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Twilight Zones:
Subjectivity, Gender, and Feminism in Three 21st Century
Popular Vampire Romance Narratives

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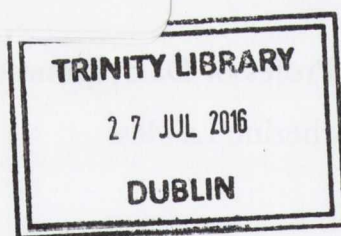
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Thesis submitted to Trinity College Dublin for the degree of Doctor in Philosophy

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Summary

This thesis examines three 21st century American vampire romance narratives: the *Twilight* novels (2005-2008) by Stephenie Meyer and their film adaptations (2008-2012), the HBO television adaptation of Charlaine Harris' *Southern Vampire Mysteries* (2001-2013) *True Blood* (2008-2014), and the CW television adaptation (2009-) of L.J. Smith's *The Vampire Diaries* (1991-). Situated in the field of feminist popular cultural studies, the thesis considers the production and reception contexts, genre, and narrative texts that make up the three series. The theoretical framework used positions popular phenomena such as *Twilight* as culturally "symptomatic." As such, they may be read as revealing larger cultural issues and anxieties. The methodology employed involves consideration of the public reception and popular discussion of the texts, a discussion of genre, and textual analysis of the three narratives in which selected scenes and storylines are used to illustrate the texts' overarching construction of subjectivity. Employing a range of feminist and psychoanalytic theories, this reading of the phenomenon of *Twilight* and related texts reveals cultural aporia around gender, feminism, and subjectivity.

Twilight achieved levels of popularity that render it a cultural reference point, widely recognised even amongst those who have neither read nor seen the books or films in the franchise. It has also been received with controversy; it is a popular text that inspires passionate opinions on its aesthetic merits and politics. Its popularity and controversy often centre on issues related to femininity, feminism and female-coded genres. The cultural saturation of *Twilight* and the controversies in public discussion of the text, its author, and its audiences make in-depth analysis of the series and responses to it worthwhile. The television shows *True Blood* and *The Vampire Diaries* are explored as two important related cultural productions, interpreted here in response to *Twilight*.

The thesis begins by exploring the contexts of production and reception of each text. Gender, genre, and discourses of feminism are shown to be central to public debate over the series' meanings. This in turn prompts a consideration of some of the shared generic traditions of the narratives, presenting them as participating in the genre of Dark Romance and locating them within a Female Gothic mode. The detailed discussion of production, reception, and generic contexts framed by feminist popular cultural studies and feminist literary theory in Chapters 1 & 2 enables and directs the textual analysis undertaken in Chapters 3, 4, & 5. Read in the context of production, popular reception, vampire culture,

and the Female Gothic, a focus on gothic womanhood and maternal subjectivity in *Twilight*, the South and Othering in *True Blood*, and epistemological uncertainty and repetitious cycles in *The Vampire Diaries* emerges. These are explored using a range of theories including psychoanalytic understandings of subject-formation, particularly work concerned with the maternal, including Luce Irigaray's theory of cultural matricide, Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection, and Melanie Klein's object-relations theories.

Ultimately the difficulty of articulating and representing maternal subjectivity from the heroine's perspective is read as indicative of the contradictions of cultural subjectivizing processes, such as abjection, for female personhood. The controversy in the popular response is read as a reaction to the problematic way in which *Twilight* brings abjection to its logical conclusion thus eliminating the female/maternal body entirely. The construction of subjectivity in *True Blood* and *The Vampire Diaries* highlights the impossibility of *Twilight*'s gothic fantasy. *True Blood* focuses on the dangers and attractions of Othering, while *The Vampire Diaries* uses the melodrama soap opera form to construct subjectivity as endless cycles of loss. The feminist potential of *Twilight* nonetheless lies in its attempt and overt failure to reconcile the female body with unified subjectivity. It demonstrates the reliance of discourses of unified subjectivity on abjection of the maternal/feminine through the impossibility of combining the leaky maternal body and the impermeable stone vampire body. The elaboration of this conflict within a storyworld that presents motherhood as central to female happiness may be read as showing the impossibility of adult female fulfilment within this paradigm. Though Bella appears to attain the best of both worlds, she does so through a final generative abjection symbolising both the positive (subject forming) and negative (refusal of the maternal) aspects of the abjection process. In achieving a complete abjection of the female body, however, Bella is psychically dead, as abjection is an on-going process of boundary assertion, not one that can ever be completed. Maternity, despite its difficult position in feminism, presents potential for imagining alternative models of selfhood not exclusively based on the oppositional self: Other dynamics shown to be deeply problematic in the three storyworlds considered.

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This thesis is dedicated to my son, Jude.

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INTRODUCTION

ARIZONA. 2nd June 2003. A twenty-eight year old woman wakes as usual around 4am, a “baby thing – left over from knowing that somebody needs you” then goes back to sleep.¹ In those early morning hours she would often “have the most vivid dreams” and that morning was to bring a dream that would change her life:²

There was this beautiful image, this boy, just glittering with light and talking to this normal girl. ... It was mostly about how much he wanted to kill her – and, yet, how much he loved her.³

Fearful she would forget the dream and interested in discovering what would happen to this conflicted couple, she “started writing it out.”⁴ Three months later she had the first draft of her first novel, *Twilight*.

* * *

So goes the simultaneously unlikely and mundane origin story of the international best seller *Twilight* by Stephenie Meyer, a novel that began a four-part saga (2005-2008) and gave rise to five film adaptations (2008-2012). The series also includes a novella *The Short Second Life of Bree Tanner* (2010) and a gender-swapped reimagining of the *Twilight* novel, *Life and Death* (2015), published as an addition to the tenth anniversary edition of *Twilight*. The *Twilight* phenomenon has left an indelible mark on the popular conception of vampires; a significant impression on many readers, mostly women, in the mid to late noughties; and inspired more than the usual amount of popular critique, much of which had a notable recurrence of explicitly feminist concerns.

Given the combination of a male desire to both kill and love the heroine of Meyer’s romance, it is perhaps unsurprising that the story provoked feminist response. One such

¹ Meyer, *The Twilight Saga: The Official Illustrated Guide*, 2.

² Ibid., 3.

³ Ibid., 3.

⁴ Ibid., 4.

feminist response was my own. I was first introduced to Stephenie Meyer's novel series in 2009 while completing an MPhil in Gender and Women's Studies. All four novels were published by this point and the immense success of the series, which had been building since 2005, was apparent in mainstream culture. I read the novels voraciously and my response was so passionate in its anger and exasperation that I decided to devote my MPhil dissertation to an exposure of the anti-feminism of *Twilight*. My response was not unique, as countless blog entries, many magazine and newspaper articles, and a significant number of academic articles, edited collections, and monographs attest to.⁵

Having completed my dissertation and been encouraged by the increasing volume of scholarly and popular outpourings against *Twilight* and its many evils, I felt satisfied with my efforts at feminist popular cultural criticism for a time. This sense did not last long, however. While the vast majority of scholarship on *Twilight* robustly critiqued its failings, with some problematically making a tacit assumption of 'media-effects' as a justification for their research, many maintained an awareness of and sometimes a focus on gendered hierarchies of taste in popular culture and the potential power of audiences' readings of *Twilight*. In popular media and in my day-to-day experience of peoples' reactions to *Twilight*, however, there emerged a troubling crossover between critiques of the series as supporting conservative and antifeminist values and condemnation of the series, its author, and its audiences based on gender using feminist rhetoric. As the popular 'feminist' critique of *Twilight* snowballed, I began to find myself in some uncomfortable alliances based on a characterisation of *Twilight* as both 'bad' and 'bad for women'.

My discomfort with this situation, combined with a creeping sense of having suppressed aspects of my own contradictory response to the series in my dissertation, led me to continue research on *Twilight*. Returning to Meyer's series, I was determined to allow the contradictions of *Twilight* and consumption of *Twilight* to be present and inform the research. In doing so, this thesis follows in an important tradition of feminist popular cultural criticism, developed by scholars such as Ien Ang (1985, 1988, 1996), Charlotte Brunsdon (1981, 1993, 2000, 2008), Susan Bordo (1990, 1993), and Joanne Hollows (2000, 2006), that refuses to maintain a misleadingly firm boundary between feminist critic and feminine culture. Embracing the contradictions of pleasure in feminine popular culture and

⁵ Examples of popular media and academic responses are discussed in Chapter One.

the negotiation of feminism within, rather than from above, that culture has enabled this study.

Given the range of scholarly work exploring *Twilight*, this research is able to move away from the central romance relationship in *Twilight* and focus on a small number of key scenes to discuss a theme passed over in scholarship on the series to date, that of maternal subjectivity. Two related vampire romance stories popular contemporaneously are also examined; *True Blood* (2008-2014) and *The Vampire Diaries* (2009-) are presented as significant alternative explorations of subjectivity within the shared genre of Dark Romance. The three stories reward careful consideration alongside one another, providing an important negotiation of contemporary discourses of gender, subjectivity, and feminism.

The aim of this thesis is to provide a feminist analysis of the cultural phenomenon of *Twilight* and related vampire romance narratives *True Blood* and *The Vampire Diaries*. It looks particularly at the construction of gendered subjectivity and the operation of discourses of feminism in and in relation to these three texts. *Twilight* has gained levels of popularity that render the franchise a cultural reference point, widely recognised even amongst those who have not read or seen the books or films. It has also been received with controversy; it is a popular text that inspires passionate opinions on its merit and/or politics by many, including non-readers/viewers. Its popularity and controversy often centre on issues related to femininity, feminism and female-coded genres. The cultural saturation of *Twilight* and the controversies in public discussion of the text, its audience, and its implications, make analysis of the narrative, but also of the phenomenon as a whole, including its contexts of production, reception, genre, and related texts, worthwhile. The television shows *True Blood* and *The Vampire Diaries*, based loosely on novel series by Charlaine Harris and L.J. Smith respectively, are explored as two important cultural productions interpreted here as responses to *Twilight*. *The Vampire Diaries*' closely related spin-off show, *The Originals* (2013-) is considered as part of *The Vampire Diaries*' story world.

This study is undertaken within a feminist epistemological framework. Using feminist methods from the fields of literary, film, television, and cultural studies, this thesis contributes an original analysis of the cultural phenomenon of *Twilight*, *True Blood*, and *The Vampire Diaries* including the operations and uses of feminist discourse in, and in reaction to, the texts. This work presents an explicit feminist bid for meaning making regarding the contested area of gendered subjectivity in popular discussion by examining and intervening in the cultural conversation surrounding *Twilight*. This conversation draws on *True Blood*

and *The Vampire Diaries* as contemporaneous vampire romance narratives capitalising on and responding to *Twilight*'s cultural position.

While several edited collections and one monograph address *Twilight* and explore issues of gender in the novels and film, none focus substantially on maternal subjectivity and the challenge of maternity to dominant narratives of subjectivity to be found in *Twilight*.⁶ Several articles and an important edited collection on *True Blood* explore the series as southern gothic and cult quality television.⁷ This work is drawn on and developed here, with a focus on abjection and monstrous femininity. In light of the analysis of *Twilight*, the exploration of subjectivity in *True Blood* is read as containing the challenge of maternal subjectivity while problematizing *Twilight*'s construction of essential womanhood through a focus on the intersectional nature of identity and inassimilable difference. Very little scholarship is currently available on *The Vampire Diaries*. While a small number of articles focus on the serial, it is mostly addressed in passing or as part of a larger discussion of the vampire romance genre.⁸ This thesis provides an in-depth exploration of subjectivity in the serial, including elements of its spin-off show, *The Originals*. Considered in the context of *Twilight* and *True Blood*'s construction of subjectivity, *The Vampire Diaries* focus on loss, repetition, and control returns the subject to the position of child. Again the threat to dominant individualist narratives of subjectivity posed by maternity is neutralised by positioning the maternal as largely an object of the child's psychic processes.

* * *

Before exploring the vampire romance narratives themselves, it is necessary to give an overview of the structure of the thesis. Unless otherwise noted, *Twilight* refers to the original four-part novel series (*Twilight* (2005), *New Moon* (2006), *Eclipse* (2007), and *Breaking Dawn* (2008)) and five feature-length films that are part of the franchise (*Twilight* (2008), *New Moon* (2009), *Eclipse* (2010), *Breaking Dawn: Part 1* (2011), and *Breaking Dawn: Part 2* (2012)); *True Blood* refers to the television serial in its entirety (2008-2014); *The Vampire Diaries* refers to seasons one to six of the television serial (2009-2015) and *The Originals* refers to seasons one

⁶ See Housel, et al. eds. (2009), Clarke and Osborn, eds. (2010), Click, Aubrey and Behm-Moraqitz, eds. (2010), Parke and Wilson, eds. (2011), Anatol, ed. (2011), Wilson (2011), Larsson and Ateiner, eds. (2011), Morey, ed. (2012), Erzen (2010), and others.

⁷ See Housel, et al. eds. (2010), Boyer (2011), Hardy (2011), Leavenworth (2012), Cherry (2012), Marrai (2012), and Reyes (2013, amongst others).

⁸ See Subramanian (2010), McMahon-Coleman (2011), Bridgeman (2013), Williams (2013), and Luksza (2014).

and two (2013-2015). *True Blood* and *The Vampire Diaries* are positioned as related and responding texts to *Twilight* in this study. Given the chronology of the texts (the novel series by Smith and Harris began before *Twilight*) and their relative mainstream presence (while both the *Twilight* novels and films enjoy widespread mainstream popularity, the Smith and Harris' novel series do not have the same mainstream presence as their television adaptations), both novels and films are included in the consideration of *Twilight*, but the focus is largely on the television adaptations *True Blood* and *The Vampire Diaries*, rather than the novel series on which they are based.

Chapter One introduces *Twilight*, *True Blood*, and *The Vampire Diaries*. The first part of the chapter presents *Twilight* as a controversial pop culture phenomenon, positioning *True Blood* and *The Vampire Diaries* as responding texts. The popular and controversial cultural status of *Twilight* is established by stating the sales figures and considering reaction to the series in reviews, opinion pieces, and commentaries. An investment in meaning making in the public interpretation of *Twilight* is shown to focus on issues of womanhood, with ideas about femininity and feminism to the fore. The use of feminist discourse and the word and identity 'feminist' in the public conversation about *Twilight* is explored. Different types of feminism are shown to be involved in public strategies of interpretation and justification of hierarchies of taste. *Twilight* is presented as a highly unstable text that generates significant insights when read as a manifestation of cultural contradictions regarding womanhood.

The second part of the chapter introduces *True Blood* and *The Vampire Diaries* as important popular responses to *Twilight*. Detailing their production and reception contexts, they are positioned in dialogue with the popular image of *Twilight*. Each text is presented as an exploration of subjectivity in the context of popular discourses of feminism and femininity that relate in significant ways to the texts' origins and location in popular culture. This discussion shows the 'culture-war' influenced critique of the popular vampire romance that identifies conservative or liberal ideology or agendas in the narratives. While presenting this as part of the popular understanding of these texts, this thesis moves to explore how these stories and the stories of their production, reception, and genre involve a problematising of subjectivity that is significant for feminist ideas and ideas of feminism in popular culture. When considered in dialogue, these three texts, which in the popular perception represent a range of political leanings, share anxieties relating to gendered subjectivity.

Vampire stories are always, consciously or not, involved in a dialogue with other vampire stories that have come before and those popular contemporaneously. Chapter Two aims to briefly situate the texts in relation to vampire culture. Having shown in the first chapter the gendered associations of genre and its use in the assessment of the three texts under consideration, this chapter locates the series in a tradition of Female Gothic work. It is this positioning that enables a reading of the series as symptomatic texts, that is to say texts that show symptoms of underlying cultural dis-ease. Using *Twilight* as the orienting text and locating the vampire romance in a Female Gothic tradition, the maternal and subjectivity come to the fore. The focus in popular criticism and academic scholarship on the merits or dangers of the central romance eclipses the significant issue of maternal relations, the body, and challenges to personhood explored in the narratives. Diane Hoeveler and Helene Meyers' work on feminism and women's Gothic writing are used to present the Female Gothic as a tradition that involves a negotiation of patriarchal systems from a feminine perspective. The relationship between feminisms and constructions of subjectivity in vampire romance is explored. The three vampire romance texts under examination are presented as engaged with this tradition of Female Gothic, an internally pessimistic mode representing processes of achieving and maintaining gendered subjectivity under oppressive conditions and unequal power relations.

Drawing on this understanding of the Female Gothic, Chapters Three, Four, and Five look to each text individually, exploring their representation of gendered subjectivity. Chapter Three considers subjectivity, the body, and the maternal in *Twilight*. Beginning with the dream that inspired *Twilight*, this chapter presents the text as a refraction of some of the difficulties of adult womanhood in Western culture and a pessimistic attempt at resolving contradictions surrounding personhood and womanhood. Irigaray's work on maternal genealogies and matricide is drawn on in a discussion of mother-daughter relations in Meyer's text. In keeping with the Female Gothic tradition, the dangers and inescapability of the institutions of family, marriage, and motherhood for women are established through the backstories of the other female characters. Bella's story presents a fantasy resolution and 'happy ending' to gothic womanhood. The abject maternal body is expunged and personhood achieved in the acquisition of a clean and bloodless vampire body. The narrative rupture and change in style and tone surrounding parturition are read as symptomatic of a problem regarding Meyer's portrayal of maternal subjectivity. Kristeva's theory of subject-formation based on abjection is used to explore the difficulty in *Twilight* of combining personhood and maternity. This results in a sense of the impossibility of a

maternal subject, yet the 'fold' in the narrative in which Bella picks up narration prior to giving birth can be read as a short-lived moment of maternal subjectivity. Bella's ultimate achievement of personhood is at the expense of the female body. This reading presents the "perfect piece of forever" at the end of *Twilight* as a fantasy of stasis.⁹

Chapter Four examines identity, abject bodies, and the South in *True Blood*. The television show is presented as a narrative that highlights intersectionality in the on-going process of subject making. The 'natural' and bloody physiology of vampires in *True Blood* is contrasted with *Twilight*'s bloodless, stone vampire bodies. The analysis shows how the vulnerable self is constantly at risk in its desire for firm boundaries. Solid boundaries are problematically and often temporarily found through faith in identity assurances of religion, cults, factions, and groups that suppress difference within the group by abjecting it outwards and onto hated 'Others'. Each season involves an exploration of the violence of individual and social processes of abjection, using the imagined South to present these excessively. Again Kristeva's theory of abjection in the process and maintenance of subjectivity is drawn on. The problem of personhood presented in *True Blood* is one of balance between a tolerance of difference and the maintenance of self. The focus of this discussion reveals *True Blood*'s move away from the difficulties of maternal subjectivity to emphasise instead the problems of the maternal for the subject in maintaining individual integrity without extreme psychic and/or physical violence.

Chapter Five explores selfhood in *The Vampire Diaries*. Nostalgia in the workings of the home channel's programming and the co-creators' origin story of the series as one of loss direct the analysis. The construction of subjectivity is deeply informed by psychoanalytic ideas of the importance of early childhood to the functioning of the adult self. Living is an experience haunted by foundational loss and marked by repetitious cycles of violence and regret in the serial. The breakdown of clear boundaries between the 'monster' and the human in vampire romance is used to establish the quality of humanity as emotion. Retroactively constructing the self out of emotion rather than action or consequence, expressing the always retrospective emotion of regret, becomes the marker of humanity. The central dynamics of subjectivity presented in *The Vampire Diaries* are read through psychoanalytic understandings of cyclical and repetitive psychic processes, particularly Melanie Klein's paranoid-schizoid and depressive conditions. A combination of nostalgia

⁹ Meyer, *Breaking Dawn*, 754.

and the uncanny present a never-ending desire for and repudiation of the past in a representation of history that is no more than the biography of the individual. Epistemological uncertainty pervades the serial as each version of events is continually undermined by a new temporarily privileged interpretation. In their representation of personhood, *Twilight's* stasis and *True Blood's* degeneration are contrasted with *The Vampire Diaries'* repetition. The dynamics of subjectivity focused on in *The Vampire Diaries* reveals, as in *True Blood*, a reaction to *Twilight's* demonstration of the contradictions of maternity and personhood by repositioning the maternal as object of the subject-in-information. The key focus in each of the text-based chapters is the construction of subjectivity and the particular aspects of subject-formation and maintenance foregrounded in each text.

* * *

While the thesis as a whole grapples with the complexity of discourses and ideas relating to feminism, gender and subjectivity, it is worth giving a preliminary introduction to these terms before commencing discussion of their bearing in and on the popular texts. The terms 'feminism', 'gender', and 'subjectivity' are highly opaque and their meanings are contested, making definitions of them necessary but inevitably somewhat reductive given the range of their use and influence. Nonetheless, it is useful to give a preliminary sketch of their meanings for this study. Definition of other important terms and concepts will be advanced as they arise in each chapter.

Using Alison Jaggar's description, feminism is understood in this thesis as:

... activity directed toward transforming social arrangements and systems of thought that accord disproportionate honour, authority, and power to men and to whatever is categorised as masculine - and that simultaneously degrade and subordinate women and whatever is defined culturally as feminine, including many groups of men.¹⁰

Within a feminist epistemology, knowledge is seen here as something produced rather than discovered. This research is engaged in the production of feminist knowledge. That knowledge should be political is not seen here as a bold statement, rather, following feminist interventions, it is viewed as a more honest acknowledgement of the impossibility of entirely apolitical knowledge. This epistemological framework follows feminist

¹⁰ Jaggar, *Just Methods: An Interdisciplinary Feminist Reader*, vii.

philosopher Donna Haraway's concept of 'situated knowledges', an epistemology that acknowledges the partial nature of knowledge without relativising all knowledge claims as equally useful or ethical.¹¹ Haraway provides a vision of knowledge making that is:

simultaneously an account of radical historical contingency for all knowledge claims and knowing subjects, a critical practice for recognising our own "semiotic technologies" for making meanings, and a no-nonsense commitment to faithful accounts of a "real" world, one that can be partially shared and that is friendly to earth-wide projects of finite freedom, adequate material abundance, modest meaning in suffering, and limited happiness.¹²

Feminism includes a range of histories, political and social movements, and philosophies. In the analysis of vampire romance texts, a range of different feminisms and strands of feminist thought will be drawn on. Various feminist discourses are utilised within the texts and the responses to them. Therefore, feminist theory is not used only as a framework for analysis; it also forms an object of analysis in this thesis.

The term gender is used in this thesis to refer to an area of on-going dispute and development in feminist thought, a "social structural phenomenon" that is "also produced, negotiated and sustained at the level of everyday interaction."¹³ It is a concept central to feminist critiques of essentialism that emphasise "the social construction of masculinity and femininity and the social ordering of relations between men and women."¹⁴ Gender is seen as intersecting with other social divisions including class, race, sexuality, and generation with meanings of masculinity and femininity varying within these relations. The concept of gender emphasises the cultural malleability of identity categories.

In the early focus on gender in feminist theorising of the 1970s, the separation of sex and gender was used as a progressive force to undo discourses of biological essentialism. However, as consideration of the sex/gender divide developed the untheorised category of sex became problematic. Sociologist Liz Stanley noted in 1984 that between the:

¹¹ Haraway, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective.", 346.

¹² Ibid., 347.

¹³ Jackson and Scott, *Gender*, 1.

¹⁴ Ibid., 1.

polarised positions... [of] 'biological essentialism' and 'social constructionism' ... most academic feminists have occupied the so-called 'middle-ground' of arguing for social constructionism which takes place on a biological base.¹⁵

Stanley draws attention to the normative and regulative aspect of sex as 'natural': " 'sex' as a natural order is also an order involving *power* and its distribution".¹⁶

Undoing the division between 'gender' as social and 'sex' as biological, allowed feminists "to ask how gender shaped the ways we think about bodily biological differences."¹⁷ Different strands of feminist engagement re-imagined the issues of the sex/gender divide in a variety of ways: while 'sexual difference' feminists focused on the alterity of the feminine, its (mis)use in Western philosophy and its symbolic role in Western cultural imaginaries; radical feminism hoped to eliminate sex difference altogether, presenting sex in a Marxist framework as a "sex class."¹⁸ Cultural feminism grew out of radical feminism but moved towards the re-essentialisation of sex/gender in attempts to celebrate devalued female and feminine attributes and associations.

Poststructuralist feminists' linguistic focus allowed a critique of sex as a pre-linguistic ontological given. Following materialist feminist re-evaluation of the division between sex and gender but coming from a linguistically focused framework, Judith Butler's theories of gender as performative have been highly influential for poststructuralist feminisms. She suggests that "sex is as culturally constructed as gender; indeed perhaps it was always already gender."¹⁹ Butler's conception of sex/gender is often misinterpreted as suggesting that sex/gender is a willing performance involving costumes that may be taken on or off easily. Rather, her theories of sex/gender as begun in *Gender Trouble* (1990) but developed in *Bodies That Matter* (1993) and *Undoing Gender* (2004), emphasise the operations of choice regarding sex and gender as "navigating among norms that are laid out in advance and prior to one's choice."²⁰

Femininity and masculinity are understood in this study as sets of socially enforced and negotiated ways of being/becoming a woman or a man in the on-going process of enacting

¹⁵ Stanley, "Should 'sex' really be 'gender' or 'gender' really be 'sex'?", 31.

¹⁶ Ibid., 40.

¹⁷ Jackson and Scott, *Gender*, 369.

¹⁸ Firestone, *Dialectic of Sex*, 1-12.

¹⁹ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 7.

²⁰ Ibid.

recognisable identities. Sociologist Beverly Skeggs describes femininity as “the process through which women are gendered and become specific sorts of women.”²¹ The focus in this analysis is on modes of femininity, rather than masculinity. Identifying or being identified as a woman brings expectations regarding appropriate femininity. This varies depending on intersections with other difference categories: “Being, becoming, practising and doing femininity are very different things for women of different classes, races, ages and nations.”²² This thesis assumes that a range of socially functional ways of performing femininity operate in society at any given time, with greater or lesser freedoms, privileges, and sanctions. Femininity is socially and culturally specific and historically changing. It is “constantly under construction and ... requires considerable interpretative work.”²³ Indeed, it is “notoriously changeable.”²⁴ According to Butler, the meaning of femininity changes “radically depending upon geopolitical boundaries and cultural constraints on who is imagining whom, and for what purpose.”²⁵ Discourses of femininity are examined in the texts, the production and reception contexts, and in the genre traditions informing the narratives and popular response. Femininity is considered largely at the symbolic and textual level through analysis of textually constructed ideas of femininity in the narratives, gender traditions, and publically available opinion and review. At times the ‘feminine’ takes precedence in the analysis over femininity. Beginning with Simone de Beauvoir’s work on the feminine subject and drawing on a range of traditions including ‘French Feminism’, radical and cultural feminism, postmodern and poststructuralist feminism, and material feminism, theories of the feminine and the feminine subject grapple with the concept of difference and the implications for gendered subjectivity.

Gender is understood here as an on-going locus of meaning in the process of producing and maintaining subjectivity. The concept of subjectivity is related to identity but opens up a space between identity and thinking about identity. Subjectivity is more inclusive than identity in that it can contain multiple identities and contradictory identifications. Using Donald E. Hall’s description, the term subjectivity “denotes our social constructs and consciousness of identity... A social and personal being that exists in negotiation with

²¹ Skeggs, *Formations of Class and Gender*, 98.

²² Ibid.

²³ Jackson and Scott, *Gender*, 271.

²⁴ Butler, *Undoing Gender*, 10.

²⁵ Ibid.

broad cultural definitions of our own ideals.”²⁶ It evokes “that tension between choice and illusion, between imposed definitions and individual interrogations of them, and between old formulae and new responsibilities.”²⁷ As such, subjectivity has been a key area of theorisation and analysis for feminist thought. Indeed, Catherine Belsey states: “One of the central issues for feminism is the cultural construction of subjectivity.”²⁸ Belsey highlights a central contradiction of subjectivity for women:

Women as a group in our society are both produced and inhibited by contradictory discourses. Very broadly, we participate both in the liberal-humanist discourse of freedom, self-determination and rationality and at the same time the specifically feminine discourse offered by society of submission, relative inadequacy and irrational intuition.²⁹

Various theories of subjectivity are drawn on in the analysis of the narratives, genres, and responses looked at in this thesis. These ideas will be introduced and elaborated upon as required in each chapter. The reading undertaken here draws on ideas and theories from a wide range of fields including psychoanalysis, literary studies, film studies, television studies, cultural studies, gender and women’s studies.

This thesis provides an examination of *Twilight*, *True Blood*, and *The Vampire Diaries* that elaborates rather than contains the destabilising potential of these provocative texts. It demonstrates the importance of exploring women-centred popular culture and considering the negotiation of feminism and feminist ideas within and in response to popular texts. Through a feminist critique that interjects in the meaning making process surrounding the texts, a position that self-consciously values feminine perspectives is maintained. This is not to suggest that feminine perspectives are uniform, or that they have allegiance to feminist perspectives, but that as viewpoints they are of value, and have a complex relation to and with feminist identities. Rather than read *Twilight* as a straightforward attempt to indoctrinate women into a regime of femininity based on a passive embrace of heterosexuality, maternity, and the patriarchal family, it is read as a highly ambiguous acting out of some of the extreme contradictions of 21st century ideals of womanhood, which are not separate or separable from discourses of feminism, such is the cultural

²⁶ Hall, *Subjectivity*, 134.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 2.

²⁸ Belsey, “Constructing the Subject, Deconstructing the Text”, 593.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 597-98.

impact of second wave feminism. Read in the context of the popular reaction to them, they become a significant site for the exploration and contestation of feminism's relation to feminine subjectivity.

CHAPTER 1: IT'S A PHENOMENON!

Popular context of *Twilight*, *True Blood*, and *The Vampire Diaries*

Twilight is described as a popular cultural phenomenon by many reviewers and scholars and is presented as such in this study.¹ A popular cultural phenomenon is understood here as a cultural artefact that has achieved remarkable success in terms of sales figures and cultural saturation. *Twilight* has become a “part of common reference.”² It has enjoyed enormous commercial success and levels of public discussion that render it culturally significant and worthy of sustained consideration and analysis. This section will demonstrate the level of *Twilight*’s worldwide success, its cultural saturation and significance by presenting its sales figures, the background to the series’ production and its impact on publishing and film production, and the varieties of popular cultural reference to it. This popularity and permeation is read as relevant to, revealing of, and in turn shaping, the given cultural moment. As Joseph Crawford writes in his study *Twilight of the Gothic: Vampire Fiction and the Rise of the Paranormal Romance* (2014):

One might just be able to sell a million books by being clever and lucky and original, but one can only sell one hundred million books by being, on some level, in tune with the times.³

This understanding of popular culture follows a cultural studies approach that perceives popular texts as in some way symptomatic of wider cultural issues, ideas, or dynamics. By studying ‘in-tune’ cultural texts, one may reasonably hope to find something out about the particular cultural moment of their popularity. Cultural critic and sociologist Eva Illouz contends “a book resonates when it articulates – sometimes directly and sometimes in a roundabout way – a social experience that is baffling, that presents itself as a repeated cognitive and emotional challenge.”⁴ She goes on to write:

¹ Anatol, ed., *Bringing Light to Twilight*; Bruner, *The Twilight Phenomenon*; Clements, *Vampire Defanged*; Clarke, et al, eds., *The Twilight Mystique*; Click, ed., *Bitten by Twilight*; Granger, *Spotlight*; Housel, ed., *Twilight and Philosophy*; Klonsky, *The Psychology of Twilight*; Parke and Wilson, eds., *Theorizing Twilight*; Reagin, *Twilight and History*; Wilson, *Seduced by Twilight*.

² Schudson, “How Culture Works: Perspectives from Media Studies on the Efficacy of Symbols”, 170.

³ Crawford, *Twilight of the Gothic*, 6

⁴ Illouz, *Hard-Core Romance*, 22-23.

If one of the insights of deconstruction is that literature is the performance of a problem, that a literary text enacts the contours of a contradiction, an impossibility, or the unresolvable character of a situation, we may generalise this claim to texts that resonate with readers and suggest that such resonance is explained broadly by the fact that the text performs a problem. Further, we may add that in contradistinction to high culture, popular texts not only enact a problem but resolve it as well.⁵

This understanding frames the discussion of popular texts undertaken here. The relationship between texts and their times however is not conceived as one-way; the “in-tune” text is read as having an impact on and influencing its cultural moment in turn.

The use of the term ‘text’ to refer to fiction, film, and television, points to the location of the work within cultural studies. According to John Frow and Meagan Morris, “there is a precise sense in which cultural studies uses the concept of the text as its fundamental model.”⁶ In this tradition, using the term ‘text’ means, as explained by cultural studies scholar John Storey, “to locate it across a range of competing moments of inscription, representation and struggle.”⁷ A ‘text’ is “an ontologically mixed entity, and one for which there can be no privileged or ‘correct’ reading... forc[ing] cultural studies’ attention to ... the open-ended social life of texts...”⁸ This is desirable as “cultural studies seeks to keep in equilibrium the different moments of cultural production – material production, symbolic production, textual production, and the ‘production in use’ of cultural consumption.”⁹ This approach implies a balance between the polarised understandings of popular culture as top-down or bottom-up. Analysing mass culture does not demand the acceptance of mass culture theory. Nor does it mean presenting mass culture as entirely open to being used as a site of subversion. Antonio Gramsci’s huge influence on cultural studies and his theory of hegemony underpin the cultural studies framework of this thesis. As such this thesis understands popular texts as sites of meaning making. Following Gramsci, feminist cultural studies scholar Christine Gledhill presents the relationship between audiences and texts as a negotiation:

⁵ Ibid., 23.

⁶ Frow and Morris, “Australian Cultural Studies”, 355.

⁷ Storey, *Cultural Studies and the Study of Popular Culture*, 8.

⁸ Frow and Morris, “Australian Cultural Studies”, 356.

⁹ Storey, *Cultural Studies*, 8.

The value of this notion lies in its avoidance of an overly deterministic view of cultural production, whether economic (the media product reflects dominant economic interest outside the text), or cine-psychoanalytic (the text constructs spectators through the psycholinguistic mechanisms of the patriarchal unconscious). For the term 'negotiation' implies the holding together of opposite sides in an on-going process of give-and-take.¹⁰

As multi-billion dollar franchises operating on a global scale, the vampire romance texts considered here operate within and utilise all the networks and business avenues the entertainment industry has to offer. In this way, the capitalist imperative of *Twilight*, *True Blood*, and *The Vampire Diaries* is present alongside any other meaning they generate. At this level, they are inherently supportive of the status quo of 21st century neo-liberal consumer-driven capitalism. Using Gledhill's negotiation as a model of meaning production that "conceives cultural exchange as the intersection of processes of production and reception, in which overlapping yet non-matching determinations operate,"¹¹ the texts' meaning need not be limited to the economic alone. This is one significant way the series makes meaning. The other important meanings generated in and around the text are not uniform, indeed as is often the case in popular texts, discourses drawn on may be highly contradictory. This chapter seeks to maintain the awareness of commercial underpinnings while exploring the symbolic cultural work happening in and in relation to these series. While exploring the significance of other meanings, however, an attempt to keep in sight the overarching effectiveness of what feminist cultural critic Eva Chen describes as the "neoliberal process of subjectification" is made. Negotiating a path between the conceptualisation of women's culture as "a utopian site of consumer sovereignty or democracy... [and] criticism that over-stresses its deception and commodification... presenting women as passive dupes," this thesis attempts to balance readings of the narratives themselves with analysis of the popular discussion of each narrative.¹² In a reversal of some studies of popular romance that emphasised the conservative nature of the narrative in contrast to the liberatory reading practises of the audience, this research finds subversive potential in the content of the stories and suggests a limiting of that potential in the popular discussion. The particular

¹⁰ Gledhill, "Pleasurable Negotiations", 101.

¹¹ Ibid., 101.

¹² Chen, "Neoliberalism and popular women's culture: Rethinking choice, freedom and agency", 441.

reading strategies and practices of fans are not explored in detail, however scholarship in this area counters popular fears of the passive and impressionable teen reader.

* * *

Following the publication of the novel *Twilight* in 2005 and its largely word-of-mouth success, the release of each new instalment in Meyer's vampire romance series was anticipated with growing interest, achieving extremely high sales records. By mid-2011 Meyer's books had enjoyed over three hundred weeks on the New York Times Bestseller List. The novels have been translated into forty different languages and have sold over one hundred million copies worldwide.¹³ The success of J.K. Rowling's fantasy series *Harry Potter* is credited with bringing about changes in the publishing industry that enabled *Twilight's* success. Following online engagement with fans and heavily promoted release dates, *Twilight* enjoyed "Harry Potter style" anticipation of each new instalment, with midnight release parties at bookshops and fans camping out overnight to purchase the first available copies.¹⁴ Like the *Harry Potter* series, *Twilight* was developed into a highly successful film franchise. Paramount Pictures' MTV films originally had the option rights to the novel series. However, a tradition of focusing on male-driven franchises as big money makers at the box office meant, despite *Twilight's* publishing success, Paramount dropped their option on the film rights in 2006 as not worth investing in. Following this, the then small independent studio, Summit Entertainment, optioned *Twilight* in 2007. Screenwriter Melissa Rosenberg worked on the script, and has been the screenwriter on all subsequent *Twilight* films. The film adaptation of the first novel was released in 2008, directed by Catherine Hardwicke. Hardwicke was best known at that time for her critically acclaimed and somewhat controversial film about girlhood, *Thirteen* (2003). The film *Twilight* displays Hardwicke's attentiveness to the largely action-free interiority of the drama of female adolescence. As such, the first *Twilight* film is dream-like and atmospheric, creating a sense of the emotional truth of first love via muted supernatural elements and the use of voice-over. Despite being filmed on a relatively small budget, it was a major commercial success largely as a result of the already vast readership of the novel series. Opening at number one in the box office, it went on to gross over \$70 million its opening weekend. This is still a record as the highest grossing opening weekend for a film directed

¹³ Larson and Steiner, *Interdisciplinary Approaches to Twilight*, 10.

¹⁴ Green, "Harry Potter with Fangs - and a Social Network."

by a woman. It grossed approximately \$200 million in the United States alone, far beyond the expectations of the studio. *Twilight* went on to earn \$392.6 million in worldwide box office sales.¹⁵ The film launched Kristen Stewart, Robert Pattinson, and Taylor Lautner's worldwide stardom. The success of *Twilight* and the subsequent films in the series had a huge impact on Summit Entertainment's financial profile, leading to its acquisition by Lions Gate in 2012.

The second film *New Moon*, directed by Chris Weitz broke the record for single-day openings with its gross takings on November 20th 2009 of \$72.7 million. It went on to achieve over \$700 million worldwide. Weitz co-directed the 'gross-out' teen comedy *American Pie* (1999) and, more recently, *The Golden Compass* (2007), an adaptation of Philip Pullman's young-adult fantasy novel *Northern Lights* (1995). The choice of Weitz as director of *New Moon* suggested the studio's desire to present *Twilight* as young-adult fantasy, rather than limit it to the commercially more restrictive area of girl's or women's interest films, which it was overtly aligned with in Hardwicke's vision.

Eclipse was released in June 2010, directed by David Slade, achieving a midnight box office opening record of \$30 million in ticket sales for midnight and 3am showings, and almost \$700 million box office sales worldwide. Slade's directorial background includes vampire horror film *30 Days of Night* (2007) and thriller *Hard Candy* (2005) that explores adolescent sexuality, victimhood, and power. *Eclipse* is the most action-driven film of the series. Again the move to a director such as Slade reveals an interest by the production company in attempting to widen *Twilight*'s appeal by offsetting its focus on romance, here by foregrounding action sequences both in the film and more heavily in the promotional material for the film.

The final novel was split over two films, *Breaking Dawn: Part 1* released in November 2011 and *Breaking Dawn: Part 2* in 2012, both directed by Bill Condon. Part 1 achieved worldwide gross ticket sales of over \$700 million, with Part 2 reaching over \$800 million worldwide. Condon had a critical and commercially proven record with writing and directing experience on films such as the gothic themed *Gods and Monsters* (1998) which explores the end of *Frankenstein* (1931) director James Whale's life story, *Candyman* sequel *Farewell to the Flesh* (1995), and big production musicals such as *Chicago* (2002), and *Dreamgirls* (2006). With

¹⁵ "Twilight", *Box Office Mojo*.

this filmography, Condon may be seen as a director suited to handling the adaptation of the potentially unfilmic final novel in the *Twilight* series, *Breaking Dawn*, and balancing the darkest aspects of the *Twilight* story and with the final happy-ever-after conclusion of the love story. Describing *Breaking Dawn* as a “full-on, non-ironic romantic melodrama”, Condon was interested in directing the film versions of a novel he read as open to “dramatically different interpretations.”¹⁶ The susceptibility of *Twilight* to dramatically different interpretations will be returned to in the next section considering the controversies surrounding *Twilight*.

Following the surprise success of Hardwicke’s *Twilight*, the subsequent film adaptations received much larger budgets that grew with each instalment. They also attracted increasingly experienced and successful directors with each film. As noted by Crawford, the changing choice of directors may be read as indicative of studio interests in weakening the exclusively feminine image of *Twilight* once its commercial potential was appreciated. Arguably the feminine pleasures offered by *Twilight* are precisely what make it so successful, and despite Summit’s attempts to neutralise the image of the series somewhat, a largely female audience fuels the on-going success of *Twilight*. It is a crossover success as it attracts an adult readership and viewership, going beyond the exclusively young-adult market. As such, *Twilight* is one of the first major commercial successes of a film franchise aimed predominantly at women. Its success has been credited as encouraging Hollywood studios to invest in female-audience driven blockbusters, including other film series based on novels written by women for a predominantly female audience, such as *Vampire Academy* (2007-2010), *The Hunger Games* (2008-2010), and *The Mortal Instruments* (2007-2014).

In October 2014, Lions Gate Entertainment Corporation announced plans to produce five short films based on *Twilight* characters as part of a short film series called “The Storytellers - New Creative Voices of ‘*The Twilight Saga*’”. In a marketing development, the short films will be released in conjunction with Facebook, debuting on *Twilight*’s Facebook page. A panel of women judges, including Stephenie Meyer, will select five female directors to receive mentorship and have their short film, based on a character from the *Twilight* story-world, produced by Lions Gate. The project is backed by Women in Film, a non-profit organisation that promotes equal opportunities for women in global media. Stephenie Meyer is also involved, independently of Lions Gate, in the production of women’s fiction

¹⁶ Rosen, “Bill Condon, ‘Breaking Dawn’ Director, on the future of Kirsten Stewart & Robert Pattinson.”

on film. Meyer has achieved wealth, fame, and influence as a result of the *Twilight* franchise. She is one of the world's top earning authors, with an estimated net worth of \$125 million, according to Forbes. She has also received numerous honours and awards, including USA Today's 2008 "Author of the Year", New York Times Editor's Choice 2006, Publisher's Weekly Best Book of the Year 2005, and has been placed on the American Library Association's "Top Ten Books for Young Adults", and "Top Ten Books for Reluctant Readers." Following this success as an author, Meyer turned to film production. She set up her own production company in 2011 with Meghan Hibbett, called Fickle Fish Films. The company is described on the Fickle Fish Films website as "a dynamic home for literature-related films and media."¹⁷ It has thus far produced Meyer's work, the *Breaking Dawn* instalments and *The Host*, and a film adaptation of Shannon Hales' Novel *Austenland* (2008) released in January 2013. The company is currently developing Kendare Blake's young-adult paranormal romance novel, *Anna Dressed In Blood* (2011), Lois Duncan's classic young-adult gothic novel, *Down a Dark Hall* (1974), and Mindy McGinnis' dystopian young-adult survival tale, *Not a Drop to Drink* (2014). Meyer's role in promoting and producing women's work on film, and the explicit focus on women as producers, writers, directors, characters, and consumers as part of the latest development in the *Twilight* story-world further complicates the cultural discussion of *Twilight* in terms of feminism. The use of feminisms in the production and reception contexts will be detailed later in this chapter.

The success of the franchise has had an impact on the economic fortunes of many beyond the publishing and film industries. In a very short space of time it has changed the economic profile of the small logging-town of Forks, Washington where *Twilight* is principally set. With a population of 3,500 people, it has seen a new tourist industry spring up in the wake of *Twilight*'s popularity, with tourist numbers going from 5,000 in 2004 to 73,000 in 2010.¹⁸ Though the films were not shot in Forks, nor had Meyer ever been there, many fans have made the trip to see the town where Meyer chose to base her series after googling to find the wettest places in the continental United States. *Twilight* related literary symposiums have taken place in Forks High School and the Forks Chamber of Commerce has seen "sales of anything that says Forks ... increase drastically."¹⁹ This new interest in

¹⁷ <http://ficklefishfilms.com/projects/>. Accessed August 16, 2015.

¹⁸ Farnham, "'Twilight' Fans Tourist Bonanza for Forks, Wash."

¹⁹ Flood, "Invaded! How one small town became overrun with vampires."

the town has led to the publication of travel guidebooks including *Twilight Territory: A Fan's Guide to Forks and LaPush* (2012), *Experience Twilight: The Ultimate Twilight Fan Travel Guide* (2009), and *Twilight Tours: An Illustrated Guide to the Real Forks* (2009).

The sales figures and worldwide distribution of *Twilight* demonstrate the franchise's huge commercial success. The on-going development of the *Twilight* franchise and Stephenie Meyer's evolution into film production hint at the series' cultural importance and influence. Beyond the *Twilight* books and film adaptations and on-going film productions, the story-world of *Twilight* exists, develops, mutates, and is responded to in a variety of forums. The *Twilight* story-world is sold through related materials and merchandise. Stores such as Hot Topic in the United States specialise in *Twilight* clothing, jewellery, stationary, posters and other memorabilia. In 2009 over half a million *Twilight* related items were sold on EBay. Many *Twilight*-inspired artworks can be purchased online.

The 'official' canon also includes guides to the series and films, a short novella *The Short Second Life of Bree Tanner* (2010), a fragment of Meyer's account from Edward's perspective, *Midnight Sun*, published on her website following leaked drafts in 2008, and the 2015 gender-swapped version of *Twilight*, *Life and Death*. Many unofficial books have also been written about *Twilight*, as guides to the series and glossy photo books of the film casts and related material. It has given rise to the release of a variety of linked work, including several novel and film parodies.²⁰

Twilight and its related public personas have provided the focus for many newspaper and magazine articles, reviews, blog posts, opinion pieces, television chat-show and celebrity news segments amongst others. It has been referenced in a wide variety of media from talk shows, award shows, sitcoms, films, magazine articles, and news items. A small sample of cultural references to *Twilight* include the promotional material for *The Muppets Movie* with Miss Piggy posed in a *Twilight* inspired poster above the name Bella Swine. The television shows *South Park* (1997-) and *The Simpsons* (1989-) have both done *Twilight* parody episodes. Many television shows and films have included passing references to *Twilight*, including *30 Rock* (2006-2013), *Parks and Recreations* (2009-2015), *Crazy Stupid Love* (2011), and many more. It is a cultural reference that is easily and widely recognised.

²⁰ Harvard Lampoon *Nightlight* (2009), Stephen Jenner *Twilite* (2009), *The Twishite Saga's New Moan* (2010), and *Breaking Yawn* (2011) by Stephordy Mayo.

Another key area in which the story-world continues to develop is in the world of fan fiction. According to Anne Jamison's research, the "megafandom" of *Twilight* "inspired hundreds of thousands of fics.... And gathered a fanbase big and passionate enough to transform mass culture and the industries that help produce it."²¹ Jamison found *Twilight*'s fan fiction writing communities involved "mostly nonradical women who came together in a radical and original, creative, self-sustaining global community," that became "the virtual site for an enormous and sometimes astonishingly frank conversation about sex, stories, and how to go about integrating the two in writing."²² The most popular pieces of *Twilight* fanfiction gained a "readership that dwarfed most *New York Times* bestsellers."²³ On one of the largest fan fiction websites, fanfiction.net, *Twilight* has two hundred and seventeen thousand 'fanfics', second only to *Harry Potter*.²⁴ Unlike other megafandoms, *Twilight* "not only inspired an underground erotic romance revolution but took it mainstream."²⁵ Works begun as *Twilight* fan fiction have been successfully professionally published, most famously E.L. James' erotic series *Fifty Shades of Grey* (2011-2015) the first instalment of which has been adapted to film (2015) and is a cultural phenomenon in its own right.

Twilight had a significant impact on the film industry as discussed earlier both in terms of the changes in Summit's fortunes and the wider increase in the viability of women-centred stories in mainstream Hollywood film production.²⁶ It also had a remarkable effect on the publishing industry. Many vampire fiction series and gothic romances, even with very little else in common with *Twilight*, have been re-issued in light of *Twilight*'s success, and a great many more vampire themed dark romance stories have flooded the young-adult and romance sections of bookstores since *Twilight*'s release.²⁷ Though Alan Ball had become interested in adapting Charlaine Harris' vampire romance series, *The Southern Vampire Mysteries* (2001-2013), before the release of the first *Twilight* movie, HBO's backing of the series was buoyed by the cultural interest in girls-in-love-with-vampires stories.²⁸ The CW's reworking of L.J. Smith's early vampire romance series, *The Vampire Diaries* (1991-1992),

²¹ Jamison, *Fic: Why Fanfiction is Taking Over the World*, 110.

²² *Ibid.*, 127, 110.

²³ *Ibid.*, 128..

²⁴ <https://www.fanfiction.net/book/>. Accessed September 2, 2015.

²⁵ Jamison, *Fic*, 110.

²⁶ Block, "How 'Hunger Games' Box Office Haul Impacts Lionsgate's Blttom Line (Analysis)", O'Hara, "The *Twilight* Legacy: How It's Changing Cinema."

²⁷ Including Annette Curtis Klause *The Silver Kiss* (1992), Christopher Pike *The Last Vampire* (1994), and L.J. Smith *The Vampire Diaries*.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 247.

was an overt attempt at cashing in on the vampire romance appetite revealed by *Twilight*. The television series of *True Blood* and *The Vampire Diaries* are presented in this analysis as a response to *Twilight*, not simply as responses to the novel and film series that comprises the core of the *Twilight* story-world, but rather as responses to the phenomenon of *Twilight* as it is understood in popular culture. The next section seeks to demonstrate the controversial position *Twilight* holds in popular culture and the contested meanings it is (dis)credited with producing.

Love it or hate it

This section looks at the social image of *Twilight*, showing its controversial status by discussing its reception in reviews, opinion pieces, public debate, and academic criticism. It demonstrates that, beyond the fan community, hating *Twilight* has widespread cultural legitimacy. This legitimacy is enabled by recourse to aspects of the ideology of mass culture and its association with femininity and a co-opting of elements of feminist cultural scholarship that construct femininity as the other of feminism, resulting in a cultural quarantining of *Twilight* as a repository of what is to be separated off from the good or valuable. Interpreting *Twilight* as antifeminist is prevalent in both thoroughgoing feminist criticism of the books, films, and franchise, and criticism by (mostly) male film reviewers with little or no feminist credibility. A repudiation of the feminine romance genre and/or the female fan takes place in both to different degrees and for different reasons, as will be explored in this section.

As noted earlier in this chapter, Meyer has topped the American Library Association's Best Books for Young-Adults. She has also been one of their "most challenged authors" with books in the *Twilight* series objected to on many different grounds, including being "sexually explicit", espousing a "religious viewpoint", and being "unsuited [to] the age group" targeted.²⁹ Meyer's simultaneous presence on 'best' and 'most challenged' ALA lists encapsulates *Twilight's* cultural position as indisputably popular and commercially successful, yet also attracting significant objections and negative reactions. While any very popular text might be expected to attract some level of criticism, *Twilight's* cultural presence is in many ways characterised by controversy, even hostility, to a noteworthy

²⁹ Flood, "Stephenie Meyer joins ranks of 'most challenged' authors."

extent. As Crawford writes in his study of paranormal romance: “Fans loved the books. Everyone else seemed to hate them.”³⁰ Reaction to the series is frequently split between love/hate positions, with interpretation of the series deeply conflicted. Thus what exactly is being loved or hated is central to the controversy; what *Twilight* means is passionately contested. As would typically be the case with any book or film, some reviews and commentaries on the series agree about the content but disagree about whether the message is praiseworthy or blameworthy based on ideological differences. For example, the series may be interpreted as supportive of conservative ‘family values,’ a positive message for some readers/viewers, but negative for others. More often, however, cultural reaction to *Twilight* is less about ideological battles based on a shared sense of the narrative’s position, and more about conflict over what the series itself means. Conservative and religious interpretations have alternatively celebrated and condemned it as encouraging abstinence or indulging in eroticism, as promoting “family values” or having a corruptive influence by glamorising evil creatures such as vampires.³¹ More liberal interpretations have read *Twilight* as supportive of right-wing ‘pro-family’ conservative values and as deeply anti-feminist,³² others as a celebration of a woman’s right to choose, whatever those choices are.³³ The series has been criticised as tame and perverse, as lacking horror and as deeply horrifying. Looking mainly at Amazon and Goodreads user review sections, Crawford charts some of the online clashes over the meaning of *Twilight*. He notes the initial cultural response to *Twilight* was “generally mildly positive.”³⁴ The occasional negative reaction appeared in 2006/2007, but most reviews remained mildly positive amongst professional reviewers and extremely positive amongst fans.³⁵ By mid-2008 onwards, however, negative reviews began to equal positive responses in number.³⁶ Crawford suggests that the grounds for negative reaction at this stage were indicative of the issues that would fuel larger cultural battles over *Twilight*’s meaning, namely the author and the standard of the writing, genre expectations and the domesticated vampire, the dangers of the series in terms of the bad role models of Bella and Edward and its anti-feminist message, and the enthusiasm of its fans.

³⁰ Crawford, *Twilight of the Gothic*, 2.

³¹ Goodwyn, “A Christian Response to Vampire Obsession.”

³² Sampson, “Twilight: what have we learned?”

³³ Buskirk, “Why is Everyone Hatin’ on Bella: Choice Feminism and Free Agency in the *Twilight Saga*”, 1.

³⁴ Crawford, *Twilight of the Gothic*, 186.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 184.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 186.

Lydia Kokkola argues that Meyer's combination of conventions from "the related, though slightly different, genres" of adult romance, teen romance, and children's literature results in a hybrid text that "valorises certain beliefs which run counter to both those promoted by conservative Christian activists and those endorsed by the liberal, feminist left."³⁷ Supporting this argument, Sarah Schwartzman found mixed reactions from religious readers in her study of "newspapers, blogs, review, and religious websites" discussing *Twilight*: "there are both those who see *Twilight* as religious allegory and fodder for Bible Study, and those who see it as blasphemy."³⁸ Schwartzman goes on to note the variety of Mormon reactions to *Twilight* ranging from "concern about... its eroticism", to endorsement of the series as "clean" reading, to contentions that the series is "the antithesis of Mormon doctrine."³⁹ Significantly, the bookshop chain owned by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints stopped carrying the series following mixed reviews.⁴⁰ The series has also been critiqued as "sneaky Mormon proselytism"⁴¹ by other Christian groups and secular commentators. Imogen Russell-Williams described the series as promoting an "unsubtle Mormon agenda."⁴² Schwartzman writes: "usually such claims are loaded with derisive anti-Mormon rhetoric and demonstrate ill-informed and unwieldy biases on the part of their proponents."⁴³ Schwartzman concludes that while "Meyer's active membership in the Mormon Church" is part of the "fabric of the book",⁴⁴ given the "deeply mixed reactions among Mormons" and the "series' ability to be interpreted religiously through various Christian lenses", it cannot be described as Mormon in any generalised or "unsubtle" way.⁴⁵

Many commentaries have noted those elements of *Twilight* that celebrate conservative values in a more generalised way. However, though liberal commentators note the parallels between, for example, *Twilight*'s delaying of sex until after marriage to Christian 'abstinence-only' and 'purity ball' culture, the Christian right is less comfortable with using *Twilight* as exemplary. On one level, *Twilight* is read as self-evidently pro-abstinence: Bella

³⁷ Kokkola, "Virtuous Vampires and Voluptuous Vamps: Romance Conventions Reconsidered in Stephenie Meyer's "Twilight" Series."

³⁸ Schwartzman, "Is *Twilight* Mormon?", 131.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid., 132.

⁴² Russell-Williams, "*Twilight* vampires? Bah!"

⁴³ Schwartzman, "Is *Twilight* Mormon?", 132.

⁴⁴ Sullivan, "Dreamcatcher."

⁴⁵ Schwartzman, "Is *Twilight* Mormon?", 132.

and Edward don't have sex until after marriage. However, though *Twilight* does not include pre-marital sex, its focus on sexual desire is unrelenting. As Lev Grossman's article in *Time* notes, *Twilight* contains "more sex in... one paragraph than in all the snogging in *Harry Potter*."⁴⁶ In a further complication, *Twilight* inverts the usual gender roles in abstinence-based sexual morality, foregrounding female desire to a troubling degree for pro-abstinence groups, in which a disproportionate level of responsibility for sexual morality is placed on girls and women.

The pregnancy story line in the final book and penultimate film has also received much attention in reviews and commentary. It is described as an "anti-abortion message seductively packaged as a true-love fairy-tale" by a pro-choice reviewer,⁴⁷ yet as a representation that "certainly gives the impression that abortion would have been a legitimate and normal option" in a conservative Christian review that warns parents of the film *Breaking Dawn's* "disturbing treatment of abortion."⁴⁸ Both reviewers agree that *Twilight's* treatment of abortion is disturbing but for opposite reasons.⁴⁹

There is a battle over interpretation in the public discussion of *Twilight*. What is 'in-tune' about *Twilight* for many is painfully discordant to almost everyone else, despite their political and ideological differences. This suggests something problematic or controversial about the cultural reflection the text is making. Rather than broadly reflecting a culture's values and standards, *Twilight* presents something culturally contentious. It may be deemed contentious in terms of the polarised reactions to it and significant given the passion of those reactions. Suzanna Walters's use of the concept of a text as 'symptomatic' is relevant here.⁵⁰ In Walters approach, a 'symptomatic' text is one that incites passionate response and controversy, as a result of which, it may be assumed to contain some culturally relevant expression, elaboration, or discussion. Examining public reaction and critique may reveal the area of contention, as Illouz contends, "public opinion is the process by which ideas relevant to public and political matters are formed through interpersonal mechanisms... or through opinions that are more authoritative, institutionalized, public, and commodified than others."⁵¹ Referring to the much discussed 1980s soap opera *Dallas*

⁴⁶ Grossman, "Stephenie Meyer: A New J.K. Rowling?"

⁴⁷ Wilson, "Breaking Dawn: Part 1 – An Anti-Abortion Message in a Bruised-Apple Package."

⁴⁸ Craine, "Parents beware: 'Twilight: Breaking Dawn' features disturbing treatment of abortion."

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Walters, *Material Girls*, 1-18.

⁵¹ Illouz, *Hard-core Romance*, 8.

(1978-1991), Ien Ang suggests that public discourses about the television show “provide a framework within which answers can be given to questions such as:

what must I think about such a television serial? What arguments can I use to make my opinion plausible? How must I react to people who hold a different opinion? Not all existing discourses, however, are equally capable of formulating satisfactory answers to such questions. Some discourses are more prestigious than others, they sound more logical or convincing, and are more successful in determining the social image of TV programmes like *Dallas*.⁵²

As a piece of popular culture “not only widely watched but widely discussed”, *Twilight* provides an opportunity to consider the intersection of various discourses of gender, genre, and value in contemporary culture.⁵³ As with *Dallas*, there are certain culturally sanctioned ways of expressing opinion about *Twilight*. Barbara Klinger, in her work on melodrama, suggests reviews and commentaries may be read as barometers of cultural values.⁵⁴ Drawing on this understanding, the reviews and public commentary on *Twilight* are read in this thesis as revealing certain cultural values regarding gendered subjectivity. The more plausible opinions of *Twilight* are those that engage with these values. Popular opinion on *Twilight* as seen in “reviews, opinion pieces, online discussions, blogs and finally even scholarly articles” finds it “innocent or guilty of, a range of cultural crimes: not just... of being badly written... but the much more serious accusations that it endangered young women, glorified abusive behaviour, taught dangerous life-lessons and unhealthy sexual attitudes, acted as a covert pro-life, pro-Mormon propaganda, and much more besides.”⁵⁵ Surveying this commentary marked by controversy, *Twilight* may be broadly understood as popular, feminine, and ‘bad’. Crawford writes that by 2011, “belief in the extreme inherent badness of *Twilight* had become... a standard part of mainstream online culture.”⁵⁶ In the years that followed, *Twilight* came to be understood as ‘bad’ in terms of aesthetics, genre, politics, and audience. Plausible reactions to *Twilight* must acknowledge some of its ‘badness’, even if they go on to present a positive opinion on the series. This gives rise to “I know *Twilight* is awful, but...” opinion pieces. Accepting its failings, particularly its sloppy prose, its poor development of the vampire myth, and acknowledging its affront to

⁵² Ang, *Watching Dallas*, 92-93.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Klinger, *Melodrama and Meaning*, 98.

⁵⁵ Crawford, *Twilight of the Gothic*, 183.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 191.

feminism in its weak heroine, its controlling hero, its abusive relationship presented as romantic, its support of abstinence, young marriage and its anti-abortion message, is required in a widely acceptable response to *Twilight*. Such a response is only possible if the meaning of *Twilight* is simplified, made coherent, and presented as self-evident. Privileged discourses functioning in this reception of *Twilight* include the associations of femininity and mass culture and a related opposition between feminism and femininity.

The Franchise that Ate Feminism⁵⁷

Journalist Anne Bilson asks the question why, if *Twilight* is indeed so bad, so much energy is devoted to “slagging it off,” with similarly poor ‘boy’ culture such as *Green Lantern* (2011), *Cowboys and Aliens* (2011), and *Conan the Barbarian* (2011), attracting disappointed rather than derisive reviews.⁵⁸ One answer to this question lies in the over-association of femininity with the ‘badness’ of mass culture. *Twilight*’s ‘badness’ is enmeshed with gender, the feminine associations first suggesting then proving the low value of the series on each of these levels of evaluation. As Sarah Harman notes, “*The Twilight Saga* is continually maligned and problematized through its association with the feminine.”⁵⁹ According to Anne Bilson’s article in *The Guardian*, the adjectives reviewers use most to describe *Twilight* are “ludicrous, ridiculous, risible, cheesy, and sappy.”⁶⁰ The “characterization of *Twilight* fans” is, according to Sheffield and Merlo, “emblematic of a troubling gendered tendency to represent the (mostly) female *Twilight* fandom as unworthy of entry to traditional fandom spaces.”⁶¹ Sheffield and Merlo demonstrate a “gendered rhetoric of superiority” drawn on by anti-fans of the series.⁶² Anti-fans position *Twilight* as “extremist” in order to distance it from “safe, sanctioned fan activity.”⁶³ The audience reading and watching *Twilight* are placed in a tradition of feminine “hysterical consumption” linked back by Sarah Harman to “Beatlemania” in the 1960s and Mark Jancovich and others to the “historical connotative femininity of mass culture” as first evidenced by Patrice Petro (1986) and

⁵⁷ Cox, “Twilight: the franchise that ate feminism.”

⁵⁸ Bilson, “I know *Twilight* is awful, but...”

⁵⁹ Harman, “The Pageant of Her Bleeding Twi-hard Heart”, 49.

⁶⁰ Bilson, “I know *Twilight* is awful, but...”

⁶¹ Sheffield and Merlo, “Biting Back: *Twilight* Anti-Fandom and the Rhetoric of Superiority”, 207.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 208.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 210.

Andreas Huyssen (1986).⁶⁴ Jancovich contends that film critics' responses to *Twilight* are "bound up with their conception of the audience's gender."⁶⁵ A feminine "indulgence in sensation" proves to be central to film reviewers' horror, situating *Twilight* and its reception in a long history of texts marked as feminine with a largely female audience that have attracted a combination of scorn and concern from cultural commentators.⁶⁶ This is a history that alternatively imagines the female reader as a perpetrator of bad behaviours and a victim of bad influences. Thus the audience is both dangerous and endangered. The audience of *Twilight* is epitomised in the image of the 'Twihard', a "hormonally unbalanced teenage girl", inviting descriptions that draw on "Victorian era gendered words like 'fever', 'madness', 'hysteria', and 'obsession'" in media coverage.⁶⁷ The reader and viewer of *Twilight* "generally identified in public discussion as a girl in her teens who allows herself to become immersed in the narrative" is presented as problematic, at once the endangered victim of the text's 'bad' messages yet simultaneously a danger to social order.⁶⁸ The 'Twihard' is also objected to within fan culture. Fan reaction is almost entirely polarised between 'Twihards' and 'Twi-haters', with fans and anti-fans equally passionate in their devotion to loving or hating the series. 'Twi-haters' and the larger fan communities who support conventions such as ComicCon have been vocal in their critique of *Twilight* fans. Jessica Sheffield and Elyse Merlo examined the rhetorical strategies of *Twilight* anti-fans in online forums in their chapter "Biting Back: Twilight Anti-Fandom and the Rhetoric of Superiority" (2010), confirming the "gendered nature of anti-*Twilight* sentiment."⁶⁹

The other dominant public image of *Twilight* fandom is the 'TwilightMom'. She is conceived in even more derogatory fashion with the addition of desperation, irresponsibility, and perversity to the image of the hysterical teen 'Twi-hard'. While the 'Twi-hard' may be redeemed by out-growing their current misguided enjoyment of the series, the 'TwilightMom' has no such potential. UrbanDictionary provides the following explanations of a 'Twilight Mom':

1. A woman older than 25, has children, can be married who has a very old saggy crusty vaj. She sits at home at her computer masturbating to pictures of Edward

⁶⁴ Brunsten, *The Housewife, the feminist, and Soap Opera*, 29.

⁶⁵ Jancovich, "Cue the Shrieking Virgins", 26.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 27.

⁶⁷ Click, "'Rabid', 'Obsessed', and 'Frenzied': Understanding Twilight Fangirls and the Gendered Politics of Fandom."

⁶⁸ Steiner, "Gendered readings: Bella's books and literary consumer culture", 195.

⁶⁹ Sheffield and Merlo, "Biting Back", 220.

Cullen. She doesn't bathe her kids, or feed them, instead locks them in a cage and tosses in a couple crackers now and then.

2. A group of 40 something pre-menopausal women who have been neglecting their children, spouses, jobs, and various pets since 2008 to post their ramblings about a dazzling 107 year old vampire who is stuck in an eternal hell of high school and the clumsy, idiotic girl who loves him.

3. A website full of uneducated middle-aged women who sneak onto the set of the *Twilight* movie, but "keep their distance" so they stay on good terms with the production company. However, to a *Twilight Mom*, keeping distance means illegally taking video and pictures from a full yard away.⁷⁰

Users generate UrbanDictionary explanations, thus reactionary or flippant entries are common. While there is an issue of register in drawing on a crowd-sourced site that encourages humour in its entries, submissions nonetheless may be read as reflecting aspects of popular perception since "users contribute and vote on which definitions are ranked highest."⁷¹ Described in the *New York Times* as an "anthropologist of the Internet, taking the pulse of the web and capturing cultural moments in real time",⁷² UrbanDictionary reveals a level of the popularity and acceptability of certain interpretations of new terms. The top definitions of 'TwilightMom' include three highly derogatory images of this imagined fan. The particular inflections of disgust along the issues of age, motherhood, sexuality, and class are revealing. Less colourful versions of these attitudes may be seen in many reviews and opinion pieces. Feminist media critic Laura Miller's opinion piece on *Twilight* underscores the impropriety of the fandom, describing TwilightMoms as "grown women" with the implication that as such they ought to know better.⁷³ Echoing the theme of shirking the duties of motherhood shown in the UrbanDictionary definitions, Miller goes on to note: "Chores, husbands and children go neglected, and the hours that aren't spent reading and rereading the novels are squandered on forums and fan fiction."⁷⁴ As may be seen from these explanations, the perceived inappropriate nature of 'TwilightMoms' behaviour is based on certain expectations of acceptable behaviour for mothers.

⁷⁰ "Twilight Mom", *UrbanDictionary*.

⁷¹ Wortham, "A Lexicon of Instant Argot."

⁷² *Ibid*.

⁷³ Miller, "Touched by a Vampire."

⁷⁴ *Ibid*.

While *Twilight* is often read as supportive of conservative gender roles, Sarah Harmon suggests in her article on female consumption of the series, that participation in *Twilight* fandom may be seen partly as a way of “evad[ing] the pre-conceived life of the ‘nice girl’ ... potentially rebellious against gendered behaviour expectations”, whilst nonetheless being “entirely rooted in heteronormative consumerism.”⁷⁵ Harmon looks closely at the ‘Twi-hard’ figure, but adds the ‘TwilightMom’ to the analysis without much differentiation, suggesting ‘TwilightMoms’ fandom involves the same “com[ing] to terms with the change of their own identity and movement away from the family into independence and sexuality” of the teen fandom but with the simple modification of nostalgia, a romanticization of the “turning” rather than a contemporaneous working through.⁷⁶ This explanation is unsatisfactory and does not address the outpouring of disgust regarding ‘TwilightMoms’ and the transgressive and threatening nature of their fandom. In the ‘TwilightMom’ the idea of a mother with an obsessive interest in something other than her ‘children, spouse, job, or pet’ is vigorously censured. The offence of ‘bad mothering’ is particularly noteworthy given the criticism of the series itself on the grounds that it limits women’s choices, reducing their options to marriage and motherhood alone. This thesis explores *Twilight* and related texts in light of contradictions such as this one in the public response. Readings of *Twilight* that worry ‘young girls’ will get a message from the text that the only way to be fulfilled is through marriage and motherhood, simultaneously attempt to shame self-identified mothers out of the public spaces of fandom and back to their “chores, husbands, and children.”⁷⁷

In an analysis of the reception of the *Twilight* films, Mark Jancovich notes an opposition between femininity and feminism used to belittle *Twilight* fans:

Many of these critics are proudly liberal and tolerant, and would rarely present other social groups in this way. The fact that they feel comfortable characterising young girls (or as we will see femininity more generally) in this way is deeply troubling, but can be understood in relation to Joanne Hollows’ discussion of the ways in which the opposition between feminism and femininity, an opposition that frequently presents

⁷⁵ Harmon, “The Pageant of Her Bleeding Twi-hard Heart”, 52.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 54.

⁷⁷ Miller, “Touched by a Vampire”.

femininity as the other of feminism, as that which feminism exist to challenge and correct.⁷⁸

Hollows shows how such oppositions are limiting and misleading, presenting identity as much less fluid than it might be, and ultimately creating many problems for the feminist project. In the reception of the *Twilight* films this opposition is used, as Jancovich writes, “to legitimate a situation in which predominantly (although not exclusively) male critics adopt the mantle of feminism to condemn women.”⁷⁹ Here feminism is drawn on as a means of belittling and silencing its largely female audience. Jancovich observes:

despite a rhetoric of feminist politics that castigates the films as politically conservative, most reviews display a sense of revulsion at the presumed audience for these films, an audience that is presented as unruly, irrational and dehumanised.⁸⁰

This points to the rather unholy alliance of commentators disgusted by the female audience of *Twilight*, but drawing on feminism to dismiss the story-world of *Twilight* as dangerous to that same audience. Jancovich argues that the attack on *Twilight* “works to legitimate the gender politics of contemporary media.”⁸¹ “It condemns these films through their supposed associations with the far right in a manner that suggests that most media products are somehow unproblematic.”⁸²

Negative reaction to *Twilight* is not confined to film critics with dubious commitment to feminism, however. *Twilight* has been deeply problematic for feminist critics too. According to Anna Silver, the “tremendous success of the novels has surprised some critics, especially those feminist media and literary critics, who argue that the series perpetuates outdated and troubling gender norms.”⁸³ Journalist Bidisha attributed the “strong feminist backlash against the books” to “Bella’s passivity, the oppressiveness of her boyfriends (presented as protectiveness), the fetishisation of female victimhood and the unstinting justification of the

⁷⁸ Jancovich, “Cue the Shrieking Virgins”, 26.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 27.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 26.

⁸¹ Ibid., 29.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Silver, “*Twilight* is not good for Maidens”, 122.

guys' abusiveness"⁸⁴ Cultural critic, Laura Miller, characterised the vampire romance of *Twilight* as "sapping our will and autonomy, dragging us back into the past."⁸⁵

Many of the feminist critiques of *Twilight* draw on ideas about feminine popular culture, particularly romance novels and romance readers, first advanced in the 1970s and 1980s. Glen Thomas argues that a model of "attacking the quality of romance fiction and the delusions of its readers" gained traction in feminist writings of "the late 1970s, continued into the 1990s, and persists in the present."⁸⁶ According to Joanne Hollows, "It has become part of contemporary 'common-sense' that romance fiction is a 'formulaic' 'trivial' and 'escapist' form read by 'addicted' women."⁸⁷ She contends that "some of these ideas still permeate contemporary feminism."⁸⁸ Some of these ideas may certainly be seen in the feminist response to *Twilight*.

One of the most enduring interpretations of romance fiction was set out by feminist activist and scholar Ann Snitow in her work "Mass Market Romance: Pornography for Women is Different" (1979). As the title suggests, Snitow presented romance fiction as a specifically feminine version of pornography. Snitow argued that Harlequin romances "reveal and pander to ... [an] impossible fantasy life."⁸⁹ Echoing this association of romance, feminist journalist Christine Seifert labelled *Twilight* "abstinence porn."⁹⁰ Grossman argued that the *Twilight* novels were "all about the erotics of abstinence."⁹¹ In 1980, Ann Douglas, in her essay "Soft-porn Culture" (1980), described the "fantasies of the Harlequins" as a form in which "woman's independence is made horrifically unattractive and unrewarding, her dependence presented as synonymous with excitement."⁹² Feminist writer Germaine Greer famously dismissed romance fiction as "dope for dupes."⁹³ In *The Female Eunuch* (1970), Greer described the male love interest of romance novels as a "hero that women have chosen for themselves. The traits invented for him have been invented by women cherishing the chains of their bondage."⁹⁴ These ideas are echoed in commentary on

⁸⁴ Bidisha, "Twilight's feminist backlash."

⁸⁵ Miller, "Touched by a Vampire."

⁸⁶ Thomas, "Happy Readers or Sad Ones?", 206.

⁸⁷ Hollows, *Feminism, Femininity, and Popular Culture*, 70.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Snitow, "Mass Market Romance: Pornography for Women is Different", 320.

⁹⁰ Seifert, "Bite Me! (Or Don't)."

⁹¹ Grossman, "Stephenie Meyer: A New J.K. Rowling?"

⁹² Douglas, "Soft-Porn Culture", 28.

⁹³ Greer, cited in Jackson, *Heterosexuality in Question*, 114.

⁹⁴ Greer, *The Female Eunuch*, 176.

Twilight such as Tanya Gold's description of the series as "disempowerment fantasies...[that] look like fairytales" representing a "kind of twilight" for women and feminism in the "growth of the loving-slave fantasy in popular fiction."⁹⁵

Described as "a passive, feeble, snoozeville heroine...for most of the series",⁹⁶ Bella is read as a "poor female role model" who "intentionally puts herself in danger in the hope that her boyfriend will save her ... who is bullied by her boyfriend into marrying him" and "when she isn't sitting and staring, she is in bed having nightmares."⁹⁷ Women's studies scholar Carmen Siering interprets Meyer's series as "an allegorical tale about the dangers of unregulated female sexuality" that perpetuates "gender stereotypes – [through] testosterone-driven male aggression, females who pine away over lost loves, boys who fix motorcycles and the girls who watch them."⁹⁸ Meenakshi Gigi Durham finds "classic symptoms of a potential batterer" in her analysis of Edward's behaviours.⁹⁹

In *Loving With a Vengeance: Mass Produced Fantasies for Women* (1982) feminist scholar Tania Modleski challenged the "dismissiveness; hostility – tending unfortunately to be aimed at the consumers of the narratives; or most frequently, a flippant kind of mockery" of critics towards feminine narratives.¹⁰⁰ Through textual analysis and psychoanalytic theory Modleski aimed to "begin a feminist reading of women's reading."¹⁰¹ She argued that the popular feminine narratives of soap opera, Harlequin romance, and gothic romance spoke "to very real problems and tensions in women's lives."¹⁰² Modleski's work was groundbreaking in its consideration of the consolatory effects of romance reading and the commonality of dissatisfaction with patriarchy shared by the "popular culture heroine and the feminist."¹⁰³

In this vein, Celia Jameson and Julia Dane describe *Twilight* as "an object of fantasy, which speaks to a specific set of normative neoliberal ideals of the feminine self at this time"¹⁰⁴ They argue that "*Twilight* and the discourse around it provides a fantasy resolution for the

⁹⁵ Gold, "Twilight is not feminist: it's female masochism."

⁹⁶ Stewart, "Twilight's Bella is the Damsel in Distress Over and Over and Over Again."

⁹⁷ Siering, "New Moon, Same Old Sexist Story."

⁹⁸ Siering, "Talking Back to *Twilight*."

⁹⁹ Meenakshi, "Blood, Lust and Love: Interrogating gender violence in the *Twilight*", 13.

¹⁰⁰ Modleski, *Loving with a Vengeance*, 14.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 26.

¹⁰⁴ Jameson, "Bite Me! The *Twilight* Saga, a Fantasy Space of Self-Transformation as Self-Realization", 244.

negotiation of some of the problems and pressures that young women face today; a fantasy resolution that reflects and reproduces some specifically neoliberal values and aspirations.”¹⁰⁵

While Modleski took feminine narratives seriously, an enduring legacy of her study is also her bolstering of the idea of romance reading as an addiction.¹⁰⁶ The idea of the addicted female reader of romance is evident in the characterisation of *Twilight* fans (often also in fans’ self-characterisation). Journalist Christine Spines reported on *Twilight* addiction and claimed “the franchise does not lend itself to casual interest.”¹⁰⁷ Kimberly Young made a direct link between *Twilight* and other addictive feminine forms - “any addiction is about escape, and some of these women are using it to fill a void. ... Instead of watching soap operas all day, they’re online following *Twilight*.”¹⁰⁸

The concern expressed by feminist critics for romance reading women is echoed in critics’ fears for/of the ‘Twihard’ and the ‘TwilightMom’. Janice Radway’s seminal study of romance, combining ethnographic methods, textual analysis, and consideration of production contexts, *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature* (1984), found the activity of romance reading served an explicit function of escape from the demands of domestic life and mothering.¹⁰⁹ Though, as Radway has noted in later discussions, this is a limited characterisation of romance reading, it is a significant aspect of the public perception of mothers’ escape from caregiving to ‘squander’ time on *Twilight*, a situation that is met with condemnation.¹¹⁰

Feminist cultural critics including Ang, Hollows, and Brunsden, have exposed the “profound separation between “us” [feminists] and “them” [ordinary women]” in feminist research on feminine popular culture in the 1970s and 1980s.¹¹¹ While much feminist cultural scholarship has interrogated such a clear-cut separation, many aspects of this division continue in some feminist comment and consideration of *Twilight*. Using the

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Regis, “What do Critics owe the Romance?”,

¹⁰⁷ Spines,

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Radway, *Reading the Romance*, 61.

¹¹⁰ Radway, “Romance and the Work of Fantasy”, 19; Miller, “Touched by a Vampire.”

¹¹¹ Hollows, *Feminism, Femininity, and Popular Culture*, 83

adolescent girl or the 'TwilightMom' as an "imagined 'other'" allows reviewers to "worry responsibly" over, "denigrate or sentimentalise her without guilt."¹¹²

Concern for a "highly impressionable teen audience" in Renae Franiuk and Samantha Scheer's article "The Lion Fell in Love with the Lamb: Gender, Violence, and Vampires" (2013) shares the "sexist assumption" Radway later admitted motivated her early study of romance, that "someone ought to worry responsibly about the effect of fantasy on women readers... [Repeating] the familiar pattern whereby the commentator distances herself as knowing analyst from those who, engrossed and entranced by fantasy, cannot know..."¹¹³ Franiuk and Scherr "highlight the potential impact of messages conveyed in [*Twilight*]... focusing on the stereotypical portrayal of men and women, the romanticizing of characteristics predictive of partner abuse, and the link between sex and violence."¹¹⁴

In her work on fan fiction, Jamison takes issue with the "mainstream media coverage ...[of *Twilight* fan fiction authors] [that] clearly characterizes thousands of women as dangerous lustful junkies so devoted to the ridiculous stories of a "churning" hack that they're forced to make their own stories to feed their habit."¹¹⁵ She notes the significance of the romance genre in this characterization:

a great deal of the stigma surrounding *Twilight* and its fans – among other fans, even among other fan writers – has to do with internalised gender and genre prejudice.... Romance is a *Girl* genre. It's not girls doing cool things boys typically do, or girls doing girl things in boy territory. It's just girls doing girl things in the way girls do.¹¹⁶

Romance studies scholars, Sarah Frantz and Eric Sellinger, attribute a welcome change in the direction of romance criticism to the "emergence of romance reader websites."¹¹⁷ These sites made visible "the insight and expertise to be found in the genre's audience," making the image of the doped/duped undifferentiated romance reader difficult to maintain.¹¹⁸

¹¹² Bode, "Transitional Tastes."

¹¹³ Franiuk and Scheer, "The Lion Fell in Love with the Lamb."; Radway, "Romance and the Work of Fantasy", 219.

¹¹⁴ Franiuk and Scherr, "The Lion Fell in Love with the Lamb."

¹¹⁵ Jamison, *Fic*,

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Frantz and Sellinger, *New Approaches to Popular Romance Fiction*, 9.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

The romance community's debates over individual novels and the progress of series, its lively mockery of incompetent writing, genre clichés, and painfully bad cover art, and its explicit, thoroughly conscious engagement with political issues and changes in the publishing industry... give the lie to enduring stereotypes about the inanity of romance readers, some of them perpetuated in the first wave of romance scholarship.¹¹⁹

Silver advises "one must concede... shadings of the series' gender ideology because, even on fan message boards heavily stacked with Edward supporters, readers vigorously debate the degree to which Edward is too controlling, and whether he is a good model for a boyfriend in today's world. Meyer's novels are more nuanced, in other words, than some reviews suggest."¹²⁰ Sarah Summers' analysis of one discussion thread on the official *Twilight* series website entitled "Twilight is so Anti-Feminist that I want to Cry" found the discussion board "allowed "young women to negotiate feminism in a space that simultaneously enacts a feminist vision for online environments." Academic Bonnie Mann sees Bella's articulated dislike of "double standards" and the essay she writes for English class on "whether Shakespeare's treatment of the female characters is misogynistic" as "as subtle textual invitation to the reader to wonder the same thing about Meyer's characters."¹²¹

In contrast to the film reviews discussed, most feminist critique admits some ambiguity in the series' messages and/or the potential for subversive or feminist outcomes amongst its readers/viewers. Adapting approaches by Radway and Modleski and incorporating the idea of pleasure foregrounded in Ang's work, Anne Helen Petersen avoids a division between feminist critic and feminine reader by focusing on "exactly what sort of pleasures ... feminist women derive from *Twilight*." By analysing responses from a small group of "self-identified adult feminists," Peterson argues "that the range of feminist response...— from those who decry the text to those who enjoy it — underscores the difficulties and divisions confronting feminism today."¹²²

From a variety of perspectives, both feminist and otherwise, *Twilight* inspires interpretations that draw explicitly on feminist ideas and ideas of what feminism is or should be. Crawford

¹¹⁹ Ibid..

¹²⁰ Silver, "*Twilight* is not good for Maidens", 126.

¹²¹ Meyer, *Twilight*, 90, 143.; Mann, "Vampire Love."

¹²² Peterson, "That *Twilight* Feeling", 51.

lists the “feminism debate” as a key point of conflict surrounding *Twilight*, “between people who believed that *Twilight* was an anti-feminist text, and those who agreed with Meyer in seeing its emphasis on Bella’s right to choose her own path in life as essentially pro-feminist.”¹²³ Here a strand of second-wave liberal equality feminism focused on equal opportunities in employment and education is used to critique *Twilight*’s retrograde representations of gender roles. This is epitomised by Betty Friedan’s famous feminist book *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) and her discussion of the “problem that has no name.” A revelation of the unsatisfactory experience of marriage, motherhood, and the family for white, middle-class, heterosexual, educated women has become a familiar theme of popular culture framings of feminism.¹²⁴ This framing of feminism is used in critiques of the heroine of *Twilight*’s obsession with a romantic relationship to the detriment of career or other interests. This is presented as an affront to the positive achievements of second wave feminism as has been described by *Guardian* journalist David Cox as “the franchise that ate feminism.”¹²⁵

Other critics, who seek to recuperate the text from this interpretation, use a discourse of feminism as ‘choice’. In this instance, feminism is presented as the enactment of choice regarding such issues as sex, marriage, work, and reproduction, rather than the choice made. The celebration of choice is most associated with third-wave feminism. Emerging from contestations within the feminist project over the “category of ‘woman’”¹²⁶ and “questions about the nature of identity, unity and collectivity,”¹²⁷ third wave feminism emphasises “the right of women to decide for themselves how to negotiate ... often contradictory desires.”¹²⁸ “Choice feminism,” a derisory term coined by Linda Hirshman, nonetheless “encapsulates widespread assumptions about what contemporary feminism should be” in popular culture.¹²⁹

Feminism is also drawn on by Stephenie Meyer and the producers of *Twilight* in their handling of *Twilight*’s public image. In defending the series against charges of antifeminism, Meyer draws on the idea of choice:

¹²³ Crawford, *Twilight of the Gothic*, 195.

¹²⁴ Tong, *Feminist Thought*, 26.

¹²⁵ Cox, “Twilight: the franchise that ate feminism.”

¹²⁶ Gillis, *Third Wave Feminism: A Critical Exploration*, 1.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Snyder-Hall, “Third-Wave Feminism and the Defense of “Choice””, 255.

¹²⁹ Ibid..

In my opinion... the foundation of feminism is this: being able to choose.

Meyer presents herself as a proponent of 'choice feminism' here and at the same time questions reviewers' presentation of Bella as a role model for other women.

When I hear or read theories about Bella being an anti-feminist character, those theories are usually predicated on her choices. In the beginning, she chooses romantic love over everything else. Eventually, she chooses to marry at an early age and then chooses to keep an unexpected and dangerous baby. I never meant for her fictional choices to be a model for anyone else's real life choices.¹³⁰

She thus simultaneously undermines the critique of the choices themselves and asserts the right to make choices. Meyer utilises a sense of antagonism between types of feminism to defend herself and her work as feminist:

One of the weird things about modern feminism is that some feminists seem to be putting their own limits on women's choices. That feels backward to me. It's as if you can't choose a family on your own terms and still be considered a strong woman. How is that empowering? Are there rules about if, when, and how we love or marry and if, when, and how we have kids? Are there jobs we can and can't have in order to be a "real" feminist? To me, those limitations seem anti-feminist in basic principle.¹³¹

Meyer uses the divisions between feminism and femininity in the popular reception of *Twilight* to present herself as a woman-centred feminist:

I think there are many feminists who would say that I am not a feminist. But, to me... I love women, I have a lot of girlfriends, I admire them, they make so much more sense to me than men, and I feel like the world is a better place when women are in charge. So that kind of by default makes me a feminist. I love working in a female world.¹³²

Meyer's sense of what being a feminist means is first positioned as potentially unsanctioned by "many feminists". This points to the idea of an antagonistic relationship between

¹³⁰ Meyer, "FAQ: Breaking Dawn", stepheniemeyer.com. Accessed January 31, 2016.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Ibid.

feminists and ordinary women. Meyer's feminism is presented in opposition to this idea of exclusionary feminism.

Twilight is less provocative when couched in the contradictory postfeminist ideals of choice. Presenting *Twilight* in line with postfeminist values is its best bid for widespread cultural legitimacy. Despite the author and producers' efforts however, the controversies surrounding it disclose its uneasy fit with contemporary postfeminist ideals. The heroine of *Twilight* is not in keeping with typical contemporary values of postfeminist girlhood. Bella displays feminine characteristics central to the postfeminist construction of gender either excessively, oddly, or not at all. She is anything but the savvy, sex-positive shopper of postfeminist culture. Reactions to *Twilight* reveal uneasiness with representations of women that do not conform to the postfeminist ideal. Postfeminism is a nebulous term, the various meanings of which are contested and can include opposites. One meaning sees the term as referring to an appropriation of and backlash against feminism, both as a movement and a diffuse set of ideas, which functions in support of neoliberal late-capitalist western culture. Angela McRobbie describes postfeminism as a "taking into account"¹³³ of feminist gains in order to dismiss feminism as surplus to requirements now that equality has supposedly been achieved. In this formulation, feminism is at best redundant and at worst detrimental for women. Significantly, it is not simply a return to pre-second wave constructions of 'woman', but rather a sophisticated appropriation of feminist ideas in the construction of a new ideal woman, one who utilises the freedoms gained by second wave feminism in order to ultimately 'choose' traditional forms of femininity. Rosalind Gill describes the development "in advertising which has responded to feminist critiques by constructing a new figure to sell to young women: the sexually autonomous heterosexual young woman who plays with her sexual power and is forever 'up for it'."¹³⁴ Choice and empowerment are central concepts in postfeminist ideology. In the foregrounding of choice and empowerment, postfeminism draws on poststructuralist theories of subjectivity as performative. In an oversimplification of Judith Butler's theory of subjectivity, gender is reimagined as entirely based on 'choice'. This interpretation of Butler overemphasises individual choice over wider regimes of control. Once choice in the making of self has been exaggerated in this way in postfeminist discourse it is directed largely towards consumption. Taylor concludes that while *Twilight* "may appear incongruent with the empowerment

¹³³ McRobbie, "Post-feminism and Popular Culture", 255.

¹³⁴ Gill, *Gender and the Media*, 252.

discourses of a postfeminist society, its popularity suggests that it has resonated strongly with contemporary female audiences.”¹³⁵ She argues that “the way the series caters for an emergent female gaze” is what “locates the series within contemporary [postfeminist] society.”¹³⁶ The foregrounding of the male body as object of a sexual gaze is a shared and prominent feature of *Twilight*, *True Blood*, and *The Vampire Diaries*. At this level, each of the texts engages in the postfeminist endorsement of equal opportunities objectification.

Condon’s perception of *Twilight* as “open to dramatically different interpretations” is evidenced by the variety of decodings of the series available in public commentary. As shown, battles over meaning surface in the cultural response. On one level these battles may be seen in the context of on-going American ‘culture wars’ between right-wing, conservative and liberal or progressive ideologies. In this context, the issues of abstinence, early marriage, traditional gender roles, heterosexism, and abortion are debated. *Twilight* is read as in support or opposition to values on both sides of debates over these issues. At this level, *Twilight*’s meaning is read as clear-cut and is celebrated or scorned from a pre-established conservative/liberal identity viewpoint typically aimed at a sympathetic reader/viewership. What this meaning is, however, varies widely. Beyond these contradictory interpretations, the public reaction of both conservative and liberal commentators may be read as participating in a shared cultural positioning of *Twilight* that constructs the text as problematic. Though *Twilight* is acknowledged as “an extremely polarizing text”, there is common concern amongst many critics over a sense of inappropriate womanhood operating in and around the series.¹³⁷ Crawford shows that the debates surrounding *Twilight* are fought largely over the “cultural terrain ... of sex, gender and sexual relations.”¹³⁸ The critiques of Meyer’s writing, the genre allegiances of *Twilight*, the gender politics it espouses, and the image of the gendered audience imagined surrounding it all intersect in ideas of proper womanhood.

* * *

Having considered the background to *Twilight* and the cultural fall-out surrounding its popular success, the remainder of the chapter explores the contexts of production and reception of *True Blood* and *The Vampire Diaries*. The context of production of both shows is

¹³⁵ Taylor, “Romance and the Female Gaze in *The Twilight Saga*”, 13.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Sheffield and Merlo, “Biting Back: *Twilight* Anti-Fandom and the Rhetoric of Superiority”, 209

¹³⁸ Crawford, *Twilight of the Gothic*, 195.

explored in some depth, as a central part of the cultural understanding and positioning of the texts with regard to gender and feminism. Jane Tompkins, in her work on American fiction in the 19th century, highlights the central role the publishing industry, including the popular review process, plays in the perception and construction of texts. Though the industry and review system has changed since the 19th century, the central point holds regarding contemporary texts, their authors' claims, and their public review:

looking is not an activity that is performed outside of political struggles and institutional structures, but arises from them. ... One such structure is the machinery of publishing and reviewing by means of which an author is brought to the attention of his audience. The social and economic processes that govern the dissemination of a literary work are no more accidental to its reputation, and indeed to its very nature, as that will be perceived by an audience, than are the cultural conceptions ... within which the work is read... The fact that an author makes his or her appearance in the context of a particular publishing practice rather than some other is a fact about the kind of claim he or she is making on an audience's attention and is crucial to the success of the claim.¹³⁹

As horror scholar Stacey Abbott notes, the vampire "is shaped both by the changing world into which it emerges as well as by the medium through which it is represented."¹⁴⁰ Rebecca Williams argues: "it remains crucial to consider contemporary vampire texts in relation to their position in terms of genre, imagined audience, and medium."¹⁴¹ As such "the conventions of TV aesthetics, production contexts and industry marketing strategies need to be accounted for in examination of the televisual vampire."¹⁴²

Laissez les bon temps rouler!¹⁴³

True Blood (2008-2014) is a HBO television show created by Alan Ball based on Charlaine Harris' *Southern Vampire Mysteries* (2001-2013). Harris published the first novel in her best-selling supernatural mystery romance series, *Dead Until Dark*, in 2001. Thirteen novels make

¹³⁹ Tompkins, *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction: 1790-1860*, 23-24.

¹⁴⁰ Abbott, *Celluloid Vampires*, 10-11.

¹⁴¹ Williams, "Unlocking the Vampire Diaries", 96-97.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Unofficial state motto of Louisiana.

up the series: *Living Dead in Dallas* (2002), *Club Dead* (2003), *Dead to the World* (2004), *Dead as a Doornail* (2005), *Definitely Dead* (2006), *All Together Dead* (2007), *From Dead to Worse* (2008), *Dead and Gone* (2009), *Dead in the Family* (2010), *Dead Reckoning* (2011), *Deadlocked* (2012), *Dead Ever After* (2013). Each instalment was published on an annual basis. A final book *After Dead: What Came Next in the World of Sookie Stackhouse* closed the series in October 2013. The series followed the romantic and sleuthing adventures of telepathic waitress Sookie Stackhouse, a “young woman with a disability who wants to try inter-species dating”, following the “coming out” of vampires in the fictional town of Bon Temps, Louisiana.¹⁴⁴ *Dead Until Dark* won the Anthony Award for Best Paperback Mystery in 2001 and the series is available in over thirty languages.¹⁴⁵ While Harris’ novels enjoyed excellent sales and critical acclaim within the romance mystery fiction market, her work reached new levels of prominence after it caught the attention of Hollywood writer and producer Alan Ball. Ball is best known for his Oscar-winning screenplay *American Beauty* (1999) and his previous HBO series *Six Feet Under* (2001-2005). With a reputation as an ‘auteur’ television creator, Ball’s work explores difficult topics and complex relationships and shows a sustained interest in themes of death, sexuality, and faith. Following the completion of *Six Feet Under* in 2005, Ball and HBO were looking for a new show to develop. Ball recalls starting Harris’ series while waiting for a dentist appointment.¹⁴⁶ After reading the then available novels in the series, he “knew it had to be a TV show.”¹⁴⁷ Ball wrote, directed, and produced the project’s hour-long pilot in 2007. The Writers Guild of America strike in 2007/2008 delayed production on the rest of the series until 2008, meaning the first season of *True Blood* began airing in September 2008, two months before the release of the first *Twilight* movie in November 2008. At this stage positive *Twilight* obsession was at its peak.¹⁴⁸ As Crawford notes “the rising tide of popularity which vampire media enjoyed in these years must go some way towards explaining HBO’s decision to actually green-light *True Blood*,” with *Twilight*’s flourishing cultural presence making the “HBO-style reinterpretation of a more populist genre” an attractive prospect.¹⁴⁹ Reviewer commentary such as the following is common:

¹⁴⁴ “About Charlaine”, Charlaineharris.com. Accessed January 31, 2016.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Nicholson, “True Blood creator Alan Ball on season two: sink your teeth into this.”

¹⁴⁷ Ball, “Inside True Blood” in *The Sookie Stackhouse Companion*, 281.

¹⁴⁸ Crawford, *Twilight of the Gothic*, 188.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 247.

The “Twilight” film franchise is largely credited with spearheading the craze [for vampires in 2008/2009], and HBO, always eager to stay on the cutting edge, soon followed with a racy take on vampires for an adult audience.¹⁵⁰

The first episode of *True Blood*, “Strange Love”, attracted a modest audience of 1.44 million viewers, rising to around four million when views on HBO’s many platforms and DVRs are included.¹⁵¹ Following the release of the first *Twilight* movie in November, *True Blood* saw a significant rise in ratings that continued for the lifetime of the series, peaking with the season three average of thirteen million combined views per episode.¹⁵² Despite differences in the target audience of *Twilight* and *True Blood*, as will be discussed further later in this chapter, interest in vampire romance generated by *Twilight* was an influential factor in the success of *True Blood* and included a large crossover audience. The show was renewed and continued for seven seasons in total, with the series finale airing on the 24th August 2014. Ball stepped down as show-runner at the end of season five, but remained involved with the series in an advisory capacity. Mark Hudis, a television producer and writer who had worked on *Cybil* (1995-1998), *That 70’s Show* (1998-2006), and *Nurse Jackie* (2009-), took over as show runner for season six but was replaced by Brian Buckner during production of the season. Buckner had been part of the writing team on *True Blood* since season one. Previously he had worked on sitcoms such as *Friends* (1994-2004) and *Spin City* (1996-2002). The choice of show runners after Ball reveals the importance placed on comedy in the series by HBO. Balancing tones between horror, melodrama, and comedy in *True Blood* is often achieved through self-conscious and popular culture referencing irony, such as the following line by the character Lafayette: “That was the sickest shit I ever saw on TV. And I watch ‘Dance Moms’.”¹⁵³ The use of irony is one element that differentiates *True Blood* and *The Vampire Diaries* from *Twilight*, as will be discussed later. Despite dwindling critical approval after season five, viewership, while falling in number, remained sizable to the series finale. Overall, *True Blood* was a huge success for HBO, its highest-rated series prior to the launch of *Game of Thrones*.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵⁰ Garofalo, “How Successful Was ‘True Blood’ for HBO? A Look Back At Ratings Before Series Finale.”

¹⁵¹ Frankel, “1.4 Million Tune into True Blood.”

¹⁵² Combined viewership includes multi-platform viewing, such as downloads and streaming on various devices.

¹⁵³ *True Blood*, S6E1 “Who Are You, Really?”

¹⁵⁴ Bibel, “Predict the Ratings for the ‘True Blood’ Series Finale.”

It's not TV. It's HBO.

Quality TV is in part based upon a set of premises about the particular indexical quality that TV narrative is presumed to have with everyday life. Definitions of quality television, both popularly and in our scholarship, depend on a basic formulation that goes something like this: narrative complexity generates representational complexity; representational complexity offers the possibility of political and cultural complexity.¹⁵⁵

This section provides a brief background to HBO as it relates to *True Blood's* production and cultural position. HBO is an American commercial-free cable channel that relies on subscriptions for revenue. Set up in 1972, its slogan "It's Not TV, it's HBO." encapsulates the approach taken by the channel to produce television programming significantly different to network productions. Beginning a "long history with experimentation and ... struggle for an identity", HBO defines itself by what it is not.¹⁵⁶ Non-sport related television has been traditionally associated with femininity and, as shown in the previous chapter, this is an association that frequently coincides with ideas of low value in terms of aesthetics and audiences. Having built a "reputation for offering high quality original programming, in addition to the showing of feature films, adult content, and televised sport, such as boxing", HBO constructed the "quality television" formula of "masculine high concept branding", a formula that has been copied and developed by other channels such as FX, Showtime, and AMC. As American Studies scholar Lorna Jowett notes, "the problem with the term *quality television* is that no one can really agree what it means."¹⁵⁷ Avi Santo describes HBO as drawing on two meanings of quality television, one referring to 'high production values, authorial style, and creative innovation' while the other refers to 'quality demographics'. Santo notes:

HBO has attempted to distinguish what types of programs can be found on the pay network versus its broadcast counterparts as well as what type of audience HBO programming attracts.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁵ Kackman, "Quality Television, Melodrama, and Cultural Complexity."

¹⁵⁶ Leverette, *It's Not TV: Watching HBO in the Post-Television Era*, 3.

¹⁵⁷ Jowett, *Sex and the Slayer*, 8.

¹⁵⁸ Santo, "Para-television and discourses of distinction: The culture of production at HBO", 31.

Referencing Robert J. Thompson's *Television's Second Golden Age: From Hill Street Blues to ER* (1997), Jowett writes:

quality television distinguishes itself from other television... produced by experienced professionals or what are sometimes called television "auteurs," it attracts a particular (educated, professional) audience... Formal identifiers include an ensemble cast allowing for multiple plot lines, ... "memory" enabling plot lines or characters to develop over time..., a mixture of genres, a more literary style than other television shows, self-conscious references to culture and popular culture, incorporation of controversial subjects, and aspirations to realism. The final identifier is that all of the above result in achievement and critical appreciation.¹⁵⁹

HBO's original programming fits into and helped create this perception of quality television. Having left "an indelible mark on the American cultural psyche"¹⁶⁰ with shows such as *Deadwood* (2004-2006), *Sex and the City* (1998-2004), *Six Feet Under* (2001-2005), *The Sopranos* (1997-2007), and *The Wire* (2002-2008), HBO found itself by 2005 approaching the end of a cycle of its most popular shows.¹⁶¹ Major staff changes at the top of the company coincided with a lack of successful new programmes. Marc Leverette, Brian Ott and Cara Louise Buckley's collected essays on HBO, published before the airing of *True Blood*, asks the question: "when quality programming starts to seem formulaic, and when the distinctions between "TV" and "not TV" start to sound like a bizarre joke, the question must be raised... "Will this be the end for HBO?"¹⁶² It was not the end. *True Blood* was a "calculated risk" for the channel, one that "revitalized HBO's programming".¹⁶³ *True Blood* both continues and adapts HBO's reputation by packaging 'quality' in a non-realist, lowbrow genre. Described by reviewer Rob Owen as "a soap, to be sure, but a soap with an eye for social commentary", the juxtaposition of trashy genre with weightier auteur-driven vision is drawn on by producers, reviewers, and within the narrative itself.¹⁶⁴ This is a division between lowbrow cult fantasy genres, feminine soap opera and romance genres, and Alan Ball and HBO's association with 'auteur' driven "quality television." Reviewer Ellen Gray's comments are telling regarding this hierarchy of cultural taste:

¹⁵⁹ Jowett, *Sex and the Slayer*, 8.

¹⁶⁰ Buckley, "It's not TV: Watching HBO in the Post-Television Era", 8.

¹⁶¹ Abbott, "TV Loves Fangs", 26-27.

¹⁶² Buckley, "It's not TV", 7.

¹⁶³ Abbott, "TV Loves Fangs", 28.

¹⁶⁴ Owen, "TV review: HBO comes out of the coffin."

Ball's done an entertaining job of turning Harris' stories about life in a small Southern town after vampires "come out of the coffin" into something adults who wouldn't dream of reading her books might be caught dead watching.¹⁶⁵

Television reviewer Alan Sepinwall asks, given Ball's previous work, "what deep social issues does Ball want to tackle with *True Blood*?"¹⁶⁶ He notes, "straight-up genre fiction isn't really what we've come to expect from HBO dramas."¹⁶⁷

HBO's niche marketing of 'quality to quality' works via a strategy in which the consumer is interpellated, to use Louis Althusser's influential term, as discerning by his/her ability to see the difference between HBO's material and televisual fare of less 'quality'. While the trashy genre elements of the show are constructed as "fun" and "entertaining", (reviewers describe the series as "appetizingly pulpy",¹⁶⁸ a "romp and a wallow",¹⁶⁹ a "sexy affair",¹⁷⁰) the difference of HBO's version of trashy is highlighted in the discussion of *True Blood* in descriptions such as Ball's: "popcorn TV for smart people."¹⁷¹ In order for it to be 'smart' in HBO's terms, it needs to deal with serious or topical issues, to present a social commentary, and to foreground moral ambiguity. To do so, political and social allusions are placed front and centre in *True Blood*. Exploration of political and social issues however are never at the expense of a sexualised celebration of attractive young bodies, particularly the bodies of the male stars, leading some commentators to describe the show as pornographic.¹⁷²

Though Harris had two other offers for film option rights on *The Southern Vampire Mysteries*, she agreed to Ball's adaptation due to his understanding of her broader social commentary: "He really 'got' me. That's how he convinced me to go with him. I just felt that he understood what I was doing with the books."¹⁷³ Harris describes what she's doing in the novels as 'having an agenda':

¹⁶⁵ Gray, "Review: True Blood Season 1."

¹⁶⁶ Sepinwall, "Sepinwall on TV: 'True Blood' Review."

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Patterson, "Hot Vampires."

¹⁶⁹ Shales, "'True Blood': Undead On Arrival."

¹⁷⁰ Owen, "TV review: HBO comes out of the coffin."

¹⁷¹ Associated Press, "Vampires, well, come to life in 'True Blood'."

¹⁷² Chapman, "Why has *True Blood* been so successful?"

¹⁷³ Shepard, "Charlaine Harris: Dead-On Author."

[the] series is really about marginalized people. Though if you don't get that and read the books for the sheer fun of it, that's OK too. I just write with a purpose.¹⁷⁴

A balance between social commentary and 'mere entertainment' is navigated in the marketing and public discussion of *True Blood*. Ball has been hailed as a "strong voice for the LGBT community" and his work frequently presents homosexual and homophobic characters.¹⁷⁵ While clearly inviting allegorical readings of *True Blood*, Ball cautions against going too far with these readings:

If you get really serious about it, well, then the show could be seen to be very homophobic because vampires are dangerous: They kill, they're amoral.¹⁷⁶

Ball chides over-simplified interpretations of the show:

To look at these vampires on the show as metaphors for gays and lesbians is so simple and so easy, that it's kind of lazy.¹⁷⁷

Yet he simultaneously objects to too much sustained attention on the show's meaning, resorting to a more evasive position often associated with less self-described 'quality' popular culture:

I just hope people can remember that because it's a show about vampires, it's not meant to be taken that seriously. It's supposed to be fun.¹⁷⁸

Ball seems simultaneously to advocate both a less 'lazy' and a less 'serious' approach to the text. While this might seem inconsistent it makes sense in relation to the show both in terms of its wider market presence and at a textual level. At the level of market value a delicate balance between entertainment and loftier aspirations must be maintained for *True Blood* to function in its HBO home. It also ensures the show remains available to audience members who may not be interested in a critique of heterosexism. At the interpretive level, the less 'serious' approach can be understood as a less literal decoding of metaphorical content. Rather than approach the text with the aim of discovering what vampires are meant to signify in the real world and limiting them to that reading alone, it may be more fruitful to

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ Robinson, "Alan Ball's LGBT Vision."

¹⁷⁶ Shen, "Flesh & 'Blood'."

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

leave aside attempts to map vampirism onto various disenfranchised or minority groups and accept the image as an over-determined metaphor, one that can mean all these groups and none of them entirely, one that is both of this world and not of this world, like the vampire itself. As Harris puts it, "If people get my agenda, great. If not, that's ok, too."¹⁷⁹ In this way, the show can appeal to greater numbers, both those who read a social critique in the series, and expect such from a HBO programme, and those who prefer to watch it as 'mere' entertainment.

Avoiding strict policing of boundaries is necessary for the success of *True Blood*. HBO's marketing strategy is one that has been described as blurring fact-fiction boundaries.¹⁸⁰ This begins with the show's opening credits, produced by Digital Kitchen. The credits are shot in a documentary style and have all the textual markers of documentary footage. Scenes from religious ceremonies, in bars, in the Louisiana countryside give an impression of 'ethnographic' footage. The credits do not feature any supernatural creatures, though they establish a pattern replicated in the show's supernatural content of a complicated relationship between ideas of reality and invention, the real and the unreal. There can be no strict divide in *True Blood* and this is continued in the cross-platform and boundary pushing marketing campaign for the show. HBO employed the services of advertising agency 'CampFire NYC' to promote the show through viral marketing. They marketed the show by "deliberately confusing fact and fiction."¹⁸¹ CampFire NYC set up websites including TruBeverage.com and the blog Bloodcopy that advertised products aimed at vampires. Well-known brands including Geico and Harley Davidson advertised products for vampires. Geico's ad included the line 'Even vampires can save 15%'. TruBeverage sells a 'blood orange' drink in the same packaging as the fictional synthetic blood product TruBlood featured on the show. Profiles on major social networking sites cropped up discussing the implications of TruBlood for the vampire community. The blog Bloodcopy later became involved with Gawker Media, paying for Gawker to feature posts from the marketing blog. This led to Bloodcopy claiming it had been purchased by Gawker and even sending out invites to a merger party. News outlets then reported on the 'merger' as fact, including *Business Insider* who later issued a statement saying that "HBO, Gawker, and

¹⁷⁹ McCune, "A Conversation with Charlaine Harris."

¹⁸⁰ Morehead, "HBO's *True Blood*: Viral Marketing and Fact-Fiction Reversals."

¹⁸¹ Laycock, "True Blood: When marketing goes for the jugular."

the marketing agency crossed a line.”¹⁸² The ‘line’ crossed seems to be one *Business Insider* drew to preserve some dignity in an embarrassingly naïve misreading. Explaining how the mix-up between news and advertising took place, Carlson explains:

... we received an email from a marketing firm announcing that ‘Blood Copy has joined the Gawker Media Network’. The email was an invitation to a party to celebrate this event. The email didn’t say that what Gawker was actually doing was throwing a party for a sponsor, not adding a new blog (assuming the party was real).¹⁸³

Carlson goes on to describe *True Blood*’s ad campaign as ‘all about creating fake news and events’ saying ‘this campaign is designed to trick people to coming to the same conclusion we came to’ (Carlson). Facing criticism for the ‘highly misleading’ marketing tactics HBO and Gawker have pointed to the self-evident fakeness of the blog given that it is written by a ‘vampire’: “Considering that it’s clearly stated that a vampire is writing this blog, the faux aspect of it really isn’t hidden.”¹⁸⁴ As Laycock points out, however, the defence that it cannot be read as real by a reasonable person because it is written by a vampire, a fictional creature, fails to account for the existence of self-identified vampires in American society. There are blogs written by ‘real’ vampires, as HBO is certainly aware having attempted (unsuccessfully) to involve the ‘real’ vampire community in some of *True Blood*’s campaign.

The marketing campaign is in sync with the vision of the show as a whole, deliberately playing with ideas of real and unreal, overlapping and confusing them at every level. From the credits of the show, to the campaign surrounding it, to the narrative itself, *True Blood* works to suggest ‘real’ world connections and then belies those connections as far-fetched by recourse to the fantastical ontological status of vampires. Ball’s seemingly contradictory comments about the show fit perfectly with this position demanding greater and better interpretive strategies while simultaneously shirking any intended or potential significance:

¹⁸² Carlson, “How HBO and Gawker tricked us into reporting and ad campaign as news.”

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ Laycock, “True Blood: When marketing goes for the jugular.”



Figure 1: *True Blood* opening credits, produced by Digital Kitchen for HBO.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸⁵ Digital Kitchen (2008). Combined opening credit stills found at *Submarine*, “Forget the Film, Watch the Titles” (web), http://www.watchthetitles.com/articles/00131-true_blood. March 25, 2009. Accessed January 28, 2016.

Occasionally, if you look, there may be a little nod to American politics or the place of religion in our culture or things like that. But it's never one hundred percent serious.¹⁸⁶

There is, however, more than a 'little nod' to American politics and the place of religion in American culture in the show. A quote from the vampire character Pam De Beaufort gives a representative example of the show's approach to political satire: when Pam and Eric dress up to try to infiltrate a GoP event in Texas, she says flatly upon looking at herself in the mirror:

Oh my God, I'm a republican.¹⁸⁷

While *True Blood* and *The Vampire Diaries* both use irony to differentiate themselves from *Twilight*, the tone of *The Vampire Diaries* is less acerbic, sticking to self-conscious awareness of genre conventions and popular culture referencing, rather than political satire. A detailed consideration of genre will be undertaken in the following chapter. The next section will introduce *The Vampire Diaries* and relevant aspects of its production and reception contexts.

Between Abstinence and Orgies

The Vampire Diaries (2009-) is a supernatural drama series created and produced by Julie Plec and Kevin Williamson, based on a vampire romance novel series first published in 1991/2. It is currently entering its seventh season airing on the CW Television Network. The CW is an American broadcast network operated by CBS Corporation and Warner Brothers Entertainment, which, like HBO, is a subsidiary of Time Warner. The demise of United Paramount Network (UPN) and The WB led to the launch of the CBS and Warner Brothers backed network in 2006. With hit shows including *America's Next Top Model* (originating on UPN 2003-), *Gossip Girl* (2007-2012), *Supernatural* (originating on WB, 2005-), the CW network described itself as the only network targeting women aged 18-34.¹⁸⁸ Rick Haskins, marketing executive at the CW, states: "in this demographic, you want to be

¹⁸⁶ Holmes, "Alan Ball on Leaving 'True Blood' Behind."

¹⁸⁷ *True Blood*, S7E5 "Lost Cause"

¹⁸⁸ The target demographic of the CW has changed to a mixed gender demographic with the change from Dawn Ostroff to Mark Pedowitz as president of entertainment at the network in 2011.

hitting what's popular,"¹⁸⁹ hence the decision to produce a vampire show in the wake of *Twilight*'s success. *The Vampire Diaries* is based on a novel series of the same name. Though they share a title and several central characters, the television series departs significantly from the storyline of the original novels. Williamson's background writing postmodern horror films, the most famous of which were the *Scream* (1996) and *I Know What You Did Last Summer* (1997) franchises, and creating the self-conscious teen melodrama *Dawson's Creek* (1998-2003), is evident in *The Vampire Diaries*, a television show which combines a focus on emotion and relationships with supernatural elements and horror film clichés. Plec worked on many projects with Williamson, co-producing *Scream 2* (1997) & *3* (2000) amongst other co-producer credits. Before *The Vampire Diaries* she was writer and producer on the science-fiction teen drama series *Kyle XY* (2006-2009). Like Ball's adaptation of Harris' novels as *True Blood*, *The Vampire Diaries* television series creators draw on the 'story world' of the original novel series, but create an alternative narrative with many altered characters and a different supernatural mythology. After reading part of one of *The Vampire Diaries*' original novels, Williamson was initially reluctant to create a television series based on them as he felt they were too like *Twilight*. After reading more in the series, particularly after the introduction of the character Damon, Williamson believed there was enough of a difference there to warrant a show.

One of the most significant changes between the books and television series include the changes made to Elena Gilbert's appearance and character, going from a blond, spoilt 'mean girl' to a brunette, girl-next-door type, whose most distinctive characteristic is her compassion. This and many other changes were so significant that a series of *Vampire Diaries*' novels, *Stefan's Diaries* including *Origins* (2010), *Bloodlust* (2011), *The Craving* (2011), *The Ripper* (2011), *The Asylum* (2012), and *The Compelled* (2012), written by ghost-writers and the TV series executive producers Williamson and Julie, were published to complement the plot and mythology of the television series. These novels do not reiterate the story explored in the episodes of the television series, rather they recount Stefan's back-story in detail which is only relayed in brief flashbacks on screen. Marketed online as 'Stefan's secret diaries', they are directly linked to the television series in which Stefan is pictured writing in his diary and the many diaries he has written over the years are referenced.

¹⁸⁹ Elliott, "Looking for Viewers. No Need to pardon the Puns."

The original novels began as a three-part series commissioned by Alloy Entertainment, a book packaging and television production company owned by Warner Brothers Entertainment, and written by L.J. Smith in 1990. HarperTeen published books 1-3, *The Awakening* (1991), *The Struggle* (1991), and *The Fury* (1991). Following the success of the trilogy, a fourth in the series, *Dark Reunion* (1992), was published the subsequent year. This would have mostly likely been the end of series had it not been for the success of *Twilight* and resultant publishing houses' attempts to cash in on the vampire romance craze. In the context of the huge readership achieved by Meyer's novels, *The Vampire Diaries*, along with many other vampire and gothic romance series, were reissued for publication with new covers. A further three books in the series, *The Return: Nightfall* (2009), *The Return: Shadow Souls* (2010), and *The Return: Midnight* (2011), were written by Smith. Alloy Entertainment then commissioned three more books, numbers 8-10 in the series, although Smith's employment by the company was terminated before publication because of creative differences. Though Smith was involved in the writing of Book 8 *The Hunters: Phantom* (2011), further books in the series, *The Hunters: Moonson* (2012) and *The Hunters: Destiny Rising* (2012), were written by an anonymous ghost-writer. The latest trilogy in the series *The Salvation* comprising *Unseen* (2013), *Unspoken* (2013), and *Unmasked* (2014) are written by Aubrey Clark.

The ghost-written novels and the novels based on the television series do not highlight their change in author, nor does the website for the television show which has several pages devoted to the various novels connected with the series. In this way fans of the original series are encouraged to view the television show and the 'new' novels as part of the L.J. Smith bibliography, while fans that come to the series through the television show can be marketed both the novels written to tie-in with the television series but the original novel series, without creating too large a gap between the 'new' and 'old' versions despite their different authorship. In fact it is only on L.J. Smith's website that details of the books that are and are not written by her is clearly laid out. Her website advises: "If a book has several names on the cover or says 'Created by L.J. Smith' you can be sure that L.J. did not write it." Smith attempted to delineate what was actually written by her, in the face of an entertainment company that legally owned the series and sought to both profit from the fan-base established by Smith's original 1990s novels, and take the series in an entirely different direction under new creative employees. In a further development, Smith released 'fan fiction' in 2014 based on the original series to provide fans her version of the on-going story. Thus far two books *Evensong: Paradise Lost* and *Evensong: The War of Roses* are available

on Kindle Worlds, a platform established in 2013 that “allows fan writers to legally publish and sell stories based on other people’s fictional creations, without changing characters’ names or masking the story’s origins”¹⁹⁰ for a limited number of licensed fictional properties. *The Vampire Diaries* is one of the licenced story-worlds. In writing on this platform, Smith’s work continues to generate revenue for Alloy Entertainment, given that Amazon pay them for the license fee. However, as a ‘fan fiction’ writer, Smith is under no contractual obligations about the direction of the series. These works continue Smith’s version of *The Vampire Diaries* taking up from the volume *The Return: Midnight*. Alloy Entertainment have links to Smith’s fan fiction on their *Vampire Diaries*’ website, showing the non-threatening and potentially lucrative source these alternative storylines present for Alloy Entertainment. Leslie Morgenstein, the president of Alloy, describes the benefits of licensing their intellectual property to Kindle Worlds: “It’s potentially another revenue stream for us that didn’t exist before... At the very least, it’s additional promotion, and in the best-case scenario, there are ideas for new properties that we can mine.”¹⁹¹ While Smith’s website has a banner reading “Official home of the ORIGINAL Vampire Diaries Books,” Alloy works to minimise awareness of divisions between the original author and itself as owner of the series. The desire on Alloy’s side to maintain a connection between the disparate incarnations of the story world of *The Vampire Diaries* may be read as part of an attempt to create brand identity.¹⁹² Clearly stories that work as brand identities are able to generate multifaceted streams of income such as merchandise, site tourism, entertainment parks and more. It ceases to be a narrative arc that may be sold in different forms (book, film, television series, comic book), rather the story world itself becomes open to many alternative narratives, that through a sense of “the intellectual property, advertising language, and presentational devices that cohere, authorize, and market the range of media products”, maintain a sense of unity.¹⁹³

Despite Smith’s dissatisfaction with her termination as writer on the series, Alloy Entertainment maintains the sense of connection between the original texts and the new ones. In this way *The Vampire Diaries* functions as a particularly “transmedial text”¹⁹⁴ in

¹⁹⁰ Alter, “‘Vampire Diaries’ Writer Bites Back.”

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁹² Parody, “Franchising/Adaptation”, 214.

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ Leavenworth, “Transmedial Texts and Serialized Narratives”, 1.

which the “economics of media consolidation”¹⁹⁵ operate. Alloy Entertainment aims for the best financial result from the narrative by creating or giving its blessing to various tributary narratives in different mediums. As outlined, in the case of *The Vampire Diaries*, the narratives are not in sync with one another, but a sense of alternative narratives is capitalized on, as shown here in *The Vampire Diaries*’ website’s promotion of Book 8 in the L.J. Smith-authored series. “Book Elena” and “Show Elena” can provide audiences with alternative romantic choices for “Elena”:

Elena Gilbert from *The Vampire Diaries* has it good. She’s gorgeous, surrounded by great friends, and has two ridiculously handsome vampires vying for her affection. However, whereas “show Elena” hasn’t yet embraced the idea of switching Salvatores (despite her blatant attraction to both Stefan and Damon), “book Elena” has gotten cosy with each brother! If you love Stefan but want a taste of what Elena and Damon are like as a couple, look no further than *The Vampire Diaries* new book *TVD Hunters: Phantom!* This steamy excerpt is for you, Team Delena¹⁹⁶ shippers.¹⁹⁷

The fan-base cultivated by *The Vampire Diaries* is based on strong identification with the ‘story world’ and a ‘team’ style support of a romantic relationship between the heroine and one of the heroes in the love triangle. This type of fan-base is also a strong element of *Twilight* and *True Blood* fandom. Alloy capitalises on the divergent versions of *The Vampire Diaries* to provide ‘shippers’ with the relationship pairing they are rooting for.¹⁹⁸ Focusing on the ‘story world’ rather than the ‘story as narrative’ allows the various Alloy owned *Vampire Diaries* stories to co-exist. Maria Leavenworth notes, “the TV series’ puzzle cannot be solved by turning to the novels and vice versa; snippets of the story do not necessarily complement each other. Rather, although each novel and each season provides a certain closure, each instantiation contains a number of gaps...”¹⁹⁹

The words “created by L.J. Smith” are flagged as signifying that a work is not written by Smith, setting up a new code for reading the cover text of these works. With Smith writing

¹⁹⁵ Jenkins, “Transmedia Storytelling 101”, 2.

¹⁹⁶ ‘Delena’ is the combination of Damon and Elena in the popular fashion of combining couples names. ‘Shippers’ refers to fans who consume the series with a desire to see a particular romantic relationship come about or survive. They are fans of that particular romantic relationship pairing.

¹⁹⁷ Theo, “TVD Hunters Phantom: Steamy Delena Quote.”

¹⁹⁸ The relationships featured are exclusively heterosexual pairings, however, unlike slash fiction which explores same-sex romances.

¹⁹⁹ Leavenworth, “Transmedial Texts and Serialized Narrative”, 5.

'fan fiction' of her own work, the issues of intellectual property and authorial ownership are invoked, eroded, and reinstated. In this murky situation of original author, ghost-writers, creators, and corporations, the producer Julie Plec emerges as the public persona most connected with creative ownership of the television series and the spin-off show *The Originals* (2013-), which follows the lives of the original vampire family introduced in *The Vampire Diaries*. Plec took over as show-runner from Williamson after the first season of *The Vampire Diaries* and continues to run the series now entering its seventh season. Plec is also show-runner on *The Originals*, commencing season three in October 2015. Unlike the authors and producers of *Twilight* and *True Blood* there is little or no discussion or comment on feminism or politically charged issues by Plec or other spokespeople for the show. This is read as indicative of the more comfortable fit between postfeminist ideology and *The Vampire Diaries*. There are few if any overt references to ideas that would be considered either risqué or out-dated to the mainstream popular sensibilities of the imagined audience. In line with this, *The Vampire Diaries* has been received as relatively inoffensive. There have been some critiques of the highly sexual nature of the teaser material for the show but this is in keeping with the sexualized representations of the CW's other major series.

The CW targets a young female viewership using language obliquely associated with feminism yet entirely appropriated to a commercial rather than a political context. With slogans such as 'Free to Be' (2006), 'Get Into It' (2007), 'Good Night' (2008), 'TV to Talk/Text/Tweet About' (2009), 'We Own The Night' (2011), and 'TV Now' (2012) the CW is clearly situated in a postfeminist context, one in which language associated with political activism is relocated to an entertainment setting and emptied of its political significance. This use of feminist rhetoric in a purely commercial context is in line with how scholars such as Yvonne Tasker and Diane Negra define postfeminism. Postfeminist texts are "highly *knowing* about sex and gender (both cognizant of sexism and knowing with respect to sexual innuendo) and deeply invested in conventional modes of femininity."²⁰⁰ Through this discourse "contemporary women are imagined ... to be free to choose, free of both old-fashioned, sexist ideas about women's limits and feminisms' supposed imposition[s]."²⁰¹ The network's slogans suggest a liberal ideology. 'Free to Be' evokes identity politics, freedom of expression, and the 1970s gender neutrality project of the Ms. Foundation for Women "Free to Be... You and Me". 'Get Into It' has a sexual connotation

²⁰⁰ Tasker, "Enchanted by Postfeminism", 68.

²⁰¹ Ibid., 60.

and suggests a 'sex positive' celebration. 'TV to Talk/Text/Tweet About' invokes a feminized realm of talk and friendship surrounding television programming in the context of social media. In this way it invokes an idea of a technologically savvy feminine community energized by the televisual material. This is significant given that online critique of cultural products has been a chief marker of the currently popular mode of feminism. 'We Own The Night' is the most overtly related to a feminist political movement. It clearly echoes the 'Reclaim the Night' slogan of feminist activist marches and protests against rape and violence against women. In the context of the CW network television channel, 'We Own the Night' is a claim to airing the best television shows in primetime evening viewing. This slogan illustrates well the way feminist rhetoric operates in a postfeminist context. Stripped of its political significance 'owning the night' comes to refer directly to commercial success using the symbolic residue of the language's assertion of agency and power in a different context.

The identities created through this discourse are those best suited to consume the available product. It is no coincidence that the postfeminist, postmodern feminine identity exists largely through exerting consumer choice. Identity based not only on what one buys but what one likes/views in terms of consumable programming is, of course, the perfect consumer identity for a television channel selling cultural product. *Twilight* and *True Blood* are certainly involved in the same process, but they do not fit as seamlessly with postfeminist sensibilities. As the title of this section suggests, *The Vampire Diaries* self-consciously positions itself between the perceived extremes of *Twilight* and *True Blood*, filling "the void between abstinence and orgies."²⁰² The next section explores the popular perception of the relationship between these three vampire romance stories.

This thesis presents *True Blood* and *The Vampire Diaries* as popularly received with reference to the social image of *Twilight*. Despite differences in the original publication dates, *Twilight*, *True Blood*, and *The Vampire Diaries* share mainstream popularity in the same historical moment. This results in producers, cast, reviewers, and fans frequently comparing the series. Reviewer Daniel Fienberg notes precisely this regarding *The Vampire Diaries*:

²⁰² Calhoun, *Love You to Death*, 12.

Publication chronology aside, it would be disingenuous to claim that just because its source preceded the sources for *True Blood* and *Twilight*, *The Vampire Diaries* isn't utterly and completely indebted and beholden to those burgeoning franchises.²⁰³

The main points of comparison centre on sex, vampires, heroines, and audiences. In this thesis, the popular relationship between the texts is read as revealing both popularly acceptable and problematic aspects of contemporary modes of feminine feminist subjectivities.

Though clearly green-lit in the context of *Twilight*'s popularity, and indeed because of this, the creators of *True Blood* and *The Vampire Diaries* are quick to differentiate themselves from Meyer's young-adult franchise. The makers of *True Blood* and the media coverage of the series and its stars emphasise the differences between *True Blood* and *Twilight* particularly regarding the audience courted, the depiction of sex, and the 'coolness' of the vampires. When asked about the similarities between *Twilight* and *True Blood*, Alan Ball answered:

I have not read *Twilight* so I don't know what those similarities are. I think vampires are a timeless powerful archetype that can tap into people's psyches. They've been around forever... I don't really know why this is all happening at this time. I'm just glad it's happening.²⁰⁴

He also points to the different audiences aimed at by the different stories:

Twilight fans are thirteen year old girls. I think that if thirteen year old girls, who watch *Twilight* and the kind of sex scenes that are in *Twilight*, watched *True Blood*, they would be traumatized. No, *True Blood* is for a different audience. *True Blood* is for adults. Period.²⁰⁵

Charlaine Harris points out the difference between the series in terms of audience age-related conceptions of romantic love:

My books are just aimed at adults. There's not the fairy-tale aspect in my books that there is in hers [Meyer's] ... How are they different? Bill turns out to be betraying

²⁰³ Fienberg, "Vampire Diaries' Team discusses those 'Twilight,' 'True Blood' comparisons."

²⁰⁴ Woerner, "Alan Ball Takes Us Behind the Pointy Fangs of 'True Blood'."

²⁰⁵ Gross, "True Blood: Executive Producer Alan Ball discusses Vampires and Sex."

Sookie the whole time. Sookie finds that out and it's devastating to her. But this leaves her to look in many different directions for love.²⁰⁶

Certainly, given *True Blood's* graphic content it is clearly aimed at an adult audience. This does not preclude an under-18 audience, however: it simply precludes the direct marketing of the show towards such an audience. Equally, *Twilight*, though marketed as a young-adult series, has found a large audience amongst adult women. The implied audience of a text may be the one coded into the text and tacitly appealed to, but the actual audience is rarely entirely made up of those targeted. Online discussion forums evidence that audiences of both *True Blood* and *Twilight* clearly overlap despite being aimed at different demographics. Given the importance of 'quality demographics' to HBO's success and the public denigration of *Twilight* fans, it is not surprising that Ball and others foreground the different audiences of *True Blood* and *Twilight*. These audiences are not constructed as equally respectable. Ball emphasizes this in his comments on abstinent vampires:

To me, vampires are sex. I don't get a vampire story about abstinence. I'm fifty-three. I don't care about high school students. I find them irritating and uninformed.²⁰⁷

Ball links high school students with abstinence, while vampires are connected to sex. The connection of abstinence itself to sex, however, is ignored and thus the sexual content of *Twilight* ignored. This works as a means of differentiating the adult from the juvenile not simply in terms of age groups but in terms of worth in HBO's construction of 'quality'. The 'irritating and uninformed' teen or 'Tw-hard' is contrasted with the 'smart people' of Ball's target viewership. Sex is the topic he uses to separate the two when in fact both *Twilight* and *True Blood* are preoccupied with sex in different ways. Both shows have been called pornographic but for different reasons: *Twilight* has been described as "abstinence porn", fetishizing abstinence over the course of four novels, while *True Blood* has been described as pornographic in the more traditional sense of showing graphic sex scenes.²⁰⁸

While *True Blood* is presented as the antithesis of *Twilight* in many ways, the producers of *The Vampire Diaries* track a balanced course between the two series in the hope of attracting fans of both, rather than alienating or fragmenting them. Like Ball, Williamson also claims

²⁰⁶ Ricapito, "True Blood Author Charlaine Harris on the Current Vampire Epidemic."

²⁰⁷ Grigoriadis, "The Joy of Vampire Sex."

²⁰⁸ Seifert, "Bite Me! (Or Don't)"; Chapman, "Why has True Blood been so Successful?"

never to have read *Twilight*, though Plec is a fan. Williamson identifies himself as a *True Blood* follower. In this way the producers personify the amalgamation of both sensibilities, as Williamson says in an interview: “The way we look at it is, she’s sort of the earnest “*Twilight*” girl and I’m the bloody “*True Blood*” guy, and we try and put it together.”²⁰⁹ The gender division here is not coincidental. The 18-35 year-old female audience pitched at by *The Vampire Diaries* are imagined as potentially being fans of both *Twilight* and *True Blood*. While acknowledging the similarities between *Twilight* and *The Vampire Diaries*, Williamson presents an important difference in their visual medium: “...you’ll see the differences, because you’re watching a weekly show. We’re not a movie with a beginning, middle, and end. We’re actually evolving, and we get to evolve and just tell the stories, and it just sort of unrolls.”²¹⁰ There is no sense of offering an alternative take on political or social issues in the presentation or popular discussion of *The Vampire Diaries*. Indeed while Stephenie Meyer, Charlaine Harris, and Alan Ball have been asked for and provided comments on feminism and related topics in their series, Smith, Williamson, and Plec provide no such commentary. Articles, blog posts, and user-generated videos frequently compare and contrast the three vampire series. These comparisons largely reflect and develop producer’s representations of *Twilight* and *True Blood* on opposite ends of a spectrum of values, with *The Vampire Diaries* operating in a less politicised zone between these two poles of culture wars. A fan is quoted by MTV saying:

Twilight is based off a horribly written novel tailored to 12-year-old girls, and the movie is twice as bad as the book... *True Blood* is freaking awesome. It is a show with layers, which ‘*Twilight*’ is desperately lacking.²¹¹

Reviewer Charlie Brooker writes: “Contemporary vampires come in two flavours... sexless wimps (*Twilight*) or smouldering hedonists (*True Blood*).”²¹² An *Entertainment Weekly* article praises the versatility of contemporary vampires to express:

both conservative and liberal views. Stephenie Meyer’s *Twilight* novels are steeped in her Mormon values. But *True Blood* speaks in part for gays and, as Ball puts it, “eight

²⁰⁹ Ghosh, “Vampire Diaries.”

²¹⁰ Fienberg, “‘Vampire Diaries’ Team discusses those ‘Twilight,’ ‘True Blood’ comparisons.”

²¹¹ Vena, “‘True Blood’ Vs. ‘Twilight’: Fans Weigh in on the Vamp-Off.”

²¹² Brooker, “*Twilight*’s sulky vampires are less frightening than a knitted cushion.”

years of institutionalized demonization of pretty much any group that wasn't on the bus with Mr. Bush."²¹³

While Bella is extensively criticised in the popular conversation as passive, weak, and unempowered, the heroines Sookie and Elena are praised for their display of largely postfeminist attributes lacking in Meyer's heroine. The "current neoliberal exhortations to work on and transform the feminine self as a project of self-transformation"²¹⁴ which Jameson and Dane suggest is resolved in *Twilight* but which this thesis argues are resolved in a highly problematic way for postfeminism. The containment of *Twilight's* subversive potential involves the positioning of other texts as offering examples of proper femininity, that is to say representing a model of femininity in which the work of containment and self-regulation is presented as part of the pleasure and power of feminine identity. Sookie's refusal to be a victim despite her on-going victimization further illustrates empowerment in terms of choice but not in terms of systemic changes that would decrease the need to actively refuse victimhood. The taking on of and refusal of victimhood is central to the vampire romance and to conflicts in feminist approaches, leading to the terms "victim feminism" and "power feminism."

Scholar Simone Knewitz writes: "[*True Blood*] enacts the social conflicts *Twilight* suppresses, remembering particular moments in US cultural history and advocating a liberal political position of cultural diversity."²¹⁵ She goes on to describe how

... *Twilight* and *True Blood* position themselves at opposite ends of the current ideological conflicts about alternate lifestyles, religion, and conceptions of morality.... Meyer thoroughly reappropriates the figure of the vampire for conservative ends, *True Blood* is more ambivalent and actually calls into question whether the Other can ever be fully domesticated.²¹⁶

Reflecting the popular discussion, scholarly consideration of *The Vampire Diaries* is substantially lower than that of *Twilight* and *True Blood*. Given its popularity, the lack of controversy or discussion of the politics of *The Vampire Diaries* is read as indicative of its use of largely acceptable discourses of gendered subjectivity.

²¹³ EW, "This week's cover: Vampires!"

²¹⁴ Jameson, "Bite Me!", 247.

²¹⁵ Knewitz, "God Hates Fangs?", 120.

²¹⁶ Ibid.

This chapter has served to provide a background to *Twilight*, *True Blood*, and *The Vampire Diaries*. They are presented as enmeshed in a popular cultural conversation involving ideas of feminism in both explicit and inferred ways. This thesis proposes that the dynamic established between the three texts in the production and reception contexts described above is one that limits feminist readings of the texts to the predictable and repetitious construction of *Twilight* as antifeminist and reactionary, *True Blood* as progressive, and *The Vampire Diaries* as either balanced or silent. It is the aim of this thesis to offer an alternative reading, one that sets up the popular conversation as key to understanding the texts. The dynamic of the popular critical engagement reveals the weak points and problematic areas of/for feminism in contemporary culture. This is in line with feminist cultural critics such as Eva Chen's call for the "feminist critique of popular women's culture... to readjust its terms of engagement."²¹⁷ The following chapter explores the relationships between genre, gender, and feminism in the narratives' exploration of subjectivity. Genre informs the texts' exploration and construction of gender, feminism, and subjectivity, complicating the inclination in the popular consciousness to reduce each series to a clear position regarding forms of feminism that are taken for granted and therefore go unexplained.

²¹⁷ Chen, "Neoliberalism and popular women's culture", 440.

CHAPTER 2: LOVE SUCKS¹

Genre and Crises that Sometimes take the Shape of Vampires²

Our Vampires Are Different³

DAMON: What's so special about this Bella girl anyway? Edward's so whipped.

CAROLINE: You have to read the first book first, otherwise it won't make sense.

DAMON: Uh, I miss Anne Rice, she was so on it.

CAROLINE: Hey, how come you don't sparkle?

DAMON: Because I live in the real world where vampires burn in the sun.

CAROLINE: Yeah, but you go in the sun.

DAMON: I have a ring, it protects me. Long story.

CAROLINE: Are these bites going to turn me into a vampire?

DAMON: It's more complicated than that. You have to feed on my blood then die, then feed on a human, it's a whole ordeal. This book, by the way, has it all wrong.⁴

Each of the texts considered here engages the 'our vampires are different' trope, a convention that serves to position contemporary work in relation to the long history of the vampire and its many manifestations in western culture. In Meyer's first novel and the first *Twilight* film, in the first season of *True Blood* and *The Vampire Diaries*, their respective vampires are introduced, popular 'myths' about vampires dispelled, and the attributes of 'real' vampires explained or discovered. Discussion of how their vampires are different also takes place in the popular conversation with many comparisons of *Twilight*, *True Blood*, and *The Vampire Diaries*' vampires available. Typically these comparisons focus on the skills, weaknesses, and relation to blood-drinking habits of the vampires. A gendered association between feminine blood abstainers and masculine blood drinkers is evident. As demonstrated in the previous chapter, the creators of each series also place the texts in relation to other vampire work. Meyer distances her series from vampire texts, while Ball, Williamson and Plec explain their texts in relation to *Twilight* and other recent vampire fiction, film, and television. Thus vampire culture is an important part of any consideration of these texts.

¹ Tagline for *The Vampire Diaries* Seasons 1-3.

² Adapted from Auerbach, *Our Vampires, Ourselves*, 117.

³ Listed as a convention of vampire texts on the popular 'TvTropes' website that compiles user generated content explaining "devices and conventions that [can reasonably be assumed] in audience members' expectations."

⁴ *The Vampire Diaries*, S1E4 "Family Ties."

Much attention has been paid in both popular critique and scholarship to the changing vampire and the significance of the particular developments of the vampire as romantic hero. This chapter presents the vampire as a figure used to symbolise, negotiate, and question the nature of human subjectivity. Presenting the changing image of the vampire in popular culture as one involving a move from monstrous to domesticated, this chapter argues that the horror of the vampire, based on category breakdown or boundary crossing, is relocated rather than entirely diffused in the vampire romance narratives under discussion. Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection and Barbara Creed's work on horror, using Kristeva's theories, are drawn on to discuss the relocation of horror in each text. Margaret Shildrick's work on monstrosity also informs the understanding of purity, contamination, and controlling boundaries between self and Other in cultural conceptions of the monstrous. The texts under discussion are explored with reference to the Dark Romance genre, a hybrid genre drawing on gothic, romance, and horror conventions. Dark Romance is presented as continuing in the tradition of Female Gothic. Using critical approaches that consider the area of the Female Gothic and engage with the relationship of gender and genre, *Twilight*, *True Blood*, and *The Vampire Diaries* are read as dramatising conflicts in discourses of subjectivity with implications for feminism. In particular Diane Hoelever's work on gothic feminism and Helene Meyers' work on femicidal plots are drawn on to elucidate the workings of feminism at the level of genre. Gothic conceptions of womanhood are explored. These are related to discourses of 'power feminism', 'victim/gothic feminism', and 'postfeminism'. The relationship between victimhood, complicity, and agency are investigated in light of theoretical positions of cultural and poststructural feminism.

Having demonstrated the controversy surrounding *Twilight* and positioned *True Blood* and *The Vampire Diaries* as responding pieces of popular culture in dialogue in the popular critical conversation, this chapter turns to genre as the key to providing an alternative reading. The public battles over *Twilight*'s feminist credentials turns on a media effects approach to popular culture and a contradictory image of the female audience as both vulnerable and threatening. It also presents an evolved postfeminism that no longer silences or casts as irrelevant the project of feminism, but uses feminist rhetoric to limit greater exploration of patriarchal conditions that might otherwise be productive for a feminist analysis. Gendered understandings of genre form a recurring means of interpretation and criticism of the series in their popular reception, making the linked areas of gender and genre key to an interpretation of the texts. This chapter puts forward an understanding of

genres as evolving textual histories concerned or preoccupied with certain themes, with the potential to contribute to conservative, subversive, and more often ambiguous political and social agendas depending on authorial intention, production contexts, reception contexts, popular readings and alternative interpretations, and changes culturally, historically, and geographically. Though operating across different media, the texts examined share a generic background along with overlapping cultural space and similarities in their extra-textual cultural life. The media effects approach dominating the popular consideration of the texts draws on genre largely as a means of devaluing the series. Genre is presented here as a suitable cultural mechanism for exploring interchanges of discourses of feminism, femininity, and subjectivity. It is key to this alternative interpretation of the series that goes beyond the feminist/antifeminist branding current in the popular conversation.

Our Vampires, Ourselves⁵

To consider Edward Cullen, Bill Compton, the Salvatore brothers and company is to invoke an ancestry in vampire literature beginning in the 18th century with the German Heinrich August Ossenfelder's lyric poem "Der Vampir" (1748), Gottfried August Burger's lyric "Lenore" (1773), Goethe's "Braut von Korinth" (1797), and E.T.A. Hoffman's short story "Aurelia" (1818), then moving to English language literature in the 19th century with John Polidori's "The Vampire" (1819), the Victorian serialised story *Varney the Vampire* (1845-47), Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla* (1872), and Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897). The 20th century and the development of cinema brought the vampire from Victorian stage productions to the silver screen from the very beginning of cinema with Georges Méliès *Le Manoir du Diable* in 1896, and perhaps most enduringly in F. W. Murnau's *Nosferatu* (1922) and Tod Browning's *Dracula* (1931). Following these early films, vampire cinema has proliferated becoming the medium through which many audiences are now first exposed to the vampire. In the 1960s the vampire became a regular character on the television show *Dark Shadows* (1966-1971). The late 20th century saw the vampire feature in a vast number of television shows, including the cult hit series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003) and spin-off *Angel* (1999-2004). With a prolific presence in modern western culture, the vampire of the 21st century takes many forms and may be found in a huge variety of cultural milieu

⁵ Auerbach, *Our Vampires, Ourselves*.

from fiction, film, television, children's books and programming, advertising, comedy, satire, romance, as well as horror. Ken Gelder in *Reading the Vampire* (1994) shows "the tremendous reach of the vampire into the popular imagination", noting "the many forms vampire narratives can take, and the many different things they can say... [though] vampire narratives do share, or even 'reproduce', certain features", including "the vampire's mobility" and their "unfailing ability to fascinate".⁶ In her study of the vampire in cinema, Stacey Abbott shows the diversity of vampires today including the good and the evil, the monstrous and the 'normal':

While Stoker's *Dracula* was primarily the prototype for the cinematic vampire in the first major cycle of American horror films in the 1930s and 1940s, since the 1970s, the image of the vampire has become fragmented into a diverse range.... Vampires today can be good, (*Blade*), evil (the Master in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, or both (*Angel*); European (*Revenant*), African-American (*Blacula*), or Mexican (*From Dusk till Dawn*); children (*The Little Vampire*) or grandparents (*My Grandfather is a Vampire*); isolate (*Nadja*) or familial (*Near Dark*); rock stars (*Queen of the Damned*), philosophy students (*The Addiction*), performance artists (*Fright Night II*) or action heroes (*Blade*); gangs (*Blood Ties*) or gangsters (*Innocent Blood*); nomadic (*The Forsaken*) or urban (*Habit*); fallen priests (*Vampires*) or fallen apostles (*Dracula 2000*).⁷

In the context of the vampire romance, they may also be friends, boyfriends, husbands, fathers, mothers, sisters, and brothers. However restrictively one defines the vampire, there remain far too many to discuss in any great detail here. Scholarly criticism of the vampire is equally expansive, proliferating, as other gothic criticism, particularly since the 1970s. As it is not the aim of this study to provide a theory of the vampire figure in its many incarnations, this section will only point briefly to aspects of the vampire figure and vampire criticism of relevance to the reading undertaken here. More detailed discussion of relevant vampire texts will be undertaken as required in the coming chapters.

The second half of the 20th century, particularly from the 1970s onwards, saw developments in popular vampire culture without which the vampires of *Twilight*, *True Blood*, and *The Vampire Diaries* would be incomprehensible. For this analysis the most significant of these developments was the focus on sympathetic vampires as subjects. Novels

⁶ Gelder, *Reading the Vampire*, ix-x.

⁷ Abbott., 4.

such as Fred Saberhagen's *The Dracula Tape* (1975) and Rice's *Interview with the Vampire* (1976) inaugurated a significant development of the vampire as a sympathetic, self-conscious subject. Rice focused on "vampire subjectivity", a focus that, according to gothic scholar Fred Botting, "opens what was once a repulsive object of horrified speculation into a creature of sensitivity and pathos... thus blurring the line between a world of human subjects and terrifying, unnatural creatures."⁸ Vampires who tell their own stories mark the beginning of what Sorcha Ní Fhlainn terms the "postmodern vampire."⁹ These vampires force an interrogation of the contours of subjectivity and the meaning of self and Other. Joan Gordon and Veronica Hollinger argue "as an inevitable result of the shifting ideological development of the vampire, its metaphorical charge has also been transformed, often in very complex ways."¹⁰ The trajectory of the vampire from largely horrific to romantically appealing, a "domestication of the vampire", allows the vampire figure to be used to dramatise various aspects of gendered subjectivity within the Dark Romance.¹¹ "Representations of vampirism", according to Erik Butler, "eclipse most other forms of monstrosity in the twentieth" century.¹² Butler argues that from the early 18th century "the form assumed by the monster darkly mirrors... the modern subject's anxieties about shifting identities within the universe in flux."¹³ A "late twentieth-century cultural necessity", the vampire endures as a highly malleable and adaptive figure drawn on for conservative and radical purposes, more often with ambivalent results. Gordon and Hollinger contend: ¹⁴

in diverse and ambiguous ways, Gothic figures have continued to shadow the progress of modernity with counter-narratives displaying the underside of enlightenment and humanist values.¹⁵

Without confining Gothic figures to either conservative or radical functions, the ability of the vampire to provide counter-narratives, even to counter versions of itself, is drawn on here as each of the texts uses the vampire figure to carry symbolic significance in their particular telling of the process and problems of selfhood. Nina Auerbach argued "every

⁸ Botting, *Gothic*, 18.

⁹ Ní Fhlainn, "I am the Dark Mirror."

¹⁰ Gordon and Hollinger, *Blood Read*, 2.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Butler, *Metamorphosis of the Vampire in Literature and Film*, vii.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 12-13.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 1.

¹⁵ Botting, *Gothic*, 1-2.

age embraces the vampire it needs.”¹⁶ If this is the case, as this thesis accepts, the use of the vampire to interrogate processes of gendered subjectivity from the feminine perspective privileged in the Dark Romance demands feminist consideration.

Female Gothic and Dark Romance

It was mostly about how much he wanted to kill her – and yet, how much he loved her.¹⁷

Drawing on a long tradition of association between desire and death in western culture, Meyer connects love and death in the origin story of *Twilight*. This connection is central to the workings of the Dark Romance genre. It is a hybridised genre that draws on elements from a variety of traditions, most notably the Gothic romance, but also from mass-marketed romance narratives, the female Bildungsroman, and horror fiction and film. To these overlapping generic traditions many other conventions, techniques, tropes, and motifs are added, depending on the work’s particular focus, medium, and audience. For example, *Twilight* owes its address to the conventions of young-adult novels; *The Vampire Diaries* uses horror film tropes and soap opera techniques to structure the televisual narrative; *The Southern Vampire Mysteries* draw on the conventions of mystery fiction; as a HBO show, *True Blood* is produced in light of the cable channel’s tradition of showcasing auteur-driven television containing provocative material and explicit violence and sex; both *True Blood* and *The Vampire Diaries* work in a tradition of telefantasy and draw on the history of the sympathetic vampire on the small screen. Despite these differences each of these narratives may be read as participating with the Dark Romance tradition, drawing on its “constellation of associated tropes.”¹⁸ Without providing a ‘shopping list’ of Dark Romance ingredients, a few recurring features of the genre are worth noting: Dark Romance stories are predominantly novels written by women for an intended female audience; They typically have a female protagonist and are usually written from this character’s perspective; They are most often series though there are stand alone examples; At a narrative level the central feature is a romance involving a human (or at least seemingly human at first) girl and an older supernatural man of dubious moral character; Love

¹⁶ Auerbach, *Our Vampires, Ourselves*. 145.

¹⁷ Meyer, *Official Illustrated Guide*, 3.

¹⁸ Crawford, *Twilight of the Gothic*, 9.

triangles are a common feature. Beyond this there are a huge variety of iterations, adaptations, and reworkings.

Writing that “genres are not fixed nor are they only bodies of textual material”¹⁹, Andrew Tudor highlights the slippery nature of genres both textually and extra-textually. Female Gothic and its critical appraisal is a tradition both drawn on and responded to by the Dark Romances explored here. As explorations of the difficulties of womanhood, they draw on a wide variety of culturally available stories about femininity and female subjectivity. The Dark Romance may be read as a space in which feminist discourses are negotiated. Various discourses of femininity and feminism are also drawn on in response to these texts. Diane Waldman, writing about 1940s women’s gothic film, describes the “Gothic designation” as follows:

a young inexperienced woman meets a handsome older man to whom she is alternately attracted and repelled. After a whirlwind courtship... she marries him. After returning to the ancestral mansion of one of the pair, the heroine experiences a series of bizarre and uncanny incidents, open to ambiguous interpretation, revolving around the question of whether or not the Gothic male really loves her. She begins to suspect that he may be a murderer.²⁰

This designation is drawn on and adapted in the 21st century fiction, film, and television considered here. Monstrousness suspected but discovered or dispelled late in the narrative appears much earlier in the Dark Romances looked at here. Each heroine discovers the ‘horrific’ identity of their lover or potential lover very early on or even before the beginning of their romantic relationship. The horrific nature of the romantic hero is thus known in advance or known early in the romance: Bella discovers Edward’s nature after one date; Sookie knows that Bill is a vampire from the first time she sees him; Elena takes the longest to uncover Stefan’s identity but again the relationship only becomes serious after she is in full possession of the facts about his ‘monstrous’ identity. The continuation of the romance despite and because of this leads to the discovery or development of otherness regarding the heroine. This knowingness regarding masculine monstrousness has implications for the credibility of the heroine as victim. Her complicity in the gothic script of heterosexual romantic ideology is highlighted from the outset in this way. The relocation of monstrosity

¹⁹ Tudor, “Why Horror? The Peculiar Pleasures of a Popular Genre”, 456.

²⁰ Waldman, “At last I can tell it to someone!”, 29-30.

is one way the Dark Romance develops from other female gothic plots and adapts them to suit the exploration of contemporary gender dynamics. Anne Williams notes the significance of context in the criticism of female gothic texts:

Thirty years of feminist Gothic criticism have revealed how the tradition's conventions of plot, setting, character, décor, and affect point to cultural manifestations of the female at many levels. But these became visible only after feminists recognized that the Gothic manifests the sexual politics of the culture(s) that produced it.²¹

A tradition of Female Gothic is, in this way, associated with certain thematic content but also with changes over time. Conventions, motifs, tropes, images, and themes associated with this tradition are taken up by each of the vampire romance stories looked at here, but in reflexive and adaptive ways to suit, highlight, or 'worry over'²² current expectations of gendered subjectivity. Positioning *Twilight* and related texts as participating with a tradition of female gothic allows for readings that move beyond the 'bad object/ good object' dichotomy of popular appraisal.

As Helène Meyers writes regarding women's Gothic fiction, the interesting thing is

not that these texts adhere to a formal code that separates them from other texts, but rather that they participate in the Gothic experience, which involves an encounter with otherness (both within and without), the transgression of boundaries (especially those of the body), and, perhaps, most important, the fear that is born of such encounters and transgressions.²³

Meyers goes on to assert "the female Gothic experience is not foundational but rather is already a narrative in need of interpretation."²⁴ Dark Romance shapes this interpretation away from the primacy of fear to territory that nonetheless deals with encounters with otherness and transgression of boundaries. Developing from work in a variety of media and styles, the Dark Romance genre has flourished in the early 21st century.²⁵ This study agrees with scholars such as Crawford who present *Twilight* as a crystallization and distinctive

²¹ Williams, "The Horrors of Misogyny: Feminist Psychoanalysis in the Gothic Classroom", 73.

²² Miles, *Gothic Writing*, 2.

²³ Meyers, *Femicidal Fears: Narratives of the Female Gothic Experience*, 20.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Crawford, *Twilight of the Gothic*, 180.

example of the Dark Romance genre that first emerged in the early 1990s.²⁶ Crawford writes a history of the Dark Romance locating its origins in the Gothic Romance novels that emerged in the 18th century. The history he presents reveals a connecting thread from Ann Radcliffe through to Stephenie Meyer of 'Female Gothic' in fiction, film, and television. Lorna Jowett presents the Dark Romance as a genre involved in the complex representation of romance, sexuality and gender.²⁷ The three works considered here are presented in relation to that tradition. The representation of romance, sexuality and gender in Female Gothic work is seen as the basis upon which the Dark Romance is built, providing it with a repository of concepts and discourses from works of horror, romance, and the gothic, but also from critical studies of these areas.

The majority of considerations of the Gothic, whether psychoanalytic, historicist, feminist, postcolonial or a combination, embroil it, as Robert Miles contends, in a "theoretically complex project: th[e]... history of the 'subject.'²⁸ While this study draws substantially on psychoanalytic theories, in the wider field of Gothic studies there has been a significant move away from predominantly psychoanalytic approaches, particularly in the past decade. So much so that psychoanalysis no longer occupies the privileged position it once did in gothic criticism. Gothic scholar Jarlath Killeen presents "historicism and formal and ideological ambivalence" as the current "critical orthodoxy" on the Gothic.²⁹

While eschewing psychoanalytic interpretation and criticising the dominance of psychoanalysis in Gothic criticism, Noel Carroll (1990) in his cognitive approach to explaining the appeal of horror texts, acknowledges that:

psychoanalysis nevertheless may still have much to say about particular works, sub genres, and cycles within horror, if only because various psychoanalytic myths, images and self-understanding have been continually and increasingly appropriated by the genre throughout the twentieth century.³⁰

An appropriation of psychoanalytic ideas may be traced in the narratives examined here. Carroll highlights the horror genre's ability to appropriate culturally available ideas. The

²⁶ Crawford refers to the genre as paranormal romance.

²⁷ Jowett, "Buffy, Dark Romance and Female Horror Fans", 94.

²⁸ Miles, *Gothic Writing*, 2.

²⁹ Killeen, *Gothic Literature 1825-1914*, 184.

³⁰ Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror or Paradoxes of the Heart*, 168.

success with which some psychoanalytic theories have infiltrated American popular culture is reflected in the horror genre. Indeed, Gothic, Horror, and Romance display this ability to utilise and comment on critical interpretations of themselves. One of the central reasons for psychoanalysis' diminished role in reading the Gothic is its failure to take into account historical, social, and political workings of texts, emphasising instead ahistorical psychological issues. Discussing horror film, Jonathan Crane criticises psychoanalytic approaches that turn horror films "into tokens of universal, unchanging, and ultimately, undifferentiable archetypes or psychic black holes with no historical relation to the times of the people who made and understood them."³¹ However, "psychoanalysis," as Karen Newman argues, "need not inevitably make ahistorical claims about human development that preclude historical analysis."³²

Within the feminist cultural studies approach taken here, an approach informed by the production and reception contexts of the texts studied, there are fruitful uses of psychoanalytic theory in interpreting the texts. This study utilises psychoanalytic theories of horror and subjectivity throughout, drawing most on theories that involve ideas of the mother, the maternal, and maternity in both processes. For this analysis the historical contingency and changing nature of discourses of subjectivity, femininity, and maternity is vital. The Female Gothic and its representation of horror is presented as a space of negotiation of dynamics of subject-formation, working through and privileging certain discourses of subjectivity that varies from text to text, with important implications for feminism.

As several critics have suggested, psychoanalytic theory is often itself an example of Gothic writing.³³ Certainly the structure of psychoanalysis and its interest in the unspoken, the past, and the strange may be read as a specific elaboration of Gothic concerns in the creation of a story of the psychological self. This interest in the meanings of silence, strangeness, and loss are significant for feminine subjectivity in a culture that associates these very issues with woman. Christine Battersby discusses the silencing and disavowal of maternal origin in philosophy as a:

³¹ Crane, *Terror and Everyday Life*, 39.

³² Newman, *Fashioning Femininity*, 62.

³³ Jones, *Horror Stories*, xxix; Kilgour, *The Rise of the Gothic Novel*, 220.

lack of theorisation of birth – as if birth was just ‘natural’, something that simply happened before man ‘is’... a theorisation [that] starts with an existent who is simply ‘thrown’ into the world.³⁴

In contrast, psychoanalysis with its interest in disturbing origins repeatedly draws on maternity and the mother figure in its narratives. This has traditionally been a deeply misogynistic view that positions the mother as at best an object of child development. Lisa Baraitser cogently argues, “maternity has traditionally been used in psychoanalysis to shore up the borders of the subject without achieving subjectivity herself.”³⁵ Work by scholars including Baraitser and Imogen Tyler using psychoanalytic theory provides important theorisation of the challenge of maternity to these modes of subjectivity. Examining *Twilight*, *True Blood*, and *The Vampire Diaries* alongside one another reveals different preoccupations in their construction of subjectivity made available through various strands of psychoanalytic theory.

Gothic’s refusal to be confined within clear boundaries points to a feature elaborated on by many critics: liminality, category breakdown, marginality and the idea of boundary making and breaking. To discuss categories and boundaries is to draw on a particular strand of thought originating in Mary Douglas’ influential anthropological work *Purity and Danger* (1966). Douglas presents a theory of cultural taboo as a “device for protecting the distinctive categories of the universe ... [to] shore up wavering certainty...[and] reduce intellectual and social disorder.”³⁶ Douglas also discusses the “cognitive discomfort caused by ambiguity”³⁷ This idea guides Carroll’s conclusion that horror’s appeal is grounded in the audiences’ curiosity about taboos or the crossing of cultural boundaries. It also informs one of the central stands of psychoanalytic theory brought to bear on the Gothic. Though psychoanalytic work in the area is profuse and varied, there is a recurrence of two key psychoanalytic ideas in Gothic criticism, that of the ‘return of the repressed’ following Freud’s work and the concept of ‘abjection’ developed in Kristeva’s work utilising Douglas’ anthropological insights.

Kristeva developed the concept of ‘abjection’, a process that begins in an infant’s very early psychological development. It involves a gendered pushing away, specifically the pushing

³⁴ Battersby, *The Phenomenal Woman*, 18.

³⁵ Baraitser, *Maternal Encounters*, 155.

³⁶ Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, xi

³⁷ Ibid.

away of the maternal, in the process of individuation. This concept has been drawn on in significant approaches to horror texts, most notably in the work of Barbara Creed. Creed applies Kristeva's idea of abjection to the processes at work in popular horror. Creed's work shows the maternal as the manifested monstrous in horror. She persuasively argues that horror works form part of a collective cultural process of abjecting the maternal body. Creed writes: "one of the key figures of abjection is the mother who becomes an abject at that moment when the child rejects her for the father who represents the symbolic order". However, Creed problematises Kristeva's failure to clearly explain abjection of the female/maternal body as either descriptive or prescriptive. Her theory, Creed suggests, "moves uneasily between explanation of, and justification for, the formation of human societies based on the subordination of women."³⁸ Creed argues that

the horror film stages and re-stages a constant repudiation of the maternal figure... but the feminine is not per se a monstrous sign; rather, it is constructed as such within a patriarchal discourse which reveals a great deal about male desires and fears but tells us nothing about feminine desire in relation to the horrific.³⁹

In *Phallic Panic* (2005) Creed turns to examine the male monster using the concept of the "primal uncanny" as a "way of understanding how [the strangeness in ourselves],...when aligned with the frightening figure of the male monster, is constructed from 'otherness' – that otherness which the male symbolic order has aligned with the uncanny tropes of woman, death and the animal."⁴⁰ The Gothic Romance stories explored here approach horror from a position of feminine experience. The problem of speaking the abject, of being a subject and being a woman/pregnant/mother is highlighted in *Twilight* by narrative shifts and changes in style and tone. If abjection is placed at the centre of horror, then stories of womanhood that privilege female perspectives, not only in terms of characters but also of audiences, have a de facto conflicted relationship to this process. This conflict is taken up in *The Vampire Diaries* and *True Blood*. *Twilight* employs Gothic elements including setting, motifs, character dynamics, supernatural elements and so forth, but when it comes to the aspect of fear, terror, and horror, *Twilight's* focus is on pregnancy and birth, rather than romance or the vampire figure. Horror in *The Vampire Diaries* is generated through visual depictions of physical mutilation and violence and the compulsion to repeat.

³⁸ Creed, "Horror and the Monstrous-Feminine: An Imaginary Abjection", 45.

³⁹ Ibid., 70.

⁴⁰ Creed, *Phallic Panic*, 25-26.

In *True Blood*, blood and gore are revelled in but lose some of their horrific impact as they are given a camp treatment. Horror is re-located to the everyday cruelty and defensive weakness of the majority of human and supernatural characters.

These overlapping generic backgrounds of Gothic, Horror, and Romance share an interest in boundaries, limits, and liminality and the making and breaking of the self. The very idea of genre is itself an engagement with category. Jacques Derrida described genre as based on a “law of impurity or a principle of contamination.”⁴¹ Each of these genres has been marginalised or maligned for a variety of reasons. They have frequently existed at the limit of respectability. They focus on boundaries both buttressing them and transgressing them in form and content. The Gothic has its origins in the emergence of that unified self idealised in Enlightenment thought. The limits of the self, particularly the self imagined through the ideology of individualism, are a central concern of the Gothic. The Gothic often focuses on the liminal and as such problematises difference categories such as inside/outside. Philip L. Simpson describes horror as “the state of mind induced by one’s confrontation with a violation of *cultural categories*.”⁴² In bringing together the disparate generic origins of vampire romance, the unifying theme is presented here as a preoccupation with gendered selfhood and category boundaries. Perhaps the most basic boundary is between the I and the not-I, the self and the Other. Otherness has been seen as central to Horror, Gothic, and Romance. Though the dynamics of self and Other are differently inflected in these varied genres, there is a shared interest in the boundaries and crossing of boundaries of the most fundamental category of existence. The relation between self and Other may be viewed as a psychological process, but also a social, historical, and cultural one as the category of self and Other forms a dynamic that is mapped onto many other interactions including those imagined in maternity, between the individual and community/society, and within the fragmented self.

In utilising the category Female Gothic some further contextualization in terms of the history of Gothic criticism is required. A vital influence on academic understandings of, and approaches to, the Gothic comes from the wide-ranging area of feminist and gender studies. The development of feminist literary theory and feminist cultural studies in particular, legitimated study of the representation of women and work by women. The

⁴¹ Derrida, “The Law of Genre”, 204.

⁴² Simpson, *Psycho Paths*, 10.

importance of feminist thought for any approach to the once marginalised areas of popular culture, women's genres, women's writing, and the Gothic is substantial. Beginning with a desire to interrogate representations of women in the established canon, then moving on to interrogate those canons based on white male upper/middle class selection and bias and retrieving works missing and ignored, feminist theory, literary, and cultural studies developed in concert with, influenced by and influencing, a variety of theoretical schools, including poststructuralism, postmodernism, and psychoanalysis. Feminist questioning of what could be given serious scholarly attention contributed to the development of the field of Gothic Studies in the academy. Tamar Heller writes:

The recovery of the Gothic tradition as a genre worthy of study has been in tandem with the feminist goal of rediscovering marginalized and deauthorised women writers, and feminist criticism of Gothic has sought to examine the attraction of Gothic conventions both to these authors and to their female readers.⁴³

While feminist approaches are not uniform or unified in terms of theoretical and philosophical moorings or even political agendas, there can be traced a multifaceted tradition of readings of the Gothic and gender with overt, though diverse, feminist commitments. This has shaped the course of Gothic studies, as well as literary and cultural studies more generally. Beginning with Ellen Moers, who is credited with coining the term 'Female Gothic' in her influential revisionist work on women writers *Literary Women* (1977), feminist criticism of the Gothic and an interest in women writers and specifically female aspects of the Gothic have proliferated. Along with other feminist scholars in the Anglo-American tradition such as Elaine Showalter, Sandra Gilbert, and Susan Gubar, Moers' work attempted to trace specifically female traditions of writing. The Gothic proved to be a particularly fruitful area for such work. The Gothic novel has, throughout its history, had ties with female authorship and readership. This is perhaps why many critical studies have focused on the role of women in the Gothic and the ambivalent representations of gender and understandings of gender in and around this genre. The genre has been identified as a particularly amenable one for the exploration of gendered power dynamics and feminine fears and desires under patriarchy. Typically a "novel in which the central figure is a young woman who is simultaneously persecuted victim and courageous heroine",⁴⁴ Moers'

⁴³ Hoeveler and Heller, *Approaches to Teaching Gothic Fiction: The British and American Traditions*, 15.

⁴⁴ Moers, *Literary Women*, 91.

provided an influential reading of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* as a 'birth myth' despite being a work "without a heroine, without even an important female victim."⁴⁵ Examining the work "in light of the sex of its author" and her experiences of motherhood, Moers identifies in Shelley's novel a "revulsion against new-born life, and the drama of guilt, dread, and flight surrounding birth and its consequences."⁴⁶ She reads Shelley's novel as a "major turning of the Gothic tradition... a generation" after Radcliffe. Moers' reading influenced many interpretations of Gothic writing by women as reflecting the concerns and confines of domesticity, pregnancy and parturition, and sexual desire, and their ambivalent impact on and expression in the lives of women. Claire Kahane's "The Gothic Mirror" moves the focus from mother to daughter reading the Gothic as a "matraphobic discourse."⁴⁷ Work such as Tania Modleski's *Loving with a Vengeance* and Margaret Anne Doody's "Dessert, Ruins, and Troubled Waters" contribute to the prominent definition of the "genre as a nightmarish refraction of female experience."⁴⁸

Scholarly interest in the feminist discovery and celebration of women's writing and genres has waned in the context of poststructural questioning of the validity of universalising categories such as woman. Though facing critique as essentialising and ahistorical, the influence of such work is still relevant to a consideration of vampire romance. It is not the contention of this thesis that unique access to a Female Gothic is afforded to women writers or readers. However, it is not entirely surprising that those who identify and are identified as women, with all the changes and variations in what that may mean, have been the ones who tend to write of the trials and pleasures of femininity, womanhood, and those experiences most associated with women. Interest in the domestic, marriage, motherhood, connected to traditional ideas and ideals of womanhood and femininity, have been traced mainly, though not exclusively, in women's writing. These change according to the historical and social setting of their production and interpretations change depending on the historical and social setting of their reception.

The current boom in so-called Dark Romance across fiction, film and television also contends the framing of horror as masculine. Drawing on a tradition of mass market female gothic, the commercial success of Dark Romances as diverse as the *Twilight*

⁴⁵ Ibid., 92.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 93.

⁴⁷ Referenced in Hoeveler and Heller, *Approaches to Teaching Gothic Fiction*, 15.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

saga (novels 2005-2008, films 2008-), the *Anita Blake: Vampire Hunter* novels (1993-), Charlaine Harris's *Southern Vampire Mysteries* novel series (2001-) and their television incarnation *True Blood* (2008-), emphasizes how important horror-fantasy is to women consumers.⁴⁹

In approaching *Twilight*, *True Blood*, and *The Vampire Diaries* and locating them in the subgenre of Dark Romance, critical work in the area of the Female Gothic becomes especially relevant as these are cultural texts originally produced by women, in a 'women's genre', and consumed ostensibly by large numbers of women. *Twilight* and the novel series origins of *The Vampire Diaries* and *True Blood* are, what Terry Lovell refers to as, "woman-to-woman" forms.⁵⁰ That is, work written from an overtly feminine perspective, typically by a woman, and aimed at a female audience. As such it is important to consider their background with regard to the history of women's genres and critical understandings of these. "Woman-to-woman" forms tend to be the most excluded, marginalised, and ridiculed of all genres, even when compared to other maligned types. As evidenced, the cultural capital of *The Southern Vampire Mysteries* increased with its move from the feminine realms of popular paranormal romance novel series to the more masculine context of HBO's 'quality television', with a male director and marketed towards a mixed audience. In the context of a "woman-to-woman" form, it is fair to expect some sort of focus, however superficial, on female experience, albeit with the caveat of the huge range of experiences of femaleness this will inevitably leave out, silence, or exclude. *Twilight* is positioned as a feminine text in popular culture and as such is read as being of relevance to ideas about womanhood, gender roles, and feminism. The ways in which it negotiates this thematic terrain owes much to the Female Gothic tradition. Thus, despite very valid problems with the idea of a Female Gothic, the tradition is nonetheless an important one for the consideration of *Twilight* and related texts. Avril Horner and Sue Zlosnik, while acknowledging the difficulty of using the category of Female Gothic in any kind of straightforward relation to male and female writers, find it nonetheless worthwhile to:

consider the significance of constantly recurring tropes, motifs, and plots in Gothic fiction by women... [which] inevitably leads....to [a] consider[ation of] issues of

⁴⁹ Jowett, "Between the Paws of the Tender Wolf: Authorship, Adaptation and Audience", 33.

⁵⁰ Lovell, *Consuming Fictions*, 33.

power and control within the family and the relation of these to particular ideological and social formations.⁵¹

This study is not concerned with the significance of the constantly recurring tropes, motifs, and plots per se but rather, drawing on others' work on their significance, with the use these are put to in this particular instance of popular interest in Female Gothic forms.

The literary, filmic, and televisual tradition of a 'Female Gothic,' but more particularly the critical tradition of interpreting and constructing the 'Female Gothic' as a category or sub-genre, is called upon in this approach to *Twilight* and related Dark Romance stories. Three main strands of scholarly work on the Female Gothic are employed: those that trace a pattern of feminine psychic development in Female Gothic texts; those that view Female Gothic as refracting conditions of feminine subjectivities in patriarchal institutions; and those that position Female Gothic as a form involved in the construction of feminism.

The idea that gothic work by women writers reflects a pattern of female psychic development draws on feminist scholarship such as that of Nancy Chodorow and Carol Gilligan who theorized women's development as fundamentally different to the patterns established for men. One of the most influential readings in this tradition is Anne Williams' Kristevan construction of Female Gothic writing *Art of Darkness: A Poetics of Gothic* (1995). Williams contends Female Gothic work may be produced by men or women but that to be Female gothic it follows a distinctively feminine pattern of development revealed in the myth of Psyche, rather than that of Oedipus. Williams presents the myth of Eros and Psyche as an often unconscious model in 18th century novels by women. Williams writes,

...when "the middle-class woman began to write" for a female audience that as consumers had power to encourage certain narratives, the Psyche plot – the story of the female self making her way in an essentially patriarchal social order – reemerged. This story admits (in both senses of the word) the power of the female and the maternal.⁵²

Continuing a focus on the maternal, Holly Blackford, following Williams' use of the Psyche myth, presents the Persephone myth as particularly important in Gothic stories for girls as

⁵¹ Horner and Sloznik, "Female Gothic", 115.

⁵² Williams, *Art of Darkness*, 161.

it expresses a “profound ambivalence about growing up in patriarchal cultures.”⁵³ This idea of a Female Gothic that is concerned with, or reveals in some way, feminine patterns of psychic development is useful in analysing *Twilight*. Reference is made in *Twilight*, its reception, and related texts to stories that have been read as making significant contributions to a cultural elaboration of achievements of adult womanhood. These culturally available stories are often connected to one another, reiterating and reimagining themes and ideas in and for different times and places. Western narratives of womanhood including the classical myths of Psyche, Persephone, the Biblical story of Eve and Lilith, the ‘Bluebeard’ fairy tale, 19th century gothic romance novels in particular *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights*, 20th century gothic romance novels such as *Rebecca* and *Gone with the Wind*, mass-market romance and gothic romance of the late 20th century, and gothic and fantasy television series such as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* form important reference points for the vampire romances considered here. These form part of a tradition linked to the critically identified area of the Female Gothic. Subscription to the concept of an ahistorical pattern of feminine psychic development is not required to acknowledge the self-referential aspect of Dark Romance works including *Twilight*, *True Blood*, and *The Vampire Diaries*, and their conscious engagement with a tradition that has been read as elaborating feminine psyche development.

Myths, fairy tales, and archetypes in this tradition are drawn on and reworked in the texts considered. Marie Mulvey-Roberts writes that the ‘Bluebeard’ fairy tale is a “reworking of the archetypal narrative of female disobedience prompted by curiosity which appears ... in the Bible as the story of Eve.”⁵⁴ Female curiosity forms a crucial element in the Psyche myth, the Persephone myth, and the ‘Bluebeard’ fairy tale. Indeed, female curiosity forms a vital part of many of western culture’s foundational stories about women. *Twilight* takes up this theme from the outset with the front cover of the first book in the series featuring a pair of outstretched hands holding forth an appetising apple. The first film in the series echoes this reference in a school cafeteria scene in which Edward offers Bella an apple, recreating the book cover momentarily. The role of tempter is not fixed in *Twilight* with both Edward and Bella functioning as tempter at different times. The specifically Mormon interpretation of the story of Eden has implications for an interpretation of the Eve story in Meyer’s work,

⁵³ Blackford, *The Myth of Persephone in Girls’ Fantasy Literature*, 5.

⁵⁴ Mulvey-Roberts, “From Bluebeard’s Bloody Chamber to Demonic Stigmata,” 98.

as this interpretation recasts curiosity as sacrifice.⁵⁵ The overt reference to the story of Eve and the apple on the cover of *Twilight* initiates an interaction between the series and various versions and reiterations of this story.

Harris and L.J. Smith's novels and the television adaptations of *True Blood* and *The Vampire Diaries* continue an exploration of womanhood in this tradition: Sookie is an amateur sleuth curiously solving crimes and encountering attendant dangers; In Season Five the mythical figure, Lilith, enters the narrative as a vampire god inciting conflict over appropriate ways of knowing and believing; Elena's curiosity regarding the Salvatore brothers is linked to a forbidden desire expressed by her double Katherine to 'love them both.'⁵⁶ This curiosity cannot be separated from danger however, as Elena's birth mother the vampire Isobel advises her: "As long as you have a Salvatore on each arm, you're doomed."⁵⁷ Female curiosity and its results may be read and (re)written as either cautionary or celebratory, or more often an ambiguous mixture of the two. Ambivalence and contradiction mark the Gothic, particularly the Female Gothic, both in the narratives, their ideological and political allegiances, and interpretations of them.

The second important strand of scholarship on the Female Gothic imagines it as a generic tradition of engagement with female experience. Recurring conventions, tropes, and motifs are read in this interpretation as codifying a feminine response to patriarchal conditions. For example the association of love/sex and violence is a recurring motif in this tradition. Inherent to the vampire romance, it may fruitfully be read as dramatising some of the conflicts engendered by heterosexual romance for feminine subjectivity in a patriarchal culture. Jowett describes the genre as one that "offers serialised stories that, while superficially fantasies of romance, consistently explore its dark side, 'how hard it is to be a woman' for an appreciative female audience."⁵⁸ This description places the Dark Romance in a tradition of Female Gothic work that registers conflict, albeit in highly ambiguous ways, between female subjectivity and heterosexist patriarchal society. This is a connection made in many scholarly considerations of Female Gothic work. Writing about women's romance fiction, Bridget Fowler notes:

⁵⁵ Mormon "Articles of Faith" found in Bushman, *Mormonism*, 117 Appendix; Jeffers, "Bella and the Choice Made in Eden", 139.

⁵⁶ *The Vampire Diaries*, S2E22 "As I Lay Dying".

⁵⁷ *The Vampire Diaries*, S1E21 "Isobel".

⁵⁸ Jowett, "*Buffy*, Dark Romance and Female Horror Fans", 97.

“The revelation of the frustrations and rage engendered by patriarchy is a strong subterranean current of women’s writing from *Villette* (1853) to a middlebrow novel like *Rebecca* (1938). At its most powerful, it embeds the personal within a wider social perspective.”⁵⁹

Diane Hoeveler finds in Gothic novels by women in the 18th and 19th century, “the projected anger of the female author... detected in the violence that just happens to plague anyone foolish enough to stand in the heroine’s way.”⁶⁰ Joanna Russ, Tanya Modleski, Kate Ellis, and Michelle Massé have in a variety of ways explored Female Gothic as a genre revealing or expressing the “terrors lurking for women within patriarchal social arrangements.”⁶¹ While the implications of these readings differ greatly, the connection made between Female Gothic and the problematic conditions of women in patriarchal societies is a commonality. Diane Wallace and Andrew Smith describe the critical identification of the Female Gothic by scholars who read it:

as a politically subversive genre articulating women’s dissatisfactions with patriarchal structures and offering a coded expression of their fears of entrapment within the domestic and the female body.⁶²

This study shows how *Twilight* and the responses to it speak about, and to, some “women’s dissatisfactions with patriarchal structures.” However, the subversiveness, and certainly the political subversiveness of this articulation, is not assumed, rather the potential of this is explored.

The third important strand of Female Gothic scholarship for this study encompasses those approaches that are overtly interested in feminism and interpret the Female Gothic as a space of invention or debate of feminist discourses. Chief amongst these are Diane Hoeveler’s *Gothic Feminism: The Professionalization of Gender from Charlotte Smith to the Brontes* (1995) and Helene Meyers *Femicidal Fears: Narratives of the Female Gothic Experience* (2001). While Hoeveler and Meyers are fundamentally opposed in their understanding of the significance of the relationship between feminism and the Gothic, their work nonetheless addresses common issues and may be read together with some caveats. Combining insights

⁵⁹ Fowler “Literature Beyond Modernism: Middlebrow and Popular Romance”, 97.

⁶⁰ Hoeveler, *Gothic Feminism*, 15.

⁶¹ Williams, *Art of Darkness*, 7.

⁶² Wallace and Smith, *The Female Gothic: New Directions*, 2.

from both scholars is particularly fruitful in an examination of *Twilight* and related texts as this section demonstrates.

Hoeveler's *Gothic Feminism* continues on from her previous work on androgyny in Romantic ideologies and the "representation of symbolic women in male-authored poetic texts."⁶³ Turning to examine the "feminiocentric discourse system, the female gothic novel,"⁶⁴ Hoeveler puts forward the provocative thesis that contemporary feminism, at least the strand disparagingly described as 'victim feminism', began in the gothic writing of women in the 18th century as a "species of professional femininity",⁶⁵

a form of gender construction and an ideology that grew out of the literary discourse systems we have come to identify as the gothic, the melodrama, and the sentimental and sensibility traditions of virtue vindicated and rewarded.⁶⁶

Hoeveler uncovers in gothic novels by women from 1750 to 1853 attempts to construct:

a series of ideologies – a set of literary masquerades and poses – that would allow their female characters and by extension their female readers a fictitious mastery over what they considered an oppressive social and political system through the pose of ... "professional femininity."⁶⁷

Seeing the Gothic novel, not as previous critics had "concerned with depicting women's achievement of psychic maturity or socioeconomic inheritance or some combination of the two," but as a "coded and veiled critique of all of those public institutions that have been erected to displace, contain or commodify women,"⁶⁸ Hoeveler writes:

the ideology that seems to ground the female gothic novel tradition is the same one that grounds one version of white, bourgeois Western feminism, the belief that women are victimized and oppressed not simply by gender politics but by the social,

⁶³ Hoeveler, *Gothic Feminism*, xii.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, xii.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, xiii.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, xii.

⁶⁸ Hoeveler, *Gothic Feminism*, xiii.

economic, political, religious, and hierarchical spaces that bourgeois capitalism, and by extension the patriarchal family, has constructed to contain them.⁶⁹

Hoeverler describes the process of the “professionalization of femininity” in these early gothic novels as a play for power involving the use of passivity and other markers of femininity to assert control in the service of white middle class women’s interests. She explicitly relates it to second wave feminism, reading:

the ideological trajectory of the female gothic novel... as the need to privatize public spaces, ...[it] is very similar to (although historically distant from) the claim made by a variety of feminists in the late 1960s and early 1970s that “the personal is political.”⁷⁰

This connection and her discussion of the linked problem of the female body in this construction is particularly useful:

women writers suffered an even more intense dread of the female body [than male writers]. A tomb, a stinking mass of death and decay, a site of vulnerability and horror – we have seen all of these attitudes toward the female body presented in female gothic writers. The dream of rising above the corrupt body, the dream of becoming masculinized – all mind, all reason – these are the core ideological fantasies that animate and motivate what I have identified as the masquerade of gothic feminism.⁷¹

This fantasy is fulfilled in *Twilight* with Bella achieving the “dream of becoming masculinized” by her transformation into vampire perfection. Hoeverler identifies radical and cultural feminists as the inheritors of this gothic dread of the female body:

The tragedy implicit in subscribing to such thinking is that self-hatred and self-deception become endemic in women, causing them to despise an identity that they cannot alter in any meaningful manner. If contemporary feminists like Shulamith Firestone, Andrea Dworkin, and Catherine McKinnon suggest in their writings that they hate their flesh, they can only impotently rail at the unchangeable ontological

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid., 245.

conditions of material existence. There is no escape except through the grave, and we have left too many female gothic heroines there already.⁷²

The grave's cultural affinities with the womb are exploited in Bella's escape from this material existence as she rids herself of the 'despicable' female body via childbirth and her resultant death. This process will be explored at length in the next chapter devoted to the maternal in *Twilight*. Sookie and Elena also contend with the dangers and vulnerabilities of the female body in a gothic universe. Sookie chooses to retain her femaleness despite the dangers it attracts, while Elena's engagement with femininity and the female body are dispersed across her several doppelganger figures. By becoming a vampire, she loses the female body's capacity to reproduce and age, but, as with every event in *The Vampire Diaries* universe, repetitions, remembrances, and reworkings form layers that undo any previous certainties.

While aspects of Hoeveler's analysis and interpretations resonate deeply with the Dark Romance stories investigated here, her overarching position regarding victim feminism is problematic in the 21st century context. She relates gothic feminism and victim feminism as performances in which women masquerade in a pose of victimization⁷³ without reference to victimization that exists beyond or outside of feminist discourse. The annexing of the critique of patriarchal institutions by feminists such as Firestone, Dworkin, and McKinnion as entirely a masquerade of vulnerability makes invisible the systemic regimes of inequality to which they respond. Hoeveler's position is one of "non-denominational feminism" aligned mostly with poststructuralist questioning of unifying categories. The problematic aspect of this position is the way in which it maps rather neatly onto neo-liberal agendas of individualized power and responsibility. Helene Meyers cautions: "The theoretical assumption of an equal playing field where none exists poses significant dangers."⁷⁴ Meyers' work is positioned against Hoeveler's "acceptance of the term "victim feminism" and her belief that in a poststructuralist universe, female victimization is a "pose" and a discourse constructed primarily by and for women."⁷⁵ Meyers' book *Femicidal Fears: Narratives of the Female Gothic Experience* examines middle to highbrow late 20th century gothic fiction by women as works that "consistently demonstrate that romantic ideology – the

⁷² Hoeveler, *Gothic Feminism*, 246.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁷⁴ Meyers, *Femicidal Fears*, 14.

⁷⁵ Hoeveler, *Gothic Feminism*, 158.

belief that heterosexual romance constitutes the key to female identity and security – constructs women as victims.” Though the explicit feminist allegiances of the authors she studies vary, “all seem keenly aware of two related scripts highlighted by feminists: the prevalence of violence against women and the tendency to blame victims of such violence.”⁷⁶ While the works examined by Meyers “demonstrate the gothic potential of scripts of male vice and female virtue, they simultaneously sustain a profound critique of heterosexual romance and its seductions.”⁷⁷ Meyers looks at “plots in which women are killed or fear for their lives” in novels by Margaret Atwood, Beryl Bainbridge, Joyce Carol Oates, Angela Carter, and Edna O’Brien amongst others.⁷⁸ She argues that these “novels of death bring the nuances of feminist thought to life.”⁷⁹ The approach taken here is greatly indebted to the work done by Meyers. Though Meyers examines middle to highbrow fiction by women, her work has some significant insights for considerations of popular gothic texts such as *Twilight*.

Meyers draws on DeLauretis’ phrase to assert, “literature, like feminism, is a “technology of gender,””, arguing the “imbrication of those two discourses.”⁸⁰ Meyers’ work seeks to problematize some of Hoeveler’s “basic assumptions” including “her acceptance of the term “victim feminism” and her belief that in a poststructuralist universe, female victimization is a “pose” and a discourse constructed primarily by and for women.”⁸¹ While Hoeveler and Meyers are fundamentally opposed in their understanding of the significance of the relationship between feminism and the gothic, their work nonetheless covers similar territory and can be read together fruitfully regarding Dark Romance narratives. Drawing on Hoeveler’s reading of gothic feminism, and combining it with Meyers’ reading of female gothic fiction as a space of contestation of feminist ideas, *Twilight*, *True Blood*, and *The Vampire Diaries* may be read as exploring different facets of conflict between discourses of women as victims, women as complicit victims, and women as agents and beneficiaries in patriarchal culture. Meyers’ work foregrounds the importance of refusing victimhood without ignoring the victimization of women to different extents and in different ways based on intersections of the identity ‘woman’ with other identity categories, particularly class, race, age, and sexuality. This study draws on

⁷⁶ Meyers, *Femicidal Fears*, 20.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, xi.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, xii.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.* 19.

⁸¹ Hoeveler, *Gothic Feminism*, 158.

both Meyers and Hoeveler to present *Twilight*, *True Blood*, and *The Vampire Diaries* as negotiating gothic feminism through the femicidal plot. The gothic femicidal plot is recast in the Dark Romance's domestication of otherness. Reading Bella, Elena, and Sookie as variations of an engagement with both Hoeveler's "Gothic feminism" and Helene Meyer's "femicidal plots" is particularly fruitful as it allows the nuance and intricacies of these stories' manifestations of problematic areas for and of feminist thought to emerge. When this analysis is situated alongside discussion of the popular understandings of these series as discussed in the previous chapter, the areas between agency, power, victimhood, and control are highlighted. The elisions and eclipses of oppression in postfeminist ideology and the power of victimhood and prevalence of discourses of victimology are explored in and between these texts. The aspects of feminist thought publically debated and mobilised in the cultural discussion of these three works and associated content are shown to inoculate against the much more significant disease operating in the texts via maternity, the grotesque, and repetition.

* * *

It should be noted that the concept of a Female Gothic is not without controversy. The idea of the 'Female Gothic' has waned in favour since the convergence of feminist, poststructuralist, and postmodern philosophy put into question the ontological possibility of a unified category 'Woman'. This questioning is to be praised with regard to the marginalisation and denial of difference that accompanies identity categories such as Woman (historically meaning white, middle-class, heterosexual women, to the exclusion of others). However, it has been noted by some as convenient that when women and marginalised groups' question male sovereignty, the sovereign subject itself is collapsed taking with it significant, though compromised and problematic, access to power and the possibility of positive change. The Female Gothic is a potentially reductive, dehistoricising and essentialising category that imagines women across time, place, and culture writing in and of a common female identity, thus universalising and reducing female experience. This potential has meant that the idea of a Female Gothic has been heavily critiqued. Chris Baldick and Robert Mighall describe the concept as "an embodiment of some invariable female 'experience' or of the archetypal 'female principle', leads straight out of history into the timeless melodrama in which (wicked) 'male Gothic' texts always express terror of the

eternal '(M)other' while (good) female Gothic texts are revealed to be - as Anne Williams claims - not just 'empowering' but 'revolutionary'.⁸²

Whether the idea of a specifically 'female gothic' as opposed to a 'male gothic' can be identified is less important to this study than the fact that, as Diane Waldman puts it, "the Gothic mode has always permitted the articulation of feminine fear, anger, and distrust of the patriarchal order."⁸³ Feminine fear and fear of the feminine are aspects of gothic work by male and female writers. Whether written by men or women feminine fear and fear of the feminine take on a different cast when presented or viewed from a feminine subject position. Not surprisingly, in the hands of women writers there is a tradition of exploring these from a vantage point of women's lived experiences. Women's experiences are historically, socially, and culturally situated and varying, with wide differences in experience based on race, class, sexuality, ethnicity, nationality, generation and other differences. White middle class heterosexual women's experiences are over-represented. The writers of the novel series considered here are white middle class heterosexual women writing about white heterosexual women for the most part. Meyers suggests, "white women wrestling with the Gothic entails an exploration of their own complicity with oppressive racialized and racist systems." While not all of the texts considered are overtly engaged with such issues, the Gothic mode in which they are situated is itself notoriously adept at signalling gaps and silences, at times despite authorial intention. Issues of race, class, and (dis)ability may be detected in each narrative, at times overtly considered in the diegesis, such as in *True Blood*, at other times represented in more oblique ways, for example *The Vampire Diaries*' use of race as a marker of the witch identity without any overt reference to this.⁸⁴

Hoeveler is interested in victim status as a pose used by privileged women to leverage as much power as they can in an oppressive context. The many stories of women's downfalls and deaths in the context of family, romance, and motherhood present that oppressive context in *Twilight*. While few critics focus on these stories in any great detail, the gothic world Bella inhabits has been read as old-fashioned and as presenting women in victimized roles that they no longer need occupy. Again there is a sleight of hand in this criticism as Bella is considered a retrogressive example of womanhood not because of her existence in a

⁸² Baldick and Mighall, "Gothic Criticism", 227.

⁸³ Waldman, "At last I can tell it to Someone!", 29.

⁸⁴ For an in-depth consideration of race in *Twilight* see Wilson, *Seduced by Twilight*.

world filled with the threat of male violence but because of her passive response to this. She is therefore dangerous in her passivity as she may encourage vulnerable young women to seek out such violence in 'real life' by attracting violent partners, of whom there are assumed to be many. Criticism is very much focused on the need for women to be active and responsible for their own safety, while the larger cultural context this refusal of victimhood takes place in remains unconsidered. The onus is on women, Bella being read as an example, to counter these circumstances by the strength of their own 'choices.' The specifics of victimhood, complicity, and agency are simultaneously invoked and avoided in the popular conversation as feminist discourse and neoliberalism overlap to chide the weak/dangerous heroine and the vulnerable/dangerous female audience members. Hoeveler argues that the gothic novel contains a:

manipulation of the masochistic pose... That is, the gothic heroine indulges in what we would recognise as masochistic gestures for effect.... These young women not only seem to tolerate all manner of abuse; they actually seem to seek it out.⁸⁵

The heroines of vampire romance foreground feminine desire for danger. Bella actively seeks out danger in *New Moon*, following the loss of Edward. She plays the victim in order to bring Edward back. Sookie describes herself as a 'Danger Whore' in the final series of *True Blood* because of her attraction to dangerous men. Elena pursues a relationship with Damon because his unrepentant violence is attractive to her. *Fifty Shades of Grey* (2011-2012), a work that began as *Twilight* fan fiction, takes up this dynamic of sado-masochism exploring issues of consent and control through a representation of BDSM sexual practices. The changes in the discourses of popular feminism from 1995 when Hoeveler published *Gothic Feminism* and the contemporary culture *Twilight* and related texts are operating in is significant. In the mid-1990s the popular presence of cultural feminism was still appreciable, though a discourse of 'power feminism' was gaining ground in the popular conversation. Books such as Katie Roiphe's *The Morning After: Sex, Fear, and Feminism* (1993) voiced an increasingly popular reaction against the prevalence of cultural feminism and its focus on rape, pornography, and violence against women. Roiphe's advocacy of individual social responsibility⁸⁶ portrayed feminism as the creator of "a new stock plot, a new identity spinning not around love, not marriage, not communes, not materialism this time, but

⁸⁵ Hoeveler, *Gothic Feminism*, 13.

⁸⁶ Zeisler, *Feminism and Pop Culture*, 118.

passivity and victimhood.”⁸⁷ In a critique more attuned to the systemic issues feminist theorists of the 1970s and 1980s were responding to, Naomi Wolf in her work *Fire with Fire: The New Female Power and How It Will Change the 21st Century* (1993) nonetheless advocates the embrace of power over the “mythology of victim feminism”, “a composite...evolved out of the aversion to power of the radical left; the identification of women and nature popularized with the ‘cultural feminism’ that came of age in the 1970s; ... old habits of ladylike behaviour that were cloaked in the guise of radicalism; and dollops of the work of such writers as Adrienne Rich, with her believing that language is male; Carol Gilligan, with her view of women’s different moral reasoning; and Andrea Dworkin and Catharine MacKinnon, with their vision of overweening male oppression and female lack of choice.”⁸⁸

Drawing attention to the relationship between victimhood and womanhood in Female Gothic texts, Helene Meyers shows how Gothic texts, specifically those that involve ‘femicidal plots’, dramatise conflicted aspects of feminist thought. In so doing they give shape to problematic areas, particularly those areas of theoretical impasse, for example the stalemate between cultural feminism and poststructural feminism regarding identity. Meyers suggests: “if cultural feminism tends to underestimate women’s power, agency, and complicity, poststructuralism with its often attendant “gender scepticism,” may overestimate women’s and feminists’ power, agency, and complicity.”⁸⁹ The Female Gothic may be read as a space of interaction rather than refusal between these two discourses. “Neither poststructuralism nor cultural feminism constitutes the demon” notes Meyers, rather “the Gothic is a useful vehicle for what de Laureates has termed “upping the anti” for troubling the polarisation between cultural feminism and poststructuralism so that those terms can do feminist work rather than signify a feminist catfight.”⁹⁰ Meyers emphasises “the use of ... contemporary female Gothics for the development and critique of feminist thought on female victimisation.”⁹¹ Meyers’ reading of mainly literary works is drawn on in this examination of popular texts to show the narratives’ internal engagement with feminist thought in light of a broader popular conversation about the texts using feminist discourse.

⁸⁷ Roiphe, *The Morning After*, 172.

⁸⁸ Wolf, *Fire with Fire*, 156.

⁸⁹ Meyers, *Femicidal Fears*, 14.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid., 19.

CHAPTER 3: LIFE SUCKS, AND THEN YOU DIE¹

Subjectivity, the Body, and the Maternal in *Twilight*

The dream...escape from the decay of the world of the female flesh into a realm of pure masculinized mind...²

When Meyer first began writing the dream that would become *Twilight*, she called the couple of her nocturnal imaginings 'boy' and 'girl'. Eventually she settled on 'Edward' for the vampire as a suitably 'old-fashioned' name given his advanced years, and chose 'Bella' for the girl as it was the name she had chosen for a daughter had she had a girl; rather Meyer has three sons. A kind of maternal genealogy features in this way in the inspiration dream and is a central theme of *Twilight* as a whole. The traditional gothic story of male vice, female virtue is recast as male vice, male virtue in the context of a passive but desiring female subject. Read 'straight', *Twilight* presents a threatening relationship between Bella and Edward that, as detailed in the opening chapter, many reviewers and critics have understandably interpreted as involving intimate partner violence and condemned as providing a positive portrayal of an unhealthy relationship. However, as the previous chapter's consideration of Female Gothic suggested and as Hoeveler notes regarding early gothic romance stories, "for the most part, taking them straight has allowed critics simply to dismiss them or ridicule their absurdities or pretensions."³ Reading *Twilight* straight has led many critics to dismiss it and ridicule its absurdities. While the "novels' gender ideology is ultimately and unapologetically patriarchal", according to Anna Silver, "focusing merely on Edward and Bella's romance obscures larger themes that the novels also explore, and that add to the series' appeal and cultural significance."⁴

In the dream that inspired *Twilight* Meyer describes looking "down on the scene":

¹ Meyer, *Breaking Dawn*, 143

² Hoeveler, *Gothic Feminism*, 246.

³ Ibid., 58.

⁴ Silver, "*Twilight* is not Good for Maidens", 122.

It was in this meadow, and there was so much light. The dream was very, very colourful.⁵

From the very beginning the vampire of Meyer's imagination is associated with light rather than darkness. He has to live in dark places such as Forks to avoid revealing his glittering body, and therefore his supernatural identity. The luminous quality of the vampire body becomes particularly significant in contrast with Bella's human body, and the 'gothic nightmare' this represents. Locating *Twilight* in the logic of the makeover narrative, Heike Steinhoff and Maria Verena Seibert, read "Bella's transformation into a vampire ... as a narrative of monstrous femininity, a tale of an abject body that is eventually erased or mastered and replaced by a normative one."⁶ The transformation from abject to normative body is central to the reading undertaken here.

Meyer frames the origins of *Twilight* in the details of everyday motherhood and locates the origins in a dream born of this context. The centrality of motherhood in the origin story shapes the interpretative strategy taken here. Silver has highlighted the significance of Meyer's extension of the traditional romance plot beyond marriage to include the heroine's experience of pregnancy and new motherhood, arguing "motherhood becomes a location not only of pleasure and satisfaction but also of power" in the novel *Breaking Dawn*.⁷ Using Meyer's dream as a way into an analysis of *Twilight* brings to the fore these themes that might otherwise be overshadowed.

Growing Up / Growing Old

Bella's mother is a notable absence from the happy-ever-after of *Twilight*. Silver argues that in the end "Bella belongs with the Cullens more than she does with Charlie and Renee by dint of her values and interests."⁸ Significantly, however, Bella's father Charlie can be accommodated into the supernatural world Bella and her new family inhabit, while Renee cannot. The epigraph to *Breaking Dawn* Book 1 excerpts a poem by Edna St. Vincent Millay, which is heard in voiceover at the beginning of the film *Breaking Dawn: Part 1*:

⁵ Meyer, *Official Illustrated Guide*, 3.

⁶ Steinhoff and Siebert, "The Female Body Revamped", 4.

⁷ Silver, "*Twilight* is not Good for Maidens", 123.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 127.

Childhood is not from birth to a certain age and at a certain age
The child is grown, and puts away childish things.
Childhood is the kingdom where nobody dies.

At first this epigraph seems to suggest a paradise kingdom that perhaps Bella and Edward live in by the end of their story, a kind of Neverland. Millay's poem goes on to say:

Childhood is the kingdom where nobody dies that matters
Mothers and fathers don't die.

Forever young, repeatedly appearing in Bella's bedroom at night, and offering Bella the opportunity to never grow old, Edward may be read as a Peter Pan figure.⁹ Millay's poem also references Peter Pan:

And if you have said, "For heaven's sake, must you always be
Kissing a person?"
Or, "I do wish to gracious you'd stop tapping at the window with
Your thimble!"
Tomorrow, or even the day after tomorrow if you're busy having
Fun,
Is plenty of time to say, "I'm sorry, mother."¹⁰

There will be deaths in Bella's eternal life. It is precisely the people who 'matter' who will die; Bella's parents, Charlie and Renee, will die relatively shortly in the context of Bella's eternal lifetime. Book 1 of *Breaking Dawn* ends with Bella experiencing an unplanned pregnancy and thus sets in motion events that will lead to her human death. The film *Breaking Dawn Part 1*, which corresponds to Book 1 and Book 2 of the novel, ends with Bella's death. Bella may be read as either confronting mortality through her death or avoiding mortality forever in her rebirth to immortality with a perfect family. Confronting mortality is to grow up. It is unclear if Bella enters the kingdom of childhood or leaves it at the end of *Twilight*. Through marriage, sex, pregnancy, childbirth, death, and rebirth, she grows from the adolescent outsider at the beginning of the story to a wife, mother, family

⁹ Blackford, *The Myth of Persephone*, 5.

¹⁰ Millay, "Childhood is the Kingdom Where Nobody Dies."

member, member of a like-minded community, and person in-control and self-aware. In this way, she moves toward adulthood. However, she moves from the world of her adolescence to a world of immortality, a place in which time and death play no, or a highly circumscribed, part. In this sense she moves back into 'the kingdom of childhood'. Silver suggests "Bella's desire for eternal life as a vampire with Edward is closely connected with her longing for a stable family... which the archaic Cullen family offers."¹¹ Edward, Silver argues, "becomes a father figure to Bella, and the Cullens as a group stand for the ideal family of a mythic past." Bella's mother, Renee, is a notable absence in the 'perfect forever' of *Twilight's* happy-ever-after. Her absence goes unaddressed. According to Silver, she becomes "a foil and anti-role model for Bella."¹² The mother-daughter relationship of Renee and Bella is presented as inverted in *Twilight*; Renee is described as childlike, unreliable, and in need of mothering. She is presented in a daughter-like role, while Bella is positioned as mothering her mother:

My mom always says I was born thirty-five years old and that I get more middle-aged every year." I laughed, and then sighed. "Well, someone has to be the adult."¹³

Meyer's depiction of Bella as "inappropriately mothered" in an inversion of mother daughter positions is symptomatic of a discourse of family values that imagines the contemporary position of the traditional family as eroded with the result that children must parent their irresponsible parents who live in an extended childhood of their own. This continues a theme in fiction and film for young adults since the 1970s that positions parents as ineffective, absent, or distracted. The well-known vampire film *The Lost Boys* (1987) uses the vampire figure to elaborate this premise. This is also one of the only vampire films Meyer admits to having seen.¹⁴ In Meyer's vision, however, the vampires represent the good not the bad family. They are idealised figures whose relationships are structured on the model of the nuclear family with clear parental roles.

¹¹ Silver, "*Twilight* is not Good for Maidens", 122.

¹² Ibid., 124.

¹³ Meyer, *Twilight*, 91.

¹⁴ Kirschling, "Interview with vampire writer Stephenie Meyer."

Headed by the patriarchal but compassionate godlike father Carlisle... balanced by the affectionate protective mother Esme, and humanized by squabbling siblings, the Cullens are the family that Bella craves.”¹⁵

While Carlisle and Esme represent traditional father and motherhood clearly, the sibling relationships are more ambiguous. The Cullen ‘children’ all see Carlisle and Esme as their parents, but they are also couples, so the sibling/lover relationship is confused. While Bella leaves her childlike mother behind, she enters a new family who are eternally present and with their special abilities, they are hyper-effective even for vampires. Bella goes from feeling like “a curiosity, a freak” who “didn’t relate well to people” to finding “her true place in the world”, displaying what Silver presents as “the series’ persistent theme that identity comes from affiliation rather than individual accomplishment.”¹⁶

Hoeveler writes that in early Gothic fiction by women “To kill and then displace the father and mother out of love became the defining work of the female gothic heroine.”¹⁷ In early gothic novels, this generational conflict was connected to changes in social structures with the ascendance of the middle-classes. In *Twilight* it is connected to a 21st century culture informed by neoliberal individualism and neo-conservative ‘family values’ also based in an individualist ideology that increasingly undermines extended family and community-based supports by privileging individual responsibility. Bella displaces her irresponsible mother who represents broadly liberal values in her permissive approach to parenting and nomadic lifestyle and her ineffective father who supports the idea of family but is unable to sustain the role of patriarch, in favour of the Cullen clan, an idealised and benevolent patriarchy that sustains her financially, sexually, and emotionally. Within this family, Bella has all her needs met. Freud’s short essay “Family Romances” describes the process by which the discovery of parental fallibility results in the recurring belief amongst children that their parents are not their real parents, that they are really the offspring of better (wealthier, more intelligent, of greater social standing, more beautiful etc.) parents. This is a means of maintaining the childhood sense of regard for the parents: “preserv[ing] under a slight disguise, the child’s original affection for his parents.”¹⁸ Bella’s move away from her flawed parents, Charlie and Renee, toward the perfect parents, Carlisle and Esme, may be

¹⁵ Silver, *Twilight is not good for Maidens*, 126.

¹⁶ Meyer, *Twilight*, 9; *Breaking Dawn*, 524 ; Silver, “*Twilight is not good for Maidens*”, 133.

¹⁷ Hoeveler, *Gothic Feminism*, 58.

¹⁸ Freud, “Family Romances”, 40.

seen as such a manoeuvre. The special qualities of Carlisle and Esme are compassion and devotion respectively. As such they have superhuman abilities in perfectly gendered parenting, representing an imagined older, more stable, and less self-centred version of parenthood and family life than contemporary values seem to provide.

When Bella first sees the Cullen children in the film *Twilight* her friends Angela and Jessica explain who they are:

ANGELA: They kinda keep to themselves.

JESSICA: Yeah 'cause they're all together. Like *together* together. Uh, the blond girl, that's Rosalie, and the big dark-haired guy, Emmett, they're like a thing. I'm not even sure that's legal.

ANGELA: Jess, they're not actually related.

JESSICA: Yeah, but they live together. It's weird.¹⁹

In the novel *Twilight*, Bella reflects on Jessica's comments:

Her voice held all the shock and condemnation of the small town, I thought critically.

But, if I was being honest, I had to admit that even in Phoenix, it would cause gossip.²⁰

The perception of the Cullen family as different to the norm and possibly involved in improper, potentially incestuous, relationships within the family resonates with some perceptions of Mormons in wider American culture. Mormons are associated with the practice of polygamy as the founder of Mormonism Joseph Smith "instituted plural marriage among his followers" in the 1840s.²¹ While the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (LDS) renounced polygamy in 1890 and forbids the practice, Fundamentalist Mormons continue to live in polygynous communities and view plural marriage as central to their faith. Meyer is a member of the LDS church and as such believes in monogamy. She described an awkward moment when she first met her agent based on confusion between LDS and Fundamentalist Mormons:

¹⁹ *Twilight*, dir. Hardwicke.

²⁰ Meyer, *Twilight*, 18.

²¹ Bushman, *Mormonism*, 2.

We were on a train, and she said: [her voice drops to a whisper] ‘So, how many wives can your husband have?’ And I was like, ‘Well, just one, if he wants to keep the one he already has.’²²

Meyer demonstrates in *Twilight* that Jessica’s perception of the Cullens as incestuous is inaccurate. The structure of husband and sister wives or co-wives does not apply to the Cullen household as each member of the family is in a couple. Unlike Fundamentalist Mormon polygynous communities, where “desiring or forming a pair bond... often generates intense feelings of shame or guilt”, the Cullen family requires “dyadic intimacy” and celebrates the “pair bond” based on “shared sexual intimacy and... a deep sense of mutual involvement and belonging.”²³ While Bella views Alice and Rosalee as sisters after marrying into the Cullen family, this relation is that of sister-in-law, rather than sister-wife. Carlisle and Esme represent a model of the perfect, loving, monogamous father and mother, heading a family based on singular values. Silver suggests “the “vegetarian” Cullens could be a Mormon family living in Provo, Utah. With their archaic names ... and their ancient provenance, they are a throwback to the mythic family of an imagined past.” Joanna Brooks in her memoir *The Book of Mormon Girl* describes her childhood sense of “sparkling internal difference” due to her Mormon faith.²⁴ The literally sparkling Cullens embody this idea of beautiful difference. The difference of being Mormon and the positioning of the Cullen family as a kind of Neverland for Bella overlap. “Each of the Cullen vampires,” as Silver highlights, “has both a family unit and a “partner” to whom he or she is primarily devoted.”²⁵ Thus the Cullen family offers Bella both the protection of childhood and the sexual fulfilment of adulthood.

Carlisle and Esme’s perfect parenthood is based on vampirism, not childbirth. Bella goes on to become a mother through childbirth. In this development the difficulty of a perfectly stable and unambiguous performance of the parental role emerges. Bella’s experience of parturition brings about the major narrative rupture of the entire series, the loss of her voice. In this rupture, motherhood and subjectivity are flagged as a difficult combination. The erasure of Bella’s birth mother Renee and the death of Bella’s maternal body through childbirth present a double matricide. This killing of the maternal body by silence and

²² Interview with Meyer by Cochrane, “Stephenie Meyer on *Twilight*, feminism and true love.”

²³ Jankowiak, “Co-Wives, Husband, and the Mormon Polygynous Family.”

²⁴ Brooks, *The Book of Mormon Girl*, 15.

²⁵ Silver, “*Twilight* is not good for Maidens”, 127.

horrific violence respectively demonstrates the negative weight of maternal genealogy in *Twilight*. By remaining silent on the subject, Bella can put off indefinitely saying “I’m sorry, mother”. Matricide, as a form of psychic violence toward the maternal body, is theorised by Kristeva as necessary for the emergence of the speaking subject: “For man and for woman the loss of the mother is a biological and psychic necessity, the first step on the way to autonomy. Matricide is our vital necessity, the *sine qua non* of our individuation.”²⁶ Bella’s matricidal violence takes place on her own body, rather than her mothers’. Matricide, in Kristeva’s formulations, is a means of separation from the mother as a ‘not-I’, that “requires that this primitive relationship with the mother be repressed or sublimated.” Bella separates herself physically from her mother by moving to Forks, but this does not complete the psychic process of matricide. Though physically distant from her mother, Bella finds the maternal relocated in various places including her own body and Edward. Maternal borders are not so easily defined as the mother’s material body. Kristeva writes:

The “subject” discovers itself as the impossible separation/identity of the maternal body. It hates that body but only because it can’t be free of it. That body, the body without border, the body out of which this abject subject came, is impossible.²⁷

Rather than being engaged in a progressive trajectory from girlhood to womanhood, Bella’s story is one of forward momentum, doubling backs, and endings that might reveal more stasis than progress. This reflects a forestalled journey through abjection and its rejection and psychic murder of the mother as a cultural process. In exploring this journey in *Twilight* several important theorists are drawn on. The theoretical work of Kristeva on abjection, as introduced in the previous chapter, is used to consider the representation of the ageing female body and the monstrous maternal body. The ‘unsymbolised’ mother-daughter relation in western culture is presented via theories of foundational matricide in western culture as explored in the work of Luce Irigaray and Amber Jacobs. Lisa Baraitser’s work on “the possibility for a specific feminine-maternal subjectivity... as a subject of alterity, transformation, interruption, heightened sentience, viscosity, encumberment and love” informs the approach taken to *Twilight*, particularly the missed opportunity and potential of *Twilight*’s engagement with maternal subjectivity.²⁸ The approaches to Female Gothic of Hoeveler and Meyers discussed in the previous chapter

²⁶ Kristeva, *Black Sun*, 27-28.

²⁷ Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 3.

²⁸ Baraitser, *Maternal Encounters*, second cover.

are drawn on to present *Twilight* as an ambivalent engagement with discourses of femininity in its construction of subjectivity. Hoeveler's theory of gothic feminism and her analysis of the place of the female body in early gothic women's writing is particularly significant for this analysis. *Twilight* is presented as pursuing a comparable trajectory from gendered divisions based on binary oppositions such as body:mind to a fantasy of 'safe' gender neutrality in a celebration of masculine mind over feminine matter available to women. Hoeveler reads the female gothic genre "as paradoxically both subversive and accommodating", an interpretative strategy that "allows us to see the tremendous rage and fear that existed at the heart of middle-class women, hemmed in as they were (and are) by a tremendous reliance on their families for their survival."²⁹ This interpretative strategy is useful for reading *Twilight*.

While the works examined by Hoeveler and those looked to here exist in entirely different frames of reference and context, and there can be no easy relation between the imagined circumstances of 'middle-class women' as a homogeneous group and *Twilight*,³⁰ this reading strategy nonetheless continues to be fruitful as it reveals aspects of *Twilight* that would otherwise be eclipsed. When *Twilight* is viewed as both a subversive and accommodating document in the context of contemporary discourses of gender, the romance may be read, not as an encounter between a male and female character, but rather between modes of feminine subjectivity, that draw on discourses of feminism including gothic feminism, and a historically specific patriarchal culture. The location of these issues in and surrounding dreams suits a psychoanalytically informed approach that seeks latent meanings and shared cultural explorations of psychological operations, whilst maintaining a historically situated and specific outlook. Dreams "reveal the deepest wounds in the psyche, and remind us of Freud's theories about the work of dreams and of their relation to trauma."³¹ More overt meanings functioning in the text are not bypassed in favour of exclusively unconscious operations; rather these readings are interpreted as working simultaneously and frequently in connected ways. Psychoanalytic theory is understood here as Kelly Oliver advocates:

²⁹ Hoeveler, *Gothic Feminism*, 58.

³⁰ *Twilight* is particularly popular with readers from working class backgrounds, as noted by scholars including Crawford (*Twilight of the Gothic*, 227).

³¹ Hoeveler, *Gothic Feminism*, 72.

not as the study of the structure and dynamics of the universal human psyche, but as the study of the psychic manifestations of particular aspects of human culture ... [an] indicator for various changes in the symptomology across or within cultures.³²

Though mother figures feature prominently in psychoanalytic paradigms, maternal subjectivity has been a blind spot of psychoanalytic theory until recently. This is arguably also true of the female gothic. While missing, mistakenly dead, and otherwise absent mothers have been a repeated presence in Female Gothic stories, as mainly a 'daughter's genre' maternal subjectivity has remained largely unarticulated. Anne Williams notes the shared blind spots of orthodox Freudian psychoanalytic theory and Gothic works and the resultant "mechanic and ... reductive readings": "the theory and the text it is being used to analyse not only have conceptual affinities, they have the same blind spots."³³ This chapter draws on feminist appropriations and reinterpretations of psychoanalytic theory, particularly those looking specifically at the area of maternal subjectivity, in recognition of the fact that "the Gothic manifests the sexual politics of the culture(s) that produce it."³⁴ The "patriarchy as a corrupt system of barter and exchange is the very nightmare from which the female gothic heroine seeks to awaken."³⁵ However, the feminist theory that has been brought to bear on *Twilight* shares some of the blind spots of the text itself and thus results in mechanic readings at times. On waking from her *Twilight* dream, Meyer wondered if the beautiful vampire kills the girl:

Because it was really close. ... I knew how close it was. ... And so I wondered: How would they make that work? What would be the next step for a couple like this?³⁶

The relationship between feminine subjectivity and a patriarchal culture is imagined by Meyer as one that is 'really close' to death, and yet it must be 'made work'. She writes the dream to 'find out what happens.' She is, of course, deciding what happens next and in this sense the story is about how to deal with what is imagined as the life-threatening set-up for women of patriarchy built on heterosexual romance. In this reading ambivalence and contradiction are allowed to surface in ways that are suppressed by readings that look for a 'good example' of womanhood in Meyer's heroine. This reading places *Twilight* in a

³² Oliver, "Conflicted Love", 2.

³³ Williams, "The Horrors of Misogyny", 73.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Hoeveler, *Gothic Feminism*, 78.

³⁶ Meyer, *Official Illustrated Guide*, 3.

tradition of what Hoeveler terms “gothic feminism.” *Twilight* is caught up in some of the logics of gothic feminism, particularly the attempt to ‘work the system’ by using gender divisions as a means of accessing power for (some) women and the related disgust of the female body that buying in to the system demands. The way this works in *Twilight* differs significantly from the 18th and 19th century fiction considered by Hoeveler. While this tradition is drawn on and adapted in Meyer’s series, the changes made to some of its central features are as revealing as what remains intact. One key change is the reversal of the chaste heroine and lecherous or sexually experienced hero. Bella notes this reversal herself when trying to persuade Edward to have sex with her. She says to Edward:

You make me feel like a villain in a melodrama – twirling my moustache while I try to steal some poor girl’s virtue.³⁷

Through explicit references to examples of Female Gothic and through the gothic backstories of the female characters in *Twilight*, Meyer locates Bella’s story in a history of gothic womanhood. This section looks closely at the female characters of *Twilight*. The trajectory of their life stories is invariably gothic, following classic feminine gothic scripts in which women are placed under duress by patriarchal structures and labelled “mad, bad, and sad.”³⁸ The majority of the women in *Twilight* are vampires and as such they have all died at some stage. The male vampires’ deaths are varied and unrelated: Carlisle dies during a vampire raid with his father; Edward dies of Spanish influenza during the early 20th century epidemic; Emmett dies from a bear attack; and Jasper is murdered by a female vampire. The female vampires die in ways directly related to femininity: Esme commits suicide following the death of her child; Rosalie is gang-raped by her fiancé and his friends the night before her wedding and dies from her injuries; Alice is falsely confined to an insane asylum by her father and step-mother where she is willingly turned into a vampire to avoid being murdered by the hunter vampire James, who later tries to kill Bella.

Esme had a deeply traumatic human life. As a child she struggled to conform to societal expectations of girls’ behaviour, and as a young woman she was not allowed to pursue her desire to become a teacher and was instead married off to an extremely violent man. When she became pregnant, she ran away from her husband for the sake of her unborn child. She set up a home for herself and worked as a teacher in the local community. However,

³⁷ Meyer, *Eclipse*, 453.

³⁸ Appignanesi, *Mad, Bad and Sad*.

she was devastated when her baby died at only two weeks old. Unable to carry on, she attempted suicide by jumping off a cliff. She survived the fall and was brought to a local hospital with life-threatening injuries. Dr Carlisle Cullen was working there and decided to turn her into a vampire. Having met and been attracted to Carlisle as a young teenager, Esme was very happy with her new situation. She went on to marry Carlisle and take up a mothering role with Edward and the subsequent vampires who join their family.

Esme is presented as the perfect model of self-sacrificing motherhood. She is devoted to caring for the Cullen family, despite their advanced years. Esme lost her child but gained access to a family in which her gentle nature was cherished rather than taken advantage of. She moved from a bad patriarch to a good one. This story of righteous patriarchy triumphing over bad is one as old as Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*, as Donna Heiland argues in her work on gothic and gender.³⁹ The importance of choosing the right man is emphasised in *Twilight* as Bella's good fortunes are set in relief by the other women's negative experiences. The foreclosure of choice however is also presented throughout the narrative in the other female characters' back-stories.

The birth of a child might promise fulfilment in this model of womanhood but, as shown by Esme, the entire meaning of a life placed on such a fragile entity leaves the self, based on this fulfilment, extremely vulnerable. When her baby dies, Esme has nothing to live for and attempts suicide. Women's suicide became a cultural obsession in the 19th century, according to Margaret Higgonet. She writes, "to take one's life is to force others to read one's death."⁴⁰ Esme's attempt at death is read by Carlisle as a cry for help, as a reaction to the 'bad' patriarchal world she has experienced. He reads her near-death, interprets it, and decides Esme should live an eternal life as an appreciated wife with a family of children around her. This might seem a punishment if Carlisle had viewed Esme's suicide as the enactment of a genuine desire to cease living altogether. He reads it otherwise, however, in line with a cultural understanding of the suicide of women. Freud denotes meaning to the different means of suicide as follows: "To poison oneself is to become pregnant; to drown is to bear a child; to throw oneself from a height is to be delivered of a child."⁴¹ Higgonet writes that: "At least since the eighteenth century, this performative utterance [suicide] has been interpreted as a set of increasingly *feminine* symptoms, whether of individual or social

³⁹ Heiland, *Gothic and Gender*, 17.

⁴⁰ Higgonet, "Speaking Silence: Women's Suicide", 68.

⁴¹ Freud, quoted in Higgonet, "Speaking Silence: Women's Suicide", 69.

illness.”⁴² The feminine suicide repositions the act as passive rather than active. In this way Esme can be saved by Carlisle. Had her suicide been read as active, it would be a perverse punishment to gift her with eternal life. Esme is an example of the blameless gothic heroine, made vulnerable to the violence of ‘bad’ men by the patriarchal structures of family and marriage that see women move from their father’s to their husband’s care.

Rosalie’s story demonstrates the dangers of womanhood in a related though more violent story. Wanting to gain social prestige through an advantageous marriage encouraged by her upwardly mobile parents and desiring a son in a self-aggrandising fashion, Rosalie was engaged to the son of Rochester’s richest family. On the night before her wedding she bumps into her fiancée and his friends who have been drinking. They gang rape Rosalie and leave her for dead on the street. Carlisle finds her and turns her into a vampire. Several days later she returns to the bank her fiancé works at in a wedding dress to torture and murder her attackers. Other than these men she has never killed another human.

The justice Rosalie serves is one that has provided the material for many rape-revenge horror films. Rosalie’s story echoes Esme’s in its focus on male vice and female desire for a male child. While Esme’s story emphasises her victimization, Rosalie is framed as a complicit victim due to her desire for marriage and a son for the social standing this would bring, rather than the self-sacrificing motifs of Esme. Rosalie tells Bella her story in the hope of impressing upon her the importance of children for female fulfilment, though Bella is uninterested until she becomes pregnant and then looks to Rosalie as an ally against male control. Rosalie’s discussion of her appearance and her fiancé’s wealth demonstrate the commodification of female beauty and sex in the exchange system of marriage. Rosalie attempts to work this system to her advantage, capitalising on her good looks to achieve social standing via marriage. She is punished for this severely by the violent attack stemming from the very person she hoped would secure her happiness. Once again ‘choosing’ the wrong man is extremely dangerous. Rosalie performs a rape-revenge fantasy in the torture and killing of her attackers. Carol J. Clover, in her work on gender and horror films, argues that rape-revenge films work on the premise “that we live in a ‘rape culture’ in which *all* males – husbands, boyfriends, lawyers, politicians – are directly or indirectly complicit and that men are thus not just individually but corporately liable.”⁴³ In

⁴² Ibid., 70.

⁴³ Clover, *Men, Women and Chain Saws*, 139.

Rosalie's story the "dynamics of males in groups"⁴⁴ are shown as leading to rape. After her attempts in life to make the most out of the system of exchange represented by marriage, Rosalie is left with no options, following the demonstration of how that system really works for women, but to go outside of the rules, pursuing dramatic, violent revenge and taking of a sexualised masculine position of power:

I was overly theatrical. It was kind of childish, really. I wore a wedding dress I'd stolen for the occasion. He screamed when he saw me. He screamed a lot that night. Saving him for last was a good idea – it made it easier for me to control myself, to make it slower...⁴⁵

Reworking aspects of one of Meyer's favourite novels, *Jane Eyre* (1847) by Charlotte Brontë, Alice's story introduces another major 19th century preoccupation that continues to have an impact on the cultural imaginary: the association between femininity and madness. Alice's victimisation to the point of death takes place in the confines of a mental asylum. Wrongly incarcerated there by her father and step-mother, Alice embodies a type of hysterical femininity associated with a thin, waif-like, androgynous body. She is the gothic heroine who sees murderous intentions and plots everywhere. Though she is correct, the voicing of these fears leads to them being used against her in order to designate her 'mad' and have her placed in an asylum. In Alice's story Meyer draws on a gothic tradition of aligning women's madness with their often justified questioning and overt fearfulness of the patriarchal order. This works in both subversive and conservative ways. On the one hand, it demonstrates that women who see the dangers of patriarchy, even when they are real, end up confined. It is not socially acceptable to be vocal about the dangerous conditions of women under patriarchy. On the other hand, the 'paranoid woman's film' tradition on which this plot draws, takes seriously women's concerns. They are usually justified in their fears and the narratives are typically presented from their point of view.

'Bad' vampire Victoria dies as a vampire at the hands of Edward while attempting to kill Bella to avenge the death of her lover, James. She was turned into a vampire by her sister Anne to save her from a life of "fear and abuse" at the hands of men. Issues of class and gender predict Victoria and Anne's human lives as entirely miserable. They are the children of a scullery maid and the master of the house. Following this inauspicious start,

⁴⁴ Ibid., 144.

⁴⁵ Meyer, *Eclipse*, 163.

they are plagued by unwanted sexual attention, violence, and poverty, as they navigate a system in which they are both physically and socially at the mercy of men. Moving between roles of maid, prostitute, and thief, Victoria learns that to disappear and evade imprisonment is the most important life skill. While such skills might have helped Esme or Rosalie escape their violent experiences of marriage and family, Victoria's story demonstrates that there is no real escape from male predation as long as one considers oneself vulnerable. While the Cullen women find solace from the bad patriarchs of human life in the vampire world, Victoria's vampire life shows how even in the vampire world, the heterosexual romance can be detrimental to women. While the Cullens murder James, he is never cast as a victim. In James' death, Victoria loses her partner. Feeling vulnerable once more, she tries to make new vampires to protect her, later deciding to use them as a means of avenging James' death. Her means of achieving this is to do to Edward what has been done to her - kill his loved one, Bella. The newborn vampires that were first to be her guard become her army in her plan to defeat the Cullens and kill Bella. Her plan is foiled by the alliance of the Cullens with the Quileute werewolves and by Bella's self-sacrifice that enables Edward to gain the upper hand and kill Victoria.⁴⁶ Victoria's red hair and wild appearance align her with typical representations of female madness and rage, and the fury of the 'woman scorned'. This type of reaction to patriarchy and its limitations is presented as outside the bounds of human and vampire society alike. Her creation of an army of newborns is against the law of the Volturi and she would have faced death at their hands had she not been killed by Edward. Bella draws on the image of the self-sacrificing woman given to her in the Quileute story of their interactions with vampires. The 'third wife' cuts herself in order to distract the vampire long enough to be killed. She then dies herself. Bella re-enacts this scene, cutting herself to distract Victoria, so that Edward can gain the advantage. Bella does not die; rather Victoria dies in her place.

The events leading to Victoria's vampire death have many parallels with Bella's story. Victoria may be read as a double of Bella, following in a long-line of female doubles that work as repositories of undesirable or unacceptable feminine rage. Gilbert and Gubar

⁴⁶ Though referred to as werewolves, the Quileute wolf-people are technically shape-shifters. This is acknowledged near the end of *Breaking Dawn* when Volturi vampire Aro says "Though the creatures think of themselves as werewolves, they are not. The more accurate name for them would be shape-shifters" (704). In an essay titled "Noble Werewolves or Native Shape-Shifters?" Kristian Jensen details the particular ways Meyer "blends some attributes of the Western werewolf with aspects of the Quileute shape-shifter...[to] form beings uniquely her own" (92). As these beings are most often referred to as werewolves in the *Twilight* world, they are referred to as such in this thesis.

argued in their seminal work on gothic work by women that it is “through the violence of the double that the female author enacts her own raging desire to escape male houses and male texts.”⁴⁷ While Bella’s violence is all directed at herself, Victoria directs her rage outwards and attacks the male ordered value system through inappropriate reproduction (making vampires). A refusal to suffer, sacrifice, and play the victim in a gothic feminist quest to gain power, her seizing of the limited means of power she does have head on and trying to eliminate Bella leaves Victoria with no possible ending in the world of *Twilight* other than having her head removed by Edward and her body torn apart and burnt. Each of the women’s stories has echoes in Bella’s story: like Esme, Bella jumps off a cliff. She attempts a recreational cliff-dive that almost kills her following the loss of Edward. Like Rosalie, Bella is almost gang-raped by a group of men. Edward saves her from the rapists. Like Alice, the vampire tracker, James, targets Bella. Again, Edward saves her. Michelle Massé’s use of Freud’s essay “A Child is Being Beaten” reveals some of the dynamics of feminine suffering explored in the gothic, including the examples made of other women:

The aunts, mothers, and older women whose stories the protagonist thinks can never be her own might themselves sadly recognise her familiar plot as it develops before them and remember when they too thought that they would be exceptions, untouched spectators of Gothic relationships.⁴⁸

The monitory stories of the other vampire women of *Twilight* each involve the heterosexual romance, marriage, family, and mothering. Involvement with these institutions and experiences is invariably bad for women and brings about their punishment in life and their violent death. Suicide, rape, institutionalisation, and murder mark the women’s lives. It seems each of the Cullen women have had to pay the ultimate price of Gothic womanhood to enter into the angelic realm of the vampire family. Avoidance of these institutions would seem an advisable course, however by presenting heterosexual romance as “the only game in town” for adult womanhood, *Twilight* refuses any postfeminist escape from the threat of violence central to the policing of feminine identity by violence under patriarchy. The women’s stories in *Twilight* have much in common with the hellish world described by Susan Brownmiller and other cultural feminists. The popular criticism of *Twilight* proceeds as though this world were an invention of Stephenie Meyer rather than a

⁴⁷ Gilbert and Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic*, 85.

⁴⁸ Massé, *In the Name of Love*, 40.

refraction of aspects of patriarchal culture. *Twilight's* excessive representation of the dynamics of heterosexual romance based on gendered sado-masochistic roles excites outrage in reviewers. The fear of Meyer's narrative displays a denial of the larger cultural contradictions surrounding gendered personhood. Each of these women's stories presents a Gothic femicidal plot that conforms to Helene Meyers' theory of the necessary coexistence of the plot of the victimised woman with the means of refusing victimisation. Meyers contends this female story is important as it does not deny the "gendered patterns of victimisation exist" as something more than "a pose, a masquerade, a feminist fantasy."

These female characters' stories show the dangers of femininity and patriarchal institutions for women. Leah Clearwater's story demonstrates the dangers for women who exist outside these normative discourses. Leah is the only female member of the Quileute tribe to phase into a werewolf. She fell in love with a member of the Quileute tribe, Sam Uley, when in school. They had a happy relationship for three years. Their relationship broke down when Sam began phasing and 'imprinted' on Leah's second cousin Emily. Devastated by this betrayal, Leah found her own mood swings difficult to control and during an argument with her mother unexpectedly phased into a wolf. Her father was so shocked he had a massive heart attack and died. While the other new werewolves struggled with the changes in their bodies and identity, they found comfort and understanding in the community of the pack. Being part of the pack was difficult for Leah, however, as her ex boyfriend Sam was the alpha and the others did not view her as one of them because of her gender. She struggled with issues the male wolves did not, such as the cessation of her menstrual cycle. Occupying the male role and social space of werewolf leads Leah to question her body's femaleness:

Had her body changed because she'd become a werewolf? Or had she become a werewolf because her body was *wrong*? The only female werewolf in the history of forever. Was that because she wasn't as female as she should be?⁴⁹

Being female is again connected directly with menstruation and the ability to bear children. Prior to her unplanned pregnancy, Bella had no desire to have children. Leah's story dramatizes the interconnectedness of ideas of womanhood and fertility, where no such

⁴⁹ Meyer, *Breaking Dawn*, 318.

connection exists for the male characters. It further underscores a lack of choice in the experience of womanhood and the perils of not conforming to gender expectations:

I just want the options I don't have... Maybe, if there was nothing wrong with me, I would never give it a thought.⁵⁰

Leah's second cousin Emily Young's story further supports the sense that patriarchal heterosexual romance is a place of danger, but is the only location of potential female happiness. Emily had refused Sam's advances despite her feelings for him out of respect for Leah. In an argument regarding their relationship Sam phased involuntarily and accidentally swiped Emily's face and side with his paw. She survived with permanent scars - "one side of her mouth ... distorted" and "a trio of scars on the right side of her face from her hairline to her chin, and more scars ... down her right arm to her hand."⁵¹ As Sam's partner and mother figure for the wolf pack, Emily's story shares similarities with Esme's. In Emily's story, male violence is accidental, though nonetheless injurious. Despite the visible evidence on Emily's face and arms of the violence of romance for women, Emily is much happier with her situation than Leah. For Bella, Emily's scars are a cautionary tale of the dangers of out-of-control men.

The feminine self is deeply problematic in *Twilight*. Bella intervenes in this narrative of womanhood by actively seeking an escape from female vulnerability through the abjection of vulnerable human body. Victoria too sought such an escape, but her misstep was in thinking patriarchal institutions and socially sanctioned female fulfilment could be entirely avoided. Leah inadvertently escapes the female body, but is involuntarily outside of heterosexual romance, marriage, and motherhood as a result. Bella attains the masculinised subjectivity described by Hoeveler not by posing as a victim or by taking on masculine roles but by suffering through the vulnerabilities of the female body. Bella's path goes through rather than around or away from feminine subjectivity in a patriarchal culture, bringing conflicts at the heart of subject formation for women to the fore.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 319.

⁵¹ Meyer, *Official Illustrated Guide*, 361-362.

Matricidal Dreams

Dreams as Hoeveler writes, “have long functioned in literature as privileged sites of meaning, transactions wherein highly charged signifiers intersect with ambiguous signifieds.”⁵² A key dream in the *Twilight* narrative occurs at the beginning of *New Moon* when Bella dreams of her grandmother, only to realise the person she thought was her grandmother is her own mirror image. This dream is used here as a distillation of the discussion of subjectivity, the body, and the maternal in *Twilight*. Bella dreams she is in a sunlit meadow. Standing in front of her is an elderly woman, whom she takes to be her grandmother. Bella rationalises that she must be dreaming because her grandmother is dead. She is keen to speak with her deceased relative:

I was about to ask her a question; I had so many - what was she doing here in my dream? What had she been up to in the past six years? Was Pop okay, and had they found each other, wherever they were?⁵³

Bella looks for her grandfather, the dead father symbolically speaking, in an attempt to locate her maternal ancestor in relation to him. Bella’s desire to locate the paternal ancestor points to her investment in a patriarchal system of exchange, one that foregrounds a relation to the father, rather than the mother, in conceptions of the self. Freud presents this relation in his exploration of foundational patricide in *Totem and Taboo*.

Luce Irigaray, however, in her project of critiquing psychoanalysis and western philosophy, presents a largely ignored matricide as the hidden foundation of western civilization, stating: “the whole of our culture in the west depends upon the murder of the mother.”⁵⁴ In her exploration of this murder, she uses the myth of Orestes’ killing of Clytemnestra as the model of a matricide that permits the functioning of the male imaginary, an imaginary, Irigaray argues, that continues to operate. She highlights the lack of representations of a maternal line in western culture and what she describes as an ‘unsymbolised’ mother-daughter relationship. Margaret Whitford explains Irigaray’s description of this ‘unsymbolised’ relationship as meaning: “that there is an absence of linguistic, social, semiotic, structural, cultural, iconic, theoretical, mythical, religious or any other

⁵² Hoeveler, *Gothic Feminism*, 72.

⁵³ Meyer, *New Moon*, 4.

⁵⁴ Irigaray, quoted and translated in Whitford, *Luce Irigaray*, 77.

representations of that relationship.”⁵⁵ For Bella communication with her ancestor proves impossible. In a reversal of western culture’s visible patricide covering over an invisible matricide, Bella sees her maternal ancestor, while her paternal ancestor is absent. The dream presence of the dead female ancestor might be brought into language, and therefore into symbolic understanding, by asking about the dead father’s whereabouts. In doing so, Bella seeks out the “third term” that can break up the mother-child dyad. This echoes the move Bella has taken away from her mother into her father’s home in Forks. It shows the difficulty of communication between these women across the generations, without recourse to the symbolic father figure. It simultaneously reveals a cultural imaginary that lacks symbolisation of a differentiation between mother and daughter. Irigaray describes this lack as follows:

But there is no possibility whatsoever, within the current logic of sociocultural operations, for a daughter to situate herself with respect to her mother: because, strictly speaking, they make neither one nor two, neither has a name, meaning, sex of her own, neither can be ‘identified’ with respect to the other ... How can the relationship between these two women be articulated?⁵⁶

Though the image of Bella’s grandmother works as a maternal figure, she is not Bella’s mother. This is significant as it points to the inaccessible relation between Bella and her maternal ancestry, rather than simply the undifferentiated state of the mother-child dyad prior to the break brought about by a paternal figure. There is a communication problem between these female figures prior to Edward’s entrance. The difficulty of such communication may be read as an intimation of the problem of female maternal genealogy in western culture. Bella and her grandmother fail to communicate, as they are the same. They both move to speak in exactly the same way at exactly the same moment. Their sameness silences them, as there can be no interaction without some element of difference. Regarding such lack of differentiation between mother and daughter, Amber Jacobs contends the “manifest mother-daughter couples in our cultural imaginary function precisely to merge the positions of mother and daughter.”⁵⁷ “Rather than offering a representation of a mediated relation”, writes Jacobs, these mother-daughter couples based on sameness work “in the service of the male imaginary (to which they belong) that

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, 143.

⁵⁷ Jacobs, *On Matricide*, 138.

systematically forecloses the relation between women and instead ... constructs... simulacra of mother-daughter couples with the aim of collapsing the mother daughter into one position in order then to exclude it from the dominant structure.”⁵⁸ Bella and her grandmother may be read as representative of maiden and crone in western culture’s traditional structuring of the stages of womanhood. In the silence between grandmother and granddaughter, lurk the absent mother and the maternal body. Absence, unlike loss, always threatens a return.⁵⁹ Maternal absence, not loss, marks each of the gothic romances considered here and is central to *Twilight*. Ideas of absence and presence are played with throughout *Twilight* as Bella contends with the coming and going of various love objects including her mother, Edward, and Jacob. Absenting herself from her mother she lives in gloomy Forks where the chaste and devoted Edward functions for a time as a transitional object. Edward may be read as playing a maternal role or functioning as a transitional object for Bella before her marriage.⁶⁰ He leaves her in *New Moon* and she becomes first silent then self-destructive in his absence – playing, albeit with high stakes, the vulnerable and endangered gothic heroine in order to bring about his return. During this time she comes close to annihilation of the self in a kind of return to the womb as death. In absenting herself from her mother, Bella is involved in differentiating herself as a subject in her own right. This process of adolescence may be read as an echo of the process of infancy, in which the individual psyche emerges from the undifferentiated world of the pre-linguistic, closely aligned with the maternal body, theorised by Kristeva as the *chora*. Kristeva uses the term *chora* from Plato’s *Timaeus* to name the realm of the not-yet-subject in which:

Discrete quantities of energy move through the body of the subject who is not yet constituted as such and, in the course of his development, they are arranged according to the various constraints imposed on this body - always already involved in a semiotic process-by family and social structures. In this way the drives, which are “energy” charges as well as “psychical” marks, articulate what we call a *chora*: a nonexpressive totality formed by the drives and their states in a motility that is as full of movement as it is regulated.⁶¹

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 37.

⁶⁰ Blackford, *The Myth of Persephone*, 5.

⁶¹ Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, 25.

When Edward too is absent, Bella seeks a return to the pre-individuated state. She dives from a cliff and in the water below experiences a happiness that is conceived as death-like:

Even as my lungs burned for more air and my legs cramped in the icy cold, I was content. I'd forgotten what real happiness felt like.

Happiness. It made the whole dying thing pretty bearable.⁶²

Significantly there is no death as such in *Twilight*. The loss of death is written onto absence instead. Over the course of Bella's story, she comes to terms with this absent presence in a violent taking-on that undoes: becoming a mother in order to finally fully exorcise the maternal from her 'self'. In her move from adolescence to adulthood, Bella accomplishes personhood at the price of the maternal through a sacrificial version of childbirth. This price is hinted at in the first novel *Twilight* when it seems Renee is in danger, but it is in fact Bella who is in danger. Meyer's representation of the female body and subjectivity draws on a tradition, identified by Hoeveler in her consideration of early Gothic women's writings, that seeks to "escape or at least elide... the demands and pitfalls inherent in the flawed female body."⁶³ That "most gothic of nightmares, the female body" provides the point of horror in Meyer's otherwise bloodless vampire story. This nightmare appears in two related forms in *Twilight*: the ageing female body and the maternal body. Bella's dream of her grandmother presents the ageing female body as horrific only at the point of identification with it. She describes her grandmother at the beginning of her dream as having:

[Skin] soft and withered, bent into a thousand tiny creases that clung gently to the bone underneath. Like a dried apricot, but with a puff of thick white hair standing out in a cloud around it. ... [Her mouth] a wizened pucker...⁶⁴

The delicate fragility of her grandmother's aged body is shown in the words "puff" and "cloud", while a worn sinewy strength sits alongside this fragility, in the image of the 'dried apricot' and the 'thick white hair'. The image of a dried apricot echoes, with a difference, the iconic image of the juicy apple that appears on the cover of *Twilight* and in one of Bella and Edward's first interactions in the film version of *Twilight*. Unlike the apple, which is

⁶² Meyer, *New Moon*, 361.

⁶³ Hoeveler, *Gothic Feminism*, 341.

⁶⁴ Meyer, *New Moon*, 4.

loaded with cultural meaning and significance, the apricot has little or no metaphorical significance in western culture. In Meyer's formulations the apple comes to have a positive connotation, drawing on Mormon changes in emphasis in interpretation of the Genesis story. Most Christian interpretations of the Genesis story, tellingly referred to as 'the Fall', focus on the sin of Adam and Eve that precipitated humankind's ejection from Eden. Mormon interpretation, however, pays tribute to the choice and sacrifice of Adam and Eve that enabled the propagation of humanity. In this interpretation Adam and Eve are seen as heroes who gave up their heavenly life in Eden to embrace the vicissitudes that knowledge brings.⁶⁵ Mormons do not believe in "original sin", as the second Article of Faith says, people "will be punished for their own sins, and for Adam's transgression." Transgression implies a boundary that has been crossed. In the Mormon faith, this boundary needed to be crossed in order to bring about the human race. Through their embrace of choice and free will, Adam and Eve inaugurated the conditions of human life and as such the opportunity for everyone to ultimately attain the celestial kingdom. Embracing knowledge thus has a different connotation in the Mormon imaginary than it may have in more mainstream cultural associations between knowledge and sin. The apple thus functions as a symbol of both temptation and bravery in relation to the acquisition of knowledge. The apricot represents a different kind of knowledge, one as yet 'unsymbolised'.

The apple is also associated through the *Snow White* fairy-tale with generational conflict between women and mother-daughter jealousy regarding youth and beauty. There is no intergenerational conflict in Bella's dream. Describing her grandmother as an apricot suggests an unquantifiable aspect to the old woman's body. The apricot is both inside and outside the world of apples. This reflects a culture that has no major representation of maternal genealogies and one that has few images of ageing and older women. Jane Ussher describes older women as:

all but invisible within both high and popular culture - with the post-menopausal woman represented primarily as the crone, the hag, or the dried-up grandmother figure, her body covered, and her sexuality long left behind.⁶⁶

Bella's description of her grandmother is not complimentary and follows cultural associations of the older woman with dryness and asexuality, but it is not full of revulsion

⁶⁵ White, "The Transformation of Mormon Theology", 16.

⁶⁶ Ussher, *Managing the Monstrous Feminine*, 118.

either. In the under-described body, that which is on the borders of the representable, lies a possibility of something contrary to the system emerging, as the figure of the hag and the crone have the potential to express alternative feminine qualities and potentialities in spite of, and perhaps because of, being figures of larger cultural derision and exclusion. Mary Russo in her work on the female grotesque writes that this association of the female body with the grotesque body has “suggested a positive and powerful figuration of culture and womanhood to many male and female writers and artists.”⁶⁷ She refers to:

“a certain archetypal view of these materials which is still prevalent in the vein of non-academic, “cultural feminism”. This view valorises traditional images of the earth mother, the crone, the witch, and the vampire and posits a natural connection between the female body (itself naturalized) and the “primal” elements, especially the earth.”⁶⁸

Here lies the alternative offered by cultural feminism: a celebration of feminine qualities in a “reversal of cultural values.” This is what “poststructuralism finds theoretically suspect, for such a reversal keeps the terms of the opposition in place and thus upholds the system it is designed to dismantle.”⁶⁹ *Twilight*’s representation of the horror of the female body as decaying and mutating matter admits no possibility for its re-evaluation. Even this limited positive feminine potential of Bella’s grandmother’s body, however essentialised and ultimately maintaining of the overarching value system it may be, is removed by the appearance of Edward in the dream, as:

brilliant sunbeams... shatter... off his skin into a thousand rainbow shards like he was made of crystal or diamond...⁷⁰

The soft, stretchy quality of the apricot is cast in shadow by the luminous sharpness of Edward’s presence. Even sunlight, which could be warm and soft, in keeping with her grandmother’s body, becomes glass-like in Edward’s presence. Bella worries that her grandmother will not understand why Edward sparkles, but her worries soon turn to horror:

⁶⁷ Russo, *The Female Grotesque*, 1.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Meyers, *Femicidal Fears*, 11.

⁷⁰ Meyer, *New Moon*, 4.

Only then, as I looked at the bigger picture, did I notice the huge gilt frame that enclosed my grandmother's form. Uncomprehending, I raised the hand that wasn't wrapped around Edward's waist and reached out to touch her. She mimicked the movement exactly, mirrored it. But where our fingers should have met, there was nothing but cold glass.⁷¹

Seeing her grandmother mirror her movements and moving to touch her but finding "nothing but cold glass"⁷², Bella realises:

There was no Gran.⁷³

There are several other important mirror scenes in *Twilight* including Bella's first look in the mirror when she arrives in her father's home:

I looked at my face in the mirror as I brushed through my tangled, damp hair. ...

Facing my pallid reflection in the mirror, I was forced to admit that I was lying to myself. It wasn't just physically that I'd never fit in.⁷⁴

Psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan's famous mirror stage theory is worth drawing on here:

The mirror stage is a drama... which manufactures for the subject, caught up in the lure of spatial identification, the succession of phantasies that extends from a fragmented body-image to a form of its totality... and lastly to the assumption of the armour of an alienating identity, which will mark with its rigid structure the subject's entire mental development.⁷⁵

From this scene of identification but dissatisfaction with her image at the beginning of *Twilight* to Bella's horrific misapprehension of her mirror image in the dream leads to her final mirror scene when she sees herself after her transformation to vampire:

⁷¹ Ibid., 5.

⁷² Ibid., 4.

⁷³ Ibid., 4.

⁷⁴ Meyer, *Twilight*, 9.

⁷⁵ Lacan, "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I", 4.

My first reaction was an unthinking pleasure. The alien creature in the glass was indisputably beautiful, every bit as beautiful as Alice or Esme. ... Her limbs were smooth and strong, skin glistening subtle, luminous as a pearl.⁷⁶

In an altered repetition of the realisation Bella has in the dream of her grandmother that she is looking in a mirror, here Bella knows she is looking in a mirror but cannot find her reflection:

My second reaction was horror.

Who was she? At first glance, I couldn't find my face anywhere in the smooth, perfect planes of her features.

...

All the while I studied and reacted, her face was perfectly composed, a carving of a goddess, showing nothing of the turmoil roiling inside me. And then her full lips moved.⁷⁷

While distance in Bella's dream of her grandmother turns into disturbing proximity:

That was me. Me in the mirror.⁷⁸

after her transformation, Bella may maintain a certain distance between herself and her image"

[I] turned my back on the strange and beautiful woman in the mirror.⁷⁹

As a vampire, Bella need not over identify with her body image as she has had to during her human lifetime. Armed with a perfect body, Bella may forget it. As she gets used to her new vampire body, she becomes a controlling subject in a way she has not experienced previously due to her vulnerability. After transforming, it is the "objects" around her that appear "fragile":

It had come on slowly, but I could feel it now - the raw, massive strength thrilling in my limbs. I was suddenly sure that if I wanted to tunnel under the river, to claw or

⁷⁶ Meyer, *Breaking Dawn*, 403.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Meyer, *New Moon*, 6.

⁷⁹ Meyer, *Breaking Dawn*, 406.

beat my way straight through the bedrock, it couldn't take me very long. The objects around me - the trees, the shrubs, the rocks... the house - had all begun to look very fragile.⁸⁰

The mirror stage is “the point at which a subject becomes distinguished from its objects, and yet both the corporeal unities that it posits, and identity itself are fictional. The closure and distinction of normative embodiment pivots on a (mis)recognition, which, whilst apparently inaugurating wholeness, in fact relies on a splitting at the heart of subjectivity.”⁸¹ Edward's presence changes Bella's perception, first alerting her to her misrecognition forcing her to confront her 'self' in the mirror (a further misrecognition) and the frame around the image she perceived as real. John Berger writes in *Ways of Seeing* (1972) “the way we see things is affected by what we know or what we believe.”⁸² Edward alters Bella's knowledge of the scene before her. The 'cold glass' of the mirror is linked to Edward's body as he is frequently described in similar terms, as crystal, diamond, granite, and always as cold. In this way Edward's body is not so much a body of flesh like her own or her grandmother's, but an extension of the male gaze as a reflective surface. His physical entry into the dream, rather than the intrusion of his voice alone, alters Bella's outlook. Looking, from a patriarchal perspective, becomes the privileged sense as it reorients Bella to perceive the images before her in a new way. Feminist scholars, largely following Luce Irigaray's influential work in this area, have taken up the idea that perception is a gendered domain. Irigaray observes the primacy of sight in western culture and associates it with forms of male knowledge and power - “Investment in the look is not privileged in women as in men. More than any of the other senses, the eye objectifies and masters.”

Margrit Shildrick writes:

In analysing the gendered exercise of the gaze, it has seemed to many feminist theorists that the emphasis on the detachment of the specular at the expense of the immediacy of touch is a characteristic of a masculinist logos.⁸³

Significantly for the analysis undertaken here she goes to note:

⁸⁰ Ibid. 410.

⁸¹ Shildrick, *Embodying the Monster*, 105.

⁸² Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, 8.

⁸³ Shildrick, *Embodying the Monster*, 103.

the value put on the clarity and distinction implied by clear sight, the lack of affective engagement, and the minimisation of interconnection are all aspects that could flourish only where the materiality and voluminosity of the flesh is reduced to a surface phenomenon that ideally reflects back the unity and completion of the viewing subject.⁸⁴

Silence, interruption, and a changing of perspective disavow communication between these two women. Edward's non-reflection draws Bella's attention to the enclosure of her grandmother within a frame. Framing turns her grandmother first into a picture and then into a reflection. The specularity is highlighted further by the impossibility of touch. Maternal lineage and communication between mother and daughter figures are shown to be impossible in Bella's dream after this change in perception. The place her grandmother and her "fingers should have met" is a cold mirror. "There is no gran" and she is only looking at herself. Irigaray contends:

Woman takes pleasure more from touching than from looking, and her entry into a dominant scopic economy signifies, again, her consignment to passivity.

Mother-daughter relationships figure throughout *Twilight* in a dynamic of almost touching only to disappear into absence, death, and/or miscommunication.

With a dizzying jolt, my dream abruptly became a nightmare.⁸⁵

The visual illusion shown in the mirror is, on closer inspection, depthless. First her grandmother and then herself are contained in this frame. Their image becomes paramount as a result of this visual presentation - framed, like a piece of art, the to-be-looked-at. In the final moments of the dream, Bella internalises her 'self' as looked at rather than looking, while Edward does not appear in the framed image. Edward's non-reflection alerts Bella to both her own abject status and the emptiness of the mirror. Bella is left with Edward:

casting no reflection, excruciatingly lovely and forever seventeen.⁸⁶

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Meyer, *New Moon*, 6.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

Finding herself in her grandmother at the end of the dream incites horror in Bella. This horror is connected to the horror of ageing with its clear links to decay and death, horror of female bodily destiny as seen in her grandmother, but also horror of merging with the maternal and therefore ceasing to exist, and a further horror in the opposite, the absence of the maternal, meaning abandonment or dereliction for the female subject. The maternal ancestor disappears when Bella realises she is her. In taking her place, she can have no relation to her.

Bella's journey throughout *Twilight* consists of oscillations between maternal and paternal identifications: death in a reassimilation with an archaic oceanic maternal nirvana, or change through the rejection, abjection, or sacrifice of the female body leading to transcendence to the Cullen's patriarchal perfection – both masculine understandings of the maternal. The attraction of Edward is that he straddles maternal and paternal worlds. His presence stops communication between Bella and her grandmother, but in realising her misrecognition of herself as her grandmother, their bodies are collapsed onto one another in sameness. In this way Edward brings about both a break from maternal genealogy and a fusion of (grand)mother and daughter. As a result, until Bella achieves her metamorphosis to vampire she is constantly at risk of being subsumed by the maternal, despite and often because of her relationship with Edward. Bella first seeks to find in Edward what she lacks in her relation to the maternal, but the horror of difference between them is too “excruciating” and Bella must eventually die or change, or both, as Bella does. The problem of the lack of maternal genealogy for the female subject is shown in Bella's grandmother/mirror dream, however, rather than interrogate and pose radical futures of the possibility of female genealogy, *Twilight* deals with this problem for female subjectivity in western culture by erasing the feminine/maternal altogether. Within the narrative world of *Twilight* a dream is made out of the gothic nightmare.

Hideous Human ... Glorious Immortal⁸⁷

The dream ends when Edward whispers “Happy Birthday”. Bella wakes abruptly on the morning of her eighteenth birthday. Her horror at the image of herself as an old woman

⁸⁷ Meyer, *Breaking Dawn*, 469

resonates with wider cultural responses to female ageing. In a study of the reproductive female body, Ussher quotes one of her interviewees as saying:

I look in the mirror and I can't believe that that same face is me. That wrinkled old lady type look. I don't feel that.⁸⁸

The disconnection between 'feeling' and 'looking' is located here in the context of the ageing female body.

That was me. Me in the mirror. Me - ancient, creased, and withered.⁸⁹

Bella's "biggest nightmare" is the idea of ageing. Though she is only seventeen years old at the beginning of *Twilight*, she has an acute awareness of her body as in a state of perpetual decay:

...I'm going to die sometime. Every minute of the day, I get closer. And I'm going to get *old*.⁹⁰

She dreads her eighteenth birthday for months in advance and calls it a "black event,"⁹¹ a "bleak day that lurked in ambush, waiting to spring."⁹² She dreads becoming 'older' than Edward, even though Edward is almost a century older than her. Physical ageing is clearly at issue, rather than ageing in the sense of time lived. It is only by dint of the fact that physical ageing and the passage of time for the individual are inseparable outside of fantasy (despite advances in cosmetic surgery etc.) that the taboo of age difference in romantic relationships is not felt more keenly with regard to the relationship of the ancient vampire and the young girl. Much of the disgust of age difference in romantic relationships relates to the horror of youth coming into contact with bodily decay and death, as if they might be somehow contaminated by this. In western culture the ageing female body incites greater disgust than the ageing male body. Romances between older men and younger women feature frequently in Hollywood film as a norm.⁹³ Edward does not fear a future in which he continues to love Bella as she ages, but Bella cannot accept such an idea. She is disgusted by it. She has several reasons for wanting to become a vampire, but by far the

⁸⁸ Ussher, *Managing the Monstrous Feminine*, 147.

⁸⁹ Meyer, *New Moon*, 6.

⁹⁰ Meyer, *Twilight*, 414.

⁹¹ Meyer, *New Moon*, 8.

⁹² Ibid. 6.

⁹³ Donahue, "Hollywood's love affair".

most pressing is that of her decaying body. On finding out that her werewolf friend Jacob has stopped ageing, Bella feels annoyed:

Am I the only one who has to get old? I get older every stinking day!⁹⁴

The days “stink” while Bella is ageing. When she first meets Edward, she misinterprets his reaction to her as disgust, again focusing on the sense of smell:

He was leaning away from me, sitting on the extreme edge of his chair and averting his face like he smelled something bad.⁹⁵

Edward asks Bella “Is that what you dream about? Being a monster?”⁹⁶ It is worth noting the choice of words: he uses the word ‘being’ rather than ‘becoming’. This is precisely what Bella dreams of: *being* the monstrous feminine as embodied in the ageing female body. Mia Campioni writes in her essay “Revolting Women”:

The menopausal woman represents ... the living embodiment of the abject, the monstrous, the castrating force, and repugnant reminder of the insecurity of the subject... This figure confronts us as a force of destruction of our hard won independent subjectivity as women and men.⁹⁷

The “look”, as discussed, is traditionally male in western culture, while touch has greater resonance with female experience, according to Irigaray. Here the gap between looking and touching introduces the objectification of the female body, in particular a heightened duality of feminine experience as simultaneously subject and object. Shildrick writes, “For the subject of the masculinist logos, the whole and unified self is affirmed by reference to an ideal of unvarying sameness that demands the disavowal of the dynamics of becoming.”⁹⁸ The perception of the self as object is linked to the operations of femininity. Beauvoir describes adolescence as a time when the girl:

⁹⁴ Meyer, *Eclipse*, 119.

⁹⁵ Meyer, *Twilight*, 20.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 433.

⁹⁷ Campioni, “Revolting women, women in revolt”, 93.

⁹⁸ Shildrick, *Embodying the Monster*, 104.

becomes an object and she sees herself as an object; she discovers this new aspect of her being with surprise: it seems to her that she has been doubled: instead of coinciding exactly with herself, she now begins to exist outside.⁹⁹

Bella has difficulty with her body in terms of appearance, movement, and its biological processes. In appearance she feels out of place and unattractive:

...physically, I'd never fit in anywhere. I should be tan, sporty, blond – a volleyball player, or a cheerleader, perhaps...¹⁰⁰

In kinetic terms, she feels unbalanced and out of control:

... I fell down a lot. Sometimes I took people with me.¹⁰¹

She's aware of how others perceive her:

Possibly my crippling clumsiness was seen as endearing rather than pathetic, casting me as a damsel in distress.¹⁰²

Bella spends much of her time worrying about, dismaying in, and occasionally indulging in her lack of bodily control:

I had enough trouble not falling down when the ground was dry; it might be safer for me to go back to bed now.¹⁰³

In her critique of regimes of femininity in Western culture, Susan Bordo writes that: "women, as study after study shows, are spending more time on the management and discipline of our bodies than we have in a long, long time."¹⁰⁴ Bella seeks to control her body or have her body controlled. Her attempts at management and control of her body are dramatised in the metamorphosis of plain human girl to glittering perfect vampire. Here Bella's body works as a reference to bodily management and discipline of and by women in western culture, as such it is also a site of contestation for larger issues of gender and power. In her influential work *Purity and Danger*, anthropologist Mary Douglas states:

⁹⁹ Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 361.

¹⁰⁰ Meyer, *Twilight*, 9.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 64.

¹⁰² Ibid., 46.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 45.

¹⁰⁴ Bordo, *The Male Body*, 91.

“The body is a model which can stand for any bounded system. Its boundaries can represent any boundaries which are threatened or precarious.”¹⁰⁵ She stresses the importance of seeing the body as a symbol of society in order to apprehend the “powers and dangers credited to social structure reproduced in small on the human body.”¹⁰⁶ In the textual presentation of the heroine Bella, her body may be read in precisely this way, with cultural “powers and dangers” operating on and through the image of her body, most acutely in her self-image.

Drawing on Beauvoir, Sandra Bartky, in her work *Femininity and Domination* (1990), exposes the ways patriarchal culture supports the self-regulation of women by encouraging objectification of the body: “In the regime of institutionalised heterosexuality woman must make herself ‘object and prey’ for the man... Woman lives her body as seen by another, by an anonymous patriarchal other.”¹⁰⁷ Iris Marion Young too explores the “looked at and acted upon” sense of the body in women’s experiences.¹⁰⁸ Expectations of femininity require self-regulation that inhibits women and affects their experience of embodiment in limiting ways. Young shows how the relationship of intentionality imagined between the self and the body operates differently in the context of femininity. She argues that there is an inhibited intentionality in the bodily expressions of women as a result of regimes of femininity that influence appearance, movement, and behaviour. Ideas of gender and embodiment operate in over-identifying women as their bodies in terms of self-esteem and worth, and in the same movement, distancing women from an unselfconscious relation with/to their bodies. In an article on rethinking embodiment, Murphy Haliburton writes that while “all people experience the world from the perspective of being in a body,”¹⁰⁹ a Western mind:body split tends to mask this basic fact. Ruth Robbins in her work on subjectivity locates this “model of selfhood founded on interiority” in the “founding of a kind of modern consciousness with Descartes ...[and] its emphasis on the apparently immaterial mind over the grossly material body.”¹¹⁰ This body is unevenly attributed to the feminine side of a masculine:feminine binary. There is a burden associated particularly with the female body. According to Elizabeth Grosz, “Women are somehow more

¹⁰⁵ Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 142.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Bartky, *Femininity and Domination*, 72.

¹⁰⁸ Young, *Throwing Like a Girl*, 39.

¹⁰⁹ Haliburton, “Rethinking Anthropological Studies of the Body” 1124.

¹¹⁰ Robbins, *Subjectivity*, 6.

biological, more corporeal, and more natural than men.”¹¹¹ In a privileging of “mental representations of experience” the dualism between mind and body is used to imaginatively separate out certain qualities, attributes, and expectations along gendered, racial, and ethnic lines. Haliburton notes:

peoples who are labelled ‘non-Western’ or ‘traditional’ are understood as either more grounded in their bodies or as experiencing the world with a more subtle awareness of mind-body interconnection that the Western subject ... the Western woman is supposedly akin to the non-Western subject in her awareness of her body.¹¹²

Both human Bella and werewolf Jacob are aligned with the body by their gender and race respectively. When Bella briefly cedes narration in *Breaking Dawn*, Jacob rather than Edward takes over.

Horror is related to that ‘more corporeal’ self for Bella. Though she encounters vampires and werewolves, she does not react in horror to their liminal status. Rather horror is increasingly located in and on her own body following interaction with these traditional ‘Others’ and their escape from bodily changes. The human female body is much more horrific to Bella than the creatures, as discussed by Christopher Frayling, dreamt up largely by a 19th century imagination as troubling ideas of the self.¹¹³ They trouble Bella because of the negative light they cast on her self. From these nightmares, the vampire has made inroads into family and romantic life in the 20th and 21st centuries, even changing from the stuff of nightmares to the heroine’s ‘dream guy’. For Bella self is already troubled and her ‘normal’ body holds horror within itself. What were once horrific ‘Others’ to a ‘normal’, centred humanity, highlight for Bella inadequacies at the heart of so-called ‘normality’. As one might expect from a postmodern text, points of centre and margin are not clear-cut. Even in what may reasonably be read as a highly conservative story, unity and stability are at a minimum re-located in the realm of the once othered. As will be discussed in the concluding chapter, the question of what makes a person ‘human’ is thrown into confusion by supernatural creatures that operate in close quarters and even become confused with so-called human beings. For Bella, horror is located in the all-too human body, meaning the

¹¹¹ Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*, 14.

¹¹² Halliburton, “Rethinking Anthropological Studies of the Body,” 1125.

¹¹³ Frayling, *Nightmare*, 215.

changing, ageing, and dying body imagined as female. The body is set in relief by the perfection of the vampire body:

They stood out from the rest of the crowd, their beauty and grace otherworldly.¹¹⁴

The 'otherworldly' nature of this physicality removes the vampire body, though material, from the associations of human and female body. Bella is very aware of the differences between her body and that of Edward:

I stared at the beautiful machine. Beside it, my bike looked like a broken tricycle. I felt a sudden wave of sadness when I realised that this was not a bad analogy for the way I probably looked next to Edward.¹¹⁵

Bella's disgust at her female body involves hatred of the material associations of the female body but also at her lack of physical beauty. The non-body of the vampires is also the perfected body of contemporary beauty standards. Bella is continually let down too by her body's relative weakness and lack of control and beauty, failings thrown into relief by the Cullen's hyper-control, gracefulness, and physical splendour. Though Edward is a vampire, and therefore susceptible to blood lust, he is aware of his weakness and is in control of it. Weakness is concentrated and bounded in one physical desire. Once this is under control, as it is in the Cullen Coven, the rest of the vampire body presents little or no weakness, inadequacy, or objectionable aspects. Bella's body is presented in sharp contrast. Her body at eighteen disgusts her, not only because of its potential for ageing, but because of her "plainness" in comparison to Edward. Looking at a photo of the two of them Bella feels:

The contrast between the two of us was painful. He looked like a god. I looked very average, even for a human, almost shamefully plain. I flipped the picture over with a feeling of disgust.¹¹⁶

Bella has an awareness of the self as object. She perceives herself as looked at, even while she is in the process of looking. In admiring Edward's body in the position of 'looker', she is taken away from her enjoyment by an awareness of the return of the look onto her own

¹¹⁴ Meyer, *Eclipse*, 354.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 207.

¹¹⁶ Meyer, *New Moon*, 65.

body, and becomes 'looked at'. This is an awareness that undermines her and brings dissatisfaction. It may be read as contributing to her sense of imbalance.

The non-body embodiment of the vampires in *Twilight* sets this burdened female body in greater relief. When describing her inspiration dream, Meyer says "... there was so much light. The dream was very, very colourful. I don't know if that always comes through in the writing - that this prism effect was just so brilliant."¹¹⁷ The vampire world is one of pure image, sharing many similarities with the world of the beauty industry. The Cullens are described as an image embodied, a reverse of the journey suggested by images, i.e. that they are a straightforward representation of a material reality. Here the image becomes re-materialised and its unnaturalness is emphasised:

I stared because their faces, so different, so similar, were all devastatingly, inhumanly beautiful. They were faces you never expected to see except perhaps on the airbrushed pages of a fashion magazine. Or painted by an old master as the face of an angel.¹¹⁸

Naomi Wolf describes the quasi-religious experience of the department store in the regulation of women's bodies in *The Beauty Myth*:

To reach the cosmetics counter, she must pass a deliberately disorienting prism of mirrors, lights, and scents that combine to submit her to the "sensory overload" used by hypnotists and cults to encourage suggestibility. On either side of her are ranks of angels - seraphim and cherubim - the "perfect" faces of the models on display.¹¹⁹

Life as a vampire is presented by Meyer as a sensory overload in a realm of angels. Bella likens the Cullens to angels on many occasions:

I wondered how I'd ever fallen for their human farce. A couple of angels, standing there with wings intact, would be less conspicuous.¹²⁰

The film version of *Twilight* takes up this idea, presenting Edward as an angelic figure in his first conversation with Bella. He is positioned with a pair of wings in the background.

¹¹⁷ Meyer, *Official Illustrated Guide*, 3.

¹¹⁸ Meyer, *Twilight*, 16.

¹¹⁹ Wolf, *The Beauty Myth*, 107.

¹²⁰ Meyer, *Twilight*, 33.



Figure 2: Bella (Kristen Stewart) and ‘angel’ Edward (Robert Pattinson) in biology class.¹²¹

¹²¹ *Twilight*, dir. Catherine Hardwicke. Screenshot found at <https://robattack.files.wordpress.com/2012/02/2ch9uhc.png> Accessed February 1, 2016.

The perfect body is a mediated image come to 'life'. When the materiality of these bodies is invoked, it is presented not as flesh but as stone, linking them again to a mediated form—statues and sculpture. These are not 'real' bodies, but versions of what has been and continues to be considered beautiful in relation to the body. As cold stone, they are dead bodies. The obvious unpleasantness and uncanniness of such a state is not highlighted, as death itself is repurposed as a realm of perfection, glamorised and sanitised – the very opposite of the decaying corpse. In this way, the Cullens contain the contradiction of being abjectless, but embodied. In a culture and a novel series that associates the abject with the bodily at the most fundamental level, the Cullens' bodies are very unusual indeed. The only way to rid them of the taint of the abject, is to make their bodies images and to remove the porous softness of the 'everyday' body. In doing so, Meyer maintains the beauty of the 'perfect' body without engaging with the messier sides of bodies. Much like the sanitised bodies of the beauty industry, this serves to strengthen rather than weaken the association of 'real' bodies with disgust. Susan Bordo describes the relationship of the self to images of perfection as follows:

With the advent of movies and television, the rules for femininity have come to be culturally transmitted more and more through standardised visual images. As a result, femininity itself has come to be largely a matter of constructing, in the manner described by Erving Goffman, the appropriate surface presentations of the self... we learn the rules directly through bodily discourse: through images that tell us what clothes, body shape, facial expression, movements, and behaviour are required.¹²²

When viewed as part of a larger negotiation of ideas and ideologies of womanhood and personhood, Bella's internalisation of her body as a problem, as the site of danger and endangerment, may be read as part of a larger ambivalence towards femininity and the female body. The contradiction of femininity is shown through Bella's position as simultaneously in-danger and danger causing. Bella's fragile body, rather than Edward's potential violence, are presented as problematic:

He moves his icy palm to rest against my cheek. 'If I was too hasty ... if for one second I wasn't paying enough attention, I could reach out, meaning to touch your

¹²² Bordo, *Unbearable Weight*, 169-170.

face, and crush your skull by mistake. You don't realise how incredibly breakable you are. I can never, never afford to lose any kind of control when I'm with you.¹²³

Edward's potentially violent power and Bella's fragility can be read as a manifestation of gendered inequalities in discourses such as gothic feminism and cultural feminism that emphasise the vulnerable position of woman in patriarchal culture as a means of managing and navigating this culture. Bella uses the key strategy of gothic feminism: the elimination of the female body, imagined as "a tomb, a stinking mass of death and decay, a site of vulnerability and horror."¹²⁴ Taking a phenomenological approach, Simone de Beauvoir in her seminal feminist philosophical work *The Second Sex* (1949) explores the material reality of life as a woman in the context of a culture that relies on a division between male and female that is mapped onto a hierarchical self:Other dynamic. Beauvoir foregrounds materiality in her understanding of the relationship between the self and the body:

to be present in the world implies strictly that there exists a body which is at once a material thing in the world and a point of view towards the world.¹²⁵

This existence is shown to be circumscribed for women by mythologies of femininity that are conflicting and limiting. Linking the "mysterious and threatened reality known as femininity" as something outside of but necessary to a masculine norm, Beauvoir writes that:

A man never begins by presenting himself as an individual of a certain sex; it goes without saying that he is a man.... The relation of the two sexes is not quite like that of two electrical poles, for man represents both the positive and the neutral... whereas woman represents only the negative, defined by limiting criteria, without reciprocity.¹²⁶

Highlighting the invisible nature of the masculine as the norm, Beauvoir is able to show that "there is an absolute human type, the masculine. Woman has ovaries, a uterus: these peculiarities imprison her in her subjectivity, circumscribe her within the limits of her own

¹²³ Meyer, *Twilight*, 271.

¹²⁴ Hoeveler, *Gothic Feminism*, 245.

¹²⁵ Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 39.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 15.

nature.”¹²⁷ This idea can be seen underlying the logic of fertility in relation to male and female bodies:

Vampires couldn't have children... Except that... well, there was a difference... human women's bodies had to change to bear children. The constant change of a monthly cycle for one thing, and then the bigger changes needed to accommodate a growing child...

And human men – well, they pretty much stayed the same from puberty to death. I remembered a random bit of trivia, gleaned from who knows where: Charlie Chaplin was in his seventies when he fathered his youngest child. Men had no such thing as child-bearing years or cycles of fertility.¹²⁸

The difference highlighted here between male and female bodies is their relationship to bodily change. The human female body is marked by “constant change”, while the human male body is imagined as unchanging. Somehow nature and its cycles are connected to the female body and its ‘natural’ cycles of menstruation, pregnancy, and eventual menopause, while the male body is presented as static and stable in comparison. Change means not only fertility cycles, but also ageing and death. Bella feels herself imprisoned in her female body and limited by its nature. Here she is the human to Edward's superhuman. This dynamic is not so far removed from Beauvoir's descriptions of the invisible body of men:

“Man superbly ignores the fact that his anatomy also includes glands, such as the testicles, and that they secrete hormones. He thinks of his body as a direct and normal connection with the world, which he believes he apprehends objectively, whereas he regards the body of woman as a hindrance, a prison, weighed down by everything peculiar to it.”¹²⁹

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Meyer, *Breaking Dawn*, 126.

¹²⁹ Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 15.

Perspectives on Maternity

You get married and you will have children. You have children and you will die.¹³⁰

In this quote, Stephenie Meyer describes marriage and childbearing in the “terrifying world”¹³¹ of Jane Austen and her contemporaries. Meyer says she used “Bella’s pregnancy and childbirth... [as] a way to ... explore th[e] concept of what childbirth used to be.”¹³²

There was a time when childbirth was possibly the most terrifying thing you could do in your life, and you were literally looking death in the face when you went ahead with it.¹³³

While maternal and infant mortality rates are vastly improved in Western countries since the early 19th century, the terror of childbirth is still relevant. The sense of “looking death in the face” or being “ripped apart”¹³⁴ continues to resonate. Writing about 21st century parturition, Sarah Blackwood describes “gestating and giving birth [as]... dangerous physical pursuits, no matter how empowered a woman is.”¹³⁵ Rebecca Kukla, in her study of present-day medical and cultural practices surrounding pregnancy and maternity, writes: “The healthy self... inhabits its own body reasonably comfortably, without radical alienation or uncanniness.” She argues that in western culture, “new mothers work hard to build or rebuild such a healthy embodied self.”¹³⁶

Thus, a potential for radical alienation or uncanniness exists at the site of the pregnant, birthing, and mothering female body in western culture. This potential is dramatically heightened in the Gothic mode. Horror scholar Stacey Abbott has said: “There is something gothic about pregnancy. It’s natural, but it’s uncanny.”¹³⁷ Sarah Blackwood reiterates this, describing *Breaking Dawn*’s:

¹³⁰ Meyer, *Official Illustrated Guide*, 36-37.

¹³¹ Ibid., 37.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Ibid., 36.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Blackwood, “Our Bella, Ourselves”.

¹³⁶ Kukla, *Mass Hysteria*, 189.

¹³⁷ Abbott, quoted in British Film Institute, Twitter post, January 10, 2014.
<https://twitter.com/bfi/status/421720463119630336>

representation of pregnancy and birth [as]... somehow real ... Bella's gestation of the half-human, half-vampire foetus proceeds along nightmare-dream logic that will be familiar to anyone who has ever been pregnant.¹³⁸

Bella's birth scene is a horrific version of a caesarean section, an experience of childbirth which Emily Martin found presents a heightened sense of alienation in her study of women's reproduction in American culture:

The separation of self from body that women describe when they talk about menstruation, menopause, and birth is present to an extreme degree when they describe caesarean section.¹³⁹

The representation of death in childbirth need not correspond only to the physical act of giving birth. Stephenie Meyer describes writing as a means of rebuilding her 'self' following early motherhood:

It was a creative outlet that was the best one I've ever found.... Being a mom, especially when kids are younger... you have to be about *them* every minute. And a lot of who Stephenie is was slipping away.¹⁴⁰

The twinned issues of equality and difference, that have charged much feminist thought, are particularly conspicuous in relation to maternity. Equality and difference with regard to gender can be found on all sides of social and political debates. Conservative ideologies may at one time support equality, in this context often manifesting as a dismissal of women's lived realities, while at other times support ideas of difference, typically when assigning certain types of labour or behaviour expectations and limitations on women. Liberal and radical feminisms likewise have drawn on both ideologies of gender equality and gender difference in the heterogeneous quest for liberation. The entanglement of equality and difference feminisms can be most clearly seen in the area of feminist theories of embodiment. Though theorists from diverse backgrounds may advocate a moving on or away, in their very different ways, from the binary structures and either/or thinking of the western patriarchal tradition, the dual of equality and difference, and the many complexities caught up in these uneasy oppositions are still pertinent today. Arguably, they

¹³⁸ Blackwood, "Our Bella, Ourselves."

¹³⁹ Martin, *The Woman in the Body*, 79.

¹⁴⁰ Meyer, *Official Illustrated Guide*, 9.

are mobilised in their most contradictory forms in the area of popular culture. Tensions between equality and difference based understandings of subjectivity can be seen in the representation of maternity in *Twilight*. By maternity I use Cristina Mazzoni's definition as referring to "early motherhood to include pregnancy, birth, postpartum, and feeding".¹⁴¹ Details of everyday motherhood and its effects are woven into the origins of the story. Meyer's initial reason for writing the dream was so that she would not forget it, attributing a failing memory to the onslaught of motherhood:

I had recently started realizing that my memory was going, and that I could no longer remember whom I had said something to yesterday. My youngest was just passing one, and the next one was two, and I had an almost-five-year-old. So my brains were like oatmeal - there was nothing left. And so I knew I was going to forget this story!¹⁴²

Meyer knows the exact day she started "being a writer" because of such details:

I wrote down the dream on June second. I had it all marked on my calendar: the first day of my summer diet; the first day of the swim lessons.¹⁴³

Even the framing story of *Twilight's* production brings with it an understanding of maternity that involves a certain disintegration of the pre-maternal self "there was nothing left" and the rhythms of domestic life as a mother. A sense of loss regarding mind and body in maternity are thus part of the origin story. Kukla's work on maternity demonstrates that:

During their pregnancies, contemporary North American women are for the most part treated as having unruly bodies – bodies rendered transparent so that their insides can be properly displaced, publicized, and disciplined in line with the common good.¹⁴⁴

While, "after they give birth, these same women are asked to give up their bodily boundaries once again, so as to form an extended romantic unity with the infant."¹⁴⁵ Kukla highlights the "ironic reversal" of the denial "that the foetus is part of the woman's body

¹⁴¹ Mazzoni, *Maternal Impressions*, 2.

¹⁴² Meyer, *Official Illustrated Guide*, 4.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹⁴⁴ Kukla, *Mass Hysteria*, 220.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 221.

while it is inside her and insist[ance] on the infant being part of her body once it is outside of her.”¹⁴⁶ Given that matricide has been the “Western, culturally sanctioned means”¹⁴⁷ of achieving personhood, used even before the ‘I’ emerges in language to pit foetus against mother as a ‘person’ who can reasonably be attributed comparable status, the difficulties of a healthy embodiment of maternal subjectivity are great. Within the narrative the gothic representation of maternity magnifies this sense of disintegration displaying certain aspects of maternity to excess. The focus here is on the conflicted and contradictory representation of maternity in *Twilight*. Interacting with, knowing, and representing the pregnant and birthing body are flagged as problematic within the narrative in a number of ways. There is an abrupt shift in narratorial voice from Bella’s to Jacob’s. There is a rupture and fold in the narrative at this point. Other than flash-forwards at the opening of each book, the narrative moves forward in time in a linear fashion. When Bella takes back up narration after Jacob there is a doubling back in time. The use of gothic horror in a supernatural romance that otherwise places little emphasis on horror, outside of the female characters’ back stories, also marks the passage as significant.

The first scenes of visceral horror take place in *Twilight* during Bella’s pregnancy and culminate in her childbirth / transformation. The pregnancy and childbirth are depicted in graphic and gory terms, both in the novels and on screen. Though Meyer has spoken of her distaste for horror and her avoidance of ‘R’ rated films, she indulges in a description of pregnancy and childbirth that revels in the corporeal excesses of horror. Motherhood is presented as at once fundamental to female subjectivity and antithetical to a subject position. Female generative power is depicted as fraught with danger. Meyer has said that her inspiration for the violent birth scene in *Breaking Dawn* came from an understanding of birth as potentially life-threatening. This understanding is placed in a historical context by Meyer, but may be read as life-threatening both in a real and a symbolic way, as birth threatens both the life of mother and child, and the boundaries of subjects. Using narrative and generic changes, *Twilight* dramatises a rupture in subjectivity and a simultaneous collapsing of and dislocation of the body and self during maternity. It gives an impression, albeit in a fantasy form, of aspects of the dislocation, divisiveness, and risks of maternity for subjectivity in a patriarchal culture.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Wieland, *Undead Mother*, 13.

When Bella becomes pregnant, we lose her voice. The young man/wolf, Jacob, takes over, witnessing Bella's maternity. In this sense the narrative does not move substantially away from Bella's story, but we see it from another character's point of view. As the teller of her own story, Bella is silenced. This connects with a long association of maternity with silence in western culture. In the narratorial shift, Bella also becomes looked at, showing the increased surveillance and observation of the female body during pregnancy - both in a medical context and in an everyday increase in the body's visibility and availability for comment, judgement, and assessment. It can also be read as an exaggeration of an increased awareness within the maternal self of the body as something other than 'self' and a displacement of 'normal' operations of thought and bodily experience. Rebecca Kukla writes: "Becoming a new mother calls each of the dimensions of embodied health into question and changes its contours. Indeed, new motherhood may seem like an insuperable threat to some of the dimensions of integrity."¹⁴⁸ In so far as gender has a culturally constructed relationship to a biological feature: the ability to gestate, the reproductive body is placed at the centre of essentialised models of female personhood. While for men there can be a split between mind and body, for women, in this paradigm, they *are* their bodies. Men may maintain this split precisely because of the cordoning-off of the body to the realm of femininity. The role of baby-making is lauded as a suitable and worthy endeavour for women by a culture that needs to uphold gender divisions, but it is based on a separation that abjects the maternal. In this way what is so vital for women in *Twilight* (motherhood) is at the same time positioned as horrific. This reflects a culture that reifies whilst also denigrating maternity. The disgust Beauvoir shows towards the female body's capacity for pregnancy reflects this understanding of pregnancy as a threat to the integrity of the person. This threat is displayed in the narrative shift from Bella's point of view to Jacob's. A difficulty with pregnancy and subjectivity is conveyed by this shift.

From the young werewolf Jacob's point of view, the reader may take up a more distanced position as an audience of horror. The film version does not highlight the change in perspective as clearly as the books, partly because the first person perspective cannot be as sustained in Hollywood film and so the viewer is always already in a position to view the heroine. Barbara Creed writes that:

¹⁴⁸ Kukla, *Mass Hysteria*, 189.

Viewing the horror film signifies a desire not only for perverse pleasure (confronting sickening, horrific images, being filled with terror/desire for the undifferentiated) but also a desire, having taken pleasure in perversity, to throw up, throw out, eject the object (from the safety of the spectator's seat).¹⁴⁹

Through Jacob's eyes, we share in his disgust and desire from his 'safe' vantage point. Abjection, a potent mix of desire and revulsion, are to the fore. Viewing Bella's body during pregnancy and giving birth is disturbing for Jacob. The conflict of abjection is mapped onto Jacob's sexual longing for Bella, his hatred/jealousy of Edward, and his revulsion toward the monstrous and unnatural creation brought about by human-vampire reproduction. The result is a highly erotically charged description of a violent and horrific childbirth:

Bella's body, streaming with red, started to twitch Her lips tasted like blood.... I heard the soft, wet sound of the scalpel across her stomach. More blood dripping to the floor.

The next sound jolted through me, unexpected, terrifying. Like metal being shredded apart. The sound brought back the fight in the clearing so many months ago, the tearing sound of the newborns being ripped apart. I glanced over to see Edward's face pressed against the bulge. Vampire teeth - a surefire way to cut through vampire skin.

I shuddered as I blew more air into Bella.¹⁵⁰

According to Kristeva, "Fear of the archaic mother turns out to be essentially fear of her generative power. It is this power, a dreaded one, that patrilineal filiation has the burden of subduing."¹⁵¹ Jacob fears the unborn child is not a child but a monster, leaving Bella free to occupy the opposite position of assurance in the goodness of the unborn, the only explanation for her self-destructive 'choices.' In this way the fear of the 'archaic mother,' even when seen from Jacob's perspective, is placed within a feminine navigation of maternity. The maternal horror depicted in *Breaking Dawn* draws on Roman Polanski's seminal monstrous pregnancy horror film *Rosemary's Baby* (1968) based on Ira Levin's novel

¹⁴⁹ Creed, "Horror and the Monstrous Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis," 48.

¹⁵⁰ Meyer, *Breaking Dawn*, 352.

¹⁵¹ Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 77.

of the same name (1967). “Though the film is certainly an odious fable of parturition,” as Lucy Fischer notes, “it is also a skewed “documentary” of the societal and personal turmoil that has regularly attended female reproduction.”¹⁵² Reflecting the “horrifying status of motherhood in American patriarchal culture,” yet also read as an “utterance of women’s private experience of pregnancy”, *Rosemary’s Baby* is an important reference point in interpreting *Breaking Dawn*’s depiction of pregnancy and birth.¹⁵³ While Bella’s vampire existence is based on the complete abjection of the maternal body, it can also be read as a specifically maternal fantasy of bodily control, separateness, stasis, and reassurance. Blackwood writes:

Gestation, birth, and motherhood are gothic emotional and physical states in which many of one’s most carefully considered intellectual stances and commitment to autonomy are challenged and often dismantled. Even more importantly, these are topics not much talked about in young adult fiction aimed at teenaged girls.... ommit[ing] a major aspect of women’s lives.¹⁵⁴

Jacob sees Bella as an innocent who has been preyed on by the monstrous Cullens. From this point of view, Jacob plays a confused and suspicious witness of monstrous pregnancy and birth. Though Jacob is male, his perspective is at times aligned with the feminine due to his shape-shifting nature. The animal like woman, according to Creed, “has been designated ‘other’, existing in a troubled relationship to the rule of law and language”.¹⁵⁵ Though innocent, Bella is potentially monstrous through maternal ignorance. From Jacob’s point of view Bella cannot see what is plain to him that the creature she is bearing is a monster. As such, she is the unwitting mechanism for monstrosity to emerge. Echoes of grotesque pregnancy and monstrous fetuses in David Cronenberg’s *The Brood* (1979) and *Scanners* (1981) may be noted in Bella’s horrific pregnancy involving a supernaturally communicative fetus. This communication is figured as horrific by Jacob but miraculous by Bella and Edward. After the birth Jacob, along with everyone else, comes to see Bella’s offspring as a beautiful and gifted child in whose upbringing he is highly invested as he has “imprinted” on her and thus is irrevocably bound to her. At this stage, the border between Bella and her child are shored up, their bodies whole and separated. Despite the ultimately

¹⁵² Fischer, *Cinematernity*, 75.

¹⁵³ Berenstein, “Mommie Dearest: *Aliens*, *Rosemary’s Baby* and Mothering”, 78.

¹⁵⁴ Blackwood, “Our Bella, Ourselves.”

¹⁵⁵ Creed, *Phallic Panic*, 24.

‘happy’ outcome of Bella’s pregnancy, the female body and its reproductive capabilities are presented as deeply threatening until childbirth is complete and the boundary between mother and child is secured through individual bodily integrity. As Barbara Creed states in her work on horror film, “that which crosses or threatens to cross [a] ‘border’ is abject.... Although the specific nature of the border changes from film to film, the function of the monstrous remains the same – to bring about an encounter between the symbolic order and that which threatens its stability.”¹⁵⁶ The border is positioned at the site of the maternal body from a feminine perspective in *Twilight*. Creed states, “in the horror film the ancient connection drawn between woman, womb and the monstrous is frequently invoked.”¹⁵⁷ The maternal is positioned as the aspect of femininity that prevents transcendence for women. The figuring of maternity as immanence involves a recapitulation of dualisms that underpin the functioning of patriarchal culture, but from the perspective of lived experience in the feminine. Where the male imaginary has been read as using the feminine as a symbolic space to project away his immanence, in *Twilight* the maternal is used as such a space for the feminine.

The homoerotic aspects of Jacob and Edward’s relationship, which are highlighted in an ironic fashion at other points in the films,¹⁵⁸ are downplayed in the film’s version of the birth scene as the voyeurism is removed. In the novel Jacob observes Edward turning an unconscious Bella into a vampire:

It was like he was kissing her, brushing his lips at her throat, at her wrists, into the crease at the inside of her arm. But I could hear the lush tearing of her skin as his teeth bit through, again and again, forcing venom into her system at as many points as possible. I saw his pale tongue sweep along the bleeding gashes ...¹⁵⁹

Catherine Keller writes in an article on the symbolic nature of the breast: “The very sacrality of the fantasy of the oral paradise of the Mother presents itself at the same time as a powerful taboo, as forbidden by the Father.”¹⁶⁰ In the film adaptation, Jacob leaves before the scene in which Edward bites various parts of Bella’s lifeless body. In both novel and film versions, the Father, Carlisle, who both Jacob and Edward respect, is notably

¹⁵⁶ Creed, *The Monstrous Feminine*, 11.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 43.

¹⁵⁸ See for example Edward’s comments about Jacob’s body in *New Moon* and the tent scene in *Eclipse*.

¹⁵⁹ Meyer, *Breaking Dawn*, 354-355.

¹⁶⁰ Keller, *Apocalypse Now and Then*, 157.

absent. In this sense, Jacob and Edward may be seen as transgressing in the absence of the father. As father figure and as a doctor, Carlisle is presented as the person who should oversee the proper care of Bella during birth. However, he is not present when Bella goes into sudden labour. Rosalie who has played the part of midwife through Bella's pregnancy, cannot help her during the birth either. In this there is a problematising of the split between so-called 'natural' processes and medicalised processes of maternity. The supernatural aspects of Bella's maternity enable the text to unsettle 'naturalness' from the maternal body but also to undermine medical attempts at containing, knowing, and thereby controlling the maternal body. The idea of a 'natural birth' in the context of Bella's vampire-human hybrid pregnancy becomes absurd, but so too does the possibility of competent medical assistance. The perceived dichotomy between 'home birth' and 'hospital birth' are also eroded, in the Cullen home, where Bella spends her pregnancy and labour. This house combines home and hospital setting, morphing between the two as required. Bella spends most of her time in the living room on the couch, with Rosalie close at hand to help her with mundane bodily issues such as eating. When things escalate, as when Bella's ribs break, Edward and Carlisle take over and the home is reconfigured to accommodate hospital equipment. Though in a domestic space, Bella is constantly monitored and Jacob sees that Bella downplays her pain and feigns being comfortable in order to be allowed to continue in the fashion she desires. From the earliest stages of pregnancy, Bella quickly becomes aware of potentially forceful impingement on her personal decision making processes by those closest to her: Edward wants her to abort the pregnancy, fearful for her life, as does Jacob and most of the Cullens. Their desire to end the pregnancy is presented as in Bella's own best interests, something she is perceived as temporarily incapable of acting upon herself. She makes an unlikely alliance with female vampire Rosalie in order to protect her desire to continue the pregnancy. Rosalie wants above all the baby to survive and so the pitting of interests of mother and child are set in terms of Edward/Jacob v Rosalie. The maternal subject sits somewhere in between. For Bella an awareness of foreclosed decision-making and increased interest and surveillance of her body mean she must exploit others' interpretations of her maternity in order to exercise choice. According to psychoanalytic theorist Bracha Ettinger:

The phallic imaginary mistakenly posits the pre-natal infant as a separate entity with a separate desire, so that anybody may make a claim to protecting it against the mother's desire.¹⁶¹

The pitting of pre-natal infant against pregnant mother is drawn on by those seeking to abort and preserve Bella's pregnancy. The conflict of interests between mother and unborn is heightened. The foetus is presented from Jacob's point of view as monstrous and predatory - a gothicised version of the 'unborn' that brings to its excessive conclusion the antagonism between mother and unborn inherent in strands of both pro-life and pro-choice discourses. The baby turns out to be anything but monstrous, which is a narrative means of supporting the 'pro-life' position, but the baby's normality cannot entirely erase the previous horror, rather it limits it as horror of the maternal body.

Barbara Creed, drawing on Kristeva's theories, writes:

abject things are those which highlight the 'fragility of the law' and which exist on the other side of the border which separates out the living subject from that which threatens its extinction.¹⁶²

Bella's birth scene makes the threat of maternity literal. Pregnancy and childbirth poses a threat to the life of the mother-to-be as a subject in a physical and symbolic sense. Subjectivity and maternity do not fit together in this model. Kristeva writes of maternity: "It happens, but I'm not there".¹⁶³ Lisa Baraitser, commenting on Kristeva's conception of maternity, shows that there is no unified maternal subject in her understanding of maternity: "no one is really 'present' ... to signify what is going on ... Neither subject nor object, the maternal body is the materialisation of the split subject, the subject that is both same and other."¹⁶⁴ *Breaking Dawn* manifests this problem in its handling of the heroine's pregnancy and childbirth, displaying the neither/nor/both subject and object of the maternal body. The only time we see an event from more than one perspective in *Twilight* is Bella's childbirth. In the 'fold' in the narrative, Bella's retelling of the birth scene, embodied maternal subjectivity is permitted to take voice. The feminist potential of presenting an embodied maternal subjectivity is ultimately foreclosed in the narrative, but

¹⁶¹ Ettinger, "Matrixial Gaze and Screen", 109.

¹⁶² Creed, "Horror and the Monstrous Feminine", 48.

¹⁶³ Kristeva, *Desire in Language*, 301.

¹⁶⁴ Baraitser, *Maternal Encounters*, 102.

not necessarily in the interpretive process. Exploring this aspect of Meyer's narrative draws attention to the possibility of a subjectivity that is based in the contradictions of maternal relations of self and other, rather than based on the logic of abjection of the maternal in the process of subject forming. From Jacob's point of view, Bella was unconscious; Bella's retelling shows that she was present even during those times:

I kept pushing against the black, though, almost a reflex. I wasn't trying to lift it. I was just resisting. Not allowing it to crush me completely. I wasn't Atlas, and the black felt as heavy as a planet; I couldn't shoulder it. All I could do was not be entirely obliterated.¹⁶⁵

Jacob's surname is Black and so Bella's "pushing against the black" can be read as a refusal of his narrative of her childbirth as well as the experience of the pain of childbirth. This speaks to the ambivalent and contradictory experiences of women surrounding birth and motherhood, as can be seen in the variety of interpretations of *Twilight* itself, including the following description of *Twilight* by scholar Sarah Blackwood as:

a masterful deployment of metaphor that somehow nails the simultaneous horror and beauty of gestation and birth.¹⁶⁶

Blackwood, drawing on personal experience, writes that "gestation and giving birth are dangerous physical pursuits, no matter how empowered a woman is..."¹⁶⁷ Having imagined a 'natural' 'empowering' birth, Blackwood's experience of a difficult labour with complications requiring medical intervention makes her reading of Bella's experience one that resonates. The provision of two versions of the childbirth scene highlights a dual aspect of pregnancy, maternity, and motherhood. It dramatises the beauty and horror associated with birth, and the idealization and denigration of maternity in western culture. In this way, Bella finds herself in a difficult position. She seeks to transcend the kind of bodily concerns epitomised by the pregnant body by becoming a vampire, but she is a woman and as such must contend in some way with both the horror and the necessity of maternity in the system. Meyer resolves this conflict by making Bella's pregnancy and birth function as a kind of cleansing defilement.

¹⁶⁵ Meyer, *Breaking Dawn*, 374.

¹⁶⁶ Blackwood, "Our Bella, Ourselves."

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

The idea of abjection is dominant in *Twilight*'s rendering of pregnancy and childbirth. Kristeva's theory of abjection forms part of a larger conception of the "subject-in-process" or the "subject-on-trial". In her theory abjection is an on-going process that the subject is involved in in order to maintain the fragile borders of the self, the subject in language, the "I". Pregnancy and childbirth may be seen as an exaggerated or heightened version of femininity, one in which the conflicts of discourses of patriarchal culture are the most difficult to resolve. In this way pregnancy and childbirth may be read as a kind of break or rupture point with regard to feminine subjectivity. During pregnancy and childbirth, femininity and maternity reorient and, as Lisa Baraister has shown in her study of the maternal subject, femininity is imagined in relation to maternity as opposites: on the one hand it can be seen as a now-lost realm of unity and solidity in comparison to the rocky-ground of the subject in maternity, or it can be seen as the true Other, now solidified or petrified in the experience of maternity. Kukla states in her work on maternity:

"All romanticism and moral analysis aside, the maternal body incarnates one human at the beginning of pregnancy and two at the end of it, and it is by no means clear how to tell a coherent story of this passage... the story of this passage from one to two is a complex and murky story to discern, involving negotiations of boundaries around and within persons that are contestable at each stage"¹⁶⁸

Pregnancy is entirely at odds with individualism in that the pregnant woman exists outside of its logic, indeed individualist thought never took into account this most fundamental category that is the beginning of everyone. Irigaray presents the pregnant woman as "neither one nor two."¹⁶⁹ "Rigorously speaking, she cannot be identified either as one person, or as two. She resists all adequate definition."¹⁷⁰ "The pregnant woman can be a challenge", as Tyler argues, to the "forgetting of origins, for she embodies gestation and is a sign of, or even for, the absence of maternal genealogies of thought."¹⁷¹ Interacting with, knowing, and representing the pregnant and birthing body are flagged as problematic in the novel and films *Breaking Dawn*. Vampires may drink blood, but when pregnant human Bella drinks blood it is the culmination of boundary crossings that brings on her labour, the most horrific scene in *Twilight*. Blood-drinking signals the potential monstrosity of Bella's

¹⁶⁸ Kukla, *Mass Hysteria*, 4.

¹⁶⁹ Irigaray, *This Sex Which is Not One*, 26.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Tyler, *Reframing Pregnant Embodiment*, 294.

child, drawing on various depictions of ‘unnatural’ maternal appetites in monstrous reproduction, including Rosemary’s consumption of raw-meat in *Rosemary’s Baby* (1967), Robin’s cravings for raw-meat during her alien-human pregnancy in the television series *V* (1984-1985) and her attempt to eat a mouse in the remake (2009), and Cordelia’s ingestion of pigs’ blood during a demonic pregnancy on *Angel* (1999-2004). Miri Rozmarin posits “unique relations between subjectivity and Otherness that underlie maternal subjectivity”.¹⁷² As such, Rozmarin advocates a cautious embrace of silence with regard to maternal subjectivity. Not the silence of the abject, but a silence that speaks to the unsayable, the ‘more than’ quality of maternity. She suggests that ‘outside of languageness’ can be reconfigured as potential. In the exchange between subject and Other, assuming the Other is a subject rather than having them prove themselves one by speaking, allows the silence of certain experiences space. The unnarratable can then exist alongside the told story, the spoken experience, the voiced. Drawing on Luce Irigaray’s theories of the maternal subject, Rozmarin suggests a space of dialogue between self and Other, not however the Hegelian dialogue of duality, but rather what she describes as ‘witnessing’.

On one level, Bella’s achievement of her desire to be a vampire via her pregnant and birthing body might be read as a synthesis of the needs of the unborn infant and the mother-to-be. Renesmee is born and Bella is reborn. However this interpretation is undermined by the abjection of the maternal body and by Renesmee’s ability to communicate even in the womb. The baby is imagined and represented as separate within Bella’s body. This separation is made manifest in the granite amniotic sack.

...The commodification and sexual objectification of the maternal body, a subject matter deeply taboo as recently as the 1990s, is now routine to the point of banality. In short, the maternal has never been so very public, so hyper visible, but the wall of commentary, which surrounds the maternal and the images that represent it, is deeply incoherent.¹⁷³

Deeply incoherent discourses of the maternal body are presented in dramatic fashion in *Twilight* and are not resolved by the embodied knowledge brought about by maternity or its radical epistemological possibilities. Rather, after the rupture and fold of *Twilight*’s representation of pregnancy and childbirth, there is a flight from maternity toward a

¹⁷² Rozmarin, “Maternal Silence”, 1.

¹⁷³ Tyler, “introduction: birth”, 5.

fantasy of the neutral (male) body entirely in control, everything that the pregnant and newly maternal body is not. The challenges for a healthy maternal self, described by Kukla, are manifested in Meyer's representation of parturition, but disappear in Bella's rebirth as a vampire. So too does the potential for maternal experience to provide alternative ways of imagining self and Other relations, and in so doing imagining alternative routes to subjectivity. In *Twilight*, the conflicts of the relationship between mother and child from the mother's perspective are contained in the pregnancy and childbirth period. Bella's post-birth body is the opposite of the leaky, porous, and still boundary-confused embodiment experienced by many new mothers.¹⁷⁴ The only hint of the abject that remains is in Bella's reaction to her new mirror image. Adapting Rosemary's reaction to her demon baby – "What have you done to its eyes?"¹⁷⁵ – Bella's admiration of her new image stops short upon noticing her own eyes:

"The eyes?" I whispered, unwilling to say *my eyes*. "How long?"¹⁷⁶

As a newborn vampire, Bella's eyes glow red because her system is still full of her own human blood. Once this blood is used up and a vegetarian diet embarked upon, her eyes turn gold. According to Kristeva, what is abject, "the jettisoned object, is radically excluded and draws... toward the place where meaning collapses."¹⁷⁷ The abject for Bella is the ageing and maternal body. As a human she is in an on-going process of abjection, one that is finally achieved through the complete abjection of pregnancy, birth, and death. Her human body is then finally radically excluded. Kristeva writes of the ways in which abjection is ritualised and codified in religious systems using concepts of defilement, taboo, and sin. Through the maternal as sacrifice, Bella overcomes her body and transcends to a vampire existence free from the abject. This state however is also one of psychic death; abjection is an on-going process that can never be completed. The draw of the abject "toward the place where meaning collapses" is exorcised during Bella's pregnancy and her abdication of a subject position, a comprehensible meaning making position. Her silence signals the dropping off of meaning. The unrepresentable is found, as is overwhelmingly the case in the western imagination, at the site of the maternal body. In order to position the maternal experience, not alone the body, as an ultimately cleansing sacrifice, *Twilight*

¹⁷⁴ Martin, *The Woman in the Body*.

¹⁷⁵ *Rosemary's Baby*, dir. Roman Polanski.

¹⁷⁶ Meyer, *Breaking Dawn*, 403.

¹⁷⁷ Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 2.

draws on a variety of ideas related to pregnancy and maternity that are often at odds with one another. It highlights contemporary conflicts surrounding maternity and the inadequacy of those models of personhood in accounting for maternal subjectivity, and thus the difficulties of articulating maternal experience in a way that restores the relationship between body and thought, a relationship that is as feminist writers Lisa Baraitser and Imogen Tyler argue, at the heart of the maternal and key to dislodging the continuing polarisation of the maternal in idealised and denigrated forms.¹⁷⁸

Conclusion

Wieland argues that the matricidal means of achieving personhood results in “a rigidly divided psyche where persecution reigns. The price of this has proved very high – for the individual, for the culture, and especially for women.”¹⁷⁹ In exploring pregnancy and childbirth in a gothic form, *Twilight* may be read as negotiating a fundamental contradiction in western culture: an opposition between the maternal female body and personhood and the simultaneous idea that female fulfilment is based on maternity, thus making fulfilled embodied female personhood impossible. The narrative rupture of *Twilight*’s turn to horror to present Bella’s pregnancy, the loss of the maternal subject’s voice and doubling back to regain that voice briefly before expunging the maternal body permanently, are read here as symptomatic of substantive cultural contradictions surrounding 21st century womanhood. The conflicts between maternity and subjectivity displayed in Meyer’s work present a heightened version of conflicts present in American culture. These contradictions are most acute in the text’s representation of abject human and perfected vampire bodies. The impossibility of maternal genealogy suffuses the text’s representation of mother-daughter relations. Potential for alternative imaginings are glimpsed in Bella’s dream of her grandmother and in her brief narration of maternity before being lost in the heroine’s fear of and escape from the female body. Hoeveler’s work on gothic women’s writing identified the “core ideological fantasies that animate and motivate ... the masquerade of gothic feminism... [as] the dream of rising above the corrupt body, the dream of becoming masculinized – all mind, all reason.”¹⁸⁰ By the end of

¹⁷⁸ Tyler and Baraitser, *Private View, Public Birth*, 22.

¹⁷⁹ Wieland, *Undead Mother*, 14.

¹⁸⁰ Hoeveler, *Gothic Feminism*, 245.

Twilight Bella lives in a world of sameness and stasis, experiencing a never-ending happiness in an angelic vampire body cleansed of all associations of the abject.

Though only glimpsed briefly, the effort to present a maternal subject and the manifest difficulty of doing so is, nonetheless, in itself disruptive and potentially subversive. The upset of the narrative portrayal of pregnancy and childbirth is demonstrated in the divided response of fans of the series. Meyer was “aware that it was taking Bella in a new direction that wasn’t as relatable for a lot of people.”¹⁸¹ She “knew that it was going to be a problem for some readers.”¹⁸² It is worth noting that Meyer originally wrote the story of Bella’s pregnancy in a work called *Forever Dawn* for an audience of herself and her sister alone. In this version, Bella’s perspective is maintained throughout. It is telling that in a private work Meyer could maintain a maternal subject position in the narrative. While this perspective would be very interesting to analyse in comparison to *Breaking Dawn*, the use of shifting perspectives in the published work better captures the simultaneously alienating and embodied experience of maternity in Western culture and the difficulties of maintaining maternal subjectivity in publically presented forms.

¹⁸¹ Meyer, *Official Illustrated Guide*, 37.

¹⁸² Ibid.

CHAPTER 4: LIFE-CHALLENGED INDIVIDUALS

Intersectional Identities, Bloody Bodies, and the South in *True Blood*

When you can assume that your audience holds the same beliefs as you do, you can relax a little and use more normal means of talking to it; when you have to assume that it does not, then you have to make your vision apparent by shock- to the hard of hearing you shout, and for the almost-blind, you draw large and startling figures.¹

Putting the 'natural' in 'supernatural'

Stephenie Meyer was “more drawn to superheroes than ...to vampires” and her vision of the vampire reflects this by foregrounding their ‘super’ human qualities in opposition to a conception of the ‘natural’ that connects it with death and decay.² Alan Ball’s representation also draws on connections between the natural, death, and decay but his vampires do not escape these elements, rather they embody such links to excess, also emphasizing the associations of sex and violence. Interested in “approaching the supernatural not as being something that exists outside of nature, but something that is more deeply rooted in nature,” *True Blood*’s vampires take Harris’ vision of the supernatural as part of the mundane and the everyday and develop the uncanny aspects of the natural.³ Depicting the “physiology for the fangs”⁴ of the vampire as functioning “like rattlesnake fangs”, the vampire becomes “a deeper manifestation of nature.”⁵

¹ O’Connor, “The Fiction Writer and His Country,” 805-6.

² Otto, “*Twilight* Author Stephenie Meyer talks about the Movie.”

³ Shadaliza, “Alan Ball talks about Anna and ‘his’ Vampires.”

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

When we thought of vampire representations, we also thought of nature as a predator, as a supernatural force, and as a parasite. ...decaying animals, spliced in carnivorous plants, and even included prehistoric swamp creatures...⁶

The Louisiana setting and the “presence of nature, the humidity, the heat, the bugs” contribute to an impression of an inherent threat associated with nature that is magnified in its vampires.⁷ Neither *Twilight* nor *True Blood*’s vampires “necessarily look like bikers or leather people or goths.”⁸ Meyer’s vampires look like hyper-white supermodels, while Ball wanted his vampires to “look like people. Because in the world of Charlaine’s books, vampires are like humans. There’s a lot of diversity.”⁹ While Bella finds in Edward and later in her own metamorphosis to vampire an ideal bounded white heteronormative ‘masculine’ body made of stone, the allure of the vampires of *True Blood* is quite different. Unlike the hard, dry, stone-cold bodies of *Twilight*, the vampires in *True Blood* have bodies that are excessively porous, always on the verge of disintegrating into a mucousy, bloody, steaming mess. While vampires in *True Blood* have a preference for same or opposite sex partners, they are polyamorous with most vampires open to a variety of sexual encounters. In Ball’s vision, “Vampires are sex.”¹⁰ “There are bodily fluids exchanged. There’s a cathartic, frenzied physical moment.”¹¹ While Bella finds in her transformation to vampire an eternal life free from the terrors of decay and death, Sookie may find no such escape in the world of vampires. Vampires only heighten the horrors and delights of the human body in *True Blood*. The Cullens physically emit light and are imagined as forces of rationality and reason, perfectly controlling their desire for blood and living a ‘vegetarian’ lifestyle. In *True Blood* the heroine Sookie is the light source, while vampires are beings who must sleep under soil during daylight hours only coming out at night. In this way, though they are romance interests and continue the ‘domestication’ of the vampire, in *True Blood* they are partially returned to the realms of darkness associated with pre-*Twilight* vampires.

I always choose to look, as much as one can, at the supernatural not being something that exists outside of nature, but a deeper, fundamental heart of nature that perhaps

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Grigoriadis, “The Joy of Vampire Sex.”

¹¹ Shadailza, “Alan Ball talks about Anna and ‘his’ Vampires.”

humans ... have lost touch with. It's a more primal thing than perhaps we are attuned to in our modern, self-aware way of life.¹²

Ball's version of the supernatural owes something to Freud's less popular theory of the uncanny, not as the return of the repressed but the return of primitive beliefs:

Today we no longer believe in them, having surmounted such modes of thought. Yet we do not feel entirely secure in these new convictions; the old ones live on in us, on the look-out for confirmation.¹³

As a critique of the "modern, self-aware way of life" or the self-congratulatory idea of it, *True Blood* demonstrates the illusion of self-awareness of modern culture. The vampire works in *True Blood* as an embodiment of primal forces exaggerating and revealing basic human desires for sex, violence, love, and death. This works as part of a larger interest in exploring selfhood in the series. While *Twilight* presented a journey from the problems of the female body to an idealised "clean and proper" body through the abjection of the maternal body, *True Blood* displays the violence of abjection and Othering and the ultimate fallacy of the quest for a solid or pure self. The series is presented as an exploration of the vulnerability of the psyche to invariably failing means of denying this vulnerability by escaping the self or Othering aspects of the self. These processes are found in religion, sex, drugs, cults, and local communities in the series. Read as such, *True Blood* may be seen as a critique of *Twilight*'s fantasy of escape from the vulnerable self. This chapter shows how a celebration of individualism nonetheless takes place as a side-effect of *True Blood*'s distrust of group dynamics and identity based on communal belief systems.

This chapter examines the television series and its representation of subjectivity. *True Blood* has been positioned in previous chapters as sharing a cultural space with *Twilight* and its construction of subjectivity is read in light of this. Alan Ball and Charlaine Harris' versions of the vampire romance are, on the whole, aligned to a more liberal political ethos and worldview than that espoused by *Twilight*. The absence of political comment in *Twilight* is contrasted with an overt and explicit political and social commentary in Ball and Harris' texts, particularly obvious in *True Blood*'s pervasive references to current affairs and contemporary political personalities and events. This mode of address and the multi-

¹² Lacob, "Inside 'True Blood's Fourth Season.'"

¹³ Freud, "The Uncanny", 154.

perspectival narrative of a television drama series allow for the exploration of a variety of identities and categories of difference and their intersections. This chapter shows how feminist theories of intersectionality may be noted in *True Blood's* representation of difference and identity politics. The chapter suggests that the Southern setting and the use of a tradition of Southern Gothic work engender an engagement with problematic histories of gender, race, class, and sexuality. Following discussion of this tradition, the role of religion in the image of the South and its use in *True Blood* is considered.

Ruddell and Cherry describe the Gothic atmosphere of *True Blood* as a hybrid, "one that borrows from a Southern Gothic milieu and melds it together with the conventions of the popular Gothic vampire".¹⁴ The Southern Gothic genre can encompass both the supernatural, most famously shown in Anne Rice and Poppy Z. Brite's "homoerotic, ... rock 'n' roll vampire" tales, also set in Louisiana, and the realistic, sometimes referred to as the Southern Grotesque, a peculiarly American take on the Gothic epitomised by writers such as William Faulkner and Flannery O'Connor amongst others. Dorothy Allison, writing in this realistic Southern Grotesque tradition, described the southern literary tradition as: "a lyrical tradition.¹⁵ Language. Iconoclastic, outrageous as hell, levelled with humour. Yankees do it, but Southerners do it more. It's the grotesque."¹⁶ This tradition is one begun by Edgar Allan Poe and frequently associated with the American South. It adapts the British Gothic tradition in its move away from the strictly supernatural towards a focus on the horror of everyday life and the monstrous in human rather than supernatural characters. It "appropriates elements of the traditional Gothic, combines them with the particular concerns of the American South, and is characterised by an emphasis on the grotesque, the macabre and, very often the violent" according to Punter and Byron's work on the Gothic genre.¹⁷ The particular concerns of the American South are not easily delineated as the concerns stem from within the South and without, as well as from evolving historical, social, political, and cultural contexts and agendas. Punter and Byron write that "madness, decay and despair, and the continuing pressures of the past upon the present, particularly with respect to the lost ideals of a dispossessed Southern aristocracy and to the continuance of racial hostilities" are central to the depiction of the

¹⁴ Ruddell and Cherry, "More than Cold and Heartless: The Southern Gothic Milieu of *True Blood*", 39.

¹⁵ Brite, *Love in Vein*, viii.

¹⁶ Megan, "Moving toward Truth: An Interview with Dorothy Allison." 81.

¹⁷ Punter and Byron, *The Gothic*, 116-117.

region in Southern Gothic.¹⁸ The South has long been a region that has fascinated the rest of America and must be viewed not simply as a geographical location, though geography is of great importance, but as many ‘Souths’, performing different functions for various interested parties both politically and culturally. Certainly literature and popular culture have played an important role in both representing and mediating the South’s history and in shaping it. Upon meeting Harriet Beecher Stowe the author of the influential *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* serialised in 1852, Abraham Lincoln said in 1862 “So this is the little lady who made this great war.”¹⁹ Stowe’s book was an influential piece of abolitionist fiction written by a white woman for a white audience. Whilst being credited with helping the abolitionist cause it has also been drawn on to produce some of America’s most racial stereotypes including the “happy darky” and the minstrel shows with very different political aims. In the 20th century an “Uncle Tom” became a term of insult aimed at black figures overly deferential to white society. The sentimental novel has been reevaluated by critics following Jane Tompkins important interpretation of the genre as doing “cultural work” with means and methods of a different order to the qualities lauded in the great American works of fiction. Harris and Ball draw on a tradition of sentimentalism and the South as an arena for doing cultural work, yet they simultaneously use the frivolous or silly associations to undercut reductive readings that limit the supernatural’s allegorical mutability.

The South and Southern Gothic

True Blood engages with the complexities of difference and the workings of identity politics in American culture. Using the figure of the vampire, but with overt references to contemporary difference categories of race, class, and religion, *True Blood* draws on a tradition of Southern Gothic texts and associations of the South in the American cultural imaginary to explore failure-bound methods of suppressing and controlling difference.

Wilbur J. Cash described the South as “not quite a nation within a nation, but the next thing to it”.²⁰ While David Potter stated: “To writers for more than half a century the South has been a sphinx on the American land.”²¹ Comparisons to the enigma of the

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Sandburg, *Abraham Lincoln: The War Years Vol 3*, 201.

²⁰ Cash, *The Mind of the South*, 1941.

²¹ Potter, “The Enigma of the South,” 178.

feminine are available. The South and in particular its literary representations are full of contradictions but certain common preoccupations may be observed. Chief amongst these are place, past, and identity. Maya Angelou describes it thus: "The black Southerner and the white Southerner are locked to the land and to history, a painful history of guilt and cruelty and ignorance. It clings to us like the moss on the trees."²² The history of slavery, the plantation social organisation based on slavery, the Civil War and the South's subsequent economic devastation, poverty, religion, racism, segregation, slow modernisation, the Civil Rights Movement and desegregation, comprise a distinct Southern history complete with varied experiences within this history differing along lines of race, gender, and class.

Geographically, 'the South' is a region of the United States falling roughly below the 'Mason-Dixon line'. Antebellum slave-owning states comprised of the eleven states of the Confederacy, South Carolina, Mississippi, Florida, Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Texas, Virginia, Arkansas, Tennessee, and North Carolina, form what is known as the American South. However, "the South is an attitude of mind and a way of behaviour just as much as it is a territory."²³ The 'Mason-Dixon line' has become a metonymy for the cultural divide between Northeastern and Southern United States. It was originally commissioned to settle a boundary dispute between landowners in Maryland and Pennsylvania but was used to some extent in the Missouri Compromise that divided the Union into slave-owning and non-slave-owning states in 1820. This divide was lamented by Thomas Jefferson who saw it as the beginning of the end for the Union: the "Missouri question aroused and filled me with alarm ... I have been among the most sanguine in believing that our Union would be of long duration. I now doubt it much."²⁴

The literary genres that are most often considered as Southern literature reflect these historical, social, economic, and cultural issues: the slave narrative, typically a first-person account of an escaped slave of his or her time in captivity and the quest for freedom; the pastoral, literatures preoccupied by the agrarian aspects of Southern life particularly of an idealised rural past of the South structured by a plantation economy; Southern humour, usually focused on satirizing and stereotypes, particularly the stereotype of the poor white, the hillbilly; and Southern Gothic characterised by the Southern Grotesque, latterly

²² Joyner, *Shared Traditions: Southern History and Folk Culture*, 25.

²³ Simkins, *The Everlasting South*, xii.

²⁴ Jefferson, Letter to John Homes. April 22, 1820.

including what is referred to as Grit Lit, works such as *Bastard Out of Carolina* (1992) that focus on the effects of poverty and abuse in the gritty everyday poverty of Southern life. These genres, though diverse, share some common features such as the past's overwhelming grip on the present, race, poverty, family and heritage, religiosity, language, and landscape. These themes are taken up in Harris and Ball's vampire texts as discussed later in the chapter.

The South's peculiar relationship with the past serves both internal and external functions. Internally there is a harkening to a flawed but rich past when the South flourished on the back of slave-ownership. Externally but within the United States the South plays a role as the collective repository of the past and guilt associated with this past. C. Vann Woodward wrote that the South has a "long and quite un-American experience with poverty."²⁵ It has also known "frustration, failure, and defeat" on a level that America at large has not in its history of 'success' and progress. As the states that supported and fought for the continuation of slavery, the South is a repository of the United States collective guilt on the issue of race. Sometimes stereotyped as an on-going enclave of backwardness and bigotry within the United States, the South is simultaneously imagined as a romantic place of loss, rich in stories and characters:

The South has had its full share of illusions, fantasies, and pretensions, and it has continued to cling to some of them with an astonishing tenacity that defies explanation. But the illusion that "history is something unpleasant that happens to other people" is surely not one of them – not in the face of accumulated evidence and memory to the contrary.²⁶

Peggy Dunn Bailey describes Southern Gothic literature as "characterized by obsessive preoccupations – with blood, family, and inheritance; racial, gender, and/or class identities; the Christian religion (typically, in its most "fundamentalist" forms); and home..."²⁷ Bailey's description of the novel *Bastard out of Carolina* by Dorothy Allison as "fundamentally Southern Gothic" given its exploration of "the themes of family/blood as destiny, the inscription of identity through cultural models of gender, class, and ethnicity, and the powerful attraction to charismatic religious experience" could well describe the

²⁵ Woodward, *The Burden of Southern History*, 15-21.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 170.

²⁷ Bailey, "Female Gothic Fiction: Grotesque Realities", 271.

preoccupations of *True Blood*.²⁸ Though Bailey discusses Southern Gothic Grotesque in its realistic forms, *True Blood* combines the supernatural of a classic Gothic tradition with the Southern Grotesque's tendency towards the everyday, the 'real' monstrous. Harris foregrounds the importance of socio-economic issues and everyday life in the writing of *The Sookie Stackhouse Novels*:

I just drew on my knowledge of what it's like to live in a small town from the viewpoint of a person who has very little disposable income, ... a person who's really having to count their pennies, plan ahead to pay their property tax.²⁹

Poverty and particularly the 'poor white' have been recurring themes in Southern literature. Most 'Grit Lit' centres on poor white protagonists, as have most Southern Grotesque works, and Southern humour has produced one of America, and the South in particular's, most well-known stereotypes: the hillbilly, typically a rural, poor, uneducated, racist, backward, inbred white person living in the South. The hillbilly and the isolated inbred poor white community is referenced in *True Blood* through various stock 'Southern' characters, and is explored in greater depth in the storyline surrounding Jason's romantic entanglements with the were-panther, Crystal.

Harris' novels have been praised for their humour and both the novels and the television adaptation may be seen as combining Southern humour and the Southern Grotesque to produce a text that may pull away from its own excesses when need be. For example the gore displayed in the television text is often neutralised through the use of humour:

PAM: There's vampire in your cleavage.

SOOKIE: Oh, ewww!

PAM: Here let me get that for you.³⁰

The incongruence of everyday concerns and Gothic creatures is also used as a source of humour. Bill's logistical problems getting an electrician to do some work on his home given his night-time-only availability is one example of this.

The everyday realism found in the Southern Gothic tradition, crystallising in the sub-genre of Grit Lit, sits alongside another Southern literary tradition in *True Blood*, that of

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Associated Press, "Vampire Author says she's the 'anti-Anne Rice.'"

³⁰ *True Blood*, S1E9 "Plaisir D'Amour"

presenting the South as a kind of lost Eden. The lush landscapes of the South and the tropical climate of heat and humidity are at once oppressive and idyllic in *True Blood*. Following defeat in the Civil War, many white writers took to a pastoral genre drawing on the tradition of the antebellum plantation novels and portraying the Old South in a romantic way that neutralised racial tensions through the figure of the “happy faithful slave” and an idealised rural way of life filled with Southern Belles and Gentleman. Elements of this tradition relating to the land and Southern manners are taken up in *True Blood* with Sookie performing a kind of modern Southern Belle, always mannerly unless provoked otherwise. Bill, as an actual Confederate Soldier, combines the mores of a traditional Southern Gentleman with the inhumanness of vampires. This combination may also be read as indicative of the contradiction between the chivalrous gentlemen and his darker role as a slave-owner or soldier of the Civil War Era.

Twilight and *The Vampire Diaries* also feature a Confederate soldier in their narratives. In the novel and film *Eclipse* Jasper Hale’s back-story is revealed when the Cullens must prepare to fight a newborn vampire army. Jasper was born in Dallas and joined the Confederate Army in 1861. Rising quickly through the ranks, he became the youngest major in Texas. On his way to the Battle of Galveston in 1963 he encountered three beautiful female vampires. One of them, Maria, turned Jasper into a vampire. His heightened emotional intelligence and military experience were useful in Maria’s quest to reclaim territory in Mexico using newborn vampires as disposable soldiers. His emotional sensitivity, however, made his way of life difficult. He grew depressed and eventually left Maria and her army. No longer required to kill vampires, he still killed humans and “was subject to their emotions as they died.”³¹ He lived a miserable existence until 1948 when he met Alice. Alice’s joy “freed him from the negative emotions that had so depressed him.”³² Jasper’s story draws on the conflicting traits of the Southern gentleman figure, combining sensitivity and savagery. As a military leader who looks after ‘newborns’ he presents a disturbing combination of traditional masculinity and femininity. Scarred by newborn vampire bites, Jasper’s body is the only imperfect vampire body amongst the Cullens. To human eyes these scars are barely visible:

³¹ Meyer, *Official Illustrated Guide*, 132.

³² *Ibid.*

At first my eyes could not make sense of the texture that was layered thickly across the skin. Curved half-moons crisscrossed in a feathery pattern that was only visible, white on white as it was, because the bright glow of the lamp beside him threw the slightly raised design into relief, with shallow shadows outlining the shapes.³³

When Bella becomes a vampire, however, she sees the scars clearly:

... the scars were Jasper's most dominant feature. ... Instinctively, I tensed to defend myself. Any vampire who saw Jasper would have had the same reaction. The scars were like a lighted billboard. Dangerous, they screamed.³⁴

Jasper highlights both the challenge of the Cullen's lifestyle and the dangers of any alternative vampire lifestyle and gender roles. He struggles more than the others to control himself due to his violent past and his emotional receptiveness.

You've experienced the way I can manipulate the emotions around myself, Bella, but I wonder if you realise how the feelings in a room affect me. I live every day in a climate of emotion. For the first century of my life, I lived in a world of bloodthirsty vengeance. Hate was my constant companion.³⁵

Jasper's story demonstrates the changeable nature of dominant discourses of masculinity and their potentially destructive impact on men. Jasper's scarred presence in the Cullen family is a reminder of the dangers of the vampire lifestyle – of the dead and deathless masculine body – without the benevolent patriarchal family of heterosexual couples combining control and compassion. Jasper's reluctance and difficulty talking about his past and Bella's vague knowledge of his origins as "somewhere from the South" draw on the American South's cultural associations with violence and dark histories to hint at the dangers and constraints of gender for men as well as women.³⁶

The Vampire Diaries' Damon Salvatore joined the Confederate army in 1863 on his father's orders. Damon deserted the army just prior to the Battle of Gettysburg. It is later revealed that his then dead mother sent a man to encourage Damon to follow his own rather than his father's conviction. The rest of his company died in the Battle, while Damon survived

³³ Meyer, *Eclipse*, 286.

³⁴ Meyer, *Breaking Dawn*, 402.

³⁵ Meyer, *Eclipse*, 300.

³⁶ Meyer, *Eclipse*,

until the following year when his father shot him and his brother. With vampire blood in his system, he transitioned to a vampire.

The Vampire Diaries is set in the fictional town of Mystic Falls. The town is described in the Pilot script as “a small Virginia town, quaint, picturesque, a place you’d like to raise a family ... Southern in its hospitality, northern in its attitude.”³⁷ Presenting Damon as a reluctant and later deserting Confederate soldier works as part of *The Vampire Diaries’* location between cultural associations of north and south in the United States.

True Blood is located in the Deep South both geographically and symbolically. Harris’ setting of the series in the fictional town of Bon Temps in Northern Louisiana is of significance in terms of Harris’ relationship to a tradition of vampire fiction and culture linked to Louisiana and New Orleans in particular. With regard to this setting, Harris has said in interview:

My thinking was that Anne Rice had done such a good job with Southern Louisiana that I would take the part [of Louisiana] no one wanted.³⁸

According to Kinlaw and Kasee, characteristic of the Southern Gothic as exemplified by Anne Rice is “a sense of decay and dissolution, a tension caused by unrevealed secrets and taboos broken, as well as a sense of topicality” (215). Harris draws on Rice’s texts but orientates her series towards the realistic by focusing on mundane aspects of everyday life and poverty in the less-romantic northern Louisiana.

As a piece of Southern Gothic the key preoccupations of *True Blood* include blood, family and tradition, identity particularly with regard to race, class, and gender, the grotesque, the faultiness of narratives of progress, and the allure of fundamentalist beliefs. These are explored in the context of 21st century social and political concerns. The continued fascination with the idea of the American South and all its contradictions is capitalised on and packaged for the HBO audience. A character in Faulkner’s novel *Intruder in the Dust* (1948) describes the interest of Northerners in the South:

With the whole vast scope of their own rich teeming never-ravaged land of glittering undefiled cities and unburned towns and unwasted farms so long-secured and

³⁷ Williamson and Plec, *The Vampire Diaries*, Pilot Episode Script.

³⁸ Ricapito, “*True Blood* Author Charlaine Harris on the Current Vampire Epidemic.”

opulent you would think there was no room left for curiosity... uncountable faces looking down at him and his in fading amazement and outrage and frustration and most curious of all, gullibility: a volitionless, almost helpless capacity and eagerness to believe anything about the South not even provide it be derogatory but merely bizarre enough and strange enough³⁹

The American Civil War looms in the Southern cultural imaginary and the United States cultural imaginary as a whole. The Civil War is frequently presented as a watershed moment in United States history that, from a Northern perspective, came good on the promises of the Founding Fathers. At stake was a contradiction between the enslavement of four million African Americans and a constitution that purported to see all men as created equal. From a Southern white perspective, slave owning was also central to the war but it was cast with a different set of values at stake. The North's capitalistic economic model was seen as spreading its grip into the agrarian plantation-based economy of the South, threatening its destruction and instigating instead the widespread adoption of North American economic models built around industrialization, urbanization and free trade. Way of life in the North was characterised as heartless and uncaring in comparison to the idealised paternalistic plantation model that saw slave-owning as a benevolent hierarchy that worked to both slave and slave-owners' mutual benefit. Ideas about ways of life peculiar to the South have been central to the regional and national conception of southern-ness. Southern manners and types such as the Southern gentleman and the Southern belle are linked to this conception of a sectional way of life distinct from the ways of the North.

Any understanding of this nation has to be based, and I mean really based, on an understanding of the Civil War. I believe that firmly. It defined us. The "Revolution did what it did. Our involvement in European wars, beginning with the First World War, did what it did. But the Civil War defined us as what we are, and it opened us to what we became, good and bad things. And it is very necessary, if you're going to understand the American character in the twentieth century, to learn about this

³⁹Faulkner, *Intruder in the Dust*, 152-53.

enormous catastrophe of the nineteenth century. It was the crossroads of our being, and it was a hell of a crossroads.⁴⁰

The main romantic hero in *True Blood*, vampire Bill, comes from this time of crossroads in the history of the United States. Popularly conceived as a crossroads between the slave-owning ways of the South with the righteous ethics of the founding fathers of the North, the internal nature of Civil-War is read as an elaboration of the self's internal warring factions and the potential for the non-acceptance of difference within the self to erupt in outward violence at any time.

In terms of history, economy, and social and cultural identities, race is inseparable from the story of the South. Both Charlaine Harris and Alan Ball were born and raised in the South; Harris was born in 1951 in Mississippi while Ball was born in 1957 in Atlanta, Georgia. They are both white writers coming from a similar place at a similar time and so it is not surprising that their visions of the American South have been compatible. Harris' novels are noticeably lacking in black characters but race plays a dominant role in the structure of the society Sookie inhabits. Reference is made to on-going post-segregation issues such as separate white and black funeral homes. These types of details regarding race form part of the backdrop of Sookie's life. Harris has been criticised for her lack of black characters, something she has acknowledged. Ball's adaptation brings more black characters into the narrative, chief amongst these are Sookie's best friend Tara and Tara's cousin Lafayette. While Harris presented a world in which Sookie's life as a white waitress has little personal involvement with black people but nonetheless operates in a deeply racialised society, Ball has been criticised for presenting an overly post-race vision of Sookie, Tara, and Lafayette's relationships. Race is not ignored in Ball's representation, however, and is articulated as an issue to white and black characters. Tara frequently discusses race and its continued significance in Southern life.

People think because we got vampires out in the open, race isn't the issue no more ... Race may not be the hot-button issue it once was, but it's still a button you can push on people.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Shelby Foote interviewed in Ward and Burns, *The Civil War: An Illustrated History*, 264.

⁴¹ *True Blood*, S1E4 "Escape from Dragon House"

In the pilot episode of the series as she is introduced to the audience Tara notes the irony of her name referencing Margaret Mitchell's influential novel *Gone with the Wind* (1936):

I have a name. And that name is Tara. Isn't that funny a black girl being named after a plantation? No I don't think it's funny at all. In fact it really pisses me off that my momma was either stupid or just plain mean. Which is why you better be nice if you plan on getting a drink tonight.⁴²

Highlighting again the intersectionality of oppression, Lafayette chides the young white straight vampire Jessica in the final series:

Has it ever fucking occurred to you that Lafayette, that queen that make all you white hetero-sexuals laugh and feel good about yourselves, has it ever fucking occurred to you that I maybe I want a piece of happiness too?⁴³

"I'm Sookie Stackhouse and I'm a waitress."⁴⁴

The heroine of Harris and Ball's series is twenty-five year old Sookie Stackhouse. Sookie narrates *The Sookie Stackhouse Novels* and so the reader is always privy to her point of view, while the television series moves to a multi-viewpoint format and the narrative is thereby expanded to include characters and storylines beyond Sookie. Nonetheless, for the first season and to a lesser extent throughout the rest of the seasons, Sookie's viewpoint is the privileged one and her story is central to the narrative as a whole. This may be seen even at the level of the musical score as discussed by Janet K. Halfyard, with Sookie's point of view privileged in the musical representation of other characters.⁴⁵ The centrality of the heroine's point of view is key to the Dark Romance genre, while a multi-perspectival narrative is central to the workings of soap opera. Brigid Cherry describes the series as telefantasy combining the heroine as anchoring perspective of the Dark Romance with a soap opera narrative including multiple plot threads, cliff-hanger endings, scenes split

⁴² *True Blood*, S1E1 "Strange Love"

⁴³ *True Blood*, S7E5 "Lost Cause"

⁴⁴ *True Blood*, S1E1 "Strange Love"

⁴⁵ Halfyard, "Listen to the Bloody Music: Scoring Women in Vampire TV from Buffy to Hemlock Grove."

across episode breaks, and the introduction of new antagonists for the next season at the end of the current one.⁴⁶

Sookie is a waitress at her local bar, Merlotte's. She did not go to college and since the death of her grandmother has struggled somewhat financially. She drives a small old car and lives in the house her grandmother left her. She is proud of her identity as a waitress and underlines her idea of herself as 'just a waitress' when others try to present her as someone special. She is aware of the potential costs of specialness, first interest but then either repudiation or annihilation. She is acutely aware of the many forms of judgment in terms of perceptions of her gender, class position, race, religion, and sexuality passed against her by others due to her self-described 'disability' of telepathy. The direct insight this allows her into the minds of potential partners prevents Sookie from having a romantic relationship with any of the men she meets. Not being able to see herself through the vampire Bill's eyes allows her enter a romantic and sexual relationship with him. It is not that Bill views her in a less objectifying way than the other men she has dated, rather she is not aware of what he may or may not be thinking about her. She is free in this way to be a subject in the interaction rather than being constantly aware of the other's point of view which in the process others her to herself. The relationship with Bill and his deception lead her to greater exploration of her self. Unlike Bella, who is overly self-critical, Sookie has an accurate estimation of her appearance:

I am [pretty]. I am blond and blue-eyed and twenty-five, and my legs are strong and my bosom is substantial, and I have a waspy waistline. I look good in the warm-weather waitress outfit Sam picked for us: black shorts, white T, white socks, black Nikes.⁴⁷

The cataloguing of her looks matches the cataloguing of her uniform. Sookie is aware, in both books and television show, of her body as a commodity, as a series of assets that may be utilised in certain situations. She's also aware of what decreases her 'market value', her "strangeness":

⁴⁶ Cherry, *True Blood*, 13-15.

⁴⁷ Harris, *Dead Until Dark*, 1.

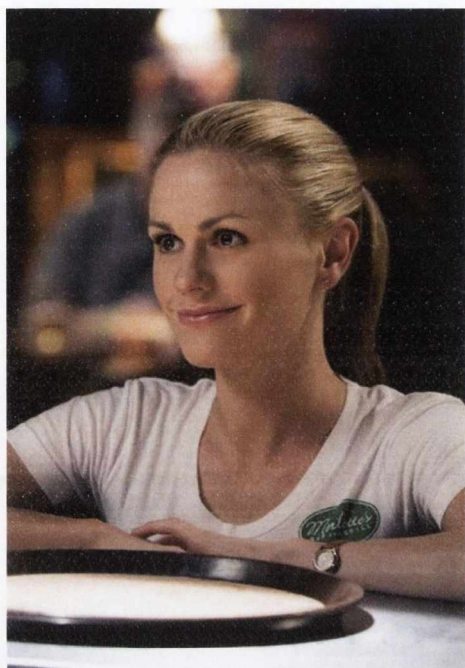


Figure 3: Sookie (Anna Paquin) at Merlotte's Bar and Grill.⁴⁸



Figure 4: Sookie (Anna Paquin) and Bill (Stephen Moyer).⁴⁹

⁴⁸ *True Blood*, S1E1 "Strange Love" (2008). Screenshot found at http://imworld.aufeminin.com/story/20140404/anna-paquin-as-sookie-stackhouse-in-true-blood-208546_w650.jpg. Accessed February 8, 2016.

⁴⁹ *True Blood* publicity shot (2008). Found at <http://liberalvaluesblog.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/06/wallpaper-sookie-stackhouse-bill-compton-bite-1600.jpg>. Accessed February 10, 2016.

Normal guys don't want to date someone as strange as I am. ... That's not to say I don't get groped at the bar occasionally. Guys get drunk. I look good. They forget their misgivings about my reputation for strangeness and my ever-present smile.⁵⁰

Her strangeness is linked at first to her mind-reading abilities and later to her fairy heritage. Casting the actor Anna Paquin as Sookie further enhances the queerness of Sookie's character. Paquin's looks are often described as unconventional.⁵¹ As a "happily married bisexual mother", Paquin has provoked public discussion about sexuality, gender, and monogamy.⁵² In these ways, Paquin's star persona operates outside of a traditional heteronormative model. Sookie's sexual relationship with a vampire brings her into a non-traditional identity category as a "fangbanger". Though as Lafayette says to Sookie "It ain't possible to live unless you crossing somebody's line", the crossing of socially constructed boundaries is not without risks as the serial murder plot of Season One demonstrates. The crossing of forbidden boundaries is central to the depiction of the vampire as romantic interest and/or sexual partner. The mixing of blood involved in the vampire's bite risks a breakdown in category that has been identified by many critics as a cultural fear underlying the figure of the vampire. Indeed horror is theorised by Noel Carroll as the twinned feelings of disgust and fascination drawn from boundary breakdown:

... along with being frightened and disgusted by horrific monsters, we are also fascinated by them inasmuch as they jam our categorical schemas. Moreover, the reasons that horrific monsters disgust us are intimately related to the reasons they fascinate us. For what defies our standing categories revolts us, but also commands our attention and fascinates.⁵³

Horror is central to the functioning of the subject and stems from a fear of contamination of the individual's body by the abject. This fear located in a rural Southern small town in

⁵⁰ Harris, *Dead to the World*, 1.

⁵¹ Paquin's looks and star persona are frequently described as unconventional. See Doss, "May 2012 Cover Girl: Anna Paquin", <http://www.zoocyemagazine.com/journal/2012/05/may-2012-cover-girl-anna-paquin>; Rhiannon "16 Celebs Whose Unconventional Looks We Love", <http://www.crushable.com/2013/11/18/entertainment/unconventionally-attractive-celebrities-who-embrace-their-flaws/2/>; and Tejada, "In Praise of Women who are Unconventionally Beautiful", http://www.huffingtonpost.ca/2015/01/29/women-unconventional-beauty_n_6572644.html. All accessed January 31, 2016.

⁵² Cruz, "Larry King is confused by Anna Paquin's 'Non-Practicing' Bisexuality."

⁵³ Carroll, "Horror, Helplessness, and Vulnerability", 117.

21st America is relevant not only in terms of racial and ethnic miscegenation but also with regard to other identity categories that have been culturally represented as potentially threatening to the status quo: the perceived threat to marriage seen by those against the rights of gay people to marry and the perceived threat of unbounded female sexuality in and of itself.

The horror of boundary dissolution is explored through the trope of the psychopath embodied in the split personality of Drew/Rene in Season One of *True Blood*. Drew Marshall, operating under the false identity of René Lenier, complete with Cajun accent, embarks on a killing spree in Bon Temps targeting women who are associated with vampires, particularly those known to be having sex with vampires. Drew/René is both disgusted and fascinated by the sexual union of humans and vampires. This disgust/fascination is connected in Drew/René to the taboo of incest and murder. His horror is first transformed to violence as a result of his sister Cindy's sexual relationship with a vampire:

No you're the freak Cindy, you're the damn freak, fucking a freak! Fuck! Spread your legs for a dead man! Momma would roll over in her grave!⁵⁴

Here Drew/René stresses the problem of Cindy's sexuality: "fucking a freak" dissolves the boundary between Cindy and the "freak". Through this act she becomes a "freak" too. The vampire turns her into what he is and the 'non-freak' Cindy is lost. The 'non-freak' here is defined in opposition to the 'freak' and so contamination by the 'freak' means the binary cannot hold. This process tests the boundary between self and Other, a boundary that subjectivity depends upon. For Drew/René the breaking of this boundary is intolerable. In Harris' novel *Dead Until Dark*, Drew/René rapes his sister and then kills her by strangling her with his belt. In the television series he is shown removing his belt and strangling Cindy. The reference to his mother and the removal of his belt place Drew/René in a warped fatherly role, disciplining Cindy. He becomes the man of the house maintaining order over the dangerous sexuality of his sister. He does this by transgressing the prohibition on incest and murder. He gains some satisfaction in his usurped role as he goes on to become a serial killer.

⁵⁴ *True Blood*, S1E12 "You'll Be the Death of Me"

“Spreading your legs for a dead man”, is an act that brings together the place of human birth, the womb, with death, the vampire. The incongruity of the presence of death in the birthplace of life strikes Drew/René so forcefully that he must end Cindy’s life in order to continue living himself. She has let in the abject and it violates Drew/René’s idea of what Kristeva refers to as the “clean and proper” body.⁵⁵ Drew/René refers to his mother, the “trustee of that mapping of the self’s clean and proper body”, to rationalise his disgust.⁵⁶ The mother’s body in western culture is imagined as all that is abject, all that is set aside in order to enter the world of the symbolic.⁵⁷ The threat of the abject mother leads to an attempt at domestication of the mother in the Symbolic Order through images such as the Virgin Mother, as Kristeva elaborates on in “Stabat Mater”. There persists however a split between the abject and the pure, dividing cultural associations between a bad mother and a good mother. The good mother is a source of propriety, free from all sexuality, life-giving, sacrificing, and nurturing. The dark side of this figure is the bad mother, encompassing all that cannot be contained in the good mother: sexuality, selfishness, and destructive impulses. The ‘bad mother’ has been theorised in relation to horror as the ‘monstrous feminine’ by Barbara Creed. Immediately after mentioning the ‘spreading of his sister’s legs’, Drew/René mentions his mother and her disapproval. Thus female sexuality in his sister is directly linked to an imagined maternally based propriety that has been violated by his sister’s actions. Imagining his dead mother’s body in her grave, Drew/René conjures both the good and bad mother. The mother of propriety who would disapprove of Cindy’s sexual transgression, but also the abject mother, now a dead body herself. The horror that Kristeva places at the foundation of our culture (*Powers* 101) is concerned with:

... the threat that the male feels as much from the possessive maternal body as from his separation from it – a threat that he immediately returns to that body.⁵⁸

With the aim of restoring order and his own subjectivity, Drew/René violates two taboos by raping and murdering his sister. Significantly it is after this violation that he takes on a new identity of René. His own subjectivity is split by the transgressions he takes in restoring order. This split allows him to place all that is ‘clean and proper’ in one part of himself,

⁵⁵ Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 72.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 12.

⁵⁸ Kristeva, *Desire in Language*, 263.

René, and all that is abject in the other, Drew. Tellingly, René is a false identity and one that cannot be maintained indefinitely. Elizabeth Grosz writes:

Abjection is a sickness at one's own body, at the body beyond that 'clean and proper' thing, the body of the subject. Abjection is the result of recognising that the body is more than, in excess of, the 'clean and proper.'⁵⁹

Drew/René becomes an internally split subject who polices the boundary between women and vampires, a boundary that has come to represent for him the boundary between life and death. The mixing of these two disrupts the idea of a physically sound live body sustaining Drew/René's existence. His violation of social taboos becomes akin to the elimination of the abject from the body, a process that ultimately results in death:

Such wastes drop so that I might live, until, from loss to loss, nothing remains in me and my entire body falls beyond the limit – cadere, cadaver.⁶⁰

Drew/René engages in transgressions of socially sanctioned behaviour in order to buttress categories that sustain his ability to function as a subject. That René's beliefs are not the inexplicable irrational beliefs of a maniac makes his crimes not simply those of the scapegoated serial killer, the singular mad man that can be punished and contained, but those of the entire community. He acts on beliefs shared by many, thus the community's prejudices are explored at their most extreme through René's homicidal actions.

Any crime, because it draws attention to the fragility of the law, is abject,...
Abjection ... is immoral, sinister, scheming, and shady...⁶¹

In choosing to kill the human women involved with vampires rather than the vampires themselves, he attacks the point of boundary dissolution, rather than the other. It is not the Other that frightens him, but the breakdown of the category dividing Other from self. In her anthropological account, Mary Douglas describes danger to 'good order' as only present when category is in doubt:

"In the course of any imposing of order, whether in the mind or in the external world, the attitude to rejected bits and pieces goes through two stages. First they are

⁵⁹ Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*, 78.

⁶⁰ Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 3.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 4.

recognisably out of place, a threat to good order, and so are regarded as objectionable and vigorously brushed away. At this stage they have some identity ... This is the stage at which they are dangerous; their half identity still clings to them and the clarity of the scene in which they obtrude is impaired by their presence. But a long process of pulverizing, dissolving and rotting awaits any physical things that have been recognised as dirt. In the end, all identity is gone. The origin of the various bits and pieces is lost and they have entered into the mass of common rubbish. It is unpleasant to poke about in the refuse to try to recover anything, for this revives identity. So long as identity is absent, rubbish is not dangerous. It does not even create ambiguous perceptions since it clearly belong in a defined place, a rubbish heap of one kind or another.”⁶²

Though the murders of “fangbangers” Maudette Pickens, Dawn Green, and Amy Burley is abhorred by the local community, Drew/René’s beliefs with regard to vampires which motivate his actions are shared by many in the community and there is a sense that human women would better protect themselves and the human community by limiting their involvement with vampires. Reflecting victim-blaming rhetoric surrounding rape, Arlene, unaware that the killer is her fiancé, says to Sookie: “Ain’t there even a part of you that thinks she had it coming?”⁶³ *True Blood* shows how male violence toward women is reassuringly imagined as coming from strangers embodied as vampires, while actually coming from human men in close and often seemingly loving relationships with the women involved. Sookie’s relationship with Bill is seen as threatening by many members of the community:

BILL: Do you realize that every person in this establishment is staring at us right now?

SOOKIE: Oh, they’re just staring at me because my brother is in some kind of trouble with the police.

BILL: ... They are staring at us because I am a vampire and you are mortal.

SOOKIE: Well. Who cares what they think?

BILL: Well, I want to make this town my home, so ... I do.⁶⁴

⁶² Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 160.

⁶³ *True Blood*, S1E4 “Escape from Dragon House”

⁶⁴ *True Blood*, S1E1 “Strange Love”

Sookie's best friend Tara and her boss Sam form an alliance to monitor Sookie's interactions with vampires:

I could help you keep an eye on Sookie. You see the way she was looking at that vampire? That is just trouble looking for a place to happen.⁶⁵

Women's sexuality is thus viewed as a weak point in relation to the upholding of category difference. Though vampires and humans cannot reproduce, the vampire can turn a human into a vampire and so the threat of dissolution remains.

... definitions of the monstrous as constructed in the modern horror text are grounded in ancient religious and historical notions of abjection – particularly in relation to the following religious 'abominations': sexual immorality and perversion; corporeal alteration, decay and death; human sacrifice; murder; the corpse; bodily wastes; the feminine body and incest.⁶⁶

The sexual union of human and vampire, followed by Drew/Rene's punishment of boundary transgression, itself a transgression, touches on each of these 'abominations'. When Sookie kills him, in the final episode of the series, some of the community's culpability dies with him, but there remains a continued prejudice towards vampires and those who associate with them:

... abjection is not something of which the subject can ever feel free – it is always there, beckoning the self to take up its place, the place where meaning collapses.⁶⁷

Prejudice based on markers of difference and its foundation in fear of category breakdown is the main form of communal belief explored and problematised in Season One. The dangers of simmering communal resentment and fear are shown in the violent manifestations of Drew/René's destructive actions. The women targeted by Drew/René, including Sookie, are at risk because of the threat and fascination their feminine bodies represent. The vagina/womb, 'between the legs' of women, serves as a threat of castration:

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Creed, "Horror and the monstrous-feminine," 69.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

...there is a motif occurring in certain primitive mythologies, as well as in modern surrealist painting and neurotic dream, which is known in folklore as ‘the toothed vagina’ – the vagina that castrates.⁶⁸

The vampire has associations with this threat in the conflation of sexual pleasure with potential violence and death. Sookie describes Bill biting her:

It felt like every single care or worry or sadness I’ve ever had was just flowin’ out of me and into him. And, yeah it hurt at first. But when I relaxed, it didn’t hurt at all.⁶⁹

The description combines a reversal of traditionally male and feminine sexual roles based on a division between the giver and the receiver with a popular narrative of female loss of virginity. While Drew/ René attempts to police the boundaries of such category breakdown and confusion, Sookie defiantly proclaims:

Oh, I definitely crossed a line and glad I did.⁷⁰

Sookie’s combination of normatively attractive femininity with ‘strangeness’ contains the paradox of the feminine for the patriarchal imaginary. As the character Lafayette says to Sookie:

They ain’t scared of you honey-child. They scared of what’s between your legs.⁷¹

As introduced in previous chapters, the process of subjectification described by Kristeva is one of abjection of the maternal body. The lost semiotic world of the maternal however holds an attraction that is prohibited in the Symbolic order or the world of language and must be held away from the self so that the subject may maintain sovereignty.

The subject, constructed in/through language, through a desire for meaning, is also spoken by the abject, the place of meaninglessness – thus, the subject is constantly beset by abjection which fascinates desire but which must be repelled for fear of self-annihilation.⁷²

⁶⁸ Campbell, *The Masks of God: Primitive Mythology*, 73.

⁶⁹ *True Blood*, S1E7 “Burning House of Love”

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ *True Blood*, S1E1 “Strange Love”

⁷² Creed, “Horror and the monstrous-feminine,” 70-71.

Intuiting the maternal significance of this, Lafayette notes the shared fear of all men regardless of sexuality:

I know every man whether straight, gay or George mother-fucking Bush is terrified of the pussy.⁷³

The feminine is abject here in that it inspires feelings of disgust and attraction simultaneously. It is also uncanny, as in Freud's formulation, "there is something uncanny about the female genitals. But what they [neurotic men] find uncanny is actually the entrance to man's old 'home', the place where everyone once lived. ... the uncanny is what was once familiar."⁷⁴ Freud has been most usefully read by feminist theorists as providing a deeply insightful description rather than a proscription of the workings of the patriarchal Western cultural imaginary in the 19th and early 20th century. In *True Blood* Lafayette describes the relation between men and the feminine as he sees it, not as it might be or should be. He also highlights how gender and sexuality interact in ways not accounted for by limiting identity to sexual preference or gender alone. The intersection of different identity categories is noted by another black character, Tara, when the local policemen laughingly suggest she could be a lawyer:

Is it funny because I'm a woman, or because I'm a black woman?⁷⁵

Kimberé Crenshaw coined the term "intersectionality" in an article describing "the various ways race and gender interact to shape the multiple dimensions of black women's employment experiences." Crenshaw and others show how white feminism, patriarchy, and racism overlap and interact:

Feminist efforts to politicize experiences of women and antiracist efforts to politicize experiences of people of colour have frequently proceeded as though the issues and experiences they each detail occur on mutually exclusive terrains. Although racism and sexism readily intersect in the lives of real people, they seldom do in feminist and antiracist practices. And so, when the practices expound identity as woman or person

⁷³ *True Blood*, S1E1 "Strange Love"

⁷⁴ Freud, *The Uncanny*, 149.

⁷⁵ *True Blood*, S1E4 "Escape from Dragon House"

of colour as an either/or proposition, they relegate the identity of women of colour to a location that resists telling.⁷⁶

The interests of multiply oppressed groups and individuals are often repressed or ignored in feminist, socialist, or civil rights activism. Crenshaw states “the problem with identity politics is not that it fails to transcend difference, as some critics charge, but rather the opposite – that it frequently conflates or ignores intra-group differences.”⁷⁷ This statement draws attention to the issue of difference and the problem it presents for identity politics and the tendency to ignore difference in the assertion of shared identity.

Identity politics are writ large in the series through its invention of the American Vampire League, a lobbying group for vampire rights and the public relations arm of the Vampire Authority. The American Vampire League’s public face is its spokeswoman, Nan Flanagan. She is the public relations face of the ‘new vampire’, the vampire that has emerged ‘from the coffin’ and entered mainstream American society. On television she presents a human-friendly version of vampires, dressing demurely and appealing to a model of civil rights and responsibilities in a country where all are, in theory at least, created equal. The differences amongst vampires, particularly those interested in ‘mainstreaming’ and those who would prefer to remain hidden in order to feed on humans with anonymity, are suppressed. Identity categories that can no longer be maintained as ontologically present due to internal difference can nonetheless be useful in gaining freedoms and equality within a society, particularly on a political level. Vampires are presented as exploiting what postcolonial feminist theorist Gayatri Spivak described as strategic choices of essentialism.⁷⁸ Through Sookie and others’ positive relationships with vampires, the increased rights of vampires that would become available through the Vampire Right’s Amendment are supported by the narrative morality of the series. However this use of identity category is simultaneously critiqued through the representation of the Vampire League and its cynical appropriation of a human rights’ model for the advancement of vampires in mainstream society. The hypocrisy of public relations efforts is exposed in the series.

⁷⁶ Crenshaw, “Mapping the Margins,” 1242.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Spivak, *The Post-colonial Critic: Interviews, Strategies, Dialogues*, 15.

The opposition is shown to be no less hypocritical. Right-wing Christian, Reverend Newland, representing the views of The Fellowship of the Sun, a fundamentalist Christian church focused mainly on the unnaturalness and ungodliness of vampires opposes the Vampire League's lobbying for the passing of the Vampire Right's Amendment. Though today the word fundamentalist may be used to refer to people of various faiths and sometimes to entirely politically motivated groups, it originally was a term specifically used in relation to "a particular style of turn-of-the-century American Christianity."⁷⁹ It was first used "to distinguish between those [conservative Protestants] who believed that the Bible was the word of God dictated to his prophets and scribes, and those who allowed it was by human hands merely inspired by God, and therefore potentially subject to errors of transmission and translation".⁸⁰ According to Sandeen, "fundamentalism has existed as a religious movement, possessing structure and identity, from about 1875 up to the present day."⁸¹

Religion

Religion has been a recurring preoccupation of Southern literature reflecting the influence of religiosity in Southern life up to and continuing in the 21st century. In the 19th century, a time when the South was establishing its identity economically, politically, and socially, Evangelicalism played a central role in shaping public consciousness. In the lead up to the Civil War and after the South's defeat, evangelical Protestantism had an increasing public presence. As a proselytizing faith, the public manifestations of evangelicalism came to form part of daily life in the South for the religious and non-religious alike. Hence Faulkner's comment that religion is "just there."⁸² Though it has had a tangled connection with issues such as slavery (used both to support slavery and playing a role in slave rebellion), poverty (challenging economic inequalities and providing help to the poor, yet also supporting an economic system that leaves disproportionate numbers experiencing poverty), and racism (recruiting black ministers and opening black churches, yet supporting segregation and buttressing white supremacy after the Civil War), religion is a tangible if not uncomplicated part of Southern culture. Historian John Lee Eighmy suggests that there is interrelatedness

⁷⁹ Nagata, "Beyond Theology" 482.

⁸⁰ Perkin "American Fundamentalism and the Selling of God" 79.

⁸¹ Sandeen, *Toward a Historical Interpretation of the Origins of Fundamentalism*, 57.

⁸² Faulkner quoted in Glynn & Blother, *Faulkner in the University*, 41.

between the South's culture and its religion that has significance for the United States as a whole.⁸³ This may be seen partly in the way American Protestantism at once reified the very characteristics demanded by free-market capitalism whilst simultaneously providing a forum of dissent against the Establishment:

Evangelical Christianity led many Americans away from the cool ethos of the Age of Reason to the kind of populist democracy, anti-intellectualism and rugged individualism that still characterises American culture.⁸⁴

True Blood explores religiosity in various forms that have been a presence in Southern culture. In particular faiths based on personal understandings of Christ have been foregrounded. Evangelism has a distinct presence in both the history and the literature of the South. The Fellowship of the Sun may be seen as a direct parody of evangelical super-churches in the contemporary South that publically advocate intolerance towards othered identities, particularly homosexuals. Campaigns against such issues as gay marriage are typically underpinned by religious claims to absolute truth. Contemporary evangelical churches may be traced back to the proliferation of Evangelicalism in the American South during the Second Great Awakening (1800-35). The spread of the 'good news' of the Gospel at grassroots level became central to Southern and American faith at large. This movement, "rooted in concern with two doctrines – the personal, imminent return of Christ (millenarianism), and the verbal, inerrant inspiration of the Bible (literalism)" was taken up in great numbers by those groups who were disenfranchised by Anglicanism, the then dominant religion of the region and the planter gentry.⁸⁵

Evangelicals had no time for the remote God of the Deists; instead of relying on natural law, they wanted a return to biblical authority, to personal commitment to Jesus, and to a religion of the heart rather than the head. Faith did not require learned philosophers and scientific experts; it was a simple matter of felt conviction and virtuous living.⁸⁶

Poor whites, women, and blacks joined the Evangelical movement attracted in part by the radical individualism and spiritual equality of a personal testimony and personal

⁸³ Eighmy, *Churches in Cultural Captivity*.

⁸⁴ Armstrong, *The Case for God*, 228.

⁸⁵ Sandeen, "Fundamentalism and American Identity," 57.

⁸⁶ Armstrong, *The Case for God*, 227.

relationship and experience of Christ. The emphasis on experience over doctrine, informal worship over ritual, empowerment of disenfranchised people as evangelists (women, the poor, and black people could be ministers), and congregationally based authority saw the conversion of many in the South as it was well suited to including and inspiring a rural, poorly educated population:

Wary of learned experts, they wanted a plain-speaking religion with no abstruse theological flights of fancy. They read the scriptures with an unprecedented literalism, because this seemed more rational than the older allegorical exegesis. Like scientific discourse, religious language should be univocal, clear and transparent.⁸⁷

This radicalism waned severely as Evangelicalism became more mainstream. In the early 19th century as it gained numbers evangelicalism would drop its opposition to slavery in the South and would restrict women's rights by emphasising the role of family life and women's place in the domestic sphere. The encouragement of 'plain people' towards a 'plain-speaking' religion has remained central to American fundamentalism:

Like some of the fundamentalist movements today, these congregations [of evangelicals] gave people who felt disenfranchised and exploited a means of making their voices heard by the Establishment.⁸⁸

This aspect of fundamentalist religious organisations' capitalising on individuals' sense of marginalisation is clearly displayed in Jason's recruitment by The Fellowship of the Sun at a time of personal crisis both as a result of emotional trauma and a sense of powerlessness and lack of identity in a changing world. The fundamentalist organisation channelling all of Jason's frustrations and confusions does precisely what Robertson terms as fundamentalism: "constitut[ing] ways of finding a place in the world ... which frequently involves attempts to enhance the power of the groups concerned."⁸⁹ When Jason becomes involved with The Fellowship of the Sun he is particularly vulnerable following a drug addiction to 'V', vampire blood, and the trauma of his girlfriend Amy's murder, a murder he initially thought he himself had perpetrated under the influence of 'V'. Reverend Newland and The Fellowship of the Sun offer Jason's life some purpose in the aftermath of these events and a chance to excel in a way he has not experienced since his glory days as a

⁸⁷ Ibid., 230.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 228.

⁸⁹ Robertson, *In Search for Fundamentals*, 239.

high-school football star. His involvement with this organisation and the affirmation they give him is dependant on his subscription to a strict belief system that places hatred for vampires at its centre. Though drawn to the certainty of purpose the Fellowship allows him, Jason struggles with the implacable nature of some of the beliefs about vampires. According to Nagata, key to fundamentalism's appeal is the way "it simplifies complex issues, makes black and white out of grey zones and attempts to restore certainty."⁹⁰ After a crisis of meaning, Jason finds some comfort in the straight-forwardness and lack of ambiguity of life as a member of *The Fellowship of the Sun*. This is fatally undermined however by the hypocrisy of the Reverend and his wife, and by the incursion of ambiguities than Jason simply cannot ignore – namely his sister. Unlike Rene/Drew, Jason does not take on a violent patriarchal role in relation to Sookie. When Sarah Newland calls Sookie a whore, Jason leaves both the church and his relationship with Sarah. The presence of his sister forces Jason to confront the inconsistencies in the seemingly transparent belief system of The Fellowship of the Sun.

Jason's best-friend Hoyt has a similar crisis of identity and seeks reassurance in the certainty of directing hate towards a vilified other. Hoyt falls in love with Jessica, a 'baby vampire', the term used in *True Blood* for a new vampire. They pursue a relationship together despite disapproval from the local community and Hoyt's Christian mother in particular. After a briefly happy period in which they move into a house together, the relationship begins to break down as Hoyt grapples with his mixed feelings towards Jessica's vampiric desires and Jessica matures as a vampire and seeks more excitement beyond the confines of monogamy and Hoyt's distaste for parts of her identity. Hoyt struggles with the demise of the relationship and spirals out of control when he discovers a sexual relationship between Jessica and Jason. At first he seeks self-annihilation by attempting to find vampires to feed on him. Following this he becomes involved with a 'hate group'. As the community becomes aware of other supernatural creatures besides vampires living amongst them, a group of vigilantes wearing Obama masks begin targeted attacks on supernatural creatures including shifters, werewolves, and vampires. They are referred to as a 'Supe Hate Group'. In much the same way Jason found comfort in the seemingly straightforward beliefs of The Fellowship of the Sun, Hoyt finds solace and a renewed sense of self in the hatred he can share with others and direct unequivocally

⁹⁰ Nagata, "Beyond Theology," 494.

towards 'supes'. Positioning supernatural creatures, particularly vampires, as inhuman others, Hoyt can vent his emotions and find purpose through hatred and violence:

Right here, right now I feel more love in this hate group than I ever felt at church or basketball, or anywhere for that matter.⁹¹

Hoyt makes the direct link between the hate group and other groups such as religion and sports that can provide a sense of belonging and a sense of purpose in peoples' lives. When faced with killing his ex-girlfriend, Hoyt regains a sense of perspective and instead saves her from death at the hands of the hate group. He realises that his involvement with the group has been a way of avoiding the pain of the ending of a relationship in which he is still invested. Hoyt's involvement with the hate group is represented as functioning along very similar lines as Jason's membership of The Fellowship of the Sun. The group is seen as exploiting emotional vulnerability and works as a temporary, in the case of Jason and Hoyt, space of certainty in a world of uncertain categories and boundaries. Both Jason and Hoyt's time in these fundamentalist groups fulfils a projection outwards of internal problems. The other becomes the repository of all that is wrong and in this way is imagined as inherently evil. Locating evil firmly outside of the self helps the individual to regain a sense of control of his/her own boundaries. Thus, questions appertaining to the self and the ambiguities of identity in a post-human supernatural world of competing identities can be foreclosed by the refusal to accept difference as anything more than a sign of evil. The Westboro Baptist Church, whose 'God hates fags' signs are referenced in the opening credits of the series as a church billboard reading 'God hates fangs', are represented in *True Blood* by the fundamentalist Fellowship of the Sun, while violent groups inciting hate and using violence such as the Ku Klux Klan are brought to mind in the representation of the 'Supe Hate Group'. Though again not functioning as direct allegories, the show references these groups enough to present a critique of how fundamentalist organisations, both publically organised and more vigilante style, prey on the weakness and vulnerability of individuals at key moments of crisis in their lives. They also prey on a weakness that postmodern life exposes, that of the difficulty of living with complexity in relation to subjectivity. As a "denial of relativism" fundamentalism provides an at times reassuring

⁹¹ *True Blood*, S5E7 "In The Beginning"

certainty in a world of changing social mores and norms.⁹² Nagata suggests that it is this environment of instability and change that engenders a desire for certainty and stasis:

It may be no coincidence that fundamentalism has been added to the academic and public lexicon at a time when the global (dis)order, with its attendant transnationalism, cosmopolitanism, pluralisms, relativisms, and movement of people and ideas across the world has contributed to an obsessive concern with identity, authenticity, and ultimate values – the fundamentals of existence. These conditions, characterised by paradox, creolisations, crossing of once forbidden boundaries in the face of bewildering choice, it may be argued, precipitate a renewed quest for guiding principles, for greater ideological certainty. For those with low tolerance for ambiguity, the attractions of a prescriptive fundamentalist solution are evidenced.⁹³

Myth and the Monstrous Feminine

While the fundamentalist religions and hate-based groups offer a process of communal Othering that unites its members and provides a means of shoring up a sense of self, *True Blood* presents other belief-based means of escaping the difficulties of selfhood, including the dangerous attractions of two mythic female figures. The ‘monstrous feminine’ described by Barbara Creed typically relates to images of the destructive, sexually licentious, and/or devouring mother figure. Two key female anti-heroes embody the monstrous feminine presented in *True Blood*: Maryann and Lilith. A central plot line of Season Two follows Maryann, who is introduced at the end of Season One as a naked woman standing with a pig in the middle of a road. The connection of woman and pig is one that references well-known horror novel *Carrie* (1974) by Stephen King and Brian de Palma’s movie adaptation (1976) and their depictions of the monstrous feminine.⁹⁴

Belief is key to Maryann’s arrival in Bon Temps as phony voodoo witch-doctor ‘Miss Jeanette’ convinces Tara that the exorcism she is performing is real. Tara’s genuine belief in the ritual summons Maryann to the area. She targets Tara in particular and the town in general as a source of power, feeding on prohibited human energy. She is a maenad,

⁹² Nagata, “Beyond Theology,” 483

⁹³ Ibid., 482.

⁹⁴ Creed, “Horror and the monstrous-feminine” 74.

described by Vampire Queen of Louisiana, Sophie-Anne, as “sad, silly things ... still waiting for the god who comes.”⁹⁵ Maryann worships the Greek god Dionysus, known as Bacchus in the Roman pantheon, god of wine, harvest, ritual madness and ecstasy. In some legends he is the son of mixed parentage between the god Zeus and the mortal Semele.

According to an Orphic myth, the Titans enticed the young god Dionysus to his death, then cooked and devoured his body. The Titans were struck by a bolt of lightning from Zeus to punish them for this act of primordial theophany, and from their ashes, there rose the first men, stained from the very beginning by this dreadful pollution.⁹⁶

Maryann’s membership of the cult of Dionysus is reflected in her foreignness, her sudden arrival into the community and her strange power to unleash forbidden desires. She is a force in opposition to the civilising, sociality of human community, or the Symbolic Order as described by Kristeva.⁹⁷ Her influence brings about the breakdown of taboo and a revelling in the abject:

All that fake civilization bullshit just fell away so they could dissolve into the infinite, so they could lose themselves and unite with their God.⁹⁸

‘Dissolution into the infinite’ involves the suspension of subjectivity; in the cult of Dionysus this is dissolution into materiality rather than transcendence of the body. The gap between maenads, who were human female followers of Dionysus, and Maryann, who is an immortal supernatural entity, is filled by Sophie-Anne: she explains that Maryann began life as a human worshipper of Dionysus but through blind belief in the god has become an immortal maenad. Sophie-Anne takes a sceptical view of the worship of Dionysus:

... So along comes this religion that encourages you to get hammered, run naked through the woods, have sex with whoever, whatever, and it’s all part of getting closer to God.⁹⁹

⁹⁵ *True Blood*, S2E11 “Frenzy.”

⁹⁶ Vernant, *The Greeks*, 274.

⁹⁷ Kristeva, *Powers of Horror* 2.

⁹⁸ *True Blood*, S2E4 “Shake and Fingerpop”

⁹⁹ *True Blood*, S2E11 “Frenzy”

The cult of Dionysus is specifically connected to women, since it is women who were the maenads, the worshippers of the wine-god:

Possessed by Dionysus, Greek women scandalously left their homes and domestic chores to roam the mountains, dancing, and swing sacred branches... At the pitch of their possessed frenzy, they could grab an animal or a child and tear it to pieces, gorging themselves with its bleeding raw meat. Because Dionysus could appear at any time in animal form, the brutal feast incorporated Dionysus and his power into the members themselves.¹⁰⁰

The monstrous-feminine embodied by the maenads is a threat to domestic femininity and to social order, particularly order in the form of prohibitions on the body. Maryann upends laws surrounding eating when she feeds the heart of shape-shifter Daphne disguised in a pie to Tara and Eggs, a love interest also under the auspices of Maryann. Eating the human heart draws them into a frenzy of sexual violence. When they wake in the morning to find themselves covered in cuts and bruises, Tara is disturbed by her actions:

MARYANN: Why be ashamed of letting go?

TARA: Because I've never been this out of control.

MARYANN: Control. Control is just a cage this stupid culture uses to lock up who we really are. We need to be out of control. We crave it.

TARA: But there's gotta be some kind of control or things would be chaos.

MARYANN: Sounds good.¹⁰¹

Drinking alcohol is also connected to the Maryann's 'letting go'. Sookie describes maenads' affinity for intoxication in *Living Dead in Dallas*:

Bacchus was the god of the grape, of course, so bars are very interesting to maenads. In fact, so interesting that they don't like other creatures of darkness becoming involved. Maenads believe that the violence sparked by the consumption of alcohol belongs to them; that's what they feed off, now that no one formally worships their god.¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ Kuritz, *The Making of Theatre History*, 19.

¹⁰¹ *True Blood*, S2E9 "I Will Rise Up"

¹⁰² Harris, *Living Dead in Dallas*, 44.

The mythic tradition of Dionysus is above all connected to the material body and loss of control. Maryann functions as a force that unleashes the primal desires of the local inhabitants and in the lifting of all prohibitions instigates chaos. The dissolution of communal laws and sanctions is brought about through her primal feminine power, both sexual and maternal. She exerts power over Sam through her sexuality, taking his virginity as a seventeen-year-old boy in need of help. With Tara she plays a kind of replacement 'good' mother, where Tara's own mother has failed to provide love or support because of her alcoholism. Maryann's love, however, is revealed to be that of the 'bad' mother, as it is self-serving and devouring. She gains Tara's trust by building her self-esteem whilst keeping her isolated:

Maybe life had just cleared out all the things that weren't working for you. Now you've got room to rebuild, decide exactly what you want your life to look like, and make it happen.¹⁰³

Maryann ushers in the 'world upside down' of Mikhail Bakhtin's carnivalesque. The carnival dates back to the annual ancient Greek festival called the City Dionysia.¹⁰⁴ It is an event outside of the normal laws involving revelling in the flesh including food, drink, defecation, and sexual life.¹⁰⁵ Through transgression of the normal social laws, the self is lost. Maryann feeds on the desires repressed in the every day community. Her cult is one that is forced on the community, but it is their underlying desires that allow her to succeed. Here the weak lid kept on the bubbling prohibited desires of human beings by societies' conventions is exposed. The importance of the lid is also shown through the destructiveness of sexual licentiousness and free license. Lifting the lid, Maryann worships her god Dionysus. It is through her unerring faith in Dionysus that she is ultimately overcome, when Sam shape-shifts into the form of a bull and Maryann mistakes him for the god. He then impales her with his horns. Maryann is the femme fatale, a highly sexual woman with destructive powers. Thus is it fitting that she is killed in a rape-like moment, impaled by the horns of a male animal. This symbolic rape by Sam reasserts masculinity and patriarchal order over the mad and chaotic femininity Maryann represents.

¹⁰³ *True Blood*, S1E12 "You'll Be the Death of Me"

¹⁰⁴ Kuritz *The Making of Theatre History*, 19.

¹⁰⁵ Bakhtin *Rabelais and His World*.

In Christian denominations loss of subjectivity is a ritual closely monitored and guided to ensure a return to the bounded subject. The communal ecstasy brought on through the worshipping of Dionysus may be seen in opposition to the eschatology of Christian Evangelical denominations. However, the breaking and re-establishing of boundaries is vital to their on-going power. The carnival, as Bahktin describes it, is a temporary dropping of the usual prohibitions, but it serves to make those prohibitions all the stronger once the carnival has ended.¹⁰⁶ In this way, the carnival may be seen as functioning as part of boundary keeping in that civilisation re-establishes its boundaries following the carnivalesque lifting of prohibitions. Maryann makes a link between the loss of subjectivity through the body and religious transcendence:

What about the saints of India? What about the mystics of every religion? ... They would black out. Run and dance through the streets, levitate, act like monkeys, run around naked. Everybody thought they were crazy. ... They were ecstatic.¹⁰⁷

There are some further parallels drawn between Evangelical and Dionysian religion in *True Blood*. Dionysus is 'the God who comes', in this sense he is waited for like the second coming of Jesus. Sophie-Anne describes Maryann as "still waiting for the god who comes."¹⁰⁸ When asked if he ever actually comes, she says "Of course not. Gods never actually show up." However, she adds, "I never said he was non-existent, just he never comes."¹⁰⁹ Whether Dionysus, Jesus, or any of the gods worshipped in *True Blood* are real or not matters less than the fact that they are imagined to be real and waited for without ever actually materialising. Even if they are real, they are disinterested.

"The First, The Last, The Eternal."¹¹⁰

The other key manifestation of the monstrous feminine in the television series is the character Lilith, introduced in Season Five. She is presented as the deity of vampires and, under a specific set of circumstances, becomes the nexus of a vampire supremacist fundamentalist belief system. The Vampire Authority, a powerful vampire organisation

¹⁰⁶ Bahktin, *Rabelais and His World*, 90.

¹⁰⁷ *True Blood*, S2E9 "I Will Rise Up"

¹⁰⁸ *True Blood*, S2E11 "Frenzy"

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ *True Blood*, S5E2 "Authority Always Wins"

committed to the project of ‘mainstreaming’, is the institution of government and centralised power in the vampire world, forming in effect a vampire theocracy. The name of the head of the Vampire Authority, Roman, a man who is driven, according to the actor playing him, by the “rightness of his cause” suggests a comparison between the Vampire Authority and the Catholic Church.¹¹¹ Roman takes a liberal approach to the Book of Lilith, the vampire equivalent of the bible, favouring a metaphorical interpretive method. He views the Book of Lilith and the relic of Lilith, a vial purported to contain some of Lilith’s blood, to be symbolic tools that lend credence to the role of the Vampire Authority, which is “the Catholic Church plus the Supreme Court for vampires” according to Ball.¹¹² The iconodulism and the long-standing opaque bureaucracy of the Vampire Authority further support analogies to the Catholic Church. Roman wages a campaign to root out and kill any vampires with fundamentalist leanings who favour a literal reading of The Book of Lilith. Roman is overthrown in a coup led by his second in command, Salomé, who is part of a fundamentalist sect within the Vampire Authority called the ‘Sanguinistas’. Salomé the vampire was, in her human life, the biblical figure famous for requesting the head of John the Baptist at the behest of her mother. She describes the infamy of her past as a misrepresentation:

SALOME: They made me a convenient villain, a symbol of dangerous female sexuality. I was just a girl with a severely fucked up family.

BILL: So you didn’t ask for a man’s head on a silver platter?

SALOME: Politics.¹¹³

She goes on to describe the ‘dance of the seven veils’ as in fact a sexual encounter, a “dance of sorts.”¹¹⁴ At a young age Salomé has been exploited as a sexual pawn in a political drama. She is used by her mother and learns the power of female sexuality both practically and, as her story becomes well known, symbolically. Though she is now over two thousand years old, she once again becomes a symbol of dangerous female sexuality, tempting Bill to forgo his commitment to mainstreaming and enter the sensual and celebratory cult of Lilith. Once Bill becomes a ‘Sanguinista’ however, Salomé’s power decreases, eventually being killed by her protégé. In a reversal of the role Salomé played in biblical history, she is tricked by Bill’s use of sex and flattery into drinking a fake vial of Lilith’s blood spiked with

¹¹¹ Ford, “‘True Blood’: Christopher Meloni on Playing a 500-Year-Old, ‘Big Old Baby’ Vampire.”

¹¹² Waxman, “Rick Sanorum Inspired ‘True Blood’ Season 5.”

¹¹³ *True Blood*, S5E3 “Whatever I Am, You Made Me”

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

silver. In her last moments she marvels at Lilith's wisdom in choosing Bill. Bill, though having been committed to mainstreaming and more opposed to violence towards humans than most vampires, becomes a follower of Lilith because he finds in this religion a way of accepting himself:

I have spent my entire life as a vampire apologizing, believing I was inherently wrong somehow, living in fear. Fear that God had forsaken me, that I was damned, but Lilith grants us freedom from fear. Vicissitudes 9:24 'Fear not, for my blood is beyond fear- fear of sin, fear of mankind, fear of retribution. For thou art begat by God, and this world is but a spring to slake thy sacred thirst.'¹¹⁵

Here we can see the many and contradictory logics drawn on at once. Feeling 'inherently wrong somehow' echoes some experiences of being gay within a community that positions homosexuality as unnatural and wrong. Fearing being damned is also an experience of some gay people particularly those within religions that conceptualise certain types of sexuality as being against god. The idea of being cured connects a religious belief in the unnaturalness of homosexuality with a medicalization of homosexuality as an illness to be treated. Bill goes on to quote from the Book of Lilith to support his newfound freedom to be himself. Usually scripture is quoted by religious fundamentalists to support anti-gay positions, but here a sacred text buttresses Bill's new sense of pride in his nature as a vampire. His selections from the text allow him a way of justifying that aspect of himself he struggled with the most: his desire to eat humans.

The Vampire Authority is presented as particularly dangerous in its combination of religion and government. Through the use of religious trappings such as a sacred text, a holy relic and so forth, a particular position on vampire-human relations becomes much more. Under Roman's role, this position was one of mainstreaming, which on the surface and in the media was a moderate political position. Below the public relations however, vampires were tortured and murdered for any defiance of the political agenda. When the 'Sanguinista' sect gains control of the Vampire Authority, the sacred text becomes inerrant, the relic becomes the actual blood of Lilith to be drunk rather than revered, and the personal witnessing of Lilith becomes a driving force in a wider political fall-out potentially

¹¹⁵ *True Blood*, S5E12 "Save Yourself"

resulting in a vampire-human war. Jessica notes the similarities between Bill's new found beliefs and those of her human parents:

JESSICA: Sounds like the Bible study my parents made me do.

BILL: It's not that different, they just had the wrong book.¹¹⁶

The literal quality of fundamentalism is underscored here. This literalism in the context of Evangelical denominations is founded on a belief in a beginning, middle, and end structure of human life on earth. Pam subverts this end-focused structure, noting with fatigue the cyclical nature of fundamentalist beliefs and group frenzy throughout history:

One of the worst things about being immortal is having to watch this same stupid scenario happen over and over, it's usually the humans though. Guess this proves we're just as fucking retarded as they are.¹¹⁷

Pam is aware of the importance of appearances and balance, not only because the public appearance of peaceful relations with humans is good for keeping those relations calm and functioning, but also because the maintenance of that appearance, even if is only a public veneer, also prevents vampires from succumbing to larger narratives of vampire supremacy and thus bringing on all out war with humanity:

We're going to do what every sane vampire in this country is going to do, pretend to still be drinking this shit, like good little main-streamers, and in private, we discreetly feed on humans.¹¹⁸

The keeping up of appearances is thus a means of maintaining sanity both within and without the vampire community. A certain level of hypocrisy is presented here as necessary for the functioning of public life. The figure of Lilith shatters this delicate balance of appearances, moderation, and privacy. After drinking drops of Lilith's blood, Lilith appears to the imbibers as a beautiful, naked, blood-soaked vampire. Her representation is similar to that of a "Babylonian terracotta relief [showing]... Lilith [as she] was believed to

¹¹⁶ *True Blood*, S5E10 "Gone, Gone, Gone"

¹¹⁷ *True Blood*, S1E12 "Save Yourself"

¹¹⁸ *True Blood*, S5E9 "Everybody Want to Rule The World"

appear to human eyes... slender, well shaped, beautiful, and nude, with wings and owl-feet."¹¹⁹

Though the drinking of vampire blood has the side-effect of causing hallucinations involving the vampire the blood came from, each vampire who witnesses a vision of Lilith becomes convinced of her godliness. All except Eric, who, when he is forced to drink Lilith's blood, sees his maker, Godric. Eric's sense of belonging, as one of Godric's progeny, is shaken first when Godric goes missing and even more so when Godric allows himself to be treated badly by humans and seeks to end his own life. He cannot understand the development in his maker's beliefs and his desire to be finished existing.

GODRIC: two thousand years is enough.

ERIC: I can't accept this. It's insanity!

GODRIC: 'Our' existence is insanity ... we don't belong here.

ERIC: But we 'are' here!

GODRIC: It's not right. We're not right.

ERIC: You taught me there was no right or wrong. Only survival or death.

GODRIC: I told a lie, as it turns out.

...

ERIC: Godric, don't do it.

GODRIC: There are centuries of faith and love between us.

ERIC: Please, please! ... Please, Godric!

GODRIC: Father ... brother ... child ... Let me go.

ERIC: I won't let you die alone.

GODRIC: Yes, you will.¹²⁰

Godric's epiphany after over two thousand years as a vampire is that his existence is wrong and he hopes for redemption through the 'true death'. Despite being finished living he looks to an afterlife:

GODRIC: Do you believe in God?

SOOKIE: Yes.

GODRIC: If you're right, how will he punish me?

SOOKIE: God doesn't punish. God forgives.

GODRIC: I don't deserve it, but I hope for it.

SOOKIE: We all do.¹²¹

¹¹⁹ Patai, *The Hebrew Goddess*, 222.

¹²⁰ *True Blood*, S2E9 "I Will Rise Up"

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

Even a vampire of Godric's age then seeks in the end a type of father figure to punish or forgive him, either way to take responsibility for him, to belong to him. This search for a father is in direct opposition to Lilith's role as vampire mother. Godric seeks belonging in his own death, while Eric is left 'fatherless' by his death. Accepting loss without returning to the realm of the archaic mother is presented as key to Eric's development. In an encounter with a group of witches, Eric loses his memory. During the period of his memory loss, Sookie takes care of him and explores with him where the person lies if not in the life history. His memory affects certain things such as his knowledge of past actions but it does not affect his awareness of his maleness for example. A version of Eric emerges through his memory loss that is presented as closer to the true Eric than the person he presents given his life experience. This essential individual character is at the heart of Eric's ability to resist the allure of Lilith. Survival, his motivating force for hundreds of years, is left behind. After drinking the blood of Lilith, Godric appears to Eric and his sister vampire Nora, dressed in white in a pool of white light, he explains that he has appeared to his "children" because:

My blood is in you. I am with you always.¹²²

This borrows directly from ritualised language surrounding the blood of Christ. *True Blood's* representation of religious language and iconography makes religion uncanny in its display of the familiar in the unfamiliar: the language of Christ in the vampire. When questioned by Nora as to the reasons for his change from murdering vampire to mercy-loving pacifist, he says:

Because I have done what you have failed to do: I've evolved.¹²³

The mention of evolution references one of the most high profile issues in relation to literal readings of the bible in America: creationism. The conflict between beliefs in evolution and those in the literal truth of the Genesis origin story first came to prominence in the Scopes trial which took place in Tennessee in 1925. A high school teacher, John Scopes, was accused of violating Tennessee's Butler Act, which prohibited public school teachers from contesting the Genesis account of the origin of human life. The trial attracted huge media attention and contributed to on-going disputes over American public-school education and the relative role and relationship of science and religion. Godric may have evolved, but a

¹²² *True Blood*, S5E10 "Gone, Gone, Gone"

¹²³ Ibid.

distinctly primal Lilith dispatches him with ease. Naked, covered in blood, and surrounded by red light, Lilith appears in Eric's vision and kills an unresisting Godric from behind. She slashes his throat, thus silencing him. Lilith does not speak. She communicates using her physicality, a screeching sound, and a magical ability to entrance and spread blood lust. Her non-use of language positions her as an archaic maternal figure, the monstrous feminine that must be abjected for civilisation and subjectivity to assert itself. She shares the same chaos inducing presence as Maryann but her location at the heart of vampire power increases her impact manifold. While the Dionysian carnival is a temporary disorder, the cult of Lilith has the potential for total destruction. Connecting the 'Sanguinistas' to 'end-of-days' Christian denominations and the 'God who comes', Salomé says:

This is not a movement Bill, this is the fucking rapture.¹²⁴

Characters' names are used in *True Blood* much like the vampire metaphor to point to possible ways of interpreting the narrative. Ultimately however, they provide more rather than less options in terms of meaning, connecting with familiar cultural images but also simultaneously setting their own internal frame of reference. *True Blood*'s reinvention of Lilith is the latest in a long history of multiplicity. Naming the vampire god Lilith immediately brings up the many Liliths of western culture. Making the connection between Lilith and vampires, Ernest Jones notes:

The Hebrew Lilith, whom Johannes Wyer called the princess who presided over the Succubi, came from the Babylonian Lilitu, who was definitely a Vampire; incidentally, the name is now thought to be derived from lulti, 'lasciviousness', and not, as the Rabbis used to maintain, from the Hebrew Laïlah, 'night'.¹²⁵

The connections to lasciviousness and night have both persisted in Lilith's cultural presence. The Lilith of Jewish folklore was Adam's first wife made not from his rib, as Eve was, but made of the earth like Adam himself. Refusing obedience to Adam, in some myths refusing sexual subservience, she leaves the Garden of Eden. Patai writes that in the Talmudic period, Lilith's beginnings as Adam's first wife were imagined thus:

... Adam and Lilith would find no happiness together, not even understanding. When Adam wished to lie with her, Lilith demurred: "Why should I lie beneath

¹²⁴ *True Blood*, S5E12 "Save Yourself"

¹²⁵ Jones, *On the Nightmare* 125.

you,” she asked, “when I am your equal, since both of us were created from dust?” When Lilith saw that Adam was determined to overpower her, she uttered the magic name of God, rose into the air, and flew away to the Red Sea, a place of ill repute, full of lascivious demons. There, Lilith engaged in unbridled promiscuity, and bore a demonic brood of more than one hundred a day.¹²⁶

The suitability of Lilith as the first vampire of *True Blood*’s mythology is evident from this passage. Drawing on her role as mother of demons, Lilith is presented as the original mother of the vampires. Made in the image of God, *True Blood* adapts the Eden story, placing Lilith at the centre, with Adam and Eve displaced to the role of sustenance for Lilith and her children. She is at once a maternal figure and an abomination of the domesticated maternal. She is sometimes represented as infertile:

Lilith’s epithet was “the beautiful maiden,” but she was believed to have been a harlot and a vampire who, once she chose a lover, would never let him go, without ever giving him real satisfaction. She was unable to bear children and had no milk in her breasts.¹²⁷

The reasons Lilith was reclaimed as a feminist icon in the 20th century are clear from her refusal to be subservient to Adam. The connection in the figure of Lilith of the maternal with the sexual has also provided a rich source for feminist re-appropriation. Discussing the Southern novel, Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* (1987), Shirley A. Stave writes:

In giving voice to Lilith, a far more empowering archetype for women than Eve, Morrison provides a cultural critique of the patriarchal obsession with and limited understanding of motherhood.¹²⁸

Stave suggests that Lilith’s destructive side has been emphasised over the centuries:

Lilith mythically has come to signify an aspect of the Great Mother Goddess, both creator and destroyer of all life; despite the former attribute, however, culture has traditionally regarded Lilith simply as a demon, as one who must be feared.¹²⁹

¹²⁶ Patai, “Lilith,” 296.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 295

¹²⁸ Stave, “Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* and the Vindication of Lilith”, 50.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 51.

In western culture she is alternatively a female demon figure, a goddess, and a reclaimed feminist icon. She is both mother and non-mother. She is above all sexually dangerous. The Lilith of *True Blood* plays on all these versions of Lilith and adds to them. The role as creator and destroyer of life is mobilised in *True Blood*'s depiction of Lilith. She is, for the vampires who worship her, a generous mother, while for humans and those vampires who do not acknowledge her, she is a force of destruction. Unlike Morrison's reworking of the myth however, no voice is given to Lilith and so she ultimately remains in the realm of the archaic Mother, the horrific, and the abject. She is the female demon creature of mythology, a threat to the established order:

Lilith is a godless god, she will lead you and all around you to destruction.¹³⁰

Godric is positioned in opposition to Lilith. He is an ancient vampire and alongside his name (God-ric) and visual presentation in white, is presented as having many Jesus-like qualities. He says:

I am actually older than your Jesus. I wish I could have known him, but I missed it.¹³¹

In this statement Godric refers to Jesus as a historical figure. This framing references the entrenchment of Evangelical Christian denominations in reaction to the prevalence of 'Higher Criticism' in biblical studies in the early 20th century in particular. 'Higher Criticism' took a historical approach to reading the bible, suggesting that the texts were not the word of God in a straightforward sense but that they represented various different peoples' accounts, subject to the inevitable editing, revisions, loss, and fragmentation that any ancient text would be. Evangelicals rallied against such an understanding of the bible, instead focusing on the bible as the direct word of God, inerrant and to be read literally. In his interactions with both The Fellowship of the Sun, who want to kill him, and the traitor amongst Eric Northman's people, Godric shows humility, forgiveness, mercy and at all times advocates peace. When Lilith attacks him, he does not fight her. He advises his vampire children not to be tempted by her but leaves them to choose for themselves. In an emulation of Jesus' sacrifice, having put himself at the mercy of the others, Godric allows himself to die with the rising of the sun. By presenting Godric, an ancient vampire, as a

¹³⁰ *True Blood*, S5E10 "Gone, Gone, Gone"

¹³¹ *True Blood*, S2E8 "Timebomb"

kind of Jesus figure embodying, more than any other character in the text, the characteristics of Jesus, the show highlights the distance between the Fellowship of the Sun's commitment to Jesus and their actions in the world, and the Vampire Authority's worship of Lilith and the violence this inspires. Here the show suggests what Monica Sjöö and Barbara Mör sum up as the measure of a god:

We do not know if a god is a true or a false god until we see what kind of world has been created in that god's name.¹³²

The Jesus that the Fellowship of the Sun appeals to and the Lilith of the 'Sanguinistas' is thus shown to be a god as reflection of self. That Godric may speak of the 'real' historical Jesus further emphasises the imaginary Jesus as nothing more than a self-serving tool. The hypocrisy of the seemingly perfect couple at the head of The Fellowship of the Sun further underline this self-serving aspect of the religious movement. Their strict gender division between breadwinner and good housewife is made ridiculous by Sarah Newland's seduction of Jason and Reverend Newland's repressed homosexuality and eventual pursuit of Jason. When Reverend Newland becomes a vampire, he does not harbour the self-loathing that a vampire like Bill does, rather he embraces his new self and seeks out the best life can offer him in this new identity. In a reversal of political positions he becomes the new spokesperson for the Vampire League, campaigning for the very group he once sought to eradicate, has a sexual relationship with Russell Edgington and becomes a member of the cult of Lilith. Steve Newland's journey from one side of the political divide to another without any great crisis of self, emphasises the cynicism of those in leadership positions of organisations that feed on insecurity and rule with 'God-given' authority. Godric is presented in sharp relief to this self-serving leadership. He is seeking the 'true death'; a final end to a life he says has gone on long enough.¹³³ His death again echoes the sacrificial death of Jesus, as he was offering himself as sacrifice to the Fellowship of the Sun.

Intersectional Subjectivities

Sookie negotiates various aspects of identity embroiled in the everyday power dynamics of her community including gender, race, class, sexuality, religion, and ability. While refusing

¹³² Sjöö and Mör, *The Great Cosmic Mother: Re-discovering the Religion of the Earth*, 393.

¹³³ *True Blood*, S2E9 "I Will Rise Up"

to allow any one category to become totalising, she nonetheless exploits the system of inequality to her own advantage when she can. The various categories comprising 'Sookie as subject' are presented in a postmodern fashion as constitutive of a fragmented subjectivity always in excess of the sum of its parts. Whilst engaging with the politics of identity categories in a pragmatic fashion, Sookie must also face the unpleasant consequences of aspects of her identity. They are not so mutable that she can escape them. For example Sookie frequently uses power associated with the female body, sexual attractiveness, and sanctioned femininity, polite manners, to achieve positive results in unequal interactions. However she is also subject to the violence of patriarchal culture towards her body, and to the limitations of femininity. She endures many violent attacks in the series, saying in the trailer for season six "I can barely remember the last time I wasn't in danger."

The constant throughout the seasons is a depiction of the individual's susceptibility to fundamentalist thought and belief systems that remove or limit personal choice in an effort to exert greater control on the overloaded world of competing identities and increasing complexity and ambiguity:

ERIC: It must be peaceful to be so sure of something, no room for doubt or remorse.

NORA: Faith isn't magic, anyone can do it.

ERIC: Yes, but it requires surrendering; I've never been a fan of that.

NORA: ... Believing in something other than yourself doesn't make you weak Eric, even the tallest tree knows its existence depends on the soil between its roots and the sun and the rain upon its branches.¹³⁴

The postmodern condition described by Jean-François Lyotard as the unsustainability of any meta-narrative and the emergence of context specific micro-narratives proves difficult for the subject, fragmented as it is yet haunted by a spectre of unity, to hold in place.¹³⁵ Ironically the individual, the centrepiece of Enlightenment thought, comes to the fore as the site of resisting totalising narratives. This subject is not unified but it is capable of accepting and holding together the fragments of identity. Living with the sense of "being in danger" constantly, the heroine accepts what Kristeva describes as the state of being "strangers to ourselves."¹³⁶

¹³⁴ *True Blood*, S5E9 "Everybody Wants to Rule the World"

¹³⁵ Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, 37.

¹³⁶ Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*.

I try to tell the best story and the story that has some heart and some genuine terror and some social commentary and some comedy and some romance and some sex and some violence.¹³⁷

The vampire functions as a metaphorical hole in *True Blood* as it is both rife with allegorical significance and never fully constitutive of its allegorical allusions. Ball sums this up when he describes his discomfort with the vampires being read as gay even though that has been an explicit connection the show has made. The show provides more fruitful meaning if a broader view of vampires is taken. Rather than equate them with any one interest group within 'real life' society, their position in American culture and their struggles for and with a group identity is analogous to any identity category. Categories such as woman are important in gaining rights and access to opportunities in mainstream culture, however those categories themselves also constrain as feminist theory and praxis has shown: the category woman as defining becomes a new hegemony and those women who do not fit or embody that category are othered. Yet the embrace of difference brings with it a crisis in terms of political and group action. A balance between the ontological impossibility of an encompassing category 'Woman' and the political efficacy of mobilising shared experiences of women is the most desirable state as it gives both freedom in terms of difference and allows common sites of resistance to be capitalised on. Such a balance allows that over half the world's population live with and through various and varied understandings of what being a woman means with both symbolic and material consequences. Other types of difference and inequality cannot be simply mapped onto this difference of gender as each has its own history and specifics of operation in relation to power, but there are similarities across these differences and individuals intersect differences in a variety of ways. The impact of gender on material existence may at times be of great significance and at other times other aspects of lived experience and identity categories such as race, class, sexuality, ability may have greater impact or intersect with one another in complicated ways that totalising views of each category cannot cope with. This complexity may lead to increasingly individualised conceptions of difference and self but, though valuable, can bring about inaction in terms of progress at the public level. For that communal action, a certain strategic simplifying of category can sometimes be necessary. This dynamic of sameness, difference, and group action is explored in *True Blood*.

¹³⁷ Lacob, "Inside 'True Blood's Fourth Season."

A strategic and pragmatic use of identities and beliefs is lauded over the complete assimilation of a system of beliefs based on a particular aspect of one's identity. This distrust of group beliefs can be likened to incompatibility of the grand narratives of life growing out of the Enlightenment Era with postmodern life: "The grand narrative has lost its credibility, regardless of what mode of signification it uses."¹³⁸ These grand narratives or metanarratives are shown in the series to be founded on a faulty ontology – an understanding of self that privileges one aspect of the self over all others and builds ways of interpreting and acting based on this. Worse than this philosophy's faulty foundation however is the hypocrisy that invariably comes with communal or shared tenets on the right way to live. That which is othered in the effort for internal unity resurfaces in various disruptive ways. For example the focus on chastity and sexual purity in *The Fellowship of the Sun* is undermined first by Sarah Newland's seduction of Jason, and later, when Reverend Newland becomes a vampire, his own sexual pursuit of Jason. Jason the sexual sinner is shown to be less hyper-sexualised than the pure and perfect couple advocating a particular mode of sexual conduct as proper. Out of the quagmire of conflicting beliefs comes an individual who can maintain him or herself without falling for the charms of belonging and the suspension of continual negotiation in terms of subjectivity. This subject acts on the basis of never fully subscribing to overarching beliefs, of accepting smaller, more local and contingent ways of being. This individual in *True Blood* fills in the gap or lack of postmodernism, which is precisely what human and supernatural creatures alike are presented as searching for and in the process surrendering to belief systems that stem the gap but not indefinitely and at extreme cost to others. A celebration of the person who can exist outside of communal beliefs, utilising when needed the categories their sense of self identifies with but never fully taking on any of these categories as complete or total, reifies that inexplicable force holding these disparate and changing aspects of self together, the individual.

¹³⁸ Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, 37.

CHAPTER FIVE: REPEAT AS REQUIRED

Melodrama, Nostalgia, and the Never-Ending Self in *The Vampire Diaries*

...the strength of the melodramatic form lies in the amount of dust the story raises along the road, a cloud of over-determined irreconcilables which put up a resistance to being neatly settled in the last five minutes.¹

I shouldn't have come home. I know the risk. But I had no choice. I have to know her.²

This quote, from the pilot episode of *The Vampire Diaries*, captures the central issues of subjectivity explored in the serial: regret, the risk and compulsion to return home, the desire to know something (gendered feminine) through the process of return, and the “wayward temporality” indicative of psychic life.³ It also points to a melodramatic ‘structure of feeling’ regarding regretful but inescapable ‘choices’ that pervades the series. Bella Swan acquires knowledge of the world and herself, magically undoing the sense of postmodern undermining of transcendental truth; Sookie Stackhouse’s survival is based on a pragmatic acceptance of the contingent and intersectional nature of identity free from the over-identification and erasure of difference of palliative but ultimately violent metanarratives of truth. Elena Gilbert begins her story in grief at the loss of her parents and goes on to experience repetitions of this loss throughout the show’s six seasons. Despite a variety of attempts to sacrifice herself for others, most of the people she cares about die, frequently returning only to be lost again. She ends in a coma-like state at the close of Season Six. The many doublings and repetitions of Elena’s story in *The Vampires Diaries* explore subjectivity as a repetitious cycle beginning in loss and involving inevitably ineffectual attempts to endure loss and the impossible idealised love it imagines for the self. The related processes of nostalgia, melancholy, and mourning pervade the series’ depiction

¹ Mulvey, “Notes on Sirk and Melodrama,” 40.

² *The Vampire Diaries*, E1S1 “Pilot”

³ Segal, *Out of Time*, 24.

of selfhood. A binary of transcendental idealism and nihilistic pragmatism is undermined in the series' exploration of repetitious cycles of humanity and monstrosity.

As detailed in the introductory chapter, *The Vampire Diaries* operates "somewhere in-between" *Twilight* and *True Blood* "both in terms of quality and degree of transgressiveness."⁴ This perception is most often related to issues of sexuality and the vampire, with *Twilight* representing a conservative endorsement of sexual abstinence before marriage through the domesticated, sparkling Cullen vampires and *True Blood* read as a liberal celebration of sexual diversity through its polyamorous vampires including Bill, Eric, Pam, and others. *Twilight* is widely viewed as 'bad' popular culture; *True Blood* is read as using a trashy style to convey more serious substance; *The Vampire Diaries* is mostly ignored and when discussed is generally viewed as indicative of the vapid, materialism of its home channel, the CW's, programming in general and the tastes of its target young female audience in particular. There is less public commentary focused on *The Vampire Diaries* and less scholarship analysing it than the other texts considered in this thesis. When *The Vampire Diaries* is mentioned in both popular and academic discussion it is often as part of a list of contemporary popular vampire romance or in brief comparison to *Twilight* and *True Blood*. It is described by television scholar Janna Subramanian as "filling in the demographic 'gap' between *Twilight* and *True Blood*, combining teen heartthrobs, high school politics, and the darkness and desperation often associated with the vampire myth".⁵

The serial may be read as creating this gap more than filling it, as suggested in the introductory chapter. Creating this gap is part of a larger agenda of the CW for enhanced demographics. The CW produces a genre of programming, identified by Kayti Lausch in a study of the network, involved in the construction of a young female audience.⁶ In the 'post-network' era of television, network channels like the CW increasingly behave like cable-channels in their attempts to create a niche market for their content.⁷ This niche must attract advertisers and so certain demographics are chased, imagined, and constructed as 'quality' in terms of their relation to consumption.⁸ Chasing certain 'quality' demographics has led to the CW's production of an unusually homogenous selection of

⁴ George and Hughes, "The Sympathetic Vampire and its Monstrous Other," 5.

⁵ Subramanian, "In the Shadow of a Metaphor."

⁶ Lausch, "The Niche Network: Gender, Genre, and the CW Brand."

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ While women are more closely associated with consumption and consumer related decision making, male audiences are often constructed as 'quality' because of the supposed difficulty of reaching male, white, middle-class, well-educated, adult audiences to advertise to.

programming, creating and consolidating its 'brand identity' as the channel for 'young women.' The 'niche marketing' of the network has led to the elimination of many successful shows: Lausch notes the cancellation of all the network's comedies, sitcoms, sports, including those shows that had previously aimed directly at and found a large audience amongst African Americans.⁹ The channel's development of an increasingly niche ideal audience member in the context of the move to narrowcasting in the television industry highlights inconsistencies in the identification of the 'young female' viewer.¹⁰ Lausch's study shows a difficulty on the CW's part in creating a coherent image of their ideal female viewer, particularly regarding her relation to feminism and femininity.¹¹ A nostalgia for a commercially friendly 1990s 'girl power' is evidenced in the network's repeated reprisal of shows and adaptations of novel series from this time.¹² Nostalgia for an imagined recent past is presented in Lausch's study as operative in the creation of the network's signature style. Creator Kevin Williamson suits this nostalgia for the 1990s as he is best known for his film and television successes that have become "90's classics": the teen drama *Dawson's Creek* (1998-2003), the first two teen slasher films in the *Scream* (1996, 1997) series and the film adaptation (1997) of Lois Duncan's novel *I Know What You Did Last Summer* (1973). *The Vampire Diaries* takes the teen drama focus on the emotionality of adolescence and adds some stylistics and motifs from slasher films of the 1990s, themselves mainstream referential versions of 1980s more low-budget independent horror films. Intertextual allusions occur in the serial through direct reference to other texts, the use of associated tropes, the episode titles, and connected thematic interests.

This chapter shows how the vampire, the doppelganger, and the Original Family are used to explore the role of repetitious psychic dynamics in the self. It provides an interpretation of the text as melodrama, drawing on Peter Brooks' theorization of 'the melodramatic imagination' and Ien Ang's use of this theory in conjunction with Raymond Williams concept of the 'structure-of-feeling' in popular culture.¹³ Using Brooks' theory that melodrama is analogous to psychoanalytic models of the psyche, the bittersweet 'structure-of-feeling' explored in *The Vampire Diaries* is elucidated using psychoanalytic theory.¹⁴ The

⁹ Lausch, "The Niche Network: Gender, Genre, and the CW Brand," 27.

¹⁰ If broadcasting aims to appeal to the majority of viewers, narrowcasting focuses on a more limited demographic, even if this alienates other demographics.

¹¹ Ibid., 16.

¹² Ibid., 63.

¹³ Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination*; Ang, *Watching Dallas*; Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, 128-135.

¹⁴ Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination*, 201.

distorted mirroring of psychoanalytic, gothic, and melodramatic paradigms of personhood are profited from in the serial and are useful in interpreting its construction of subjectivity. The representation of subjectivity and the problems of subjectivity in *The Vampire Diaries* moves away from *Twilight*'s exploration of the problematic female body and *True Blood*'s foregrounding of inassimilable difference. *The Vampire Diaries* constructs subjectivity as embroiled in endless cycles of loss and failing attempts at mastery. This fits with the CW network's postfeminist sensibilities.

The show's creators, Julie Plec and Kevin Williamson, present grief as part of their motivation to make *The Vampire Diaries*. Williamson was convinced by Plec to go ahead with development of the series as a means of working through grief following the death of a close friend: "We both use the show as an exercise of grief. It's an outlet. Really the entire series is an outlet for grief and an allegory for being alone."¹⁵ The show presents multiple repetitions of the inevitability of loss in the presence of love in a style that relates to the diary writing of the title. The need to write becomes a way of purging or separating parts of the self. In *The Vampire Diaries* writing is an outlet for both Elena and Stefan, as they both keep diaries. In the opening episode, Elena writes in her diary hoping for something to bring her out of her depressed state:

Dear Diary ... Today will be hell. But, I'm ready. I can deal. I have a plan. I will smile. It will be believable. Genuine. My smile will say, "I'm fine, thank you." "Yes, much better." "Time heals everything." They will see that Elena is alive and well. And if I can convince them, then maybe, just maybe, I can believe it myself.¹⁶

The 'outlet', the 'diary', the 'exercise of grief' point to the cathartic nature of the show and explain some of the repetitious quality and the suspension of time in an outpouring of emotion that exaggerates and immerses in sentimentality. Fulfilling one of the classic tropes of coming-of-age stories including romance, the heroine is an orphan. Surviving a tragic car accident that brought about the death of her parents, Elena's story begins as one of alienation in the wake of grief. Though once a "popular and well-adjusted girl", grief following the death of her parents changes Elena and alienates her from her former 'normal' self.¹⁷ The activities she once found pleasure in, like cheerleading and socialising,

¹⁵ Abrams, "Kevin Williamson wasn't initially interested in adapting *The Vampire Diaries*."

¹⁶ *The Vampire Diaries*, S1E1 "Pilot"

¹⁷ Ibid.

no longer hold the same appeal. Her former boyfriend is no longer of any interest to her, other than as a friend. She cannot seem to fit back into the life she had before experiencing loss. Through Elena and Stefan's narration, and the motif of diary writing, the theme of the troublesome or alienated self is introduced. The diary entries introduce from the first episode themes of self and the negotiation, representation, construction, and recording of self through language.

Nostalgia rests on an irreparable gulf between past and present.¹⁸ To span that gulf a unifying story of the self is required. This story demands highly selective and on-going narrative remaking by the present self. *The Vampire Diaries* presents subjectivity as a process of story-telling. In "Creative Writing and Day-Dreaming" and "Family Romances" Freud presents story-telling as "the means by which children deal with their anxiety about sex differences, sibling rivalry and beings upon whom they are dependent, especially the mother."¹⁹ Ann Kaplan, considering Freud's work in this area, describes:

two predominant fantasies... [that of] the Bastard and of the Foundling... Both have to do with the child's Oedipal relationship to the mother, and with concerns about origins; and both reflect the child's needs at the moment of disillusionment with the originally narcissistically idealized parents.²⁰

Subjectivity is structured around such storytelling about the self in *The Vampire Diaries*. It begins in Season 1 with the newly-orphaned Elena whose lost parents are of course the good idealised kind. In the first two seasons Elena learns the truth about her origins both in terms of her birth mother and father, her ancestry, and her doppelganger identity. Stefan has his diaries and when in 'Ripper' mode he tells stories with the bodies of his victims. After ripping their bodies to pieces and draining them of their blood, he reassembles the pieces. When Damon and Alaric find two dead girls sitting on a couch, Damon kicks one of the corpse's feet and her head falls off:

It's his signature. It's the reason they call him "the Ripper"... he puts the bodies back together.²¹

¹⁸ Tosh, *Why History Matters*, 34.

¹⁹ As discussed in Kaplan, *Motherhood and Representation*, 65.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ *The Vampire Diaries*, S3E1 "The Birthday"

Vampire Bodies

The Vampire Diaries' location on The CW channel brings with it a network image requirement for entire casts with model good looks, notable even in the beauty-biased world of film and television. Each of the texts examined here have beautiful actors playing the lead vampire roles in their film and television adaptations. In-keeping with the CW tradition, every member of *The Vampire Diaries* cast is young, beautiful, and predominantly white. They present the perfected image of the body Bella sees when she first encounters Edward and his siblings. As Lausch writes:

What distinguishes the CW is how much it relies on its attractive actors' sex appeal to sell its shows ... and the superficial uniformity of its casts. There are no outliers, no non-normative bodies starring on the CW's shows; even secondary characters largely conform to the network's beauty standards. If one laid out the shows' cast photos side-by-side, it would be difficult for someone unfamiliar with the network's offerings to distinguish between the casts. The CW presents a narrow definition of femininity, one that is reliant on consumerism and normative ideals of beauty.²²

While Bella obsesses over Edward's physical beauty, the beautiful body is taken for granted within the diegesis of *The Vampire Diaries*. There is no sense of disparity in looks between the heroine and her love interests. Outside of the narrative, the beautiful bodies form part of the commodity sold, their meanings read visually in an attempt to create in the imagined audience of young women the type of longing dramatised in Meyer's story: a desire for the impossibly perfected body. The impossibility of this level of perfection ensures perpetual 'self work' to strive towards the unattainable. In *Twilight* Bella achieves a body that is so perfect it may be ignored. *Twilight* may be read in this way as a deeply problematic fantasy of eliminating the endless 'self-work' of contemporary neoliberal consumer culture. The bodies represented in *The Vampire Diaries* are closer to the pure and abjectless vampire body sought by Bella as both self and lover, than the attractive though potentially contaminating vampire body of *True Blood*, a body Sookie desires to relate to but not assimilate to. Bella becomes the shining body of glossy magazines, Hollywood film, and high-production values 'CW style' television like *The Vampire Diaries*. Sookie leverages her

²² Lausch, "The Niche Network: Gender, Genre, and the CW Brand," 91.

attractive appearance in an unequal system that grants limited power to acceptable forms of feminine beauty, whilst being aware of the simultaneous disadvantage and danger this system puts her in, dramatized via her fairy identity. In their different ways, both Bella and Sookie are self-consciously aware of their looks and the meaning of their looks in constructing and operating as a coherent subject. Since everyone in *The Vampire Diaries* is conventionally beautiful, there is no need or possibility of discussing beauty as an axis of difference. In this way, contemporary beauty standards are both front and centre, yet entirely silent. This silence is indicative of a number of silences in the serial, particularly regarding race, class, feminism, and sexuality. It is noteworthy that the makers of both *Twilight* and *True Blood* have been questioned by popular press about and discussed their opinions of culturally and politically important topics such as feminism, LGBT rights, race, and religion in American culture. These topics are not popularly considered as relevant to a discussion of *The Vampire Diaries*. The network as a whole and all its programming aim at and construct a viewer who is 'young' and 'female.' This gendered positioning means that the programme may be read as always already engaged with issues of gendered subjectivity. Given this, silence on issues such as feminism is read as significant. The serial and its producers are largely silent on political and topical issues, foregrounding instead broader themes such as grief, loss, love, and compassion. The exploration of these broad emotion-based themes, however, is based on and creates gender politics. Considering *The Vampire Diaries* in a Female Gothic tradition and as a response to *Twilight* and *True Blood* highlights important silences and omissions, and draws attention to the making and remaking of gender and selfhood.

Twilight is a contemporary reference point for *The Vampire Diaries*, and name-checking Anne Rice's work points to the postmodern vampire's beginnings in the 1970s. *Buffy The Vampire Slayer* is also referenced in the series and Whedon's iconic television show is an important influence. The celebrated character, Buffy, is the type of girl-power inspired heroine the CW inherited but finds difficult to recreate for a 21st century audience. The early 1990s forms a key era of nostalgia for the series; vampire films from this time have an influence beyond a simple name-check. The film *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1992), Neil Jordan's adaptation of *Interview with the Vampire* (1994), Francis Ford Coppola's *Bram Stoker's Dracula* (1992), and Michael Almereyda's *Nadja* (1994) were all released within two years of each other in the early 1990s. Fred Botting writes:

With Coppola's *Dracula*, then, gothic divested of its excesses, of its transgressions, horror and diabolical laughter, of its brilliant gloom and rich darkness, of its artificial

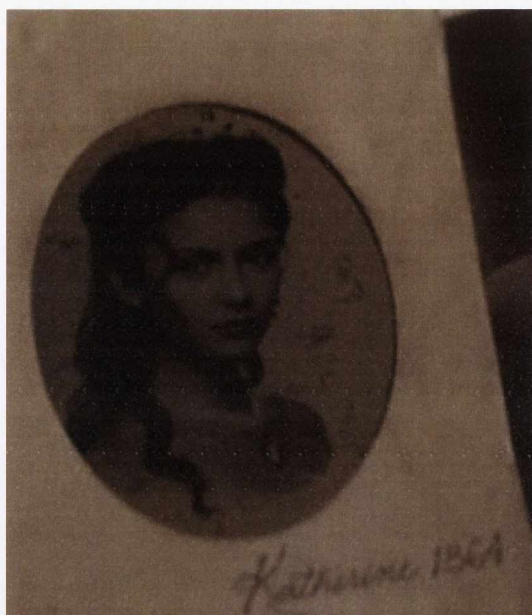


Figure 5: Portrait of Katherine Petrova/Pierce (Nina Dobrev).²³



Figure 6: Portrait of Mina Harker (Winona Ryder).²⁴

²³ *The Vampire Diaries*, S1E10 “The Turning Point” (2009). Screenshot found at <http://www.popoptiq.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/Katherine1864.jpg>. Accessed February 10, 2016.

²⁴ *Bram Stoker’s Dracula*, dir. Francis Ford Coppola (1992). Screenshot found at <https://s-media-cache-ak0.pinimg.com/736x/10/20/9a/10209aff912656105ad5c002b482cd24.jpg>. Accessed February 10, 2016.

and suggestive forms, is caught up in the hallucinatory effects of texts, images and media that are on the point of becoming digital.²⁵

The CW displays nostalgia for the “point of becoming digital” in what has become a digitised post-network era. In Coppola’s film, the *Dracula* story is altered by a frame story involving a “pseudo-historical account of Vlad the Impaler’s tragic love.”²⁶ Mina is a double of Dracula’s dead wife; he sees her photo in Jonathan Harker’s belongings and thus sets in motion the narrative of Dracula reimagined as what Botting terms “sentimental romance” encapsulated in the epigraph of the film’s poster advertising ‘Love never dies.’²⁷ Botting writes:

Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* is merged with another popular romanticisation of a nineteenth-century novel, *Wuthering Heights*, as a tale of excessive individual passions, of a love enduring beyond all social forms and history, beyond the grave.²⁸

The Vampire Diaries draws on this film, repurposing some of its central motifs: Stefan keeps a daguerreotype style portrait of Katherine amongst his belongings. Elena discovers this image of her likeness to her horror. The image is also very similar to the photo of Mina in Coppola’s film. The heroine as a double of a lost love is magnified by its repetition: Elena discovers she is the doppelganger, identical to Katherine who was once loved by Stefan and Damon. When human, Katherine was involved in a romance with Original brothers Elijah and Klaus, who in turn both loved a previous doppelganger, Tatia, in their human lives. For several seasons, Tatia appeared to be the original Petrova starting the doppelganger line. However the *original* original for the line of Petrova doppelgangers is discovered in Season Five, when the love triangle of Qetsiyah, Silas, and Amara is revealed. This triangular relationship, and jealousies and betrayals within it, sets in motion the repetitious occurrence of doppelgangers and love triangles throughout history.

In Season Five, Katherine’s daughter Nadia enters the narrative. Her name and her role in anticipating her mother’s death points to a 1990s’ source of inspiration: Michael Almereyda’s 1994 art-house style vampire film *Nadja* in which Dracula’s daughter claims her father’s body in New York City. The film is itself a reimagining of the Universal sequel

²⁵ Botting, *Gothic*, 192.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 191.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*

to *Dracula* (1931), *Dracula's Daughter* (1936), in which Countess Marya Zaleska travels to London in the hope of escaping the curse of her vampirism following the Count's death, by destroying his body. It is also loosely based on Andre Breton's surrealist novel *Nadja* (1928). Almereyda describes Breton's book as "a kind of starting point... There were lots of things about madness, love, chance, and identity in it that are related to what the movie is about."²⁹ *The Vampire Diaries* draws on this indie-vampire film's interest in family bonds and the vampire daughter in the character Nadia. She has been searching for Katherine for over five hundred years, finally tracking her down in present-day Mystic Falls. Almereyda's Nadja's mother died in childbirth, while Katherine was forced to give up her daughter, Nadia, shortly after childbirth. While Nadja's father is the source of her vampire identity, Nadia becomes a vampire in order to find her mother. The mother-daughter scenes between Katherine and Nadia are used to further complicate Katherine's monstrousness. The plot also presents one of the few maternal points of view in a serial that is very much focused on the daughter/son perspective. Though the audience is aware that Katherine once had a child, when her now adult vampire daughter enters the narrative, Katherine finds herself facing new motherhood, an aging body, and death all at once. The connection between maternity and embodiment explored in *Twilight* emerges in this storyline in which both mother and daughter die by its closure.

Humanity Switch

Stefan Salvatore describes life as a vampire to Elena in Season Two of *The Vampire Diaries*:

You feel like you can do anything. Be anyone. Beautiful things are more beautiful. Everything's heightened, you know. You live more intensely. Love more powerfully... Anger becomes rage. When you're sad, you're in despair. Grief, loss, it can cripple you. That's why so many of us turn our emotions off. If just becomes... too overwhelming.³⁰

The 'humanity' of vampires is defined by the experience of emotions. An ability to endure emotional suffering forms the core of *The Vampire Diaries*' construction of the human. In this way the figure encapsulates the melodramatic mode and suggests an important

²⁹ Almereyda quoted in Abbott, *Celluloid Vampires*, 145.

³⁰ *The Vampire Diaries*, S2E20 "The Last Day"

interpretation of the serial as functioning within the logics of a ‘melodramatic imagination.’ While each of the texts examined may be considered melodrama, *The Vampire Diaries* not only partakes in the melodramatic mode but thematises key aspects of its logic. Peter Brooks in his seminal work on melodrama describes it as a:

form for a post-sacred era, in which polarization and hyperdramatization of forces in conflict represent a need to locate and make evident, legible, and operative those large choices of ways of being which we hold to be of overwhelming importance even though we cannot derive them from any transcendental system of belief.³¹

When Klaus reveals that Elena must die in order for him to break his mother’s ancient curse on him suppressing his werewolf side, Elena decides to sacrifice herself to avoid Klaus killing her friends and family, as he did when Katherine Petrova, the previous doppelganger, evaded him. Elena could live on as a vampire if she wished. Great consideration of this choice takes place over the course of several episodes. Turning into a vampire in this story requires death with vampire blood in the system. Following death the person will awake to a period called ‘transition.’ If they do not feed on human blood within twenty-four hours they will die; if they do feed they will become a vampire. The element of choice in the vampire transition process contrasts with *Twilight*’s infecting bite followed by excruciating pain and *True Blood*’s more elaborate blood exchange and burial, both of which demand vampire decision-making only. This choice is representative of a construction of selfhood in the serial refracting an inescapable emphasis on individual responsibility despite its ineffectiveness. Great importance is placed on the choice during transition to become a vampire or to die. At the end of this plot line, Elena dies but comes back to life still human because her Uncle John, who is revealed as her birth father, uses magic to link his life to hers, sacrificing himself so she can live.

Elena, it’s no easy task being an ordinary parent to an extraordinary child. I failed in that task. And because of my prejudices, I failed you. I’m haunted by how things might have played out differently if I’d been more willing to hear your side of things... Whether you are reading this now as a human or as a vampire, I love you all the same as I’ve always loved you and always will.³²

³¹ Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination*, viii.

³² *The Vampire Diaries*, S2E21 “The Sun Also Rises”

The repetitious expression of love and regret in John Gilbert's suicide note to his daughter is a hallmark of the show's accumulative method of producing meaning. When Damon reads Stefan's diaries he compares him to the famous American transcendentalist:

Very Emerson, the way you reveal your soul. So many ... adjectives.³³

Damon's refusal of Stefan's idealism appears first to be a character trait. He professes pessimism regarding human and supernatural basic 'goodness' as a result of his own character flaws. It is later revealed that Stefan, rather than Damon, has been the instigator of their transition to vampirism and as a 'Ripper', Stefan's potential for violence and murder exceeds Damon's. Having witnessed Stefan's lapses, Damon finds his attempts at self-knowledge by writing the self pointless. However, at key points in the series useful information about the past is revealed through Stefan and others' diary entries.

We are always coming up with the emphatic facts of history in our private experience and verifying them here. All history becomes subjective: in other words there is properly no history; only biography.³⁴

The subject that is "so often the child in psychoanalysis, gathered up retroactively by the child-now-adult through the process of analysis" is at the centre of *The Vampire Diaries*.³⁵ Each vampire history may be read as a form of retroactive gathering up of the self, formed in the every-returning dynamics of childhood family relationships.

The telling and re-telling of history to suit present needs is evident in official and personal histories. Damon's reference to Emerson is significant, particularly regarding Emerson's understanding of creativity as 'quotation':

Every book is a quotation; and every house is a quotation out of all forests and mines and stone-quarries; and every man is a quotation from all his ancestors.³⁶

He also writes:

It is the same among men and women, as among the silent trees; always a referred existence, an absence, never a presence and satisfaction.³⁷

³³ *The Vampire Diaries*, S1E3 "Friday Night Bites"

³⁴ Emerson, "History," 240.

³⁵ Baraitser, *Maternal Encounters*, 5.

³⁶ Emerson, *Representative Men*, 462.

The focus on lack and repetition anticipates the interest of postmodern theories including Roland Barthes' work on the limits of authorial intention and Jacques Derrida's concept of 'difference.'³⁸ This deconstructionist tendency is evident in the serial's repeated retellings of the past with each version signalling gaps and inconsistencies in the previous version. *The Vampire Diaries*' historical accounts point to the attractions and dangers of nostalgia. The motif of lies within lies informs the plot lines, but also the characterization. So 'good' Stefan contains restraint, in so far as he is abstinent regarding human blood, but he also contains the potential and then the display of excessive indulgence in consuming human blood and murdering mainly women in the process. Indeed his abstinence is linked to his excesses when 'off the wagon', very obviously drawing on understandings of alcohol addiction. When Elena asks him "How come you're so much better at controlling it,"³⁹ he responds, "Because I'm so much worse when I don't."⁴⁰ Damon, first presented as entirely monstrous, becomes an exemplar of moderate or controlled indulgence, without the uncontrollable 'ripper' tendency of Stefan, but also less virtuous generally and capable of unpredictable cruelty and violence even with his humanity 'on'. *The Vampire Diaries* continuously erodes its antagonist's monstrosity or sets up situations in which the so-called 'good' characters are forced to make strategic alliances with seemingly bad characters.

Bonnie explains to Damon in Season Six that he is not a monster, despite all the monstrous things he has done, because he feels remorse. The remorseful vampire has been a staple of the small screen since Barnabas Collins became a regular character of the 1960s gothic soap opera *Dark Shadows*. *The Vampire Diaries* takes this tradition of vampire identity as a form of tortured regret combined with the likelihood of future repetition of the regretted action as the core feature of subjectivity itself. Remorse, regret, and other emotions based on retrospection are central to *The Vampire Diaries*' construction of subjectivity. Each of the vampire romance texts examined explore control with regard to selfhood, but *The Vampire Diaries*' exploration of control is almost entirely linked to the past, and the return of the past. It is presented as inevitable that every character in *The Vampire Diaries* will at some point behave in monstrous ways. The difference between the monstrous and the human lies in how the self's monstrosity is told by the self in retrospect. The diary motif therefore works as the ideal symbol of self-reflection as self-making. In the context of the domesticated vampire, and the postmodern unhooking of the 'monster' from the

³⁷ Emerson, "Nature," 403.

³⁸ Barthes, "The Death of the Author"; Derrida, *Of Grammatology*.

³⁹ *The Vampire Diaries*, S5E21 "Promised Land"

⁴⁰ Ibid.

monstrous, *The Vampire Diaries* reinstates a code of humanity and monstrosity in its device of the “humanity switch.” The “humanity switch” refers to a vampire’s ability to switch off their emotions, thereby alleviating the unpleasant experience of feeling heightened versions of human beings’ negative emotions, particularly grief, regret, and shame. When humanity is switched on, the vampire structures the world via recourse to emotion. With the humanity switch off, however, the vampire is callous, unfeeling, and tends to view the world with an ironic sense of detachment. This is an idea unique to *The Vampire Diaries*, though many vampire works contain versions of this concept: addiction based metaphors regarding blood consumption and blood lust as potentially overwhelming reason or morality are fundamental to many vampire stories. Perhaps the closest relation to the ‘humanity switch’ in popular culture is Angel’s change to Angelus in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003), here connected to the concept of a ‘soul’ as the marker of humanity and the true moment of happiness as the trigger for the suppression of the human. Such religious concepts are rarely drawn on in *The Vampire Diaries*. The humanity switch is clearly in this tradition but is linked to pain rather than happiness. Damon describes being a vampire to Bonnie in Season Four:

We are a predatory species, we enjoy the hunt, the feed and the kill and when the guilt gets too bad we switch off our humanity and we revel in it.⁴¹

Notoriously disingenuous, Damon’s professed attitude towards ‘humanity’ is not necessarily reflected in the circumstances in the series when characters utilise the humanity switch. Stefan is compelled by Klaus to switch off his humanity, and later blackmailed by Caroline into doing so in order to save his niece’s life; Damon turns off his humanity to avoid feeling guilt at his friend Enzo’s presumed death. Enzo turns off his humanity to avoid working through his conflicted feelings towards Damon’s lack of loyalty; Elena turns off her humanity following her brother Jeremy’s death; and Caroline turns off her humanity following her mother’s death. While the switching off of ‘humanity’ might result in temporary revelry in the kill, this is rarely a motivator. Rather, avoidance of especially painful emotions motivates vampire’s escape from ‘humanity.’ This is an act of violence towards the self that results in violence towards others as the ‘humanity off’ vampire rarely cares who they kill. The philosopher Parker Palmer describes violence as “what happens

⁴¹ *The Vampire Diaries*, S4E4 “The Five”

when we don't know what else to do with our suffering."⁴² In *The Vampire Diaries* suffering can be repressed via the humanity switch but in doing so the self becomes monstrous. Elena discovers an alternative in Season Six by making a monster of what is lost. Instead of turning off her humanity following the loss of Damon, she has Alaric use compulsion to erase her memories of loving him. Stefan reveals this process to her:

You made Damon a monster in your own mind because you couldn't handle the grief of losing him.⁴³

The process of making a monster out of the lost object is critiqued in this storyline as bad or inappropriate mourning, one that will ultimately come undone.

Katherine describes humanity as "a vampire's greatest weakness":

No matter how easy it is to turn it off, it keeps trying to fight its way back in. Sometimes I let it.⁴⁴

This quote highlights different conceptualizations of the movement between humanity and non-humanity in the narrative. The switch suggests a clear on-off position, without any ambiguity between the two. The oppositional relationship of the binary between monster-human is asserted here. When characters switch off their humanity it is presented as a conscious decision with immediate and unambiguous results, giving the impression of a stark boundary between the monstrous and the non-monstrous. However, humanity "keeps trying to fight its way back in", suggesting a more porous boundary. The monstrous 'off' position is as continually assaulted by the humanity 'on' position as the emotionally connected vampire is tempted to find relief by switching 'off.' Both positions must endure the presence of the other.

In Season Two, Rose undermines the whole idea of the 'humanity switch' saying:

It's a lie, you know. There's no switch you can turn off. Sure, when you're a newbie... But after a couple of hundred years... you just have to pretend.⁴⁵

⁴² Palmer, "Heartbreak, Violence, and Hope for New Life."

⁴³ *The Vampire Diaries*, S6E4 "Black Hole Sun"

⁴⁴ *The Vampire Diaries*, S3E9 "Homecoming"

⁴⁵ *The Vampire Diaries*, S2E9 "Katerina"

Greater life experience leads to an awareness of grey areas of identity and the false 'switch' idea that presents humanity and monstrosity as opposites. The 'switch' is related to choice and the pretence of choice, thus both valorising and undermining the power of choice. Choice is inevitably a function of control - without control, choice becomes redundant, as displayed in Stefan's addiction, only regaining the ability to choose not to drink blood by regaining control of himself - significantly via emotion. However, in *The Vampire Diaries* control is not aligned exclusively with humanity or monstrosity - a vampire such as Stefan has control when ordering his life via emotion but goes out of control when his humanity is off, while Damon loses control because of heightened feelings and often switches 'off' his humanity or emotions to regain a sense of control over himself. Caroline turns off her humanity following the death of her mother but continues to exercise control, even choosing not to kill humans she feeds on to avoid unwanted investigation. The only significant difference between the humanity on and the humanity off vampire is the vampire's self-narrative. Despite the erosion of the validity of the 'humanity switch' by characters including Rose, the concept is nonetheless returned to throughout *The Vampire Diaries*' six seasons. A monster-making process is also at work in the foundational relationships of *The Vampire Diaries*' story-world: the Original Family.

Family History

Epistemological uncertainty pervades *The Vampire Diaries* through the untrustworthiness of both official and secret histories. When Stefan attends a history class in Mystic Falls' High School, he corrects the teacher knowing the 'facts' of how many people died in the official historical record of events. He also knows the real history, having lived through it. As Elena discovers that Stefan is vampire she also learns of this secret history of the town and the roles played by the Founding Families, of which she is a descendant. The founding history of the secret supernatural world Elena has been introduced to is discovered as a hoax itself. The elaborate and strategic manipulation of the process of 'secret' historical record is used to cover up Original vampire, Klaus', true origins. Positing beginnings and 'Original' origins, the series finds no beginning to the beginning and each idealized origin is found to have another imperfect story beneath or within it. This conception of the past draws on the Gothic tradition of secret histories and "the use of one narrative to cover up a 'true'

narrative.”⁴⁶ In *The Vampire Diaries*, this narrative is also uncovered as a lie, as will be the next and the next, creating a hall of distorted mirrors perception of history. Analysing *The Vampire Diaries* Joseph Crawford writes:

If the show has a central, defining motif, it would be the double deception, the lie told about another lie⁴⁷

When the facts of the past are always in doubt, the self’s story of the past comes to hold both more and less significance. This story cannot be taken for a master narrative of the past and in this sense it is entirely subjective, likely to be countered by both other interpretations and the discovery of previously unknown or covered up events. However, given the many cover-ups and falsifications of official and group histories, the most subjective accounts are more likely to contain some truths, albeit small truths.

The history of European settlement in America is undercut in *The Vampire Diaries* by the Original Family’s original journey there in the 10th century before returning to Europe and re-emigrating to New Orleans in the 18th century. Each of the vampires’ long personal histories make the depiction of historical eras purely biographical. As it is discovered that all vampires lives depend on the life of the original vampire of their ancestry, the entire vampire population’s continuation is based on the survival of the Originals. As such, the past of the Original family is a shared past. It is the childhood of every character in the series. In this way place and time period work as part of the psycho-biographical history of each character. An interest in history is thus an interest in the self as shown by Stefan’s knowledge of history and his diary collection documenting his life since Civil-War Era America. Damon’s distrust of this type of self-knowledge comes from his experience of Stefan’s ‘ripper’ cycles and the events that led to his transition to vampire. In this way, the subjective account of history is also revealed as suspect. The subjective position may reveal some truths covered-up in the official narrative, but it too is full of deception. In *The Vampire Diaries*’ construction of monstrosity, this points to the self-deceptions that enable a sense of purity regarding the self.

In the first season of *The Vampire Diaries* the central characters discover the Curse of the Sun and the Moon. This story of the workings of the supernatural world order is discovered as a

⁴⁶ Subramanian, “In the Shadow of a Metaphor.”

⁴⁷ Crawford, *Twilight of the Gothic*, 265.

cover up of the Original Vampire Klaus' hybrid identity due to his mother's infidelity. The curse he seeks to break is one placed on him by his mother to suppress his werewolf side. In fulfilling his hybrid nature, Klaus seeks to create a family of hybrids. The continually revised origin story of the Original Family and the repeated returns of characters after death and their repeated attempts to return 'home' in Mystic Falls and to re-create 'home' in New Orleans create a sense of epistemological uncertainty regarding beginnings and a melancholia resulting from the impossibility of fulfilling the desire to return to beginnings that are so uncertain. *The Vampire Diaries* thus presents a conjunction of nostalgia and the uncanny in its focus on origins and returns. Subjectivity is made in relation to stories of home, the family, and origins, and of the constant returns and repetitions that assert and undermine the solidity and the transparency of these stories. The perfected bodies of *The Vampire Diaries'* world are undermined by ambiguities surrounding the borders of life and death, of past and present, of history and lies.

Melodrama and Soap Opera

Steve Neale describes melodrama as a "mode of narrative... marked by chance happenings, coincidences, missed meetings, sudden conversions, last-minute rescues and revelations, *deus ex machine* endings."⁴⁸ Pathos is generated, according to Neale, by a gap between the audience and the characters' knowledge. In *The Vampire Diaries* the gap is not between audience and character, but in the characters' regrets. Being "haunted by how things might have played out differently" is central to *The Vampire Diaries'* production of pathos. Though Elena does not become a vampire in Season Two, this scenario recurs in Season Three when a doctor treating Elena uses Damon's blood to heal her. She later dies in a recreation of the car accident that killed her parents at Wickery Bridge. Having died with Damon's blood in her system, she wakes in transition and later drinks human blood to become a vampire. The trope of repetition with slight alteration recurs in various guises through the show's six seasons. How things might have been is experimented with but never results in characters' sustained happiness or endings. As with the structure of the television soap opera, endings are explored but never finalised until the bitter end.

⁴⁸ Neale, "Melodrama and Tears," 6.

Repetition, replication, and recapitulation operate at structural, narratorial, character, plot, and thematic levels.

With very long seasons, *The Vampire Diaries* is close to the never-ending-story format of traditional soap operas. Charles Derry writes that:

Soap operas reject the traditionally structured plot, whereby a character is embroiled in a conflict which leads to an integrated series of crises and one concluding climax. Stories in soap opera mirror the haphazardness of life.... Sometimes a major event (such as a storm or a revealed secret) can, without warning, change everything. Other times, a main character suddenly dies and the narrative simply and cruelly continues... a shocking effect relating to our self-perception as the focus of a primary narrative. (It is difficult to conceive of a world going on without us.)⁴⁹

The “inescapable resemblance between soap opera and life: In both, things just keep happening” is both a description and a thematic interest of the series.⁵⁰ The figure of the vampire captures this never-ending existence as one of perpetual returns. The difficulty of imagining one's own death is explored by the very many deaths and returns staged in the series. Every important character dies at some point, but the vast majority of them return in some form: as vampire, ghost, by possessing another body, in a magically resurrected body. Many characters have died and returned repeatedly. A public funeral is often denied those left behind because of the supernatural causes of most of the deaths. As such, there is often a private goodbye ritual enacted by the friends. The dead character typically witnesses this goodbye ceremony from the ‘other side’ or in a vision/dream-scape. This type of scene is repeated throughout the series, shown in its most elaborate version in Elena's farewells in Season Six. The “temporal waywardness of psychic life” is manifested in the television vampire show's frequent use of flashback and in the use of ‘vision-scapes’ in which the dreaming or unconscious mind produces spaces of interaction in *The Vampire Diaries*.⁵¹ This idea begins in Season One with dream manipulation, a skill long associated with the vampire figure. Damon influences Elena's dreams to feature him in a sexual context. Vampire blood has a similar effect in *True Blood* and Bella begins dreaming of Edward shortly after she meets him, though Edward does not influence this consciously.

⁴⁹ Derry, “Television Soap Opera: ‘Incest, Bigamy, and Fatal Disease,’” 5.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 6.

⁵¹ Segal, *Out of Time*, 24.

This concept is developed further in *The Vampire Diaries* in the concept of the 'vision-scape'. For example, when Damon's vampire friend and sometimes sexual partner, Rose, is dying of a werewolf bite, he manipulates her hallucinations bringing her in her mind's eye to a sunny hill in her homeland of 15th century England. When Elena is placed under a stasis spell in Season Six, each of her friends says their goodbyes to her by touching her lifeless hand and entering her mindscape. These visions are used to heighten the emotional resonance of key moments in the narrative. The mental creation of physical space for the operations of the emotional encounter can be linked to the origin in loss that fuels the series as a whole. Each vision uses location to invoke the past into the present and the nostalgia of friendship and romance into a melodramatic moment whose emotional excess is heightened by the layering of the simultaneous 'realities' of Elena's 'dead' body in a coffin with her friends mourning her and the telling of their emotional relation in the mind's eye goodbye. Peter Brook has described psychoanalysis as a melodramatic mode.⁵² The frequent witnessing by the dead their own funerals, memorials, or goodbyes displays what Freud describes as the incapacity to "imagine our own death" as "whenever we try to do so we find that we survive ourselves as spectators."⁵³

Derry describes the thematic component of soap opera as:

a trichotomous organization: 1) the breaking of taboos, 2) the basic horrific and random destiny, which organises the universe and all of our lives, and 3) the twin mysteries of birth and death, which confront and confound us at every turn.⁵⁴

The Vampire Diaries uses the supernatural to present these three related ideas to excess, denying all expectations of ending and thus exploring the same with a difference repeatedly. The difference in sameness and sameness in difference is explored in the series recurrent use of doppelgangers or shadow selves, split personalities, body swapping/invasions, and doubling of various relationships.

It is useful to consider this representation in light of Ang's work on soap opera, most famously her combined ethnographic and textual analysis of the prime-time soap opera *Dallas*. Drawing on Raymond Williams' concept of the "structure of feeling" to refer to the "complex system of mediations" between an individual and the social, she suggests there is

⁵² Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination*, 201.

⁵³ Freud, *Reflections on War and Death*, unpaginated.

⁵⁴ Derry, "Television Soap Opera", 5.

a 'tragic structure of feeling' that is mobilised via the combination of the melodramatic mode and the narrative structure of soap opera, making outlandishly presented scenes be experienced as emotional realism.⁵⁵ In *The Vampire Diaries*, the outlandishness and emotional realism are heightened by the supernatural elements of the series. Just as the vampire experiences emotion in an excessive way, the viewer of *The Vampire Diaries* must accept excessive emotional exposition as central to the pleasure available from the serial. One of Ang's most significant points was that not all audience members view television texts using the dominant 'structure of feeling:' some take on what Ang identified as an "ironic" stance. In a later article discussing her work on *Dallas* and international melodrama programming, Ang discusses the affective versus the ironic structure of feeling of soap operas, suggesting that an increasing number of soap operas since in the 1980s encode an ironic tone and potential viewing position into the text.⁵⁶ This is certainly the case in *The Vampire Diaries*, in which the viewer is often prompted to ironically consume the series by the character Damon:

If I have to hear the word 'doppelganger' one more time, I think I'm gonna actually have to learn how to spell it.⁵⁷

Lines such as these create an ironic distance and mitigate the more outlandish, sentimental, or melodramatic aspects of the text. Damon is frequently ironic whether his humanity is 'on or off' but ironic distance is more associated with the absence of emotion. Humanity as a way of engaging with the world via 'feeling' and the absence of such being a distance from the world via irony is a gendered division. As Stevi Jackson and many others have noted, "emotionality in general has been associated with the feminine, counterposed to masculine rationality" with "love in particular being part of the feminine sphere."⁵⁸ Within the context of a feminised piece of popular culture with a central focus on heterosexual romance, humanity is imagined on the feminine side of what tends to be a hierarchal division between emotionalism and irony. As Ang's work displays, the ironic stance may also function as a means of engaging with feminine and debased cultural objects without losing cultural capital. Jane Tompkins writes in her work on the American sentimental tradition:

⁵⁵ Best, "Raymond Williams and the Structure of Feeling of Reality TV," 194.

⁵⁶ Ang, "Television Fictions Around the World: Melodrama and Irony in Global Perspective."

⁵⁷ *The Vampire Diaries*, S5E1 "I Know What You Did Last Summer"

⁵⁸ Jackson, "Women and Heterosexual Love: Complicity, Resistance and Change," 52.

Twentieth century critics have taught generations of students to equate popularity with debasement, emotionality with ineffectiveness, religiosity with fakery, domesticity with triviality, and all of these, implicitly, with womanly inferiority.⁵⁹

Ang's analysis showed an "ironical viewing attitude" utilised by audience members with an interest in maintaining credibility with regard to the ideology of mass culture.⁶⁰ These audience members resolved the difficulty of taking pleasure in a culturally low and degraded form via mockery and irony. In *The Vampire Diaries*, Damon gives cues as to how to engage with its feminine world of emotionality and romance without entirely losing the privileges associated with masculine regimes of 'taste':

Believe it or not, Stefan, some girls don't need my persuasion. Some girls just can't resist my good looks, my style and my charm... and my unflinching ability to listen to Taylor Swift.⁶¹

The ironic stance is at once a critique of sentimentalism and a necessary component of the successful middle-ground vampire romance *The Vampire Diaries* works to maintain. It allows for the excesses, repetitions, and emotionalism of the feminine-coded genre of melodrama to be protected from the critical censure a work like *Twilight* receives, which has been analysed by many scholars as a cultural response deeply informed by gender associations. As the series develops, the 'switch' like all seemingly stable concepts in *The Vampire Diaries*, is undermined and the ironic and affective positions are untethered from and overcome the simple on/off binary, becoming more and more porous, reflecting the cyclical quality of the serial television form and that "basic melodramatic idea" described by Ang as:

"the sense that life is marked by eternal contradiction, by unsolvable emotional and moral conflicts, by the ultimate impossibility, as it were, of reconciling desire and reality."⁶²

The combination of melodrama and irony dramatised in the 'humanity switch' allows *The Vampire Diaries* to capitalise on the popularity of vampire romance. It embraces the largely sentimental mode of *Twilight* received as feminine, while creating a sense of critical distance

⁵⁹ Tompkins, *Sensational Designs*, 123.

⁶⁰ Ang, *Watching Dallas*, 96.

⁶¹ *The Vampire Diaries*, S1E4 "Family Ties"

⁶² Ang, "Melodramatic Identifications: Television fiction and women's fantasy," 239.

via an ironic self-consciousness. *True Blood* uses a campy and feminine aesthetic as conduit for overt topical social commentary; *The Vampire Diaries* avoids this, favouring nostalgia over direct criticism of the contemporary moment. This fits with the form, format, and context of *The Vampire Diaries*, which self-consciously draws attention to the generic workings of the show, as Katherine says to Stefan: “You hate me, huh? That sounds like the beginning of a love story, not the end of one.”⁶³ A mobile viewing position is encouraged, one that, as Ang puts it, “can be gripped at one moment by the tragic structure of feeling, and at another moment can assume a more ironic attitude towards the text – identification and distancing constantly.”⁶⁴ An ironic attitude toward melodrama is described by Brooks as one that allows spectators to “demur from the melodramatic – find it a hoot, at times - and yet still be seriously thrilled by it.”⁶⁵ If, as Roland Barthes wrote, the novel “transforms life into density, a memory into a useful act, duration into an oriented and meaningful time”, the serial television narrative does no such thing.⁶⁶

Serial programmes do provide closure of storylines, but rarely in the same episode in which the plot was introduced. When storylines are resolved in serials, they are often replaced with even more suspenseful or engrossing narrative enigmas – the resolving third act morphs into a disruptive first act of a new plot line.⁶⁷

Ang notes:

the end of the narrative is always a problem for melodrama. It is often pointed out that a melodrama is only effective when it has an ‘open’ end: at first sight there may be the possibility of a happy ending, but so many future conflicts are already brewing that the happy end itself is not credible.⁶⁸

In this way, serial programmes are aware of and make reference to the narrative expectations of discrete genres, but they do so in a way that undermines the structural function of endings. *The Vampire Diaries* is noted for its fast-paced and dramatic story arcs, with storylines that resolve only fleetingly. This fits with the larger representation of epistemological uncertainty as a result of layered meanings and stories that undercut other

⁶³ *The Vampire Diaries*, S2E1 “The Return”

⁶⁴ Ang, *Watching Dallas*, 61.

⁶⁵ Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination*, ix.

⁶⁶ Barthes, “Writing and the Novel,” 150.

⁶⁷ Mittell, *Television and American Culture*, 230.

⁶⁸ Ang, *Watching Dallas*, 74.

versions. The structural requirement of conflict perpetuating resolutions rather than true resolution complements perfectly the representation of the subject as ultimately involved in a backward looking process of creation in a constant and cyclical state of revision. Conflict generating faux resolutions feature throughout each season of *The Vampire Diaries*. The key source of conflict at the start of Season One is Stefan's evil brother Damon. This conflict is eased when Stefan and Damon form an uneasy alliance. However this alliance results in the appearance of a new source of conflict, Katherine. Her character becomes complicated by her human and vampire past and so she cannot be perceived as entirely bad for long. Original Vampires then enter the narrative as the new source of evil. They become so sympathetic, however, that a spin-off show, *The Originals*, following Klaus and Elijah's lives in New Orleans, began in 2013. Every character, whether marked as good or bad initially, oscillates between humanity and monstrosity at various points in the serial. At the level of plot and character, resolution is consistently denied. There is a cyclical quality to the emergence and diffusion of each source of conflict in the self and the plot. By the end of Season Six, with the announcement of the departure of the lead actress, Nina Dobrev, the heroine Elena ends her story under a stasis spell. She is placed in a coffin guarded by her two vampire lovers until her reawakening. She becomes a sleeping beauty with her life linked not to the kiss of a prince but to the life of her best friend and witch Bonnie Bennett. While Bonnie lives, Elena will remain in a sleep-like coma wherein her body will not age. Upon Bonnie's death, Elena will reawaken to live out her human life. When saying goodbye to her consistently self-sacrificing friend, Elena reassures her saying:

We can both have everything we want, just not at the same time.⁶⁹

Doubles and Triangles

In Damon and Stefan's origins we see a reworking of the foundation myth. Damon and Stefan's mother was apparently dead. Their father was an overbearing and dominating man who sought to impose his views violently on his two sons if necessary. Damon resisted his father's authority, refusing to conform to his father's standards, while Stefan tried to placate his father and live up to his ideals. He courted his father's good opinion and delighted in pleasing him. When an orphaned girl named Katherine came to live at the

⁶⁹ *The Vampire Diaries*, S6E22 "I'm Thinking of you all the While"

Salvatore estate, Stefan's allegiances were tested. Katherine, a sexual interest for both Damon and Stefan, functioned as a kind of mother object in the rivalry she incited between the brothers. She had a flirtatious relationship with Giuseppe Salvatore also, but on discovering her true nature as a vampire, Giuseppe planned to kill her. This planned killing echoes the lie Klaus told about Mikael killing the Original Mother. Stefan was unsure whether to help his father or protect his lover. He was torn between his father's rationalist and scientific laws and the erotic desire he had for Katherine. Stefan, unlike Damon, struggled with Katherine's vampire side and could not fit it with his desire for her. Damon on the other hand accepted everything about Katherine and was determined to go to any lengths to protect her. In the end they both failed and believed Katherine to have perished. In the events of the evening, they were both shot by their father. Having vampire blood in their systems however, they woke the following day and began to transition. Damon was determined not to complete the transition, believing Katherine to be dead he saw no joy in living and no desire to drink the blood of innocent people. Stefan planned to do the same but wanted to visit his father before dying. Giuseppe admitted to shooting him and Damon and tried to stake Stefan. Defending himself, Stefan overzealously pushed his father away where he fell with a stake in his stomach. Stefan tried to help his father but was overcome with blood lust and fed on him, thus completing the transition to vampire. Stefan, fearing loneliness, then convinced Damon to transition. With both brothers living as vampires, their stories were forever intertwined.

The dynamics of this sequence are reiterated again in present day Mystic Falls, but this time they are seen from the point of view of Elena, the subject/love object. In present day Mystic Falls, Stefan and Damon are presented initially as fixed subjects with wholly different approaches to life. The contrasted ways of living of Damon and Stefan, a kind of cold pragmatism versus a flawed idealism are further complicated by their location in the cycles, dyads, triads, and repetitions with many affinities to psychoanalytic theories of the human psyche. Providing accounts of the psyche that foreground its instability, fragility, violent conflict, and endless potential for regression, psychoanalysis focuses on those split, dual, returning aspects of the self. Every self in *The Vampire Diaries* is split or dual in some way. The most obvious example is that of heroine Elena and her counterpart Katherine. Accommodating love and hate within characters and therefore within the self is central to the functioning of the narrative.

Half selves, combined selves, doubled selves, imposter selves, and dark selves populate the intricate plotting of the serial. The heroine discovers she is a doppelganger in Season One.

Damon and Stefan function as doubles of each other. They are also doubled by the Original vampire brothers Klaus and Elijah. Stefan discovers he has a shadow self and is a doppelganger in Season 5. The figure of the doppelganger has absence built in, as a double is always contingent bringing with it the absence of originality. The way the doppelganger motif is used in *The Vampire Diaries* is significant. Rather than the heroine and later Stefan coming into contact with their doppelgangers and dealing with the traditionally unsettling and often tragic outcomes of such encounters, both Elena and Stefan discover that they are doppelgangers, the latest copy in an ancestry of doubles. The originals of the doppelganger lines are not revealed until Season Five. It is worth referring briefly here to the history of the doppelganger in the western imagination.

Doubles have been a popular theme since antiquity and appear in many archetypal myths and legends from the twins Romulus and Remus to Narcissus' haunting by his mirror image.⁷⁰ During the 19th century German Romantic period, the double or doppelganger became a literary fascination in work by Hoffman, Richter, von Kleist, Tieck, Fouque, and Heine amongst others.⁷¹ Jean Paul Richter is credited with coining the term doppelganger in his novel *Siebenkäs* (1796) as a literary device suitable for questioning the Enlightenment subject.⁷² It has since become a canonical theme in Gothic literature exemplified by authors such as Edgar Allan Poe.⁷³ The doppelganger or shadow self idea is present in those texts that have come to be associated with "the birth of horror" in the 19th century and have continued to captivate the popular imagination: Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) and Robert Louis Stevenson's *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886). As a feature of modernity the doubled self expresses fears about the unified subject, dramatizing the split nature of subjectivity. With the rise of psychoanalysis the doppelganger has come to be understood as a "symbolic discourse expressing psychic conflicts wherein dual characters represent facets of the unified self."⁷⁴ Karl Miller's study *Doubles* (1985), drawing on notions of second selves from antiquity to the 20th century, dates the modern idea of the doubled self to the Romantic period by examining "specimens of duality drawn from the romantic modern world of more recent times, and to the themes of isolation and escape, suffering

⁷⁰ Fischer, "Two-Faced Women," 24.

⁷¹ Rogers, *A Psychoanalytic Study of the Double in Literature*, 53.

⁷² Vardoulakis, *The Doppelgänger*, 329.

⁷³ Ibid., 100.

⁷⁴ Fischer, "Two-Faced Women," 25.

and salvation.”⁷⁵ He suggests that the original double may be the double literature itself creates. That in creating a text the author creates a double of herself.

Split selves have been a notable subject of feminist engagements with culture, including the influential reading of *Jane Eyre* by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar. Gilbert and Gubar present Bertha Mason as a dark double of Jane used by Bronte to express the rage that Jane cannot as an adult gentlewoman. The split between Jane and Bertha is further complicated and problematised by Jean Rhys’ *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) which may be read as a shadow or double of Bronte’s novel, revealing some of the darker colonial issues underpinning Jane’s story. The dark double and the split self have animated many cultural understandings and feminist critiques of womanhood, including the virgin:whore dichotomy. This split and the related masculine version of the priest:devil are taken up in *The Vampire Diaries*. While the serial plays with these divisions, the general association of sexuality with women’s morality and spirituality with men’s morality is maintained.

The triangular relationship focused on in *The Vampire Diaries* is that of two men in love with the same woman. The dynamic of two men in love with the same woman is replicated several times in the narrative. Stefan-Elena-Damon’s romance is shadowed by the relationship between Stefan, Damon and Katherine. Such shadowing generates instability in the roles played by each of the romantic interests as Katherine’s manipulation of the Salvatore brothers, when they were human, has an impact on how Elena’s interactions with them in 21st century Mystic Falls are viewed. History here functions in a non-linear fashion. The past and present are experienced at once, as the viewer experiences them watching flashbacks in the show. This is akin to a psychoanalytic conception of temporality – one that in fact lacks historicity. For psychoanalyst Hans Leowald, “[t]ime, in human (not physical) terms, ... is not to be measured point by point. One might come closer to human time by saying that it consists in an interpenetration and reciprocal relatedness of past, present, and future.”⁷⁶

The love triangle is repeated yet again in flashbacks and references to the relationship between Klaus-Katherine-Elijah, and once more with slight variation in the contemporary relationship between Elijah-Elena-Klaus. Each of these love triangles involves brothers and a doppelganger. There are further representations of love triangles in the form of Tyler-

⁷⁵ Miller, *Doubles*, vii.

⁷⁶ Leowald, “Psychoanalysis and the History of the Individual” 531.

Vicky-Jeremy, Matt-Caroline-Tyler, and Tyler-Caroline-Klaus. Layering of images that contaminate each other is an on-going feature of the series. Stories of all kinds, historical, mythic, local, and personal, are frequently discovered as falsified or cover-ups. In this way the viewer is taught to question the validity of any story and the stability of every character. In the case of the love triangle such repetition suggests an understanding of such dynamics as a recurring feature of romantic relationships. The love triangle becomes part of the founding myths of Mystic Falls, one that is renewed again and again.

Eve Sedgwick notes that in such love triangles:

the bond that links the two rivals is as intense and potent as the bond that links either of the rivals to the beloved... the bonds of 'rivalry' and 'love', differently as they are experienced, are equally powerful and in many senses equivalent.⁷⁷

The bond of the rivals is further intensified here as they are brothers so they share bonds of familial love also. In the final episode of Season Six, Stefan describes his experience of the love triangle between himself, Elena and Damon:

We loved each other, but she was also the only person I've ever met who actually believed that my brother was worth loving. And she reminded me that I used to believe that about him too. Her faith in him, it brought Damon and me back together, and yeah, I loved her, more than I thought I could love somebody else, but I think in the end I needed him more than I needed her.⁷⁸

As Katherine is the brothers' vampire mother, Elena works as a kind of mother replicate to Stefan and Damon. Significantly this triangle is presented primarily from the point of view of the object – the girl in the triangle. By positioning her as the viewer she becomes a subject. So the rivalries of male attentions are seen from the position of feminine object-subject, dramatically changing the implications. Rather than a triangle of jealous covetousness of the mother object, the triangle works as a feminine engagement with forces of control. As the subject-object, the feminine point of view is simultaneously both self and other. She must build a sense of self based on her subjectivity in this dynamic – who to choose, but also based on her objectivity here. As the contested object, she must inevitably

⁷⁷ Sedgwick, *Between Men*, 21.

⁷⁸ *The Vampire Diaries*, S6E22 "I'm Thinking of You All the While"

lose one of her 'love objects' no matter what the outcome. She is the only one in the triangle who must lose either way.

The centrality of the love triangle to each text looked at in this thesis may be read as a forum for exploration of female desire but also as a symbol of the limited options available to women in hetero-patriarchal culture. The heroine of each text desires to maintain the triangle but knows that this is not acceptable. Katherine says to Elena: "It's ok to want them both, I did."⁷⁹ But neither Katherine nor Elena, Sookie nor Bella, can have them both. The objects' desire turns back upon them reminding them of their roles as object in the triangle between men. This move acknowledges that for the rivals sharing the object would defeat the exercise of rivalry central to their relationship. The love triangle, particularly when slanted toward the feminine perspective, forces the simultaneous functioning of the self as self and other to other selves. The desire to put off the resolution of the triangular dynamics into a couple and excluded person is the female desire that perpetuates the narrative of *The Vampire Diaries*. This dynamic, as with everything else in *The Vampire Diaries*, functions in an ever-changing but cyclical and repetitious journey. This journey is one towards an understanding of the adult self as rife with regression and the reappearance of past events in the present.

"Nostalgia's a bitch."⁸⁰

Nostalgia scholar Svetlana Boym defines nostalgia as "a longing for a home that no longer exists or has never existed."⁸¹ She writes:

A cinematic image of nostalgia is a double exposure, or a superimposition of two images – of home and abroad, of past and present, of dream and everyday life. The moment we try to force it into a single image, it breaks the frame or burns the surface.⁸²

In Season Six, Damon and Bonnie find themselves trapped in an alternative version of Mystic Falls on a single day in 1994. Christine Gledhill describes the melodramatic mode's

⁷⁹ *The Vampire Diaries*, S2E22 "As I Lay Dying"

⁸⁰ *The Vampire Diaries*, S1E19 "Miss Mystic Falls"

⁸¹ Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, xiii.

⁸² Boym, "Nostalgia and Its Discontents", 7.

evocation of the 'beneath' or 'behind' as "metaphor through gesture, music and mise-en-scene"⁸³ The recreation of an unpopulated 1994 in Season Six manifests an interest of the serial as a whole in nostalgia as a process that works with an imagined past, one that is often emptied out of its original inhabitants and occupied by the present trapped self. In this way, the past becomes a location, part of the mise-en-scene, to explore selfhood and the crafty workings of the obscured or forgotten self.

Restorative nostalgia puts emphasis on nostos and proposes to rebuild the lost home and patch up the memory gaps. Reflective nostalgia dwells in algia, in longing and loss, the imperfect process of remembrance.⁸⁴

There is an affinity between these types of nostalgia and Melanie Klein's object-relations theory of the paranoid-schizoid and depressive positions in psychic life. Klein is most famous for her developments of Freud's work to centre on the mother rather than the father in the area of object-relations. She draws on stories of matricide to explain psychic processes that are foundational to human psychological development. Moving away from Freud's focus on the Oedipus myth, Klein's use of the Oresteia shifts interest to the pre-Oedipal and the role of the mother in early psychic life. Her theories emerge from her analysis of very young children in clinical practise. In focusing on the Oresteia, matricide and guilt come to the fore as structuring features. According to Klein, guilt is often experienced in a primitive way as persecution.⁸⁵

Nostalgia is often described as a form of homesickness.⁸⁶ As its etymology suggests it describes a painful longing to return home. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Freud refers to the "jocular saying" that "love is a longing for home" and that this place may be interpreted as "man's old home, the place where everyone once lived.... [the] womb."⁸⁷ Lynne Segal summarises Freud's theory of the uncanny as arising:

⁸³ Discussed in Mercer and Shingler *Melodrama: Genre, Style, Sensibility*, 79.

⁸⁴ Boym, "Nostalgia and Its Discontents," 13.

⁸⁵ Klein, "The Psychogenesis of Manic-Depressive States", 138.

⁸⁶ Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, 3.

⁸⁷ Freud, "The Uncanny," 151.

from places or experiences that triggered the arousal of repressed complexes from childhood... or by a sense of something familiar but somehow associated with archaic or primitive beliefs such as ancient fears of the return of dead spirits.⁸⁸

The figures of the vampire and the double express these two aspects of the uncanny. According to Freud, “many people experience the [uncanny] feeling in the highest degree in relation to death and dead bodies, to the return of the dead, and to spirits and ghosts”, all of which populate *The Vampire Diaries*.⁸⁹ Combining the uncanny nature of the return of these figures with the monster’s and particularly the vampire’s postmodern reinterpretation, the returning uncanny is presented as partially longed for. As the original ‘home’ of all people, the mother’s body or some version of an idealised childhood becomes longed for and rejected at the same time. Once again the process of abjection is relevant. Its combination of fascination and disgust are reimagined via nostalgia as longing and acceptance/non-acceptance of the nonexistence of the nonetheless longed for ‘home.’ The longed for home is a creation of the present self that torments and gives pleasure by its present absence.

Original Family

The return of the past in the present adult self is modelled on the psychoanalytic privileging of childhood experience in the subconscious of the adult psyche. Discussing the vulnerable process of subject-forming, Margrit Shildrick writes “the disgust and anxiety invoked by the object is that felt by the clean and proper subject faced with the memory trace of her own origin, which both repel and attract.”⁹⁰ Displaying a gothic sensibility and informed by psychoanalytic theory, Klaus describes the Original family:

A thousand years ago, my mother turned us into monsters, yet still she claimed to love us even as she vowed to destroy us. The noble Elijah, tormented by long buried shameful secrets. Kol, the wily troublemaker out for no one but himself. Finn, the devoted acolyte, his love all too easily warped by our mother’s sick hate. Fierce Rebekah, willing to risk everything on the chance that she might one day find

⁸⁸ Segal, *Out of Time*, 20-21.

⁸⁹ Freud “The Uncanny,” 151.

⁹⁰ Shildrick, *Embodying the Monster*, 81.

happiness. And me, the bastard child, my mother's greatest shame. Now finally we have defeated her, giving her the choice she never thought to give us: to live on as one of the monsters she created, or suffer the agonizing death she so deserves.⁹¹

Family romance fantasies are usually quite theatrical. Freud notes that many narratives themselves function as family romance fantasies for readers – a way of imagining one has a different family. Sedgwick notes that they work by creating “a free switchpoint for identities of subject, object, on-looker, desirer, looker-away.”⁹² The psyche occupies several positions and moves back and forth between them for a broader experience of the fantasy. The doubling and repetition of family dynamics in *The Vampire Diaries* encourages this “free switchpoint for identities.”⁹³

The family is the crucible of love and loss in both *The Vampire Diaries* and *The Originals*. Here the individual must fight for an autonomous self, rebelling against the father and separating from the mother. Here too the ambivalence of loss of the parents in this individuation is explored through absent and murderous parent figures. The bad parent is represented and the son and daughter's power struggle with them played out. Alongside parent-child relationships, the dynamics of sibling relationships also hold ambivalence promising an idealised sameness yet threatening the obliteration of the unique self by this sameness. Here the family romance described by Freud and the love triangle theorised by René Girard meet. Freud describes the male-female-male love triangle as symptomatic of the threat caused by a sibling for the mother's love. Girard theorises the love triangle as the basis of desire, what he terms “acquisitive mimesis”, meaning a desire not for the object itself but a desire to imitate the desire of another. This love triangle is related directly to the function of the scapegoat theorised by Girard, the operations of both may be seen in *The Vampire Diaries*:

If acquisitive mimesis divides by leading two or more individuals to converge on one and the same object with a view to appropriating it, conflictual mimesis will inevitably unify by leading two or more individuals to converge on one and the same adversary that all wish to strike down.⁹⁴

⁹¹ *The Originals*, S2E10 “Gonna Set Your Flag on Fire”

⁹² Sedgwick, *Tendencies*, 183.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ Girard, *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*, 26.

The founding myth of the vampire race rests on a few key events. This is a myth not only referred to but also represented in the show through flashbacks. The threat of death and an over-extension of love in the face of death mark the beginning of the vampire race, when Esther, the Original Mother/Witch, casts a spell to make her children immortal. The Original Witch is the Original Mother and her grief at losing her first born child leads her and her husband, Mikael, to the new world several hundred years before the first Europeans arrived there. Settling in the area of present-day Mystic Falls, the family endures a second tragedy when one of the children is killed by a werewolf. Unable to accept the potential death of her remaining children, Esther uses a spell to make them immortal. In order to complete the spell the Original Father kills each of his children and himself and they are reborn as vampires. Under the parentage of a domineering father, Klaus discovers he is the child of an affair his mother had with a werewolf. Klaus kills his mother Esther in anger and flees with his brothers and sisters telling them their father Mikael killed their mother. The foundation of the vampire race and the dynamics at work in the founding myth are perpetuated, reiterated, and relived throughout the centuries.

Klein's object relations theory is relevant here. Klein outlines a series of pre-Oedipal object relations experienced by the child that structure much adult life. Love for the mother is undermined by the fact that sometimes the mother is not there or does not satisfy the child's needs. This leads to a splitting of the mother into good and bad mother. Hatred towards the bad mother ensues. This hatred induces fear of retribution from the bad mother. Denial of such negative feelings follows and the fear is then internalised as hatred towards the self as the bad object.

The good mother who attends to the infants' needs is also the bad mother who disappears and frustrates. This position brings with it fear and guilt about the phantasy destruction of the bad object in the "paranoid-schizoid position". These feelings of fear and guilt can lead the child in two directions. The first: a return to the "paranoid-schizoid position", if the child fears retribution from the mother for their destructive phantasies, leading to anger towards the mother and a re-splitting of the mother into good and bad. The second: attempts at reparation, "the repair of the mother through restorative phantasies and

actions.”⁹⁵ This splitting is evoked at the same time as attempts at reparation and reintegration are made.

Stefan and Damon move between these positions and they move between one another. Stefan can be read at times a representation of the paranoid-schizoid position. Oscillating from feelings of desire to guilt to fear, he cannot contain either in himself or in others, the possibility of both good and bad aspects. Overcome with the guilt of killing his father, Stefan ‘shuts off his humanity’ and becomes a ‘Ripper’. Cycles of ‘Ripper Stefan’ and tortured soul Stefan begin. This cycle is one of introspection followed by bouts of extreme violence towards others. Damon in his calm refusal to transition is functioning in the depressive position. He accepts the contradictions of Katherine, he loves the good and bad mother in one. As a result he has no impulses to violence, only sadness at her loss. When he is forced to transition however he regresses to a paranoid-schizoid position projecting onto Stefan all of the difficulty of holding good and bad together in acceptance. The rivalry of the brothers functions as a way for both brothers to project some of their guilt outwards.

These are the projections and introspections involved in the ‘paranoid/schizoid position’ may develop to the more desirable ‘depressive position’ that accepts the existence of both good and bad mother in the one person, but only after a successful mourning process. Even if the depressive position is achieved, regression can take place at any time. “The depressive position ... is an anxiety-mitigating achievement that the infant or adult only sometimes, and often only briefly, succeeds in inhabiting.”⁹⁶ The depressive position values guilt and reparation as positive feelings that allow for empathy. *The Vampire Diaries*’ humanity switch dramatizes these processes. Commenting on Klein’s depressive position, Sedgwick writes it requires “the simple, foundational, authentically very difficult understanding that good and bad tend to be inseparable at every level.”⁹⁷ This idea is central to subjectivity in *The Vampire Diaries*.

Empathy, particularly feelings of guilt, is presented as the mark of humanity in a contradictory and confusing world of constantly shifting indicators of good and evil. Feelings of guilt when accompanied with an intention of reparation can indicate a movement towards the depressive position. This position of accepting good and bad in one

⁹⁵ Alford, “Melanie Klein and the ‘Orestia Complex,’” 172.

⁹⁶ Sedgwick, “Melanie Klein and the Difference Affect Makes,” 636.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 637.

object and in the self is a difficult one to maintain and regression to the paranoid-schizoid position is always a risk. This is elaborated in the various cycles of love and violence in *The Vampire Diaries*.

As a result of his hatred and jealousy of his father as the domineering paternal law, Klaus finds expression for his parental hatred through the discovery of his mother's betrayal. Feeling guilty about his own negative feelings towards his father he projects these out onto his mother in her sexual betrayal, making her the bad mother. Fearing her as the bad mother he kills her. Once he has killed her however he is once again taken over by fear and cannot bear to admit his own actions. Instead he blames his father for her death, telling his siblings that their father killed their mother. For the other siblings, the good mother has been murdered by their father and they must flee lest he kill them too. Matricide, resulting from the child's object relations of fear and projection, forms the basis of the vampire race. The children of the Original Family are then set loose to mourn the lost wholeness of the womb in perpetual fear of the violent law of the father. They are trapped in what Freud calls the 'family romance'.

The liberation of an individual, as he grows up, from the authority of his parents is one of the most necessary though one of the most painful results brought about by the course of his development. ... the whole progress of society rests upon the opposition between successive generations.⁹⁸

Klaus' experience is a family romance fantasy. As a result of being slighted by parental figures and the discovery that parents are not the all perfect beings the child once thought of them as, the child imagines alternative parents – that she has been adopted or that her mother had an affair and so her father is not her real father. These fantasies have according to Freud "two principal aims, an erotic and an ambitious one" and are fuelled by the motive of "revenge and retaliation."⁹⁹ Revenge and retaliation are enacted in Klaus' story, but rather than achieve liberation the Original children exist in perpetual fear of the returning mother and father. Freud presents the fear following the murder of the father in *Totem and Taboo* as the motivation for the establishment of the 'law of the father' in his absence. In *The Vampire Diaries* the law of the father is founded not on patricide but on a cover-up of matricide.

⁹⁸ Freud, "Family Romances," 235.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

It is as though subjectivity is always already contaminated by its own archaic memories. In other words, the object never really leaves the subject-body, but remains as both reminder or, and threat to, the precarious status of the closed and united self.¹⁰⁰

Klaus kills his mother, covers-up the matricide, to become the “son of Mikael, paranoid, vengeful, and powerful...”¹⁰¹ Klein found in her treatment of children that “destructive impulses towards the mother become the cause of feelings of guilt and persecution.”¹⁰² The on-going returns of the parents and siblings, indeed of every dead person, dramatise the psyche as the space of “always and forever” in *The Vampire Diaries*.¹⁰³

If the uncanny is a fear of something returned, something strange yet known of old, as explored in the previous chapter often associated with the womb, nostalgia is a desire to return home and is read using psychoanalysis as part of an incomplete mourning process. The hidden matricide of Western culture described by Irigaray and explored by Jacobs presents an incomplete mourning of the death of the mother. The mourning is incomplete because the matricide is unacknowledged. According to Jacobs’ theories of cultural matricide, “Negotiating the loss of the loved maternal object” may be performed by “the psychic mechanisms of introjection or incorporation:”

In the process of introjection, the loss of the loved object is acknowledged and mourned, allowing the loss to be converted into words. It is through the process of introjection that loss becomes generative. Incorporation, however, is a phantasy that functions to deny the fact that there has been any loss at all.¹⁰⁴

The loss of the Original mother is never introjected and so Klaus’ matricide remains a source of unaccepted guilt and the murderous avenging parents keep returning to threaten the surviving subject.

The ‘tragic structure of feeling,’ described by Ang in relation to melodrama, draws on aspects of melancholia. Melanie Klein writes: “According to Freud and Abraham, the fundamental process in melancholia is the loss of the loved object. The real loss of a real

¹⁰⁰ Shildrick, *Embodying the Monster*, 81.

¹⁰¹ *The Originals*, S2E7 “Chasing the Devil’s Tail”

¹⁰² Klein, “*The Psycho-analytic Play Technique*”, 48.

¹⁰³ *The Originals*, S1E1 “Always and Forever”

¹⁰⁴ Jacobs, *On Matricide*, 65.

object, or some similar situation having the same significance, results in the object becoming installed within the ego. Owing, however, to an excess of cannibalistic impulses in the subject, this introjection miscarries and the consequence is illness.”¹⁰⁵ Both nostalgia and melancholia are related to unsuccessful mourning. Scholar Eynel Wardi writes “Melancholia is a belated, traumatic reaction of denial to the tantalising insufficiency of a plenitude that *was* – not enough.”¹⁰⁶ In her work on Dylan Thomas and Julia Kristeva, Wardi explores nostalgia and “its pivotal function in the creative process as an elaboration of narcissistic loss.”¹⁰⁷ At the outset of *The Vampire Diaries*, the loved object is lost, as it is at the outset of *Twilight* and *True Blood*. The mother in Bella’s case, and both parents in Elena and Sookie’s stories, are lost at the start of the narrative. This loss is reiterated repeatedly through every season of *The Vampire Diaries*. Parents return and are lost again. Parents are discovered to be good, bad, good again, and unreadable in terms of a good:bad binary. The cycle of paranoid-schizoid and depressive states manifests in each character and their never-ending revolutions of this pattern. In *Simulacra and Simulations*, Baudrillard writes, “...we are all melancholic. Melancholia is the brutal disaffection that characterizes our saturated systems. Once the hope of balancing good and evil, true and false, indeed of confronting some values of the same order, once the more general hope of a relation of forces and a stake has vanished.” *The Vampire Diaries* dramatizes this idea and problematizes it. The melodramatic impulse is to reinvent a moral order out of disorder and *The Vampire Diaries* supports a concept of retrogressive self-making that can always find humanity in the present by resorting to emotion. No emotion, even the most negative, is monstrous in this world. Only the suppression of emotion is deemed monstrous.

Given vampires’ often long biographies spanning many historical eras, the combination of intensely heightened emotions with a thematic exploration of the past as haunting the present with impossible visions of alternative presents and futures, the potential for the bittersweet sentiment of melodrama is exaggerated even further. The inclusion of the supernatural, particularly the vampire figure and the double, allows for a construction of subjectivity that dramatises issues of the split, fragmented, and replicated self and related epistemological uncertainty. These themes are present in many CW shows but are heightened and complicated by the metaphorical potential of the supernatural. Melodrama

¹⁰⁵ Klein, “*The Psychogenesis of Manic-Depressive States*,” 117.

¹⁰⁶ Wardi, *Once Below a Time*, 93.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

is a “mode and style deeply implicated in nostalgic longing.”¹⁰⁸ A conjunction of nostalgia and the uncanny informs *The Vampire Diaries*’ exploration of selfhood. The affinity of the melodramatic mode and psychoanalytic theory shown by Brooks underpins this link. Focus on the dynamics of love and loss is shown in the triangular shape of most of the relationships depicted in *The Vampire Diaries*. These triangular relationships tend to be structured around negative correlations, so that when one subject is experiencing love another experiences loss, and cyclical progression, so after a character experiences happiness he/she will experience grief related to the source of happiness. *The Vampire Diaries* magnifies the dynamics of this social arrangement. It is elucidated by psychoanalytic object relations theory that holds any love object as imbued with potential loss due to the presence of love. The love triangle encapsulates the “complexity of object relations, which present excruciating conflicts from virtually the beginning of life”¹⁰⁹ The move from childhood to adolescence to adulthood involves a recapitulation of some of the individual’s subject-forming relationships within the family. The repetitious cycles of love and loss suggest the dynamic of the ‘fort-da’ game of mastery observed by Freud in young children. This chapter suggests that the ‘in-between’ occupied by *The Vampire Diaries* forms a kind of ‘fort-da’ game between the fantasy of stasis presented by *Twilight* and the orgy of entropy unravelled in *True Blood*. There is no progress in *The Vampire Diaries*, but nor is there significant unravelling. Rather the plot and characters operate in cycles, combining stasis and movement. The presentation of highly sentimental exchanges in the context of elaborate plotting with repeated discoveries, uncovering, red herrings, and last-minute loopholes in a supernatural world whose rules and very premise are never entirely fixed is representative of the show’s style and structure as a whole. Following in a tradition of female-centric US network programming and the particular brand identity cultivated by the CW, the emotional is privileged in the serial and plotting is subordinate to the emotionally charged interactions it may bring about. According to Brooks, melodrama attempts to express a “moral occult” that, in the wake of an undermining of religious and other ways of structuring the world as a whole, forms a “domain of operative spiritual values which is both indicated within and masked by the surface of reality.”¹¹⁰ Linda Williams writes, “This quest for a hidden moral legibility is crucial to all melodrama.”¹¹¹

¹⁰⁸ DeFalco, “A Double-Edged Longing,” 28.

¹⁰⁹ Ury, “The Nietzschean Monster: Reconsidering Guilt in Developmental Theory,” 66

¹¹⁰ Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination*, viii.

¹¹¹ Williams, “Melodrama Revisited,” 51-2.

The Vampire Diaries' representation of humanity and the monstrous forms part of this quest. The concept of the 'humanity switch,' "through its heightening, attempts to make present" this domain of values.¹¹²

Conclusion

The Vampire Diaries' self-positioning and popular understanding between the perceived extremes of *Twilight* and *True Blood* is relevant to the interpretation of the series' construction of gendered subjectivity. The relative silence both within the diegesis and in the conversation surrounding it on feminism and the lack of social and political readings of the serial signal that *The Vampire Diaries* draws on a more postfeminist sensibility. Indeed it often presents a post-gender, post-race, post-class world in its focus on wealthy, white, male family dynamics. While *Twilight* inspires passionate response, frequently in reaction to its perceived regressive representation of women, and *True Blood* is overt within the text in its liberal political agenda, *The Vampire Diaries* is not deemed 'bad' enough or 'good' enough to warrant much discussion in terms of feminism and/or politics. Theorists of postfeminism have described silence on the subject of feminism as part of a sensibility that erases the relevance and presence of feminism in mainstream culture.¹¹³ The background of *The Vampire Diaries* detailed in Chapter One and this chapter's textual analysis presents the 'in-betweenness' of this television series as reflective of broadly acceptable negotiation of contemporary discourses of gendered subjectivity. The series manages to avoid provoking polarised or passionate political or cultural readings in terms of feminism at a time when feminist comment on popular media is prevalent.

The series draws on affinities between psychoanalytic, melodramatic, and gothic paradigms of the subject. Its use of nostalgia as a means of engaging with loss and its structural and diegetic use of repetition, cycles, and non-closure allow it to avoid taking up a definitive position and is continually negotiating as the story always keeps going and the past is always reinterpreted through its return. If, as Kaplan argues in her work on film melodrama, closure is the cure to the instability thrown up by the melodrama, then the absence of closure continuously keeps other options in play. In *The Vampire Diaries*, there is

¹¹² Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination*, viii.

¹¹³ See for example Gill (2011), McRobbie (2008), Negra (2008), Tasker (2011).

always “some other option at play” as Damon puts it, as the pace of the series and the length of each season demand a huge amount of twists, turns, and surprises.¹¹⁴ The premise repeatedly provides the means of its own dismantling. The postmodern sensibility may be noted here as deconstruction continually shows the instability of discrete ways of knowing, always imagined in *The Vampire Diaries* as stories about the returning/reusable past, which are in turn stories about the self.

This chapter explored *The Vampire Diaries*’ thematic occupations in light of its context in the popular cultural imagination introduced in Chapter One. Its exploration of self is in tune with the CW genre and the story of the network itself. As such it takes up a sexy, soapy aesthetic and explores nostalgia for the recent past involving a sense of loss and epistemological uncertainty. Central thematic concerns of the show, the channel, and postfeminist televisual identity come to the fore in the show’s use of the supernatural, particularly the figure of the vampire and the double. Though direct discussion of feminism is not a feature of the series or discussion surrounding it, this thesis reads the show as part of the CW channel’s construction of a gendered audience and therefore involves negotiation of contemporary expectations of feminine and feminist identities. In response to *Twilight*, *The Vampire Diaries*’ elaborates a subjectivity based on maternal object relations, rather than maternal subjectivity.

¹¹⁴ *The Vampire Diaries*, S3E11 “Our Town”

CONCLUSION

This thesis demonstrates how *Twilight* may be read as exploring the problems and conflicts in contemporary discourses of feminism, femininity, and subjectivity. Produced in the context of *Twilight*'s controversial success, *True Blood* and *The Vampire Diaries* respond to aspects of *Twilight*'s construction of subjectivity. Most significantly they diffuse the central problem in *Twilight* - the conflict between personhood and womanhood - by exploring subjectivity in which the maternal is contained in an object position. Kristeva's theory of subject formation based on abjection is drawn on throughout this thesis. It repeatedly surfaces as a fitting means of elucidating aspects of the texts' constructions of subjectivity. Donna Wieland argues in *Undead Mother*, "Kristeva assumes that the only way a child can separate from mother is in a radical, violent and total manner which resembles a murder."¹ That abjection should be the theory most suited to a consideration of these vampire romance stories reveals the central problem 'worried over' in the genre: subjectivity based on psychic matricide from a feminine-identified subject position. Wieland writes that while abjection is not necessarily "the only means by which separation from mother can be achieved," it is, nevertheless, "the way Western culture has followed - a way which leads to an individual becoming fatally divided against himself and perpetually in terror of the powerful maternal 'murdered' object."² This way of achieving individual identity is even more problematic for female subjectivity given the female subject's potential to also be the mother.

Twilight sees the process of abjection brought to its full conclusion, the death of the maternal body. The feminine subject reaches a psychic death. If abjection is a constant process, a never-ending pushing away in order to continually assure the boundaries of the self, Bella's 'perfect piece of forever', the completion of abjection, is a world without psychic life. The key stumbling block for feminine subjectivity in pursuit of the bounded, unified personhood of mind over matter, embodied by the Cullens, is the maternal body. Maternity is also the key to accessing a normative body without foregoing female happiness. The difficulties of presenting maternal subjectivity are signalled through the narrative ruptures and doubling backs. For feminist purposes, this is most fruitfully read as

¹ Wieland, *Undead Mother*, 11.

² Ibid.

indicative of the contradictory expectations and ideas of maternity in contemporary Western culture. The perfect female body is infertile in *Twilight*, yet women's happiness is closely bound to the ability to have children in this story. This sets up a conflict that cannot be easily resolved, and often ends in tragedy as shown in Esme, Rosalee, and Leah's experiences. The heterosexual institutions of marriage, family, and motherhood in these contexts are superficially celebrated which has led many critics to declare the series entirely supportive of conservative values. However, the threat posed by these institutions is played out in gothic terms on the female body. This interpretation finds an earnest engagement with these institutions and the challenges they pose to female personhood and fulfilment, albeit within a highly circumscribed frame of possibility. This reading presents the difficulties posed by Bella's pregnancy at narrative, stylistic, and generic levels as symptomatic of a cultural problem imagining maternal subjectivity. Lisa Baraitser's theorization of the experience of mothering in its various forms and its potential to generate an understanding of subjectivity based on the interrupted rhythms of caring for such radical Others as children appears all the more important given *Twilight's* violent erasure of the maternal subject taking the object it can give, a child, and ignoring the potentialities of its challenging ontology and disruptive relation to such clean and unified ideals of personhood as the Cullen vampires. Meyer's comments on motherhood and her writing process hint at this potential subjectivity only to expunge it in the narrative's dénouement.

The fantasy of the controlled masculine body reified in *Twilight* is a ridiculous fallacy in the world of *True Blood*. The show uses its privileging of feminine perspective and its location in a feminised genre to undermine the masculine unified and pure subject, exposing the vulnerability of the self and the void at the centre of subjectivity. Where *Twilight* worked to achieve an erasure of difference, the intersectionality of identity is foregrounded in *True Blood*. Conflicts between members of different groups, those crossing group boundaries, and those unable to suppress differences within groups are explored. Identity politics are critiqued by the series as at best public relations tactics and at worst hate-inciting, limiting, and potentially violent means of pitting groups against one another. The desire for solidity and unity of the self is shown to open the self to control and manipulation by groups, faiths, and cults in the mobilisation of fear as hatred. Finding horror in the everyday, the grotesque in the most human of characters, *True Blood* follows in a tradition of Southern Gothic writing. It uses its location and the imaginary South of the American consciousness to explore the horror of difference and the dangers of current discourses of identity that

attempt to exploit but also flatten out difference into media-friendly sameness. Sookie presents a practical negotiation of unequal social structures, refusing victimisation while taking advantage of whatever limited means of power available. In undermining any form of group-based identification, however, the series displays an “allergy to generalization [that] paradoxically brings us back to liberal individualism.”³ Susan Bordo writes that “the inflections that modify experience are in reality endless and *some* item of difference can always be produced that will shatter any proposed generalisation.”⁴ Complete scepticism of generalisations that can produce shared identificatory alliances leaves a universe composed entirely of counterexamples, in which the way men and women see the world is purely as *particular* individuals, shaped by the unique configurations that form that particularity.⁵

If *Twilight* settles the self in the fixed unity of the bounded and perfected vampire body, and *True Blood* unsettles the self by emphasising uncontrollable desire and vulnerability through the bloody and explosive vampire body, *The Vampire Diaries* presents an oscillation between unity and disunity, it undoes only to redo and undo repeatedly. The vampire body here is the closest to a human body, with heightened emotion emphasised over physicality. Cycle and repetition forms *The Vampire Diaries*’ subject. The self produced is thus always in flux yet predictably repeating the same oscillations and thus never really changing. The self in *The Vampire Diaries* presents movement without progress and thus captures a sense of postmodern subjectivity. It is self-aware, both nostalgic for the subject of progress and deeply distrustful of the lies required to sustain a ‘progressing’ self. The diegetic exploration of longing and loss becomes problematic in the context of the CW’s creation of a genre based on the contemporary “hyperculture of commercial sexuality”.⁶ While each text examined here is involved in perpetuating idealised beauty standards, the CW network, home of *The Vampire Diaries*, bases its brand identity on heightened beauty standards. Celebration of the process of attempting mastery of an impossible task over and over again in the narrative problematically reinforces the process required of the postfeminist feminine subject committed to bodily improvements.

Twilight’s unlikely feminist potential lies in its engagement with maternal subjectivity. Though its fantasy ending is deeply pessimistic regarding any kind of embodied female

³ Meyer, *Femicidal Fears*, 13.

⁴ Bordo, *Unbearable Weight*, 238-239.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 239.

⁶ McRobbie, “Postfeminism and Popular Culture,” 34.

subjectivity, it demonstrates the problem of maternal subjectivity. It does so by presenting maternity in direct conflict with, yet also a means to achieving, personhood. This concept of personhood is based on a separation of mind and body in a culture that nonetheless locates female fulfilment in biological motherhood. While *True Blood* and *The Vampire Diaries* problematise aspects of *Twilight*'s construction of subjectivity, they also neutralize *Twilight*'s most radical aspect: its depiction of a maternal subject. Though mothers and the maternal are explored in the television serials, they are done so from the child's perspective thus returning 'mother' to object. It is significant that both Sookie and Elena want to have children 'one day' but neither experiences pregnancy, childbirth, or motherhood in the narrative. Desire for this 'female' fulfilment is presented as a highly motivating but unrepresentable aspect of feminine subjectivity. While the politics of *Twilight* are very problematic from a feminist perspective, the attempt to represent maternal subjectivity in a way that foregrounds its conflicts, is worth drawing attention to. *Twilight*'s way out of the conflicting yet dependent conditions of personhood and maternity is to re-enact the sacrifice of the maternal body as self-sacrifice in the female self's subjectivisation. *True Blood* and *The Vampire Diaries* displace *Twilight*'s attempt at maternal subjectivity by exploring maternity from the distance of its relation to the subject-forming child. Taken together the texts demonstrate the conflict at the heart of our cultural ways of forming and maintaining subjectivity. Central to this conflict is the unimaginable maternal subject.

* * *

It has been said that all love begins and ends with she who gave us life.⁷

Reading *Twilight*, *True Blood*, and *The Vampire Diaries* as symptomatic of cultural aporia surrounding womanhood, this study provides an original contribution to feminist popular cultural criticism and scholarship on these texts. The foregrounding of a feminine point of view allows an exploration of selfhood that oscillates between positions of viewing and of being viewed highlighting contradiction and fragmentation in the self. Donna Weiland describes the cultural changes from the rigidly paternalistic society Freud analysed to the contemporary "embrace of the pleasure principle" and questioning of boundaries as a change involving "not only progress and liberation from repressive paternal/male authority but also – and in a way that throws us into confusion and a state of terror – a

⁷ *The Originals*, S2E10 "Set Your Flag on Fire"

‘return of the repressed.’”⁸ Operating within a Female Gothic tradition, there is a pessimism to each of the texts’ construction of gendered subjectivity. However, that does not necessitate pessimism in the response. The vampire romance stories examined here reveal the need for new ways of thinking about female subjectivity.

As a new century begins, we take stock of the unprecedented destructiveness unleashed on the planet and on fellow human beings by the West. As the paternal super-ego is slowly eroded we are left with the ghosts and the furies, searching for a new way ahead.⁹

The reading conducted here forms part of the creative task of reimagining female subjectivity.¹⁰ As Tania Modleski argues “a fully politicised feminist criticism... aim[s]... at bringing into being new meaning and new subjectivities, seeking to articulate not only what is but “what has never been.”¹¹ For this reason, this interpretation attempts an exploration that provides an alternative means of using these important popular texts to query and question cultural understandings of subjectivity, femininity, and feminism. This study leaves the gothic stories and their heroines in the “perfect piece of forever”, the tacked on happy ending, and the sleeping beauty spell, with the sense that:

Happy ever after it was not, but sometimes even the worst endings are not really endings at all. And you know ... that even when all seems burnt to ash, in our story, there is always another chapter to be told.¹²

⁸ Wieland, *Undead Mother*, 13.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 14.

¹⁰ Whitford, *Luce Irigaray*,

¹¹ Modleski, *Feminism Without Women*, 46.

¹² The Originals S2E22 ‘Ashes to Ashes.’

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Film

Addiction, The (1995), dir. Abel Ferrara, US.

Blacula (1972), dir. Fredric Hobbs, US.

Blade (1998), dir. Stephen Norrington, US.

Bram Stoker's Dracula (1992), dir. Francis Ford Coppola, US

Breaking Dawn Part 1 (2011), dir. Bill Condon, US.

Breaking Dawn Part 2 (2012), dir. Bill Condon, US.

Brood, The (1979), dir. David Cronenberg, US.

Buffy the Vampire Slayer (1992), dir. Fran Rubel Kuzui, US.

Dracula (1931), Dir. Tod Browning, US.

Dracula's Daughter (1936), dir. Lambert Hillyer, US.

Eclipse (2010), dir. David Slade, US.

Fright Night (1985), dir. Tom Holland, US.

Habit (1997), dir. Larry Fessenden, US.

Hunger, The (1983), dir. Tony Scott, US.

Interview with the Vampire (1994), dir. Neil Jordon, US.

Lost Boys, The (1987), dir. Joel Schumacher, US.

Martin, (1977), dir. George Romero, US.

Nadja (1994), dir. Michael Almereyda, US.

Near Dark (1987), dir. Kathryn Bigelow, US.

New Moon (2009), dir. Chris Weitz, US.

Night of the Living Dead (1968), dir. George Romero, US.

Rosemary's Baby (1968), dir. Roman Polanski, US.

Scanners (1981), dir. David Cronenberg, US.

Twilight (2008), dir. Catherine Hardwicke, US.

Wisdom of Crocodiles (1998), dir. Po-Chih Leong, UK.

Television

Angel (1999-2004), prod. Joss Wheedon and David Greenwalt, US.

Buffy the Vampire Slayer (1997-2003), prod. Joss Whedon, US.

Dark Shadows (1966-1971), prod. Dan Curtis, US.

Originals, The (2013-), prod. Julie Plec and Kevin Williamson, US.

True Blood (2008-2014), prod. Alan Ball, US.

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