

of introduction, Melissa Anyiwo provides an overview of the *True Blood* marketing campaigns as part of the wider transmedia narrative of the series. Maria Mellins then looks at the real-world experience of fans and visitors to the club Fangtasia London. The fans that Mellins interviews are not recreating the vampire bar in the series, but incorporating aspects of its pleasure into their everyday lives. In particular, these fans enjoy the opportunities Fangtasia London offers, allowing them to dress differently and socialize with others from alternative communities. Most importantly, Fangtasia London is not a replica of the bar in the series nor do fans role-play their favourite characters. Rather they play with and rework the text to suit their own ends, affording them the pleasures of celebrating difference and standing out. Finally, Erin Hollis discusses the *True Blood* fan fiction. She explores how fans rewrite the *True Blood* text to satisfy their own desires. Unsurprisingly perhaps, Eric and the relationship between Eric and Sookie are the most popular subjects of fan fiction. Hollis considers the way the fan writers draw on and rework the canonical texts of both novels and television series. Significantly, she concludes that fan fiction is not derivative, but archontic, arguing that together all these narratives – novels, television and fan writing – draw on each other to form a *True Blood* archive.

It is interesting in thinking of *True Blood* as a cult TV series that the chapters in the book make frequent references to a set of lines of dialogue and moments from the show that contribute to the 'quotability' of the series. The authors return over and over again to the 'God hates fangs' billboard in the titles, the heated imagery of the titles as a whole, Sookie's references to Fangtasia as a ride at Disneyworld and her incredulity at being told she is a fairy, the excessive levels of blood and gore when the vampires are staked, Lorena's and Russell's exuberant 'bad face' of vampirism, Lafayette's 'burger with AIDS' speech to the redneck customers at Merlotte's and the use of music tracks in the episode titles and end credits. This series of key moments revisited in the chapters evokes the appeal of *True Blood* for

viewers, fans and academics alike. In keeping with the main setting of *Bon Temps*, a name borrowed from the unofficial Louisiana state motto, 'Laissez les bon temps rouler', let the good times – and bad things – roll.

Notes

- 1 Viewable at <http://www.rollingstone.com/culture/photos/theyre-hot-theyre-1> Viewable at <http://www.rollingstone.com/culture/photos/theyre-hot-theyre-sexy-theyre-undead-20100817>. (Accessed 10 August 2011.)
- 2 See <http://heardontv.com/tvshow/True+Blood> for a full list. (Accessed 11 August 2011.)
- 3 See <http://www.peopleschoice.com/pca/awards/nominees/index.jsp?year=2010>. (Accessed 10 August 2011.)
- 4 See TCA press release available at <http://tvcritics.org/2009/08/01/television-critics-association-celebrates-25th-anniversary-at-awards-ceremony/>. (Accessed 10 August 2011.)
- 5 The series is set to have thirteen books in total by 2013 and since *True Blood* new novels in the series have entered the New York Times Bestsellers list with *Dead Reckoning* (Harris 2011) going straight to number one on the list on publication.
- 6 Viewable at <http://www.d-kitchen.com/work/main-titles>. (Accessed 11 August 2011.)
- 7 Viewable at <http://www.d-kitchen.com/work/true-blood-main-title#>. (Accessed 11 August 2011.)
- 8 Viewable at <http://news.creativeleague.com/feature-dks-true-blood-the-making-of>. (Accessed 11 August 2011.)
- 9 The virals can be viewed on the BloodCopyCom Channel on <http://www.youtube.com/user/BloodCopyCom>. (Accessed 12 August 2011.) The Campfire Agency's documentary on their 'prequel' campaign for the launch of *True Blood* can be viewed at <http://campfirenyc.com/#work2>. (Accessed 12 August 2011.)
- 10 Viewable at <http://www.d-kitchen.com/work/true-blood-season-2-campaign>. (Accessed 12 August 2011.)
- 11 See <http://www.d-kitchen.com/work/true-blood-season-2-campaign>. (Accessed 12 August 2011.)

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EBSCOhost

PART 1

THE TRUE FACE
OF VAMPIRES:
GENRE AND STYLE

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EBSCOhost

TV LOVES FANGS: THE TELEVISUALITY OF HBO HORROR

Stacey Abbott

We have lived among you and we hope to live among you still. ('Breaking – Vampires Announce Themselves')

God may hate fangs but the success of HBO's *True Blood* demonstrates that TV loves them. The TV vampire is of course nothing new. Ever since Barnabas Collins was released from his coffin in the ABC daytime soap opera *Dark Shadows* (1966–71, USA), the vampire has been a recurring presence on television screens. While legend has it that the vampire cannot enter a home without an invitation, television serves as a threshold through which the vampire enters on a regular basis via advertising,² children's programming,³ TV movies,⁴ episodic appearances in TV series,⁵ and starring roles in their own programmes.⁶ But has the vampire effectively been domesticated by being allowed to enter our homes in this way? Does watching vampires on TV, within the safety and familiarity of our living rooms, and where they have been increasingly romanticized and humanized, render them safe? This chapter will consider how the vampire genre is rendered televisual in *True Blood* while also exploring how HBO has used the vampire, not to deny, but to embrace the horror genre as a means of maintaining its standing as 'not TV'. Like the vampires who have 'come out of their coffins' to inform us that they have always lived among us, this essay will demonstrate that television horror has always been a thriving part of TV and through *True Blood* it continues to thrive.

HBO Embraces Horror

HBO, one of the leading pay TV channels in the USA, is renowned, as Janet McCabe and Kim Akass argue, for ‘shocking scenes, unforgettable sequences ... taken from original programmes considered by many critics and viewers as “the best of American TV”’ (2007, 63). Not bound by Federal Communications Commission (FCC) regulations, it is a channel that courts controversy by pushing the boundaries of what is acceptable on television in terms of language, sex and violence, and in so doing challenges social and cultural taboos. It is also known for offering its programme creators the freedom necessary for innovative original programming. As Cathy Johnson has argued:

The Sopranos exploited HBO’s exemption from the FCC’s regulations regarding profanities, nudity, and violence to offer a representation of mob life that confronted the realities of this violent, macho world. This contributed to its aura of prestige and quality in that *The Sopranos* offered a vibrant, realist, and rounded portrayal of modern gangster life. (Johnson 2010, 149)

In recent years, HBO’s success has led to a proliferation of smaller cable channels such as TNT, AMC, Showtime and FX that have capitalized on the channel’s successful model. They have attempted to out-HBO HBO by taking mainstream television genres and pushing stylistic and narrative boundaries in series such as *Nip/Tuck* (2003–10, FX, USA), *The Shield* (2002–8, FX, USA), *Dexter* (2006–ongoing, Showtime, USA), *Weeds* (2005–ongoing, Showtime, USA), and *Californication* (2007–ongoing, Showtime, USA). As Simon Brown has argued: ‘*Weeds* was *Desperate Housewives* plus one; a little more outrageous, a little more vulgar, a little more subversive ... and loud enough to attract the attention of fans of the network show and encourage them to try something new’ (Brown 2010, 160). At the same time, many of HBO’s flagship programmes such as *Sex and the City* (1998–2004), *Six Feet Under* (2001–

5), *The Wire* (2002–8), and *The Sopranos* (1997–2007) were either coming to their natural end or, as in the case of *Carnivàle* (2003–5) and *Deadwood* (2004–6), cancelled prematurely. Furthermore, a change in the executive team at HBO in 2007 saw chief executive Chris Albrecht replaced by Richard Plepler and Michael Lombardo, while Sue Naegle replaced Carolyn Strauss as President, Entertainment Division (Ryan 2008). This left a new crew starting out 'with a cupboard mostly barren, as shows like *John From Cincinnati* failed to catch fire and one long-running quality drama, *Big Love*, had to overcome tepid support from the previous regime' (Carter 2009, B1).

The arrival of *True Blood* revitalized HBO's programming. With Alan Ball's adaptation of Charlaine Harris's *Southern Gothic Mysteries*, HBO began to regain the audience figures and reputation for producing transgressive and challenging material once again. News reports during the first season confirmed that the show 'was growing faster than *The Sopranos*' (Moody 2011) which only saw a ratings jump in season two. The series was renewed for a second season very quickly and has continued to see its audience figures rise each year, turning it into a genuine pop culture phenomenon with its stars regularly appearing on the covers of *Entertainment Weekly*, *TV Guide*, *Muscle & Body*, *Vogue Mexico* and *Vogue Italy*. This culminated in the infamous photo of the blood-streaked, naked and suggestively intertwined bodies of *True Blood* stars Anna Paquin, Stephen Moyer and Alexander Skarsgård on the cover of *Rolling Stone* magazine in September 2010. If, as Bill Carter (2009, B1) argues, a central part of HBO's programming strategy is to generate not only quality material but 'water-cooler' programmes that demand to be talked about, *True Blood*, with its sultry atmosphere and increasingly graphic depictions of sex and violence, not to mention tapping into the growing popularity of all things vampiric, fits the bill.

This was, however, a generic change for a channel that, despite having developed a series of 'programmes that aimed to construct loyal relationships with viewers' (Johnson 2010, 149), had rarely strayed into developing original programming in the cult genre of telefantasy. HBO had previously produced

the anthology horror show *Tales from the Crypt* (1989–96) based upon the EC Comics series, but this was aimed primarily at a niche horror audience and while much loved by fans, it never generated the same level of popular attention as the channel's star programmes. More recent forays into telefantasy, *Carnivàle* and *John From Cincinnati* (2007), have similarly been unable to extend their audiences beyond cult followings. These series opted for a softer approach to genre, mixing supernatural storylines with traditions of surrealism and narrative ambiguity, more in keeping with art-house or indie cinema. This contrasts with *True Blood's* overtly supernatural narrative and sensationalist style. With *True Blood*, therefore, HBO were clearly looking to generate noise and link the series to its previous successes, a strategy reinforced by the fact that it is written and produced by Ball, creator of *Six Feet Under*. While the series was marketed at existing vampire and horror fans through mail-outs written in dead languages and including 'samples' of the blood substitute Tru Blood, HBO also sought to draw a great deal of attention to the programme more widely. The company rolled out a print and billboard campaign advertising the new drink called Tru Blood – with the tag line 'Friends Don't Let Friends Drink Friends' – while also creating viral videos promoting the American Vampire League and the Fellowship of the Sun (Umstead 2008, 12). This immediately positioned *True Blood* as more than genre if somewhat less than 'quality', with Ball having described the series as 'popcorn for smart people' and promising fans 'a second season of just more – sexier, hotter, funnier, scarier, more violent' (quoted in Keveney 2009, 1D).

The choice of launching a vampire/horror series as HBO's new flagship programme was a calculated risk. The horror genre, unlike the Western and the gangster film, is not generally associated within popular culture with notions of quality, but rather with cult film, trash culture and juvenile audiences. Robin Wood once described the horror genre as 'one of the most popular and, at the same time, the most disreputable of Hollywood genres', but where 'the popularity itself has a peculiar characteristic that sets it apart from other genres: it

is restricted to aficionados and complemented by total rejection, people tending to go to horror films either obsessively or not at all' (1986, 77). This does not appear to be the formula for a new television show aimed at a broad and diverse audience. The vampire, however, from Dr John Polidori's *The Vampyre* (1819) through to *Twilight* (Catherine Hardwick, 2008, USA), has strong associations with notions of the Gothic. As Matt Hills has argued, Gothic is often perceived to be more acceptable for television, 'carrying connotations of historical tradition, and "restrained" suggestion or implication rather than graphic monstrosity and splatter' (2005, 120). Yet HBO and Ball did not shy away from integrating the more restrained conventions of Gothic with the graphic elements of horror. In fact, *True Blood*'s hybrid form has been used to reconfirm the channel's slogan 'It's not TV. It's HBO' by drawing upon and expanding those aspects of Harris's books – sex, blood and violence – that would normally be restricted on network TV. To this end, *True Blood* embraces horror full-on, but, despite their claims to be 'not TV', it does so in a televisual way that does not diminish the horror but makes it all the more disturbing.

To begin with, *True Blood* is part of a well-established tradition of TV Gothic, following in the footsteps of cult series *Twin Peaks* (1990–1, ABC, USA) by setting its narrative within small-town America and revealing, through its narrative and aesthetic excesses, the underside of the American dream.⁷ *True Blood* shares *Twin Peaks*' large ensemble cast, all with their own dark secrets and distinct and evolving storylines, including Jason Stackhouse's repeated, and often failed, attempts to learn from the past and better himself, Hoyt's dysfunctional relationship with his mother and evolving love affair with vampire Jessica, and Arlene's history of failed relationships, her growing romance with Terry Bellefleur and her unplanned pregnancy. The first season also, like *Twin Peaks*, has a murder mystery at its centre that serves as a catalyst to investigate and gradually reveal the town's tapestry of secrets. In this *True Blood* draws upon the serialized narrative tradition of soap opera to channel its Gothic roots.

Furthermore, like many examples of the Gothic on television, *True Blood* emphasizes the domestic space as the site of horror. As Helen Wheatley explains, Gothic television is 'understood as a domestic form of a genre that is deeply concerned with the domestic, writing stories of unspeakable family secrets and homely trauma large across the television screen' (2006, 1). What makes Gothic television particularly unsettling, therefore, is the mirroring of the domestic locations of the Gothic series with the location of the TV upon which the show is being watched. Gothic television presents the domestic space, usually the site of security, as under threat. *True Blood*, like much Gothic television, is largely, if not exclusively, domestic in nature. Sookie's grandmother's house becomes the central location around which much of the show is structured. This house is presented initially as a cosy and secure family space where Sookie and her brother Jason are cared for by their grandmother. In the first few episodes of season one, there are numerous scenes of Gran in the house cooking breakfast, baking and waiting up for Sookie after work. Sookie's best friend Tara explains that this house always felt like a home to her as it was a welcome space for her to escape her alcoholic mother ('Cold Ground', 1.6). Even vampire Bill Compton is made welcome in this house ('The First Taste', 1.2). In 'Sparks Fly Out' (1.5), however, the security of this space is shattered when Sookie comes home to find her grandmother's dead body sprawled in a pool of blood on the kitchen floor. The homely and sun-drenched *mise-en-scène* is redressed with blood spatter, emphasized through a series of close-ups of Gran's body drenched in blood at the end of 'Sparks Fly Out' and then repeated at the beginning of 'Cold Ground', so as to transform the homely space into a site of horror.

While Sookie insists that she has more good memories of this house than bad ones, this does not last long. From the death of Gran onwards, Sookie's house comes under repeated attack by a series of human and supernatural monsters. It is here that Sookie discovers, just before he attacks her, that her 'friend' René Lenier is actually the serial killer ('You'll Be the Death of Me', 1.12). In season two the maenad Maryann first infiltrates

and then commandeers Sookie's house to be used as one of the prime locations for a series of Dionysian orgies and sacrificial ceremonies, while in season three the house is repeatedly attacked by werewolves. In season four Eric, having bought the house when Sookie was in fairyland, can enter freely and has installed a cubby hole for himself beneath a cupboard. While the private house may be safe from vampires, who require an invitation to enter, *True Blood* repeatedly demonstrates the fragility of the home, and in so doing, the family. In fact, it is family that is often shown to be truly monstrous as when Jason hits Sookie, blaming her for their grandmother's death, saying it should have been her ('Cold Ground'). Flashbacks to Sookie's childhood also reveal that her parents were first unsettled then outright frightened by her telepathic ability, leading to an unhappy family life and a lack of support for Sookie. Tara's mother is an abusive alcoholic, Lafayette's is revealed to be violently schizophrenic, leading him to fear for his own sanity, and Sam's family are revealed to be drunken, thieving and violent poor-white trash. In season three Arlene becomes increasingly afraid that her unborn baby, conceived during her relationship with serial killer René, is destined to be a monster like its father. These dysfunctional family relationships are contrasted with the tender loyalties expressed by many vampires for their sires or progeny. Vampire Eric weeps tears of blood while begging Godric not to commit suicide ('I Will Rise Up', 2.9) and Pam later withstands lengthy torture in order to protect her maker Eric ('Hitting the Ground', 3.7). Russell Edgington, the King of Mississippi, is so overwhelmed with grief when Eric murders Talbot, his progeny/husband, that he carries his bloody remains in a crystal urn while he goes on a murderous rampage. The family, a central and generally reaffirming motif of TV drama, is repeatedly twisted and disfigured.

True Blood also draws upon traditional television aesthetics, if only to render them horrific. Karen Lury argues that historically television has avoided the long shot as it is seen as more theatrical and painterly in composition while the close-up, one of the hallmarks of television aesthetics, caters to the perceived visual limitations of the *small* screen while also emphasizing

the importance of dialogue, familiarity and intimacy (2005, 28–9). These factors are usually seen as elements which reduce the visual dynamism of the image and transform it into what Jane Espenson describes as ‘radio-with-pictures’ (2010, 47). This familiarity also generally imbues television with a cosy security that seems to run counter to the aesthetic drive of horror. In *True Blood*, however, the close-up introduces a horrific form of spectacle that is intricately bound to notions of intimacy. The flashback to vampire Bill’s turning by Lorena in ‘Sparks Fly Out’ is shot largely in extreme close-up as Lorena throws Bill to the floor and then, with the camera poised above them, leaps on top of him to drink his blood. As the camera spirals down into an extreme close-up of Bill’s face distorted with shock and pain, the sounds of Lorena’s drinking dominate the soundtrack. The style of this sequence is repeated when Lorena decides to turn Bill and she once again sits on his chest as she cuts her own throat. As the blood drips into his mouth, his tongue tentatively tastes it before he reaches up and begins to drink it directly from the vein, all shot in a perverse shot/countershot exchange of extreme close-ups. The intimacy on display in these scenes is not the intimacy of character development but the monstrous eroticism of vampirism that is central to the series. The climactic shot of Lorena in extreme close-up staring directly into the camera, and therefore out at the TV audience, as Bill drinks from her, is a confrontational horror image that undermines the supposed reassuring quality of television. Instead it generates a raw and violent intimacy, more disturbing because of the presence of this image up close and personal on the small screen.

This is taken even further in season three in yet another series of ‘intimate’ exchanges between Lorena and Bill, first when they have sex (‘It Hurts Me Too’, 3.3) and later when she tortures him (‘I Got a Right to Sing the Blues’, 3.6). In ‘It Hurts Me Too’, in a reversal of his transformation sequence, Bill, trapped by his sire and in a complete rage, throws Lorena onto the bed. Declaring that he will never love her, he leaps upon her, bites into her throat and, obeying her command, has sex with her while twisting her head 180 degrees. The violence

of this controversial scene, shocking even for a show that is replete with graphic and disturbing sex scenes, is enhanced by the final low-angle close-up of Lorena facing the camera as blood drips from her mouth, still caught in a moment of ecstatic pleasure, while Bill ferociously looks down at her.⁸ Vampires have never been more abject and Bill, the supposed vampire-hero of the series, has never been more monstrous. Yet this monstrosity also finds its corollary in a twisted form of tenderness conveyed through the close-ups of Lorena's blood tear-streaked face after she has tortured Bill for his betrayal of her in 'I Got a Right to Sing the Blues'. These are not delicate blood tears dripping from the corners of the eye that we see when Bill, Eric or Jessica cry but rather long, thick streaks of blood pouring across her cheeks. This image is disturbing and yet its composition of blood also possesses a beauty that seems in keeping with a growing aestheticization of blood that has become increasingly prevalent in contemporary TV horror such as *Dexter* and *Being Human*.⁹ *True Blood*, particularly in season three, thus pushes the boundaries in the graphic representation of blood and gore on television. This may make it seem to be 'not TV', but it is also responding to developments within TV horror that make it highly televisual. This increased graphic display is not simply there to shock or show what previously would have been restricted. It is used to attest to the vampire's physical otherness and enhanced emotional vulnerability. After spending two seasons emphasizing the similarities, both good and bad, between humans and vampires, and thus laying the groundwork for a sympathetic TV vampire, season three of *True Blood* highlights, through the televisual aestheticization of blood and body horror, the otherness of the vampire body and in so doing enters into a dialogue with a history of TV vampires.

The Sympathetic TV Vampire

While rendering the vampire genre televisual in its conception and execution, *True Blood* also positions itself within a long

tradition of the TV vampire. *True Blood* is not the first nor will it be the last TV vampire series. Since *Dark Shadows*, there have been numerous vampire shows which include *Forever Knight*, *Kindred: The Embraced* (1996, Fox, USA), *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997–2003, WB/UPN, USA), *Angel*, *Moonlight* (2007, WB, USA), *Blood Ties* (2006–8, Chum TV, USA), *Being Human* (2008–ongoing, BBC, UK)/(2011–ongoing, SyFy, USA), *Vampire Diaries* and *The Gates* (2010, ABC, USA). While these vampire series are all quite distinct, each positioning the vampire within a different range of genres that include teen comedy/drama, gangster, detective and soap opera, they all share one thing in common. They each hold at their centre a reluctant or sympathetic vampire as one of the central protagonists. This reluctance or disdain for their vampiric condition has, over the years, seen the vampire increasingly humanized and this could be interpreted as a process of domestication for the more mainstream media, making the vampire more acceptable for a wide range of audiences. As Milly Williamson argues, it is the suffering of the reluctant vampire, refusing to drink human blood, that makes them ‘deserving of our sympathy’ (Williamson 2005, 42; the emphasis in this passage is mine).

True Blood varies this formula by situating its narrative within a world where vampires no longer need to drink human blood because a synthetic substitute has been developed. As a result, the vampire nation has revealed itself to the human world, wanting to live openly as they no longer pose a threat. Vampires are, therefore, no longer presented as necessarily reluctant since they have a legitimate alternative to human blood. This is established in the first few minutes of season one when Nan Flanagan, the spokesperson for the American Vampire League, is shown on television making a very articulate claim for vampire civil rights (‘Strange Love’, 1.1). Vampires become sympathetic in *True Blood*, not because they are struggling against their condition and resisting the thirst, like Mitchell in *Being Human* who equates his refusal to drink human blood with ‘being on the wagon’, but because they are victims of prejudice. This is reaffirmed by the small-minded reaction of the residents of Bon

Temps to Bill's arrival, the series of murders of fangbangers and the militant actions against vampires performed by the Christian-right group, The Fellowship of the Sun, culminating in a suicide bomb that kills both humans and vampires alike. In this manner, the series offers an entirely new spin on a well-established TV tradition of the sympathetic vampire.

Furthermore, the repeated appearances of Flanagan on television throughout the series self-consciously acknowledge this formula by representing, within its diegesis, vampires on television as civilized and domesticated. Flanagan uses television to reassure the American public that vampires are safe, thus reaffirming arguments that television is fundamentally reassuring rather than the space for horror. Yet *True Blood* is an example of serialized television which, as Milly Williamson argues, serves to undermine the notion of the domesticated vampire:

serialisation as a narrative form is unable to sustain the clear categorisation of the moral universe through the unambiguous depiction of good and evil. Serialised narrative produces shifting perspectives and extended middles that, as many feminists have noted in relation to soap opera, contribute to the moral complications that surround characters. (Williamson 2005, 48)

While Flanagan might insist that 'every vampire in our community is now drinking synthetic blood' ('Strange Love'), the narrative gradually reveals that this is not the case. Throughout the series, vampires are repeatedly shown drinking blood from a series of willing and not-so willing human donors. Furthermore, Flanagan's repeated appearances on television increasingly highlight the constructedness of this 'official' face of the vampire nation. Generally depicted with a healthy complexion and wearing beige or white tailored suits, Flanagan is the picture of middle America, but her off-screen image is decidedly different. In 'I Will Rise Up' she appears for the first time in person, with pale skin, dark red lips, hair pulled back and wearing a black

leather jacket and black trousers, a look that is repeated when she interrogates Eric in 'Everything Is Broken' (3.9). Here she looks less reassuring, more vampiric and more dangerous. When Eric questions her power to remove him as Sheriff of Louisiana, she responds, 'Hey I'm on TV. Try me.'

True Blood, therefore, conforms to yet another tradition of the TV vampire, luring the audience into feeling sympathy for the vampire before muddying the water with moral ambiguities. For instance, Bill and his progeny Jessica are presented quite sympathetically because of their love for Sookie and Hoyt, respectively, before the increasing moral complexity of their existence is revealed as Jessica deals with the guilt of her first kill and Bill's duplicity is gradually revealed. At the same time, the show self-consciously highlights this formula when the public TV image of the vampire established by Flanagan is shattered by Russell Edgington's own commentary on the Vampire Rights Amendment when he bursts onto TV screens and rips out the spine of a television newscaster, live on camera. Watched by Flanagan in the shadows of her limousine, revealing the hypocrisy of the public face of the vampire nation as she drinks blood from the inner thigh of a female 'victim', Russell represents all that the American Vampire League seek to repress. Sitting at the news desk holding the bloody spine and licking the blood from his hand, Russell declares:

We are nothing like you. We are immortal because we drink the true blood. Blood that is living, organic and human. That is the truth the AVL wishes to conceal from you because, let's face it, eating people is a tough sell these days. So they put on their friendly faces to pass their beloved VRA but make no mistake – mine is the true face of vampires! Why would we seek equal rights? You are not our equals. We will eat you after we eat your children.

Here *True Blood* is overtly using television to comment on the TV vampire, for Russell is not the face of a domesticated monster, made palatable for television audiences. He *is* a monster. *True*

Blood demonstrates, however, that the TV vampire, from *Dark Shadows* to *Angel*, is all the more monstrous and frightening because it is represented as both 'other' and just like us. While HBO might seem to be pushing the boundaries of the vampire genre and TV horror due to its greater televisual freedom, in reality it is primarily *Buffy* + 1, a little sexier, scarier and gorier and as a result a lot noisier. But because of all the noise, it is also calling attention to its place within a long history of TV horror and, through its success, demonstrating that TV horror, like the vampire, will continue to live among us. It is not TV, it is vampire TV.

Notes

- 1 'Breaking – Vampires Announce Themselves', video posting. Viewable at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OEiSK-ILwXk>. (Accessed 4 August 2011.)
- 2 RayBan sunglasses, Duracell batteries and the Mazda 3, for example.
- 3 Count von Count in *Sesame Street* (CTW, 1969–), *Mona the Vampire* (BBC, 1999).
- 4 *Dracula* (Dan Curtis, 1974, USA), *The Night Stalker* (Dan Curtis, 1972, USA), *Salem's Lot* (Tobe Hooper, 1979, USA).
- 5 *Thriller* (1960–2, NBC, USA), *Night Gallery* (1969–73, NBC, USA), *The X-Files* (1993–2002, Fox, USA), *Supernatural* (2005–ongoing, CW, USA).
- 6 *Forever Knight* (1989–96, TriStar Television, USA), *Angel* (1999–2004, WB, USA), *Vampire Diaries* (2009–ongoing, CW, USA).
- 7 For a discussion of *True Blood* as American Gothic see Jowett and Abbott (forthcoming 2013).
- 8 For a discussion of the mixed reactions to this sex/rape scene please see Boursaw (2011).
- 9 For a discussion of the aesthetics of TV Horror please see Brown and Abbott (2010, 205–20); Abbott and Jowett (forthcoming 2012).

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