

MINORITARIAN ROMANTIC FABLES IN HBO'S *TRUE BLOOD*

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I've got three part-time jobs and I still can't get health insurance! (Lafayette, 'Nothing But the Blood', 2.1)

The writers for *True Blood* contemporize the political relevance of the series with spare, wry comments such as the one above. These messages, along with the apt choices of incidental and end credits music tracks,¹ signal to the viewers how the text intentionally encompasses political and cultural issues of the day, while at the same time sustaining a humorous, distancing perspective. Alongside these overt remarks in incidental dialogue, the ongoing proliferation of timeless, extra-natural, human-like entities creates a conceptual arena for the refraction of national political strife centring on difference. That arena is imagined within the political and cultural geographic locale of the Deep South where one can assume these tensions are at their height and, at least as much as one may expect to find anywhere in the nation, there is a salient history of parochialism, racism, misogyny, homophobia and xenophobia. As the markers of difference become redefined into quasi-species, they emerge as refracting masks of the organic distinctions that lie at the base of antipathy towards the Other. Free-thinking, empathetic individuals – such as Sookie, Bill, Tara and Lafayette – traverse boundaries and thus their actions articulate the strife and reconciliation across these boundaries.

The invention of social structure on either side of these differences subverts suppositions about social behaviour, either as it is conditioned by mortality or by being undead. The imagined structures for the vampires and werewolves are hierarchical, authoritarian and rife with fealty, obedience and conspiracy. But these structures ultimately rely on volitional adherence, and so resistance, challenge, obsession and vindictiveness arise as well. The actions and drama unfolding within these social structures among the extra-natural entities witness no interference from the co-extensive human social environment where the presence of the state is no more prominent than the feckless local constabulary. That, too, is an easy supposition regarding the secluded rural geography.

In their book, *A Thousand Plateaus*, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari outline the conglomeration of concepts that they develop as a set of tools, meant to be useful as freely extrapolated into diverse contexts (1987). The semi-poetic exposition of Deleuzean texts already encourages thinking of the notions that Deleuze creates as deliberately denying precise definition and restrictive contexts. Especially with the proviso for extrapolated application, minoritarian causes, nomadism, war machines, lines of flight, becoming-animal, becoming-woman and rhizomatic action all gain considerable purchase in making sense of the invented political/cultural tales of *True Blood*. The advantage of using these conceptual tools in this freely fortuitous fashion is the way it can pry loose aspects of the text – in this case a premium channel television series – that are readily missed by the more obvious approaches in terms of genre and industry trends. In a similar fashion, there are handy concepts from the writings on aesthetics by Jean-Luc Nancy, Jacques Rancière and Alain Badiou: the uncanny landscape, the *mêlée*, the film fable, the anti-representational, and the ‘inaesthetic’.

The Uncanny Landscape and the Mêlée

The landscape provides an inexhaustible opening for transformation. It absorbs and dissolves everything that arises on it. It is where divinity is in retreat, where gods have meaning only as being absent. It is where the gods have departed and where humans are ever yet to arrive. Peasants who live in the landscape can thus only be pagans, living with the forces that the landscape imposes upon them, having become tolerantly pantheistic and having become schooled into anticipation of advent of the new by the landscape's power to absorb and to foist change erratically. And yet they are inured to being unburdened by the fatuous investment in transcendent faith. The landscape's uncanniness to the peasant is ordinary – that is, ever presenting the possibility of drastic change and inevitable decay. The imminence of continuous departure and arrival makes it the landscape of time; it is in time that we see how the landscape works. The pagan remains pragmatically resilient and adaptable to how the forest yields up satyrs, nymphs, demi-gods and unknown entities, even as gods and princes can muster only a tenuous pretence of prevailing over the realm. The acquiescence to living unsettled in the landscape subjects the peasant to the feeling of atheism, however much that may abet the cultivation of hope and faith in transcendence. This is how Nancy explains the uncanny landscape (2005, 51–62).

It is in the elaborate, associative montage of the repeated opening titles of *True Blood* that we are exposed to the uncanny landscape. Intense vegetation in the bayous and swamps disguises all of the contours of the land, even the smallest indentation or bump. The waters of the swamp obscure the distinction between the flow of a river and the calm waters of a lake. The swamp vegetation obscures where the land is submerged and where it is not; there are no riverbanks in the swamp and no lakeshores. The obscurity of the landscape harbours horrible and poisonous reptiles – pure and indifferent animal viciousness. Living and dying matter intertwine. Time-lapse sequences of decay exhibit the intense fury of consumption in the wettish environment. The

movements of insect metamorphosis find imitation in religious rapture. The public display of eroticism is indistinguishable from that of religiosity. Viscous continuity of substance and oblique connections of organic processes define this world. It is a land that harbours multiple countries, not all of which are perceptible to people of just one country. The uncanny landscape does not allow us to see the physical country and the country is thus more easily reducible only to how it can be imagined.

That the vampires delineate the segments of their social organization along state-lines concedes that these nineteenth-century delineations of governmental purview, with their straight-line boundaries, comprise arbitrary divisions that are just as useful to the extra-human layers of vampire and werewolf domains as they are to divisions of the USA. The uncanniness of the country is perfectly accommodated by these arbitrary straight lines, since aside from the big rivers, it is difficult to comprehend or distinguish the terrain in large or small distinctions.

Thinking through the opposition of cultural identities and mixtures, Nancy fixes upon the *mêlée* as exemplifying how both mixture and identity are enduring events and not unchanging facts, are transitory actions and not determinant substance (2003, 277–88). Racism is fuelled by the fear of the challenge of the *mêlée* and by the revelation that culture constitutes a configuration that is always in flux. Racism and its variant prejudices find explicit evocation among those who insist stridently upon the permanence of identity and thus become as philosophically dedicated to how identity has always been as they are to the rationale for keeping it that way.

Nancy identifies two types of *mêlée*, that of combat and that of love, which hasten the conflict between or mingling of identities respectively. The *mêlée* is distinct from the mixture in either case. Mixture is identity driven in both its starting and end points as polarization and then as hybridization. But in assimilation of all diversity into the same identity, identity becomes a trivial and indistinct commonality. The *mêlée* retains difference and individuation, a mingling rather than a reduction.

There are three apparent overt *mêlées* in the first three seasons of *True Blood*, all three of which are exaggerated in their adaptation from the novels. The first is instigated by the hypnotism of the maenad, Maryann, releasing pure communal eroticism devoid of cognisance of the object of desire, but this is actually what Nancy calls a mixture of love – the bland but strident desire of all for all. The second transpires when an acolyte of the Light of Day Institute detonates a suicide bomb releasing silver shrapnel to kill as many vampires as possible ('Timebomb', 2.8). This is what Nancy calls a *mêlée* of combat, in which the confrontation of identities aims at extermination of difference, and in which the assertion of identity governs cognisance and purpose. The third occurs among the werewolf pack in Jackson, at their full-moon gathering that sends them all stampeding into the night, to ravage whatever they come across, and thus merging combat and libido ('9 Crimes', 3.4). This, however, is a combination of the *mêlée* of combat with the mixture of love. The genuine *mêlée* of love consists in miscegenation, wilfully and joyfully chosen, where difference is adored, not ignored and not negated. Sookie and Bill, and eventually Eric as well, exemplify the *mêlée* of love, as do the characters that the HBO series expands extensively from the source novels – Jason, Tara, Lafayette, Hoyt and Jessica – though with different outcomes. Where the mingling does become a *mêlée* of love, it signifies action and not substance, transformation and not succumbing to the demands for common identity. As with the uncanny landscape, the *mêlée* inaugurates transformation, and is thus originary. It also inaugurates the creation of new narratives, new fables to replace the older fables of identity.

Fables and the Anti-representational

Jacques Rancière outlines two barriers to inventive storytelling in cinema (2006). First, the camera apparatus records images according to its own mechanics and optics. As much as the cinema storyteller may want to mould the image to the story,

the camera simply records and records aspects of the image that are not intentional. Second, the cultural institution of cinema relies upon established conventions of how to shoot a scene, how to construct a Western, how to construct drama to fit into feature-length films and so on. So the intellectual and political challenge for practitioners of film fables is to construct meaning to transcend these two barriers (2006, 8–11). Rancière valorizes the transformation of social and philosophical issues into a fabulous construction, where they are transposed from their actual context and into standard cinema genres (2006, 73–94). The possibility for injecting social commentary arises when the trappings of the genre are duly adhered to but minimized. Rancière's exposition of the exemplary film fable provides something of a model for how *True Blood* approximates a political purpose. That is, as conventional as genre fables may be, some exemplars indulge fantasy and some abstain from it. In *True Blood*, the constant presence of computer-graphics insert effects (particularly for the sake of the naturalism of fangs and darkened irises for hypnotized eyes), super-speeded-up motion of the vampire's extra-natural physical powers, the audio distortions of Sookie's telepathic hearing, the obligatory gushers of blood, the violent unanticipated deaths, the cliff-hanger dénouement and the wry choice of exit music all define every episode. This regular set of effects sustains expected generic tropes, especially as hyperbolized in the gushers of blood. In contrast to the older Hollywood vampire films, however, when vampires perish in *True Blood*, they do not just quietly grimace and fade, they explode, leaving gooey residue everywhere, and usually drenching Sookie into the bargain. There is as much blood on the ground as there is humidity in the Louisiana air. Drawing upon the visual themes of the show's opening montage, that humidity is also a cipher for an environment of ubiquitous sexual desire, which resonates as well in the explosive release of vanquished vampires. The constancy and excess of that conceit renders it un-dramatic and un-marvelous. It is precisely at this point when special effects become blasé that the show sets genre conventions aside and becomes anti-representational. There is no longer anything

that is beyond representation and thus everything that fits into ordinary representation becomes mundane (Rancière 2007, 109–38). Precisely because of their regular excess, the impact of the effects becomes muted and unremarkable.

It is the substance of the narrative that then stands out. The extra-natural species – vampires, werewolves, shape-shifters, maenads, telepaths, witches, necromancers and fairies – all allow for the refraction of all-too-human traits where we can see them better, and especially as what becomes exposed challenges suppositions about love, devotion, servitude, hatred, family, community and conformity. The narrative demonstrates the permeability of the boundary between human and non-human from the other side as well, where human behaviour can quickly become inhumane. The best case in point is the Light of Day Institute, which Charlaine Harris explicitly likens to the Ku Klux Klan (2002, 104–5). In the series, however, the Institute echoes contemporary American political and religious culture. Here, the Light of Day Institute incorporates the deliberate selective violence of anti-abortion extremists, the sanctimoniousness of the anti-gay marriage movements, the xenophobia of the anti-illegal immigrant movements, the para-military zealotry of American football culture and the resentfulness underlying the Tea Party's fanatical opposition to health care insurance being extended to all. The HBO series expands a parallel that Harris draws between animosity to-wards vampires and a late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century emanation of racial hatred in American society. In *True Blood*, the Light of Day Institute exhibits a broader political and cultural animosity that finds expression in a variety of contemporary national political issues.

The 'Inaesthetic'

The politicized form of art *à la* Rancière that we can detect in *True Blood* gains further refinement in Alain Badiou's projection of the 'inaesthetic' relation of art to truth, which arises when

the idea in the construction of art is intentionally singular and immanent, and which we can comprehend beyond an aesthetic exercise in pleasure and forgetting (2005, 78–88). But what complicates understanding the substance of a film or television series in terms of the idea it imparts is the dominant presence of an authorial voice as the origin of the idea. In the first three series (totalling 36 episodes), *True Blood* roughly incorporates plot material from the first four of Charlaine Harris's Sookie Stackhouse novels. Twelve hours of programming is more than sufficient to capture the entirety of narrative detail in a moderately spare novel. What is particularly remarkable in the series is how much has been invented. Further, given the usual strategies of a limited series with elevated production values, a consistency of approach characterizes the team efforts of producers, directors, cinematographers, actors and writers. All of the major authorial roles are thus shared, collective efforts with the unifying guidance in meaning and form stemming from the executive producer, director and primary scenarist, Alan Ball. The collectivity of the effort means that the Idea imparted is something other than a nuanced, personal, philosophical statement and more of a broad but vague outlook of something like a political party, although any explicit connection with an actual political party is strictly suppressed since, after all, this is mainstream American television programming, the occasional wry commentary notwithstanding.

The Minoritarian, the War Machine, Nomads and the Line-of-Flight

Thus, without supposing any direct literary influence, *True Blood* provides an interesting ground upon which to see how these ideas from recent French philosophy about art and culture are capable of explanatory insight and incisive critical perspective as well. But to return to Deleuze and Guattari's exposition of minoritarian action, what especially stands out in contrast to these thoughts extracted from Nancy, Rancière and Badiou is how utilization of

the concepts from *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987) creates flexibility and not categorical differentiation, which is exactly how Deleuze and Guattari recommend using their concepts. The first upshot of that difference is a conceptualization that elucidates a critical account, though without an *a priori* differentiation of positive or negative judgement. Nancy means the uncanny landscape and the *mêlée* to be elements to be praised, as does Rancière with the film fable and the anti-representational and Badiou with the inaesthetic.

Deleuze and Guattari understand minorities as those social and cultural groupings whose sense of identity diverges from the axiomatically defining structures of the culture that surrounds them (1987, 280–6). Overt cognisance of the virtue of that difference is minoritarian. Hence, for example, hippies were minoritarian until that point when their difference became absorbed within the variance of the axioms of the dominant culture, roughly when tie-dye shirts become commercial. Whereas there is enormous power in the axiomatic culture, it is a power of entropy, control and stasis. There is by contrast enormous energy and potential in the minoritarian culture and all the more so as a function of the entropic energy store in the state, though it can easily dissipate, acclimatize to the axiomatic culture or become its own axiomatic culture.

Hence the vampires in *True Blood* are minoritarian precisely for having at long last to defend their existence and history publicly. Their intention is to make their presence known, to count among the populace and its electorate and yet to maintain difference. Yet, aside from this development, the vampires follow a rigid, axiomatic, hierarchical orientation within their own historical social structures. Their rules and lines of authority are absolute and their sanctions are harsh. By contrast, the werewolves are content to remain largely unacknowledged within the surrounding culture, and their rhythmic divergence from human nature being volitional rather than quotidian better allows for that subdued presence. Shape-shifters, maenads and telepaths can remain isolated, Sam Merlotte in particular. The narrative, however, especially within the amplifications of the

HBO series, transforms racial and social difference into a quasi-species difference. How the axiomatic, majoritarian culture copes with the sudden recognition of a different version of human-like nature in its midst extends the way racism as a general form of despising the Other can become psychologically compulsive. The vampires are despised but lusted after. They are shunned yet also public attractions. Though they are discriminated against, they own property, employ people and become consumers of the products of a new industry for making and selling synthetic blood. As easily as the organic difference is overlooked if not forgotten, fixation on difference within regular human nature thus proves arbitrary. That arbitrariness can erode with the socialization of diversity. The vampires decide to make their presence overt and commit to the American Vampire League to advocate their inclusion in the political and economic fabric of American society. The putative success of their political effort presumes a general political recognition that difference does not entail animosity.

A politicized movement rising as renegade against the axiomatic structures of the political state is what Deleuze and Guattari call a war machine (1987, 351–61). Military action may be its most easily recognized form of action, and hence the nomenclature, but it need not be military or even violent. Gandhi and Martin Luther King inaugurated war machines defined by non-violence. The Ku Klux Klan was a war machine, but only insofar as it was ever beyond the control of the dominant political structures of the states in which it flourished. The odd supremacist cult hardly counts, but the Tea Party is a war machine in the contemporary political scene in the USA, that is, so long as the Tea Party movement remained out of the control of the Republican National Committee. Once it became incorporated into mainstream Republican Party politics, it became part of the axiomatic political structure, despite having had the effect of shifting that structure ideologically.

Deleuze and Guattari mean the war machine as neither a utopian nor a critical concept, nor as adumbrating practical political strategy. The importance of the emergence of a

war machine is its volatility and the resultant impact it has upon axiomatic structures, which otherwise sustain entropy indefinitely. So, for example, once Tea Party sentiments deflect the Republican Party platform, the Republican congressional leader publicly refuses to repudiate fantasist claims about Barack Obama's place of birth. One has to look carefully to detect the suppressed grimace, but it is there. Another sign of this volatility is how extremely wealthy corporate moguls fund a national television advertising campaign meant to support state governments' efforts to curtail collective bargaining with state workers, but with the assertion that unionized workers earn significantly more than non-unionized workers. Though that fact is meant to foster resentment and division within the working class, it has an obviously backfiring message that one would expect organized labour to be able to exploit. And so the usefulness of the ambivalence of Deleuze and Guattari's notion of the war machine is that it allows us to see how the war machine loosens the inherent tensions in the axiomatic political structure. With that loosening, dramatic change can occur, even as the results are entirely contrary to what instigates the particular instance of the war machine. Even so, there is no guarantee of liberation or enlightenment with the advent of a war machine, and also no guarantee that the results will ultimately be either progressive or reactionary.

The American Vampire League is a war machine, as is the Light of Day Institute, especially as it is very much likened to contemporaneous national political sentiments, including the xenophobia and what Nietzsche (quoted in Deleuze and Guattari, 276) identified as *ressentiment* that has animated the Tea Party movement. This similarity is especially evident as its aspects are elaborated in the HBO series. *True Blood* also appends a war machine aspect to the vampires, particularly in the faction that aspires to organized efforts to command control of the state. In this way as well, one sees how the complexities of political difference are foregrounded in the HBO adaptation and, likewise, how the ramifications of the renegade political movements are complex. As much as the Light of Day Institute may have ignited vicious anti-

vampire sentiments, the extremism of the Institute more than its actual demise contributed to the acceptance of vampires and the moderate success of the American Vampire League. Similarly, that rise of political success becomes blunted with the aspiration of a faction of vampires to seize control of human society. Essential elements of the war machine for Deleuze and Guattari are its volatility and its ambivalence. Those two elements play out in the unfolding of the HBO series, which simultaneously sustains the narrative over a long sequence of episodes, but also composes the inventive political structures with a complexity such as one finds in the actual political developments of the nation. That realistic complexity enhances the way the show's composition can have contemporary relevance.

In contrast to the groupings of the axiomatic and minoritarian cultures, there are nomads in *True Blood* – individuals who wander away from the territory they belong to, and thus are deterritorializing (1997, 291–2). These distinct individuals pass through and obliterate boundaries and walls. Significantly, the HBO series augments and amplifies the nomadic individuals relative to the source text. As with the obligatory gushers of blood, the volume-level of explicit sexuality is established in the opening episodes of the series. As that volume-level sets a norm, the sensationalism becomes muted, allowing for the sex scenes to lay out a spectrum of how individuals (and the odd orgiastic group) engage in sex, as variant as are their individual personalities with desires and neuroses intact and oblivious to pseudo-species differences. These nomads are Sookie, Jason, Bill, Godric, Eric, Alcide, Sam, Tara, Lafayette, Hoyt, Crystal and Jessica. Their various sexual interactions across human/non-human boundaries are all individually distinct, with neither happiness nor despair uniformly achieved and with diverse character development in each case. Jessica is an invention of the series. Tara, Lafayette and Hoyt are changed from minor into significant characters who elaborate the flexible variety of interactions between humans and extra-natural entities. In the cluster of their varied experiences, the HBO series thus explores the vagaries of relationships that transgress refined boundaries of difference, but without

focus upon any one boundary as definitive. Mostly, these entail unforeseen struggles and suffering, but consistently the nomads do not allow their apprehension about boundaries to prevent their wanderings. They wander without fixed points of destination or return, hence they are genuine nomads and not just migrants or travellers. The relationship between Jessica and Hoyt echoes a traditional narrative of youthful first love: a consuming mutual infatuation that is deeply resistant to parental interference. That the two lovers are oblivious to their difference (at least initially) underscores how easily youthful romance can fly past boundaries and perhaps that they have not learned to enforce those boundaries.

The open explorations of sexuality across boundaries – where the disparities between mortal and timeless entities matter less than do the desires and needs of the individual partners – softens the focus on the elements of identity difference and thus leaves behind the exoticism of both its thrill and its taboo. Though evident among the reactionary characters in the series, obsession with miscegenation – particularly as a trait of racism, xenophobia and homophobia – is simply overcome as quickly as sexual attraction can be consummated. As with minoritarian groupings, there is energy, innovation and change in the nomadic dispersals.

Common to both minoritarian and nomadic movements is the pursuit of a line of flight out of the stultifying constraint of the axiomatic culture (Deleuze and Guattari 1997, 271–2). The nomad, however, ventures into possibilities that ignore the definitions and barriers of difference entirely. Whereas the other nomads venture forth with palpable apprehension, with some notion of yet belonging to a territory, it is Sookie whose line of flight is fearless, decisive, intelligent and adventurous. Charlaine Harris's choice of a first-person narrative with Sookie as the narrator facilitates her telepathy within her internal dialogue. It also gives voice to the wry and profane commentary that Harris creates for Sookie's private thoughts in contrast to the regular Southern *politesse* that she acquired from her grandmother and which she consciously utilizes to advantage.

Yet what is especially interesting in the narrative – mostly captured in the TV version but in hints rather than in Sookie's private monologue – is the depiction of the depths of Sookie's empathy and comprehension of what people are thinking and feeling, even without invoking what she calls her 'disability'. Her perspicacity and concomitant skills in manoeuvring people efficiently also stand out in the HBO series. It is a character trait that one can attribute to the telepath, which engenders an interpersonal intelligence that others tend not to suppose for a working-class woman who waits on tables in a small town bar and restaurant. Her unprepossessing impact on people belies her intelligence, courage, exuberance, perseverance and openness to diversity and transformation. These subtle aspects give her the advantage in facing crisis. But once that advantage is witnessed, she becomes threatening to some individuals, both human and extra-natural, and especially those who are committed to strictly defined social expectations.

Sookie is thus the one character who, though not exhibiting rebelliousness, most easily acclimatizes to difference. This is in no small part down to her reflective consciousness of her own thoughts and intentions, along with the telepathic or natural perception of how others are thinking and feeling. Her headlong flight into adventure is instigated by romance, but with consequences of danger, intrigue and physical harm. The stalwartness of Sookie's earnest adventurism risks the transformations of herself and Bill first through feeding on each other's blood but also in how Sookie becomes knowledgeable and inured to the ways of timeless entities and Bill comes to acquire virtues that do not inhere naturally in the vampire – empathy, kindness and beneficence. Their bond then becomes transgressive and creative. What they establish has no precedent in either of their two different cultural/natural realms. It is a rhizomatic connection in contrast to the hierarchical definitions inherent in those two cultures separately. The non-vampire qualities that Bill aspires to are those he *chooses* to create and thus are not natural, given attributes. Sookie schools him in that growth, which he does not complete fully, however.

Bill and Sookie each have specific traits that dovetail to facilitate their rapport and romance. She cannot read his thoughts and he cannot glamour her, which negates the ways in which each has the advantage in dealing with people. Hence they need to rely upon open, spoken interaction, this genuineness in how people can deal with others is what each has come to yearn for. This mutual need is a decisive element of attraction between them. Their second conversation arises after Sookie saves him from drainers ('Strange Love', 1.1). As he recovers, and demonstrates his fast healing powers, Bill asks Sookie whether she would like to consume some of his blood, which has been drained into plastic blood bags that lie nearby. She declines, with clear revulsion. He asks her what she is, but she does not know, and he is puzzled that she does not know and does not know what he is asking about. After the suicide bombing by the Light of Day church in 'Time Bomb', Eric will entreat Sookie to suck blood from his wounds, saying untruthfully that it will save him. Only then does Bill explain that consuming vampire blood creates an inclination for amorous thoughts about that individual vampire, and thus Eric had done this just to induce Sookie's attraction to him. However, Bill had given his blood to Sookie to save her life several times by then, as early as 'The First Taste' (1.2), and he had never told her about this significant side effect. He offers it to her the very first time they have a private conversation together. That he had never told her about what consuming his blood would mean for their relationship – in effect making it organically induced – even when she inquires pointedly about the effects in 'The First Taste' after he has her feed from his blood to save her life, proves to be a point of contention. The supernatural, restorative powers of Bill's blood are obvious, as is the heightening of her senses. With hesitation Bill says it will also heighten her libido and that now he will know when she calls out to him from whatever distance. But he does not mention the other intimate bond that the sharing of his blood creates, which he thinks about, ostensibly, in that moment of hesitation.

Eventually, Sookie is angry with Bill for not being honest about that effect, especially since honesty is deeply important

to their relationship and especially since it had allowed each of them to understand how to be a lover without the powers that plagued them and fostered manipulateness – his ability to glamour and her telepathy. She is also disappointed that he takes so long to reveal to her that she is a fairy, particularly since fairy blood is prized among vampires, which means she flirts with extreme danger associating with his kind. But he suspects what she is from the very outset. This interesting construction of the characters establishes a narrative arc that extends 30 episodes forward. That fundamental setting of the seeds of the relationship in honesty, trust and release from their respective advantages of power underscores the way in which Bill and Sookie have explored the openness and transgression of identity boundaries at the core of their relationship. This makes it profoundly crucial that Bill's failure to heed that trust ultimately undermines it, especially as he had not confided what he knew from the very outset.

The corporeal transformation in the mutually invigorating exchange of blood helps to deliver the spiritual and experiential transformation – for both Sookie and Bill – that Deleuze and Guattari call becoming-animal (1987, 274–5). What accompanies Sookie's facility as a nomad is this openness to transformation, a will to continuous self-invention, which Deleuze and Guattari term becoming-woman (1987, 276–80). Those important 'becomings', however, are given more explicit and constant exposition in the first-person narrative in the novels. They nevertheless provide constant orientation for the otherwise wildly rambling narrative in the HBO adaptation. The upshot is first of all an exercise in encountering difference and secondly an exhibition of wilfully unrestrained personal transformation. Just as volatility and ambivalence inhere in the war machine, so it is also with being a nomad. That is, aside from the repeated physical and mortal peril that Sookie encounters, her spiritual traversals are also rife with peril. At no point do we suspect that her happiness is guaranteed. Her relationship with Bill – and, again, later with Eric – is complexly problematic. Sookie's moral comportment is creative,

deriving from her own reflections about choices she makes, and not strictly according to rules that she has learned to obey. That creativity entails the peril of doing wrong, which is similar to committing one's heart to the wrong person. But what makes the narrative and its protagonist compelling is how Sookie's spiritual travels demonstrate that fulfilment comes from choosing to be exceptional, just as social change originates in being minoritarian, in finding an anchor outside the prevailing social and political definitions. As Lafayette tells Sookie in 'Burning House of Love' (1.7), 'it ain't possible to live unless you crossin' somebody's line'.

Notes

- 1 For example, we hear the vocalizations of Tuvan throat singing at the beginning of episode 5 of the first season, and the cover of the Rolling Stones' 'Play with Fire' at the closing of episode 7, after the arson attack on the vampires' house.
- 2 See also Nietzsche (2003).

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