeping her records of the Great Family, and Mekare by devouring the heart and brain of Akasha, thereby completing the funeral feast that was disrupted so long ago. The mother's body and the mother's knowledge are literally internalized in a dramatic move toward female wholeness which emphasizes the recovery of lost female ties between mother and daughter, between sister and sister.

The importance of a mother's influence on individual development is stressed in various other ways throughout The Vampire Chronicles. Lestat, for instance, is the only vampire character who has a strong mother figure in his life. Gabrielle is enigmatic and he often doesn't understand her, but she is present and her influence on him is far more dominant than that of his father. It is Gabrielle who is educated and who gives him the means to educate himself by sending him out into the world and encouraging him to pursue his dreams his way. She is the only member of his family whom he loves, and
upon whom he bestows the Dark Gift of vampirism. Her impact on his early life as both a human and a vampire is worth noting, because Lestat is both the focal character and the strongest, most consistent first-person voice in the Vampire Chronicles.

When a mother-figure is not present, it is missed. Even Marius, the ancient vampire to whom Lestat turns for a deeper understanding of his identity as a vampire, acknowledges the importance of having a mother:

If there was anything I'd missed in my rather eventful life . . . it was the love and knowledge of my Keltic mother. She'd died when I was born, and all I knew of her was that she'd been a slave, daughter of the warlike Gauls who fought Julius Caesar. (Rice, *Lestat* 397)

Marius was the result of a union between a slave and a conqueror, a mixed-blood whose Roman education and lifestyle reflected exclusively the values of his Roman father (i.e., the dominant culture of his time). As a human in ancient Rome he traveled widely, writing his own history of the world yet expressing "little or no curiosity about [his] Gallic ancestors" until he was kidnapped by a band of Keltoi to be made into a vampire god (397). His renewed curiosity about his mother's culture coincides with his "birth" as a vampire—a juxtaposition which links vampirism directly with the recovery of lost history. Significantly, that lost history belongs to the female half of his ancestry.

The vampire protagonists' desire for self-knowledge in each of these women's texts runs parallel to their equally compelling desire for self-revelation and self-representation. The need to speak, to openly proclaim and express an identity, to tell one's own stories to an attentive audience, persists, often driving entire plots. The formerly silent center in vampire fiction by men is silent no longer, and the question

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5 It should be noted that in this context, lost history does not just involve Marius's mother. It also involves vampires. The vampire "god" whom Marius is chosen to replace is horribly burned and knows of numerous vampires who have been destroyed by whatever has caused his injuries. He sends Marius into Egypt in search of that cause, where Marius learns of the existence of Akasha and Enkil—the very first vampires.
arises: What are the consequences of female authors' facilitation of the vampire's speech? In "Promises of Monsters," Donna Haraway discusses the desire of the speaking representative for a population that is "permanently speechless, forever requiring the services of a ventriloquist" and proceeds to illustrate how the pro-life movement appropriates the fetus as just such a speechless ideal, "entirely without political ambition of its own" (301; Ritchie 11). As a fictional character the vampire, like the fetus, can never have any "political ambition of its own." However, via authors' representations, it can and does become an explicitly political figure. Within the context of vampire fiction, if one imagines the condition of the vampire prior to speech as both "monstrous" and marginalized, then it should be acknowledged that the act of speaking does not serve to change that condition. In works by both men and women vampires are, without question, *monsters*. When the vampire speaks in novels by women, what changes is the author's *representation* of that particular form of monstrousness. This shift in representation has the power to affect perceptions of the vampire not just among the other characters in the texts themselves, but among readers of the texts as well.

Rice, Charnas, and Gomez consistently express the need for and explore the impact of sympathetic representations of the vampire in their work. In *The Vampire Tapestry*, for instance, it is Weyland who seeks out Floria Landauer, with whom he shares his vampire identity. When his therapy is finished he informs her that he wants "to go from here with you still alive behind me for the remainder of your little life—to leave woven into Dr. Landauer's quick mind those threads of my own life that I pulled for her. . . I want to be able sometimes to think of you thinking of me" (173). In telling the stories of his life Weyland has established his first and only intimate connection with a human woman, and it is a connection he wishes to keep. Charnas stresses here the importance of being individually *known*. Just as Floria stops thinking of Weyland as "Dracula" after hearing his stories about himself, Weyland stops thinking of Floria as

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merely a tool for self-discovery or a future meal. Prior to slipping into Floria's bed, Weyland stands naked before her and wonders, "How did you grow so real? The more I spoke to you of myself, the more real you became" (175). Self-representation through storytelling pushes both characters away from convenient stereotypes and thereby makes them acknowledge each other as individuals. In a broader context, this scene illustrates the power of the act of telling to transform both the teller and the listener by increasing the level of mutual understanding between them.

In *The Gilda Stories*, Gilda regularly chronicles the experiences of her life in her journal. Ultimately she begins to share these experiences with others. In a letter to Aurelia, a human black woman whom she has befriended, Gilda "break[s] silence with someone outside the family" and begins

> . . . spilling the legends that became reality across the page. She opened up her past as far as she could remember it, back to the dark comfort of her mother's Fulani face. She had never spoken or written these words for any but herself—words that said she was different from them all, a part of them yet apart from them. She wanted to leave Aurelia with hope, an honest hope, born of who they really were. (128)

The "they" to whom Gilda refers are not vampires but Aurelia and other African Americans—women in particular. In sharing her knowledge of their African heritage, she hopes to provide Aurelia with the key to a past which extends back beyond slavery. With such a past comes a more complete sense of identity. Gilda's "legends" are thus intended as a source of cultural strength.

By the year 2020, Gilda has become America's "most popular author of romance novels," and the reader learns that she has "chosen that particular genre because it was one of the few forms of written literature the populace still followed" (219). The popularity of Gilda's stories within the dominant culture may be due, in part, to the fact that as romances, they have been made public in a form which already enjoys wide acceptance within that culture. According to the most recent statistics, "49.8% of
paperback books sold in America are romances," which generate approximately one billion dollars per year in sales (Romance Writers of America 1). Paradoxically, however, it should be noted that the romance genre tends to be derided by the very culture which so eagerly consumes it—not solely because it is formulaic, but also because its central characters and the bulk of its readership are women. Romance author and literary scholar Jennifer Crusie comments on this phenomenon:

Historically, one of the most devastating moves patriarchal culture has made has been the derision and resulting division of women's communities. That derision is overwhelmingly present in the critical treatment of romance fiction today which almost invariably focuses on the genre as a whole rather than individual works. Imagine an intellectually honest critic saying "All literary fiction is bad" without ever having read widely in literary fiction. Yet people who have never read romance fiction routinely ridicule not only the entire genre but the women who are brave enough to admit to reading it.

That ridicule is a political act, taking our stories from us. (2)

I would re-phrase Crusie's final statement slightly to characterize the ridicule of romance as an attempt to take women's stories from them because despite such ridicule, romance has continued to flourish, supported by a female readership numbering in the tens of millions (Romance Writers of America 1). The impact of a popular author's voice on such a large, powerful audience should not be underestimated, as Gilda is well aware. Within the context of The Gilda Stories, Gilda uses the romance genre to return stories to her readers, to re-establish a sense of community that has been lost. Her motivations for writing are worth quoting at length:

Writing romances was, for Gilda, a way of sharing some of the many stories she had gathered through her long life, much as song-writing had been. The journals she'd treasured for years and the lessons they held had become a fine field to harvest for characters and ideas. To many, the stories she wrote seemed curious, archaic, even though the periods in which they were set were rarely more than 150 years old. Having conspired to forget their past, the generations plowed ahead at top speed to some mythical future as if the wild west existed in the stars. Gilda had written the stories of their history, cloaking it in adventure and mysticism,
and they sold... For her, the stories were an urgent message—a way of speaking with thousands of people in distant places, places she had been to or hoped to visit in the future. She insinuated herself into their homes and their thoughts, and they welcomed her. (220)

This passage reveals the multiple ways in which Gilda uses stories. First and foremost, they are a means of sharing both experience and a history that people have "conspired to forget." The author's word choice is intriguing. If loss of history is part of a "conspiracy" then it is not merely a matter of forgetfulness but a deliberate, sinister act. Gilda's novels are her representational strategy for counteracting this "conspiracy," and their popularity suggests that they strike a chord with her audience, which has now expanded beyond black women to include thousands of "new people" (221). Gilda's endurance within American culture as both a vampire and a black woman is due primarily to her sense of connection with her ancestors. Through her books, she strives to share that survival strategy by stressing that in order to have a viable future, one must first remember the past. Her own longevity serves to prove her point. The fact that her stories are described as "urgent messages" illustrates both their importance and the degree to which Gilda feels compelled to tell them. In her discussion of Toni Morrison's Beloved, Teresa A. Goddu suggests the significance of such telling for African American writers:

... silence is an understandable response to the horrors of history, but it is ultimately disempowering and isolating... By writing their own gothic tales, [Morrison and Harriet Jacobs] combat the master's version of their history; by breaking the silence, they reclaim their history instead of being controlled by it. (155)

In Gomez's novel, both the author and the vampire character she constructs work to revise the master's rendering of black history and, in doing so, to reclaim it not only for themselves, but for those who hear their stories as well.

The closing emphasis of The Gilda Stories is on the sharing of individual knowledge and experience via storytelling. As Gilda and Ernis journey to meet the rest of Gilda's vampire family in South America, Gilda tells her lover: "We will build large
campfires, then you must tell me your story. Who you've been and what life has been like for you. There will be stories and dancing again" (251). This statement, combined with the fact that the vampires have survived persecution and are moving toward the ruins of Machu Picchu to build a new life together, suggests a return to community as represented by tribal culture. Individual stories will be the building blocks of that community, and their telling will ensure its strength and survival. Gomez sets this revitalization of tribal community to coincide with the disintegration of the dominant culture. Such a juxtaposition highlights both the ultimate fragility of the dominant culture and the resilience of the Others who have resisted assimilation by that culture.

Vampire characters in the novels of Anne Rice also display a real need to tell their own stories. In *Interview With the Vampire* it is Louis who approaches the boy who conducts the interview, stating "I would like to tell you the story of my life . . . I would like to do that very much" (2). It is Lestat, however, who is most blatant in his efforts to be seen and heard. At the beginning of *The Vampire Lestat* he has joined a rock band, and when he spies copies of *Interview With the Vampire* on a bookstore shelf, he "ache[s] to write his story for [Louis]." He wants a book of his own, and his purpose in writing it is clear:

I wanted my band and my book to draw out not only Louis but all the other demons that I had ever known and loved. I wanted to find my lost ones, awaken those who slept as I had slept . . . . I wanted mortals to know about us. I wanted to proclaim it to the world . . . . And it didn't matter that they didn't believe it. It didn't matter that they thought it was art. The fact was that, after two centuries of concealment, I was visible to mortals! I spoke my name aloud. I told my nature. I was there! (16-17)

Lestat's desire for fame is simultaneously a desire to re-connect with his own kind and a desire to openly proclaim his identity to the dominant human society, to be recognized for what he is: a vampire. It is this same urge which prompts him, when he first
becomes a vampire, to go on-stage in a Paris theater and terrify the audience. Explaining his motives to Gabrielle, he states:

In that moment on the stage . . . I revealed myself. I did the very opposite of deceiving. I wanted somehow in making manifest the monstrosity of myself to be joined with my fellow humans again. Better they should run from me than not see me. Better they should know I was something monstrous than for me to glide through the world unrecognized by those upon whom I preyed. (309)

Again, Lestat is driven by a need for recognition. He realizes that he doesn’t "fit in" with human society, but he desperately wants that society to acknowledge his presence—even if such acknowledgment comes in the form of fear and hostility. Behind his efforts is a nagging loneliness which, amid his deteriorating relationship with Gabrielle, leads him to fantasize about establishing a contact with a human being:

...I’d see a man or a woman—a human being who looked perfect to me spiritually—and I would follow the human about. Maybe for a week I’d do this, then a month, sometimes even longer than that. I’d fall in love with the being. I’d imagine friendship, conversation, intimacy that we could never have. In some magical and imaginary moment I would say: "But you see what I am," and this human being, in supreme spiritual understanding, would say: "Yes, I see. I understand."

Nonsense, really. Very like the fairy tale where the princess gives her selfless love to the prince who is enchanted and he is himself again and the monster no more. Only in this dark fairy tale I would pass right into my mortal lover. We would become one being, and I would be flesh and blood again.

Lovely idea, that . . . . (Rice, Lestat 337-338)

Within this "Beauty and the Beast" fantasy of confession and acceptance is Lestat’s desire for transformation via communion with a human being. Dissatisfied with the isolation of his vampire existence, he wishes to surrender his Otherness, and in order to do so, he must freely admit what he is. His vision of "becoming one" with a sympathetic mortal lover is a vision of assimilation in which he reenters the dominant human society and is no longer labeled a monster. Of course, such a complete surrender of self is impossible and Lestat knows it—hence his dismissal of his dream as "nonsense." Still, his desire to
be recognized by humanity compels him to make repeated public displays of his vampire identity. Only after he encounters Marius and begins to achieve a better understanding of his vampire heritage does he expand the goal of these displays to include other vampires, in an effort to connect with his own kind. He questions his mentor:

Marius, don't you ever have the desire to tell all of it to all of them! I mean, to make it known to the whole world of our kind, and to draw them together? . . . So that we might possess our legends, might at least ponder the riddles of our history, as men do. So that we might swap our stories and share our power . . . (Rice, *Lestat* 478)

From this perspective, Lestat's goal in publicizing his stories is very similar to Gilda's goal in writing her romances: empowerment through knowledge of a shared history.

Along with their shared compulsion to tell the stories of their lives, the vampires in these women's novels share an understanding that such a telling involves risk. Because they are Other, they recognize that when they do speak, they may not be taken seriously or may need to disguise their speech within a format which the dominant culture deems "acceptable" in order to prevent that speech from being censored or perceived as a threat. When Gilda reflects on writing in her journals, she reveals that "It's best to write in one of the other languages in the event someone should stumble upon the book. I sometimes even wrote as though it were a fiction" (Gomez, *Gilda* 109). Later, when she publishes her romance novels, she "cloak[s] [history] in adventure and mysticism" as a means of making it more palatable to the public. Gilda's efforts to disguise her writings are a gesture toward self-preservation born of her own firsthand knowledge of the dominant culture's hostility toward that which it labels "Other." Yet although she disguises her writings, she does not alter the truths which they contain, and she is not so afraid of the dominant culture that she remains silent. She writes anyway. By contrast, Weyland is far more wary of the consequences of self-revelation. Without the support of a larger vampire community, his primary survival strategy is his secrecy, his ability to blend in
with the dominant society. When his vampire identity is exposed he is first shot, then enslaved in a chain of events which graphically illustrates that society's impulse to destroy or assimilate that which it perceives as Other. When his therapy sessions with Floria are finished, he burns all of the notes she has taken to prevent their contents from ever becoming public knowledge.

While Weyland strenuously avoids publication of his vampire identity, Lestat goes to the opposite extreme. When he publishes his own book and becomes a rock star he flaunts his vampire existence before the world, deliberately outdoing Louis whose "story, for all its peculiarities, had passed for fiction." He recognizes that if mortals ever actually began to believe his words vampires "would be known, and . . . would be hunted, and . . . would be fought in this glittering urban wilderness as no mythic monster has ever been fought by man before," but he does not think this will ever occur. What really drives him is his knowledge of "the other war that was going to happen, the one in which we'd all come together, or they would all come to fight me" (Rice, Lestat 17). The "we" and "they" Lestat refers to in this passage are his fellow vampires. The publicity Lestat creates inspires both love and hatred among his own kind, one of whom scrawls a graffiti declaration on the back wall of a bar in San Francisco acknowledging that "there has never been a Baltimore Catechism for vampires. That is, until the publication of . . . The Vampire Lestat. . . . He has given us not only a catechism but a Bible" (Rice, Queen 11-12). For the first time, vampires find the names of their own ancestors in print. Lestat's book awakens in them an awareness of their shared past, but they are afraid that he has also literally awakened the past, embodied in Akasha, Pandora, Marius and other ancient vampires whose actions they can neither predict nor control. Questioning the veracity of Lestat's songs and stories, the younger vampires condemn his efforts: " . . . the monster is courting a change in mortal perspective. And though we are too clever to corroborate for the human record his foolish fabrications, the outrage exceeds all precedent. It cannot go
unpunished" (Rice, *Queen* 13). The "change in mortal perspective" which these vampires fear is a change in the dominant society's perception of vampires from creatures of art/fiction (to be taken for granted) to real monsters (to be taken seriously). Basically, Lestat is "outing" them without their consent, and they are afraid of the consequences. Rather than seek the truth of their vampire history for themselves, they plot to destroy the voice which exposed that history in the first place. Their narrow understanding of themselves and of the dominant society's attitude toward vampires is revealed in an encounter between Marius and a "fledgling" vampire bent on silencing Lestat. Marius quizzes the young one:

"Why this obsession with the Vampire Lestat? What about the contents of his revelations? Have you fledglings no desire to seek Marius, the guardian of Those Who Must Be Kept? To see for yourselves the Mother and the Father?"

The young one was confused, then gradually scornful. He could not form a clever answer. But the true reply was plain enough in his soul—in the souls of all those listening and watching. Those Who Must Be Kept might or might not exist; and Marius perhaps did not exist either. But the Vampire Lestat was a greedy fiend who risked the secret prosperity of all his kind just to be loved and seen by mortals.

He almost laughed in the young one's face. Such an insignificant battle. Lestat understood these faithless times so beautifully, one had to admit it. Yes, he'd told the secrets he'd been warned to keep, but in doing so, he had betrayed nothing and no one. (Rice, *Queen* 16)

Unlike the younger vampires, Marius is well aware that Lestat can say what he pleases and reveal whatever secrets he likes because the dominant society will not take him seriously as a real vampire. Indeed, within the context of the novel, Lestat's fame among mortals is fleeting. He hates returning to anonymity on that level, stating

... it's just so painful to shrink back into the shadows—Lestat, the sleek and nameless gangster ghoulie again creeping up on helpless mortals who know nothing of things like me. So hurtful to be again the outsider, forever on the fringes, struggling with good and evil in the age-old private hell of body and soul. (Rice, *Queen* 3)
The fact that Lestat’s impact on the dominant society fades so quickly poses some interesting questions about the power of Other voices in general as they, too, are raised within that society. Vampires as Rice presents them are marginalized beings with a history of their own which runs parallel to and often intersects that of the dominant culture in which they live. The dominant society’s limited awareness of that history results in its understanding of vampires as two-dimensional (“fictional”) creatures whose stories, while occasionally provoking fear or interest, are not to be believed. The vampires themselves, most of whom know little of their history, often strive to conform to these vignettes which the dominant culture has both produced and preserved. This is the environment into which first Louis, then Lestat and other vampires, interject themselves. Their voices are undeniably strong and popular, as Lestat’s "bestseller" status indicates—but they are still marginalized, and the truth of the experiences they present is obscured by the dominant culture’s well-established conviction that vampires are nothing more than what it says they are (i.e., fiction). Within a broader cultural context, as it is represented by the vampires in Rice’s novels, the power of an Other voice to provoke mutual awareness and understanding is thus rendered highly questionable. There is,

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6 While it is presently true that the dominant culture as it is established within the Vampire Chronicles is incapable of perceiving vampires as anything other than fiction, the fact that Lestat has raised his voice and exposed the existence of vampires within that culture opens the possibility, however remote, that one day vampires will be acknowledged as real. If even a few individuals really listen to his bold representations and start making more critical observations of the world around them, vampires may be less and less easy to dismiss. The transition from skepticism to belief and the change of vampire status within the dominant culture which would accompany it is a possibility which Lestat clearly relishes, stating "...suppose—just suppose—that when the corpses began to turn up in ever greater numbers, that when those closest to me began to hearken to their inevitable suspicions—just suppose that the art ceased to be art and became real!" (VL 17)

7 See Ritchie 17, where she states her suspicion that "representation continues to invent itself as agency." Through her construction of Lestat’s shortlived experience of fame within The Vampire Chronicles, Rice makes it quite clear that representation does not
however, a context in which Lestat's voice carries real power, and that is among his fellow vampires. Both the very young and the very old listen to him and take him seriously. His voice awakens Akasha from a sleep of millennia and sets in motion a chain of events which results in the deaths of scores of vampires and humans alike. His actions bring the oldest, most powerful vampires out of solitude and enable them to pool their vast knowledge and resources. Younger vampires write graffiti to each other, questioning Lestat's motives and the history which he has given them. He sparks communication and a potential for solidarity among vampires where before there was none, and for vampires this is an empowering move. Despite his thwarted desire for recognition in the mortal world, he acknowledges that "It is good to have them with me, the others; it's crucial, really—and what I always thought I wanted: a grand coven of the wise, the enduring, the ancient, and the careless young" (Rice, *Queen* 2). The other vampires share this sentiment and are determined to maintain contact because, as Lestat puts it, "Nobody want[s] to be lost in time again" (Rice, *Queen* 464). To be "lost in time" is to be forgotten, to be denied connection with and impact on present and future generations. Newly united (and, in several cases, newly awakened), the older vampires are an embodiment of recovered history which serves as the last line of defense against Akasha. Together, they are the salvation of their kind.

When Lestat writes about himself and his fellow vampires he is well aware that he is "breaking the rules" in doing so:

...if there is one law that all vampires hold sacred it is that you do not tell mortals about us.

You never pass on our "secrets" to humans unless you mean to bequeath the Dark Gift of our powers to them. You never name other immortals. You never tell where their lairs might be. (Rice, *Lestat* 16)
Ostensibly, these laws are designed to protect vampires within the dominant culture by withholding knowledge that could lead that culture to turn on and destroy them. However, over the course of centuries, the resulting silence among vampires themselves progressively leads to isolation and misconceptions as they forget the names of their ancestors and the history that accompanies them. When Lestat carves his first messages for Marius into stone walls he breaks that silence. It is his act of writing that enables him to literally connect with his ancestors and re-establish broader communal bonds between vampires which are based not on vampire lore written by humans but on a fuller, vampire-oriented understanding of the truths of their own history. Small wonder then that, despite the risks involved, he experiences "a wondrous satisfaction" in doing it (Rice, Lestat 320).

In each of these women's texts, history and storytelling are presented as fundamental elements in the construction of identity and the representation of the self at both individual and cultural levels. It should be noted, however, that distinctions between these elements prove problematic at best. History is vital to vampires at a personal level but of dubious value in its more widely recognized and accepted form within the dominant culture. In that larger context, history becomes a primarily one-sided form of representation which either distorts or fails to include the experiences of

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8 See Bonnie Winsbro, Supernatural Forces: Belief, Power, and Difference in Contemporary Works by Ethnic Women (Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 1993) 19. Winsbro states that "The destruction by one group of another group's gods, of its living mythology, is one of the most effective, even if unintended, means of achieving group disintegration and disorientation and the consequent psychic alienation of its members." Akasha and Enkil are the original vampires and, as such, the closest thing to gods which the vampires possess. While Akasha and Enkil are not stolen from the vampires by "another group," they function within The Vampire Chronicles as lost/forgotten parts of ancient vampire history. Without knowledge of their common heritage, or of the legends of Marius, Maharet, Mekare, and other ancient ("First Brood") vampires, characters like Louis, Claudia, and Lestat exhibit symptoms of disintegration and alienation analogous to those which Winsbro describes.
the vampires/Others in its midst. Over time, as a result of this absence or distortion, those vampires/Others are stripped of the identity which a fuller awareness of their own unique past can provide and left instead with labels which the dominant culture assigns them. The vampire protagonists of these women's texts are united in their rejection of those externally imposed labels. They indulge in a kind of surface conformity which enables them to "pass" for human, but beneath that surface they are highly conscious of their own vampirism/Otherness and strive to construct and maintain an individual identity on their own terms. Central to that identity is a knowledge of vampire ancestry.

Weyland, alone in the world and with no recollection of his own past, does his best to use human language and knowledge (esp. anthropology) as a means of interrogating his own existence and his role within the dominant society. Thanks to her mother's storytelling and her own diligent efforts to record her life experiences, Gilda is already connected with her roots as an African-American woman, and Gomez repeatedly stresses the importance of that connection in promoting Gilda's survival. Louis and Lestat, disconnected from their heritage as vampires, actively seek their vampire ancestors in an effort to better understand precisely what they are. Connection with Marius and the history of vampires literally reinvigorates Lestat and gives him the strength to move ahead through the centuries.

Links to ancestors and recovery of the history of which they are a part is a critical element of vampire survival in the novels of Rice and Gomez. In the worlds created by both authors, an awareness of such connections to the past is something which must be shared. The protagonists do not remain silent about what they have learned. They talk, write, and sing about it, spreading the knowledge to a much broader audience which includes vampires and nonvampires alike. In the process, they often make deliberate representational distinctions between vampire "fact" and vampire "fiction." These characters are well aware of the stories about vampires which circulate among the
general population. They are also aware that their own counternarratives may get "lumped into the mix," so to speak, but this is irrelevant to them so long as they are finally included in that mix.

As portrayed by Rice and Gomez, the vampires' desire to communicate, to be recognized and understood, is very strong. Their acts of self-publication entail risk, as the plot to kill/silence Lestat illustrates, but they also open avenues of communication within the vampire community and between vampires and the dominant society which previously did not exist. Connection with fellow vampires is stressed as particularly valuable. Knowledge of a shared history can strengthen individual vampires and promote greater solidarity among the vampire minority, transforming their alienation into an alien nation within the dominant culture. Ultimately, these possibilities for empowerment at the level of both individual and community are what make the risk of self-revelation worthwhile.
CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

To more fully understand the revisions Charnas, Rice, and Gomez have made in the tradition of vampire fiction, one must first establish which aspects of that tradition they have left intact. Certainly, these women continue to stress the importance of blood as both sustenance and the key to vampire transformation. Vampire bodies still possess immortality, great physical strength, and beauty. Their striking appearance sparks desire in their human victims, and that desire is often homoerotically charged. While vampire bodies are clearly gendered either male or female, that gender is typically problematized by the vampires' polymorphous expressions of sexuality and desire. Human male sexuality is naturalized as aggressive and the rape impulse, whether literal or sublimated as bloodlust, is a pervasive catalyst for character interaction.

As monsters, vampires are well suited to serve as political free agents in the texts through which they move. Their unrestricted mapping and tapping of desire, together with the taboos which they shatter along the way, evokes powerful anxieties which compel us to examine ourselves, to question the stability of the social and cultural norms which we invoke on an everyday basis. The primary distinction between male- and female-authored vampire fiction lies in the author's perception and subsequent representation of those anxieties. In vampire stories written by men, the vampire's destabilization of the dominant society's established codes of gendered behavior is perceived by other characters as a sign of corruption. It is a prelude to changes (especially the awakening of sexual aggression in women) which are constructed as evil.
and which must therefore be resisted (often at a cost of extreme violence against female bodies). The narration reveals intense discomfort regarding the vampire's exposure of the vulnerability of heterosexist privilege—discomfort which provokes the human protagonists into a highly defensive reaction against the vampire and, by extension, in support of the patriarchal status quo. Although efforts to destroy the vampire either fail outright or achieve only dubious levels of success, characters who actively resist the vampire's influence are portrayed as heroic and "good." It is they who are typically the center of focalization, and it is they with whom readers are led to sympathize.

In novels produced by the women in this study, discomfort created by the vampire's perversion of accepted (i.e. Western patriarchal) moral and behavioral standards provokes a very different response. Anne Rice is aware of this response, which she articulates through a female character named Jesse in *The Queen of the Damned.* Upon reading *Interview With the Vampire,* Jesse observes:

> There is something obscene about this novel. It makes the lives of these beings seem attractive. You don't realize it at first; it's a nightmare and you can't get out of it. Then all of a sudden you're comfortable there. You want to remain. Even the tragedy of Claudia isn't really a deterrent. (178)

Vampires in novels by men also combine attributes of attraction and repulsion, but for Rice, as for Charnas and Gomez, the attractive impulse clearly supersedes. A majority of the human characters in these women's novels do not want to destroy vampires; they want to become vampires. Vampires are sought not as creatures of corruption which must be destroyed, but as creatures whose abilities are coveted and whose hybrid standards of subjectivity incorporate a radical expansion of possibilities for identity construction that merit exploration. As Peter Stallybrass and Allon White observe,

> Hybridization . . . produces new combinations and strange instabilities in a given semiotic system. It therefore generates the possibility of shifting *the very terms of the system itself,* by erasing and interrogating the relationships which constitute it. (58)
Anxiety and danger inhere in these de-stabilized relationships, as vampire fiction by men so aptly demonstrates, but efforts are not made to negate these instabilities via destruction of the vampire. Instead, the vampire's monstrous subjectivity is validated as a means of experiencing personal empowerment and as a tool for representation of the self. Its status as a *transgressive* tool, however, is perpetually called into question by the manner in which women's vampire novels simultaneously question and reinscribe social values. Via this construct, female authors of vampire fiction enact their own version of the "ironic political myth" to which Donna Haraway refers in her cyborg manifesto. According to Haraway, "Irony is about the contradictions that do not resolve into larger wholes, even dialectically, about the tension of holding incompatible things together because both or all are necessary and true" (Haraway, "Simians" 149). Within the context of women's vampire fiction, irony functions as both "a rhetorical strategy and a political method" which is articulated primarily through a shift in focalization.

The novels of Rice, Charnas, and Gomez are focalized on the vampires themselves (and, particularly in Charnas's case, on human characters who grow to care about the vampire as an individual). The use of this rhetorical strategy promotes reader sympathy by creating an intimacy which takes the reader into the mind of the monster and makes that monster's cyborg experiences the "norm" against which the rest of reality is understood. We are immersed in the process of identity construction, in the politics of speaking "I" from a subject position which the dominant society has designated as Other, and it is a process which leads not to the rejection of that Otherness, but to its embrace.

Such an embrace is itself problematic. Indeed, toward what end does sympathy for the vampire lead? What does it reveal about the female authors who create it, and about the readers who experience it via the strength of those authors' characterizations? On a surface level it suggests, ironically, that patriarchal suspicions regarding female collusion with the vampire/the Devil have been correct all along. Yet where male-
authored vampire fiction tends to cast this collaboration as damning, female vampire fiction endeavors to construct it as liberating. Vampires and vampirism as they occur within the novels of Rice, Charnas, and Gomez serve not so much as agents for destruction as catalysts for self-discovery. In *The Vampire Tapestry*, Charnas permits Katje de Groot, a young boy named Mark, and Floria Landauer to recognize Weyland as a vampire, and that recognition compels them to tap their own inner reserves of strength in order to deal with him effectively. In *The Gilda Stories*, Gomez constructs vampirism as a gift that Gilda acquires from other women and that enhances her already considerable level of self-possession, enabling her to endure and to pass on her stories. In *The Vampire Chronicles*, Rice's concept of vampirism problematizes the manner in which we assign taboos to sexuality. In the process, it liberates the mind and the body, allowing for an aesthetic experience of the world which breaks down the exclusivity of pre-existing categories of knowledge and self-definition and renders the subject a celebration of the hybrid potential of those same categories. The author verbalizes Louis's initial encounter with Lestat in the following terms:

> The moment I saw him, saw his extraordinary aura and knew him to be no creature I'd ever known, I was reduced to nothing. That ego which could not accept the presence of an extraordinary human being in its midst was crushed. All my conceptions, even my guilt and wish to die, seemed utterly unimportant. I completely forgot myself! . . . I forgot myself totally. And in the same instant knew totally the meaning of possibility. From then on I experienced only increasing wonder. (Rice, *Interview* 13)

Louis's mind is transformed even before his body, and it is a transformation instigated not by corruption but by revelation. The vampires in these women's novels experience

1 It is significant that, once he becomes a vampire, his enhanced ability to understand the human world around him is first articulated as a form of racial enlightenment. As a plantation owner, he acknowledges that "I had several extremely intelligent slaves who might have done [the overseer's] job just as well a long time before, if I had recognized their intelligence and not feared their African appearance and manner. I studied them clearly now and gave the management of things over to them." In light of his earlier
fundamental changes in the way they perceive themselves, the world, and the human beings who dwell in it; moreover, they can extend that gift of expanded vision to other characters whether those characters eventually become vampires or not. All three authors strongly suggest that a vital key to these transformations of body and/or consciousness is the vampire's capacity to love and/or to inspire love.

In these intersections between monster, love, transformation, and Self are overt connections with "Beauty and the Beast." Vampires are perceived as beautiful by human characters around them as well as by each other despite and, at times, even because of their monstrosity. Vampirism is not a condition from which they can or even need to be "saved," and this is a significant revision. It suggests that monstrosity is a valid subject position which exists not merely to reinforce the dominant cultural status quo by serving as the Other against which that status quo defines itself, but to present an alternative channel for self-definition which is desirable and potentially heroic in its own right.

Marina Warner describes the evolution of the Beast figure in fairy tales:

> Whereas, to a medieval spectator, the Devil was represented as close to the animal order in his hooved hairiness, and a bloodless and fleshless angel in gleaming armour approximated the divine artefact, the register of value has been turned topsy-turvy since the eighteenth century and the wild men has come into his own as an ideal. The evolution of the Beast in fairy tale and his portraits in film illustrate this profound shift in cultural values as well as sexual expectations. (317)

The female authors included in this study have grafted this fairy tale-inspired evolution of the Beast into their own texts. Chamas and Rice, in particular, make explicit references to the pattern of the tale itself. Chamas pointedly describes how, as she wrote

_..._
The Vampire Tapestry, "Weyland turned into a sterling example of the oh-he's-not-so-bad-when-you-get-to-know-him school of vampire, complete with the irresistible seductiveness of that model and the inevitable conquest of his nature by various forms of love" (Charnas, "Meditations" 61). On more than one occasion throughout The Vampire Chronicles, Rice has Lestat refer to his dream of being recognized and loved by a mortal for what he is. In Memnoch the Devil, he makes an explicit analogy between his own relationship with Dora and "Beauty and the Beast," adding that "as Beasts go, I mean really, I'm quite a stunner" (123).

What is perhaps most intriguing is the manner in which these female authors have created vampire protagonists that merge beauty and the Beast into the body of a single character. The plots of their novels deploy and interrogate the contradictions inherent in a subjectivity which combines "masculine" and "feminine," aggression and submission, strength and vulnerability, monstrosity and humanity. In the works of Rice and Charnas, vampires are simultaneously villainized and victimized. Yet where male authors establish this polysemy of culturally en-gendered traits as a perversion to be rejected, the women construct it as a mode of conversion to be embraced. Here again, Haraway's cyborg model applies:

The cyborg appears in myth precisely where the boundary between human and animal is transgressed. Far from signalling a walling off of people from other living beings, cyborgs signal disturbingly and pleasurably tight coupling. Bestiality has a new status in the cycle of marriage exchange. (Haraway, "Simians" 152)

Jewelle Gomez echoes this valorization of cyborg subjectivity when she writes:

We need to be able to accept contradictions—such as the fact that women are both powerful and victimized—in order to visualize beyond our own immediate experience. A child suckling at its mother's breast is not called a predator or a leech, but might not someone from an alien planet see it that way? That experience is also a sensual one, despite all the social taboos which prevent discussion of it in those terms. By embracing the
complications and contradictions of our emotional and sensual existence, we have a chance to imagine our lives as bigger than we may have imagined them in the past. (Gomez, "Recasting" 91).

Neither the coupling espoused by Haraway nor the embrace which Gomez describes is easy or comfortable. Vampires in these novels by women struggle to come to terms with who and what they are, and to convince others to do the same. By focalizing on these struggles, female authors make their readers privy to the complexities inherent in the journey toward individual subjectivity. The didactic element of the genre remains, but it is no longer geared primarily toward stressing the superior moral value of existing behavioral "norms." Instead, these vampire protagonists use their cyborg sensibilities to instruct us in the celebration of wonder, and in the strength to be drawn from learning to accept and love one's self regardless of the labels placed on that self by the dominant society. They are a literary illustration of how "[t]he enchantments and disenchantments of the Beast have been a rich resource in stories women have made up, among themselves, to help, to teach, to warn" (Warner 318).

But not necessarily to escape. Vampire fiction is Gothic fiction, and as Judith Halberstam has astutely observed, "Gothic always plays through available categories of identity and transforms the riot of those categories into "real threat," but this is not to say that Gothic accesses some outside to gender, race, sexuality, and class. Uncertainty is always built into binary formations, usually as part of the debased category; so, for example, homosexuality plays as 'eroticized uncertainty' to heterosexuality's stability" (185). The vampire protagonist's body is not a human body, but it is a body that appears human to most of human society as the authors portray it. The vampire body is therefore interpreted by that society via all of the pre-existing categories which the dominant culture applies to human bodies including, in particular, gender and race. No matter how confused these categories are within the vampire's subjectivity as the author constructs it, the fact remains that in the larger world context within the novels, vampire subjectivity is
rare and its capacity to have a broad, lasting impact on the dominant society is problematic at best. At the end of *The Vampire Tapestry*, Charnas has her solitary Weyland leave his post as a popular college professor and return to an indefinite period of hibernation. When *The Gilda Stories* closes, Gomez has Gilda abandon her popular romance-writer persona, Abby Bird. Hunted for the immortality their blood can bestow, she and the rest of her vampire "family" are in retreat as Western civilization begins to disintegrate. In *The Vampire Chronicles*, Rice has Lestat lamenting the swiftness with which his fame as an author and rock star dissipates. It should be noted, however, that individual characters with whom these women's vampire protagonists come in contact are dramatically influenced, for better or worse, by that contact. Some die, some go mad, while others find the strength to assert themselves. Still others are destined to become vampires in their own right. Whatever the end result, emphasis is placed upon the vampire's capacity to affect an individual's perception of the world. By stressing the impact of individual experiences with that which the dominant society has labeled Other, and by immersing readers in the power of those experiences via their focalization on vampires and the individuals who love them, female authors establish sympathy for the vampire as the authoritative ideology of their texts. While social influences are also powerful and inform the construction of these characters' (vampires or humans in contact with vampires) subjectivities, these influences are rendered subordinate to the individual character's cyborg experience of the sensual and the marvelous. This devalorization of the dominant culture's established social "norms" in favor of individually constructed "norms" reverses the pattern witnessed in vampire fiction by men and constitutes a significant revision of the genre.

Ultimately, perhaps the most truly subversive element of female-authored vampire fiction is the sheer popularity of Ann Rice's *Vampire Chronicles*. Every novel in the series has been a bestseller, and there are millions of copies in print. As a
consequence, her vampire characters have had a tremendous impact on popular cultural interpretations of the vampire. *Interview with the Vampire* has been turned into a highly successful film. Music groups including The Vampire Lestat and Savage Garden have drawn their names from Rice. There are fan clubs, web sites, tours of New Orleans, and even an annual Halloween "Bloodsucker's Ball" for vampire aficionados hosted by the author herself. The proliferation of Gothic rock music and the Gothic subculture itself, not to mention role-playing games such as *Vampire: The Masquerade*, owes much to her characterization of vampires as angst-ridden individuals who manage to become heroic in the midst of their own monstrousness. The expansion of these books into other media and the global nature of their success (as of 1996, *Interview with the Vampire* had been translated into eleven languages) (Riley 11) suggests that Rice's vampires have struck a powerful chord with those who read her books. Indeed, Rice's construction of vampire subjectivity is the only serious challenge to Bram Stoker's Dracula—a character who, through countless repetitions in film, in books, and on stage, has been described by Nina Auerbach as moving from "a highly particularized, even innovative creature, into a weighty archetype, The Vampyre" (130). While *Dracula* valorizes conformity to existing patriarchal "norms," Rice sets up a new version of the vampire myth which transgresses Stoker's rendering of the vampire character and thereby disturbs the archetypal "Vampyre" as s/he exists in a fictional framework. By creating vampire characters with whom millions of readers feel they can sympathize, Rice has turned *The Vampire Chronicles* into a formidable counternarrative in a genre previously dominated by men. Indeed, for many contemporary readers who have never encountered Stoker's novel, it is Rice who has created the "authentic" fictional vampire, embodied primarily by Lestat.

Rice's characterization of Lestat poses intriguing problems for the reader. As a vampire, he is a killer who takes pleasure in bringing death—yet he also possesses a conscience. His sensual experience of the world around him as a Savage Garden ruled by
a carnivalesque blurring of boundaries is beautiful, romantic, perverse, and horrific all at once. It is his experiences which the *Chronicles* privilege, and his experiences with which readers are led to most closely identify. Wayne Booth describes the central dilemma of texts narrated by criminal subjects as "the reader's inability to dissociate himself from a vicious center of consciousness presented to him with all of the seductive self-justification of skilful rhetoric" (390). This "vicious association" is a genuine risk for readers of the *Chronicles* (and, to a lesser extent, for readers of Charnas and Gomez as well) who are manipulated toward a desire to travel with the vampire protagonist rather than to stand against him/her. Significantly, it is a rhetorical move which consciously attempts to reverse the direction of reader sympathy as that sympathy is manipulated in vampire fiction by men. It should be noted, however, that this is not necessarily an uncritical reversal. Throughout *The Vampire Chronicles*, Lestat is not always so confident in his own defense. Rice has developed him as a liminal creature who persistently tests the bounds of his liminality in order to better understand his place in the world. Moreover, he feels compelled to broadcast his liminality. He wants his voice to be heard regardless of the labels which the dominant society and even his fellow vampires will place on him when he reveals himself. With Lestat, Rice has created a character who commands his readers' attention as he details his love for humans and his desire to become human, only to discover in *The Tale of the Body Thief* that such conformity to the dominant society is a denial of his vampire identity which he cannot endure. "I no longer maintain a deception," he states. "I know now I truly love being the little devil that I am" (406).

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2 This dilemma involves a level of moral ambiguity which Booth wants to avoid. The women whose works are presented in this study, however, are using their vampire characters in part as vehicles for interrogating existing moral codes. From this perspective, moral ambiguity within the text may be read as both potentially threatening and potentially liberating. Hence, it is not necessarily to be avoided.
Rice's construction of Lestat's journey toward self-acceptance incurs tremendous violence upon her protagonist and upon those around him; nonetheless, it is a journey which she clearly feels he must take, and her readers are pulled along with him as he questions his existence. Over the course of the *Chronicles* she builds him as a character who identifies with the Devil—a being who dares to accuse, to question, to challenge the motives and even the authority of God, who is Himself the ultimate patriarch. The questions which Rice voices through her primary vampire protagonist do not always have clear answers and, indeed, the cyborg nature of vampire experience tends to preclude absolutes. Yet perhaps this is not the point. There is purpose enough in the questions themselves, and in possessing the courage to voice and explore them regardless of where they may lead. In vampire fiction by women, they often lead to perpetual redefinition of the territory of the self. The instabilities which compel this need for re-territorialization may bring intense discomfort, but they may also be tapped as a source of strength. As Mary Douglas observes, while

... disorder spoils pattern, it also provides the material of pattern. Order implies restriction; from all possible materials a limited selection has been made and from all possible relations a limited set has been used. So disorder by implication is unlimited, no pattern has been realised in it, but its potential for patterning is indefinite. This is why, though we seek to create order, we do not simply condemn disorder. We recognise that it is destructive to existing patterns; also that it has potentiality. It symbolizes both danger and power. (95)

Rice articulates her own recognition of the power of disordered states through her cyborg construction of the vampire Lestat and of the Savage Garden which he inhabits. Charnas and Gomez echo this recognition through their respective constructions of Weyland and Gilda, albeit in less dramatic fashion. From all three women, existing vampire fiction by men has provoked a literary response through which many of the tropes associated with that fiction are contested and re-contextualized to produce myths of the vampire which exploit the hybridity of that figure as a channel for individual enlightenment. In the
process of obligating reader sympathy for the vampire, female authors have written their
vampire protagonists as heroic, though not unproblematic, displacements of Dracula.
Readers of their works are left with a range of choices regarding the degree of sympathy
that they are willing to admit with these monstrous characters. While some may
uncritically accept intimacy and surrender to the vampire's worldview as the text proffers
it, others may resist that worldview on the grounds that it either conforms to social values
which they reject or subverts social values which they esteem. Still others may occupy a
middle ground in which their sympathy for the vampire fluctuates as the character enacts
the contradictions made inherent in his/her cyborg subjectivity. The politics of reader
location are inextricably tied with the individual reader's ability to recognize and morally
respond to the author's construction of vampire hybridity and the re-visioning of the
world which that construction permits. In creating their counternarratives within the
genre of vampire fiction, female authors confront their readers with new possibilities that
lurk in a very old monster figure--and in the very old configuration of social institutions
from which that monster first arose. The complexity of these women's vampire
protagonists as evinced in this study suggests that this "new look" is significantly more
than cosmetic. To classify women's vampire fiction as merely a reification of or a
reaction against existing social "norms" is an oversimplification of texts which may be
read as both. It is this merging of contradictory impulses which is at the heart of the
vampire figure's subjectivity and which Rice, Charnas, and Gomez have appropriated not
as a contagion to be denied, but as a phenomenon to be welcomed and explored. Implicit
in these women's vampire stories is an invitation for their readers to share in this
endeavor.
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