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1

Every Age Has the Vampire It Needs:¹

An Introduction

Kirstine Moffat and Gareth Schott

The vampire of folklore is a mysterious and menacing figure who lives in the shadows, a legend evoking dread because it is hidden, separate, and unknowable. Think of John William Polidori's elusive Lord Ruthven who "gazed upon the mirth around him, as if he could not participate therein," or Sheridan L. Fanu's Carmilla, a "strange and beautiful companion" whose "ardour" is "hateful and yet overpowering," or Bram Stoker's Count Dracula "with a red light of triumph in his eyes, and with a smile that Judas in hell might be proud of."² The reverse is true of many contemporary vampires, who seem to be omnipresent and — in part because of their visibility and in part because of their domestication — familiar, known, almost friendly. Writing of the vampires of our age, J. M. Tyree observes that "Edward, Bill, and Eli embody a new combination of undead chum and unnaturally attentive lover, a sort of guardian angel with fangs."³ If, as Milly Williamson has argued, "we conjure the vampires that we want or need for the cultural and historical times that we find ourselves in,"⁴ the contemporary vampire has, in many ways, been "de-fanged" and "re-souled," continuing to beguile because of its supernatural power and immortality, but as hero rather than as monster.

There are, of course, contemporary examples of predatory vampires, such as the sadistic Vlad Tepes of Elizabeth Kostova's *The Historian*, who is described by his creator as "a metaphor for the evil that is so hard to undo in history."⁵ Films such as *I am Legend* and *Against the Dark* symbolically link vampirism with disease, while the Federal

Vampire and Zombie Agency website (the subject of Joan Ormrod's discussion in Chapter 3) casts vampires as the threatening "other" in a post-9/11 world. Likewise, series such as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Demons* focus on the heroic exploits of those who protect humanity from supernatural monsters. However, the fictional vampires who currently people the pages of books and the screens of cinemas, televisions, and computers tend to be much less menacing. Think of the many texts which centre on vampire families attempting to live a "normal" life, such as Matt Haig's dysfunctional Radley family, or the conflicted family of *Young Dracula*, or Mitchell in *Being Human*. Many modern vampires are designed to amuse rather than horrify, such as Gail Carriger's witty Lord Akeldama, resplendent in "yellow checked gaiters, gold satin breeches, an orange and lemon striped waistcoat, and an evening jacket of sunny pink brocade,"⁶ or the rock-and-roll musicians of *Suck*, or the parodic Edward Sullen of *Vampires Suck*. Alternate or parallel worlds entice readers and viewers with their varied and intricate vampire mythologies: Richelle Mead's *Vampire Academy*, Elizabeth Knox's haunting *Daylight*, Sergei Lukanenko's *Nightwatch* series, New Zealand film *Perfect Creatures*, the *Underworld* trilogy. Even the classics can now be read "spiced" with some vampire action, such as Sarah Gray's *Wuthering Bites*, Charlotte Brontë and Sherri Browning Erwin's *Jayne Slayer*, or Louisa May Alcott and Lynn Messina's *Little Vampire Women*. Above all, on page and screen the romantic, moody, charismatic, vampire hero transfixes fans with his hypnotic gaze: Angel, Edward Cullen, Stefan Salvatore, Eric Northman.

The all-pervasive nature of the vampire in contemporary Western culture was brought home to us during a fact-finding trip to one of New Zealand's largest chain stores, the Warehouse. We were literally encircled by vampires. On a stand in front of us vampire texts jostled for attention: Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* quartet, Charlaine Harris's *Southern Vampire Mysteries*, Rochelle Mead's *Vampire Academy*, Colleen Gleeson's *The Vampire Voss*, Christine Feehan's *Dark Peril*. To the left a display of DVDs enticed us with their vibrant colours: the first series of *The Vampire Diaries*; the third season of *True Blood*; the sci-fi *Daybreakers*, the poignant *Let the Right One In*. To the right sat a selection of posters and games. Should a shabby or plain interior need beautifying, then a brooding Edward, or the eroticized "Vampire Girl," fangs bared and cleavage on display, was there to offer the perfect solution. Should the detached adoration of the representational qualities of the vampire fall short, fans could turn to the orientational function of an interactive digital game (such as *Vampire Rain* for Playstation) and "become" a vampire. To the left, a display of T-shirts highlighted the insight of Lisa Lewis's proclamation that: "We all know who fans are. They're the ones who wear the colors of their favorite team ... Fans are, in fact, the most visible and identifiable of audiences."⁷ By donning T-shirts with slogans such as "I Kissed a Vampire and I Liked It," "Screw Being a Princess I Wanna Be a Vampire!" and "Only Vampires Can Be Your BFFs," the self and identity construction of the vampire fan could be easily cemented and articulated. These aspects of constructing and maintaining fan identity are

highlighted by Brigid Cherry, who examines communities of fans who knit in Chapter 8, and by Rick Hudson, who investigates the world of alternative fashion and photography in Chapter 9.

Vampire products, and their positioning within the compositional designs of shop displays, are, of course, evidence of a superb marketing ploy. The “product” which is the contemporary vampire is a highly successful commodity, as David Huxley explores in Chapter 7 in relation to comic books. We argue that this plethora of books, T-shirts, DVDs, and posters is also indicative of fan demands, a heightened audience appetite for all things vampiric. In this collection we seek to understand these fan demands more fully by investigating the context within which vampire texts are produced, circulated and consumed.⁸

Fans are divided on the subject of the contemporary vampire. Some celebrate the romanticizing and domestication of the vampire, while others call for the return of the Gothic vampire who not only titillates but chills and horrifies (such as the authors of the fan fiction discussed by Candace Benefiel in Chapter 13, and Maria Lindgren Leavenworth and Malin Isaksson in Chapter 14). Unsurprisingly, the idea of extending this debate within an edited collection materialized from a conversation between two fans (who also happen to be colleagues). As editors and academics we hail from English and Media Studies respectively and we share a penchant for texts that engage with vampire mythology. For us, and for the other contributors to this volume, the vampire as an object of study firstly excites our passion as fans, before being related to wider disciplinary interests and located within intellectual frameworks. In focusing our analyses on the vampire as it is expressed in contemporary literature, film, television, graphic novels, and fan activities, this collection serves to acknowledge the power of popular culture to tap into emotions and provoke strong associations, as well as the ability of this medium to release audiences from everyday thoughts and concerns. Cultural hierarchies may continue to separate the activities of fandom from more “valued” cultural artefacts, such as “high” art or literature, but scholars such as Jolie Jenson have been eager to question the boundaries and practices that separate aficionados (such as scholars) from fans, arguing that devotion and loyalties to “high” cultural forms (as opposed to those that are popular, inexpensive and widely available) are not really qualitatively different in terms of levels of knowledge, expertise, research and time investment.⁹ Such arguments serve to acknowledge the complexity of the engagement with the popular. Indeed fans typically operate as both avid consumers and passionate yet analytical readers of texts, as Roy Parkhurst highlights in Chapter 17. Herein lies the challenge of this collection: to expand the address of cultural criticism beyond the ivory tower and to account for the place of popular culture in our everyday lives.

While the politics of studying popular culture (which has been well covered elsewhere)¹⁰ is not the central preoccupation of this collection, we share with fans and fan scholars an interest in the everyday and in the modes of cultural expression that

form a central role in who we are and how we see the world, be it as part of a regular, scheduled viewing experience on television, or a more pronounced passion for phenomena that others might consider trivial, irrelevant, banal or trite. While the “sympathetic” vampire is a key figure in modern vampire tales, it is not itself a modern phenomenon, having been traced back to the figure of Lord Byron by Milly Williamson.¹¹ Indeed, the domestication of the vampire can be read as an extension of the desire expressed by the powerful Dracula, who reads in order to free himself from both his physical isolation in a castle surrounded by wasteland and his sense of his redundancy at having no armies to command and no children to rear.¹²

“... for some years past, ever since I had the idea of going to London, [my books] have given me many, many hours of pleasure. Through them I have come to know your great England, and to know her is to love her. I long to go through the crowded streets of your mighty London, to be in the midst of the whirl and rush of humanity, to share its life, its change, its death, and all that makes it what it is.”¹³

More pronounced in contemporary culture is the way in which the sympathetic vampire has been reinscribed with the concerns of fans, focusing on the pragmatics and realism of day-to-day vampire existence and vampire relationships with humans (as discussed by Katie Hoskinson in Chapter 11). By examining the current resurgence of the vampire, we therefore expand the notion of fandom beyond the aca-fan (academic fan) to the “author as fan,” with Amy Elizabeth Smith focussing on vampiric recreations of Jane Austen in Chapter 15 and Fiona Martin exploring multiple layers of homage and adaptation in her analysis of *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Undead* in Chapter 16. It can be argued that contemporary treatments of the vampire fulfil a similar performative role to that which has traditionally been associated with media fandom, that is, the creation of texts that “enact, share in, and see scenes that the canonical author never created.”¹⁴ The complexities of these fan reworkings and extensions of beloved texts is the subject of Melissa de Zwart’s discussion of online identity and copyright in Chapter 12.

Jonathan Gray, Cornel Sandvoss, and C. Lee Harrington have already commented on the “mainstreaming” of fandom, and with it fan scholarship, during the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.¹⁵ A predominant theme in contemporary vampire texts is the shift to an open co-existence between vampires and humans, described as “mainstreaming” in *True Blood*. Edward Castronova uses the term “synthetic worlds” (often interchangeably with virtual worlds) to broadly describe spaces in our everyday lives that replicate many of the features of the real world, but also contain a sort of fantastical reality.¹⁶ Taking this idea a little further, the concept of the synthetic age (an advancement of the genetic age) describes the proliferation of the role and presence of synthetic materials, advanced polymers, artificial intelligence, and composite materials in our daily lives. This notion of the synthetic facilitates a blurring

of reality and fantasy to such a degree that, in the vampire universe, it has succeeded in lessening the sharp distinctions between good and evil, human and non-human, which Kimberley McMahon-Coleman examines in relation to *The Vampire Diaries* in Chapter 10. *True Blood* (based on Charlaine Harris's Southern Vampire Mysteries) uses a synthetic blood beverage Tru Blood to enable and initiate the domestication of the vampire through its removal of the *need* for cold-blooded murder. The modern vampire has successfully "mainstreamed," literally re-entering public life and popular consciousness.

As is argued in this collection, the plight of the modern vampire also evokes feminism, classism, civil and gay rights, homo-nationalism, and other liberal-progressive politics. These crucial aspects of fan identity are the subject of Susana Loza's analysis of the homonormativity of *True Blood* in Chapter 6, and underpin Jennifer Jenson and Anita Sarkeesian's discussion of the archetypal feminine in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and the Twilight saga in Chapter 4. Simultaneously present in the fictional world of *True Blood* and our navigable virtual worlds (reinforcing the constant presence of alternate realities) is the AVL (American Vampire League) whose members seek to "eradicate the fear and hatred of vampires that is caused by both widespread misinformation and an entire race's punishment for the crimes of a few."¹⁷ The AVL website features a list of "vampire friendly brands," with global corporations (such as Harley Davidson and Gillette) in on the ruse. Mini is credited as one of the first companies to "remove industrial silver from their product line;" in doing so, they have "greatly reduced the contamination risk for thousands of vampires, eliminating silver-oxide from its electrical components and replacing silver-plated bearings with ceramic alternatives". Conversely, the fictional anti-vampire church, Fellowship of the Sun, featured in Season Two of *True Blood*, also holds a web-presence which condemns vampires for undermining "our way of life, sullyng our communities with their routine acts of hedonism and cruelty."¹⁸ In doing so, the church presents a defence of humanity and what it means to be human.

In most of the contemporary versions of the vampire discussed in this collection we find a rupturing of the mundane (with the assimilation of the vampire into everyday life), or, put differently, the mergence of worlds. The artistic effect is a breaking down of the frames that previously demarcated vampire texts as belonging to the horror genre, and the rise in popularity of the "dark romance" genre. Prior to the current resurgence of the vampire, Colin Odell and Michelle Le Blanc stated that, as "'supernatural' beings, vampires offer escape from reality."¹⁹ Contemporary vampire texts embrace and generate collision between fantasy and reality, revelling in the juxtaposition created by the transformation of the vampire myth of demonic power into a much more mundane identity faced with the cruel realities of immortality (on which Jonathan F. Bassett reflects in Chapter 2).

C. Lee Harrington and Denise Bielby provide a compelling argument for the need to apply a “life course” perspective to the study of fandom, placing emphasis on the continuing role and influence of media fandom throughout life.²⁰ Such relationships between individuals and media objects, they argue, also serve as a means of “understanding lives through times.”²¹ The concept of age and aging also sits well with the thematic focus of our book. The modern vampire text, our object of study, serves to forefront social and historical change via the vampire. On the one hand the vampire remains in physical stasis (reflecting the human age and historical period in which they were made), yet, on the other hand, vampires carry with them the ideals, conventions, beliefs and values of times past into the present. As a media object, the vampire text evolves via contemporary franchises that are also released, read and watched over an extended period of time. In doing so, they constitute something close to a life stage or a “period” themselves, something that Harry Potter fans are confronting with the release of *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows: Part 2*, the final instalment of the film franchise. Indeed, the tag line for the promotional poster for the final film reads “It All Ends.”

At the time of writing this collection, the Twilight book series has been concluded, yet it remains incomplete as a film franchise. Another popular example, the television series *True Blood* (also a book adaptation), is currently airing its fourth season. Having started with modest viewing figures in the United States, it has now become cable channel HBO’s (Home Box Office) most watched production since the highly successful *The Sopranos*. The life course of many of the texts discussed in this collection thus currently remains ongoing, and is therefore still a significant part of individual lives.

This book focuses on key shifts in the representation and treatment of the vampire in the current age. Within this new era, it appears that different manifestations of the modern vampire hold relevance for specific generations. Clearly the popular Twilight series has been associated with a predominantly female teenage audience, particularly through its encouraged division of loyalties and declaration of preference for either Team Edward (vampire) or Team Jacob (werewolf/shapeshifter) which has, in turn, given it a perceived lower cultural value with some audiences (as discussed by Catherine Strong in Chapter 5). While the Twilight books clearly deal with “normatively appropriate age-based identities and activities,” *True Blood* offers a much more adult-themed account of encounters with the ever-expanding supernatural world that converges upon the fictional setting of Bon Temps, Louisiana.²² In contrast, the Twilight series can easily be read as a text that assists in making sense of significant physical changes, identity formation, and an emerging sense of self during adolescence, although it also identifies graduation from high school as a key transitional life moment, one that holds additional significance for Bella Swan, as her proposed date for transformation and entry into the vampire world.

The pervasive influence and relevance of vampire narratives in the lives of fans was frequently brought home to us while editing this collection, particularly during social gatherings such as birthday parties and weddings. Given the specialist nature of many

academic preoccupations, the typical experience of the academic upon meeting a party of strangers and attempting to answer the inevitable, "So, what do you do?" conversation facilitator, is the onset of the "glazed-eye syndrome." Sadly, however appealing academic passions may be to those working in a particular field, non-specialists frequently find these obsessions at best boring and at worst incomprehensible.

This collection has had the effect of actually reversing this eye-glazing process. Through our preoccupation with the dark, compelling figure of the vampire, we have experienced genuine interest in the book project, gaining a kind of glamour by association. Both friends and strangers have clamoured to tell us about either their love or hate relationship with the world of vampires. We have inadvertently initiated arguments and exposed otherwise clandestine devotees of the *Twilight* saga, who reveal themselves in order to defend the novels against those who cringe at the idea of vampires who sparkle. We have incited those who relish the contemporary fascination with the vampire to share their passion with those who are either baffled by or contemptuous of this interest in the supernatural. In these contexts voices inevitably get raised and arms begin to gesture wildly as fans seek to get their point across and demonstrate what the non-fan fails to appreciate. We present comments surreptitiously jotted down as mention of this collection unexpectedly triggered informal gatherings of fans and anti-fans:

"Well *Twilight's* just for swooning girls, but every Monday night at 9:30 I tune in to *True Blood*. Sooooo sexy!"

"I kind of get the lure of the supernatural, the defeat of death, the erotic possibilities of the vampire bite. But I just don't see how the vampire can be tamed. He or she is a beast. Surely that's the charm. We want to escape from mortality and powerlessness. Or we just want to shiver in fear, or see evil defeated."

"Why are vampires male? Where are the female vampires?" "Well, there's the whole erotic bite thing going on, and the tortured soul of the immortal. I suppose vampires are the ultimate 'bad boy' hero." "Yeah, but can you name me one vampire heroine? They're usually either irritating victims or slayers like Buffy."

"Well, I'm grateful to the sudden fashionability of vampires! It took the vampire to make pale, skinny guys sexy!"

While most of the debates focused on fictional texts featuring the vampire, we have also been offered more wide-ranging examples of fan practices and preoccupations. A lawyer acquaintance asked whether we had heard about the 2010 case in which two men and a woman were charged with biting and drinking the blood of a man on Mt Victoria in Wellington, New Zealand.²³ Another person mentioned reading an article in a woman's magazine about a middle-aged *Twilight* fan whose weight-loss regime was inspired by tattoo rewards featuring her favourite characters from Meyer's novel. Such

engagements with the vampire are the central preoccupation of this book. As the anecdotal examples provided above illustrate, some of the engagements are critical of the influence of vampires on contemporary culture, but most are celebratory of audience consumption of the modern vampire. After all, the contributors in this collection (however critical we may be of some vampire texts, mythologies, or fan practices) are all themselves “fanpires.”

Notes

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- 3 J. M. Tyree, “Warm-Blooded: True Blood and Let the Right One In,” *Film Quarterly* 63, no. 2 (2009), 32.
- 4 Milly Williamson, *The Lure of the Vampire: Gender, Fiction and Fandom from Bram Stoker to Buffy*, (London: Wallflower Press, 2005), 5.
- 5 Elizabeth Kostova, quoted by Jane Sullivan, “Dracula and the Human Factor,” *The Age*, 7 June, 2006, <http://www.theage.com.au/news/books/dracula-and-the-human-factor/2006/06/02/1148956490961.html?page=fullpage>.
- 6 Gail Carriger, *Soulless: An Alexia Tarabotti Novel* (New York and London: Orbit, 2009), 46.
- 7 Lisa Lewis, ed. *Adoring Audience: Fan Culture and Popular Media* (London: Routledge, 1992), 1.
- 8 Henry Jenkins, “On Mad Med, Aca-Fandom and the Goals of Cultural Criticism,” Confessions of an Aca-Fan: The Official Weblog of Henry Jenkins, accessed January, 25, 2011, <http://henryjenkins.org>.
- 9 Jolie Jenson, “Fandom as Pathology: The Consequences of Characterisation,” in *Adoring Audience*, 9-30.
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- 11 Williamson, *Lure of the Vampire*.
- 12 Clive Leatherdale, “*Dracula*”: *The Novel and the Legend* (Rayleigh, UK: Desert Island Books, 1993), 232.
- 13 Bram Stoker, *Dracula* (London: Penguin Books, 2007), 31.
- 14 Kurt Lancaster, *Interacting with Babylon 5: Fan Performances in a Media Universe*, (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 2001), 131.
- 15 Jonathan Gray, Cornel Sandvoss, and C. Lee Harrington, eds., *Fandom: Identities and Communities in a Mediated World* (New York: New York University Press, 2007).
- 16 Edward Castronova, *Synthetic Worlds: The Business and Culture of Online Games* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).
- 17 *The American Vampire League.com*, accessed August 24, 2011, <http://americanvampireleague.com/>.
- 18 *Fellowship of the Sun.org*, accessed August 24, 2011, <http://www.fellowshipofthesun.org/>.
- 19 Colin Odell and Michelle Le Blanc, *Vampire Films* (Harpndon, UK: Pocket Essentials Series, 2000), 7.
- 20 C. Lee Harrington and Denise D. Bielby, “A Life Course Perspective on Fandom,” *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 13 no 5 (2010): 429-450.
- 21 Christine L. Fry, “The Life Course as a Cultural Construct,” in *Invitation to the Life Course: Toward New Understandings*, ed. Richard A. Settersten, Jr., Towards New Understandings of Later Life Society and Aging Series (Amityville, NY: Baywood, 2003), 271.

22 Harrington and Bielby, 431.

23 "Vampire Attack in Wellington," *Dominion Post*, 6 May 2010,
<http://www.stuff.co.nz/national/crime/3662417/Vampire-attack-in-Wellington>.