

THE HOMOSEXUAL VAMPIRE AS A METAPHOR FOR ... THE HOMOSEXUAL VAMPIRE?: *TRUE BLOOD* HOMONORMATIVITY AND ASSIMILATION

Darren Elliot-Smith

The figure of the vampire in modern culture, like the homosexual, has arguably been so thoroughly assimilated into mainstream dominant culture that it has begun to take on normative traits, becoming conventional and even banal. Like many contemporary gay men within Western society, however, the vampires of *True Blood* are simultaneously tolerated and yet intolerable. In a world in which assimilation seems to be the order of the day, with vampires, humans and other supernatural types trying to *fit in*, the opening titles contain a visual reference to an illuminated church billboard with 'God hates fangs' emblazoned upon it. This tongue-in-cheek pun (referencing the religious intolerance of the Westboro Baptist Church and their 'God hates fags' banners) suggests a knowing critique of the tensions in mainstream, conservative America around the assimilation of gay men and lesbians into the heteronormative (heterosexual, monogamous, procreative) culture. While *True Blood's* representation of the vampire as a metaphor for Othered minorities (ethnic, gendered and sexual) is clear, their wish to 'come out' and live openly alongside humans also questions what happens to the vampire-as-metaphor (for homosexuality) in a text in which homosexuality is rendered explicit. I want to suggest that in such cases, the figure of the vampire further critiques gay and lesbian subcultures

by highlighting the dead 'homo-ness' of a (non-)conformist gay culture.

Out of the Crypt: Gay Male Vampires

Ellis Hanson suggests that the vampire in popular culture historically reflects and provokes 'homosexual panic', but this is not restricted to infection (in relation to the AIDS crisis, for example): 'AIDS has helped to concretise a mythical link between gay sex and death [but] I have a suspicion that notions of death have been at the heart of nearly every historical construction of same sex desire' (Hanson 1991, 324). Vampiric symbolism is also evident in media representations of gay men suffering with AIDS, an iconography that has escaped from the generic confines of the horror film or Gothic literature and been mapped onto the AIDS documentary for example. This is not new, however, and gay men have always been stigmatized as vampiric, or as Hanson says 'as sexually exotic, alien, unnatural, oral, anal, compulsive, violent, protean, polymorphic, polyvocal, polysemous, invisible, soulless, transient, superhumanly mobile, infectious, murderous, suicidal, and a threat to wife, children, home and phallus' (Hanson 1991, 325). Hanson's all-encompassing, yet seemingly exclusive list of queer tropes fixes the vampire as a liminal, ambiguous and elusive creature that is unnameable whilst also presenting a recognizable set of behaviours. Indeed, his analysis of Stoker's *Dracula* sets out Renfield as a 'homosexual hysteric' seduced and 'transfixed' by the monstrously erotic gaze of his vampiric master. Hanson extrapolates this point, arguing that it is 'extremely important to avoid the gaze of the gay man for fear of being seduced (or recognizing oneself in the Other)' (Hanson, 1991, 329). In his discussion of the lack of identification offered to him as a gay male spectator of vampire cinema, Hanson refers to the Hammer vampire films and those of the early 1980s as providing a 'heterosexualized' space 'in which the revenant as sexual deviant is neither to be identified with nor desired ... the polymorphous is again relegated to its familiar abjected space'

(Hanson 1991, 330). In offering identification with gay and polymorphous vampires, *True Blood* directly addresses this lack in popular culture.

Richard Dyer also considers the vampire within literature and film as a metaphorical representation of homosexuality (Dyer 1988, 51). He argues that Gothic literature and film since John Polidori's short story *The Vampyre* (1819) onwards displays cultural attitudes towards nineteenth- and twentieth-century gay and lesbian identities. There are, however, explicit representations of the gay male vampire. Dyer references Karl Heinrich Ulrich's influential short story *Manor* (1885), the erotic vampire imagery in Adolf Brand's gay male magazine *Berlin*, 'Count Steenbok's The Story of a Vampire' first published in 1894 and its reproduction in 1970's 'bisexual magazine' *Jeremy*. Anne Rice's cult novels *Interview with the Vampire* (1973) and *The Vampire Lestat* (1985) also foreground the desire for homosexual companionship and love in their depiction of romantic same sex vampire couplings between centuries-old Lestat and his reluctant companion Louis. In the same vein, Poppy Z. Brite's short story *And His Mouth Will Taste of Wormwood* (1995) perpetuates the bacchanalian bloodlust of historical gay male vampires in New Orleans and her gay vampire novel *Lost Souls* (1992) centres upon human/vampire hybrid Ghost and his desire to formulate an alternative but ultimately self-destructive family unit of queer¹ vampires.

Although the gay male vampire is not a central figure in Charlaïne Harris's *Sookie Stackhouse Mysteries*, the novels and Alan Ball's adaptation of the series metaphorically depict the marginalization of an 'outed' vampire race attempting to assimilate into North American culture – drawing obvious parallels with various minority groups, including racial minorities as well as homosexuals. Harris has been forthright in her confirmation of the stories' subtextual references to gay tolerance in the Deep South. 'Definitely, there's a subtext to the books about tolerance,' she says. 'I think the obvious parallel is between vampires and the gay community. I'm sure that any group that's experienced exclusionism could identify with that' (quoted

in Forman, 2008). *True Blood's* success, however, is due (at least in part) to the series' frankness about its human and vampire characters' sexualities. In *True Blood*, abject Otherness is both assimilated and revelled in. The vampire Other not only stands as metaphor for symbolic homosexuality but is also literalized in the plethora of *outed* gay vampire and human characters. If *True Blood* is indeed a text in which the representation of vampirism/homosexuality is both literal and metaphoric, then what purpose does the symbolic serve? I want to argue that in representing an assimilative homonormativity, the show ceases to offer the same essentialist threat to heteronormativity that the metaphorical vampire-as-homosexual might once have done. Rather, *True Blood* is *performing* a 'bisexual, sexually exotic, polymorphic and polysemous' (Hanson 1991, 325) threat that is no longer exclusive to the homosexual subject.

The alternative sexuality of the vampiric characters in *True Blood* is evident. In the episode 'Mine' (1.3), gay vampire Malcolm taunts seemingly chaste central vampire Bill Compton, alluding to his erotic enjoyment of human victims of both genders. Bon Temps' vampire sheriff Eric Northman possesses an erotic and emotional connection to his centuries-old, but perpetually adolescent, maker Godric, not to mention demonstrating a fluid performative sexuality in satisfying his own and other's polymorphous sexual desires (including the bourgeois, gay King of Mississippi Russell Edgington and his male companion Talbot). Domesticated vampire Eddie ('The Fourth Man in the Fire', 1.8) is a reclusive, closeted, gay couch-potato vampire hired by queer cook and male escort Lafayette (arguably *True Blood's* most unassimilated character) for sex in return for his potent blood (referred to as 'V'), which Lafayette sells to V-addicts on the black market. In season three, the inclusion of the queer couple Russell and Talbot, the development of Lafayette's love life with his mother's carer, male witch Jesus Velasquez, the lesbian Vampire Queen Sophie-Anne (who has a same-sex relationship with Sookie's cousin Hadley) and the deliciously arch Pam, Eric's queer progeny, have further established the series' unabashed presentation of homosexuality.

Monstrous Metaphors: The Queerness of Vampires

For Richard Dyer, the figure of the vampire encodes 'how people thought and felt about lesbians and gay men – how others have thought about us, and how we have thought and felt about ourselves' (Dyer 1988, 51). He confirms the vampire's nature as shape-shifting metaphor for societal anxieties, including the parasitic aristocracy and capitalists who live off the poor and the proletariat, the ancient past reaching into the present, exotic Europeanism (and indeed any foreign culture) and the threat it poses towards Western (particularly American) culture. Much of Dyer's understanding of the vampire's alternative sexuality need not automatically render it an exclusively *homosexual* monster, 'many of the other meanings are articulated through the sexual meanings' (Dyer 1988, 54). However, he reads the vampire's inherent potential for homosexuality through the obvious sexual dynamic in the breaching of the private physical and symbolic spaces. Seduction, attack and feeding usually occur in private, specifically in the bedroom:

It is at night when we are alone in our beds that the vampire classically comes to call. ... Equally it is one of the contentions of the history of sexuality developed by Michel Foucault, Jeffrey Weeks and others, that we live in an age which considers the sexual to be ... the most private of things. (Dyer 1988, 56)

For the purposes of his argument, Dyer draws further parallels between the idea of vampiric secrecy and the closet: 'Being lesbian/gay is something one must keep to oneself. [It] accords with the idea of the authenticity of private sexuality, but it is also something one must keep to oneself if one is not to lose job, family, friends etc.' (1988, 57). Yet despite the vampire's closeted secrecy in traditional vampire narratives, the monster is usually revealed by the recognition of widely acknowledged 'traits' or 'tell-tale signs'. Dyer points out the contradictory nature of the vampire narrative in relation to 'secrecy'. On the one hand, vampirism

(sexual orientation) ‘doesn’t show, you can’t tell who is and who isn’t by just looking, but on the other hand there ... are tell-tale signs that someone “is” and usually this leads to the vampire’s/ homosexual’s painful outing and eventual destruction’ (Dyer 1988, 57). As such, Dyer’s reading of the vampire as homosexual also relates to the Gothic motif of doubling; at surface value the vampire appears ‘normal’ yet conceals a monstrous secret, his/ her vampirism/queerness. The vampire becomes a nefarious night stalker who indulges in his/her seemingly abnormal desires by night, while sleeping or appearing ‘normal’ by day. Dyer concludes that vampiric narratives (albeit depending on one’s reading strategy) are often imbued with a sense of gay shame and self-loathing:

The gay resonances are even stronger here. ... Homosexuality has been justified and defended ... through the argument that ‘we/they can’t help it’. Much of the feel of the apologia for homosexuality, whether written by gay men and lesbians themselves or by others, has been a mix of distaste for homosexuality with a recognition that it cannot be resisted – ‘I don’t know why I want to do these disgusting things, but I do and I can’t stop myself and there’s no real harm in it.’ (1988, 63)

Moreover, Sue Ellen Case argues that the vampire’s queer potential lies in the figures’ fluid gender and ambiguous sexuality, deemed ‘unnatural’ in relation to heteronormativity: ‘The queer has been historically constituted as unnatural. Queer desire, as unnatural, breaks with the life/death binary of Being through same-sex desire. The articulation of queer desire also breaks with the discourse that claims mimetically, to represent the “natural” world by subverting its tropes’ (1991, 200). For Case, the queer – like the vampire – revels not only in his/her marginalization and transgression, but also in ‘the discourse of the loathsome, the outcast, the idiomatically proscribed position of same-sex desire’. This revelling ‘constitute[s] a kind of activism that attacks the dominant notion of the natural’ (Case 1991, 200). This is a concern

in reference to contemporary vampire narratives that literalize the vampire-as-homosexual by explicitly including gay, lesbian and queer vampire characters. Case argues that rather than offering an opportunity for subversion of heteronormative culture and spectator identification, such 'heterosexist configurations' of the queer vampire only serve to simultaneously 'invoke and revoke' any affinity with same-sex desire. Such examples simply reconfigure 'queer desire back into the heterosexual by deploying sexual difference through metaphors' (Case 1991, 206). Such instances of the queer vampire are thus both literal and metaphorical.²

Manifesting the Metaphorical: Truly, Bloody, Queer

For Case, the true celebration of the queer vampire's transgression remains 'outside the boundaries of heterosexist proscription' (Case 1991, 206). When it comes to representations of queer vampires in mainstream film and television, one must look for subversion in 'what [the heterosexist gaze] refuses to see' (Case 1991, 206). Indeed, configuring the queer vampire in heteronormative narratives can be considered as a temporary revelling in the frisson of alternative sexuality, only for it to be disavowed and destroyed in their destruction. The heteronormative spectator is excluded from identification with transgressive queer vampirism – they can 'hear the music, but [they] can't go to the party' (Case 1991, 206).

As Case herself recognizes, however, this reading of the queer vampire is inevitably rooted in the cultural moment. She considers the 1980s vampire as an encoding of cultural fear of infection, contamination, 'pollutions', 'viral disease' and in particular AIDS: 'a construction that signifies the plague of their sexuality' (1991, 209). If the vampire-as-homosexual is a metaphor for all things aberrant, this is entirely dependent on what is deemed unnatural at particular points in history: 'nature isn't what it used to be, and likewise the undead have altered with it' (Case 1991, 208).

Whereas at one time the vampire may have been configured as a symbol of queer fear, it can be argued that its recent assimilation into mainstream culture has led to its use as a form of self-examination. In considering the assimilation of the queer vampire in the 2000s, and particularly its representation in narratives such as *True Blood*, a number of questions emerge. As Case suggests, does the literal queer vampire continue to represent the 'invoking and revoking' of same-sex desire, fear of infection (in relation to AIDS or homo-contamination) and the unnatural elements of contemporary Western culture – or does it reconfigure them? And if so, does *True Blood* also reconfigure the heteronormative subject's limited revelling in the queer's/ vampire's transgression? The vampire bar Fangtasia, first seen in 'Escape from Dragon House' (1.4), is visualized as a theme party venue which attracts human customers who wish to experience the thrill of vampire culture (it can arguably be paralleled with the appeal of gay nightclubs to straight clientele). Following on from Case's argument, the heteronormative subject – that is, the human tourists and fangbangers (who actually participate in vampire sex without becoming vampires themselves) of the narrative and the audience watching at home – can hear the music and go to the party, only to be kicked out at closing time. This foregrounds, and celebrates, the accessibility of the vampires' alternative sexual otherness, but does it assimilate them into normative culture or conversely does it emphasize the vampire's queerness as 'performance'?

Fitting in: Vampires and Homonormativity

While *True Blood* offers vampirism as a metaphor for homosexuality in terms of representing the campaign for gay rights, homosexuality is also *literalized* within the narrative by being openly referred to and represented by both vampire and human gay characters. Furthermore, *True Blood* also encodes the frustrations and anxieties felt by gay men in particular when acceptance into dominant heteronormativity comes at the expense

of their difference *from* the norm. In a sense, the assimilation of the homosexual (vampire) into mainstream culture demands abstinence from transgressive sexuality and the adoption of a homonormativity where gay masculinity (vampirism) is rendered non-threatening, bland and asexual.

In *True Blood*, vampires are encouraged to 'mainstream': to conform, deny the drinking of human blood in favour of Tru Blood, the mass-produced, synthetic substitute, and become domesticated (as Bill Compton does). This serves to relocate what was once a sub-textual element of the vampire text, its potential for homosexuality, to the foreground. The acceptable face of vampirism is presented by the American Vampire League and its media-friendly (albeit dissembling) spokesperson Nan Flanagan. Public acceptance is opposed by the religious far right represented by the Fellowship of the Sun in season two (Baptist minister husband and wife Steve and Sarah Newlin³ recruit devout followers literally to wipe out the threat of 'perverse' vampirism), but in private, vampires also experience self-loathing and shame. Bill and Eddie both experience sub-cultural anxieties centred around accepting their own sexual/vampiric subjectivity and being assimilated into heteronormativity.

Furthermore, *True Blood* often posits the vampire as the troubled 'victim' of a new human addiction to vampire blood, which has curative, narcotic and hallucinogenic effects when ingested by mortals – an ironic turning of the tables upon the bloodsuckers who instead find themselves having their own life essences drained. This presents a complex flipping of the vampire figure as Other, whereby humans have the potential to be *as* vampiric as their vampire peers. However, representations in the series are more complex than a straightforward interchange of *us* and *them*. The vampires themselves prove to be equally intolerant of humans and their own kind. Vampire subculture is shown to be as judgemental, as bigoted and as stratified as that of their human counterparts: dominating, oppressing or preying upon other uncanny species such as werewolves, shape-shifters and fairies, whilst basing their society on a hierarchy of

kings, queens, sheriffs and magisters determined by wealth and maturity.

If the figure of the vampire remains a metaphor for homosexuality, it is for a limiting, hierarchical and marginalizing homonormativity in which difference is marginalized from *within*. Homonormativity, in Lisa Duggan's formulation of the term, refers to 'a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions, but upholds and sustains them, while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency, and a gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption' (2003, 179).

Duggan argues that this process gives rise to the 'good gay subject' whereby relationships are built upon 'monogamy, devotion, maintaining privacy and propriety' (Duggan 2003, 179). The consequence is a hierarchy of 'worthiness' with those that identify as transgender, transsexual, bi-sexual or non-gendered deemed less worthy of equal rights than those in stable relationships that mirror structures of heterosexual marriage. Within the male homosexual community, homonormativity tends towards a white, middle-class, youth-oriented clonishness that aspires to a hypermasculine body ideal.

True Blood's representation of the homonormative encodes sub-cultural tensions within gay (vampire) subcultures. It highlights the psychological traumas of 'fitting in' to a subculture defined by materialism, promiscuity, gym body culture, youth obsession and self-indulgence. Eddie's closeted, couch-surfing vampire is not only reclusive because of his vampiric and/or homosexual impulses but because, being middle-aged and overweight, he does not *fit* into a world in which bodily perfection is revered. He resorts to using escorts to feel loved. The introduction of Vampire King Russell Edgington and his long-term male partner Talbot (a vain, effeminate, possessive, but lustful 'queeny' Latino) as the 'civil-partnered' rulers of Mississippi further reinforces a stereotypical portrayal of privileged homonormativity that arguably harks back to the capitalistic, land-owning, consumerist vampire of the 'old world'.⁴ Russell's pursuit of wealth and power is symbolized by

ruthless desire to dominate and collect capital – whatever he desires he gets: antiquities, treasures, objects, people and land. Indeed, Russell and Talbot's 'antiquing' gay vampire couple is steeped in the Gothic tradition, in which 'antiquing' is code for homosexuality.⁵

As an out-gay vampire couple, Talbot and Russell's partnership resembles bourgeois monogamy, yet they remain promiscuous. Talbot seduces Eric after disagreeing with Russell. Russell's desire for power leads him to undertake a marriage of convenience to Sophie-Anne, the Vampire Queen of Louisiana, in order both to resolve her debts and to expand his own empire (much to the chagrin of Talbot). *True Blood's* knowing reflection of homo-conformism encompasses the inevitable failure of monogamy between the Edgingtons, leading to Talbot's death. In an act of vengeance, the omni-sexual Eric provides Talbot with the experience of 'the true death', impaling him from behind in all senses (mortally via a wooden stake and anally via sexual penetration). Upon Talbot's death, Russell suffers a mental breakdown and descends into a crazed and vengeful rampage in which he publicly rips the spine from a newscaster on live television and imagines a rent boy is his lost love Talbot during a fatalistic bout of casual sex. The trajectory of Russell Edgington from materialistic aesthete to crazed *homme-fatale*⁶ perpetuates the cliché of a psychotic, murderous gay love. *True Blood's* own self-awareness of gay archetypes and clichés suggests that what is being lampooned, however, are the limitations imposed upon representations of gay masculinity and homosexual love in popular culture. Season three's opening episode ('Bad Blood', 3.1) includes a hilarious fantasy sequence in which shape-shifter Sam Merlotte, having ingested some of Bill Compton's blood in order to defeat the maenad, has a campy, homoerotic dream about his vampiric saviour in which the pair stop just short of making love. This level of self-awareness as to audience and generic expectations clearly both parodies and revels in the potential for homoeroticism.

In proffering an overt representation of homosexual characters, *True Blood* disregards the need for the vampire-as-

homosexual metaphor in liberal times, but in doing so further complicates the issue. In particular, the series highlights the hypocrisies *within* minority groups, where acceptance into the mainstream can either cause further divisions (subcultural rejection) or complete invisibility (assimilation or denial). *True Blood* encompasses a wide variety of 'types', from the closeted (Eddie) and the abstinent and those in denial (Bill), to the queer (Eric) and the stereotyped homonormative (Russell and Talbot who eventually reveal psychotic and promiscuous tendencies). The series encodes the necessity and the contradiction of acceptance at the expense of conformity, where characters discard elements of their 'true nature' in order to fit in. In order to assimilate, there has to be a watering down of the one's 'true' nature (in the case of vampires, to drink human blood, to be confidently out, not to feel shame). For Bill it is the giving up of drinking human blood in favour of the methadone-like Tru Blood, for Sookie it is keeping secret her psychic ability and hybrid human-fairy origins, for Sam it is keeping hidden his ability to shape-shift. With Bill being configured and chastised as an abstinent (and thus symbolically impotent) vampire, he is arguably emasculated in his attempt to fit in with humans and to conform to their standards. Vampirism itself threatens to become as mundane as human society, having its own politics (Nan Flanagan and the American Vampire League), being cemented into a capitalist culture of branding (Tru Blood and Fangtasia) and becoming a social and sexual 'trend' (fangbanging). When Russell Edgington reveals his true face during his crazed rampage, Nan Flanagan spins this as an even more extreme Otherness, portraying Russell as a terrorist.

'Who ordered the Hamburger with AIDS?': Bad Blood and Black Homosexuality

Interestingly, it is a *human* character – the black, gay, feminine, gender-troubling cook, Lafayette – who is a more 'truthful' portrayal of homosexuality in the Deep South. Lafayette flag-

rantly displays his true nature, representing an idealized gay masculinity that blurs gender boundaries and challenges stereotypes of black male machismo, whilst remaining a strong, individualistic character unafraid to stand up to bigots and homophobic abuse. 'Sparks Fly Out' (1.5) contains one of *True Blood*'s most noteworthy scenes. A trio of redneck customers return a burger to the kitchen at Merlotte's, where Lafayette is the resident cook, complaining that it contains AIDS. This elicits a fierce yet articulate response from Lafayette. He slams the bun in the customer's face after licking it, ironically informing him that: 'Faggots been breeding your cows, raising your chickens, even brewing your beer long before I walked my sexy ass up in this mutherfucker. Everything on your goddamned table got AIDS. ... All you gotta do is say "hold the AIDS"!'

In his discussion of AIDS-inspired vampire narratives, Hanson argues that intolerance of sexual difference remains fixed and the concept of 'bad blood' or 'infection' is revisited. In this scene, however, infection is not limited to the vampire-as-metaphor but literalized (albeit comically) in the threat of homosexuality that Lafayette renders ridiculous via his extravagant retort.⁷ If *True Blood* is to be considered as a post-AIDS text, this scene reveals the outrageous and ill-informed bigotry of middle America and the empowerment available through protest. Lafayette's relationship with Jesus (who is a gay Latino witch) can be seen as progressive in its portrayal of mixed-race, homosexual relations, while still carrying with it an implied sense of 'difference' that works to empower the couple. Jesus opens Lafayette's mind to his potential supernatural abilities as a voodoo witch ('I Smell a Rat', 3.10), an 'other-worldliness' under the surface of 'ordinariness' and a transgressive, occultist spirituality brought about by their seemingly ordinary, yet still transient, relationship. As a drug-dealing, promiscuous, effeminate, black, gay male, Lafayette is clearly paralleled with the Otherness of the vampire in terms of transgressive sexuality. I would argue, however, that the general 'whiteness' or 'paleness' (and omnisexuality) of the show's vampires reveals a more normative set of values than that of the arguably *more* radical

and powerful Lafayette. As such, Lafayette's marginalized character can be set against the relative white civility of the gay vampire in *True Blood*. In her discussion of *True Blood* and racism, Nicole Rabin points out that, 'In our multiracial society, issues of miscegenation no longer fall solely on the white/black line but all monoracial categories must now be protected. As part of the maintenance of these monoracial boundaries comes the necessity to delimit specific characteristics as to what these monoraces are not (mixes).' (2010, 5) Rabin maintains that the vampire is the perfect metaphor for miscegenation as their drinking and mixing of (varied racial types of) human blood is a mixing of races. It displays an erotic and social desire for the communal bound together by Otherness. However, this is an Otherness that simultaneously reveals a desire for the normative, be that in Bill's mainstreaming, the civil order of the vampire hierarchy or the Vampire League's campaign for equality. This reveals the paradox at the heart of *True Blood's* representation of vampirism/homosexuality as Other; it is diverse and yet homogenous. The depiction of the supernatural realm is of a fragmented community deeply divided along lines of diversity, where shape-shifters live in an in-bred, run-down community, fairies linger in a liminal fantasy world, witches look out for themselves and werewolves protect the pack. At the top of the food chain, the vampires construct hierarchies of difference within their own number, whilst their contradictory desire to seek out others like themselves reveals a homo-ness and a longing for the same which ironically only further serves to divide and not to unite them.

Notes

- 1 For the purposes of this article I want to distinguish 'queer' as a sexually counter-normative identity in general and 'gay' in relation to my discussion of contemporary female/male homosexual identity.
- 2 In particular, Case refers to the late 1960s' and early 1970s' proliferation of a niche 'lesbian vampire' subgenre of films which explicitly associate lesbian sexual desire with vampirism, taking literary influence from Sheridan La Fanu's *Carmilla* (1872). In a move towards the explicit

foregrounding of the vampiric lesbian, films such as *Twins of Evil* (John Hough, 1971, UK), *The Vampire Lovers* (Roy Ward Baker, 1970, UK) and *The Velvet Vampire* (Stephanie Rothman, 1971, USA) were a significant departure from the suggestive lesbian sexuality of Gloria Holden's Marya Zaleska in *Dracula's Daughter* (Lambert Hillyer, 1936, USA).

- 3 Many critics have commented on what they consider to be Alan Ball's thinly veiled parallels between the Newlins and real-life television husband and wife pastors, Joel and Victoria Osteen.
- 4 In his reading of Bram Stoker's archetypal literary vampire in *Dracula* (1897), Franco Moretti points out that, 'He *needs* blood ... his ultimate aim is not to destroy the lives of others ... but to use them. [He] is a true monopolist: solitary and despotic. ... He no longer restricts himself to incorporating (in a literal sense) the physical and moral strength of his victims' (2006, 91–2). Moretti reads the vampire metaphor, by way of Marx's theory of 'capital [as] dead labour that, vampire-like, only lives by sucking labour and lives the more, the more labour it sucks', growing stronger the more it feeds upon labour in a parasitical way.
- 5 As Steven Bruhm points out, the relationship between antiques dealer Kurt Barlow and his vampire 'partner' Straker in Stephen King's *Salem's Lot* (1975) is seen by many in the text as a paedophilic, homosexually coded one: '[the] boys who then fall victim to the dandiacal, urbane, Barlow and his "partner" Straker ... these finely cultured, foreign men, the town decides are "[p]robably queer for each other", "[l]ike those fag interior decorators" (*Salem's Lot*, 70, 71, 80)' (1998, 87). Further, in an episode of *Supernatural* ('Playthings', 2.11) the homoerotic relationship between the demon-hunting Winchester brothers is referenced within the narrative as the two brothers check in at a Gothic hotel posing as 'antiquers', prompting assumptions about their sexuality from the hotel's owner.
- 6 The murderous homosexual couple has long been a stereotype within Western culture, no more obviously than in the 1922 real-life case of Leopold and Loeb, university graduates and lovers who sought to murder another student to prove their superiority. The many film adaptations that more than hint at the male couple's homosexuality include *Rope* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1948, USA), *Interview with the Vampire* (Neil Jordan, 1995, USA), *Swoon* (Tom Kalin, 1992, USA), *Compulsion* (Richard Fleischer, 1959, USA) and *Murder by Numbers* (Barbet Schroeder, 2002, USA).
- 7 It is also worth noting that in 'Mine' (1. 3) Bill is almost tricked by Malcolm into drinking blood that is infected with Hepatitis D, a strain of the disease that only 'infects vampires'. The concept of infectious vampirism as an AIDS metaphor is collapsed in this post-AIDS text into a literal depiction of a blood disease that poses a *cross-species* threat.

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