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Biting Back: Racism, Homophobia and Vampires in Bram Stoker, Anne Rice and Alan Ball

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Biting Back: Racism, Homophobia and Vampires in Bram Stoker, Anne Rice and Alan
Ball

An Honors Program Thesis

by

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Introduction

Vampires have been an enduring and powerful image throughout history, and each individual probably conjures up a different vampire in his or her head when hearing the word. Whether it be the sparkling Edward Cullen from *Twilight* or Bela Lugosi's classic depiction of the Count from *Dracula*, the idea of the vampire is perpetually ingrained in modern culture. Vampires are constantly changing creatures, and they reflect the culture that has borne them. While it is easy to think vampires have only grown more sympathetic in recent depictions, they have always been a sort of sympathetic creature. This is because of the humanity of vampires. Barring the ice-cold skin and long, pointy fangs, most vampires are strikingly human. They talk like us, walk like us, and act like us—save for a few deviations. Some are unable to walk around in the daylight, some lack the ability to see themselves in mirrors, but they are—upon first glance, at least—human. This resemblance acts as a glossy warning to humanity about its own potential for evil. Look at what you can become, the vampire seems to say. Witness the cold and dark things lurking within the depths of your soul!

Despite the similarities, one thing has and will always be clear about these creatures: they are frightening, dangerous things. Vampires are immortal, and these undead beings are blood-sucking killers. They often possess super-human powers, such as staggering speed and strength. On top of the physical capabilities of vampires, some possess supernatural abilities as well, such as mind-reading and the ability to see into the future. The danger of vampires is not only in their ability to crush humanity, though. They tend to be educated as well, having had dozens or even hundreds of years to study whatever they desire. This intelligence lends them undeniable wit and charm. Most depictions of vampires paint them as strikingly beautiful as well. More often than not, mere humans are no match for them in matters of the heart and body, making them nearly

impossible to defeat and impossible to deny. Because of this, regardless of their true nature, vampires are perpetually frightful beings. Surfaces can be deceiving, of course. Even the most cultured, seductive vampire can turn victim to his or her own bloodlust, and for every good vampire, we get a reminder of their dark counterparts. The Cullens of *Twilight*, in all the glory of their honey-colored eyes and impeccable taste, are rivaled by the violent, blood-thirsty, red-eyed evil vampires of the Volturi. Stefan Salvatore's diet of rabbits, in *The Vampire Diaries*, is undercut by his brother Damon's diet of beautiful, teenage blonde girls, and thanks to this, Stefan is no match against him in. Vampires, no matter how sympathetic, will never be saviors, because their very existence means danger. On the whole, most young ladies would probably be better off in a world lacking the paranormal. Bella Swan might have avoided numerous near-death experiences, and Caroline Forbes might have grown up to be the beauty queen she was always meant to be, yet their frequent desire to rendezvous with the dangerous creatures left them cold and, relatively speaking, dead.

These vampires, as well as their nemeses, grow with time, but the message has often been the same: vampires act as metaphors for the feared, the ostracized and the unknown. The painful lives of vampires are representations of the painful lives of those who choose to stray from the accepted and normalized conventions of a time period and a culture. Therefore, so long as bigotry and hatred exist, so will vampires in popular culture. Throughout the history of western depictions of vampires, these creatures have functioned within their respective mythology to represent the monstrous aspects of humanity dwelling just beneath the surface of cultural and social norms. Beneath the porcelain veneer of Victorian ideals, for example, misogyny lurked. Racism has haunted the American landscape since the earliest colonies and the establishment of the plantation system. And homophobia has proved a recurring terror in

Western culture whether through nineteenth-century obscenity laws or hate crimes in twentieth-century America. Though vampires may drum up a common image or idea—nocturnal, parasitic, sweepingly evil—there is no singular, static vampire. Vampires continually transform in order to adhere to the culture that bears them. They embrace the hatred that social and cultural biases fuel and expose humanity's worst prejudices and fears. Although each vampire functions in its own way, they always act as vehicles for the unknown, and through vampires, the horrors of the real world are revealed.

While they have been around for ages, the first imagined vampire in western literary history was presented in Byron's/Polidori's Lord Ruthven character. Though an original character, this creature immediately established and employed classic vampire tropes. The story features a wealthy, aristocratic vampire preying on the young and vulnerable. From this clunky character, vampires have endlessly grown and transformed. Most notably, the nineteenth century ended with Bram Stoker's magnum opus, *Dracula*. Ever since the publication of this novel, Dracula and his ilk have been reimagined again and again. The popular silent movie, *Nosferatu*, which first appeared in 1922, was illegally adapted until the Stoker estate successfully sued the filmmakers. The most iconic movie adaption of Stoker's vampire, however, is Todd Browning's 1931 *Dracula*, featuring the irreplaceable Bela Lugosi as the titular character. This adaption was created after the success of the 1927 Broadway play of the same name, which also starred Lugosi in his first major English role. Lugosi's depiction of the Count is arguably what comes to most minds when asked to picture Dracula, from the accent to the iconic widow's peak hairstyle. The success of the 1931 adaption only inspired countless others. Over the years we have watched these vampires change, but we inevitably see them employ the same tropes. The vampires are usually wealthy, handsome and aristocratic in some sense. Louis of *Interview with the Vampire*,

for instance, is the owner of a large plantation, and his wealth initially inspired his creator to turn him into a vampire. The Cullens from *Twilight* possess a staggering wealth, which includes Ivy-league educations and fancy sports cars. Similar, the undead of *The Vampire Diaries* have impressive financial resources as well. The Salvatore's own a sprawling Southern mansion, and they make it clear that money is not, and never will be, a problem for them.

As beloved and convenient as vampires are within the world of horror, a world lacking vampires might mean an improved one. Since, as mentioned earlier, vampires work to reflect the bigotry of a culture, the absence of vampires would suggest the absence of hateful fear, bigotry and intolerance in the modern world. Wishful thinking. While America stumbles forward on social and political issues, it also finds a way to trip and fall back into the dark abyss of chauvinism and bigotry. Even in 2018, men still relentlessly seek to control female sexuality. Bigots, emboldened by racially insensitive remarks from the President still feel empowered to use racial slurs, to promote ideas of racial supremacy, and to attack African Americans and other ethnic groups with impunity. Transgressive sexuality is still harmfully misunderstood, as represented in the backlash transgender and gay communities still face, from the incessant violent and physical attacks against members of the transgressive community to the unnecessary and hate-charged decision to ban transgender military members. In a time such as ours, with serious social and political fractures raging through the country, one must wonder what sort of vampire might be conjured up in the future.

The vampire will always be an important figure in the western world, and is not wont to fade any time soon. As vampires continue to grow into more alluring and sympathetic creatures, so will the public's understanding of them. Younger generations may think of sparkles rather

than blood when they think of vampires. As this perception changes, the metaphor that the vampire presents does as well.

Overview

Biting Back: Racism, Homophobia and Vampires in Bram Stoker, Anne Rice and Alan Ball will seek to expose the various metaphors hidden within the world of vampires. Specifically, my analysis will focus on how vampires have been used to critique and explain the social fears that plague any given age, with a specific focus on racial and sexual fear. In each of these popular-culture phenomena, vampires critique the way the masses fear what they do not know, and what is foreign to them. Thus, through vampires, they are able to act on their fear of transgressive sexuality and ethnic others. The masses transform their hatred for the unknown into a hatred of vampires. These chapters are featured chronologically, in order to show how monstrous vampires will adapt and transform as time goes on.

The first chapter will discuss Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, which is, in many regards, the most influential and important vampire story to date. This chapter will feature two parts, one devoted to sexuality within the text and one devoted to race/ethnicity. The sexuality section will focus heavily on women: the vampire brides, Mina Murray, and Lucy Westenra. Stoker juxtaposes the punishment the vampire brides and Lucy faced for their prevalent sexuality with the rewards bestowed on Mina for being a chaste female. Stoker also makes sexuality a central concern in his depiction of men. Homosexual undertones permeate the relationship between Harker and *Dracula* that point to contemporary anxieties about transgressive sexuality, the onset of the twentieth century, and the obscenity laws that persecuted figures such as Oscar Wilde, someone who was once a friend of Stoker's. After this discussion of sexuality, the chapter examines race and ethnicity in *Dracula*, and how the oriental or ethnic other was feared and ostracized within

Victorian Britain and beyond. From the start of the novel, readers bear witness to Harker's Victorian sense of superiority, as he sneers at most everything he encounters while visiting Dracula's home country. The section also examines the difference between the eccentric Dr. Van Helsing and charming, American-as-apple pie Quincey Morris, juxtaposed against the frightening Count Dracula. Overall, the entire chapter is devoted to proving the way Stoker critiques the stringent and usually harmful morals and ideas in Europe during the Victorian period.

The second chapter focuses on sexuality and race in Anne Rice's *Interview with the Vampire*. Much of the sexuality section focuses on the complicated and painful relationship between Louis and Lestat, and how it replicates a homosexual relationship. In the novel, Rice presents same-sex desire a natural part of life, and something that comes naturally to vampires with ample opportunity and time for experimentation, as well as disregard for cultural norms. Through the normalcy in which she depicts the relationships, she is criticizing those that would view same-sex desire negatively. Within Rice's depiction of the abnormal family, she is critiquing the stringent society-regulated family unit, one that defines a family as a female mother, a male father and children. Rice's vampiric family twists these notions, offering instead two men who fulfill the roles of mother and father, and more. The race section focuses primarily on slavery, as the novel begins within the American south, and Rice uses Louis's plantation and slave ownership to remind readers of America's inescapable racist past. This theme of slavery is prevalent throughout the entire work, as readers watch Louis become enslaved to his affliction, his master and his bloodlust. Furthermore, the race and ethnicity section also explore how slavery can be represented within vampirism itself, creating an important parallel between the two that furthers Rice's idea.

The third and final chapter focuses on the first season of Alan Ball's television adaptation of *True Blood* for HBO. Throughout the series, Ball sheds light on the rampant racism and homophobia that plagues America, especially the American South, in modern times. Ball uses the hatred of vampires in the show to examine the difficulties of contemporary civil rights, including the ongoing struggle for black rights and gay rights. Specifically, he depicts the exploitation of African Americans through the way they are consistently undermined and persecuted throughout the show. Tara, best friend of protagonist Sookie, is an intelligent black female in the American South. She is aware of the racial hatred surrounding her, yet she seems to be the only one. She receives no sympathy from her lovers, her coworkers or even her best friend. The primary black male character and her cousin, Lafayette, is a homosexual, and his life in the South is plagued by discomfort and hatred as well, from both homophobes and racists. These brutal truths are paired with the fictional struggle of vampires, from their fight for vampire marriage to having to constantly defend themselves from those that seek to use them for their valuable blood. In these depictions, Ball is forcing viewers to understand and condemn the racism, misogyny and homophobia that overwhelms modern America. Through the treatment of vampires and vampire-human relationships, as well as the depiction of a black homosexual in the American south, Ball is able to condemn this bigotry.

These different depictions of vampires act in different ways, and despite being set in different time periods, they all share a similar argument: vampires act as vessels to condemn and critique harmful and prevalent social and cultural fears. In each example, vampires are used to critique the way transgressive sexuality and racial otherness has been targeted and persecuted in Western culture, and they challenge white, heteronormative, patriarchal values that promote inequity and harmful divisiveness.

Chapter 1:

Dracula and Stoker's Bloody Depictions

Published in 1897, *Dracula* cemented Bram Stoker's name in literary history in both the tradition of gothic fiction and the vampire genre. Though a few different literary vampires existed before this novel, such as John Polidori's *The Vampyre* (1819), James Rymer's *Varney the Vampire* (1847), and Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla* (1871) Stoker's continues to be the most popular and influential. He not only drew on these earlier works, but he also introduced many new elements to the genre that helped make Count Dracula the archetypal vampire. In fact, he has provided the cornerstone for all the vampire myths ever since.

Born in Dublin, Ireland in 1847, Bram Stoker suffered from mysterious illnesses that left him bedridden for most of his childhood, and these circumstances fostered him into a profound love of reading. This passion would inspire him to spend a lot of time reading and writing at Trinity College, and he pursued a career in journalism after college, working as a civil servant at the Dublin Castle by day and as an unpaid writer for a local newspaper by night. He did this for nearly ten years until he met the famous English actor, Sir Henry Irving. This was an extremely important relationship to Stoker on both personal and professional levels. The two became close friends, and soon Irving offered Stoker a job at the famed London Lyceum Theatre. His exposure to the theater would shape his dramatic sensibility as a writer, and it would subsequently inspire Stoker to think of Count Dracula as a character with theatrical possibilities. He even begged Irving to play the titular role in an adaptation of his novel.

Stoker also cultivated relationships with esteemed literary figures such as Walt Whitman and Oscar Wilde. Stoker fiercely admired Whitman's poetry. On February 18, 1872, Stoker penned a long, adoring letter to Whitman, and laid his soul bare to him: "You see, I have called

you by your name. I have been more candid with you— have said more about myself to you than I have said to anyone before” (qtd. in Skal, *Something*, 98). Stoker had been an acquaintance of Wilde since their Dublin days. They were always friendly but an underlying competition characterized their relationship. The two went on like this until Stoker proposed to a woman Wilde had been publicly infatuated with, Florence Malcombe. Stoker and Malcombe married and had a child together, and with this, the relationship between Stoker and Wilde dissipated, ending with Stoker distancing himself from Wilde during his prosecution for indecency.

Stoker drew inspiration from many sources in composing the novel. First, as many scholars have noted, Stoker’s *Dracula* was partially inspired by the story of Vlad “The Impaler” Tepes, from Wallachia, or modern-day Romania. However, Auerbach and Skal have explained, Stoker had never been to Transylvania, the fictional *Dracula*’s homeland, and the author had a very limited knowledge of the actual culture and lore. (331). Not having knowledge of a culture but choosing to write about proved problematic, leading to the spread of misinformation and the perpetuation of stereotypes. Most scholars believe many Westerners acquired most of their knowledge of Romania from *Dracula*, and this fanciful, stereotypical depiction continues to misrepresent Romanian culture to this day.

Stoker’s relationships with Irving and Wilde provided additional sources of inspiration as well. While working at the Lyceum Theatre, he worked very hard for Henry Irving’s approval and appreciation. Stoker hoped the stage production of *Dracula* would impress him, but Irving allegedly found the whole thing dreadful. As noted by Skal, many believed that the relationship between Harker and *Dracula* was an allegory for the mentally and physically draining relationship between Stoker and Irving (373). Despite this, Stoker praised and supported Irving endlessly. While Irving was being knighted, however, Stoker’s other friend Oscar Wilde was

being imprisoned for homosexuality. Stoker knew he that he must publicly act horrified by Wilde's transgressions but he felt differently. According to Talia Schaffer, Stoker wrote Harker and Dracula as representations of the conflicting sides of Wilde as a homosexual. She argues that Dracula is one version of Wilde—a representation of the way Western culture viewed homosexuality as threatening and evil—and that Harker represents the imprisoned, suffering Wilde. Stoker clearly saw both sides of his friend and sympathized with him because of their friendship, but when the time came, Stoker did not openly support Wilde. As Schaffer explains, “To homophobes, vampirism could function as a way of naming the homosexual as monstrous, dirty, threatening. To homosexuals, vampirism could be an elegy for the enforced internment of their desires. *Dracula*, however, functions as both accusation and elegy. Stoker used the Wildean figure of Dracula to define homosexuality as simultaneously monstrous, dirty, threatening, alluring, buried, corrupting, contagious and indestructible” (473).

Traditional folklore further influenced Stoker as well, and he contributed a number of innovations to the vampire mythology. He, for instance, created the first vampire with an aversion to garlic and no reflection. Most importantly, Stoker made vampires terrifyingly close to being a human. Previous vampires seemed to be inhumane creatures. The Count, however, is eloquent, cultured, wealthy, knowledgeable and elegant, rather than a rambling zombie. He feels things that every normal human feel, such as jealousy and rage, and he can be tender and caring. He also knows British law, speaks perfect English, wears class appropriate clothing, and seduces British women. While previous vampires lurked in the dark, Dracula does all of this in broad daylight, seemingly indistinct from other Englishmen. This ability to be in the light is the ultimate representation of his ability to integrate into Victorian society, and it made him particularly horrifying in the 1800's.

Although *Dracula* did not immediately skyrocket to fame, Stoker always had hopes for the story to transcend the novel. With his background in the theatre, he immediately sought to produce a staged version of the text. Stoker drew a lot of inspiration from Shakespearean themes and ideas, such as the melancholy and darkness of Hamlet, as David J. Skal notes in “Theatrical Adaptations of *Dracula*.” The Shakespearean allusions could be indicative of Stoker’s belief that *Dracula* was always meant for the stage. Almost immediately after the book’s publication, Stoker ordered the theatre to put on a reading of *Dracula* in 1897. It was relatively unsuccessful, and although Stoker was correct that *Dracula* was meant for something more, he would never see a successful rendition of his novel. His widow oversaw his estate and was vigilant about new productions of her late husband’s masterpiece. After a few smaller theatrical productions, the Broadway version featuring Bela Lugosi premiered on October 5, 1927. The production was extremely successful, and Lugosi’s rendition helped make *Dracula* synonymous with the vampire. The immense popularity of the play attracted Hollywood and in 1931 Universal produced Tod Browning’s version of *Dracula*. Again, Bela Lugosi played the iconic titular role. The film was a powerhouse for Universal, helping to launch the Golden Age of Hollywood horror, and it assured Lugosi’s perpetual association with the Count (Skal 379). Despite Lugosi and Universal’s success, Lugosi only ever received \$3,500 for his work on the first film.

The story of *Dracula* begins with an entry from Jonathan Harker’s diary, and the rest of the novel takes place within journal entries, letters, or other forms of print culture such as newspaper articles and medical memos that have been assembled by Mina Murray. Harker has been sent to Transylvania to handle a business transaction with Count Dracula, and he is immediately plunged into Transylvanian customs. His comparisons with British culture allow him to feel superior to these simple, rural people, but they also suggest his blindness to the power

of non-western folk traditions. While in Dracula's castle, it slowly dawns on him that he is not a guest but a prisoner of the Count. Harker also realizes over time that the Count is not the man he thought he was; he is completely otherworldly. After a number of horrifying days and uncomfortable interactions, the three voluptuous vampire wives of Dracula assault Harker late at night, and their role as seductresses and predators establishes a pattern of depicting female sexuality in the novel. Any violation of sexual purity on the part of women appear monstrous and must be destroyed.

At the same time, Stoker uses Harker's fiancée Mina and her best friend Lucy to contrast proper and improper womanhood in Western culture. One of the first things we learn about Lucy is her promiscuity. She has three different men interested in marrying her, and she has no idea whom to choose. Stoker juxtaposes this with Mina's virtuosity, waiting for her fiancée to come back to England and admonishing Lucy's capriciousness. Soon after Dracula arrives in England, Lucy begins to be afflicted by him, and Stoker links her suffering with her inability to settle down and conform to traditional values. Not surprisingly, Dr. Van Helsing and his companions see it as their mission to cure Lucy and keep Mina as pure as possible. The explicit scene of four men transfusing their blood into Lucy's in an effort to save her implies a kind of sexual exchange for which she is punished. After failing to control Lucy's sexuality and womanhood, they determine that she had to die. Even after Lucy's death, she returns as a terrifying vampire preying on young children, her final betrayal of traditional womanhood. This time the men execute her in a violent, bloody manner before setting off on their quest to kill the Count. Meanwhile Dracula is able to bite Mina, and while she suffers a little, she emerges mostly unharmed, unlike Lucy. Eventually the men are able to hunt Dracula down and kill him. His death cures Mina and effectively eradicates the threat of unconventional sexuality.

Throughout *Dracula*, Stoker also presents beings that deviate from the white, heteronormative English hierarchy as dangerous. Lucy and Dracula's vampire brides are transgressive in their sexuality and actions, but their appearance also deviates from white, Western European norms. Their dark hair and aquiline features link them with the other women Harker has noticed in Romania. In the case of the Count, the racial other must be eradicated and chased out of England and, presumably, chased out of western culture altogether. Dracula is foreign and ethnic, and his ability to prey on pure the Victorian women captures the fear of otherness in nineteenth-century England. For Stoker, those fear reflect oppressive intolerance for difference that has a corrosive effect on British culture.

Ultimately, Stoker's novel presents the hierarchies surrounding gender and ethnicity in Victorian England as preventing meaningful connections and fracturing community. They hinder real intimacy between men and women by asserting and insisting on the subordination of women. They discourage any recognition of sexuality as something fluid. They foster suspicion and ignorance about other cultures. And they encourage people to act out of fear instead of empathy and understanding. As such, Stoker suggests that the real horror lies in this culture of intolerance, not in the supernatural threat of vampires or the shadowy depths of Dracula's castle.

Dracula's Women: The Dangers of Sexuality in Victorian Culture

Dracula portrays women as under the control of men, and within this cultural context, women that violate the cult of true womanhood (purity, domesticity, submissiveness, and piety) become monstrous. During this time, anything that deviated from the traditions surrounding sex, marriage, and the subservient role of women in society became viewed as immoral. Throughout

the Victorian era, Christianity profoundly shaped the social, personal and political lives of the era by buttressing white, patriarchal hegemony. Women became objects to be controlled and domesticated. They were relegated to the home as wives and mothers with very few opportunities for a public or professional identity. If a woman did not accept these power roles, she found herself vilified and ostracized. Furthermore, since heteronormative white Christian males maintained power, anyone that deviated from this identity was suspect. Thus, transgressive sexuality and liberated women were viewed as threats. To capture and comment on this dynamic, Stoker presents Dracula's wives and Lucy as women who reject domesticity and social norms by embracing their sexuality and liberation. Because of the way these women reject traditional Victorian values, they transform into monsters. Stoker does this to reveal the extent of male discomfort with female sexuality not under the yoke of Victorian cultural mores. As such, transgressive sexuality gets linked with their horror, and Stoker does this to critique the way the society condemns women who do not conform.

Stoker introduces Dracula's three vampire wives as monstrous and predatory but also extremely alluring to emphasize the hypocritical way that men viewed female sexuality during this time. All of these women are presented as overtly sexual: "All three had brilliant white teeth, that shone like pearls against the ruby of their voluptuous lips. 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" (Stoker 42). He notes that he should not write down these desires for fear of hurting Mina's feelings. By presenting these women as monstrous for their sexuality yet alluring to Harker, Stoker criticizes the double standards of sexuality. Men want to control the sexuality of women, disapproving of outward expressions of female desire, yet they are also drawn to it. Here, Stoker critiques the explicit

hypocrisy of men who both condemn and desire what they deem as monstrous. Stoker is also making a comment on the horrors of womanhood here. Society requires absolute suppression of the female sexuality, and if the sexuality is not properly suppressed, it will result in serious ostracization and marginalization. As a result, women must live in fear of their own sexuality and what it can do to their lives, which makes every day a nightmarish struggle for control.

Not only are Dracula's vampire brides in control of their own sexuality, but the fact that they are actively engaged in a polygamous relationship adds to their horror. Since traditional monogamous marriage functioned, in part, as another tool for men to control a female's sexuality, polygamy became the ultimate act of defiance. These vampires are beautiful and voluptuous, but they are hungry, ready to feed literally on Harker as he craves to feed on them sexually. Their monstrosity suggests that Victorian England viewed the sexualized woman as morally condemnable. The subsequent punishment of these women also suggests that patriarchal society believed that such displays of overt sexuality should result in physical and mental discipline. In part, this attitude revealed a fear that men would suffer because of the constant temptation even though they know this temptation is wrong. In Anna Silver's *Victorian Literature and the Anorexic Body*, she notes that the hunger of women represents their sexual propensities, and she explicitly links the literal appetite for food with sexual desire (118). Because of this link, the hunger of the women to feast on Harker's blood also represents their hunger for sex and intimacy. Like one's hunger for food and nourishment, Stoker suggests that sexuality is a natural desire here and that punishing it is antithetical to human nature. Similar to Harker's hunger for some added spice in his sexual life, he hungers for a literal spiciness in his food. He takes meticulous notes on the food he encounters in Romania, which features paprika, something he would like Mina to use more of at home. If Harker hungers for something like

paprika at home, does he also, perhaps subconsciously, hunger for something sexually deviant and salacious, such as polygamy as well? His interest in this literal and figurative spiciness brings the blandness of his life at home and Victorian ideals and morals as a whole into question. His desire for spice, however, is presented alongside his English sense of superiority and distaste. Despite his attraction to them, these women ultimately face a brutal and bloody end, something Stoker does to critique how patriarchal norms look to oppress and punish female sexuality.

Stoker uses Dracula's vampire brides and Dracula's own transgressive sexuality to criticize the rigid and oppressive structure of traditional gender norms and the way his culture enforces them. The vampire brides and Dracula's affinity for Harker function to reject domesticity completely. The vampire brides offer a glimpse into Lucy's future, and a glimpse into the future of any woman who refuses to conform. In the ultimate rejection of motherhood and the values of womanhood, the vampire brides feast on newborn babies. These women, despite their obvious horror and monstrosity, are still able to tempt Harker to stray from his moral values of monogamy, even with his pure, domestic bride-to-be waiting for him at home. While the women prepare to feast on Harker, Dracula enters the bedchamber and forcefully repels them. He claims Harker to be his, and this leads to an argument between him and the women about love, painting Dracula's desire for Harker as erotic as well. After this, Harker faints at the horror of it all, and Dracula carries Harker's limp body back to his room and folds his clothes for him. Dracula's possessive interest in Harker and his domestic tenderness create an image of homoerotic desire between men. Harker belongs to Dracula in a sexual way, making him much more than just Dracula's prisoner. The erotic desire of Dracula and the women's lust threatens Harker's integral heteronormative values. In Dracula's castle, and altogether in

Transylvania, Harker has encountered a life wholly unfamiliar to him. Witnessing the transgressive sexualities of Dracula and his vampire brides shocks and forces Harker into a world that turns everything he thought he knew upside down. He has always aligned himself with the important morals of the Victorian era, but he also finds himself attracted to these three women who tarnish the ideal of monogamy. What does this say of him? Harker cannot truly fathom the continuum of sexuality that he has witnessed and his own attraction to it. The horror of all this transgressive attention weighs Harker down so much that he loses consciousness.

Stoker uses Dr. Van Helsing's violent murder of the vampire brides as one more critique of male attempts to control female sexuality. Like many of the other men in the novel, Van Helsing is attracted to the females he murders, highlighting again the hypocrisy of patriarchal oppression. He is not only hypocritical in his desires and animosity for the female vampires but he is also immensely oppressive in his view of women. He only allows himself to think of women in two ways: as licentious or angelic. These extreme stereotypes, which reflect the contemporary bind facing nineteenth-century women in England and Ireland are corrosive and harmful. They prevent men and women from engaging in honest, fulfilling, and equal relationships. It also prevents women from forming their own identities, lest they fail to live up to their idealized expectations. For example, the female vampires are subjected to bloody and violent deaths like Lucy, but their deaths are preceded by Dr. Van Helsing's longing for them: "She was so fair to look on, so radiantly beautiful, so exquisitely voluptuous, that the very instinct of man in me, which calls some of my sex to love and to protect one of hers, made my head whirl with new emotion. But God be thanked, that soul-wail of my dear Madam Mina had not died out of my ears; and, before the spell could be wrought further upon me, I had nerved myself to my wild work" (Stoker 320). Van Helsing blames his longing not only on his natural

tendencies but on some sort of spell. This allows him to take no responsibility for his own sexual transgressions here, shifting the entire moral burden on women. In fact, only because of the scream of pure Mina is he able to pull away from the monstrous women before it is too late, suggesting that Mina's embodiment of purity is necessary for male fidelity. Once again, women are fully responsible for upholding the code of sexuality.

Lastly, Stoker juxtaposes Mina and Lucy, focusing on Mina's purity and Lucy's promiscuity, in order to critique the Victorian premise that women are meant to forcefully control their own desires and sexuality. Stoker presents Mina as virtuous and pure, the virginal woman waiting for her husband-to-be to return home from his voyage. She is held in stark contrast with her promiscuous best friend who has multiple marriage proposals. Lucy enjoys the attention she is given, and she will suffer greatly for this by the novel's close. Almost as soon as the Count arrives in England, he puts Lucy under his spell. She is possessed by fits of sleep-walking and strange dreams. During one particular sleep-walking episode, Mina finds Lucy asleep in a churchyard with Count Dracula bent over her. On seeing Mina, the Count flees. All of Dracula's actions in this scene are reminiscent of an animal, from bending over his prey to running away upon hearing someone approach. This animalistic portrayal casts his appetite for sexuality and conquest as monstrous. Despite all of his shows of affection and elegance, the point Stoker is making here is that underneath it all Dracula remains an animal who craves sex and food. Mina finds Lucy asleep and generally unharmed, but her state is strange. She seems more like a woman in the throes of intercourse than a proper, slumbering Victorian lady. "When I bent over her I could see that she was still asleep. Her lips were parted, and she was breathing-not softly, as usual with her, but in long, heavy gasps, as though striving to get her lungs full with every breath" (Stoker 88). Lucy being asleep while this all happens represents the

powerlessness in a woman's life. The presumption by the men and even Mina, who aligns with patriarchal values, is that Lucy cannot control her sexuality. This powerlessness over her sexuality makes her dangerous, yet Lucy has some sense for the danger. After this episode, Lucy begs Mina to keep it between them, as if she were caught doing something shameful and unchaste. Mina agrees, blind to the harmful social limitations that control her friend's sexuality and control her life.

After the Count bites Lucy her subsequent illness becomes a metaphor for the way the culture believes a sexualized woman must be punished. For Stoker, punishing women for their sexuality is an act of savage brutality, and he crafts Lucy into a sort of warning about what happens to women that reject domesticity and virtue. Van Helsing, for example, quickly decides the men must transfuse their blood with Lucy's to keep her alive. This scene has been widely critiqued, and in "Kiss Me with Those Red Lips": Gender and Inversion in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*," Christopher Craft argues that "This repetitive contest (penetration, withdrawal; penetration, infusion), itself an image of *Dracula's* ambivalent need to evoke and then repudiate the fluid pleasures of vampiric appetite, continues to be waged upon Lucy's infinitely penetrable body until Van Helsing exhausts his store of 'brave men,' whose generous gifts of blood, however efficacious, fail finally to save Lucy from the mobilization of desire" (455). The failure of their intervention speaks to the overall horror. As a cautionary tale, Stoker is showing that sometimes when a woman takes her rebellion too far, nothing can save her. The scene is a very important aspect of the novel, for its sexual overtones, through the act of merging bodily fluids suggests rape. The first transfusion is fraught with sexual tension and energy. The men surround Lucy, a woman they are all attracted to on some level, and they proceed to penetrate her with fluid from their bodies. This again represents the way society views the hypersexualized female

as something a man can use and violate as he sees fit: “As the transfusion went on something like life seemed to come back to poor Lucy’s cheeks, and through Arthur’s growing pallor the joy of his face seemed to absolutely shine. After a bit I began to grow anxious, for the loss of blood was telling on Arthur, strong man as he was. It gave me an idea of what terrible strain Lucy’s system must have undergone that what weakened Arthur only partially restored her” (Stoker 114). The act of transfusing their blood brings joy to Arthur while simultaneously exhausting him. Likewise, Dr. Seward is only able to fully empathize with and fathom Lucy’s pain when he sees it affect someone more like himself, a white male. This lends to the idea that sexual transgressiveness dehumanizes Lucy, even to the men who wished to court her. In her sexualization, she is monstrous, while male desire calls for normalization and even martyrdom. Stoker sets up this double standard to condemn the way sexually liberated women are demonized, but sexually adventurous men are admired. Despite all of their efforts, these transfusions cannot save Lucy. She is too far gone. She has been compromised because of this violation by several men. She will never be as pure as her counterpart, Mina. Therefore, she is not worth saving.

After Lucy’s death, Stoker quickly resurrects her as a female vampire to suggest the way women and their reputations become perpetually tarnished if they assert any transgression from the norm. A sexualized woman in this time would not be able to rest in peace because her reputation would stay with her even after death, and Stoker literalizes this by not allowing Lucy to rest either. The monstrosity of her appetite must be emphasized. As a vampire she is seen preying on young children, and the men who once loved Lucy must seek her out to kill her. She has committed the ultimate sin for a woman by harming a child, the very thing she, as a woman, is expected to create and nurture. Given the chance to choose between domesticity or

promiscuity, Lucy has made chosen sexual desire and exploration over motherhood and as Stoker suggests, a woman could not have both. Lucy thus has harmed the traditional family unit of England. Her second death comes off as a violent rape scene, with her head being cut off, her mouth filled with garlic, and a stake rammed through her heart. These men are so bothered by their attraction to what they cannot and should not have that they lash out with sexual violence to destroy the object of their desires. Lucy has paid the ultimate price for rejecting traditional family values and domesticity. Stoker does this to find fault with the violent and harmful way men react to anything that challenges patriarchal, heteronormative norms.

Dracula seduces Mina next, but Stoker makes it so that her purity and chasteness protects her from him, thus exposing the flawed way Victorian society holds women to these pure standards. She is the ultimate woman and wife, travelling all the way to Budapest to care and coddle Harker after his traumatic visit to Dracula's castle, and returning as his wife. Despite her domesticity, Mina's intelligence is crucial in defeating Dracula. She aids in figuring out who Dracula truly is and what he is up to. Because of her knowledge, Dracula visits Mina and bites her as he did Lucy, and going further, he forces her to drink from a wound on him. This sexualized moment inverts typical gender roles as Mina drinks from him and he drinks from her. This twists the portrait of a child drinking from a mother's breast. The image complicates Stoker's critique on female sexuality, because although Mina represents the pure Victorian woman, Dracula is still able to seduce her. However, Stoker keeps her pure by limiting her suffering. She goes through a small transformation, becoming fainter and sleepier, but she does not suffer as much as Lucy. Stoker eases Mina's suffering because unlike Lucy; Mina does not deserve punishment according to Victorian society. Her purity and sweetness protect her, and in this way, Stoker returns to the double standard characterizing Victorian life.

Ultimately, the hypocrisy of the Victorian mores about sexuality were harmful to both women and men. The rigid social structure and expectation of domesticity and chasteness for women hindered the structure of true relationships. Women and men had to uphold certain standards that prevented them from really being themselves, thus barring the formation of a fulfilling relationship. Men who strayed from heteronormative sexuality were ostracized and held legally responsible for their desires. Both women and men were dangerously condemned for any sign of transgressive sexuality, and Stoker's novel suggests the need for a less structured society. If women were just allowed to be themselves and embrace their sexualities, they would not be forced to live in fear of their own bodies and male counterparts. Sexuality is human nature, and Stoker believed it was not something to be restricted.

Dangerous Others: Ethnicity in *Dracula*

Stoker's presents Dracula as the dangerous ethnic other to condemn the pervasive and harmful suspicions of nonwhites and anything that deviated from English culture. There are three obvious foreigners in the novel: Dracula, Dr. Van Helsing, and Quincey P. Morris. Dracula's otherness is immediately presented as dangerous and monstrous, and his dark hair, unusual habits and nonwestern origins make him a threat to the British colonial mindset. However, Van Helsing's Dutch otherness is almost comical. It is light and fun and the knowledge he possesses helps the English, though they might scoff at it at first. Morris' foreignness is similar to that of Van Helsing's, because he too is white and overtly American, or westernized. While Dracula wants to invade and take over, Van Helsing and Morris only want to tag along and help rid the British of him. Stoker makes sure that the intervention of the helpful foreigners is important, but not too important. Overall, their foreign assistance, though irreplaceable and immensely helpful,

is not the ultimate savior of British society. Only through their combined work is Britain saved from the frightening foreigner, the Count. Stoker does this to critique the way the West combines its superior might to overcome and oppress those who would oppose or threaten them.

From the beginning of the novel, Stoker contrasts the western civilization of Britain with Dracula's Transylvania to condemn the way English think themselves immensely superior to any non-western society. Harker critiques everything, but he does not do so in a necessarily malicious manner. He does it as one who genuinely believes that he is superior, as if it were an idea given to him at birth and constantly reiterated. To him, the shortcomings of Transylvania are not opinions; they are facts of life. Upon his visit, Harker witnesses a world completely foreign to him. The cuisine is unlike anything he has ever had before, and he rather enjoys it. He enjoys the foreign foods so much that he often makes a note to get recipes for Mina. Though Harker enjoys this food, he has no problem finding fault with it as well, and he has no qualms about his fiancé making it in the future. In this, Stoker mocks Harker's simple white naivete and feeling of superiority. Harker did not even know what the spice paprika was, yet in typical western fashion, he thinks his bride to be will be able to use it in recipes is just as well as those who have been making it for decades, negating the years of culture and experience these dishes probably require. Harker also comments on the late trains in Transylvania: "I had to sit in the carriage for more than an hour before we began to move. It seems to me that the further East you go the more unpunctual are the trains. What ought they to be in China?" (Stoker 11). Harker acknowledges that these countries he deems inferior have similar technology to his shining Britain, but they do not operate with the same speed and precision. Stoker creates this dichotomy to enforce the difference between the civilized and primitive, the technically advanced and the simple.

Throughout his train ride Harker comments on both the landscapes and people he sees on the other side of the window, and Stoker uses these observations to depict and critique the harmful, and seemingly god-like superiority a white, heteronormative British man during the Victorian era might adopt. Harker meditates on the beautiful country that he sees, and he also mentions the “picturesque” people. Calling these people picturesque exemplifies just how superior Harker feels to them, and it is a way for him to dehumanize them. They are not beautiful or interesting, they are simply picturesque, like a bush or a waterfall. Their backgrounds are minimized, if not completely erased by Harker. The lives of these people are viewed as one-dimensional, fleeting and unimportant in the grand scheme of things. Harker would not, even if he wanted to, be able to think of these people with intimate and painful feelings. Immediately following his picturesque comment, he mentions that the women look pretty but only from afar. The reader can assume Harker feels the same about the pretty little towns he has passed on his journey. This is typical of westerners who are venturing outside their known and comfortable spaces. Things are exotic, shocking, new and “picturesque.” But to westerners, this beauty is fleeting. Bit by bit, the illusion falls, things are critiqued, and ugliness is revealed. Upon finally reaching the hotel, Harker meets the locals and learns of their superstitions. The innkeepers clearly know of what Dracula really is, and they wish to warn Harker of it. However, Harker scoffs at their genuine concern for his wellbeing: “Do you know where you are going, and what you are going to? She was in such evident distress that I tried to comfort her, but without effect. Finally she went down on her knees and implored me not to go; at least to wait a day or two before starting. It was all very ridiculous, but I did not feel comfortable” (Stoker 13). The woman, so desperate to keep this stranger safe that she literally gets on her knees, is ignored and ridiculed by Harker. Her actions are waved away, chalked up to a foreigner’s silly superstition.

From the second he steps foot in this country, Harker looks down on it and its people. Surely, he would never get on his knees in an attempt to keep the female innkeeper safe. His feeling of English superiority is so inherent and strong that it exists without question. Harker's ignorance is inevitably what endangers him, his loved ones and his country. This country, for Harker, exists only to be laughed at, ridiculed and belittled, despite the fact that he is now a powerless outsider, or foreigner. This remark that Harker makes within Dracula's castle is emblematic for his entire experience in the country; despite his feelings of superiority, the country and its culture will always remain unknown to him because of his indifference and carelessness: "But I am not in heart to describe beauty, for when I had seen the view I explored further; doors, doors, doors everywhere, and all locked and bolted" (Stoker 31-32). However, by the time Harker's coach arrives (late, not to Harker's surprise) he has begun to feel a bit of fear leak into his feelings of superiority. As the darkness draws near, Stoker is suggesting that perhaps, Harker should have forsaken his white superiority and heeded the warnings of the townspeople.

Everything leading up to Harker's entrance to the castle warns of danger, and Stoker does this to remind readers of the danger of Harker's mistakes, his ignorance. From the eerie warnings to the ominous howling of the wolves, Harker's situation screams for the perilous times that lie ahead, and his blind naivete reinforces Stoker's critique of colonial hubris. Because Harker cannot "see" Transylvanian culture, he cannot recognize the dangers that are right in front of his eyes. Right before reaching the castle, Harker writes "This was all so strange and uncanny that a dreadful fear came upon me, and I was afraid to speak or move. The time seemed interminable as we swept on our way, now in almost complete darkness, for the rolling clouds obscured the moon" (Stoker 20). Stoker makes sure that from the beginning, the Count's otherness is apparent and has an air of danger. Stoker also makes it clear that Harker's harmful and disturbing

ignorance—his steadfast belief that since this culture primitive to him, he cannot be harmed—is what lands Harker in the belly of the beast, in Dracula’s lair. While the foreignness of the town and the country was mocked and ridiculed by Harker, the foreignness of Dracula’s castle is no longer quirky or exotic—it is simply terrifying.

Dracula’s desire to not just acclimate into English society but to take it over becomes apparent very fast, thus linking his racial otherness with a hunger for conquest. The English, so used to colonizing others, are blind to the ability of another to colonize them. After a mildly warm welcome and a night in the castle, Harker and Dracula engage in many important conversations that allow Dracula to flex his intellect and his vast array of knowledge. In one instance, Dracula discusses Transylvania and its bloody history. From Harker’s description of the way Dracula talks about his country’s history, he clearly has immense pride in his heritage, and he speaks of it as if he were always there. The Count insists that the blood of Attila, the legendary Hun and conqueror, runs through his own veins. He is almost violent in his pride of his own ability to conquer and rule. He insists that his bloodline “...can boast a record that mushroom growths like the Hapsburgs and Romanoffs can never reach” (Stoker 35). Dracula revisits the past decades as if he had been there, and when Harker later discovers various forms of currency covered in dust, it is an early suggestion of his immortality and longevity. This dusty currency is more for Stoker, though. The dust covered coins seem to suggest that perhaps modern conquest, bloody and painful imperialism and colonialism, are useless, fruitless things. All the wealth can, and will disintegrate, or be rendered irrelevant with time. Despite the drive for the colonization of foreign lands, Dracula has been around for a long time, and he is thriving. Here, imperialism has failed. Dracula makes it clear to Harker that he intends to keep it that way, as well. He says to Harker “I have been so long master that I would be master still- or at least

that none other should be master of me” (Stoker 26). This statement is both a fact and a warning for Harker and presumably all of England. Dracula is warning Harker that if he intends to gain some sort of control over him there will be a violent struggle, and Stoker is also warning his contemporaries that their bloody history of colonization cannot go on perpetually unchecked. Eventually, those who are conquered will retaliate when their resentment becomes too much to bear. Dracula will make it impossible for another to control him because he controls himself so well. The Count has seen war, has seen the bloodshed that colonization brings, and he has survived anyway. In fact, he has become a more dangerous and volatile adversary because of it. In Dracula’s perseverance and the stacks of useless currency, Stoker is offering an alternative view of colonialism, one that renders it useless and harmful to all.

Stoker does not allow Dracula to grasp for words in English, which would open the door for criticism and correction, because in Dracula’s intelligence and confidence, Stoker heightens the danger of his outsider by making him nearly impossible to define as one. He does not dress oddly or poorly, nor is he ignorant of English customs and traditions. He knows the place he has infiltrated perfectly and intimately, allowing him to be an apex predator. The danger of Dracula’s assimilation is that nobody asked for it. When a place is colonized, the goal is to create a new world where the old culture and traditions disintegrate under the pressure to integrate. By all means, in colonization, assimilation is the key and goal. But this only works when everyone starts out knowing who the foreigner is, and their assimilation is forced and observed. In Dracula’s case, his ability to integrate himself into English society is terrifying because nobody knew who he was in the first place. In this, Stoker has created an inversion of colonialism, because the outsider assumes the role of colonizer. His assimilation is not a result of something forced upon him, as colonizers would prefer, but rather something he decided to take up himself.

This hints at Dracula's wealth and intelligence, something Stoker knows the English believe is reserved for them. In showing Dracula's ease at integration, Stoker is mocking the way the English view colonization, and showing that there are many different sides to it.

In making Dracula virtually indistinguishable from the English but still the ultimate threat to the norm, Stoker is playing on and criticizing the xenophobic fears of the Victorian era. The Victorians feared that the values and morals they prided themselves on were disintegrating, and they believed the arrival of ethnic others, such as cultural outsiders and non-westerners, would be the main reason for the fall of their culture. Monika Tomaszewska discusses the idea of racial contamination in "Vampirism and the Degeneration of the Imperial Race: Stoker's *Dracula* as the Invasive Degenerate Other." She argues that the obvious link between vampires and blood is significant to Victorian culture. "According to late Victorian scientists, blood is to be treated as material that contains all the information pertaining to the mental and physical characteristics of an individual" (Tomaszewska 5). So, Dracula, an ethnic predator, tries to invade England through blood as well. He forces Mina to drink his blood and he drinks the blood of others, resulting in a continuous blending of fluid. Stoker allows blood to mix in this way to critique the way Victorian people pride themselves and base their life on things like the purity of blood, which can be taken away in an instant. The most dangerous thing about the mixing of pure blood is the potential for miscegenation. In a culture such as the Victorians, whiteness and ethnic purity were viewed in moral terms. Because of this, the idea of interracial breeding and love is particularly terrifying to Stoker's readers for both cultural and moral reasons. Since one of Dracula's best talents is seducing women, his potential for inbreeding is immense and monstrous. Consider the Count's vampire brides, for example. While Harker describes two of them as looking similar to Dracula, the third stands out. She has golden blonde hair and sapphire

colored eyes. She is stunning. The presence of this woman with blonde hair and blue eyes, the quintessential picture of western beauty, suggests that Dracula's future trip to London may not be his first time mingling with western society. A type of miscegenation has already occurred, and thus his seduction of Lucy and Mina poses an ethnic threat as well.

Stoker also uses the Dutch Van Helsing to comment on the dangers of British xenophobia. He was called to help the British fight Dracula, so already the idea that he could be a threat is greatly minimized. Van Helsing is a foreigner, but his otherness is far less frightening than Dracula's. He never tries to hide it, and foreignness, he would never be able to discreetly pass through like Dracula has, anyway. While Dracula has a near-perfect understanding of the English language, Van Helsing's has a comical and childlike hold over it. This proves that Van Helsing, in all his wisdom, still has a lot to learn from the British, unlike Dracula. Because of his poor grasp on their language and culture, the British men feel comfortable around him. They know he is intelligent, but his intelligence does not come through as threatening or domineering; he has no wish to control or invade them. Aside from language and accents, Van Helsing's safety lies in his appearance as well. He is white, and appears western enough to his companions and contemporaries. His whiteness makes him an ethnic ally in the fight against a foreign invasion. The easy superiority that the British feel over Van Helsing also derives from his lack of knowledge about technology. While he is a very smart doctor and professor, he is easily impressed by Mina's control over modern technology, something he has little to no knowledge on. His essential knowledge lies in superstition, and despite the immense aid it gives the Crew of Light, superstition will always be something they can scoff at and attribute to primitive thinking. find they can easily ignore and scoff at. Van Helsing's otherness thus fits the typical paradigm of colonial thinking.

Stoker uses the American Quincey Morris in the same way, to critique selective British xenophobia. Like Van Helsing, Morris has an over-the-top accent because of his life in Texas. Morris is introduced as one of Lucy's suitors, but he gracefully remarks that he appreciates her friendship more than her potential love. Like Van Helsing, Morris is absolutely around to help the British, and he wears his foreignness like a badge of honor. He is extremely, almost comically American. He is also a very kind man who desires nothing more than to help his British friends out. He knows who he is and he knows where he might fail. He tells Mina after she praises the troupe of men: "I'm only a rough fellow, who hasn't, perhaps, lived as a man should to win such distinction..." (Stoker 287). Unlike Dracula, he does not shy away from or hide who he is. Morris' foreignness is like Van Helsing's. Though undoubtedly different, it is not threatening. Morris is white and very westernized, and he continually pledges his friendship and fidelity to his friends. He is loyal, and his unwavering bravery and loyalty results in his death at the hands of The Count. Morris comes from America, one of Britain's famously failed colonies and the British colonization of America bred immense levels of resentment well into the nineteenth century. President Andrew Jackson, for example, resented the British well before the War of 1812. Stoker uses the aid of the American to call attention to the fallings of British colonialism. Despite being a nation lost to Victorian morals and values, America had begun to thrive as an industrial nation by the end of the 1800s, surpassing the United Kingdom. Here, Stoker captures the limits and failings of colonialism. Morris is proof that sometimes, a nation does not need Britain to intervene to succeed.

By making Dracula nearly immortal, Stoker reminds his contemporaries that their desire to keep England pure by keeping others out is futile and harmful to all. Dracula is very old, and he would have presumably lived forever if he had not been killed by the Crew of Light. Had he

been allowed to go on, he probably would have fed on the English, and perhaps, other Westerners. Even after his death, the events that transpired while Dracula was in England are unforgettable to those who survived. Jonathan and Mina's child's birthday is the same as the day that Morris died, a perpetual reminder of his death and what caused it. "In the summer of this year we made a journey to Transylvania, and went over to the old ground which was, and is, to us so full of vivid and terrible memories" (Stoker 326). Despite all they had overcome, Dracula and his invasive horror will never be forgotten. Subsequently, a foreigner's imposition into Victorian society can never be forgotten or halted. As such, Stoker uses *Dracula* to act as a metaphor for all the fears of his Victorian culture. He understands them but he also critiques them. The English fear everything they do not know, and everything that might threaten their way of life even the slightest bit. By casting ethnicity and otherness as dangerous and monstrous, Stoker calls into question the way the English do the exact same thing. Stoker shows the limitations and harm of this ideology of fear and intolerance. Just like women under the yoke of patriarchy, the persecution and marginalization of nonwhites breeds resentment. It prevents empathy and understanding for cultural differences. And it situates the real horror in a colonial mindset that views others—whether men or women—as objects to be subdued and conquered.

Chapter 2:

Interview with the Vampire and the New Family

Anne Rice published her iconic debut novel *Interview with the Vampire* in 1976. First in *The Vampire Chronicles* series, this gothic novel and its characters played a significant role in creating the sympathetic vampire. This series revitalized the vampire myth and created a vampire that is much more than just a monster. Rice's vampires, Lestat de Lioncourt and Louis de Pointe du Lac, forged new paths that were wholly unfamiliar to the vampire mythology. These vampires are akin to humans, and they possess sympathy and empathy, culture and decadence, beauty and eloquence. This humanity allows Rice to minimize the distance between them and the human race. Not only does Rice draw on previous vampire mythology, such as having her vampires sleep in coffins, but she also changes it as well, giving vampires psychological depth as well as dispensing with some of the traditional tools used against them such as garlic and wooden stakes.

Born Howard Allen Frances O'Brien, Anne Rice was born in 1941 in New Orleans, Louisiana. She was named after her father, but changed her name from Howard to Anne in the first grade. Her mother died while Rice was young, leading Rice to give up on her belief in Catholicism briefly. After moving to Texas with her family, she studied briefly at the Texas Women's University and the North Texas State College. She then moved to San Francisco where she earned her master's degree in English and Creative Writing, as well as a bachelor's degree for Political Science. Though she did not stay in New Orleans very long, the setting and supernatural culture of it clearly stayed with her, influencing her *Vampire Chronicles* stories. She married Stan Rice when she turned twenty, and the two lived in California until the 80s. Rice gave birth to two children: Christopher, who also writes novels, and their daughter Michele, who sadly died from leukemia at only five years old. Before her literary success, Rice faced many rejections

while trying to get published. In the interim, she worked a variety of odd jobs, including waitressing. Eventually, *Interview*, written in only five weeks, was published and her career began to soar (Riley).

While *Interview* is undoubtedly Rice's most popular novel, she has become a prolific writer, authoring over thirty other books. Most of them focus on various supernatural legends and myths, though there was a period where she wrote about Christian lore when her devotion to the religion was revitalized. Her love for history results in work often rooted in some sort of historical period. Her work has also been strongly influenced by her personal life. The culturally rich birthplace of New Orleans provided the setting of her first novel, as well as many novels afterwards. Her gothic roots have stayed with her throughout the years, and she continues to write about traditional supernatural figures in gothic horror, such as witches, vampires and werewolves. Many of her characters are also drawn from figures in her life. Many critics consider the vampire child in *Interview*, Claudia, to be influenced by Michele, the daughter Rice lost to leukemia at only five years old. In an interview given to *The Daily Mail*, while discussing the character of Claudia with her husband, Rice says "We had no idea we were talking about our own daughter" (Das).

Rice's work continues to be influenced by the supernatural, but she veered away from that genre for a short while. She published a few historical novels, as well as some erotic novels published under the pseudonym A.N. Roquelaure and Anne Rampling. Rice's work has been met with varied reception throughout the years, and her debut novel was no exception. Despite its prolonged success and influence, it did not immediately garner rave reviews. On May 2, 1976, Leo Braudy of the *New York Times* wrote "The publicity tells us Rice is a 'dazzling storyteller.' But there is no story here, only a series of sometimes effective but always essentially static

tableaus out of Roger Corman films, and some self-conscious soliloquizing out of Spiderman comics, all wrapped up in ballooning, pompous language. Maybe the movie will be better, but the book is too superficial, too impersonal and too obviously made, to touch the sources of real terror and feeling.” Despite this scathing review, the novel has become a best-seller and a staple of vampire literature.

Less than twenty years after its publication, *Interview* received a film adaptation in 1994, headlining Brad Pitt and Tom Cruise. The rights to the book were purchased by Paramount before it was even published, but the studio had trouble creating a script for the movie. In *Anne Rice and Sexual Politics*, James Keller explains that “The effort to bring the novel to screen included many script revisions that were intended to sanitize the story for the popular viewing audience. One script made Daniel (the interviewer) and Armand into young women and made the child, Claudia, into an eighteen-year-old woman. Rice complained that the story had been eviscerated” (Keller 14). Paramount just could not condone a script that featured homoerotic relationships. Rice would not comply with the desired changes. Eventually the film ended up with Warner Brothers, and it was given a \$70 million-dollar budget under the direction of Neil Jordan. The casting and production of the film faced some difficulties, though. Rice wrote the screenplay herself, but Jordan insisted on writing one as well, which created some tension. Rice constantly pushed for numerous other actors to play the vampire Lestat, and she was incensed by the studio’s eventual decision to use Tom Cruise. Rice had even toyed with the idea of making Louis a female, and she was in strong favor of Cher for this version of her protagonist. Once the film was released, though, Rice seemingly warmed up to Cruise’s portrayal of Lestat, and the film proved successful at the box office. Despite mixed reviews, it was also nominated for two Academy Awards.

Anne Rice's *Interview with the Vampire* is a story within a story, and it begins with a vampire named Louis de Pointe du Lac telling his centuries old story to a young, unnamed male reporter. The reporter is eager to hear what Louis has to say, yet he has doubts when he learns the truth about Louis' claims of being a vampire. Louis begins his story in 1791, when he owns a plantation near New Orleans. Louis lives a charmed life on his plantation with his mother, sister and his brother Paul. However, this beauty and peace does not last long. Paul, a deeply religious boy, soon claims to have visions, and even though Louis adores his brother, he refuses to entertain such a notion. One day, after a vicious argument over this, Paul falls to his death and Louis' perfect mortal life is shattered. Louis feels responsible, and his family seems to silently feel this way as well. After Paul's death, Louis becomes an entirely wretched creature, one that craves both salvation and death, and this is when he meets the vampire Lestat. Lestat drinks from Louis but leaves him alive, only to return later to complete the transformation and turn him into a vampire. Once Louis' transformation is complete, the two take over control of the lucrative Pointe du Lac plantation, which was Lestat's main reason for turning Louis. Louis and Lestat live together for a while, though they fight often because of Lestat's refusal to comprehend Louis' refusal of human blood and murder. Lestat mocks Louis for this endlessly, and he does not care about the sufferings of his companion or anyone else. The slaves on the plantation quickly become suspicious of the two men and rise up against them, forcing the vampires to flee the beloved plantation.

Lestat and Louis wind up in New Orleans, again living together. Lestat knows the power he holds over Louis, and he rightly fears that Louis will abandon him if he fully figures out how to survive as a vampire on his own. Despite their prolonged time together, their relationship does not decrease in volatility. The two fight often, and both refuse to understand one another. Louis

is constantly struggling with his perception of himself as a monster, and Lestat only makes things worse by parading his victims around with absolutely no regard for their humanity and suffering, which Louis resents. One night, Louis comes across a very young girl, Claudia, who is lamenting the recent death of her mother. At this point Louis has been feeding on rats and vermin to get his fix of blood, and he is overcome by his desire to feed on Claudia. He gives in, only to be caught by Lestat who relentlessly mocks him for his fall from grace. Though Louis flees the scene in disgust, leaving Claudia to die, Lestat brings Claudia back to life and brings her home. The trio turns into a twisted portrait of a family, and despite Louis and Lestat's hatred for one another, they both adore Claudia in their own way. The trio lives together for decades, yet due to the vampire affliction, they never age. This breeds intense resentment and bitterness in Claudia, for she is stuck in the body of a child. When Claudia finds out Lestat was the one who turned her, her hatred inspires her to plot his death with Louis' help. Eventually, they poison Lestat, slit his throat and bury his body in a swamp, but Lestat survives, at first unbeknownst to them.

Louis and Claudia flee to Europe—to escape him and learn more about vampires—but the Eastern European vampires prove to be nothing like themselves. These vampires they encounter in Eastern Europe are basically zombies, living only to feed mindlessly—the vampires of the East are incomparable to those of the West. Louis and Claudia flee Eastern Europe, and they begin to worry that them and Lestat are the only sentient vampires in the world. However, once in Paris, they meet a troupe of vampires, including Armand—a sympathetic vampire who explains the history of their kind and divulges more information than Lestat ever did. Louis and Armand quickly find themselves smitten with one another, and Louis turns a Parisian doll-maker, Madeleine, into a vampire so that Claudia has a companion. When Lestat eventually catches up with Louis and Claudia, he openly accuses them of trying to kill him, the ultimate sin

for a vampire. Armand is able to save Louis from the vampire tribunal that follows, but Claudia and Madeleine are executed for this crime. Louis' despair over Claudia and Madeleine has left him devastated. When Louis finishes his story, the young reporter asks to be turned into a vampire. Louis becomes enraged, feeling that the message of his entire story has fallen on deaf ears. The boy has been drawn in by all the glamour of an immortal life and not at all affected by all of the ruin. The story ends with Louis attacking the boy but leaving him alive and unbiten. The boy decides to set off to find Lestat, hoping he will fulfill his wish instead.

Throughout *Interview with the Vampire*, Rice twists the preconceived notions of white, heteronormative culture by neither idealizing nor demonizing homoerotic relationships. The relationships are presented as natural and completely normal. They can be beautiful, as was the relationship between Louis and Armand, and they can be hostile and messy, as with Louis and Lestat. Depicting homoerotic relationships in this way is Rice's ultimate tool in critiquing homophobia, because she is presenting homosexuality and heterosexuality as sharing similar characteristics. Neither one is presented as inherently good or bad. In questioning traditional heterosexual roles, Rice also challenges the traditional heterosexual family unit—the female mother, the male father and the child. Through Louis, Lestat, and Claudia, she presents a same-sex couple raising a child. Similar to her presentation of homosexuality, Rice does not present an ideal family. The roles of mother, father and child transcend gender here, and this blurring of roles, which shows Louis as capable of “mothering” Claudia, for instance, creates a space for same-sex parenting. Furthermore, unlike the typical families one sees on TV at this time, such as the white, heteronormative *The Brady Bunch*, Rice's vampiric family is messy and downright chaotic—characterized by love and frustration, sacrifice and selfishness, parenting successes and failures. It is, in short, like any other family. In addition to her examination of sexuality and

family, Rice offers a powerful meditation on the legacy of racial injustice in the United States. Louis is a sugar plantation owner, and by enslaving others, Louis drains them of their happiness and freedom in order to feed the sweet tooth of white America. Slavery, in other words, devastates the lives of blacks for the frivolities of consumerism. At the time, Louis does not give much thought to owning slaves. For him, it was just another part of his idyllic plantation life. Rice uses Louis' blindness to the ingrained racism of the South to call attention to its ongoing legacy in America. Only after being turned into a vampire does Louis reflect on how some of his slaves were rather intelligent and deserved better, and this detail enables Rice to condemn a racist ideology so ingrained in American culture that whites can only recognize it in death.

Twisted Families and Lovers: Sexuality in *Interview with the Vampire*:

Interview with the Vampire allows sexuality, gender identity and traditional family roles to change throughout the entirety of the novel. Gender, and the roles typically ascribed to gender, are fluid. Though the vampires in this novel never actually have physical sex, Rice makes homoeroticism part of vampire life, yet this transgressive sexuality does not come across as horrifying. Rather, Rice depicts homosexuality and bisexuality as natural to depict sexuality as fluid and to condemn the homophobia undergirding heteronormativity.

Rice introduces Louis as the reader's first glimpse of transgressive sexuality. Only as a vampire can Louis be true to himself and his sexuality because he is free from the oppressive cultural norms of the living. As an immortal, culturally and socially affluent white male, Louis has the freedom and time to experiment with relationships as he pleases. He has nothing left to fear from others. Despite his early happiness, Louis has always been a man in search of a deeper,

male focused relationship. This depth of feeling is not erased after becoming a vampire, it is enhanced and uninhibited. As a mortal, Louis looked to his brother, Paul, to fill the role of a caring and sensual male figure. However, Paul's tragic death leaves Louis reeling, and this loss gets filled by the vampire Lestat. Rice turns Lestat into everything for Louis—father, mother, brother, and husband. For example, when Lestat turns Louis into a vampire, Louis takes a drink and nourishment from him, acting as his mother. The night of his vampire transformation, the two sleep in a coffin together, as if sharing a bed for the first time after marriage. Since Lestat is also the only vampire in Louis' life for a while, Lestat plays a paternal as well as fraternal role. He teaches Louis as a father would, but he also fights with Louis constantly, as a brother would. Lestat assumes many different roles for Louis, and while the two often do not get along, Louis finds comfort and love in Lestat all the same. He yearns for Lestat after losing him as a son would yearn for a father or a wife would yearn for a husband.

Rice purposely makes the relationship between Louis and Lestat a complicated one in order to challenge the public's view of homosexuality. Through Rice, the homoerotic feelings of Louis and Lestat are presented as natural. The relationship is not a grotesque mimicry of heterosexual life; it is its own relationship mapped out on its own terms. As such, Rice argues that homosexuality should neither be feared or idealized. It should be allowed accepted as easily as heterosexuality is. Interestingly, Louis' vampirism does not diminish his sensuality; it enhances it and allows it to flourish. Louis, through vampirism, is allowed to explore his sexuality and his desire for a same sex relationship. In being allowed to experiment with sexuality only because of his vampirism, mainstream culture at the time is being called out as oppressive. As any heteronormative person would, Louis experiments in relationships. While discussing the time the two vampires spent together with the reporter, Louis divulges just how

toxic their relationship could get. Lestat was manipulative and occasionally, downright wicked. In the depiction of their relationship, Rice presents Louis and Lestat as mutually destructive. She does not shy away from the ugliness of their dynamic in order to cast heterosexual and homosexuals in the same light. Both have the potential to be beautiful as well as harmful, nurturing as well as corrosive.

Rice furthers this argument with the introduction of the vampire Armand. He is the opposite of Lestat, and the relationship and companionship he provides for Louis is nourishing and fulfilling. Unlike Lestat, Armand does not cruelly fight with Louis or withhold information because of his own insecurity or fear. He is honest and loving, in all the ways Lestat was not. Though he is older and wiser than Louis, he does not convey this information through malice, danger or condescension. He is an open book for Louis. Unlike Lestat, Armand has nothing to gain from his relationship with Louis except love and companionship. He also wants to save Louis in every way possible. Rice uses the stark contrast between Lestat and Armand to further the image of a natural homoerotic relationship. This reinforces Rice's critique and challenge of the public's homophobic demonization of same sex relationships, as well as her desire to simply depict these relationships as normal—things that can be both beautiful and ugly.

Throughout the novel, Rice does not shy away from reversing and bending traditional gender and social roles. The traditional family unit and the roles of the family are not exempt from this. Rice challenges the traditional idea of a family by allowing Louis and Lestat to act as both mother and father to Claudia. Claudia also acts in many different roles, which of course includes daughter, but also lover. The future inclusion of Madeleine only inverts these roles further, turning Louis into mother, father, and lover to Madeleine and turning Claudia into mother, daughter and lover to Madeleine. The interchangeability of these roles allows Rice to

twist the traditional family unit in such a way to critique the way the conservative, Christian Americans have typically considered same-sex couples to be the downfall of the family and traditional values. Rice challenges the typical gender and family roles of traditional American families by presenting a family that molds themselves into these categories fluidly and with ease.

As noted, Lestat acted as both a mother and father to Louis, as well as husband. In furthering this familial twist, Rice also makes Louis and Lestat both mother and father and lover to their adopted vampire daughter, Claudia. Both men played an important role in creating Claudia as a traditional mother and father do, with Louis finding her and first feeding on her and Lestat transforming her and feeding her. For a while, Louis and Lestat act as Claudia's parents, but as she ages, so do their interactions with her. What was once a distorted parental relationship distorts even further.

Claudia was bitten as a small child, halting her physical growth. While her outward appearance is stunted for the rest of her life, her emotions and intelligence are not. Her mind grows every day, and soon enough, Claudia is no longer a child. This growth creates immense bitterness in Claudia, which she takes out on Louis and Lestat. She learns to detest Louis' abhorrence for murder, as Lestat does. She taunts him by often asking him to come out and kill with her, despite knowing how uncomfortable it makes him. Yet she also stoked Lestat's jealousy, often cuddling up to Louis. As she struggled as a woman in her young girl body, Claudia manipulated the both of them relentlessly to relieve her anger. All the while, though, she is still acting as their daughter. However, the daughter lines become blurred as well with Claudia's often erotic desire for her parents. This of course comes to a head when Claudia plots the murder of one parent, Lestat, while clinging to Louis despite her inward revulsion of him. At times Claudia also becomes her supposed father, Louis', protector, saving him from the evil and

controlling Lestat. In an article by Steven Bruhm, on the relationship between Claudia and Louis, he writes “The child becomes the mother of the man in a way that not only skews the psychoanalytic formula of the cross-parental identifications, but *queers* it, positing the female child as a father to the son who fathered (and mothered, and loved) her” (Bruhm 102). In creating a complicated and uncontrolled portrait of the family, Rice is critiquing the harmful homophobic ideas of a family that stems from a same sex relationship.

This distortion is only fueled on by the addition of Madeleine, whom Louis fathered by turning into a vampire. Madeleine also acts as a wife to Louis, and at times, a lover to Claudia. Madeleine fills many voids in Claudia, beginning with loving Claudia in a way her fathers never did. Madeleine cuddles up with Claudia all the time, playing with the young vampire's hair and treating her as a doll. Claudia both wants to be with and be Madeleine. She acts as daughter and lover to Madeleine as she did to Louis and Lestat. The bending of gender roles and family units starts with Louis, though. In her article “Dieting and Damnation: Anne Rice’s *Interview with the Vampire*” Sandra Tomc writes “Louis is variously Claudia’s lover, father and mother; he is Lestat’s wife and son, Armand’s gay paramour, Madeleine’s father and husband” (Tomc 99). The roles of a typical family are constantly shifting for the vampires in *Interview*, however, as with all the relationships these vampires engage in, the family cannot go on forever. Eventually, Louis’ daughters and lovers Madeleine and Claudia burn. Rice does this to critique the stringent idea of gender and family roles, and to critique the way homophobes thought a family was doomed if led by a same sex couple.

In depicting the sexuality and gender of the vampires as transgressive and fluid, Rice is condemning the rampant homophobia of the late twentieth century. In casting Louis and Lestat as the interchangeable mother and father, and Claudia as both daughter and lover, as something

that functions relatively similar to a “normal” family, Rice is critiquing the conservative Christian values desperately forced upon all of America.

Race and Ethnicity in *Interview with the Vampire*

Rice places her socially nonconforming vampires into New Orleans, an area with a vast racial and cultural history. She does this because race and ethnicity are meant to play a larger role in *Interview*, as they have been playing a large role in both post-Civil War America, and the 1970s, the time in which the novel is published. As a plantation owner, Louis owns slaves. Yet after being turned into a vampire by Lestat, Louis becomes a slave. When meeting the vampires of Eastern Europe, Louis is disappointed by them, because they do not possess the traits of the vampires he has known. Rice begins her novel in such a historic place to show how America is a country built on racism. Although by the 1970s slavery was abolished, Rice is arguing that institutional racism is still rampant and the culture of America is still one that dangerously and repeatedly overlooks people of color.

The setting of the American Southern plantation has undeniable links with slavery and institutionalized racism. The link between the vampire hierarchies and slave/master hierarchies are pervasive throughout the novel. In becoming a vampire, the human is transformed into both a slave and a slave-owner. As a vampire, Louis is a slave to Lestat, as well as the rules and hierarchies of vampire life. No longer is Louis allowed to be completely in control of his life and his fate as he once was. Now, he is meant to be subservient to both Lestat and his new vampiric lifestyle. Lestat uses Louis to exert his power and his dominance. He believes himself to be immensely superior to Louis, thus allowing himself to be turned into a wicked figure in Louis’

life. He completely takes advantage of Louis' ignorance of vampirism, and he does this with pleasure. He relishes the power he wields, and lives in a delusional state of being tyrannous without consequence, as a slave-owner would. Louis is enslaved by his lack of knowledge, which results in a lack of freedom. Louis is repulsed by the idea of being Lestat's slave, because as slave-owner, he knows the pain slavery can bring. Louis recounts an interaction between him and Lestat: "They're jealous of their secret and of their territory; and if you find one or more of them together it will be for safety only, and one will be the slave of the other, the way you are of me.' 'I'm not your slave,' I said to him. But even as he spoke I realized I'd been his slave all along" (Rice 84). In his realization of his own enslavement, Louis is also realizing what a nightmare slavery is. In an article by Ken Gelder, this structure is summed up perfectly: "Rice's vampires then reproduce enslavement as a routine matter of self-definition. In one sense, her vampires enjoy the privileges of masters, free to prey on anyone they want and to go wherever they please. In another sense, the very fact of *being* a vampire severely limits their options; in particular, it limits their capacity to go anywhere other than where they are taken by other, older vampires" (Gelder 409).

In the novel, vampirism acts as a metaphor for slavery itself. Vampires seem free at first, as they are able to feed however they like, and their immortality gives them an endless pass for experimentation. However, the things that seem to loan vampires their freedom also take it away. Louis is enslaved by his bloodlust. His morality and virtue make it extremely difficult to feed, though he must if he wishes to stay alive. His immortality, though granting him freedom in some ways, also confines him. His world is inescapable. No matter how many homes he burns down, his past always comes back to him, and even after he has watched all the love in his life disintegrate, he must continue living.

Rice makes Louis indifferent and blind to the suffering of his slaves, and she does this to suggest there is a larger blindness and indifference to the suffering of people of color in America. This indifference did not begin with the institutions of slavery and nor did it end with it. When discussing the days of the plantation with the reporter, Louis often remarks on how he might have underestimated the slaves. When he first underwent his transformation with Lestat, Louis thought he was safe and acting under privacy. It did not even occur to him that his slaves would take note of what was going on. "I failed to realize that their experience with the supernatural was far greater than that of white men. In my own experience I still thought of them as childlike savages barely domesticated by slavery" (Rice 27-28). So it is clear that Louis is not unaware of the slaves completely. He admits that he has had experiences and interactions with them. This fact makes Louis' ignorance not only abhorrent, but dangerous. His indifference to the slaves and their culture lulls him and Lestat into a false sense of security that could have resulted in their death. Because Louis refuses to acknowledge the vast culture and history of his slaves, and he ignores the idea that they may possess knowledge that he and Lestat do not, he has left them both vulnerable to persecution for their vampirism. While Louis feels sympathy for every victim he kills, his sympathy does not extend to the deaths of slaves. He and Lestat view the killing of slaves as something they have earned or deserve. When slaves are killed, little attention is paid to the family and friends that may be left mourning the victims. The concept of the humanity, intelligence and culture of the slaves is a completely foreign idea to the vampires. Louis is completely indifferent to the slaves who may suffer because of him, whether the suffering he caused was done directly or indirectly. In Louis' carelessness, Rice is supporting her critique of the inherent racism that the American south was plagued with during the era of plantations.

Rice moves the setting away from the plantation eventually, but the themes of slavery are still prevalent throughout the novel. In the world of Rice's vampires, there is only one thing that a vampire can do to be seen as criminal in the eyes of other vampires: kill the vampire that created them. Of course, Claudia and Louis have been accused and later convicted of doing just that. Claudia and Madeleine burn for this sin, while Louis manages to slip away. This ultimate crime is reminiscent of the ultimate crime for slaves. While slaves had many more rules and laws to obey, killing or lashing out against your master or his family was still considered the worst crime you could commit. A slave merely had to be accused of this infraction to suffer the consequences, and more often than not, this would result in their own death. Rice creates a parallel between the ultimate crime of slaves and vampires to show that even though vampires were slave owners, centuries later they find themselves as slaves in a way. In doing this Rice is reaffirming the idea that America and its people will not be able to get away from their racist past, despite how many years have gone by.

Using the ethnicity of other vampires, Rice critiques the way the society of the 70s viewed ethnic outsiders. When Louis and Claudia are on their hunt for information, they eventually reach Eastern Europe. Here, they find hysterically superstitious townspeople and a species of vampire. The townspeople speak openly with Louis and Claudia about the other species of vampire, whom they dub as barbaric. These vampires are seen by Louis and Claudia as immensely inferior. They are mindless, and while Louis is constantly plagued by existential worries, these vampires are only worried about their next meal. They do not speak, they only make noises. They possess none of the glamour, intelligence or eloquence of the vampires we know. After his first encounter with one Louis says "We had met the European vampire, the creature of the Old World" (Rice 191). These vampires, defined by their Eastern European

ethnicity and culture, are portrayed by Rice as completely barbaric, cruel and monstrous. While discussing an encounter with the vampires he met in Eastern Europe, Louis says “We rolled over and over, until I pinned him down again and the moon shone full on his face. And I realized, through my frantic sobbing breaths, what it was I held in my arms. The two huge eyes bulged from naked sockets and two small, hideous holes made up his nose; only a putrid, leathery flesh enclosed his skull, and the rank, rotting rags that covered his frame were thick with earth and slime and blood. I was battling a mindless, animated corpse” (Rice 190). After this scuffle between Louis and the vampire, the vampire dies from a rock crushing his skull. Louis and Claudia remark on this bloody death as if it were nothing, and Claudia digs around his destroyed skull with morbid curiosity. Rice portrays the vampires in this way to call attention to the way white, western cultures believe themselves superior to eastern cultures and ideals.

Louis is viewing these Eastern European vampires through the lens of white, western colonialism. He does not understand these vampires, therefore he perceives himself as superior to them. Louis and Claudia insert themselves into the lives of the Eastern Europeans. Louis views both the peasants and the vampires of this area as wholly inferior. The peasants subscribe to views Louis had previously laughed at, such as garlic and crucifixes, and the vampires themselves are mindless. While investigating these vampires, Louis gets in a fight with one and the result is that the Eastern European vampire dies, with Claudia rifling through its remains as if it were a lab specimen. Again, Louis and Claudia have declared themselves superior without any question. In doing this, they have erased the identity of the Eastern European vampire. Louis does not even wish to call this being a vampire. Only he and his kind, the vampire that can think and speak eloquently, can really be considered a vampire to him and Claudia. Rice does this to call attention to the traditional actions of western colonialism. White westerners deem

themselves as superior to a group, and because of their own declaration, they are able to act without consequence.

The way Rice erases the identity of the Eastern European vampire is similar to the erasing of the culture of the black slaves on Louis' plantation, and both of these acts of denying a group its culture and history is a critique of the racism that is ingrained in America as a whole. Louis prides himself on his empathy skills, yet he cannot empathize with what he does not understand. He is indifferent to his slaves, and his indifference erases them and their culture. In fact, as the novel progresses, slaves cease to be mentioned because they are no longer of use to Louis. If they are not owned by him, people of color do not matter to Louis. Similarly, the Eastern European vampire cannot be understood by Louis, so it is a creature to be overlooked and neglected, literally left dead in the dust. As with typical white Americans, people that differ from them in culture, skin tone and social status are negated.

Chapter 3:

True Blood and the Modern Vampire's Metaphor

The HBO television series *True Blood* (2008-2014), produced and adapted by Alan Ball from the novels of Charlaine Harris, focuses on the plight of vampires in a human world. This fictional universe presents vampires as “out of the coffin” literally and metaphorically. With the existence of vampires being a fact of modern life by the start of the series, the first season explores the grievances of this undead community as they adapt to living with humans. One of the main issues facing vampires is their lack of rights, and the show continually depicts them campaigning for civil rights. Not surprisingly, both vampires and humans struggle with the challenges of coexistence. Some strive to forge community. Others believe it to be impossible. These vampires deviate from traditional vampire lore by exposing many traditional tropes to be lies, created by vampires as ways to trick humans, such as not being able to see themselves in mirrors. However, these vampires still cannot survive in sunlight, and they must sleep in coffins during the day.

Alan Ball, an Academy and Emmy award-winning director, writer, and producer, was born in Georgia in 1957 to an airplane pilot and a homemaker. He was one of four siblings, and at the age of thirteen, he witnessed his beloved older sister, Mary Ann, die in a car accident while she was driving him to a piano lesson. This, according to Ball, fractured his world in two. Her death haunted him for years, and it would inspire his life-long artistic exploration of mortality from *American Beauty* and *Six Feet Under* to *True Blood*. After graduating from Florida State University, where he studied theatre, Ball moved to Sarasota, Florida and later to New York City. Here he worked some miserable jobs at an advertising agency while writing off-Broadway plays.

Soon enough, Ball and a few friends started their own theater company, Alarm Dog Repertory. This small company produced some of Ball's plays, and after a while the productions started reaching a larger audience. Specifically, their production of *Five Women Wearing the Same Dress* (1993) got Ball noticed by people in Hollywood. This resulted in Ball being offered a television script writing job, and in 1994 he set off for Los Angeles. However, his experience in these television shows was not very pleasant, and he soon left to pursue writing that was more meaningful to him. These efforts resulted in the award-winning film *American Beauty*. Its success catapulted Ball into a world where he was given free range to work on his own art, rather than writing sitcoms he didn't much care for. Soon Ball created, wrote, and directed the HBO television show *Six Feet Under* (2001-2005). Working on this show was a way for Ball to not only flex his artistic muscles, but it was also a way for him to confront his painful past. "Much of the anguish that Ball has worked through in *Six Feet Under* comes from the traumatic loss of his sister... Ball wasn't able to write about this loss—or that of his father, who died of lung cancer several years later—until *Six Feet Under*" (Fahy 2). Working on this show allowed for Ball to enjoy the success of working with big names such as HBO, but also allowed him to take his work as deep as he had when he was working on lower and smaller theatrical productions with his friends. In 2008 Ball adapted and directed for *True Blood*. After four successful and groundbreaking years as showrunner, Ball left the show in 2012.

Beyond dealing with grief and loss, Ball also uses his work to force those who view it to wake up, if only for a short period, from the drudgery of modern life. Ball considers consumer culture extremely harmful to American society, and he typically uses shock to shake audiences out of complacent reveries. As Fahy argues, "Ball consistently depicts moments of sudden, disturbing violence (whether literal or imagined) to shock his audience into awareness—to

challenge them to reject some of the more oppressive aspects of American culture (such as materialism, sexism, racism, homophobia, and conservative Christian ideology) and to live more authentic lives” (5). Ball’s fiction seeks to reveal the more primal aspects of human nature through things like violence and sexuality, regardless of how it makes his viewers feel. Ball does this to inspire his audiences to reject inherent social anxieties that result in oppressive thought and harmful prejudice. By offering glimpses into the darker aspects of humanity, Ball forces viewers to confront uncomfortable topics that, if not for the show, they would more than likely avoid.

Ball’s inspiration for *True Blood* came from a series of novels written by Charlaine Harris, known as *The Southern Vampire Mysteries*, or *The Sookie Stackhouse Novels*. Like Ball, Charlaine Harris was born in the American south, specifically, Mississippi in 1951. Harris has been very understanding while watching her characters go from book to screen, but in an interview given to *Inverse*, she mentions understanding that the show had to differ from her books. “Of course, the differences became more and more remarkable as the series progressed because Alan [Ball] had his own goals as a creative person. I began to see that it was never going to come back to any of my plot lines but, you know, my books were still sitting there. They were just fine. Anybody could buy them that wanted to. I made my peace with it” (*Inverse*). So while the first season adheres closely to the books, as the show goes on it becomes less and less recognizable to Harris and fans of the novels. As Harris’s concerns suggest, the television show and novels are quite distinct from one another, and both need to be understood on their own terms. My focus on the television series in this chapter—as noted in the introduction—is not a criticism of the source material. It is merely a reflection of the scope of this project and of the importance of vampire television in the evolution of this genre in the twenty-first century. Like

Bela Lugosi's rendition in the early twentieth century and Rice's novels fifty years later, contemporary television has recently been the most dynamic space for the genre.

The show, as mentioned, does not shy away from the necessity of social change. The opening credit montage for season one lays the groundwork for the important discussions the show will offer. The first few shots depict swamps and old mansions—staples of the American south. Then, viewers see images of distorted bodies, seemingly in the throes of sexual pleasure. These images are cut with images of black church congregations. Next, white police officers violently clash with black protestors, and this is followed by an image of a child KKK member with his parents. There are also pervasive images of death, from skulls to dead possums. Most notably, there is the image of “God Hates Fangs” on a billboard, close to the infamous homophobic slur often used during the height of the gay rights struggle. The images then speed up, and sex, black religious members, and the KKK congregations are cut together, almost indecipherable from one another. These images can range from mild to extremely grotesque, like the sped-up depiction of the fox being eaten alive by insects. Overall, the images in the opening credits are a *True Blood* primer for viewers, introducing them to the predominant themes—race, sexuality, life and death, and religion—that the show will cover, and the shocking way Ball will depict them throughout.

Through brutal depictions of violence, sexuality, and even violent sexuality, *True Blood* forces audiences to confront things that most would rather ignore. Beneath the shock factor, though, is Ball's overall critique of contemporary cultural anxieties and prejudices. Specifically, Ball's depiction of Bon Temps, Louisiana comments on fears about non-normative sexuality in order to challenge contemporary social mores that demonize homosexuality and bisexuality. The early twenty-first century saw the fight for LGBTQ+ rights grow stronger, yet it also became

increasingly polarized and volatile. Concern for civil rights among people of color was growing again as well. Fighting over basic human rights always brings out negativity in people, and Ball reflects this negativity in the people of Bon Temps. In a deft touch, Ball mirrors the civil rights movement for gay rights in the vampire rights movement. As in the real world, there is a stark and volatile difference between liberals and conservatives in the show. Naturally, the conservatives and far-right groups are opposed to vampires and their rights. The Fellowship of the Sun, a conservative Christian cult/church, for example, champions the fight against vampires, which is reminiscent of the Westboro Baptist Church, the overwhelmingly conservative group that terrorizes the LGBTQ+ community and other marginalized groups regularly. One scholar describes *True Blood* as integral to the arguments between liberal and conservative politics. “The discourse on vampire politics in *True Blood* is in many ways a commentary on issues of race and sexuality in contemporary American culture” (Knewitz 129). In using the vampires as a symbol for homosexuality and the misunderstood and by reflecting homophobic and racist volatility in the citizens of Bon Temps and America, Ball effectively condemns the homophobia and prejudice that plagues America.

Sexuality and Race in *True Blood*

In the first season of the TV show, Ball presents race and sexuality in many different ways. Specifically, he establishes three sexually transgressive groups: sexually liberated women (“fangbangers”), homosexual men, and overtly sexual straight men. For the first season, Ball creates an intersection between gay men and race, as well as sexually liberated women and race. Sexually liberated females are often ostracized and sometimes end up murdered, but sexually free men suffer as well. Specifically, “fangbangers,” or anyone who seeks a sexual relationship

with a vampire, is demonized by the less progressive citizens of Bon Temps. Furthermore, people of color who exhibit transgressive sexuality are punished the most by the institutions of racism and sexism in the American south. This attitude, according to the glimpses we see of the news, seems to be true of America as a whole. The nation must acclimate to relationships with vampires as it did with interracial and same-sex relationships. As with those relationships, many people reacted with extreme violence and insensitivity. These separate struggles allow Ball to critique religious conservative ideologies in America and to critique the way the patriarchy and heteronormativity are used to justify the destructive persecution of women and homosexuals. Transgressive sexuality throughout the first season is always punished in some way, and Ball does this to critique the way transgressive sexuality and any forms of otherness are condemned in the current culture of America.

A prevalent theme throughout the first season is the hunting, condemning, and demonizing of sexually liberated women to criticize intolerance toward female sexuality. Most of the women are young, sexy and not afraid to embrace these qualities, from the gorgeous Sookie (Anna Paquin) to the hilarious and beautiful Tara (Rutina Wesley). However, one of the main story arcs for the first season involves the grisly murders of women. In punishing these women for their sexual freedom and especially for their sexual interactions with vampires, Ball forces the viewer to confront the injustices of the way women who exhibit their sexuality are treated. Before the murders are even known, the degradation of women who have sex with vampires gets revealed. Within the first fifteen minutes of the first episode of season one, “Strange Love” (1.1), we witness an unnamed Jason Stackhouse (Ryan Kwanten) react with contempt and disgust upon finding out the woman he is currently having sex with has previously had sex with a vampire, as told by the fang marks on her inner thigh. After seeing the bites, Jason

pulls himself away from Maudette (Danielle Sapia) with disgust. He punctuates this disgust by wiping his face and preparing to leave, though his attempt is rather half-hearted, and it doesn't take much from Maudette to convince him to stay. Later on, in the midst of sex, Jason ties Maudette up and gets rough with her, calling her a "sick little vampire fucker." By the end of the episode, Maudette's death gets blamed on Jason, and the underlying sexual violence exhibited during their interaction acts as a vehicle to represent the real murderer's feelings (we find out Maudette was found dead, and at first it seems as if Jason was responsible, thus the beginning of a long line of grisly murders with sexual undertones that continually shroud Jason in suspicion). Though innocent, Jason's treatment of women certainly shocks viewers into acknowledging the painful truth of the way men attempt to control female sexuality, by any means necessary. Ball's depiction of the way men seek to punish and control the sexuality of women even gets emphasized in the depiction of Maudette's dead body: hanging with her hands tied over her head, totally naked. This final glimpse offers insight into the violence of toxic masculinity and patriarchal ideals, suggesting men would rather see a woman vulnerable and entirely without agency than see her sexually, emotionally, and socially liberated.

By employing this crude image, Ball works to shock viewers out of their complacent alignments and ideals. The scene gives male viewers a chance to reconcile their own morals and thoughts with what they are seeing. Do they condone this image of a woman's body or does it horrify them? If so, will they work to untie these figurative ropes, and challenge toxic patriarchal ideology? In his overt depiction of the hatred men hold for women that are in control of their own sexuality, Ball forces viewers to question their ideologies and preconceived notions of sexuality, as well as question and hopefully challenge the world around them.

Ball furthers his depiction of patriarchal oppression by creating an intersection between white women and women of color. By having Tara and Lettie Mae (Adina Porter) act as vehicles for possession, Ball depicts their punishment for overt sexuality and nonconformity in a different way. While the sexually liberated white women were hunted by a murderer, the main women of color in the show, Tara and her mother Lettie Mae, are depicted as literally having a demon inside of them to rationalize their rejection of traditional female roles and values. Lettie Mae's demon is attributed to her alcoholism and inability to be a competent mother, while Tara's demon only emerges after the viewer witnesses her have casual sex with Sam while still holding a torch for Jason. After her mother's own exorcism, the exorcist turns to Tara and tells her she needs to get her own demons out as well. In "Burning House of Love" (1.7), Miss Jeanette, the voodoo exorcist, cites Tara's lack of friends and difficulty holding down a job when saying she has a demon within her, and if she would just let Miss Jeanette purge her of this demon, Tara can and will experience a happier, less lonely life. Throughout the show one thing is abundantly clear: Tara is a strong woman of color. She is stubborn, loyal, and fearless in standing up for the things she believes in, even in the face of an overwhelmingly white and unsympathetic crowd. While most would see these things as positive attributes, Tara is tricked into thinking the opposite by her mother and Miss Jeanette, and Tara is left feeling powerless to her imagined demon. In making her feel powerless, Miss Jeanette is enforcing the traditional oppression of black females, though she is a black female herself. Soon enough, both Tara and her mother undergo an expensive exorcism to rid them of these supposed demons. It is ultimately revealed, however, that the exorcisms, as well Miss Jeannette, are a scam. The hallucinations Tara experienced were due to peyote, and her vomiting was induced by ipecac. She was not expelling a demon. She was simply falling victim to Miss Jeannette's selfish exploitation. A black woman

being economically duped in order to render her powerless is not a new occurrence in America, and with this situation, Ball condemns the way black females have consistently been taken advantage of in America, from slaves being raped to their Jim Crow era low-paid, exploitative domestic jobs. Throughout history, black women have been forced to stay on the lowest rung of the social and economic ladder, and their gender and race has been used to justify that. Miss Jeanette exploiting Tara and Lettie Mae through her supposed voodoo is especially upsetting because rather than offering ethnic solidarity with other females, Miss Jeanette has filled the role of a typical white oppressor, taking advantage of the way black women have been oppressed and twisting the rich history of voodoo into something to dupe these women. Tara is rightly furious, but her mother is not. Regardless of the truth, Lettie Mae appears cured of her alcoholism. She starts going to church more often, dresses up, visits with her friends, takes care of the house and, perhaps most notably, makes Tara a delicious breakfast, something she apparently hasn't done for her daughter in a very long time. With her purported demon finally gone, Lettie Mae is able to undertake all the duties of a typical housewife. In this depiction, Ball is critiquing the way society will oftentimes demonize a woman, especially a woman of color, for rejecting motherhood and other aspects of a traditional domestic life. He is also calling attention to the way white people and others in power roles have sought to disenfranchise nonwhites and the poor.

Ball also depicts instances of men suffering for their sexuality as well, though they suffer and are persecuted far less than women. Jason Stackhouse is one of the main male characters in the show, and the viewer is immediately made to understand that he is a man in complete control of his sexuality. He goes from woman to woman with ease, and he seems to genuinely enjoy sex as one would enjoy a book or a sport. The viewer certainly sees him engaged in sexual activity

more than any other character over the span of twelve episodes. However, even though Jason's sexuality is depicted as a constant occurrence, he is clearly not murdered or made to think he has a demon living inside of him. Instead, Jason's suffering happens on a small, occasionally comical scale. Each of his sexual partners ends up dead under suspicious circumstances, resulting in him being hauled off to jail repeatedly. During Jason's small interludes at the jailhouse, all the citizens of Bon Temps seem to turn against him, as they do against females who are known to have had sex with vampires. However, as soon as he is proclaimed innocent, he goes right back to his previous social standing, and his grief over his dead sexual partners is short-lived. Even the death of Amy, his girlfriend who he proclaimed to love, is eclipsed by his new devotion to the church. For a female, the stigma of their sexual transgressions stays with them permanently. The only real suffering Jason endures is depicted in episode four. Due to downing an entire vial of vampire blood, Jason winds up with priapism. While the situation is rather funny, Jason's suffering is clear in his crude rendition of the way the doctor cured his affliction, which involved sticking a long, sharp needle into his penis, which then painfully drains the excess blood. Ball depicts the suffering of privileged men as similar to the way it usually plays out in real life. They are not stigmatized for their sexuality nor punished in any permanent capacity. In doing so, Ball emphasizes the deep chasms and double standards between men and women and their sexuality.

Jason Stackhouse is a bit of an enigma throughout the entire first season of *True Blood*. He is chock-full of horrible qualities, yet the people in his life consistently excuse him, and their love is seemingly unconditional. So we, as viewers, are made to see Jason in many different lights. Occasionally he is depicted as a man brimming with toxic masculinity and white privilege, from his constant objectification of women, which includes striking his sister for her

affinity towards vampires, to his ability to constantly talk himself out of situations with the police and other officials. However, he is also someone the show likes, and in turn, someone the viewers are made to like. He is uncompromisingly handsome and constantly forgiven for his perceived sins, a luxury the black females and males in the show are not often given, and as season one progresses, so does his inherent goodness. He defends the vampire he has kidnapped against Amy, and in a particularly saccharine flashback, we see a very young Jason protect Tara from her alcohol-crazed mother in “Escape from the Dragon House” (1.4). These kind moments often intersect with Jason's more brutal depictions, but as the series progresses, Jason seems to evolve into a thoughtful and contemplative character. Even though by the end of season one, he is on the road to joining the vampire hating church, his intentions seem pure enough. This Jason is starkly different than early season one Jason, when the real Bon Temps murderer, Rene, later to be known as Drew Marshall (Michael-Raymond James) is still unknown. Jason seems to act in his place, becoming easily angered and constantly lashing out at the women in his life. Because Rene is not able to openly represent his hatred throughout most of the first season, Ball has someone else publicly punish them. Jason has no qualms about hiding his distaste, exemplified in the previous example with Maudette, as well as his anger over Sookie and Bill Compton’s (Stephen Moyer) relationship and his similar disgust in Dawn (Lynn Collins) when he finds out she has also had sex with a vampire. However, though this distaste never dissipates entirely, by the close of season one, it has seemingly turned from a fiery rage to a thoughtful simmer. In crafting such an ambiguous character, Ball is assessing the possibility for growth amongst traditionally oppressive men. While the benevolence of Jason’s shift is still in question by the end of season one, Jason has turned into a different person nonetheless. This shift highlights the

way a man who has experienced privilege his entire life and has created strict biases from this can change and grow into a deeper and more thoughtful character.

While Jason Stackhouse is a perfect depiction of the way a privileged, heteronormative white male is treated for his sexuality, Ball creates a stark difference between him and the show's prominent gay character, Lafayette Reynolds (Nelsan Ellis) in order to critique the way the treatment of a white heterosexual man is—and always has been—exceedingly superior to the treatment of a black male and especially of a black male that exhibits transgressive sexuality. Lafayette was a very important character in *True Blood* and in mainstream media, as before then, a queer black male mainstream character—one who did not ascribe to harmful stereotypes or distinctions—was very hard to come by. The late Nelsan Ellis was integral to this part, acknowledging the fact that although in real life he was straight, it was nonetheless important handle this role with responsibility and care. Ellis did just that—with immense success. In the show and in real life, he had no room for homophobia. He famously called out his co-star, Luke Grimes, in an interview with *Vulture* for quitting the show over an idea to make his character gay. Lafayette never shied away from the nuances of his character, from proudly relying on sex work to supplement his income to painting his nails at work, and Ellis never failed in his portrayal of a proud, gay black male in the deep American south. Lafayette Reynolds is no stranger to prejudice and hate, though he takes it all in stride and never conforms to what his peers expect him to be.

In depicting the suffering of Lafayette as adjacent to the suffering of the vampires who are yearning for their own rights, Ball is calling attention to the way people who are so entrenched in their own ideas and their own biases will lash out at anyone who seems a little bit different. For example, the overtly homosexual, African-American Lafayette often bears the

brunt of Southern bigotry and hatred. The sexuality of people of color was long used as a tool to disenfranchise and oppress African Americans, and this sexuality has also been a fear of many white bigots, from black male sexuality being seen as a threat to white women to the rampant over-sexualization of black females. This fear resulted in lynching, segregation, and socioeconomic disenfranchisement, justified by racist and misogynistic misconceptions. Thus, Lafayette's overt queerness, paired with his skin color links the centuries-long persecution of people of color with people of transgressive sexuality in America. For example, "Sparks Fly Out," (1.5) Lafayette is harassed and bullied at his workplace for his homosexuality. While working as a cook at Merlotte's, Lafayette encounters some homophobic men. They send the burger he made for them back because they were worried that it might be infected with AIDS. Of course, they don't personally know Lafayette and would have no reason to believe this other than blind bigotry. While Lafayette confronts them in the diner, he doesn't always react this way in the face of harmful bigotry. In "To Love Is to Bury," (1.11) Lafayette sees a politician he has been sleeping with and selling vampire blood to on live television, denouncing the rights of vampires as well as homosexuality in order to promote the ideal of a Christian, heteronormative family. Lafayette reacts to this situation differently than the previous one. Instead of confronting the politician and getting violent or yelling, as he did with the diner patrons, he instead attends one of the politician's publicized galas. Lafayette rejects his usual outfits, and instead dresses in a suit and tie, and confronts the politician as if the two were strangers. He speaks softly and lets the man know what he thinks, all while keeping up a calm demeanor. He shakes his hand, and sarcastically praises the senator, saying "I'm so happy and proud to shake the hand of someone with your values. Too often we're governed by criminals and hypocrites. Don't you agree? But I can tell you're a man of virtues and I applaud the effort you're making against the poor and

disenfranchised, especially the vampires and the gays” (1.11). The politician is clearly shaken by this, and in this confrontation, words clearly resonate deeper than violence or anger would have. Lafayette uses different means in dealing with conservative attitudes because he knows how these things will transpire with different people. Had he treated the politician the way he treated the diner patrons, he would have been publicized as a crazy person, and would have furthered the politician’s cause. Ball depicts the homophobia Lafayette endures in a candid manner in order to shock his viewers into realizing and recognizing the hard truths and biases that plague the country, but may go unnoticed to those who do not suffer from it.

In the depiction of Lafayette, Ball has created a specific character that embraces and flaunts his sexuality to challenge any social norm that suggests someone should do otherwise. Lafayette paints his nails and wears skirts, announcing his queerness through his attire and demeanor. Lafayette’s boldness is a metaphor for stark opposition to homophobia in *Bon Temps*, and the world at large. His refusal to hide who he is acts to confront homophobia head on, forcing those who denigrate homosexuals to face their hatred head on. This blatant opposition comes at a cost, though, and Ball makes sure to make that clear to viewers. Lafayette suffers for his personal honesty, as depicted in the previous paragraph. However, Lafayette must reconcile this suffering with the ability to be able to enjoy his truth. Social change will always come at a cost, and Ball does not shrink away from this truth. In depicting the intersection of truth and pain, Ball shows viewers how social change is not a painless process, but still a necessary one.

Ball’s critique of homophobia is furthered by the show’s use of vampires as a metaphor for homosexuality and the struggle for gay rights. The first episode begins with a news broadcast on television of a vampire championing for vampire rights, Nan Flanagan. The arguments she and her opponent have are eerily similar to the arguments between conservatives and gay rights

advocates. Ball does this to exemplify the way bigotry will always find an outlet, whether it is persecuting black sexuality, homosexuality, or vampirism. Because of their fear and hatred for the unknown and the other, bigots will always employ hatred as a weapon in fighting what they do not understand. Shortly after seeing this television broadcast, we also see a sign that says “God Hates Fangs,” a clear mirroring of the horrible slogan homophobes and other bigots chant, “God Hates Fags.” The vampires are out of the closet and no longer hiding from the masses. Some vampires are happy to reveal themselves, some are not. The vampires have their own club, Fangtasia, and people go there because they view sex with vampires as a novelty. Vampires are campaigning for a variety of rights previously denied to them, such as the right to marriage and the right to have a relationship with regular humans. The vampires even have a disease that is similar to AIDS—Hep D—and the panic that surrounded it. In depicting the struggle for gay rights alongside the struggle for vampire rights, Ball is able to offer his criticism on the country’s homophobia and hatred.

The first season of *True Blood* depicts race and ethnicity in a similar manner to the way homosexuality is depicted. Specifically, the struggles that the vampires face are reminiscent of the various struggles for civil rights. The vampires are presented as their own race, thus, they must face conservative attitudes steeped in racism and prejudice. People criticize the relationships between vampires and normal humans, and vampires are persecuted throughout the nation. They are refused service, and they are openly criticized. In response to this treatment, some vampires choose to retreat to the comfort of their own society, rather than mix with the rest of humanity. The show’s two prominent characters of color, Tara and Lafayette, are not vampires. Yet they still suffer from racism and persecution, despite the contemporary times. Racism directed towards vampires highlights and amplifies the racism that has been ingrained in

American society. In these brutal, yet truthful, depictions, Ball is critiquing and forcing viewers to confront the racism and hatred that runs rampant throughout contemporary America.

By setting the show in the American south, specifically a fictional town in Louisiana, near New Orleans, Ball points to the long history of racism within America, with obvious and horrific roots in slavery and intense racism. Louisiana, specifically, has very vibrant roots within this history, as it featured the largest slave revolt in history, and by the mid-1800s was hosting the largest slave market in America. This legacy of racism persists into the twenty-first century, and Ball uses *True Blood* to demand a change towards this ideology. In the first episode of season one, “Strange Love” (1.1), for example, Tara gets fed up with an annoying customer in a supermarket she works at. This customer calls Tara’s boss over, and Tara reacts with similar anger to him, rather than backing down in the face of her boss. Tara punctuates this meeting by slapping her boss and quitting. Before this, though, Tara made her boss and the customer obviously uncomfortable by bringing race into the argument, accusing the two of them for believing in and ascribing racist stereotypes to her. Both her boss and the customer become increasingly flustered and embarrassed, but Tara is just angry with how things transpired. Later on in the episode, Tara mentions her mother naming her after a fictional plantation from *Gone With the Wind*. “Isn’t that funny, a black girl being named after a plantation? No, I don’t think it’s funny at all. In fact, it really pisses me off that my momma was either stupid or just plain mean” (1.1). During this episode Ball cements Tara’s place in the show as a woman of color who is hyperaware of the prevalent southern racism, misogyny and white privilege that permeates her life. Her refusal to submit to it encapsulates Ball’s message that the viewer should not condone such an ideology. Tara’s relentless willingness to constantly call out the prejudice she encounters, continuously catching others off guard with her comments rather than listening to

racist discourse ensures viewers will be made uncomfortable with their own misconceptions and internalized racism.

In another episode, “The First Taste” (1.2), Bill meets Sookie’s grandmother, Adele (Lois Smith), Jason and Tara for the first time. After mentioning that he had been a confederate soldier in the Civil War and grew up in Bon Temps during the 1800s, Tara asks him if he had owned slaves, which Sookie reproaches her for. Her question is a valid one, and for a black woman, an important one in structuring her relationship with her best friend’s boyfriend. Tara seems unfazed by Sookie’s outrage, as white outrage is probably something she is used to, and she forges forward with her question, crossing her arms and arching her eyebrows. Bill says he never owned slaves, but he admits that his father did. He smiles while briefly recounting them, and he is surprisingly unapologetic of this fact, not even bothering to reproach the institution of slavery or offer some sort of apology or grimace. He quickly moves on to a nostalgic discussion of the older days with Adele. Full of discomfort, this scene speaks to the racism people of color in the American south must constantly deal with. To begin, Sookie’s outrage at her friend’s question is upsetting. Tara is her best friend, but she chooses to act disappointed throughout the entire discussion to protect Bill’s pride rather than question the possibility of his racist past, especially given his confederate history. Everyone seems uncomfortable with the question, and sits in silence, furthering Tara’s ostracization and punishment for being a black woman willing to speak her mind. Finally, Bill answers and everyone moves on, hardly acknowledging this horrible transgression. To make matters worse, Bill and Adele immediately reminisce about these old times in front of Tara, times when racism was exponentially more prevalent, ignoring the racist implications of this. Adele is especially interested in the history of Bon Temps, and when she says her group will be excited to hear about all this, Tara asks her if they will be excited to hear

about slaves, ignoring more of Sookie's reproach. Clearly uncomfortable, Sookie's grandmother responds that they will be excited about anything from that time period. This idea, reimagining and aggrandizing a period while ignoring its horrific truths to justify the interest, is a very dangerous one, and one that Tara actively tries to rebel against, even when there is nobody to support her. Tara's bravery goes unrewarded, as Bill hardly has the decency to look uncomfortable from the situation, and worse, her friends do not support her or even condemn Bill at all for his racialized past. Rather, they chastise and isolate Tara while praising Bill.

One of the show's most prominent depictions of racism presents itself within the discourse surrounding human-vampire relationships, which Ball stages to closely resemble regular interracial relationships. In "Escape from the Dragon House," Tara reprimands the police officers for how they responded to her and Jason's purported relationship: "People think just because we got vampires out in the open now race isn't the issue no more. You see the way folks look at mixed couples in this town? Race may not be the hot-button issue it once was but it's still a button you can push on people" (1.4). In *Bon Temps*, mixed couples are treated just as badly as vampire-human couples. As previously discussed, people who have sex with vampires are discriminated against, sometimes violently. Sookie is relentlessly mocked and insulted by the people in her life for her relationship with Bill Compton, which is especially difficult given her ability to read minds. Everyone believes they have to protect her from Bill, whom they consider a monster. Whenever she is with Bill in public, Sookie cannot help but notice everyone staring at them, keeping tabs on how their relationship progresses. Sam Merlotte (Sam Trammell), the owner of Merlotte's, the restaurant Sookie works at, acts as one of the staunchest opponents to their relationship. His hatred for vampires, paired with his perpetual desire for Sookie, makes him a constant nuisance in both her and Bill's relationship. Sam is initially depicted as a

supporter of the vampire rights fight, and his support for vampire rights was one of the first things Sookie discussed with Bill. However, as Bill and Sookie's relationship progresses, so does Sam's unhappiness and volatility towards vampires. Ball uses Sam's attempt at making himself seem a benevolent ally to vampires is reminiscent of the way some white people will publicly support civil rights but not privately—or at least not in ways that promote meaningful change.

In the episode, "Sparks Fly Out," Ball furthers this racial discourse by linking vampire prejudice with racism in the South. Bill is set to speak to Adele's group in a church. Sookie is attending with Sam during and Bill's brief hiatus, as well as Adele, Tara and Jason. In preparing for Bill's speech, a man asks Adele if they've made the right choice in inviting a vampire to speak, and whether or not everyone will be safe, and the camera pans to the church's predominantly white audience. A few seconds later, we see someone hanging a confederate flag, much to Tara's obvious discomfort. Tara's discomfort is interrupted by Sam and Sookie seating themselves near her, to which Tara mutters "Could always use more white people" (1.5). This utterance makes Sam and Sookie noticeably uncomfortable, though the confederate flag and the overarching racist implications of confederate sympathy do not faze them at all. While their discomfort is obvious to Tara, they seem to be wholly ignorant of what is making her uncomfortable, and they make no effort to find out. Adele goes on to introduce Bill, asserting to the audience that he is one of them, a human, and perhaps, specifically, a white human, and she seemingly proves this by acknowledging his fight for confederate Louisiana. Immediately after Adele's introduction, the camera shows the smiling white audience with the only black member, Tara, pushed all the way to the side, almost out of the frame completely. This cinematic choice highlights Tara's growing ostracization in a town that clearly reveres and praises its racist past. During Bill's speech, one of Arlene's (Carrie Preston) kids are in awe of how white Bill is.

Arlene responds to this with “No darlin’, we’re white. He’s dead!” (1.5). Bill’s whiteness/deadness gets amplified by a harsh fluorescent lighting below him, making him look nearly translucent, and certainly sickly. During the speech, the same people who harassed Lafayette in the diner interrupt by crushing some garlic and laughing loudly, trying to incite Bill. Despite this, he powers on with his speech, winning over the entire audience and certainly Adele. Numerous people congratulate Bill, but Tara is noticeably absent from this. The many important scenes in this episode speak to Ball’s overall critique of racism in America. By amplifying the civil rights struggle in vampires, while simultaneously highlighting the racism in the contemporary American south, Ball condemns the overarching racism that defines the country.

Interestingly, both Stackhouse siblings express internalized disgust or resistance towards interracial relationships, and Ball uses this to highlight another insidious aspect of racist ideology—the way it is passed on or internalized by younger generations. Obviously, these two are not outright racist individuals like some of their Bon Temps neighbors. However, in a country like America with a history of systematic, prevalent racism, racist ideals can be internalized and unconsciously executed. Jason Stackhouse is a notable playboy type, willingly sleeping with and ending up in relationships with nearly any white woman that comes along. However, when it comes to Tara, who has been holding a torch for him for years, he refuses to imagine a life with her that goes beyond a friendship. He often almost treats the idea as comical. In “Mine” (1.3), Sookie meets Bill’s brief roommates, Malcolm, Liam and Diane. They are notably different than Bill, and they conduct themselves in a crude manner. They do not mainstream or even try to, as Bill does, and they keep a human sex/blood slave. Diane, a woman of color, is especially repulsive to Sookie, and she expresses disgust at finding out Bill and Diane slept together. After meeting Bill’s wild associates, Sookie decides a life aligned with him is not

for her. She believes herself to be in constant danger, and she insists that though her life might have been boring, she prefers it to a life where she feels continually threatened. These internalized microaggressions against people of color are just another reality of the pervasive racist ideologies the American south has fostered, and Ball presents this small yet important instance of internalized prejudice within the Stackhouse twins.

Throughout *True Blood*, Alan Ball amplifies the deep-rooted racism and misogyny that plagues the American South through his brutal depiction of the racism and bigotry towards vampires. Through this, the harmful Southern hatred of otherness and difference is highlighted, and subsequently critiqued by Ball. Ball uses these harsh depictions to shock and galvanize audiences into acknowledging and realizing their own internalized ideas of racism, homophobia and misogyny. He does this in the hopes that his audiences will wake up out of their misguided reveries and realize what is really happening in the world around them. Though the world of Bon Temps is a fictional one, Ball's message still permeates.

Conclusion

Vampires in popular culture act as metaphors for the harmful social anxieties that envelop a culture and time period. Bigotry has always been, and perhaps always will be, a relatively unopposed force. That is because in fearing the unknown and misunderstood, bigots also close themselves off to learning, thus completely stalling any empathy or consideration. As such, it is difficult to critique harmful ideals on the surface. Racists will not entertain the idea of someone telling them they are racist, homophobes will veil their hatred in religion or morality, etc. Because of this, opposition to bigotry must surreptitiously invade popular culture, and this often results in the popular image of the vampire acting as a metaphor for these social anxieties. Through vampiric stories and discourse, people can examine humanity on a larger scale, as well as their inner selves.

As far as vampiric metaphors for social anxiety go, the Victorians had Bram Stoker's *Dracula*. Through the Count, from his strange accent to his penchant for castles, and his contrasting Dr. Van Helsing, the irrational and oftentimes harmful European fear of the outsider, or the oriental other was revealed. Van Helsing's assimilation into England's lifestyle was accepted and enforced by his male counterparts, while Dracula's was shunned and feared. Both men had strange accents and funny tendencies, but Dracula's otherness was too foreign compared to Van Helsing's Dutch lineage, and therefore, Dracula is the hunted while Van Helsing is the hunter. Lucy, the liberated woman who had no qualms about trying out different male lovers, is turned into a vampire. As a vampire, she terrifies the town and feeds on children, similar to her progenitor's vampire brides. These female vampires are hunted and destroyed by the white, powerful heteronormative men in the novel. Mina, Jonathan Harker's chaste bride-to-be, is targeted by Dracula as Lucy was. However, thanks to her domesticity and adoration for

only one man, she is not executed. In creating these contrasts, Stoker is critiquing and condemning the rampant and irrational fears that plagued Western Europe during the Victorian period.

The 20th century had Anne Rice's *Interview with the Vampire*, and the vampires Louis, Claudia, Armand and Lestat. These four vampires embodied gender fluidity. Louis and Lestat were often depicted as gay lovers, as were Louis and Armand. Claudia, the vampiric daughter of Louis and Lestat, expressed both filial and sexual love for her father Louis. The four created an inverted image of a family, and through them Rice effectively condemned the homophobia and harmful fear of transgressive sexualities that ran rampant within her culture. In setting her novel on a gothic plantation in the deep south, filled with superstitious black slaves, Rice also crafts a critique of racism and the history of slave ownership in America.

The television series *True Blood* presents socially conscious vampires within the 2000s. In this show, Ball explores the harmful racism and homophobia that plagues America, and specifically, the American south even today. Ball's sexual and racial vampiric metaphors are more difficult to differentiate, and often his vampires simultaneously act as metaphors for various civil rights movements. In depicting vampires as "out of the coffin" and playing on harmful slurs used by homophobes, Ball links his vampires with homosexuality, and their fight for rights is *similar* to the fight of the LGBTQ+ community. Similarly, the vampire's desire for rights also acts as a metaphor for people of color and their fight for rights, and this is represented in various ways, and is most apparent within the treatment of vampire-human relationships as interracial. The vampires must deal with a constant onslaught of hatred from both homophobes and racists, and even the human citizens of Bon Temps, Louisiana suffer from these toxic ideologies.

Similar tropes can be seen in the CW11's teen drama, *The Vampire Diaries* (2009-2017). Adapted from a set of novels of the same name written by L. J. Smith, the show catered to audiences too young to appropriately enjoy *True Blood*, but still infatuated by the vampire craze. In modern sympathetic vampire fashion, the show is filled with sappy romance, beautiful characters and a fight between good and evil, vampires giving into their affliction and those fighting against it. Though the show is for teenagers and young adults, it features many similar themes and criticisms of modern American life.

The show, adapted by Kevin Williamson and Julie Plec, often strayed far from the original source material. The showrunners fit black characters into the previously whitewashed narrative, and highlighted the Southern location—and the connotations of that location—of the show. Sexuality in the show is not necessarily as transgressive as the other examples, rather, the topic of sexuality revolves around girlhood and the desperate restrictions placed on young female sexuality. As for race and ethnicity, the show takes a very notable stance in casting almost all of the central black characters as witches, who typically help the vampires in the show.

Elena Gilmore, played by Nina Dobrev, is a beautiful, popular orphaned teenager. Bonnie Bennett (Kat Graham) and Caroline Forbes (Candice King) are her best friends, and, relatively speaking, they remain so throughout the tumultuous eight seasons. The girl's lives are changed forever when a new boy shows up at their school, the elusive and handsome Stefan Salvatore (Paul Wesley). In a whirlwind of events, Stefan's true vampiric nature is revealed and he and Elena are dating. Around the same time that Stefan and Elena begin their relationship, Caroline becomes subservient to Stefan's older brother, Damon Salvatore (Ian Somerhalder). Similarly, Bonnie's witchy powers begin to manifest, depicted in small ways, from slight premonitions to floating feathers. All of the girls are waking up, so to speak, embarking on the journey from

girlhood to womanhood. Williamson and Plec emphasize this within the particular and symbolic bloodiness of the transformations of Elena and Caroline, as Elena's life becomes controlled by Stefan and his ongoing fight against his own bloodlust and Caroline's transformation is punctuated through Damon feeding on her while controlling her mind. As argued by critics Subramanian and Lagerwey in "Teen Terrors: Race, Gender and Horrifying Girlhood in *The Vampire Diaries*," the bloodiness of Caroline's new life is intentional, and made to directly link this awakening with her sexuality. "Similarly, the bloodiness of Caroline's monstrous awakening recalls the inevitable bloodiness of female puberty, emphasizing the metaphorical work Caroline's transition does to link the transition from innocent girlhood to young adulthood that is at first frightening, powerful and obsessed with out of control consumption until ideological structures are internalized and self-discipline is imposed to contain the powerful monstrosity, whether of a desire to drink human blood or to act as an autonomous, sexual subject in the world" (188-189). The insertion of the bloody vampires depicts the horrific truth of the stringent and harmful expectations placed on young women and their virginity.

By inserting vampires into the girls' lives and stimulating their feminine transformation at the same time, the showrunners are critiquing the way America still seeks to control feminine sexuality, and particularly covet the sexuality of young women, with conceptualized notions such the preservation of virginity and chastity. After meeting the Salvatores, the girls become sexual beings, and with that, they are granted agency over themselves and their lives. Elena is shaken from her morose meditation over her parent's death, Caroline is able to break free from her controlling father and misunderstanding mother, Bonnie is able to defend herself and her friends properly, eventually culminating in her martyring herself in order to preserve the safety of her

friends. These girls have transformed into strong women, though this impetus was spurred on by male control.

As mentioned, Bonnie's life ultimately ends with a sacrifice to save her friends. Bonnie's demise here is fitting, as she spent the entire show hurting herself to help them. In fact, most of the black witches in the show act to aid the vampires in their various quests. They hardly ever do anything to help themselves, though the vampires often leverage a self-serving purpose to trick the witches into helping them. Every time a witch does help a vampire, though, it ends badly for them, and Bonnie is no different. The mostly white vampires use the black witches to do their bidding, and when the witches try to protect themselves from these situations, the vampires continually find ways to lure them back in, back towards their demise, and the vampires often think nothing of it.

The racial and sexual themes presented within *The Vampire Diaries* are similar to the classic themes presented within vampire literature and media—vampirism acts as a metaphor for social fears and anxieties. The patriarchal fear of a young girl's budding sexuality is depicted by the showrunners through the transformations of Caroline and Elena, and the racist undertones that plague the American south are evident in the way the white vampires treat the black witches who continually aid them, even in the face of their own demise. Though this show is considerably milder than most vampiric stories, the metaphor buried within the vampire is still present.

Vampires will continue to act as metaphors for prevalent social anxieties, especially in America's current political and social climate. From being ruled by a president that constantly incites violence and hatred against the unknown and misunderstood with his dangerous rhetoric to the hateful public reemergence of nazis and anti-Semitism, America is nowhere near erasing

painful bigotry and hatred. As such, vampires in western culture are not going to go away any time soon. While the initial vampire craze of the 2000s might have died down a bit, it is only a matter of time until viewers and readers find a new undead creature to sink their teeth into.

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Television and Film

True Blood (2008-2014)

Season 1 (2008)

Episode 1 (1:1) "Strange Love." Teleplay: Alan Ball. Dir.: Alan Ball. HBO. 7 September 2008.

Episode 2 (1:2) "The First Taste." Teleplay: Alan Ball. Dir.: Scott Winant. HBO. 14 September 2008.

Episode 3 (1.3) "Mine." Teleplay: Alan Ball. Dir.: John Dahl. HBO. 21 September 2008.

Episode 4 (1.4) "Escape from the Dragon House." Teleplay: Alan Ball. Dir.: Michael Lehmann. HBO. 28 September 2008.

Episode 5 (1.5) "Sparks Fly Out." Teleplay: Alan Ball. Dir.: Daniel Minahan. HBO. 5 October 2008.

Episode 7 (1.7) "Burning House of Love." Teleplay: Alan Ball. Dir.: Marcos Siega. HBO. 19 October 2008.

Episode 11 (1.11) "To Love Is to Bury." Teleplay: Alan Ball. Dir.: Nancy Oliver. HBO. 16 November 2008.

