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# From Monsters to Victims:

# Vampires and Their Cultural Evolution from the Nineteenth to the Twenty-First Century

By Caitlyn Orlomoski

We've been living in the age of the vampire. Over the past forty years, vampires have jumped in popularity and pop-culture appeal, dominating our television sets, the box office, and book shelves around the world. In 2010 alone, Hollywood churned out four wide-release vampire films (along with a bunch of straight-to-DVD pictures), and the immensely popular television series *True Blood* and *The Vampire Diaries* continued airing to wide audiences. Dozens of vampire-themed books hit the shelves, including critically acclaimed texts like Justin Cronin's *The Passage*[1] and teen-fare like the latest book in the *House of Night* series[2] by P.C. Cast. And that was just in 2010.

Vampires are the latest fad to appear on pop-culture's radar, but this is not the first time they have latched onto the public consciousness. These bloodsuckers have been a constant presence in literature and film since the 1897 publication of Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, arguably the most influential vampire text of all time. Even before *Dracula*, vampires permeated Eastern European folklore, supposedly terrorizing small rustic communities in the dark of the night and acting as scapegoats for almost anything the locals could neither change nor understand. Since that time, vampires have represented society's fears about the unknown "other," and over the past one hundred years, they have evolved from immoral and inhuman monsters to undead humans who point out the monstrosities of living humans themselves. By examining the evil monsters in John Polidori's "The Vampyre" (1819) and Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), the semi-sympathetic creatures in Richard Matheson's *I Am Legend* (1954) and Anne Rice's *Interview with the Vampire* (1976), and the immortal victims in Charlaine Harris' *Southern*

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[1] *The Passage* tells the story of a group of people struggling to survive after government-created vampires make North America a place where you're only safe in the daylight.

[2] These books imagine what would happen if select teenagers turned into vampires when they hit puberty and have to attend the House of Night boarding school.

*Vampire* series (2001-present) and John Ajvide Lindqvist's *Let the Right One In* (2004), these fears and the progression from monster to human will become clear.

First, in order to fully examine vampires in literature, it is essential to have an understanding of vampires in Eastern European folklore. While vampiric-figures have appeared in literature all over the world, the vampire as we recognize it today comes out of this particular folkloric tradition. Vampires in Europe were not the same across the continent, but the number of similarities makes them, in essence, the same creature. In most cases, people became vampires after death because of their activities while they were alive, rather like our modern idea of ghosts. Anyone from drunks, thieves, accused witches, murderers, or those excommunicated from the church could become a vampire after their death (Melton 66). In other cases, people became members of the undead because they were the first to die in their community during the outbreak of a devastating disease (Melton 356).

In this way, vampires were often scapegoats for their communities; a dead person was easiest to blame for whatever was wrong in the village at the time. These populations that did not have our modern understanding of medicine and disease would attribute the current plague or childhood death to a vampire (Karg 10). Vampires could also be used as a warning; in some Eastern European folk stories, vampires in the guise of handsome men became a cautionary tale for young women, reminding them "not to stray from the counsel of their elders and priests and to avoid glamorous visiting strangers who would only lead to disaster" (Melton xxiv). In short, vampires represented an unknown danger in folklore, substitutes for criminals, religious and political dissidents, strangers, and anything else the townspeople feared.

The physical appearance of the undead varied greatly from region to region. While some vampires simply appeared to be “normal” humans fully capable of regular physical functions (including procreation with their wives), many were reanimated corpses who would leave the grave at night in order to drink blood from livestock or their owners. Vampires were also not restricted to one social class; there were reported instances of both high class gentlemen and low class farmers being suspected of vampirism. In any case, vampires were most easily identified by digging up the coffin of a suspected person and examining the now-decomposing body. Because most people during this time period were unfamiliar with the processes of decomposition, the corpse’s appearance alone could lead to the diagnosis of vampire. Depending on soil conditions, the body’s skin might have a ruddy complexion, leading to the idea that the corpse had gorged on blood during the night. “Screams” coming from the corpse as it was staked could be explained by unseen gases escaping the body. There were also reported cases in Northern Europe where corpses had chewed-off appendages attributed to when “vampires fed on themselves before leaving the grave to feed on others,” but more likely caused by improper burial conditions and hungry animals. (Melton 211-2)

When locals determined that their ex-neighbor was undead, they took measures to prevent the vampire from terrorizing the village. There were generally three steps in the process of eliminating the vampire. First, you staked the body in the grave, sometimes through the heart like in today’s stories, but often through the stomach region to prevent the corpse from moving. Second, you removed the head from the body. Usually, these two steps stopped the vampire from doing more damage, but in the event that bad things kept occurring, you ceremonially burned the body. After that, the villagers’ problems usually disappeared. While

there were other, more-specialized methods for killing vampires,[3] the process of staking, decapitating, and cremating was most common. (Melton 165)

While folkloric vampires were monsters who represented the various fears of village communities, the creature in John Polidori's short story "The Vampyre" (1819) was symbolic of the early nineteenth-century fear of a corrupt aristocracy. Polidori, a medical doctor, is distinguished by being the first author of a story with a "gentlemanly" vampire, an undead creature that blends in perfectly with society at large because he is not a rotting corpse; instead, his vampire looks like a regular man. Polidori came up with the idea for the story during a vacation with his friend Lord Byron in the summer of 1816. Percy Bysshe Shelley and his wife Mary were also in attendance. As the legend goes, the writers challenged each other to write horror stories, and Mary Shelley walked away with the start to her novel *Frankenstein*. Byron reportedly began a story but later abandoned it, and the physician Polidori produced what would eventually become "The Vampyre." ("The Context of Dracula" xxvii) [4]

Polidori's short (and floridly-written) story details the downfall of an aristocratic youth named Aubrey at the hands of the vampire Lord Ruthven. During the tale, Aubrey travels around Europe with Lord Ruthven before breaking off their friendship and journeying to Greece on his own. Once there, Aubrey falls in love with Ianthe, a beautiful Greek native who tells him tales about vampires, descriptions of which match Lord Ruthven perfectly. One night, Ianthe is killed by a mysterious attacker, and Aubrey is nearly killed himself in the process of protecting her. When he recovers, Aubrey finds that he has been nursed back to health by Ruthven, and

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[3] One Bulgarian method called "bottling" involved trapping the vampire in a bottle stuffed with his favorite food and then throwing the bottle into a fire. (Melton 67)

[4] This story's details vary widely from source to source. Some critics say Polidori simply expanded on the story penned by Byron, while others assert that Polidori's story is completely original.

they continue on their travels together until Ruthven is shot and killed by robbers. Before he dies, Ruthven makes Aubrey promise that he will not speak about him or mention his name for a full year. Of course, when Aubrey returns to town to be with his sister, Ruthven appears; since the lord is supposed to be dead, this revelation drives Aubrey mad because he now recognizes Ruthven's true identity and nature. At the story's end, Ruthven is about to marry Aubrey's sister, and Aubrey dies knowing that his sister's fate will be the same as his love Ianthe's.

Lord Ruthven is an important figure in vampire literature because he is the first "gentlemanly" vampire. While there were reports of upper-class citizens being turned into vampires in folklore, it was much more common to hear about poorer people becoming members of the undead. Also unlike folkloric vampires (those reanimated corpses who only leave the grave at night), Polidori's vampire is a handsome member of the aristocracy, able to travel in the highest circles of London society in broad daylight as well as during the night. He has a special allure that attracts both males and females alike, independent of Ruthven's physical features:

> In spite of the deadly hue of his face, which never gained a warmer tint, either from the blush of modesty, or from the strong emotion of passion, though its form and outline were beautiful, many of the female hunters after notoriety attempted to win his attentions, and gain, at least, some marks of what they might term affection… (69)

Ruthven attracts Aubrey because he is such a mystery, though not for long. During their travels, Aubrey discovers that Ruthven enjoys ruining humans: men by providing them with money for their vices, and women by corrupting their innocence. When Aubrey ruins the "fun" with one of Ruthven's female conquests by warning her about Ruthven's appetite for destruction, this triggers the vampire's desire to ruin Aubrey's life and everything he loves.

Therefore, Lord Ruthven represents a corrupt aristocracy who uses his money and influence for evil rather than good. He exploits his upper-class position, pushing his way into the companionship (and, presumably, the beds) of high-society women. He is generous with his money, but only to those who do not deserve it.[5] This character would have resonated in a pre-Victorian society which had witnessed the results of the French Revolution only a few years earlier. These people had just survived a decade where it seemed as though the French aristocracy cared nothing for the lower-classes, and the bloody aftermath landed close to home in England ("Social Causes"). The English ruling class passed a series of laws during this time which restricted radical political action, hoping to prevent a similar revolution from happening in their country (White).

Unlike future vampires in literature of the twentieth-century, Lord Ruthven is completely evil and has no redeeming qualities. When he nurses Aubrey back to health (after murdering Ianthe, though Aubrey is not yet certain of this fact), Ruthven looks on his patient "with a smile of malicious exultation playing upon his lips" (77). He delights because he drained Ianthe. Later, Ruthven takes the news of Aubrey's madness in a peculiar way:

> When he heard of Aubrey's ill health, he readily understood himself to be the cause of it; but when he learned that he was deemed insane, his exultation and pleasure could hardly be concealed from those among whom he had gained this information. (84)

He then quickly woos Aubrey's sister, simply because he knows it will further destroy Aubrey's mind. At the end of the story, we know that Ruthven has killed the sister, effectively ending the story as well as Aubrey's legacy.

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[5] Aubrey notes how Ruthven only gives financial support to those who want money for selfish reasons; for example, he will not give money to an honest beggar, but he will supply another with the funds for alcohol. (71)

Lord Ruthven is also pure evil because all of the other characters in the short story are pure innocence. Aubrey is described as someone who "believed all to sympathise with virtue, and thought that vice was thrown in by Providence merely for the picturesque effect of the scene" (70). Ianthe, Aubrey's Greek love, is "innocence, youth, and beauty, unaffected by crowded drawing-rooms and stifling balls" (74). Aubrey cannot help but love her, even though she is of a lower class. Miss Aubrey is not a beauty but instead has a "melancholic charm" which "appeared to indicate a soul conscious of a brighter realm" (80). She loves for her brother, and she cannot understand why he does not want her to marry Lord Ruthven. In light of these characters, Ruthven cannot appear in anything other than a shadowy light.

Lord Ruthven is an ultimate destructive force: he is an "other,"[6] able to insinuate himself into the highest social class while corrupting and destroying it from within. Ruthven is dangerous because he is a part of this society that he is working to destroy. He becomes what pre-Victorian Englishmen feared. "The Vampyre" was so influential and popular at the time of its publication because Polidori dared to bring the vampire myth into contemporary society, something that had never been done before.

John Polidori's short story is perhaps the first to feature the gentleman vampire in a contemporary setting, but it is certainly not the most well-known example. That distinction is reserved for Bram Stoker's most famous text, *Dracula*. Written in 1897 near the end of the Victorian era, the novel was Stoker's most popular publication (though the author did not realize the magnitude of its popularity during his lifetime). *Dracula* tells the story of Jonathan Harker, his wife Mina, and their friends as they face-off against Count Dracula, a vampire from

[6] The "other" is traditionally a way to look at a certain group of people by stigmatizing and stereotyping them, creating an "us versus them" dynamic, particularly when applied to class and race relations. ("Othering")

Transylvania who immigrates to England and begins to terrorize the country. Dracula succeeds in turning Mina's best friend Lucy into a member of the undead before they are able to destroy the count during his flight back to Transylvania, using traditional methods they know through folklore.

Told in epistolary form as a series of diary entries, newspaper clippings, and letters, *Dracula* works effectively on multiple levels, both as a Gothic horror novel and as an allegorical commentary on what English Victorian society feared the most. Stoker incorporates Victorian fears about the conflict between science and religion, the potential for reverse-colonization, and changing female sexuality into his novel, creating a monster in Count Dracula who threatens to destroy society for no clearly-stated reason.

The Victorian era was a time where science and religion began to truly mix in the public consciousness, where both were thought about by scholars and lay-people alike:

> As science education was expanded and formalised, a fundamental transformation occurred in beliefs about nature and the place of humans in the universe. A revival of religious activity, largely unmatched since the days of the Puritans, swept England. This religious revival shaped that code of moral behavior which became known as Victorianism. ("The Context of Dracula" xxi)

There were those who found an increased religious zeal in the face of this new acceptance of science, but there were also those who threw science in the face of religion. After the publication of Charles Darwin's text *On the Origin of Species* in 1859, many people, especially scholars and scientists, were convinced that the story of Genesis, along with all other Biblical teachings, were completely false. Others hovered in the middle, combining science and religion into many varied views of the world around them. (Fyfe "Victorian Science & Religion")

The new prominence of science in the public consciousness led to questions about an age-old question: what happens to us after we die? Instead of focusing on the idea of an afterlife in Heaven, scientists began to examine the process of death and decomposition, and this study of death actually moved out of the scholarly sphere into the public sector:

> Death too had become scientific... There was growing scientific interest in the pathology of death and dead bodies among lay people (Ariès 354); public dissection for entertainment became the rage, and the wealthy often purchased corpses for the after-dinner edification of their guests, leading to a shameful increase in the theft of cadavers (366-69). This was a perfect stage for the appearance of the undead. (Hallab 22) [7]

Although the grave-robbing and body-snatching fad was not as popular when Stoker was writing *Dracula* in the late nineteenth-century, science had become a perfect tool for horror fiction as it could be used to "explain" why horrible things happen, or why terrifying creatures were created.[8]

Yet, there was still anxiety about the conflict between science and religion. The text of *Dracula* demonstrates a Victorian fear about the possibility of a total subversion of scientific progress in the face of religion instead of the mingling of both for the benefit of society as a whole. At the very beginning of the novel, Christianity is present in the foreground; during Harker's journey to the Castle Dracula in Transylvania, the old innkeeper gives him a crucifix to wear when she learns that he is going to travel on the night before St. George's Day, a time when "all the evil things in the world will have full sway" (Stoker 154). Although Harker is a Protestant and considers the crucifix "idolatrous," he later takes comfort in it while he is

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[7] See Mary Roach's fascinating text *Stiff* (W.W. Norton, 2004) for more information on the Victorian love of public autopsies, as well as the consequential rash of grave robberies during this period (since only criminals could be legally used for autopsies).

[8] See Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* as another example of science being used to create context for a horror story.

trapped in Dracula's castle, pondering "if there is something in the essence of the thing itself, or that it is a medium, a tangible help, in conveying memories of sympathy and comfort" (Stoker 173).

Science also appears near the beginning of the novel, providing a nice contrast between the "superstitious" east (Transylvania) and the "modern" west (London). Mina Harker, in observing her duties as a good wife to Jonathan, practices on the typewriter so she can better assist him with his work when he is home (Stoker 194-5), and Dr. John Seward records his own diary on a phonograph. London is a modern city, open to the latest advances in science and technology, and the character of Dracula quickly becomes a threat to that way of life.

When the Count arrives in London after leaving Harker at his castle, Dracula slowly exsanguinates Lucy Westenra (although it takes Dr. Abraham Van Helsing and the rest a long time to determine that this is the cause of Lucy's illness). Van Helsing and Seward try to help Lucy by giving her transfusions of blood, first from her fiancé, Arthur Holmwood, but then from Seward himself and Quincy Morris.[9] Van Helsing tries to fight Dracula's power with modern medicine, but these techniques are no match for the vampire. Even when Van Helsing eventually turns to the "superstitious" method of placing garlic around Lucy's bed, he is too late, and she becomes a vampire like her master, Dracula.

After this, religion takes a much more prominent place in the novel since Christian symbols are the only things which seem to stop Dracula and Lucy from killing more people. Van Helsing uses the Eucharist wafer to stop-up the cracks in the vampire-Lucy's tomb so she cannot escape (Stoker 323), and the gang of vampire hunters later use crumbs of the Host to

[9] All three men sought Lucy's hand in marriage, and so these blood transfusions have another meaning, to be discussed later.

sterilize Dracula's spare coffins so he cannot rest in them (Stoker 394). However, the most striking use of the Eucharist occurs after Dracula forces Mrs. Harker to exchange blood with him; when Van Helsing places the Host wafer on Mina's head to bless her, "[t]here was a fearful scream which almost froze our hearts to hear. As he had placed the Wafer on Mina's forehead, it had seared it – had burned into the flesh as though it had been a piece of white-hot metal" (Stoker 393). This symbol of Christianity proves itself against the "unclean" Mina who is slowly changing into a vampire, and the men who love her now must race against the clock to make sure Dracula is defeated.[10] Although the Count is ultimately killed by the force of sheer manpower,[11] his death symbolically allows science and technology to continue to progress, not separate from religion, but mixing with it for the betterment of society as a whole.

Although the advancement of science and its engagement with religion is dealt with in *Dracula*, this is certainly not the only thing that the British feared during the late nineteenth century. Victorians also worried about the possibility of reverse-colonization where England would be overthrown by a nation it had previously conquered. Great Britain was truly a force to be reckoned with during the nineteenth century. Cities sprang up around the country, becoming centers of industry and huge exporters of trade goods. The British government, via its superior military, had already expanded its territory across continents, ruling over Australia, India, and South Africa, among many other colonies ("Victorian History"). Benjamin Disaraeli, Great Britain's prime minister at the time, called for further expansion of British rule into "uncivilized" countries. He invoked "generalizations partly derived from Darwin's theory of

[10] According to the rules of *Dracula*, someone who is transformed into a vampire can be changed back to "normal," or back to their human status, if their master/changer is killed.

[11] Jonathan Harker decapitates Dracula with a Kukri knife and Quincy Morris stab him in the heart with a bowie knife, symbols of the modern British and American empires triumphing over the Oriental East (Arata 641), and also following traditional folkloric methods of disposing of vampires.

evolution" ("The Context of Dracula"), asserting that Britain would bring Christianity into these heathen colonies and therefore make them civilized.

England was essentially the leading world power, and as we know from history, the only place to go from the top is downward. Even though Great Britain was so powerful, its people felt the threat of "reverse colonization," or:

> [t]he fear that what has been represented as the "civilized" world is on the point of being colonized by "primitive" forces … the colonizer finds himself in the position of the colonized, the exploiter becomes exploited, the victimizer victimized. Such fears are linked to a perceived decline – racial, moral, spiritual – which makes the nation vulnerable to attack from more vigorous, "primitive peoples." (Arata 623)

For example, reverse colonization could have occurred if India overcame Great Britain's stronghold and then, in turn, decided to colonize Britain. While it seems impossible that a nation on one continent could overtake another, England knew that it was possible since they had done it themselves for hundreds of years.

The looming Victorian fear of reverse-colonization is sprinkled throughout *Dracula*, perhaps because of Bram Stoker's political leanings. Stoker was born in Ireland, and his literary works are peppered with themes which could be interpreted as sympathy for the Irish nationalism movement. However, Stoker lived in England for most of his life and achieved mild success there as a writer, so "his writings reveal the competing attractions of different national identities, suggesting a tension between his sense of his own local Protestant Irish origins and his desire for a more formal imperial-metropolitan ideal of citizenship" (Glover 23). The question of where Stoker's sympathies truly fall will puzzle scholars for years to come.

As discussed earlier, Count Dracula and Transylvania represent the uncivilized East while the Harkers & Co. and London represent the civilized West. From the very beginning of the novel when Jonathan Harker believes the Count is a good man, he still feels a sense of unease when he finds that the contents of Dracula's library contains almost entirely English books and almanacs on politics, history, and every other topic "relating to England and English life and customs and manners" (Stoker 166-7). When Harker compliments the Count on his mastery of the English tongue, Dracula replies that he is not yet fully in control of the language, but he wants to be: "I am content if I am like the rest, so that no man stops if he sees me, or pause in his speaking if he hear my words, 'Ha, ha! a stranger!' I have been so long master that I would be master still – or at least that none other should be master of me" (Stoker 167).

But, Dracula is a much greater master of English language and customs than he lets on, and this is what truly terrifies Jonathan Harker. Dracula leaves his home, dressed in Jonathan's clothing, and he delivers letters he made Harker write "so that he may both leave evidence that I have been seen in the towns or villages posting my own letters, and that any wickedness which he may do shall by the local people be attributed to me" (Stoker 187). And this is exactly what happens. When Dracula kidnaps a baby to feed his three vampire brides and the baby's mother turns up at the Castle Dracula, Stephen Arata asserts that the "…peasant woman's anguished cry – 'Monster, give me my child!' (p. 60) – is directed at him [Harker], not Dracula" (Arata 638).

It is truly frightening how well Dracula can masquerade and blend in as an Englishman, both in his home country of Transylvania and later in London when he transports his coffins of dirt. No one seems to question his identity; none of the movers mention that he seemed like a

stranger, only that he was incredibly strong. Since it seems like Dracula's goal is to transform the London population into vampires like himself (or simply exterminate the whole city)[12], the fact that he can perfectly blend in with the Englishmen around him is scary. The idea of a "backward" minority existing (and in some ways being more successful than the standing population) in a modern society would have been terrifying both for the characters in the novel and the book's contemporary audience.

This theme of reverse-colonization would have certainly been frightening for the late-Victorian audience, but perhaps the most unsettling theme in *Dracula* involves female desire and sexuality. The novel demonstrates a prevailing anxiety about the changing expression of female sexuality. This topic is probably the most-discussed in critical literature written about the novel, and with good cause; it is perhaps easiest to read the book in this context. Ideals about morality and sexuality are what are most-commonly known about the Victorian era. Today, we tend to think of the Victorians as sexually-repressed individuals who went to extreme measures to prevent talking about sexuality or anatomy. On the contrary, Elizabeth Lee argues that, since the Victorian's goal was to raise a family, consummating a marriage and talking about the act of having sex was something which could not be avoided ("Victorian Theories of Sex and Sexuality").

Women's sexuality went through changes throughout the Victorian era. Where women were considered to be "innocent" at the beginning of the nineteenth-century in comparison to the men, by the end of the century the roles had swapped, with women "tempting" the men and needing to be watched carefully in order to protect their innocence (Lee). Even more

[12] Dracula's end-goal is never fully explained in the novel, but the film *Nosferatu* (dir. F.W. Murnau, 1922) implies that the vampire's goal is to kill, or turn, the entire population, like a plague.

scandalous was the appearance of the "New Woman," which Mina Harker herself mentions during the novel. The New Woman was perceived as wanting to get out of the house and get a job, earning money for her family just like the man of the house, and "some of the most radical New Women even argued that they were entitled to the same freedom of sexual expression as men" (Spencer 206). This challenged typical gender roles and their lesser status as a non-voting, non-head of the household.

By one interpretation, it is apparent that Bram Stoker was frightened by the idea of a woman with a sexual appetite because he portrayed all of his sexual women in *Dracula* as villainous. During the opening chapters of the novel, we encounter the three vampiric "brides" who live in the Castle Dracula. Jonathan Harker blunders upon them while exploring an area of the mansion he is not supposed to be visiting. All three women are described in language that can only be described as sexual; they have "voluptuous lips" and instill "some longing and at the same time some deadly fear" in Harker (Stoker 181). They advance on Harker, ensuring each other that "there are kisses for us all" (181), and they are only stopped from sucking Jonathan dry by the interruption of the Count.[13] Since these are the same women who drain a child mere moments later, there is no way that they can be interpreted as anything but evil creatures.

The other sexual female character is Lucy Westenra. Before she is turned into a vampire, Lucy is mostly innocent, though she is not entirely perfect; on writing to Mina about her three separate marriage proposals, she writes, "Why can't they let a girl marry three men, or as many as want her, and save all this trouble? But this is heresy, and I must not say it" (Stoker 199).

[13] In fact, in *Bram Stoker's Dracula* (dir. Francis Ford Coppola, 1992), Harker has what can be interpreted as an orgy with the vampire women.

However, once Lucy starts to succumb to Dracula's draining, her hidden inner desires move to the surface. The men all remark on her altered physical appearance,[14] and she asks for kisses repeatedly (in an effort to drain whoever bends down to meet her lips). Then, when Lucy is a full-blooded vampire, she is truly transformed: "The sweetness was turned to adamantine, heartless cruelty, and the purity to voluptuous wantonness … As she looked, her eyes blazed with unholy light, and the face became wreathed with a voluptuous smile" (Stoker 324). She could be a prostitute, based on the way Stoker describes her.

In fact, after Dracula first bites Lucy, everything about her becomes sexualized. After Dr. Van Helsing performs the blood transfusions, Arthur Holmwood remarks that he feels like he was truly married to Lucy because he was able to give her some of his blood. When he leaves the room, Van Helsing says in his broken English, "If so that, then what about the others? Ho, ho! Then this so sweet maid is a polyandrist, and me, with my poor wife dead to me, but alive by Church's law, though no wits, all gone – even I, who am faithful husband to this now-no-wife, am bigamist" (Stoker 295). This clearly connects the exchange of blood with sexual intercourse; therefore, the vampire-Lucy has a deviant sexual appetite which has trapped all these innocent men into sinning with her.

Lucy's second death in the tomb is also loaded with sexual imagery. The vampire slayers are tasked with staking Lucy so she cannot kill any more children, and her fiancé Holmwood volunteers for the task. Holmwood drives in the stake with a hammer, leading to this startling second-conclusion of Lucy's life:

> [Lucy's body] shook and quivered and twisted in wild contortions; the sharp white teeth champed together till the lips were cut, and

[14] Her beauty is heightened and, at times, her canine teeth seem elongated and sharpened, like fangs.

> the mouth was smeared with a crimson foam … And then the writhing and quivering of the body became less, and the teeth seemed to champ, and the face to quiver. Finally it lay still. The terrible task was over. (Stoker 328)

Lucy's second death is orgasmic. It physically and emotionally exhausts Holmwood, and it makes Van Helsing, Seward, and Quincy Morris voyeurs to an incredibly private act.

Mina Harker is exempt from all the sexual imagery of *Dracula* until the latter part of the novel when the Count targets her as his next victim. While the men were searching all over London for Dracula's coffins, they completely miss that Mina is slowly becoming sick in the same manner as Lucy; that is, until they eventually discover the Count exchanging blood with Mina. Seward writes, "With his left hand he held both Mrs. Harker's hands, keeping them away with her arms at full tension; his right hand gripped her by the back of the neck, forcing her face down on his bosom… The attitude of the two had a terrible resemblance to a child forcing a kitten's nose into a saucer of milk to compel it to drink" (Stoker 381). The drinking of blood is linked with sexual intercourse in the novel, so this scene can be interpreted as a rape; Mina is being forced to drink Dracula's blood, and he displays an enormous amount of satisfaction after the act. Before this scene of the book, Mina is the perfect wife, nursing Jonathan back to health after his escape from the Transylvanian castle and even memorizing the train time-tables so she can better assist her husband. Dracula's blood-bond ruins Mina's innocence, but she, unlike Lucy, is able to regain it by the end of the novel when the men slay Dracula.

Bram Stoker's novel reflects these Victorian anxieties about the blending of science and religion, the potential for reverse-colonization, and the evolution of female sexuality, and through these themes, Dracula himself is revealed to be a purely evil character. In this way, Dracula is incredibly similar to Polidori's Lord Ruthven. They both appear to be aristocratic

gentlemen who are initially friends with the stories' protagonists. They both have an allure which attracts others to them, though the count's is caused by the exchange of blood. (This is why Mina occasionally seems sympathetic toward the vampire.)

Dracula in particular does nothing which reveals inner goodness or care for anyone but himself.[15] He represents practically every minority group Victorians feared, from foreigners with different religions and political ideas to women with a new attitude about their role in the household. He expresses no particular reason for his desire to overtake London, seeming to want to destroy society just for the fun of it. Dracula is therefore the perfect villain; it is easy to see why the character has survived and thrived for the past one hundred years.

After *Dracula*, vampire literature lay dormant for fifty years while vampire movies rose in popularity following the invention of the movie camera. Frederick Murnau's *Nosferatu, Eine Symphonie des Grauens* (1922)[16] is one of the earliest vampire movies to survive and is still regularly studied in film classes today. This German film was an unauthorized adaptation of Stoker's original novel, so Murnau changed locations and character names to avoid breaking copyright laws[17] (Melton 437). In 1931, Universal Studios produced *Dracula*, an authorized adaptation of the book starring Bela Lugosi. Lugosi's vampire, with his pale skin, slicked-back hair, and swirling black cape, enormously affected many subsequent depictions of the Count in film and television (Melton 177-9).

Vampires appeared mainly in cinema during the fifty years following *Dracula*, but that began to change in 1954 with the publication of Richard Matheson's novella *I Am Legend*. The

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[15] Francis Ford Coppola's *Bram Stoker's Dracula* tries to add this additional dimension to the character by making Mina the reincarnated form of Dracula's dead wife, therefore giving the Count some motivation for wanting to go to London.

[16] Translated as *Nosferatu: A Symphony of Horror*

[17] Stoker's widow still succeeded in destroying most copies of the film.

novella received mixed reviews during its initial print run but has increased in popularity with hindsight. In this story, vampires illuminate a 1950s American fear of isolation and the threat of nuclear devastation, and by the end of the novella, vampires become something to sympathize with rather than fear. This text documents the life of Robert Neville, believed to be the only person immune to bacteria which has turned the human populations into vampires. Over a period of three years in isolation, Neville spends each night being taunted by the vampires outside his barricaded house while he tries to find a vaccine to kill the bacteria, and he uses the daylight to roam around his town, gathering supplies and staking every vampire he can find. At the end of the story, Neville is captured by a group of vampires who have found a way to maintain their humanity by eliminating their need for blood. Neville discovers that he has become "legend" in the vampire community for his ruthless murder of harmless vampires during the day, and the story ends as Neville commits suicide so the vampires do not have the chance to put him on trial.

In the early 1950s when Matheson was writing *I Am Legend*, the United States was dwelling under the threatening cloud of nuclear war. After the end of World War II, relations between the United States and the Soviet Union deteriorated rapidly; the Soviet Union was hoping to expand its territory in Europe and Asia while the United States' goal was to help rebuild the areas of the continents that had been destroyed by WWII ("Cold War"). Because both countries possessed nuclear weapons, many people around the world feared that some event would cause one country to push a button and trigger nuclear war. Paranoia reigned, and people were afraid that their world could drastically and irrevocably change in a matter of seconds.

This idea, that life as we know it could change at the drop of a hat, is present throughout *I Am Legend*. Although Robert Neville never learns the ultimate cause of the vampire bacteria, it might be an effect of a "war" we learn about in flashback. Neville has a conversation with his wife, Virginia, about a new epidemic that is affecting the population at a national level. They speculate on the increase of mosquitoes (and whether or not they might be carriers), and Virginia wonders if the bugs' mutations are a result of "the bombings" which have been causing dust storms in the area (Matheson 56). Virginia asks Neville to tell her the newspaper highlights about the epidemic, and he says the government is blaming "[e]verything from germ warfare on down" for the disease (Matheson 57).

Neville himself does not blame the newly-finished war for the new epidemic, but during this flashback, Virginia begins to display the first symptoms of the disease. He has very little time to speculate about the cause of her illness since he has to spend all of his time caring for her and their daughter, who also becomes ill. Neville's entire neighborhood gets sick, including his carpool partner Ben Cortland, who later in the novel appears as Neville's main vampire tormenter. In the end, Neville has to kill his own wife and child who succumb to the disease and become vampires. After this, he is completely alone.

Robert Neville's life completely changes within a matter of a few months. He becomes the "last man on earth"[18], forced to live on his own in a society out to get him, not because of his politics, social class, or religion, but simply because he is a living human being with blood pumping through his veins. Ben Cortland's taunting shouts of "Come out, Neville!" (Matheson 18) do not really count as companionship. He has no one but himself to talk to, only his books

[18] This idea is picked up by two of the story's film adaptations; one movie starring Charlton Heston is called *The Omega Man* (1971), and another starring Vincent Price is simply titled *The Last Man on Earth* (1964).

and records for company. Neville is in solitary confinement like a high-security prisoner, but he has done nothing to deserve his punishment.

Fears of being isolated from everyone and everything you love are rampant in *I Am Legend*. This paranoia about being alone was a subject Matheson himself acknowledged in his early work. He has said that, in the years when he was starting a family, "[m]y theme … was of a man, isolated and alone, and assaulted on all sides by everything you could imagine" (Clasen 316).

Matheson effectively plays with the theme of isolation in *I Am Legend*. Throughout the novel, Neville searches for another person who is immune to the vampire virus. He knows that his chances of finding another survivor are incredibly small, but:

> [f]or always, in spite of reason, he had clung to the hope that someday he would find someone like himself – a man, a woman, a child, it didn't matter … Sometimes he indulged in daydreams about finding someone. More often, though, he had tried to adjust to what he sincerely believed was in the inevitable – that he was actually the only one left in the world. (Matheson 101)

Neville is realistic about his chances of ever finding a companion, but he holds out a tiny bit of hope that things will change.

This is why Neville is so happy, and wary, to discover two potential companions. First, Neville finds a dog; one day, after he has pledged to drink "till the end of time or the world's whisky supply, whichever came first" (Matheson 93), he stumbles outside to discover a scrawny dog walking on his lawn. When the dog runs away, Neville is devastated: "To come across a living being, after all this time to find a companion, and then to lose it. Even if it was only a dog. *Only* a dog? To Robert Neville that dog was the peak of a planet's evolution" (Matheson 94). Over a period of weeks, Neville feeds the dog, making him accustomed to the sound of his

voice, and hoping to tame him as a pet. Until one day, the dog shows up, and he is obviously sick.

Neville has grown accustomed to the dog, perhaps even grown to love this animal he has not been able to touch without frightening, and he cannot believe that this dog might now be dying, just when he found him. He captures the dog and takes him back to his house, hoping that the close proximity will ease their friendship. Finally, *finally* when the dog licks Neville's palm, he thinks things will be all right. But, in Matheson's straight-forward prose, we learn that "In a week the dog was dead" (Matheson 110).

After this point in the novella, Neville seems to resign himself to the fact that he will be alone for the rest of his life; if a dog cannot survive the vampire virus, there is no chance for anything else in the world. Hence, Neville thinks he is hallucinating when he sees a woman walking in the daylight. When he convinces himself that he has not had a mental break, he chases the woman down, hitting her in the face when she struggles with him. He asks, "What are you afraid of?" and Matheson tells us that "[h]e didn't realize that his voice was devoid of warmth, that it was the harsh, sterile voice of a man who had lost all touch with humanity" (Matheson 125). Separated for so long from human company, Neville seems just as monstrous as the vampires he is fighting against.

Neville believes this woman named Ruth is too good to be true, and he confirms his suspicions later in the novella when he tests her blood, only to find the vampire virus in her blood. Ruth is one of the "new" vampires who have found a way to live with the germ in the form of a pill they can take which lets them roam in the sunlight for limited amounts of time

and survive without drinking blood. They, like Neville, have found a way to live, and they are also trying to eliminate the "old" vampires who only exist to drain others of their blood.

But, Neville cannot tell the difference between the "old" and "new" vampires. Neville's isolation has prevented him from seeing the distinctions between the different races of vampires. He now sees his life as a battle between himself and the rest of the world, and he does not recognize that things can change. Since Neville cannot see these differences, the "new" vampires decide to kill him, just as he has killed so many of their kind. Neville has become the "other" in his new world, the "legend" that everyone else fears. In the end, Neville's isolation from the rest of the world becomes his undoing.

In *I Am Legend*, Matheson suggests that Neville is not that different from the vampires he fears and wants to eliminate:

> The vampires are at once sub-human and eerily like normal people: like Neville, who in various phases is driven by monomaniacal obsessions (for companionship, for survival, for knowledge), the vampires are driven by *their* basic needs … Matheson thus seems to suggest that the vampires are dangerously similar to normal human beings in certain respects (and vice versa). (Clasen 321)

Yes, the vampires throughout the majority of *I Am Legend* have only the desire to drink Neville's blood, but Neville's job throughout the novella is to mercilessly kill the "harmless" vampires during the daytime, regardless of whether or not they have personally attacked him. While Neville pines after his dead wife and longs for companionship (even from a mangy dog), he also has a bloodlust to kill the creatures surrounding his house at night, especially his former neighbor, Ben Cortland.

Matheson's work begins the shift from vampires as purely bloodthirsty killers to something more akin to the humans they once were. *I Am Legend* spends most of its page-length with the vampires in the background, focusing instead of Neville's fragile mental state and intense desire to find a cure for the virus. The vampires through the first three-quarters of the novella are what we would anticipate from a stereotypical text, only wanting to drink blood;[19] however, in the last quarter of the story when Ruth is introduced, vampires become more sympathetic. We feel for Ruth when she tells Neville that he has killed her family: "When I was first given the job of spying on you," she writes in a letter, "I had no feelings about your life. Because I *did* have a husband, Robert. You killed him." But then Ruth goes on to compare her situation with Neville's: "But now it's different. I know now that you were just as much forced into your situation as we were forced into ours" (Matheson 154), and she encourages him to flee his house before the "new" vampires can attack and kill him.

In this way, Matheson ultimately makes the vampires sympathetic monsters in *I Am Legend* unlike the pure evil of Lord Ruthven and Dracula. They were forced into their situation, just like Neville. None of them wanted to become creatures of the night; they were simply infected by bacteria and could not control their actions. On the other hand, Neville is a normal, relatively-sane human who slaughtered hundreds of the vampires while he was living in isolation. At the end of the novella, Neville is just as evil as the vampires, if you can call either species "evil." In this way, Matheson portrays the consequences of an imaginary nuclear was, playing on Cold War-American fears of isolation and the desolation of modern warfare.

[19] … and cannibalizing each other when they cannot get to Neville.

After the publication of *I Am Legend*, vampires began to once again increase in popularity. Hammer Films made and distributed a series of horror B-movies starring Christopher Lee as Count Dracula. These films, beginning with *Horror of Dracula* (1958), are sexualized, with Dracula's female victims appearing almost eager to be exsanguinated. Lee's Dracula was also more complex than other interpretations of the vampire: "… Lee developed Dracula as a complex human who had great positive qualities – leadership, charm, intelligence, and sensuality – coupled with a savage and ferocious streak that would lead to his eventual downfall. Dracula also had a tragic quality, his undead immortality" (Melton 360). The vampire's immortality becomes more undesirable for the creatures rather than something to look forward to. The public was no longer satisfied with vampires who were simply the villains; they wanted to know what made these monsters tick.

Anne Rice was more than happy to answer the public's call for complex vampires. In 1976, Rice published her first novel, *Interview with the Vampire*, the first book in an incredibly popular series called *The Vampire Chronicles*.[20] The novel plays on anxieties about religion and homosexuality, creating semi-sympathetic vampires who cannot escape the curse of immortality. *Interview* is told in the first person by our narrator, the vampire Louis. The novel's text is essentially an interview Louis gives to a young journalist in San Francisco. During the story's present, Louis is 200 years old, but he was only 25 when he was "turned" by the vampire Lestat. Forced to abandon his family and plantation, Louis lives with Lestat, questioning his existence and cursing his immortality. He simultaneously loves and hates Lestat, and their conflicted relationship dominates the story. By the end of the novel, Louis has abandoned

[20] Other books in the series include *The Vampire Lestat* (1985), *The Queen of the Damned* (1988), and *The Tale of the Body Thief* (1992) along with a half-dozen other novels.

Lestat and everyone else who loves him, and he roams the world alone, trying to find some meaning for his eternal existence.

The years leading up to the publication of *Interview with a Vampire* were a time of great change for Anne Rice. At the age of eighteen, Rice became an atheist after being raised in the Roman Catholic Church, partly because she was dating her future-husband, Stan, (a "passionate atheist") but also because she was free to read the books "forbidden" to her as a Catholic (Rice "Author's Note" 306).[21] Then, in 1972 when Anne and her husband were trying to make ends meet as writers, their five-year-old daughter died from adult leukemia ("Anne Rice Biography"). This was a devastating event in the couple's life, and it later had a direct impact on *Interview*'s plot through the character of Claudia, a young girl dying of the plague that Louis and Lestat turn into a vampire.

However, it is Rice's atheist beliefs that really come through in her first novel. *Interview* presents a world which questions religion, therefore causing anxiety for its main character (and its readers in turn). Louis is a vampire who constantly examines his place in society and doubts the existence of God in a world where vampires can exist. Before being turned into a vampire, Louis is a plantation owner with a brother who wants to become a priest. However, he begins to doubt his faith when his brother insists that he has received prophetic messages from God: "I was a Catholic; I believed in saints. I lit tapers before their statues in churches; I knew their pictures, their symbols, their names. But I didn't, couldn't believe my brother. Not only did I not believe he saw visions, I couldn't entertain the notion for a moment" (Rice 9). One day after

[21] Rice returned to Roman Catholicism in 2002, deciding to "consecrate her writing entirely to Christ." However, in the summer of 2010, Rice "quit" being a Christian because she refused to be "anti-gay…anti-feminist… anti-Democrat…anti-secular humanism…anti-science"; she currently believes in Christ but does not prescribe to one particular Christian denomination. (Flood)

having an argument with Louis, the brother falls down the stairs and breaks his neck. Louis blames himself for his brother's death, becoming listless and reckless with his own life.

This, Louis' reckless abandonment for his own life, is what attracts Lestat; he recognizes a weakness in Louis that he can mold and potentially exploit. In fact, Louis changes his attitude toward his existence and everything he believes almost immediately after being turned by Lestat:

> … the moment I saw [Lestat], saw his extraordinary aura and knew him to be no creature I'd ever known, I was reduced to nothing. That ego which could not accept the presence of an extraordinary human being in its midst was crushed. All my conceptions, even my guilt and wish to die, seemed utterly unimportant. I completely forgot *myself!* … And in the same instant knew totally the meaning of possibility. From then on I experienced only increasing wonder … I saw my life as if I stood apart from it, the vanity, the self-serving, the constant fleeing from one petty annoyance after another, the lip service to God and the Virgin and a host of saints whose names filled my prayer books, none of whom made the slightest difference in a narrow, materialistic, and selfish existence. (Rice 14)

This moment at the beginning of Louis' new vampire life is a complete turning point for him. Lestat becomes his teacher for this unfamiliar immortal form, his god and master in his new existence. Louis struggles with his faith for the rest of the novel, alternating between a complete doubt in God and the idea that he is damned for all eternity because of his vampiric nature.

Lestat himself is a creature who believes in nothing but the certainty of his own existence. He refers abstractly to God, but usually only while mocking Louis. For example, when Louis balks at drinking the blood of a child, Lestat explains:

> Evil is a point of view ... God kills, and so shall we; indiscriminately He takes the richest and the poorest, and so shall we; for no

> creatures under God are as we are, none so like Him as ourselves, dark angels not confined to the stinking limits of hell but wandering His earth and all its kingdoms. (Rice 88-9)

Lestat uses this rationale to kill arbitrarily and cruelly; he does not care if he drains a man, woman, or child, as long as he can get a filling meal out of their blood.

Louis hates himself and vampires in general because of this constant need for blood. He tries to live off the blood of other mammals instead of killing humans.[22] In fact, Lestat taunts him for his human-conserving ways, calling him a "whining coward of a vampire who prowls the night killing alley cats and rats" (Rice 51). But Louis is ultimately unsuccessful because human blood is simply more satisfying and thrilling than animal blood.

Louis recognizes himself as an "other," both within vampire society for his dislike of killing human beings, and society as a whole because he is an immortal. He feels like he does not fit in with either group, and he is not imagining this separation. Claudia and the vampires of a coven in Paris, the Theatre des Vampires, think Louis is strange for his dislike of killing humans. This, along with his constant brooding about his immortal fate, leave him alienated from both human and vampire worlds.

However, only part of Louis' angst comes from his new vampire status. At least part of his sorrow comes from his relationship with other vampires, something he cannot do without and yet something he hates with practically every fiber of his being. For a great portion of the novel, Louis lives with Lestat because he believes that Lestat has not told him all the "rules" about being a vampire. Lestat implies that there is some great secret about vampirism that

[22] This is similar to the "vegetarian" Cullen family vampires of the *Twilight* series by Stephenie Meyer who go on regular hunting trips in the woods to satiate their need for blood instead of draining human beings.

Louis has not yet learned, and he uses this mystery as a bargaining chip (and occasionally as a form of blackmail) through which he can spend Louis' money and have a constant companion.

Yet, Louis does not stay with Lestat for this reason alone. There is a chemistry, an attraction between the two which makes it practically impossible for Louis to leave. Although he often rages against Lestat in the narration, complaining about Lestat's vulgar and cruel methods of procuring (and draining) his victims, he does not abandon him until Claudia comes into his life. Claudia, the vampire-child created by Louis and Lestat for companionship,[23] grows to hate Lestat; she blames him for turning her into a vampire and leaving her an intelligent and mature adult stuck in the body of a five-year-old. So, she hatches a plot to kill Lestat, and Louis does not warn him because he loves Claudia, too. It takes a number of attempts to kill Lestat,[24] and Louis feels nothing but guilt after the act because he has abandoned and hurt his creator.

Lestat is a part of Louis since they had to exchange blood during the transformation process, and, as discussed earlier, Louis considers Lestat to be godlike. But, he also loves Lestat in a way that is more than platonic or servile. Like in the connection between the count and the various women throughout *Dracula*, the relationship between the vampire and his victims is usually portrayed in a romantic and erotic manner. *Interview with the Vampire* is no exception as the relationship between Louis and Lestat can easily be interpreted as a homoerotic one (although the two never seem to physically act on this dynamic).

The years leading up to the publication of *Interview with a Vampire* provide additional context for homoerotic overtones in the novel. The 1960s and the 1970s were revolutionary

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[23] …and perhaps something more on Louis' end – he is physically attracted to Claudia from the very beginning, and when she grows to be an adult in a child's body, there is a mutual love between the two that is never quite acted upon.

[24] Actually, Lestat never dies – he is just too weak to seek revenge on Claudia and Louis. Lestat reappears at the end of the novel when the San Francisco interviewer goes to search for him in New Orleans.

decades in the United States' history, marked by an overall sense of social activism. Protests for civil rights and against the Vietnam War were commonplace. The counterculture movement became popular, best known for its ideas of "free love" and experimentation with recreational drugs.

During this period, the gay liberation movement was also held a large part of the public consciousness. In June of 1969, a police raid on a gay bar in New York City sparked the movement because, "[i]nstead of acquiescing in the raid, the bar's patrons fought back, battling the police with bricks, bottles, and shards of broken glass. Three days of civil disobedience followed" (Minsk). This incident brought attention to the gay and lesbian civil rights cause, and it led to a unified front for the movement. In turn, this new sense of community encouraged many people who had previously kept their homosexuality hidden to "come out of the closet" and be proud of their sexual orientation. However, homophobia was still incredibly widespread,[25] just like in the present day, so it would be many years before the gay community gained widespread support from the general United States population.

It seems natural that homoerotic overtones would creep into *Interview with a Vampire* based on the context of the time period, and the novel seems to pick up on American society's general homophobia. At this point in her life, Rice was living in the San Francisco Bay area, a part of the United States known for gay pride ("Anne Rice Biography"). It cannot be a coincidence that Rice chose to set the story's present in San Francisco. But, the most overt tones of homosexuality occur during the interactions between Louis and Lestat and, later, Louis and Armand.

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[25] See the 1978 assassination of Harvey Milk, a San Francisco man who was the first openly-gay man elected to public office as an example.

Rice's language choice from the very beginning of Louis and Lestat's relationship has homoerotic insinuations. Although Louis recognizes the older vampire's beauty from the very beginning, his descriptions become more intense when they exchange blood. Lestat sits next to Louis with "movement so graceful and so personal that at once it made me think of a lover" (Rice 18); when Lestat speaks, Louis recalls that "the movement of his lips raised the hair all over my body, sent a shock of sensation through my body that was not unlike the pleasure of passion" (Rice 19); finally, when Lestat realizes he does not have a second coffin for Louis to sleep in, he commands Louis, "…you will get in on top of me if you know what's good for you" (Rice 25).

Rice's word choice is deliberate, and this is not the only time Louis uses amorous language to describe a male vampire. In the second half of the novel, Louis meets Armand, the leader of Paris' Theatre des Vampires, a coven of vampires who incorporate their victims into their nightly shows while an adoringly-ignorant human audience cheers on the proceedings. Armand barely tolerates the coven's methods, only staying with them because he has nowhere else to go. But, when Louis comes to Paris, Armand is willing to abandon his family in order to travel with him.

Four-hundred-year-old Armand is a response to Louis' prayers; he has answers to many of the questions Louis had been asking about the existence of God. Armand tells him that, in all of his years, he has never found evidence for any kind of deity, never mind the Christian god. He explains that there are gradations of evil, and he makes Louis realize that he must treasure every moment of his life because there is nothing afterwards (Rice 235-9). All the while during their emotional discussion, Armand expresses his attraction to Louis; he touches Louis on the

arm, holds his face in his hands when he is in despair, begs him to come back when he leaves the room.

Louis feels more than an intellectual attraction to Armand. He finds himself constantly looking at Armand, ignoring everything else in the room and feeling "a longing for him so strong that it took all my strength to contain it, merely to sit there gazing at him, fighting it" (Rice 254). Louis claims that his love is not physical and is instead the love a student has for a teacher who will not deny knowledge (unlike Lestat). But Armand (and the reader) knows better; he tells Louis, "… I want you. I want you more than anything in the world … You want this of me, yet you don't come to me … There are things you want to know, and you don't ask" (Rice 282).

Claudia immediately recognizes the newfound relationship between Louis and Armand. When the Theatre des Vampires coven starts to suspect them of murdering Lestat, she confronts Louis, telling him that she knows he will abandon her if he has to choose between her and Armand: "You would leave me for Armand if he beckoned to you … You would leave me, and he wants you as you want him. He's been waiting for you … He loves you. He would have you, and he would not have me stand in the way" (Rice 249-50). And this is what ultimately happens, since Armand chooses to first rescue Louis when he and Claudia are imprisoned by the coven for killing Lestat, and Claudia combusts in the sunlight.

In the end, Louis burns down the Theatre des Vampires in revenge for Claudia's second-death and travels around the world with Armand for a few years. But, Louis is depressed after the fire and his revelations with Armand about God, good, and evil; he tells Armand that their love "was impossible from the beginning, because you cannot have love and goodness when you do what you know to be evil, what you know to be wrong. You can only have the desperate

confusion and longing and the chasing of phantom goodness in its human form" (Rice 336). With this speech, Armand recognizes that Louis is completely different from who he thought he was, and he cannot stand to live with another vampire who has grown to hate him almost as much as he hated Lestat. So he leaves Louis because they cannot be together, and this is where Louis' interview with the San Francisco boy ends.

The homoerotic relationships in *Interview with the Vampire* are what have most interested readers and scholars since the novel's publication. Specifically, Louis' descriptions of the other male vampires in his life, combined with his inability to actually connect with those vampires, have received a lot of speculation. Because American society in general is still uncomfortable with the reality of homosexuality, *Interview*'s homoerotic overtones and Louis' inability to act on his desires reflects our culture's anxiety and homophobic tendencies.[26]

George E. Haggerty reads *Interview* and the rest of the Vampire Chronicles series as a discussion about the hidden desires of society. In this reading, vampires represent the sexual "other" in culture, the man with non-heterosexual yearnings. In his essay "Anne Rice and the Queering of Culture," Haggerty writes, "I think Rice's vampires express our culture's secret desire for and secret fear of the gay man; the need to fly with him beyond the confines of heterosexual convention and bourgeois family life to an exploration of unauthorized desires…" (6). He points to Rice's readers' love for Lestat, arguably her most popular character, as an example. According to Haggerty, Lestat is "our culture's prototypical gay predator," and we as readers are attracted to him because he "takes his prey with a lusty abandon that fulfills – I mean violates – every cultural taboo" (5).

[26] Even the 1994 movie adaptation starring Brad Pitt as Louis and Tom Cruise as Lestat practically omitted that entire dynamic.

Lestat is such a popular character because he breaks society's rules, but he and the other vampires in the novel cannot go unpunished for this violation of our culture's mores: Lestat is poisoned, incinerated, and has his throat slit throughout the course of the novel; Armand, for all his wisdom, is abandoned by the person he loves the most; and Louis can never be satisfied with his life, even when he is surrounded by people who love him. For the most part, they are all sympathetic creatures, but they have traits which the reader (and the author) cannot forgive. As Haggerty writes, Rice loves her vampires:

> … their bravado and their contempt for convention; their physicality and their sensuousness; their love for one another as well as their hatred. But she also makes them easy to loathe: they avoid the kinds of commitments that make human beings human; they betray human relations with the kiss of everlasting life that is death itself; they slip among, between, even within ordinary mortals and bring them grief. Their pleasure is finally narcissistic, and narcissism is performed without abandon … (Haggerty 14).

Rice must punish these characters for pushing society's boundaries and disobeying all its rules because that is what is expected of creatures that have these types of traits. Rice is the god of her story, punishing her vampires even though she loves them at the same time.

In general, vampire literature during the 1950s to 1980s had transitioned to a position where the vampires could be sympathized with. But, they were still monsters who needed to be punished for breaking the rules of society, whether that involved drinking the blood of their victims or desiring a vampire of the same sex. We are "induced to sympathize with his suffering, not with his appetites" (Byrne 176), unlike Lord Ruthven or Dracula who we never pity. At the end of *I Am Legend* and *Interview with the Vampire*, we feel bad for the vampires, but we still cannot forgive them for who they have killed and their poor decisions during the stories.

In the present day, vampire literature has taken another step, creating vampires who we sympathize with more than the human characters in the novels. Vampires become the victims of human cruelty in these stories, serving as a way to point out the faults in our society and encouraging the need for change. Charlaine Harris' *Southern Vampire* series and its television counterpart, *True Blood*, are perhaps the most popular example of this evolution.

The first book in the *Southern Vampire* series, *Dead Until Dark*, was published in 2001 and quickly earned a devoted fan-base. It is told in the first-person by narrator Sookie Stackhouse, a telepathic waitress from a rural town in Louisiana that is all abuzz about its first vampire resident, Bill Compton. In this world, vampires have just made their existence known to the general public due to the creation of a Japanese synthetic blood which negates the need to drink from living humans. As Sookie grows to know (and become romantically involved) with Bill, her town of Bon Temps is shaken by a series of murders linked to vampires. This is also the basis for the first season of Alan Ball's HBO series *True Blood*.

In *Dead Until Dark*, vampires are most obviously symbolic of the homosexual community, though Harris also uses the undead to represent other minority populations as needed. Because vampires explicitly represent minorities, they become something that can easily be pitied more than the narrow-minded humans in the novel. To anyone living in the United States today, the symbolism in the series is particularly apparent. Although the United States has come a long way since the civil rights disputes of the 1950s to 1970s, the biggest issue today still involves the rights of homosexual couples, specifically the right to a marriage recognized by the government, along with the same legal rights as heterosexual couples. The gay marriage issue has affected political action, becoming one of the hot topics during election-

time debates and, in some cases, splitting individual states into factions when gay marriage comes to a vote.[27] *Dead Until Dark,* and especially *True Blood,* plays on these issues, particularly in the television series' depiction of a spokeswoman for the American Vampire League who regularly appears on cable news programs to advocate for vampire rights.

Vampires in this universe stand for the groups that the majority population fears and hates for no justifiable reason – the people who are discriminated against just because of the color of their skin or their sexual orientation. On the first page of the novel, Sookie describes her excitement about meeting a vampire: "Ever since vampires had come out of the coffin (as they laughingly put it) two years ago, I'd hoped one would come to Bon Temps. We had all the other minorities in our little town—why not the newest, the legally recognized undead?" (Harris 1). The opening credits to the show *True Blood* make this connection even clearer as the sequence cuts from images of the backwoods South to those of an outdoor bulletin board with the message "God hates Fangs" and little kids in Ku Klux Klan outfits ("Strange Love"). As J.M. Tyree emphasizes about *True Blood*, "it's about tolerance and integration of many kinds using the vitriolic American debate over gay marriage as a touchstone while linking it with the Southern reaction against civil rights" (32).

Many of the vampires in *Dead Until Dark* are working to eliminate the prejudices in place against them by the United States' general population. Bill himself tries to "mainstream," or survive primarily off the synthetic blood while interacting with living humans. He hires Bon Temps workmen to renovate his house, and he speaks at a meeting of the Descendants of the Glorious Dead about his experience during the American Civil War in order to build a rapport

[27] See Proposition 8 in California as an example of state legislation which split the state, and eventually the country, into two sides: pro-Prop 8 (anti-same-sex marriage) and anti-Prop 8 (pro-same-sex marriage).

with his fellow townspeople. Others like Eric, a vampire who was changed during the time of the Vikings, mainstream by opening a bar which caters to vampires and fang-bangers, "[m]en and women that hang around with vampires and enjoy being bitten" (Harris 22). Mainstreaming vampires desire the same civil rights as humans, including the ability to vote in elections and marry whoever they please.

Not all vampires are looking to mainstream into human culture, and this is where much of the conflict in *Dead Until Dark* comes from. The synthetic blood substitute provides the nutrition vampires need to survive, but it does not entirely satisfy their hunger for human blood. This leads some vampires to take blood unwillingly from human victims, occasionally using their innate "glamour" to make their targets forget about the incident. These vampires believe that their immortality and great strength makes them superior to humans, forgetting that they were once human themselves.

Since the negative actions of one person nearly always overshadow the positive action of a hundred other people,[28] this vampiric behavior in turn leads to increased prejudice on the part of living humans. The course of the novel deals with these subsequent attacks against vampires. In the opening pages of the novel, Sookie rescues Bill from the Rattray couple, two "drainers" who bleed a vampire for its blood's ability to "temporarily relieve symptoms of illness and increase sexual potency" (Harris 6). Drainers are known for taking a vampire's blood and either staking it or leaving it to combust in the sunlight after weakening it. Later, a mob of Bon Temps citizens torch a house in the middle of the morning, killing the four vampires inside.

[28] Take for example the reaction to Muslims (or anyone who looked Muslim) immediately following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. Even though the attacks were performed by a tiny militant sect of the Islamic religion, all Muslims became suspected of the potential for other terrorist actions.

Later books in the *Southern Vampire* series feature the Fellowship of the Sun, a fundamentalist Christian group that kills vampires in the name of God.

The most powerful example of vampire hatred in *Dead Until Dark* is in the character of Rene Lenier. Sookie believes that Rene is her friend throughout the course of the novel, but she discovers at the end that Rene is responsible for the murders in Bon Temps. Rene kills women linked to vampires; three of his victims are women who had sex with vampires and allowed them to drink their blood, and he kills Sookie's grandmother because she gets in the way of his plan to kill Sookie herself. Sookie learns that Rene's psychosis stems from his disgust for his sister, a fang-banger who preferred the company of vampires to her relationship with her brother. Rene murders her and then proceeds to do the same to other women in his community who have a sexual connection with vampires.

Although vampires are not entirely peaceable in *Dead Until Dark*, their violence is justified compared to the actions of Rene or the Rattrays. Early on in the novel, Bill kills the Rattray couple; however, Bill only dispatches the couple after they have nearly beaten Sookie to death in revenge for meddling with their plans. Bill's actions save Sookie's life, especially when he allows her to drink his blood so she can heal. He resorts to violence at other points in the novel, most notably when he kills Sookie's uncle who molested her as a child. But, in this case Sookie becomes angry with Bill, telling him, "I can't have you trying to fine-tune my day-to-day life. I'm gonna get mad at people, people are gonna get mad at me. I can't worry about them being killed. I can't live like that" (Harris 166).

In both of these instances, Bill asserts that he only hurt humans because he was protecting Sookie. Bill tells Sookie about how his human nature affected his method of survival

during his early days as a vampire: "I had been a good man when I was alive—I mean, before I caught the virus. So I tried to be civilized about it, select bad people as my victims, never feed on children. I managed never to kill a child, at least" (Harris 49). Later in the series, Bill also reveals his origin story: he was on the way home after the end of the Civil War, and when he stopped at a woman's house to gain shelter for the night, she attacked him, revealing her true vampire nature and changing him. He did not decide to become immortal; it was forced upon him. Although Bill can be cruel at times, his violence in the novel is always justified by his desire to protect himself or Sookie. His violence has more of a purpose than the simple desire to feed.

*Dead Until Dark* emphasizes that both humans and vampires can be evil and do evil things. When Bill first meets Sookie, she is not afraid of him, and Bill reminds her that, just because she saved him from the Rattrays, "Vampires often turn on those who trust them." Sookie, in a surprising burst of wisdom, responds, "A lot of humans turn on those who trust them" (Harris 12). Later, when the people of Bon Temps are suspicious of Bill simply because of his association with other, meaner vampires, Sookie remarks that "Vampires are just as different among themselves as humans are" (Harris 135). Likewise, there are humans in *Dead Until Dark* who try to protect Sookie while there are others who want to kill her for her private relationship with a vampire.

Vampires in this series represent what the majority of society defines as different, and as such they show what humans irrationally fear about minority groups. The book and television series rebel against conservatism, a resistance to change with the belief that change can lead to the detriment of society. Instead, they advocate progressivism where change is a

force for good in society. *Dead Until Dark* asserts that change is necessary for the evolution of society, and that people who oppose those changes are close-minded.

As J.M. Tyree writes about the first season of *True Blood*, the show "manages to broach an unusual kind of horror, that inflicted *on* and not by vampires" (34). *Dead Until Dark* and *True Blood* posit that humans have the ability to become monsters without undergoing a metamorphosis. The series demonstrates that a person is not necessarily born bad but still has the capacity for evil, depending on the circumstances around them and the influence of past events on the present. The potential for evil is within all of us, lurking just beneath the surface and waiting for something to trigger it.

If vampires in *Dead Until Dark* stress an unfounded fear of minority groups, then the vampires of John Ajvide Lindqvist's Swedish novel *Let the Right One In* (2004) demonstrate the terrible potential consequences of a general deterioration of society, both on a physical and on a moral level. This erosion of society is apparent through the story of Oskar, a preteen boy who is the constant victim of overly-cruel bullies. His parents are divorced, and his mother never seems to connect her son's cuts and bruises with trouble at school. Things change for Oskar when a girl named Eli moves in next door, and a unique friendship blossoms between the two, even when Eli reveals her true identity: she is a vampire and a boy, castrated during her rebirth by her vampire-maker.[29]

The idea of the deterioration of Swedish society does not fit the mold of our idealized vision of the peaceable Swedes. However, the stereotype of gorgeous, blonde supermodel citizens is slowly being plowed under by literature coming out of the country over the past 10

[29] For the sake of this paper, I will refer to Eli as a male even though Eli is seen as a girl through most of the novel.

years. The *Wallander* series by Henning Mankell depicts an aging detective who cannot prevent the brutal crimes committed in his small town, and Steig Larsson's *Millennium* trilogy shows Stockholm's seedy underbelly of sex trafficking and governmental corruption. Similarly, *Let the Right One In*, set in the 1980s, shows the general sense of social decay present throughout this time:

> During this period, Sweden was in a state of economic decline at the same time that the tax burden for workers was reaching eighty percent. Late Cold War tensions were keenly felt in a country so geographically close to the Soviet Union. Both the United States and the U.S.S.R. had a substantial naval presence in the Baltic, and in 1981, a Soviet nuclear submarine ran aground in Swedish territorial waters—an event that serves as a backdrop to Lindqvist's novel. (Calhoun 27)

This historical background provides context for the foreboding feeling lurking under the surface throughout *Let the Right One In*.

Even though *Dead Until Dark* tends to portray humans in a negative light, *Let the Right One In* takes this dynamic to a greater extreme. Almost every living human in the novel is malicious in one way or another, and most of this cruelty is not even directed toward Eli, the vampire. Instead, the human characters in the book act malevolently toward each other.

For example, Oskar is constantly bullied by other children at his school. In the novel's opening pages, Oskar hides in the bathroom after class because he had answered a question in class, "a declaration of existence, a claim that he knew something. And that was forbidden to him. They could give a number of reasons for why they had to torment him; he was too fat, too ugly, too disgusting. But the real problem was simply that he existed, and every reminder of his existence was a crime" (Lindqvist 10). His resulting beating is the mildest of the examples in the novel. On another occasion after trying to avoid a beating, one of Oskar's former friends whips

him across the cheek with a wooden switch, cutting into his skin. In one particularly scary incident, the boys try to push Oskar into a frozen lake before he fights back, hitting one of the bullies in the ear with a stick and deafening him. Of course, this crime cannot go unpunished, and the film's climax takes place at a pool where the boy's brother tells Oskar he must hold his breath underwater for five minutes (an impossible task) or have his eye gashed out. Eli saves Oskar, the only person to intervene throughout all the bullying in the novel.

Interestingly, both of the novel's film adaptations do not shy away from portraying this bullying. The 2008 Swedish version directed by Tomas Alfredson and the 2010 American remake *Let Me In* directed by Matt Reeves both make the violence on screen during these scenes cringe-worthy, especially when adults nearby are oblivious to what's going on. By the end of each movie, the audience is actually relieved when Eli violently steps in to stop the bullies (once and for all):

> The torment he undergoes at the hands of the boys at school is unusually violent, easily making the point that monstrous children can come in forms other than the supernatural variety. Only Eli (certainly not Oskar's hopeless parents) seems equipped, or even willing, to protect him, and her rescue takes on a form that in any stable society would be defined as cruel and unusual. (Calhoun 31)

Because Eli is Oskar's only defender, Oskar's tolerance of her undead nature and need for blood is understandable.

Although *Let the Right One In* is a very child-centric story, adults are also important to the novel's stress on the deterioration of society. Nearly every adult character is unlikeable, from the group of alcoholics who meet at a Chinese restaurant every night to complain about how the world has changed to Håkan, the pedophilic old man who lives with Eli. Håkan knows

the truth about Eli, both in regards to her gender and vampiric nature; he bargains with Eli throughout the novel, offering to go and get blood for him in exchange for the possibility of sexual favors.[30]

These adults seem awful, but perhaps the worst adults in *Let the Right One In* are Oskar's parents. Unlike Håkan, they do not do anything outwardly malicious, but they are totally oblivious to the beatings their son receives on a regular basis. Oskar lives with his mother, and she never questions the outward signs of abuse on Oskar's body. She cares more about if he is wearing a hat when he goes outside instead of where he is actually going. As for his dad, since Oskar's parents are divorced, his father can be forgiven for not knowing about the bullying. However, Oskar's dad has other issues which label him as a neglectful parent. On the infrequent occasions when Oskar is able to visit his father, their visit is always disrupted by the arrival of his father's friend. This means that the bottle comes out and his father starts to drink:

> He never got violent or anything. But what Oskar saw in his eyes at those times was the absolutely scariest thing he had ever seen. Then there was no trace of Dad left. Just a monster who had somehow crawled into his dad's body and taken control of it. The person his dad became when he drank had no connection to the person he was when he was sober. And so it was comforting to think about Dad being a werewolf. That he in fact contained a whole other person in his body. Just as the moon brought out the wolf in a werewolf, so alcohol brought this creature out of his dad. (Lindqvist 256)

Oskar wishes that his dad were a traditional monster instead of a metaphorical one because that would at least rationalize his behavior. When this happens in the novel, he actually leaves and catches a bus back to his mom's house, all without his father noticing.

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[30] It is fitting that Håkan turns into a true monster by the end of the book when he dies while Eli is draining him; he becomes a mindless vampire-zombie hybrid whose only goal is to be sexually satisfied by Eli.

This parental neglect is perfectly illustrated in the film *Let Me In*. Owen (the American version of Oskar) lives with his mother, and we never actually see her face full-on throughout the course of the film. In some segments, director Matt Reeves shot the scene so that the mother's head is chopped off by the top of the frame. In other scenes, we see the mother from a distance, calling to Owen from the apartment's balcony or crying on the couch in the living room. The only glimpse we ever get of her face is a reflection in a windowpane. Owen's father is entirely absent as the parents are in the middle of a messy divorce. We only hear his voice on the phone where he is usually yelling at his wife. During the one conversation he has with Owen, he essentially asks to speak to the mother and has no real interest in talking to his son. None of the other adults in the film are framed this way, so Reeves really drives home the theme of parental neglect from the source material.

Without a doubt, both of Oskar's parents are inattentive, bordering on abusive. They do not mean to be oblivious to everything going on in his life, but this inattention definitely has an effect on Oskar. As John Calhoun writes, "here we see how adult failure produces not just childish victims, but monsters" (28), since Oskar himself has the potential to be a truly evil person. From the beginning of the novel, Oskar dreams of getting revenge against the boys at school. He steals a hunting knife from a store and practices stabbing a tree, taunting his imaginary victim with the same language the bullies use against him ("Go on, squeal like a pig") (Lindqvist 36). He also hides a scrapbook in his room that he fills with newspaper clippings about murders in Sweden and abroad; he thinks that one of his dreams is "to see someone executed in the electric chair" (Lindqvist 18).

This is our introduction to Oskar in the novel; he is a boy who, with the right motivation and a little bit of courage, could become like the serial killers he idolizes in his scrapbook. Later in the novel when Oskar is disgusted by Eli's need to kill people, Eli turns Oskar's own activities against him. Eli first met Oskar when he was attacking the tree, and he makes him admit that he would kill the bullies at his school if he could get away with it; Eli replies, "And that would be simply for your own enjoyment. Your revenge. I do it because I have to. There is no other way" (Lindqvist 351).

This is what distinguishes Eli from the other monsters in the novel. He murders people because he needs their blood in order to survive. He, like Bill in *Dead Until Dark*, did not choose to become a vampire,[31] and he hates every part of his immortality. Eli's monstrous acts, the half-dozen murders he performs for food throughout the course of the novel and the massacre at the swimming pool, are all done in order to survive or save the person he loves. On the other hand, Oskar would commit murder if he was given the chance, and the boys at school are bullies simply because there is no one to stop them. While it makes sense for Oskar to want to defend himself, the extreme measures he would be willing to take are practically unforgiveable. In this way, the human Oskar is nearly more of a monster than the vampire Eli.

Although the living humans in *Let the Right One In* are not creatures who go bump in the night, they are monsters all the same. Their innate tendency toward violence, in the case of Oskar, Håkan, and the school bullies, or physical and emotional neglect, like that of Oskar's parents, shows a capacity for malicious behavior present in humankind. Like in *Dead Until Dark*,

[31] As he shows Oskar in flashback, Eli was turned into a vampire when, as a child, he was the sacrificial victim to the shadowy ruler of his village, a creature who turns out to be a member of the undead. This vampire castrates Eli and then makes him immortal.

Lindqvist asserts that the capacity for evil is present within everyone, but *Let the Right One In* implies that this evil bubbles to the surface more often than not. In this way, the novel becomes a cautionary tale; we are not sure if the degradation of society is caused by the actions of its malicious residents or if the problems with the people are a symptom of a contaminated culture, but the results are frightening in any case.

While vampires have always represented what society fears the most, their relationship to society has evolved since their first popular inception in Polidori's short story. During the 1800s, the bloodsuckers were monsters that existed solely to ruin the lives of the innocent humans around them; they are purely evil, delighting in the misfortunes of others and causing tragedy whenever possible. Then, vampires became more sympathetic characters in the mid-1900s, and the living humans around them alternately became less innocent. Yet, the vampires were still the ultimate villains of their story because their hideous actions could not be forgiven. However, in today's literature, vampires become the true victims of their stories; while they still commit heinous crimes, they are more a product of their environment, unable to completely forsake their bloodthirsty nature that was forced upon them. Humans become the real villains of these stories, doing evil things to the vampires and to each other simply because they want to.

Vampires touch on something in the public consciousness. They have been consistently popular in literature and film for the past two-hundred-and-fifty years, a feat that few other characters have matched. Maybe it is because of what they represent to the ever-changing public eye, but perhaps it is because of the nature of the creatures themselves. They are and always have been outsiders on the fringe of society, not that different from the humans they

prey upon. They can teach us about our treatment of real, living people today, and this is why vampires have survived for decades. They reappear unexpectedly in the literary sphere like they do in the novels themselves. Just when you think they're dead, they come back for more.

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