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VAMPIRES AS “MEANING MACHINES”:
SIGNIFYING THE MONSTER THROUGH RACE AND SEXUALITY

BY

Isabel Turner-Debs

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-INTRODUCTION-

Monsters are meaning machines. They can represent gender, race, nationality, class and sexuality in one body.

-Halberstam, *Skin Shows*, 21-22

The vampire is an utterly fascinating figure. He is the monster that haunts the margins of society, that polices the boundary between normative behavior and deviant behavior. He serves as the embodiment, sign, and receptacle of society's fears. As such, he signifies all that is considered non-normative and marginal. He teaches us what is considered normal and good and moral and what is considered deviant and evil and immoral. He is the vampiric Other to our human Self. And he not only defines what is deviant by embodying and performing it, but also he defines what is normal by providing its contrast and opposition.

Although the vampire is ubiquitous in almost all types of media, he began his modern incarnation in literature in the nineteenth century. At a time when English society was grappling with categorizing and defining identities, the vampire too was fomenting. And as the lines between normal and abnormal were drawn in categories of race, sexuality, nation, and gender—to name just a few—the vampire came to embody and signify all the deviancies that society could conceive. He was constructed as diametrically opposed to humanity, as the enemy of humankind. And as the monstrous Other, he became the ultimate antithesis to everything considered natural and normal: life, rule of law, heterosexuality, monogamy, whiteness, and Englishness.

Ultimately, the vampire threatens to breach all the boundaries and binaries that the very success of society rests upon. Therefore, the vampire threatens not just

individual human lives, but the existence of humanity as a whole. This apocalyptic threat that the vampire embodies is signified by the specific ways in which he violates individual norms. (Another common trope of the vampire is that he is predominantly produced as masculine, which is why I use masculine pronouns to refer to the vampire in general, even though there are, of course, exceptions to this trend—for example, *Carmilla*.)

In this thesis, I am specifically interested in the categories of race and sexuality in the vampire figure and how these have been used to produce the vampire as monstrous—or not. In his formative years, the vampire was always and inextricably coded as the racial and sexual Other, i.e. non-white and non-heteronormative. But this is the vampire of the nineteenth century, the monster just rising from his grave to haunt society. His descendants of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries evolved and mutated considerably, primarily in response to changing social conditions. Race and sexuality in the vampire, instead of always being signs of monstrosity and Otherness, are renegotiated in later works, especially in twenty-first century works. Some texts perpetuate the normative *function* of the vampire, but reproduce the vampire himself as heteronormative and white, instead of sexually queer and non-white as his nineteenth century predecessors had been. On the other hand, some works maintain the non-normative identity of the vampire figure, but, instead of producing the vampire as the monstrous enemy to humankind, question human normative systems and imply that humans themselves may be the true monsters.

Nineteenth century works thoroughly established the traditional vampire as monstrous precisely because he was the racial and sexual Other. As the monster that

policed the boundaries of normative behavior, the vampire reinforced the critical importance of normativity. Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* series (2005-2008), while still intended to enforce normativity, reproduced the vampire as the romantic hero by recasting him as white and heteronormative. Instead of scaring the reader into normative conformance, Meyer's vampire lures the reader into it. In a radical appropriation of the vampire, Octavia Butler's *Fledgling* (2005) maintains the racial and sexual deviance of the vampire, but rejects the association with monstrosity. In questioning normativity, Butler's vampire subverts the idolization of whiteness and heteronormativity and, furthermore, implies that it may be normative, human society that is the true monster.

Foundations

Otherness

Simone de Beauvoir, in *The Second Sex*, articulates her conception of a binary constructed between man as the Self and woman as the Other. Before discussing the position of woman as the Other in depth, de Beauvoir observes, "The category of the *Other* is as primordial as consciousness itself. In the most primitive societies, in the most ancient mythologies, one finds the expression of a duality—that of a Self and the Other" (177). Indeed, she notes, "Otherness is a fundamental category of human thought" (178). This dichotomy of Self and Other is pervasive and infinitely applicable to different situations. De Beauvoir herself provides some clear examples:

In small-town eyes all persons not belonging to the village are 'strangers' and suspect; to the native of a country all who inhabit other countries are 'foreigners';

Jews are ‘different’ for the anti-Semite, Negroes are ‘inferior’ for American racists, aborigines are ‘natives’ for colonists, proletarians are the ‘lower class’ for the privileged. (178)

De Beauvoir elucidates the nuances of such dichotomies, noting that they are most often constructed as natural and pre-ordained and that the Self is in large part defined by its contrast to the Other. De Beauvoir’s interpretation of dichotomies of Self and Other invites a reading of the vampire as the Other to humanity’s Self, at least in his early figurations. And this positioning is produced and buttressed by similarly coding the vampire as the racial and sexual Other. By imbricating these multiple layers of Otherness, the vampire is produced as doubly, even multiply, Other to humanity—that is, white, English, and heteronormative humanity.

Race

Race is a social construct. This has been established, discussed, and agreed upon by scholars from diverse fields, biology to anthropology. It is now widely accepted that, despite our predecessors’ beliefs, there are no biological causes or identifiers of race. Race is not to be found in genes nor in physical appearance. Instead, race was, and still is, applied as a means of categorization and hierarchization to justify specific social orders. As Ian Haney-Lopez observes, “Races are [...] not biological groupings, but social constructions” and “race mediates every aspect of our lives” (200, 192). In Western paradigms, white skin is superior to colored skin. However, race is about much more than skin color. An essential part of racial delineation is nationality, i.e. where one is from and

where one is a citizen. Therefore, implied by the designation of white is the identity of an English or American citizen born in England or America. On the opposite side, to be non-white means to have non-white skin and/or to hail from a country other than England or America. In this Western paradigm, anyone foreign is necessarily racially different. This normative system of race was actively constructed by scientists, politicians, and everyday citizens of England in the nineteenth century and the vampire figure served to illustrate and reinforce this racial propaganda. If the vampire is terrifying and monstrous it is, at least in part, because he is coded as non-white and non-English. Racist and xenophobic fears of the Other bolster the vampire's monstrosity. And, simultaneously, the vampire is coded as non-white and non-English to enhance his monstrosity, to make him into a monster that the English public will fear. Therefore, the vampire narratives of the nineteenth century worked to reinforce xenophobia and racism as society adopted and invested in notions of racial difference and hierarchy. And this racial deviance was implicitly tied to sexual deviance, as racist constructions of race often bear sexual prejudices: "racial stereotypes invariably embody some elements of sexual identity" (Haney-Lopez 198).

Sexuality

Just as the vampire developed alongside and in conference with developing notions about racial difference, so too did he develop alongside new categories and ideas about sexuality. The Victorian Era introduced a new policing of sex and its appropriateness. And as Michel Foucault discusses in his treatise *The History of Sexuality: Part One*, while it may seem that sex and sexuality were repressed during this

time, discourses on sexuality proliferated. At this time, different sexual behaviors and preferences were being categorized and codified into a comprehensive system:

Through the various discourses, legal sanctions against minor perversions were multiplied; sexual irregularity was annexed to mental illness; from childhood to old age, a norm of sexual development was defined and all the possible deviations were carefully described; pedagogical controls and medical treatments were organized; around the least fantasies, moralists, but especially doctors, brandished the whole emphatic vocabulary of abomination. (36)

As more and more deviations were named and categorized, society hierarchized these identities, placing reproductive, heterosexual, monogamous sex at the top. An ensuing disgust and fear developed towards all sexual behaviors and preferences that deviated from this newly installed norm. However, while these deviations were being codified during this time, the terms that we use today had not yet come into existence. As Jonathan Katz has discussed, the terms heterosexual and homosexual did not come into their present-day meaning until around the turn of the twentieth century. But, despite the absence of our current terminology, there was still considerable anxiety around the issues of sex and sexuality in the nineteenth century when the vampire was born.

At a time when nineteenth century Victorian society invested in delimiting normal sexuality and ostracizing and punishing aberrant or perverted sexualities, the vampire, in all his non-heteronormative glory, embodied and signified the threat of perverse sexuality. The vampire functioned as a sign of abnormal sexuality at the same time as he

was made monstrous via his deviant sexuality. The vampire has long been associated with perverse sexualities. At the most basic level, the vampire's defining characteristics, both his fangs and his method of feeding, carry sexual connotations. The fangs themselves are phallic symbols that are readily visible in a way that the phallus itself is usually not. The invisible, real phallus is therefore rendered visible, quite literally, on the vampire's face. But more sexually suspect is what the vampire *does* with these fangs. The vampire bites into humans, penetrating human flesh. Therefore, the vampiric feeding act is a perverse echo of sexual, penetrative intercourse. Further tying the vampire's feeding practices to sexuality is the common analogy of desire for sex and hunger for food that Sigmund Freud references: "The fact of the existence of sexual needs in human beings and animals is expressed in biology by the assumption of a 'sexual instinct,' on the analogy of the instinct of nutrition, that is of hunger" (135). This metaphoric conflation is made literal in the vampire in that his nutrition comes from a sexually-laden act. Therefore, for the vampire, desire for sex and desire for nutritive substances become one, perverting the sexual norm.

A key term that I use regarding sexuality is heteronormativity—instead of heterosexuality, which seems too narrow to encompass all the myriad ways in which the vampire deviates from the sexual norm. I use heteronormativity to refer to the interlocking systems that privilege and take as the norm not just heterosexual relationships, but also gender-sex conformance, reproductive sex, monogamy, and married sex. By this I mean that non-heterosexual individuals and behaviors are marginalized and discriminated against; men and women are expected to be heterosexual and to perform traditional gender roles in accordance with their sex; and sex is ideally

penile-vaginal, reproductive sex that occurs in a monogamous marriage. All of these expectations and norms are subsumed within the term heteronormativity. Therefore, when I say that something or someone is non-heteronormative, I mean to say that they violate one or all of these norms. For example, the vampire is read as non-heteronormative because he performs alternative sex acts to reproductive sex and is not monogamous in terms of whom he engages in sexual feeding acts with.

Critics on The Vampire

I am indebted to the scholars who have come before me in analyzing the vampire, race, and sexuality and their imbrication. Nina Auerbach is an essential source for anyone doing work on the figure of the vampire. Her seminal book *Our Vampires, Ourselves* clearly delineates the relationship between the vampire and his contemporary cultural context. Although I do not discuss in depth the vampire in his contemporary social context, Auerbach's book is critical to understanding the vampire and his infinite, yet unique productions over time. There exist many thorough and astute anthologies on the vampire in media, of which I found Joan Gordon and Veronica Hollinger's *Blood Read: The Vampire as Metaphor in Contemporary Culture* and Sam George and Bill Hughes' *Open Graves, Open Minds: Representations of Vampires and the Undead from the Enlightenment to the Present Day* to be particularly helpful. While not specific to vampires, Judith Halberstam's theoretical book *Skin Shows: Gothic Horror and the Technology of Monsters* nevertheless provides an absolutely essential analysis of the role of race and sexuality in producing the monster. Similarly, Jeffrey Cohen's book *Monster*

Theory: Reading Culture proposes several important theses regarding the production and functions of the monster in literature and culture.

Evidently, the vampire has received much critical attention and study—and so too the roles of race and sexuality in producing the vampire. While critics have explored the representations of race and sexuality in the major works I will be analyzing, they have rarely—or not at all—examined the imbrication of racial and sexual difference as critical to producing the vampire as monstrous. That is, they have recognized that race and sexuality play important roles in these works and that they may relate to vampirism, but they have not made an explicit connection between the new and refigured productions of the vampire in these twenty-first century works and the old ways of producing the vampire. Scholars have gone to great lengths to analyze the colonialist and racist means of ascribing value and power to characters in Meyer's *Twilight* series, but have not realized that these are startlingly different than earlier productions of the vampire as the racial and sexual Other. Similarly, critics have argued that Butler's *Fledgling* uses the hybrid vampire to challenge racist and heteronormative systems of power, but have not recognized that she uses the vampire, traditionally the racial and sexual Other, to challenge humanity itself, reproducing humanity as the monster not the vampire.

Tying It All Together

What I seek to contribute to scholarly discussion with this thesis is a deeper understanding of the interplay and overlay of race and sexuality in the figure of the vampire and how this relationship has evolved over the years. I will explore how race and sexuality produce and define the vampire and what the effects of such racial and sexual

designations are. I will compare two vastly different twenty-first century works that, although they both diverge from the traditional nineteenth-century productions of the vampire, reproduce the vampire for either conservative or subversive ends. I will seek to understand what purpose the vampire serves in these unique reproductions and how he violates, challenges, or enforces normative systems of power and privilege along racial and sexual delineations.

Similarly, while the works analyzed in this thesis have all been discussed many times over by many different critics, this thesis is the first to extensively analyze and compare Meyer's *Twilight* series and Butler's *Fledgling* side by side. Furthermore, these novels have rarely—if at all—been placed and analyzed in relation to the traditional vampire narratives of the nineteenth century. This thesis also extends Halberstam's argument regarding the imbrication of race and sexuality in the monster to the vampire figure specifically and explores the nuances and variations in different figurations of race and sexuality in the vampire.

Building off the existing scholarly work, I will argue that the vampire is both defined and produced through his race and sexuality. Initially, in his formative years, he was defined as the racial and sexual Other to English society. However, later interpretations have reproduced the vampire differently. While Meyer, in a decidedly conservative move, strips the vampire of his coding as racially and sexually deviant and instead produces him as the sign of whiteness and heteronormativity, Butler centers the black, sexually queer vampire in order to challenge the very normative systems that privilege whiteness and heteronormativity. Therefore, I argue, both Meyer and Butler refigure the vampire, but for drastically different purposes and with near opposite effects.

While Meyer de-monsters the vampire by removing his coding as non-white and non-heteronormative, Butler uses the black, sexually queer vampire to unsettle normative binaries. Meyer's vampire effects a re-inscription of conservative norms while Butler's vampire questions the very basis of those norms. In either case, the vampire has evolved considerably from his nineteenth-century origins as always and horrifically the monstrous combination of racial and sexual deviance.

My argument develops over three chapters, each of which focuses on a particular figuration of race and sexuality in producing the vampire. These are also roughly chronological in order to demonstrate the progression and evolution of the vampire figure in literature over time. My first chapter examines the beginnings and formation of the vampire figure in Gothic literature in the nineteenth century, looking closely at three key texts: John William Polidori's *The Vampyre* (1819), Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla* (1871), and Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897). While these texts differ among themselves, they nonetheless produce a relatively consistent relationship between the vampire and race and sexuality. They establish the vampire as always and inextricably coded as racially and sexually deviant and therefore in opposition to English society. These early authors produce the vampire as the receptacle and sign for all kinds of difference and as the monster that haunts the margins of both narratives and societies.

The second chapter jumps to a twenty-first century reinterpretation of the vampire narrative, Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* series (2005-2008). Before I discuss *Twilight* itself, though, I look at Anne Rice's *Interview with the Vampire* (1976) as a text that laid some of the ground work for Meyer's interpretation. I argue that these works engage in stripping the vampire of his traditional coding as both racially and sexually deviant. In

Interview with the Vampire, Rice removes the coding of racial deviance, but still invests in producing her vampire as sexually queer. However, this nonetheless signals a shift from the imbrication of racial and sexual deviance as producing the vampire that was established in the nineteenth century. Following Rice's lead, Meyer completely strips the vampire of his coding as both racially and sexually aberrant and instead reproduces her vampire as the pinnacle of whiteness and heteronormativity. Simultaneously, there is a shift in genre from the Gothic, which produced the vampire, to the Romance—specifically, in the case of *Twilight*, young adult paranormal romance. Therefore, I argue that Meyer removes the vampire's coding as racially and sexually deviant in order to reproduce him as the romantic hero. Meyer also strengthens her production of the vampire as the white, heteronormative romantic hero by contrasting him with and placing him in opposition to other characters who are coded as non-white and non-heteronormative.

The third and final chapter examines Octavia Butler's *Fledgling* (2005) and analyzes her re-tooling of the vampire figure as black and sexually queer in order to challenge and subvert the normative systems that privilege whiteness and heteronormativity. Before I discuss *Fledgling* in detail, however, I examine Jewelle Gomez's *The Gilda Stories* (1991) as a precedent for Butler's novel. Gomez reproduced the vampire as black and lesbian and used this figuration to question the earlier designation of sexual and racial deviance—i.e. anything that was not white and heteronormative—as monstrous. Butler builds off Gomez's interpretation of the vampire as black and sexually queer by centering this new vampire figure and suggesting that it is those who invest in maintaining normative systems of white privilege and

heteronormativity that are truly monstrous. She uses her hybrid vampire to challenge and subvert the binaries of Self / Other, white / black, heteronormative / non-heteronormative, human / vampire. Thus, I argue that Butler engages in a progressive and radical reimagining of the vampire in order to center those identities that have previously been marginalized and to challenge normative systems that allocate power and privilege.

-I-

**THE THREATENING RACIAL AND SEXUAL OTHER:
NINETEENTH CENTURY VAMPIRES**

The vampire arose in literature in the nineteenth century as the ultimate monster, firmly rooted in Gothic and romance origins and thoroughly coded as the racial and sexual Other. The formation of the vampire figure coincided with growing interest in categorizing humans by certain characteristics, such as gender, race, nationality, and sexuality. Therefore, as the ultimate monster, the vampire came to embody and represent the deviant identities of these categorizations. In particular, the vampire was produced as the racial Other, primarily by his non-British nationality, and as the sexual Other, both by his sexually deviant feeding practices and by his intimate relations with members of the same sex. These associations are produced and strengthened over the course of the nineteenth century, but I have chosen to examine three texts in particular—*The Vampyre*, *Carmilla*, and *Dracula*—in order to discuss the progression of the vampire's coding as the racial and sexual Other. *The Vampyre*, although not as well-known today as *Dracula*, was in fact the first complete vampire narrative to be published in prose literature. Therefore, it serves as the forefather of all the vampire texts that followed. *Carmilla* is an intriguing vampire narrative in that it contradicts the hegemony of the vampire as masculine that persists in both *The Vampyre* and *Dracula*. The titular vampire of *Carmilla* is female and is therefore interesting primarily because of her uniqueness. And, of course, *Dracula* is perhaps the most well-known of all vampire narratives. His legacy

has lived on for over a hundred years, both in movies that explicitly appropriate the character of Dracula and in other works that reveal more subtle influences by *Dracula*.

Romance & the Gothic

The vampire is inextricably a product of the Gothic. However, the Gothic itself is a descendant of both Romanticism and romance. The medieval romance, with its rich descriptions of courtly love, infused with fantastical magic, provided the inspiration for the Romantic movement, which spanned the late eighteenth century to the early nineteenth century. Similarly, Romantic literature was filled with rich emotion and imagination over rationality and logic (Drabble 842). “Emotionally it expressed an extreme assertion of the self and the value of individual experience” (842). And while Romanticism faded during the nineteenth century, the romance genre, more broadly, has endured and evolved. Gillian Beer notes that “sexual love is one of the great themes of the romance,” one that has persisted over the centuries (3). She notes that “romance is always concerned with the fulfillment of desires,” and as such provides entertainment and escape for the reader (12). Tracing the more modern meaning of romance, Beer observes that it has “become a literary quality rather than a form” and is now more often used to refer to lower-tier books, which are rarely considered high literature and are rather pure entertainment (66). As will be discussed later, Stephenie Meyer’s *Twilight* series falls into this more modern definition of romance.

One of the major evolutions of the Romantic was the Gothic, also called the gothic romance. The Gothic too originally dealt with medieval, temporally distant settings. However, as the Gothic evolved, it became more about the past haunting the

present, about one's ancestors' past mistakes wreaking havoc on the present generation. Fred Botting identifies two of the Gothic's key themes as excess and transgression (1-13). In corrupting and violating social norms and boundaries, the Gothic introduced a great sense of unease and even terror. However, many Gothic novels used this transgressive element to reinscribe the importance of those norms and boundaries that were transgressed: "The terrors and horrors of transgression in Gothic writing become a powerful means to reassert the values of society, virtue and propriety: transgression, by crossing the social and aesthetic limits, serves to reinforce or underline their value and necessity, restoring or defining limits" (7). The Gothic also constructed a seemingly clear distinction between good and evil and allowed the reader to vicariously expel the fears of transgression and disintegration. "Antitheses, made visible in Gothic transgressions, allowed proper limits and values to be asserted at the closure of narratives in which mysteries were explained or moral resolutions advanced" (8). The Gothic evoked strong emotional responses of both terror and pleasure: "Terror, in its sublime manifestations, is associated with subjective elevation, with the pleasures of imaginatively transcending or overcoming fear and thereby renewing and heightening a sense of self and social value" (9).

The Gothic often used monsters to embody these excessive and transgressive anxieties and its most enduring monster has proved to be the vampire. Vampires embody the ultimate transgressive—and excessive—force: they literally transgress respected boundaries, such as those of the body—via their penetrative feeding practices—those of the patriarchal family home, and those of the British nation. However, in terms of transgressive threat, theirs is primarily sexual:

The threat of wanton and corrupt sexuality is horrifically displayed in the vampiric shape. Their decadence, nocturnal existence and indiscriminate desires distinguish vampires as a particularly modern sexual threat to cultural mores and taboos: they are modern visions of epidemic contagions from the past, visited on the present in a form that, like venereal disease, enters the home only after (sexual) invitation. (Botting 148)

Not only do these Gothic vampire tales present this terrifying transgressive force, but they usually vanquish it, thereby comforting the reader with the re-inscription of the superiority of social norms and values. “In the face of the voluptuous and violent sexuality loosed by the decadent licentious vampire, a vigorous sense of patriarchal, bourgeois and family values is restored” (149).

The Vampyre

The first vampire to appear in prose literature was Lord Ruthven in John William Polidori's *The Vampyre* in 1819 and so began the coding of the vampire as sexually and racially deviant—and therefore truly monstrous. Polidori is perhaps best known for his close, but troubled relationship with Lord Byron. Polidori served as Byron's personal physician on a tour of the continent until they parted on acrimonious terms. There was and continues to be much speculation as to the true nature of their relationship and many believe it to have been a homosexual one. Byron wrote a fragment of a vampire tale as well, which many people study alongside Polidori's story, sometimes even conflating and

combining the two. Further complicating their literary relationship is the fact that *The Vampyre* was first published—unauthorized and erroneously—under Lord Byron’s name.

Polidori’s *The Vampyre* is often read as mimicking his own sexually suspicious and eventually antagonistic relationship with Lord Byron as they toured the continent. As such, *The Vampyre* relays the story of a naïve young man, Aubrey, who becomes infatuated with the mysterious Lord Ruthven, and follows him on his travels, eventually leading to the destruction of his prospects and happiness. Aubrey’s uneasiness with Ruthven grows as he receives warnings from home as to Ruthven’s character and his scandalous effects on the noble women of Britain. Aubrey separates from Ruthven and travels on to Greece, where he woos a beautiful young woman, Ianthe. However, Ianthe is murdered and Ruthven reappears. Locals blame her death on the mythic vampires said to haunt the forests. Aubrey gets sucked back into his relationship with Ruthven as Ruthven nurses him through an illness. And then, further binding him to Ruthven, Ruthven, while on his deathbed, following an attack by bandits, makes Aubrey swear not to reveal any suspicions as to his true nature for a year and a day. Aubrey returns home to Britain, weakened by his time with Ruthven, only to realize that Ruthven, apparently resurrected, is now courting his sister. Beholden to his oath of silence, Aubrey is powerless to stop their marriage and falls into the depths of madness and despair. The story closes with word of Aubrey’s sister’s death—and Ruthven’s disappearance—and Aubrey’s proclamation that Ruthven is indeed a vampire, his oath having finally expired: “Lord Ruthven had disappeared, and Aubrey's sister had glutted the thirst of a VAMPYRE!” (125).

Although the threat of the homosexual had not yet been articulated and raised in

the public imagination, the potential for same-sex desire to threaten society was very much present at the time of the story's release. As such, *The Vampyre*, without of course ever truly naming the threat of same-sex desire, presents the possibility of it, playing on fears of sexual corruption and impropriety. The vampire is never explicitly named as harboring or inspiring same-sex desire, but nonetheless he is *coded* as such. Lord Ruthven, then, is coded as homosexual as one facet of his Otherness. But it is perhaps Aubrey's response to Ruthven that truly reveals the homosexual undercurrents of the text. Aubrey is almost immediately drawn to Ruthven and intrigued by his glamour and mystique. Polidori writes that Aubrey "watched [Ruthven]" and "he soon formed this object into the hero of a romance" (110). In essence, Aubrey develops an infatuation with the mysterious older man and seeks to become close to him. This pursuit leads to their eventual agreement to travel the continent together as companions.

Mair Rigby notes that, in choosing to invite Ruthven on his European journey, "Aubrey is thrown off course and his progress towards a normal (i.e., married) future is arrested." I would further emphasize that it disrupts his *heterosexual* future. This is realized even more explicitly when Ruthven murders Aubrey's Greek love interest, Ianthe. Aubrey's most concrete path to a heterosexual, and as Rigby notes "normal," future is destroyed by Ruthven, shunting Aubrey outside the circumscribed realm of heterosexuality. She also discusses other aspects of their relationship that are laden with sexual connotations. When Ruthven nurses Aubrey back to health following the murder of Ianthe, "the close proximity implied by his 'tender care' [...] suggests a sexualized relationship." Similarly, she remarks on the connotations of Ruthven's penetrating gaze on Aubrey:

In Western culture the sexual boundaries of male identity have been phobically constituted by a refusal to be penetrated by another man, and male same-sex desire has been commonly understood in terms of the gaze. Ruthven's gaze 'fixed intently' upon Aubrey therefore hints figuratively at the more complete dissolution of male subjectivity supposedly inherent in 'sodomy.' (Rigby)

She acknowledges that this coded threat of same-sex activity nonetheless corresponds with a notable lack of overt same-sex activity since Ruthven "appears strictly 'heterosexual' in his feeding habits." But nevertheless, there is always the "possibility that he *might* bite Aubrey" and make real the penetration threatened by his gaze.

Aubrey's illness that incapacitates him from the murder of Ianthe through to the end of the story may be read as punishment for his homoerotic relationship with Ruthven. He has strayed too far from heterosexual norms, and quite literally strayed from his (heterosexual) nation, and is therefore punished for it. This punishment, visited on him in the form of an incapacitating illness and insanity, bears an implicit warning to those readers who would follow in Aubrey's footsteps and enter into a homoerotic relationship. While not explicitly labelled as homosexuality, it is nevertheless punished and discouraged as if it were overtly homosexual.

Ultimately, Rigby argues that the conflation of Polidori and Byron's relationship with the vampire "has contributed to the subsequent and analogous, coded relationship between vampires and queer sexual desire." In its coding of the non-heteronormative

potential of the vampire, *The Vampyre* laid firm foundations for the vampire to become intertwined with the notion of sexual queerness, for better or for worse.

It is also significant, Rigby suggests, that this suspiciously homosocial journey terminates in Greece. Rigby notes that at the time “‘Greek love’ was a common euphemism for sex between men” and therefore argues that Greece is the “most homosexually symbolic of spaces.” That Aubrey and Ruthven end up in Greece draws an explicit connection between the interconnected Otherness of sexual queerness and race. Greece, as Rigby notes, was conceived of as a homosexual space. Therefore, it exists in opposition to Britain, which was constructed as a heteronormative sphere. That Ruthven is so associated with the continent and Greece in particular demarcates him as non-British. This initiated, in some ways, the second association of the vampire with the racial Other. While it laid the groundwork for the association, it does not invest in fleshing out this double Otherness as much as future texts do.

Carmilla

While Polidori’s story initiated the coding of the vampire as sexually and racially deviant, Le Fanu’s *Carmilla* (1871) heightens and intensifies these associations in his female vampire. Sheridan Le Fanu’s *Carmilla* emphasizes the potentially homosexual threat of the vampire and her capacity to violate heteropatriarchal boundaries and norms. A young woman, Laura, recounts her strangely intimate relationship with a striking young woman named Carmilla. Carmilla is entrusted to the care of Laura’s father and the two girls quickly develop an affectionate relationship. Carmilla is beautiful, but mysterious, retreating to her room during the daylight hours and refusing to elaborate on

her origins. Soon after she and Carmilla become friends, Laura becomes ill and during the night suffers pains in her neck and chest and dreams of a large black cat prowling her room. While on a visit to a nearby ruined castle, Laura and her father encounter an old friend, General Spielsdorf. The General tells the tale of his own daughter's close friendship with a beautiful stranger, which ultimately led to her illness and death. He tells them that the mysterious young woman who killed his daughter, Mircalla, is a vampire and his aim is to discover her ancestral grave, which he suspects is at this castle, and kill her. Suddenly, Carmilla briefly appears and the General recognizes her as the vampire he seeks to kill. The General unearths her tomb and reveals the eerily lifelike corpse of Carmilla. The two men decapitate her, drive a stake through her heart, and then burn her remains. Although Laura recovers her health after the destruction of the vampire, she stills harbors desire for her lost friend.

Carmilla is predominantly read as being about sexuality, specifically female homosexuality. Critics have again and again examined the homoerotic relationship between Carmilla and Laura. They point to this homoerotic relationship as being the primary transgressive feature of the text, as it subverts heteropatriarchal structures. While Lord Ruthven may have initially enticed Aubrey with the lure of an intimate friendship, in *Carmilla* that relationship is realized. Nina Auerbach argues that Carmilla, because she is female, is allowed to consummate this allure: "everything male vampires seem to promise, Carmilla performs: she arouses, she pervades, she offers a sharing self. This female vampire is licensed to realize the homosexual, interpenetrative implications of the friendship male vampires aroused and denied" ("My Vampire" 11).

Elizabeth Signorotti notes that Le Fanu's novella indicates a critical change in vampire fiction. Up until that point, the vampires of these tales were all male predators. With *Carmilla*, though, the story revolves around a female vampire and her female lover. Their lesbian relationship explodes patriarchal power systems in a radical way. Signorotti claims that "Laura's and Carmilla's lesbian relationship defies the traditional structures of kinship by which men regulate the exchange of women to promote male bonding" (607). Signorotti argues that *Carmilla* embodies the burgeoning fears of the nineteenth century regarding female homosocial relationships (610). Certainly, the novella plays on and feeds into fears about female sexuality and about the power of female relationships.

Indeed, Ken Gelder reads Carmilla as a recognizably coded lesbian figure:

"[*Carmilla*] mobilises a range of undercoded but no doubt recognisable representations of the aristocratic lesbian: Carmilla is 'languid,' 'apathetic,' sleeping well into the afternoon—yet highly sexed, obsessive" (60). Her relationship—i.e. her sexual activity—with Laura marks her as homosexual, but her character also suggests her lesbianism. But the imagined threat of homosexuality is made obvious in the text: Carmilla "drains the life from" her female lovers, while also causing a fatal "illness" in the surrounding villages (61). Gelder reads this as representative of the typical Victorian conception of lesbianism as "'unnatural,' against nature" (61). And so here Le Fanu seems to be evoking popular constructions of the lesbian and her imagined horrific effect.

As in *The Vampyre*, the sexually queer vampire confuses the sexual feelings of its human victim. Just as Aubrey is confused by Ruthven's "tender care" and intimacy, Laura is disoriented by Carmilla's affection. She struggles with her own feelings towards Carmilla, echoing Aubrey's struggle with his own potentially homoerotic feelings for

Ruthven. In this way, the sexually deviant vampire demonstrates her threat: she does not prey on *unwilling* victims in some sense. The vampire does not impose same-sex desire, but rather provokes it. Her human victim finds herself experiencing desire for the vampire, which places her own sexuality outside the strict confines of heterosexuality. In this way, the vampire realizes all the fears of heteronormative—even homophobic—society: she *infects* her victims with same-sex desire.

While Carmilla's homosexuality seems to be excitingly radical, her sexual queerness is ultimately constructed as antagonistic to society and as the reason for her execution. Heteronormativity cannot stand for this threat to its reign and so the patriarchs unite at the close of the narrative to (phallically) execute this perpetrator of same-sex desire and activity. She is not allowed to survive and so her glimmer of non-heteronormative potential fades.

Carmilla's grave sexual threat is coupled with her threat as the racial Other. Like *The Vampyre*, *Carmilla* does not quite explicitly construct the vampire as the racial Other, but signifies it through nationality and location. The story takes place in Styria, which is now a part of Austria, and is therefore removed and distanced from Britain. Laura and her father are British, but Carmilla is constructed as foreign. She has ancient familial ties in this foreign land, she has dark hair, and she appears unfamiliar with British traditions (Brock 123). As Marilyn Brock notes, Carmilla's reaction to the British funeral procession constitutes a "perplexing response" that alienates her from British identity: "her face underwent a change that alarmed and even terrified me. It darkened, and became horribly livid [...] she trembled all over with a continued shudder as irrepressible as rage [...] a low convulsive cry of suffering broke from her, and gradually

the hysteria subsided” (123; Le Fanu 267). That Carmilla is also associated with the only explicitly non-white character in the text furthers her own coding as the racial Other.

When Carmilla arrives at Laura’s home she is in a carriage with a black woman, who is described as crazed and animalistic: “a hideous black woman [...] nodding and grinning derisively towards the ladies, with gleaming eyes and large white eyeballs, her teeth set as if in fury” (257). So, by association and by subtle physical and behavioral traits, Carmilla is coded as the racial Other.

Once again, race and sexuality are imbricated in producing the vampire as the monstrous Other since Carmilla’s sexual queerness also serves to further her construction as the racial Other. Again, the implication is that such queer behaviors as vampirism and homosexuality do not exist in Britain, but in spaces divorced from and opposed to it. In the typical construction of the Self and the Other, the Other is in some sense required in order for the Self to construct itself. Therefore, the British Self requires the queer, foreign Other in order to construct itself as the subject and the superior entity. It is because vampirism and queerness are located in *other* spaces that Britain can envision itself as pure and normal. Thus, in locating dangerous deviations from the norm—as vampirism and queerness are—outside of Britain, Britain can experience the fear and disgust at these behaviors without having them too close to its borders. There is a certain safety in this distance because not only does it construct Britain as the superior norm, but it also negates, or at least minimizes, the threat of vampiric or queer infection to Britain itself.

Dracula

While *Carmilla*—and *The Vampyre* before it—invests in coding the vampire as monstrous primarily through sexual deviance, Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897) epitomizes the imbrication of racial and sexual deviance in the vampire figure. In *Dracula*, the foreign vampire finally reaches British shores and begins a campaign of terror and infection in an effort to colonize the ultimate colonizer, Britain itself. A young solicitor, Jonathan Harker, travels to Transylvania to meet and advise his firm's client, Count Dracula. Harker seems to be the only other resident of the Count's vast castle aside from Dracula himself. Soon enough Harker becomes suspicious as to Dracula's true nature, but Dracula prevents him from returning home. In the meantime, the narrative returns to England where Harker's fiancée, Mina, eagerly awaits his return. She is staying with her friend Lucy, who has multiple suitors for marriage, all of whom will later become part of the vampire-hunting band. Lucy falls ill soon after a ghost-ship grounds off the coast. Lucy's friends struggle to save her life as she continues to suffer from mysterious blood-loss, but ultimately she dies. However, she soon rises from the dead to feed upon children from the village, necessitating her violent execution with a stake to the heart. Harker has been missing for a while and when Mina hears word that he has finally reappeared she rushes to Europe to be by his side. He is ill and weak, but they marry immediately before returning home. However, Mina soon begins to experience the same illness that Lucy succumbed to. The group, aided by Dr. Van Helsing, have by this point realized that Count Dracula is the vampire responsible for these maladies. The band of men, and Mina, set out to destroy Dracula, chasing him back to Transylvania before they finally dispatch

him. And thus, the vampire's invasion of England is thwarted and the threat of the vampire eliminated, at least for the time being.

While Dracula initially seems to imitate Ruthven and Carmilla in cultivating an intimate relationship with a same-sex human, he abandons this relationship quickly. Nevertheless, this relationship is wrought with queer undercurrents. Dracula receives Jonathan Harker at his castle and it seems that it is only these two men in the domestic space. They dine together and stay up late into the night talking. Dracula also seems to have access to Jonathan's bedroom. It is implied at one point that Dracula carries an unconscious Harker back to his bed after his encounter with a female vampire trio: "I awoke in my own bed. If it be that I had not dreamt, the Count must have carried me here. I tried to satisfy myself on the subject, but could not arrive at any unquestionable result" (48). Neither Jonathan nor the reader knows what—if anything—transpired during this lapse in consciousness, but Stoker has created space to fill with fears of queer behavior. The spatial proximity, and isolation, of these two men serves to raise questions of heteronormative propriety. Not only is there the spatial implication of improper sexual contact, but Dracula also claims ownership of Harker's body in the context of a sexual confrontation with the sensual "wives": "How dare you touch him, any of you? How dare you cast eyes on him when I had forbidden it? Back, I tell you all! *This man belongs to me!* Beware how you meddle with him, or you'll have to deal with me" (46; emphasis added). Without an appropriate female to mediate their relationship, these two men seem to edge closer and closer to the precipice of homosexuality, a possibility that is furthered by Dracula's proclamation of ownership over Harker's (sexual) body.

Harker, like Aubrey in *The Vampyre*, suffers from an incapacitating illness and insanity after his close association with the vampire. In this case, after his stay at Dracula's castle and his uncomfortably intimate and unmediated relationship with Dracula, Harker disappears. When he finally surfaces in an institution, we learn that he has been wandering about Eastern Europe, insane and ill. Although not condemned to permanent insanity and illness like Aubrey, Harker is nonetheless punished for his close relationship with Dracula in much the same manner. Notably, he is rescued by his fiancée Mina and they immediately marry when she arrives to bring him home. He is saved from his punishment for a potentially homosexual relationship with the vampire by a woman who, immediately upon her arrival, brings him firmly back into the realm of heterosexuality by marrying him. While Aubrey's potential wife is murdered by the vampire, thus exiling him permanently from the bounds of heterosexuality, Harker's fiancée marries him, hence reestablishing his heterosexuality.

Once Dracula reaches England, his homosexual threat widens. While the reader only sees Dracula feed on women, there is an underlying threat that he will feed on one of his male adversaries. These strong and virtuous Englishmen are not only subjected to the fear of homosexual attack from Dracula himself, but are also indirectly rendered impotent by Dracula's attacks on their women. First Lucy and then Mina are brought under Dracula's spell and the Englishmen struggle to rebuff his attacks. In fact, they attempt to reverse Dracula's effect by transfusing their own (English) blood into Lucy. However, "This effort proves ineffective and demonstrates the Western male characters' impotence in comparison to Dracula—their very life blood is useless to stop him" (Brock 125). Thus, they are deprived of enacting their heteropatriarchal protection of their English

women by Dracula's more powerful control. Ultimately, like Ruthven, Dracula seems to be preventing the British men from performing their heterosexuality, again throwing their conformance to heterosexuality into question. This works alongside the more subtle, and unrealized, threat that Dracula could directly attack one of these men and phallically—and therefore homosexually—penetrate him, corrupting his heterosexuality. However, and unlike in *The Vampyre*, the vampire Dracula is executed by these very men, ultimately re-inscribing the dominance of heterosexuality.

As Punter and Byron note, there is a pervasive anxiety about gender, specifically as tied to female sexuality, throughout the text. With the social upheaval of Victorian England, notions about women's roles and female sexuality were in a state of flux. The concept of the New Woman, "who was characterized by her demands for both social and sexual autonomy," was prevalent (Punter and Byron 231). In a way, the New Woman herself was a queer figure because she challenged the norms of heteropatriarchal order. That the vampire becomes associated with the queer figure of the New Woman is not surprising. The pervasive anxiety surrounding these issues is particularly obvious in the text as the female vampires prey on children in "a rather obvious rejection of maternity" and in the uncanny flirtatiousness and seductiveness of Lucy, which blossoms after her transformation into a vampire (232). Dracula's vampire "wives" are also disconcertingly horrifying for their explicit sensuality. Jonathan describes them as voluptuous, a word with distinctly sexual connotations. He also experiences a disturbing sexual attraction to them: "I felt in my heart a wicked, burning desire that they would kiss me with those red lips" and "I closed my eyes in a languorous ecstasy and waited" (44, 45). Both their sexual appearance and their ability to arouse sexual desire in virtuous men is disturbing,

even horrifying. Their unreserved sexuality would have been truly terrifying to contemporary readers as it embodied a pervasive social anxiety. Lucy and the wives are ostensibly called into the queer category of the New Woman by their exposure to and interaction with Dracula. They are quite literally infected with queerness, as manifested in New Woman characteristics, by his vampiric bite. Although there exist certain non-heteronormative figures, such as Dracula and the female vampires he creates, Stoker ultimately condemns this sexual deviance.

Signorotti identifies *Dracula* as a vehement response to *Carmilla*'s radical lesbian tale. Stoker, in contrast to Le Fanu, explicitly punishes the "loose" woman, Lucy, for her implied desire to defy heteropatriarchal conventions. Her flirtation with three men at once hints at an overactive sexual drive that must be punished. Unlike in *Carmilla*, "Stoker placed the women of *Dracula* firmly under male control and subjected them to severe punishments for any sexual transgression" (Signorotti 620). In fact, Signorotti identifies "Stoker's overriding concern in *Dracula*" as "the threat of rampant female sexual desire" (621). While many have read Dracula himself as the sexual predator of the text, Signorotti reads the female vampires as the most sexually threatening figures of the text. She argues that "Dracula's kiss enables women to become sexual penetrators. Using their sharp teeth to penetrate men, they reverse traditional gender roles and place men in the passive position customarily reserved for women" (623). Lucy, with her implied desire for sexual deviance, is horrifically punished by a brutal execution that nevertheless successfully "returns her to the accepted role of sexually passive female" by phallically penetrating her body with a stake (624). Meanwhile, Mina, who is portrayed as "the traditional Victorian angel-in-the-house," is spared Lucy's brutal fate and instead serves

to mediate the group of men set on tracking and killing Dracula (624). Signorotti notes that without Mina there to mediate the band, “their homosocial group might suffer from the taint of homosexuality” (626).

Although some critics read *Dracula* in the light of non-heteronormativity, the majority of critics view the narrative as an allegory of xenophobic British fears of social and cultural invasion. That the vampire is again cast as a foreigner is no coincidence, but rather a deliberate choice so that when Dracula arrives on British shores and begins attacking British citizens, the anxiety of foreign invasion is realized.

In *Dracula*, the vampire’s source is Transylvania, a real region that has since become synonymous with vampirism in its fantasy conception. The novel begins with a British man, Harker, leaving Britain and traveling to Transylvania to meet the Count. He feels uncomfortable in Transylvania—and Eastern Europe in general—and longs for the security of Britain. The Transylvanian countryside is rural and mostly uninhabited in contrast to Harker’s bustling urban home of London. Thus, the common dichotomy between Western civilized culture and Eastern uncivilized culture is established. However, instead of simply constructing the vampire as existing outside of Britain—and inherently in opposition to it—as Polidori and Le Fanu did, Stoker has his vampire explicitly threaten Britain itself with colonization. As Gelder notes, “Vampirisation is colonisation—or rather, from the British perspective, *reverse* colonisation” and “In *Dracula*, the vampire returns colonisation to the colonisers; he is shown to be more of an imperialist than the British” (12). Dracula threatens to turn Britain’s most powerful tool of control—colonization—against it. While Britain has subjugated many a country and people, Dracula threatens to subjugate those who have so long been the oppressors.

In *Dracula*, Stoker plays on the pervasive fear of “reverse colonization, the fear of racial degeneration which would corrupt and destabilize identity” (Punter and Byron 232). Dracula is marked not just as the monstrous Other, but as a distinctly foreign Other. He comes from far away and preys upon the pure and innocent British people. He intends to conquer England by preying on the people and then controlling them: “My revenge has just begun! I spread it over centuries, and time is on my side. Your girls that you all love are mine already; and through them you and others shall yet be mine—my creatures to do my bidding and to be my jackals when I want to feed” (370). That Dracula intends to effect this foreign invasion by sexually feeding on and corrupting the virtuous young women of Britain reveals the imbrication of racial and sexual deviance and the terrifying combination of the two in the figure of the monstrous vampire.

At the root of this fear is the idea of degeneration and corruption of national, and racial, identity. Dracula, a foreign infiltrator, threatens to corrupt Britain’s national identity. His vision of creating a following of “infected” vampires would unbalance Britain’s conception of its stable, unified national identity. Those who were infected with vampirism, and Dracula’s Eastern European taint, would no longer be true British citizens under the national identity. And so, Dracula truly embodies the threat of national degeneration in his determination to corrupt the allegiances and identities of British citizens. His incursion into Britain itself also constitutes a direct, physical threat. He has quite literally breached the boundaries of the nation itself and has succeeded in corrupting some individuals. The ease with which he does so heightens the fear of real attacks upon Britain’s national identity and therefore his expulsion and eradication is required to resolve these fears by the close of the novel.

Conclusion

The three texts discussed in this chapter, Polidori's *The Vampyre*, Le Fanu's *Carmilla*, and Stoker's *Dracula*, demonstrate how the vampire was coded as the sexual and racial Other in his formative years and how this furthered his production as the ultimate monster. However, the vampire has evolved considerably since this early figuration as always and inexorably the monstrous sexual and racial Other. As the vampire was adapted into film in the early twentieth century—primarily in interpretations of Stoker's *Dracula*—his racial Otherness was emphasized, but his deviant sexuality was tempered. Similarly, as the vampire expanded into television, his Otherness was modified and he became a more sympathetic figure. For example, in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, Angel and Spike—at different times—are represented as near-human and deserving of respect and love. Therefore, the twentieth century served as a transitional time during which the monstrous vampire of the nineteenth century was transfigured and morphed into a creature who could potentially evoke sympathy—even admiration and love—from humans, both internal characters and external audiences.

-II-

THE WHITE, HETERONORMATIVE ROMANTIC HERO:

MEYER'S CONSERVATIVE VAMPIRES

While the nineteenth century vampire narratives established the vampire as a terrifying monster, in large part because of his deviant racial and sexual identities, later interpretations drastically repurposed and re-imagined the vampire and his relationship to racial and sexual Otherness. Stephenie Meyer, in the *Twilight* series (2005-2008), strips the vampire of his previously coded identities and instead displaces them onto other characters in order to construct the vampire as the embodiment of whiteness and heteronormativity. In constructing her main vampires as normative, Meyer de-Others the vampire, abandoning the nearly two-hundred-year-long legacy of the vampire and centering her vampire firmly in the genre of young adult paranormal romance. However, Meyer was not the first to engage in this kind of reproduction of the vampire. In her 1976 novel, *Interview with the Vampire*—followed up by a series—Anne Rice began to limit the vampire's Otherness by producing him as white and racially superior to African-American slaves in the antebellum South. While she re-formed the vampire as racially normative and dominant, Rice maintained—perhaps even strengthened—the vampire's association with sexual deviance by producing her vampire as homosexual in all but name. This figuration of the vampire seems a natural foundation for Meyer to build on with her more thorough reinterpretation of the vampire as entirely normative, both as white and as heteronormative.

Much of the criticism on *Twilight* has explored Meyer's treatment of sexuality and race; however, it has not explored this in the context of the typical coding of the vampire figure. Most of the criticism regarding sexuality in the novels addresses the clear ideological message of sexual abstinence; however, a handful of critics have examined the notable lack of sexual queerness in this vampire narrative. Kathryn Kane argues that Meyer's central vampires are overwhelmingly heteronormative—and conservative—and reject the queerness associated with earlier vampires. Similarly, Ashley Donnelly notes the lack of non-heterosexual characters in the series and argues that Meyer codes certain marginal characters as sexually queer in order to explain and reinforce the Cullens' dominance. However, not all critics agree that the text is overwhelmingly heteronormative—perhaps even bordering on homophobic. Joseph Sommers and Amy Hume choose to examine the queer potential of Edward Cullen primarily because of his refusal to sexually engage with Bella during their courtship as well as the potentially queer implications of the Cullens' inability, and refusal, to reproduce. However, critics are not only interested in the role of sexuality in the novels, but also pay great attention to the mechanics of race in the series, especially in regard to the characterization of the indigenous peoples of the Quileute wolf pack. Most critics agree that the novels evoke racist and colonialist discourses to justify and buttress the production of non-white characters as inferior to the incredibly white Cullens. Natalie Wilson reads the relationship between the hyper-white Cullens and the indigenous werewolves as employing racist and colonialist tropes that create a dichotomy between civilized white and savage natives. Similarly, Danielle Borgia explores the layers of Edward's and the rest of the Cullens' white privilege, which grants both material and immaterial benefits.

As with the discussion around sexuality in the novels, there are those critics who disagree with the majority. Alexandra Hidalgo, although she acknowledges problematic aspects of Meyer's treatment of race, argues that Meyer uses the different species—human, vampire, and werewolf—as allegories for different races and negotiates concordance and unity among these allegorical races by the close of the series. In the same vein, Michelle Bernard explores the potentially progressive potential of negotiations among species and the hybrid child that Bella bears in the final novel.

Kathryn Kane analyzes the ways in which the Cullens are de-queered in order to be produced as heteronormative. They reject feeding on humans, denying their basic desires, thereby electing normativity over queerness. It is the human world, instead, which is produced as the realm of the queer, what with “divorce, alternative family formations, and sex outside of marriage” (113). The heteronormative vampire family therefore becomes a refuge from the queer human world that Bella inhabits. Thus, the Cullens represent “the return of conservative values” as “they embrace a rigid worldview that restrains the troubling possibilities of queer” (117).

Similarly, Ashley Donnelly argues that Meyer's series enforces heteronormativity both by its erasure of non-heterosexual people and relationships and by its coding of other characters as queer in order to reinscribe the dominance of the heterosexual Cullens. She notes that all of the main characters are heterosexual, but that certain antagonistic, ‘bad’ characters are queered by allusion.

However, Joseph Sommers and Amy Hume disagree with these criticisms that argue that Meyer has reproduced the vampire as heteronormative. They do a queer reading of Edward's denied sexual desire and argue that he is queered by his refusal to

conform to his species' typical desires. They argue that Edward is 'queered' by his refusal to give in to his desire for Bella's blood. Frankly, the nuances of their argument are hard to follow and their ultimate argument seems flimsy given the overwhelming heteronormativity of the text, which they themselves acknowledge: "His otherness as a gay boyfriend, though, typically flies under the radar of most readers, largely because Meyer's audiences and characters both inhabit an overwhelmingly heteronormative culture" (158).

Natalie Wilson argues that *Twilight* presents a clear juxtaposition of the Cullens as civilized whites, and the Quileute werewolves as uncivilized and savage indigenous people. She notes that while the Cullens are consistently associated with whiteness, and all its attendant privileges, their adversaries the werewolves are characterized, in typical colonial fashion, as uncivilized, savage, and dehumanized. She therefore argues that the treatment of race in the novels is reductive and relies on colonialist and racist narratives that cast non-white individuals, specifically indigenous peoples, as inferior to whites.

In the same vein, Danielle Borgia discusses Meyer's inscription of white privilege in the Cullens, particularly Edward. She notes that not only are the Cullens literally so white that they sparkle, but also they possess all the other attendant aspects of white privilege: "wealth, status, and the ability to manipulate others" (166). She too discusses how the Cullens are constructed as white via their direct contrast with the indigenous peoples of the Quileute tribe, particularly the werewolves. While these indigenous werewolves are associated with savagery and lack of self-control, the Cullens are cast as eminently civilized and capable of civilizing the "savage" werewolves—and obligated to do so.

Contrary to Wilson and Borgia, Alexandra Hidalgo and Michelle Bernard read Meyer's treatment of race more favorably. Hidalgo argues that Meyer uses different species—human, vampire, and werewolf—to allegorically resolve tension between races. Treating the different species as “metaphorical races,” she sees both Bella and her daughter Renesmee as individuals who unify these different species (81). Hidalgo argues that Bella and Renesmee model ways to bring together antagonistic ‘races’ through their intimate relationships with both vampires and werewolves, which ultimately inspire the ‘races to accept each other and work together. While Hidalgo does not completely place beyond doubt any evidence of racism in the text, her central argument is that the series is more antiracist than racist.

Similarly, Bernard reads the potential for antiracist negotiations in Meyer's series. She argues that the primary racial conflict in the text, between the Cullens and the Quileute werewolves, is a result of stereotyping and lack of firsthand knowledge of the other group. Bernard therefore reads the series as endorsing learning about and becoming accepting of the Other. She identifies the characters of Bella and Renesmee as particularly forcing this recognition of stereotyping between the two groups. Bernard goes so far as to claim, “We should read the *Twilight* texts and take from them a profound lesson of tolerance” (186).

Like Wilson and Borgia, I read the series as relying on racist and colonialist tropes in its idolization of uber-whiteness and white privilege and its accompanying subjugation and dehumanization of all those who are not white. However, I see this as a response to how the vampire has previously been coded as the racial Other. In seeking to reinscribe the dominance of whiteness, Meyer has had to strip the vampire of his coding

as racially deviant and displace that attribute onto other, opposing characters. The Self cannot be constructed without the Other, so in order to erase the vampire's traditional coding as non-white, Meyer must attribute this to others in the text in order to confirm and bolster the vampire's new construction as white.

Similarly, I reject Sommers and Hume's reading of Edward as queer in favor of Kane and Donnelly's argument that the text is overwhelmingly heteronormative and represents a de-queering of the vampire. Again, though, I place this in the context of the vampire's traditional coding as sexually queer. Just as she has done with race, Meyer strips the vampire of his coding as sexually queer in order to construct him as heteronormative. While with race Meyer clearly constructs enemies who are racially deviant to bolster the Cullens' whiteness, her displacement of non-heteronormativity is less overt. There are not characters or groups that are explicitly identified as sexually queer, as there are those who are identified as non-white, but Meyer certainly creates sexual ambiguity around some individuals and groups that oppose the Cullens in order to affirm the Cullens' heteronormativity. Meyer is able to produce the vampire as a romantic hero precisely because she peels back the imbrication of racial and sexual Otherness in the vampire that had existed previously.

Interview with the Vampire

Before Meyer romanticized and thoroughly normalized the vampire, Anne Rice produced a partially normative one in *Interview with the Vampire* (1976). In many ways, *Interview with the Vampire* was to the twentieth and twenty-first centuries what *Dracula* was to the nineteenth century. Rice not only revitalized the vampire genre, but also

provided the foundation for a new wave of vampires, including Meyer's *Twilight*. Rice began stripping the vampire of his nineteenth century coding as sexually queer and non-white. Although Rice maintains the characterization of the vampire as non-heteronormative, she re-produces him as white and inherently superior to the slaves that he owned as a human.

Rice's *Interview with the Vampire*, steeped in allusions to homoeroticism, describes a series of intense attachments between male-male pairings. The novel, which contains the life story of Louis, a vampire, is framed as an interview between a young man and Louis in the Castro District of San Francisco. In 1791, Louis, a wealthy young plantation owner outside of New Orleans, is attacked by a beautiful vampire, Lestat, and transformed into a vampire himself. Louis and Lestat disagree about the proper way to be a vampire, but nevertheless maintain a close relationship. After the destruction of Louis' plantation, they move to New Orleans where Louis first begins to consider separating from Lestat. Lestat, sensing Louis' desire to leave, turns a young girl, Claudia, into a vampire and presents her to Louis to care for, thus trying to create a family. Claudia soon comes to despise Lestat even more than Louis does and tries to kill him. Claudia and Louis leave America and travel to Eastern Europe, searching for others of their kind. However, they encounter only mindless and savage reanimated corpses there. They eventually settle in Paris, where Louis becomes infatuated with another vampire, Armand. Claudia resents Louis' new infatuation and therefore forces him to turn a woman that Claudia has become attached to into a vampire companion for her. However, Claudia and Madeleine are soon murdered by other vampires and Louis departs with Armand. Despite his initial passion for Armand, Louis soon becomes detached and even

resentful of him. At the close of his tale, the young man to whom Louis has been confessing begs Louis to turn him into a vampire as well, provoking Louis' anger and disappearance.

Perhaps only second to *Dracula* in its impact on the vampire tradition, *Interview with the Vampire* began a new age of vampire stories. "Most readers and scholars agree that Rice's *Interview with the Vampire* was a turning point in the tradition of vampire mythology and literature because of the way Rice abruptly shifted the narrative perspective from the vampire hunters to the vampires themselves and gave her vampires a complex consciousness" (Clements 35). This opened the door for (human) readers to identify with the vampire in hitherto unavailable ways.

Not since *Carmilla* has a vampire tale revealed such overt homoeroticism. In fact, many critics read Rice's novel as an extended metaphor about homosexuality and gay life. The novel is certainly rife with male-male relationships with sexual connotations. The first of these two major pairings is, of course, Louis and his maker, Lestat. Many have noted the erotic overtones of Louis' transformation into a vampire, a ritual which involves the exchange of blood between two men with the phallically symbolic fangs (Benefiel 262). Although their relationship grows increasingly acrimonious, there is an undeniable attraction between the two men. The second potentially gay relationship in the text is between Louis and Armand. Keller notes that "the homoerotic implications of Louis and Armand's flirtation are obvious. Armand offers Louis all that Lestat could or would not" (21). While Lestat's erotic transformation of Louis into a vampire seems to promise an equally erotically fulfilling relationship, it does not come to fruition. It seems that the potential relationship with Armand, however, promises the fulfillment of this

sexual relationship for Louis. Not only is homosexuality evident in the intimate relationships between characters, but the world of vampires seems to be an almost exclusively male environment, which necessarily implies a range of male homosocial relationships (19).

Critics have also examined the non-heteronormativity and queerness of the family arrangement in the novel, that of Lestat, Louis, and Claudia. Lestat and Louis serve as same-sex parents—and lovers—to their “child” Claudia. They both had a part in creating her as a vampire and both raise her after her transformation. The triangle is laden with incestuous implications, though, as both Louis and Lestat view her as a sensual creature who had initially inspired an erotic desire in them, which led to her transformation. Louis and Claudia repeatedly confess their love for each other and sleep together in the same coffin. At one point, Louis refers to himself as “hopelessly her lover” (102). He also ruminates on having shared a coffin at night with Claudia for many years—both as father and as lover: “for how many years had I slept with her as if she were part of me I couldn’t know (101).

Keller argues that, while queer theorists might revel in the alternative family arrangement, Rice—be it intentional or not—reinforces a number of negative stereotypes regarding homosexuality and same-sex parentage. Among these stereotypes are that same-sex couples are simply grotesque imitations of heterosexual couples (15), that children of same-sex couples are somehow damaged or experience stunted maturation (19), and that gay men, in particular, are pedophilic in their sexual desires and actions (26). Keller therefore argues that one must question the readiness with which queer

theorists confirm the cultural association between vampires and homosexuals as it can involve the reinforcement of incredibly damaging stereotypes.

While Rice furthered the association of vampirism with non-heteronormativity, she diverged in her treatment of race, instead laying the foundations for later interpretations like *Twilight*. While nineteenth century vampires represented the threat of invasion of Britain by a foreign, racial Other, Rice's American vampires are aligned more with racial superiority than inferiority. She chooses to construct her vampires as white and more civilized than both humans *and* other vampires. Whereas earlier narratives contained only one, or very few, vampires, Rice's world contains many vampires. Therefore, the hierarchization of individuals and groups becomes more complex as some vampires are rendered superior to others. This is most evident when Claudia and Louis travel to Eastern Europe in search of other vampires. When they finally discover them, they are disappointed by their savagery and inhumanity. The Eastern European vampires are little more than mindless revenants, who fail to realize their superiority to humankind. Thus, they lie at the bottom of the power pyramid of vampires. However, this distinction still seems to evoke earlier dichotomies between the civilized West and the uncivilized and savage East, but instead of the West being England, Rice's West is America.

The superiority of whiteness is also bolstered by the presence of slavery in the novel. Louis is a plantation owner, with a full cohort of slaves under his control. Thus, even before he becomes a vampire, Louis holds a position of superiority. He is already constructed as superior by his relationship to the dehumanized, black slaves. While they are property, he is free. When he becomes a vampire, he observes how Lestat enjoys preying on and taunting the slaves in order to further his own perception of racial

superiority. Interestingly, very few critics treat—or even mention—the role of slavery in the novel. It certainly seems rife with implications, but nonetheless critics seem to have overlooked it.

That Rice chooses to construct her vampires as sexually queer, but also white and Western, clearly influences later, more conservative interpretations of the vampire figure. In fact, Meyer's *Twilight* series picks up Rice's portrayal of the vampire as white and takes it to the extreme.

Young Adult Paranormal Romance

While not the first young adult paranormal romance, Meyer's *Twilight* garnered popularity like no other before and spurred an increased popularity and recognition of young adult paranormal romance as a literary genre. Although this genre, in large part, derives from the gothic romance, it veers more towards the romance than the gothic. This genre is called paranormal romance—sometimes contemporary fantasy or paranormal fantasy—and when directed to a teen audience, young adult paranormal romance. The vampire has evolved considerably from his gothic roots as a terrifying and predatory monster to be destroyed at all costs. Now the vampire has come to be figured as an enchanting romantic hero. While some elements of the gothic surface in *Twilight*, these are figured as relics of the past and associated with the more traditional, human-hunting vampires. The new vampire is instead the ideal romantic partner, who poses little substantive threat to his human lover, and is beautiful, virtuous, and charming.

Paranormal romance typically focuses on a heterosexual romantic relationship and contains characters endowed with supernatural powers. Most often, the male

romantic partner is the supernatural character and, although figured as dangerous due to his non-human nature, is incredibly attractive and hypermasculine. The paranormal romance, although it often involves danger, typically closes with a happy ending.

Paranormal romance stories often look like retellings of the Beauty and the Beast story in that “they frequently depict male protagonists who are literally beasts or monsters, often vampires, werewolves, or demons of various sorts” (Lee 59). As Beauty and the Beast stories with dangerous, but appealing male heroes, “the conflation/confusion of desire and danger, or eroticism and violence [...] is a common trope” (61).

However, due to the younger audience of young adult paranormal romance, the “eroticism” that Lee refers to is often played down. The anticipation of sex between the central couple is often present, but the actual sex rarely occurs—or if it does then it is certainly not shown. Christine Seifert, a feminist critic, noted this censorship inherent to young adult paranormal romance and coined the term “abstinence porn” to refer to young adult novels that eroticize abstinence and the postponement of sexual pleasure, as opposed to sex itself (“Bite Me!”). Seifert specifically locates her definition of “abstinence porn” in the *Twilight* series, arguing that sex is removed in favoring of dwelling on the pleasure to be taken from remaining abstinent and waiting to have sex until marriage.

By locating the vampire in the genre of young adult paranormal romance, authors like Meyer have stripped away most of the gothic elements of the classic vampire narrative in favor of ensconcing the vampire in the romance genre. As one of the key works of young adult paranormal romance involving the vampire, Meyer’s *Twilight* series epitomizes this abandonment of gothic settings and figurations of the vampire as

monster in favor of casting the vampire as the ultimate romantic hero. She dwells on descriptions of Edward's beauty and virtue and his professions of deep and eternal love for Bella. The danger that he poses as a vampire is acknowledged as a difficult obstacle that they must overcome to be together, but one that is not impossible. And, perhaps most tellingly, the story ends not with death and ruin, but with their marriage, a child, and happiness—in other words, happily ever after.

Interestingly, Edward Cullen is figured as a “Byronic hero,” referencing of course the iconic romantic figure, Lord Byron. Meyer admits on her website that she chose the name Edward for its romantic associations, especially with that classic Byronic hero Edward Rochester of Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*: “For my vampire (who I was in love with from day one) I decided to use a name that had once been considered romantic, but had fallen out of popularity for decades. Charlotte Brontë's Mr. Rochester and Jane Austen's Mr. Ferrars were the characters that led me to the name Edward” (“The Story of Twilight”). That *Twilight* echoes the romantic strain of Byron's legacy and not the more obvious vampiric aspect is surprising—at least in this context. Byron may be remembered as the ultimate romantic hero, but his legacy is also intimately connected with the vampire through Polidori's *The Vampyre*, as discussed earlier. That a vampire story chooses to recall only the romantic piece of Byron's legacy is interesting. It seems that the rejection of Byron's vampiric associations is but part and parcel of this new wave of vampire narratives that abandon the gothic roots of the vampire.

In *Twilight*, not only is the gothic left out in favor of the romance, but it is figured in the text itself as being old, outdated, and deserving of abandonment. Within the context of the novel, the gothic is associated with the ruling vampire coven, the Volturi.

This coven has ruled the vampire world for millennia and resides in a grand, albeit concealed, palace in Italy. This is one of the few times when Meyer evokes gothic imagery; the tunnel through which Bella and her companions enter the Volturi's enclave is dark and has "long trails of ebony seep[ing] down the gray stones, like [...] bleeding ink" and the central room is "cavernous [...] perfectly round like a huge castle turret" with "several massive wooden chairs, like thrones" (*New Moon* 460, 465-466). The Volturi adhere to the traditional vampire way of life that the Cullens eschew: drinking from and killing humans. They are always figured as the opposite of the Cullens' moral interpretation of vampirism, but by the close of the series, it has been explicitly stated that their way of life is outdated: "Perhaps the time will come when our world is ready to be free of the Volturi altogether" (*Breaking Dawn* 743). The rejection of the older, more traditionally monstrous vampires within the text signals the simultaneous rejection of the gothic as the genre of vampires. Instead, it is suggested that the vampire has evolved and outgrown his gothic roots and is now located firmly in the realm of romance.

The *Twilight* Series

The *Twilight* series consists of four novels that span two years in the life of Bella Swan. The first novel, *Twilight*, begins when Bella moves to Forks, Washington to live with her father in the middle of her junior year of high school. She is described as clumsy but nonetheless attractive. She meets a young man named Edward Cullen, who is incredibly beautiful but mysterious. Bella discovers that Edward, along with his family, is a vampire. He and his vampire family are anomalies of the vampire world as they choose to drink animal blood instead of human blood in order to better assimilate into the human

world. Despite this obstacle, the two quickly become a couple and profess their love for each other. However, their happiness is threatened when an unfamiliar vampire, James, becomes obsessed with hunting Bella. Bella leaves Forks and goes to Arizona in an attempt to lose James, but ultimately he catches up to her. Bella is almost killed in the attack, but Edward and his family save her. Bella and Edward return home to Forks and attend prom, where Bella expresses her desire to become a vampire and Edward angrily refuses.

New Moon, the second novel of the series, sees Bella separated from Edward for much of the story. Edward, along with his family, leaves Forks in an attempt to prevent Bella from being put in further danger as a result of her exposure to the vampire world. Bella falls into a deep depression, but slowly begins to return to normal when she becomes friends with Jacob Black, a family friend from the nearby Quileute reservation. However, Jacob too turns out to be supernatural since he has the ability to shape-shift into a wolf as a member of the Quileute wolf pack. Bella discovers that when she is in physical danger, she hallucinates Edward's face and voice. Bella craves this gratification and so puts herself in progressively more dangerous situations, which ultimately results in Edward's misconception that she has committed suicide. Determined to kill himself, Edward goes to Italy where he intends to provoke the ruling vampire coven, the Volturi, into killing him. With the help of Edward's sister, Alice, Bella rushes to Italy to stop Edward and meets the Volturi, who make her swear that she will become a vampire since humans are not supposed to know their secret. Bella, Edward, and his family all return to Forks.

In the penultimate novel, *Eclipse*, Edward and Bella's reunion causes problems with her friend Jacob and his wolf pack. The Cullens and wolves have been longtime adversaries but are bound by a treaty which allows them to coexist relatively peacefully. Bella finds herself caught between the two men, both vying for her love. The stakes are raised when Victoria, the mate of James from the first novel, seeks revenge on Bella—and by extension the Cullens—for James' death. She has assembled an army of vicious newborn vampires to destroy Bella and the Cullens. The Cullens form an uneasy alliance with the Quileute wolves to defeat Victoria's army. Bella finally agrees to marry Edward, who has asked her many times since their reunion at the end of *New Moon*. Jacob, distressed by this, is injured during the battle with the newborns. The Volturi also briefly appear, ostensibly to stop Victoria, but do not arrive until after the battle. They emphasize again that Bella must be turned into a vampire—and soon.

The series comes to completion in *Breaking Dawn*. Bella and Edward marry but their honeymoon is cut short when Bella, still human, becomes pregnant—a shock since they thought vampires were unable to reproduce. Bella becomes weak and ill as the fetus grows, seeming to suck the life out of her, but she still loves the baby growing inside her. The wolf pack considers Bella's impregnation to be a breach of the treaty—the treaty which is meant to protect humans from harm at the Cullens' hands—and prepare to attack. However, Jacob, who still loves Bella, becomes irate with the pack, warns the Cullens, and breaks from the original pack, forming his own. Bella technically dies in childbirth, but Edward injects his venom into her heart, turning her into a vampire at the last moment. Bella awakes as a vampire and quickly assumes her new life as Edward's vampire wife and mother to her daughter, Renesmee. She discovers that Jacob has

imprinted on Renesmee, which means that he is irrevocably bound and devoted to her—imprinting is often described in the novels as a more intense form of soul mates. Another vampire, Irina, sees Renesmee from afar and believes her to be a forbidden “immortal child.” Irina informs the Volturi of this violation of vampire law and the Volturi prepare to destroy the Cullens. The Cullens assemble a group of other vampires to bear witness that Renesmee is not an “immortal child,” but something altogether new and unthreatening. The wolves join the Cullens’ side as well since Jacob has imprinted on Renesmee. Ultimately the battle between the Volturi and the Cullens is averted when it is discovered that Renesmee is not the first of her kind after all and that there exist other half-human-half-vampire children. The series closes with Edward and Bella looking to a blissful eternity together.

Obviously, the thrust of the series concerns the romantic relationship between Bella Swan, a human, and Edward Cullen, a vampire. There are numerous threats to their relationship, such as other vampires like James, Victoria, and the Volturi, Jacob’s love for Bella, and Bella’s near fatal pregnancy, but they overcome all of these and get their happily ever after. Not only is there a distinct shift in the genre, as evidenced by this new focus on romance, but also there is a change in the production of the vampire figure. Earlier vampire works produced the vampire as an inherently queer figure, through his transgressive feeding practices, his non-heteronormative sexual behaviors, and his coding as raced. However, Meyer has abandoned this coding of the vampire as queer and instead produced a vampire who is deeply heteronormative and the pinnacle of whiteness.

The Cullens’ refusal to drink human blood and their decision to instead survive on animal blood creates the possibility for them to be rendered as heteronormative. Earlier

vampires were defined by their consumption of human blood and the transgressive nature of these feedings. However, by refusing to feed on humans, the Cullens escape the sexually deviant connotations of the vampire's kiss. Edward tells Bella, when she asks why he hunts animals instead of people, "I don't *want* to be a monster" (*Twilight* 187). This assertion could be read as Edward's—and by extension all of the Cullens'—desire not to be sexually queer. Because monstrosity and otherness have so long and so often been associated with sexual queerness, Edward's proclamation also implies his desire not to be queer, but rather to be human, to be normal. We also learn that Edward's own sexuality was in question before he met Bella. He tells Bella, "All this time [Esme's] been worried about me, afraid there was something missing from my essential makeup [...] She's ecstatic. Every time I touch you, she just about chokes with satisfaction" (*Twilight* 327). Because Edward has not found a mate in almost a hundred years of being alive, his family worries that he is not heterosexual. Since performing their heterosexuality is an important part of their normative agenda, Edward threatens this appearance of normativity. So, when he meets Bella and enters into a heterosexual relationship with her, these worries are alleviated and his conformance to heteronormativity is completed.

This desire to behave more like a human and less like a vampire means that Edward refuses to bite Bella, even though he thirsts for her blood. He exercises immense self-control and restraint in order to control this physical desire for her blood. Similarly, he tightly controls his sexual desire for Bella, and in turn polices her sexual desire for him. He adopts a perspective of extreme abstinence, disallowing any form of sexual contact between them beyond kissing. When Bella first alludes to the possibility of them

having sex, Edward responds, “I don’t think that...that...would be possible for us” (*Twilight* 310). Later in the series, when Bella attempts to initiate sex with him, Edward angrily stops her. When she attempts to negotiate with him, he says, “We’re not having this discussion” (*Eclipse* 443). Ultimately, Edward tells Bella that he will not have sex with her until they are married, to her great regret: “So that’s it. You won’t sleep with me until we’re *married?*” (*Eclipse* 455). Edward, in enforcing abstinence before marriage, echoes religious ideologies on the subject of sexuality. In fact, some critics read Edward’s abstinence as the result of Meyer’s Mormon faith. In proscribing “the consummation of love outside of wedlock as weakness,” the novels conform to the Mormon ideology that “the passion of lust must be safely confined to marriage” (Borgia 158-159). Regardless of the motivations for this ideological stance, Meyer has almost entirely erased the vampire’s sexuality and substituted in its place a decidedly conservative attitude. As such, Meyer has removed the inherent threat of the vampire as sexually deviant in favor of rendering him, for the most part, non-sexual, but certainly heteronormative and conservative.

Typically, vampires are coded as non-heteronormative, even anti-heteronormative. However, the Cullens, with their adherence to an ideal heteropatriarchal family and their rigidly heterosexual relationships, are definitively stripped of that coding as sexually queer. Despite all of this, Sommers and Hume read the Cullens as queer because of “their refusal to reproduce” by traditional means, or even vampiric ones (157). They rarely turn humans into vampires and only in cases when the human is on the brink of death. And, as a result of their vampire nature, they are unable to reproduce and bear children. This is a particular point of distress for Rosalie, who desperately wants a child,

but is unable to produce one because she is a vampire. Rosalie uses this reason to try to talk Bella out of becoming a vampire. She laments her inability to bear children, noting that while she is grateful to have found her mate, Emmett, “there will never be more than the two of us” (*Eclipse* 167). However, this physical inability to bear children does not prevent Esme, Carlisle’s mate, from performing the heteronormative ideal of motherhood. Rosalie herself notes, “Esme’s made do with us as substitutes” (*Eclipse* 167). By “us” Rosalie means herself, Emmett, Jasper, Alice, and Edward, who are produced as the “children” of Carlisle and Esme. But Esme’s maternal instincts extend even beyond her adopted children. In *Breaking Dawn*, when Jacob, Leah, and Seth separate from the main wolf pack, Esme worries about their comfort and lack of a home, plying them with food and clothes. Edward tells Jacob, “Esme was troubled by the hardships this is putting your pack through... The *homeless* part, particularly. She’s very upset that you all are so... bereft” (*Breaking Dawn* 272). And so, Esme compromises by “adopting” children and is ultimately constructed as the model of motherhood in the novels, overcoming this queer inability to become a biological mother.

Bella, however, circumvents this inability of vampires to procreate when she successfully bears a child resulting from honeymoon sex between her and Edward—all while still human. Apparently, it is only female vampires who are unable to reproduce, but male vampires can procreate with human women. Although the pregnancy is challenging and Bella nearly dies in childbirth, Edward turns her into a vampire at the last moment, saving her “life.” Thus, Bella and Edward avoid the queer demarcation of being unable to reproduce: “The fact that [Edward and Bella’s] sex is reproductive, however, is what fully marks it as the narrative’s heteronormative fulfillment” (Kane 114). This

“heteronormative fulfillment” builds upon the pervasive heteronormativity of the text as a whole.

Meyer primarily enforces and encourages normative sexuality through the pervasion and power of heteronormativity, but there are also characters who are produced as inferior to the Cullens whose conformance to heteronormativity is suspect. Thus, Meyer creates sexual confusion around certain characters that she produces as inferior or antithetical to the Cullens. As Donnelly notes, there is a clear message implied:

Through physical appearance and relationship status, Meyer’s characters fall clearly into categories of “good” and evil,” creating a very distinct message that the good guys are attractive and joined with another in heterosexual relationships and the bad guys are physically different and live in alternative relationship situations, underscoring the message that the only “right” way to live is within a narrowly defined patriarchal heteronormative worldview. (185)

The queer implications in *Twilight* are quite subtle, designated more by lack of overt heterosexuality than explicit homosexuality. Meyer instead creates space for doubt about certain characters’ conformity to heteronormativity. This first occurs at the end of the first novel, when Bella meets her first vampires that are not Cullens. James, Victoria, and Laurent first appear as an uneasy ménage-a-trois that resists the same kind of clear heteronormative structure that the Cullens display. While it is later revealed that James and Victoria are mates, the group initially appears as a trio that defies heteronormative delineations. Another significant hostile group that defies heteronormative organization is

the Volturi, who are constructed as the primary enemy of the heteronormative Cullens. At the head of the Volturi is another trio, although this time all-male without any female to mediate homosexual implications. Aro, Marcus, and Caius are the three-headed monster that Bella fears throughout much of the series. Their non-heterosexual arrangement at the top of the Volturi filters down through the ranks since there are no explicitly heterosexual pairings. Instead the Volturi are characterized as an amorphous mass, which is suspiciously queer. For example, one of their most powerful assets, a vampire named Jane, who can inflict pain simply by looking at a person, is described as androgynous and therefore sexually undetermined. When Bella first sees her, she is confused by this indeterminate appearance: “At first I thought it was a young boy. The newcomer was as tiny as Alice, with lank, pale brown hair trimmed short. The body under the cloak [...] was slim and androgynous” (*New Moon* 456).

Clearly Meyer has invested in stripping her main vampires of their sexually queer coding in order to construct them as the ideal of heteronormativity, opposed and superior to all those characters who are endowed with suspicion of sexual deviance. In addition to this de-queering of the vampire, Meyer also works to remove the vampire’s coding as non-white and similarly displaces this onto other characters in order to construct the Cullens as superior in their pure, sparkly whiteness. The Cullens are hyper-white not only because they have abnormally pale skin, but because one of Meyer’s inventions is that the vampire, rather than being burned, sparkles in sunlight:

Edward in the sunlight was shocking. I couldn’t get used to it, though I’d been staring at him all afternoon. His skin, white despite the faint flush from

yesterday's hunting trip, literally sparkled, like thousands of tiny diamonds were embedded in the surface. He lay perfectly still in the grass, his shirt open over his sculpted, incandescent chest, his scintillating arms bare. His glistening, pale lavender lids were shut, though of course he didn't sleep. A perfect statue, carved in some unknown stone, smooth like marble, glittering like crystal. (*Twilight* 260)

Bella's awe and adulation of Edward's skin further reinforces the worship of white skin and privilege in the series (Borgia 165-166). The words that Meyer uses to describe Edward's white skin evoke images of wealth and opulence. The comparisons to diamonds, marble, and crystal signal that Edward's white skin is explicitly connected to his immense wealth. While Bella is primarily fascinated by his sparkly uber-white skin, she also appreciates the other aspects of Edward's white privilege signaled by this description. Although she offers superficial denials of her interest in his wealth, ultimately it seems that "Edward's attractiveness to Bella consists of all aspects of racial privilege, including wealth, status, and the ability to manipulate others—all of which, by singling her out as his partner, he offers to Bella as well" (Borgia 166). Bella's description of the Cullens' cavalier attitude towards money reveals their failure to recognize that their white privilege accounts for their success:

Edward had a *lot* of money—I didn't even want to think about how much. Money meant next to nothing to Edward or the rest of the Cullens. It was just something that accumulated when you had unlimited time on your hands and a sister who had an uncanny ability to predict trends in the stock market. (*New Moon* 13)

That Bella attributes their wealth in part to Alice's supernatural ability to see the future also signals the unfairness of their success.

Not only are the Cullens themselves white, but everything around them is white. When Bella visits their house for the first time, she notices that "the walls, the high-beamed ceiling, the wooden floors, and the thick carpets were all varying shades of white" (*Twilight* 322). They are also incredibly well educated, having attended prestigious universities many times over. Their (white) beauty makes them popular at school, while Carlisle's prestigious position as a doctor earns the family respect among the townsfolk. As Borgia notes, all of this privilege is offered to Bella by her relationship with Edward. Ultimately, once she too becomes a member of the Cullen family, she has access to all of this privilege. When she finally marries Edward and becomes a vampire, she lives in a custom-renovated house, drives a Ferrari, and has access to absurd amounts of money: "I raided their petty cash, taking about twice the yearly income for the average American household" (*Breaking Dawn* 672).

This multiplicity of white privilege is directly contrasted with other characters and groups, who are marked as racially Other. The most obvious contrast, and the one most noted by critics, comes in the juxtaposition of the Cullens and the werewolves of the Quileute tribe. The werewolves are marked as racial Others first and foremost by their physical appearance; they have rich brown skin and black hair. They are easily identified as racially different, even from afar. In fact, when Bella first visits the reservation and meets some of the tribe members she notices their exotic appearance: "As we got closer we could see the shining, straight black hair and copper skin of the newcomers, teenagers

from the reservation come to socialize” and “His skin was beautiful, silky and russet-colored; his eyes were dark, set deep above the high planes of his cheekbones” (*Twilight* 117). Not only are the Quileutes easily identifiable as the racial Other, but, as a result of their association with wolves due to their nature as werewolves, they are associated with savagery through their animalistic representation. They are quite literally dehumanized by their initially uncontrollable transformations into wolves. We learn that the transformation into a wolf is—at least at first—uncontrollable and triggered by anger. Thus, the wolves are produced as ruled by their emotions and lacking self-control. When Bella first witnesses this violent transformation, she is terrified:

Paul seemed to fall forward, vibrating violently. Halfway to the ground, there was a loud ripping noise, and the boy exploded. Dark silver fur blew out from the boy, coalescing into a shape more than five-times his size—a massive, crouched shape, ready to spring. The wolf’s muzzle wrinkled back over his teeth, and another growl rolled through his colossal chest. His dark, enraged eyes focused on me.
(*New Moon* 325)

In this passage, the wolf, steeped in violence and rage, is explicitly figured as a physical threat to Bella in a way that Edward never is.

The wolves constitute the opposite position to the Cullens in many classic colonial binaries: the wolves are emotional while the Cullens are rational, the wolves are savage while the Cullens are civilized, the wolves are associated with the body while the Cullens are associated with the mind. As Knewitz observes, “the *Twilight* series

incorporates a racial subtext, which perpetuates stereotypes that associate whites with the life of the mind and Native Americans with physicality and primitivism” (126).

Ultimately, Bella is forced to choose between Edward, the white vampire with his attendant intellect and white privilege, and Jacob, the savage and dehumanized werewolf. Unsurprisingly, in a book that promotes the superiority of whiteness, Bella chooses Edward. Although it is not constructed as an issue of race, or species, in the novels, the fact remains that Bella chooses to be enveloped by Edward’s white privilege instead of associating herself with a racially marginalized individual.

While the juxtaposition of the Cullens and the wolves constitutes the major element of the text that promotes white privilege and dominance, there are other characters who are similarly rendered inferior and non-white. One of the three nomadic vampires who interrupt the Cullens’ baseball game at the end of *Twilight* is described as having an “olive-toned” complexion (*Twilight* 376). In the sequel, *New Moon*, this vampire, Laurent, returns and very nearly kills Bella, clearly placing him in opposition to the peaceful Cullens. He is ultimately destroyed, although interestingly not by the Cullens, but rather by the werewolves, who themselves are marked as racially Other. Similarly, two members of the Volturi are described as having darker skin: “Felix and Demetri were both of a slightly olive complexion—it looked odd combined with their chalky pallor” (*New Moon* 463). The Volturi are ultimately outmatched by the Cullens in *Breaking Dawn*, yet again rendering those coded as non-white inferior to the Cullens’ whiteness. Also interesting in this passage is that Bella remarks that their darker complexions “looked odd” with their vampiric pallor, implying that dark skin and vampirism are somehow incompatible—or at least not natural. Following this logic, only

those who are white are naturally disposed to assume the power and privilege of being a vampire, while those who are non-white—and therefore lacking power and privilege—are inappropriate candidates for vampirism.

Conclusion

Unlike the majority of its predecessors, the central vampires of Meyer's *Twilight* series are stripped of their coding as racially and sexually deviant and instead are inscribed as the “white heteronormative ideal” (Knewitz 128). While the Cullens are strict and virtuous in their heteronormativity, their enemies—whom they ultimately defeat—are rendered inferior by their associations with or suspicions of sexual deviance. And while the Cullens are the epitomized embodiment of uber-whiteness and all of its attendant privileges, those individuals and groups who are non-white are similarly revealed to be inferior. Therefore, Meyer seems to have successfully stripped the vampire of his imbricated coding as non-white and sexually queer in order to reconstruct it as the embodiment of attractive white heteronormativity.

-III-

**THE BLACK, SEXUALLY QUEER VAMPIRE:
BUTLER'S RADICAL REINTERPRETATION**

In the classic vampire narratives of the nineteenth century, the vampire was coded as racially and sexually non-normative in order to produce him as the ultimate Other. Therefore, the vampire served to represent deviance of all types and to buttress the normative definitions of human society as white and heteronormative. As discussed in the previous chapter, Stephenie Meyer, in the *Twilight* series, breaks from this tradition and instead constructs her vampire as the pinnacle of whiteness and heteronormativity in order to justify casting him as the ultimate romantic hero. However, Octavia Butler, in *Fledgling*, realizes the vampire's radical potential by using her non-white, sexually queer hybrid vampire—she is black, pansexual, polyamorous, and half-human-half-vampire—to challenge the normative systems that privilege whiteness and heteronormativity. Her vampire, Shori, defies simple categorization along the lines of race, species, and sexuality and thus destabilizes these normative systems. Just as Meyer built upon Rice's work in removing the coding of non-white and non-heteronormative from the vampire, Butler builds upon Jewelle Gomez's *The Gilda Stories* in her use of the black, sexually queer vampire to challenge the dominance of white heteronormativity.

As with Butler's other works, *Fledgling* is primarily discussed by critics in regard to its critiques of race and racism. Specifically, many critics focus on Butler's use of hybridity—Shori is both part-human-part-vampire and mixed race—in challenging the binary of white and black. Critics Ali Brox and Melissa Strong both explore Butler's

treatment of hybridity in the novel and argue that her centering of a hybrid figure both reveals and challenges existing methods of categorization and their related power structures. Melissa Strong, in addition to discussing hybridity, also reads the novel through the lens of critical race theory (CRT)—originally a subsection of legal studies—noting its emphasis on storytelling to combat assumptions and prejudices about an individual with a marginalized identity, or identities—key tenets of CRT. Susana Morris similarly argues that Butler challenges dominant systems of power in the novel, but discusses this effort in the contexts of Afrofuturism and feminism. Marie-Louise Loeffler examines Shori and Wright’s relationship in the historical context of interracial romance in America and argues that Butler uses the vampire genre and figure to rewrite dominant discourses on the subject. Theri Pickens’ analysis of *Fledgling* echoes others as it too examines the role of racism in the novel, but specifically its intersection with ableism, which she identifies as another system of privilege and oppression in Ina society. While the primary focus is on racial hybridity, some critics also briefly discuss the role of non-normative sexuality as well. Elizabeth Lundberg engages in one of the most thorough discussions of Shori’s non-heteronormativity and argues that it, like her racial hybridity, challenges normative systems.

Ali Brox points out the multiple ways in which Shori is a hybrid, in terms of race and species, and argues that Butler represents Shori’s hybridity as a positive thing, bringing “physical, emotional, and psychological advances” (406). Brox discusses Shori’s hybridity in regard to discourses on race; miscegenation and its ties to hybridity; hierarchies of power; and gender and reproduction. She concludes that Shori serves to destabilize traditional, fixed ideas of race, species, the natural division of power, and

gender. Brox heralds the hybrid figure as essential to revealing and rethinking socially constructed categories, and even to questioning whether purity, in any form, is actually ever possible.

Melissa Strong also discusses hybridity in the novel, but employs a different approach to Brox. Strong uses critical race theory (CRT) to produce a new reading of Butler's novel and argues that *Fledgling* models CRT strategies of storytelling for the purpose of individualizing a person and combating prejudices regarding race, gender, and sexuality. CRT originated in legal studies and its purpose is to combat ingrained stereotypes and prejudices against non-white individuals in legal situations. Strong also uses CRT to discuss hybridization in the context of the novel and the deceitful "race-blind" approach that some Ina—Butler's name for her vampiric species—claim to use. Noting that much of the novel occurs in a courtroom-like setting, Strong argues that Shori uses storytelling in order to shift the perception of her from a symbol of hybridization to an individual, while simultaneously combatting assumptions made about her based on *what* she is rather than *who* she is. Like Brox, Strong argues that Shori's identity as hybrid allows her to transgress and disrupt pre-established boundaries and binaries, which she cites as the reason for her persecution at the hands of the opposing Ina, most notably the Silks and Katherine Dahlman.

Susana Morris argues that Butler, in *Fledgling*, writes into the vampire genre—a genre dominated by white male authors—from an Afrofuturist, feminist position, transforming the vampire from "enchanted icon of whiteness" to a figure that is used to display progressive treatments of race, sexuality, and family (147). (Morris' claim here is confusing as she does not specify a particular text or era. While she may be referring to

Twilight, which as we have seen invests in producing the vampire as white, it is not clear. If she is referring to the vampire tradition as a whole, then obviously it would run counter to the argument put forth in chapter one of this thesis.) Morris argues that Butler's vampiric vision inherently challenges systems of power such as heteropatriarchy and white privilege. While Butler subverts heteropatriarchy by making her vampires queer and seemingly non-patriarchal—perhaps even matriarchal—her critique of racism is more subtle. Butler reveals that it is not only humans who suffer from racist thinking and action by making the driving force of the plot other Ina's racial hatred for Shori.

Marie-Luise Loeffler argues that Butler uses the figure of the black female vampire to renegotiate issues of interracial relationships in a way that challenges and contradicts dominant historical and present discourses on the issue. While interracial romances are typically fraught with complications resulting from the complex history of race relations, Loeffler argues that Butler, in her “fantastic space,” creates a pleasurable, mutually desired, and fulfilling interracial romance (110). She argues that although Butler revises traditional discourses on interracial relationships, she consciously alludes to and uses these within the text. Ultimately, Loeffler argues that Butler has transferred power from the typically endowed partner—the white man—to the typically deprived partner—the black woman—and in doing so critiques and reverses the dominant discourse on interracial romance. Loeffler's argument particularly asserts that it is because Shori is a vampire and because this occurs in a fantastical world that Butler is able to accomplish these negotiations.

Theri Pickens argues that Shori, as a disabled, black vampire, reveals “ableism and racism as systemic underpinnings” of Ina society (35). She argues that Shori's

identity as both black and disabled—as a result of her amnesia—which other Ina use to try to prove that she is not actually Ina, reveals the fragility of the racialized and abled binaries that Ina society is unconsciously built on. Like other critics, Pickens argues that Shori's unique identity challenges the legitimacy and value of pre-existing binaries which bestow greater power on certain individuals, such as the Silks, than others.

Elizabeth Lundberg discusses issues of sexuality and queerness and argues that queerness is normalized by Ina society and that, contrary to “human” norms, heterosexuality and monogamy are constructed as deviant sexual behaviors. Noting that vampires are typically read as queer, Lundberg emphasizes that Butler produces a new figuration of queerness in the vampire: “rather than represent queerness as abject or monstrous, *Fledgling*'s vampires challenge heteronormative family structures by completely naturalizing same-sex familial and sexual relationships and by making those relationships necessary to the survival and perpetuation of the Ina species” (573).

I agree with these readings of Shori as a figure who challenges the power systems of heteronormativity and white privilege; however, I would go further to place Shori's unique identity-figuration in the context of the vampire literary tradition. The vampire has previously—with the obvious exception of Gomez's *The Gilda Stories*—been constructed as Other and monstrous because of its coding as racially and sexually deviant. However, Butler brings this marginalized character to the center of her narrative and uses Shori to challenge the assumptions implicitly reinforced by earlier works that to be non-white and non-heteronormative was to be monstrous, inferior, and irreconcilable with humanity and society.

The Gilda Stories

While Butler, with *Fledgling*, provides a forceful and thorough challenge to systems of racial and sexual privilege with her black, sexually queer vampire, she was not the first to realize the vampire in this way. In fact, Jewelle Gomez preceded her by almost fifteen years in publishing a vampire narrative centered on a black, sexually queer vampire. Jewelle Gomez, in 1991, published *The Gilda Stories*, which is written in episodic form covering almost two hundred years in the life of Gilda, a black lesbian vampire. While *The Gilda Stories* certainly represents a significant change from the previous vampire narratives, Gomez only provides a midway point between what has come before and what Butler will realize after.

Although hard to summarize due to its segmented episodic form, *The Gilda Stories* is essentially the life story of a young runaway slave—initially referred to as the Girl—who is turned into a vampire by a benevolent white vampire named Gilda and her Lakota companion, Bird. The Girl takes the name Gilda when she becomes a vampire. As the reader follows her over the course of two hundred years, Gilda moves all over the United States, forging bonds of friendship and intimacy with humans and vampires alike. She cherishes these connections that she builds, from her longstanding, but also long-distance bond with one of her creators, Bird, to her friendship with Julius, whom she ultimately turns into a vampire. She weaves an intricate and far-reaching web out of these connections to form a large but tight-knit family including Sorel and Anthony, Bird, Julius, Effie, and Ermis. And when the Earth becomes overrun with humans seeking to kill vampires for their immortality, the family reunites.

While earlier vampires, such as Dracula, were coded as racially non-white, Gomez quite obviously identifies Gilda as black and situates her within African-American history by making her a runaway slave. In this case, however, the racially deviant vampire is not marginalized in the narrative, but rather constitutes the center of the text. Not only is Gilda deeply tied to her African ancestry, but her often long-distance companion, Bird, is similarly rooted in her Native American origins. Bird leaves Gilda soon after Gilda becomes a vampire to return to her people and to excavate her ties to her original family. Both Bird and Gilda experience marginalization in white society. Bird ruminates on this when she is teaching the young, still-human Gilda to read: “Bird gazed into the African eyes which struggled to see a white world through words on a page. Bird wondered what creatures, as invisible as she and the Girl were, did with their pasts” (21).

Throughout the novel, there is a persistent challenge to racial systems of power that originate in slavery. The horrors of slavery are an integral part of Gilda’s character as she often is drawn into memories of her childhood on the plantation. She is established as a runaway slave at the very beginning of the narrative and the first scene depicts Gilda—as the Girl, as she was referred to before becoming a vampire—fending off a white bounty hunter intent upon raping her. The critique of slavery and those individuals who profited from and enforced slavery is insistent. In preparing to kill the bounty hunter, Gilda feels that “she was not ready to give in to those whom her mother had sworn were not fully human” (10). This begins the new and unusual association of whiteness—and by the end of the novel, humanity in general—with monstrosity. Gilda’s feelings towards white people are rooted in her mother’s statement, “They just barely human. Maybe not even. They suck up the world, don’t taste it” (11). Even though Gilda soon becomes a

vampire, who literally “sucks” from the world, she is not figured as the ultimate world-draining monster in the text, but rather it is white humanity that consumes the world in its greed.

Even after slavery ends, Gilda experiences routine stigmatization and resistance. When she travels to the West Coast in 1890 to stay with fellow vampires, Sorel and Anthony, she conceals her gender while on the road, saying, “Even with my advantages I’d be fair game for every male passerby” (66). Although she frames this as solely a matter of gender, it is implicit that a *black* woman risks much more by traveling openly than does a white woman. This risk is proven true when, some years later in 1921, Gilda encounters two white men on the road at night. The men, once they recognize that she is a black woman, threaten her with violence: “‘Maybe we teach one more niggah a lesson tonight, hey Cook?’ Gilda peered at the braided leather [of the whip], dark with blood she could smell” (113). These men clearly have made sport of brutally attacking black people, particularly black women, in ways evocative of slave-era punishments. However, Gilda refuses to play the role of vulnerable victim to these white men and instead fights back, reversing the intended punishment onto the men themselves: “She cracked the whip once over his head, then lay a stroke across his back. That she hit him with his own whip seemed to startle him more than the pain” (113).

Similar to her production of her vampire as non-white, Gomez produces her vampire as explicitly non-heteronormative in that she is a lesbian. Whereas prior vampires, such as Louis in Rice’s *Interview with the Vampire*, had been heavily coded as gay, Gomez overtly identifies her vampire as such and shows her in lesbian relationships, both romantic and sexual. And whereas in earlier vampire narratives, such as Le Fanu’s

Carmilla, homosexuality and female sexuality were punished and eradicated, at least temporarily, Gomez's Gilda is not punished for her lesbianism, but rather is normalized as an individual in her own right. The lesbian sex that Gomez does depict is not sensationalized as it so often is in narratives that seek to fetishize lesbianism, but is instead shown to be normal. The erotic descriptions of lovemaking apply not to heterosexual encounters, as is so often the case, but instead to homosexual ones. Gomez seems to nod to this shift by acknowledging that the interior experience differs from the exterior appearance when Bird and Gilda finally reunite after a long separation and have sex: "She wanted to know this body that gave her life. Her heart swelled with their blood, a tide between two shores. *To an outsider the sight may have been one of horror*: their faces red and shining, their eyes unfocused and black, the sound of their bodies slick with wetness, tight with life" (140; emphasis added). Gomez acknowledges the typical perception of lesbianism and vampirism as monstrous and horrific, but re-centering her narrative on the lesbian vampire takes the reader inside the rich and genuine emotional experience of that previously always Othered being.

In fact, the romantic and sexual pairings in Gomez's novel are almost exclusively homosexual. As a result, within the confines of the narrative, homosexuality becomes the norm rather than heterosexuality. The original Gilda and Bird share a romantic partnership that also extends into running Woodard's, a brothel, together. They have successfully built both a business and a life together in Louisiana. They are partners at the head of Woodard's and both the women of the house and the clients respect their partnership and leadership. They occasionally retreat from the business and spend time alone together: "Gilda and Bird sometimes retreated to the farmhouse for a day or more,

spending most of the time walking in the evening, riding, or reading together silently, rarely raising questions” (21). After the original Gilda’s death, the Girl/Gilda and Bird similarly have an intimate, although frequently long-distance, relationship laden with deep passion. When the two reunite after almost a hundred years apart, both are deeply affected by emotion at the sight of each other: “they rocked together in each other’s arms, making quiet sounds that were without tears” (137). While Bird is away on her many travels, Gilda meets another vampire, Effie, with whom she becomes romantically involved. The two move into Effie’s rural New Hampshire home together and live in domestic partnership for quite a while. As with the original Gilda and Bird’s relationship, Anthony and Sorel are business partners as well as a couple. Sorel is technically the patriarch of the vampire family, but wields no authoritative power. None of these homosexual relationships or encounters are fetishized or cast as aberrant, but are instead seamlessly woven into Gilda’s life story. In a way, homosexuality is normalized in that it is shown to be an essential and non-momentous aspect of life for this vampire family, even if it has not achieved normalization within the broader world.

Through the productions of race and sexuality in the novel and in the character of Gilda, *The Gilda Stories* questions the true meaning of being human. Ostensibly the question raised by the novel is: if to be human means to subscribe to the norms of whiteness and heteronormativity, does one really want to be human? In presenting alternatives to this racist, heteronormative vision of humanity, *The Gilda Stories* answers with a resounding “No.” And, in demonstrating the undesirableness of this brand of humanity, Gomez also begs the question of who is the real monster: Gilda and her compatriots or the humans who have destroyed their own world? “Gomez positions a

community of vampires and social monstrosity as methods of liberation and white-determined humanity as a troubling force. In *The Gilda Stories*, white human beings—not vampires—are depicted as draining the world of its life” (Lewis 449). In flipping the perspective, Gomez reveals that it is white society that is monstrous, not the vampires—or the non-heteronormative, black identities associated with vampirism. This perspective also indicates a shift from the point of view of the colonizers, for example, the band of Englishmen in *Dracula*, to the colonized, that of a runaway slave in *The Gilda Stories*. Gomez herself has noted the radicalness of creating a hunter out of the traditionally hunted, in other words an inherently predatory vampire out of a traditionally oppressed Black woman (Jones 157). And in switching this perspective, Gomez reveals who deserves the attribution of monstrosity. It is not the oppressed and abused slaves whom white people viewed as three-fifths of a human, but white people themselves for their abhorrent treatment of other human beings.

Although Gomez provides an important figuration of the vampire, her novel seems to lack the cohesion required to fully realize the vampire in a way that effectively confronts both racism and homophobia. Perhaps it is a result of the episodic, and therefore disjointed, nature of the narrative, but in comparison to Butler’s conception of the black, non-heteronormative vampire, Gomez’s seems inadequate. Perhaps too it is a product of where each author was in her career when she published her vampire novel; while Gomez began her publishing career with *The Gilda Stories*, *Fledgling* was Butler’s last published novel after a three-decade long writing career. In all of her novels Butler is deeply concerned with issues of race, gender, and sexuality, and I believe we see a certain culmination of this in *Fledgling*.

Afrofuturism

All of Butler's works are deeply concerned with the construction and implications of race, gender, and sexuality. Almost all of her works are about black women and the ways in which they navigate alien environments, which, although foreign, are still infused with racism, sexism, and homophobia. Butler was known for being a black, female science fiction writer in a field dominated by white men, and she embraced this.

Although for much of her career, the term was not even existent, Butler is retrospectively considered to be one of the key progenitors of a genre of science/speculative fiction called Afrofuturism. Afrofuturism was coined as a term in 1993 by Mark Dery—who is, interestingly, a white man—and has since been accepted as a distinct sub-genre of science fiction. Dery articulates his conception of Afrofuturism thus: “Speculative fiction that treats African-American themes and addresses African-American concerns in the context of twentieth-century technoculture—and, more generally, African-American signification that appropriates images of technology and a prosthetically enhanced future—might, for want of a better term, be called ‘Afrofuturism’” (180). This definition has since expanded beyond the limits of technoculture into other realms of science/speculative fiction. So much of science fiction has reproduced the erasure and subordination of African-Americans present in American society. The future, written by white authors, is always and exclusively white, reinforcing the socially inscribed normativity of whiteness. However, as black authors began, albeit gradually, to write into the science fiction genre in the second half of the twentieth century, the assumption—and assertion—that the future would be white was challenged,

comprehensively and aggressively. Samuel Delany, a fellow African-American science fiction writer, in an interview with Dery, states that the dearth of black people writing science fiction is in part due to the pervasive erasure of black culture and historical knowledge dating back to slavery: “The historical reason that we’ve been so impoverished in terms of future images is because, until fairly recently, as a people we were systematically forbidden any images of our past” (190-191).

Afrofuturist writers such as Delany and Butler “use [science fiction] as means to open up alternative visions of the world, ones which also counter the genre’s predominant, normalized whiteness, and thus to promote social change in the perception of race” (Lavender 189). Whereas the bulk of science fiction has imagined futures devoid of race by simply neglecting to include non-whites, Afrofuturism is intimately concerned with futures in which both race and racism still persist. In addition, by Lavender’s definition, Afrofuturism bears an inherent political aim in seeking “to promote social change in the perception of race” (189). Not only does Afrofuturism create alternate or future realities in which race and racism are still present, but, in doing so, it seeks to change present understandings and perspectives on these matters. “[Science fiction] has the ability to imagine a world without racism but also to imagine a world without race. Critical race theory and Afrofuturism remind us of the crucial difference between these two visions and of the necessity to attend to the historical specificity and the consequences of racial constructions” (192). And Morris notes that “not only does Afrofuturism posit that blacks will exist in the future, as opposed to being harbingers of social chaos and collapse, but in ‘recovering the histories of counter-futures’

Afrofuturism insists that blacks fundamentally *are* the future and that Afrodiasporic cultural practices are vital to imagining the continuance of human society” (153).

Fledgling

As in all of Butler’s works, *Fledgling* demonstrates an Afrofuturist imagination of a different world in which race and racism still figure prominently. In *Fledgling*, Butler uses an alternative reality in which vampires exist to interrogate and challenge the foundations of racism. Since the vampire has always been the ultimate Other, it is especially appropriate that Butler chose the vampire for this exercise. However, whereas prior vampire narratives construct the vampire as the Other to humans, in *Fledgling* the vampire protagonist is both the Other to humans and the Other to the rest of her vampire species, the Ina, because of her darker skin color and her half-human nature. The fact that she exists in between these two identities corrupts the simple idea of binary distinctions. While other vampire narratives are concerned with constructing the vampire as utterly and completely different from humans, Butler uses Shori, a non-heteronormative, mixed-race, human-Ina hybrid, to challenge binary characterizations of Otherness, specifically race and sexuality.

Fledgling is the story of fifty-three-year old vampire, Shori, who appears to be a young black girl. Having suffered a brutal attack, she awakes with no memory of who—or what—she is. In her search for safety and knowledge, she forms an intimate bond with an adult white man, Wright, from whom she drinks blood. Together they meet Shori’s father, Iosif, who reveals that she is a member of a vampiric species called Ina and that her home and her female family were destroyed in an attack that Shori alone survived.

Shori also learns that her dark skin—in comparison to the Ina's typical deathly white pallor—is the result of a genetic experiment intended to increase the Ina's ability to be conscious during the day and to sustain exposure to sunlight. Shori and Wright also learn that Ina require a group of human companions, called symbionts, to provide blood and intimacy in order to survive. Shori and Wright prepare to move in with Iosif's family, but, before they can do so, the compound is burned and the inhabitants killed. Shori adopts two of the female symbionts—Brook and Celia—who escaped the attack and the small group seeks refuge and understanding at one of her father's other properties. Following another attack there, the group suspects that Shori is the intended target because of her genetically-modified nature. They seek answers and safety at another Ina family's compound, that of the Gordons. Shori and the human symbionts fend off yet another attack and manage to capture some of the human attackers for questioning. They reveal that they have been sent by another Ina family, the Silks, to kill Shori and her family because of her hybrid nature. The Gordons call an Ina trial of the Silks at which numerous families gather to hear Shori's story and the Silks' defense. The Silks' representative at the trial, Katharine Dahlman, sends one of her symbionts to kill one of Shori's in an attempt to destabilize her and provoke her into rash action. Both the Silks and Katharine Dahlman are found guilty of their crimes against Shori and for their punishment the Silk family is broken up and Katharine is sentenced to have both of her legs amputated. However, Katharine protests her punishment and attacks Shori, thus condemning herself to execution. Shori, having achieved some justice on behalf of her family, looks to the future and the creation of her own family.

Whereas prior vampires—excepting Gomez’s Gilda—have been coded as racially Other primarily by their nationality and the spaces they occupy, Shori is overtly identified as racially Other by her darker skin color. The reader is first made aware of Shori’s skin tone when Wright points it out: “Ordinary sun exposure burns your skin even though you’re black?” (31). Shori begins to correct Wright until she realizes what he meant: “I’m ...’ I stopped. I had been about to protest that I was brown, not black, but before I could speak, I understood what he meant” (31). Shori initially assumes that Wright is referring solely to her skin tone, which, as she points out, is brown not black. However, she quickly realizes that he is referring to her racial identity, which is understood to contain a whole range of skin colors and to denote descent from African ancestors. Since the novel takes place in America, we can assume that he is specifically referring to African-Americans, those individuals descended from imported slaves.

Even though Shori presents explicitly as the racial Other, she continually challenges the simple binary construction of race as white and black. Because of course Shori is not only black, as others see her, but she is in fact mixed race—a hybrid of the two binary positions. And this in and of itself challenges the validity of the binary. Indeed, by definition, a binary consists of two *separate* entities that are in opposition. Her racial identity is publicly disavowed by her opponents as the reason for their opposition and instead they claim that her hybridization of species—human and Ina—is what makes her monstrous. Just as mixed-race individuals challenged the race binary necessitating the “one-drop rule,” Shori challenges the Ina-human binary. The one-drop rule refers to the social and legal practice of considering individuals black if they had at least one “negro” ancestor. Strong observes that the “insistence on a clearly demarcated Ina/human binary

with no in between mirrors the similarly constructed white/black binary of the one-drop rule that denies the reality of hybridity” (15-16). Not only does this reveal anxiety about hybridization, but also the corresponding fear of corruption of racial purity. If corrupted by the “inferior” race, even to a relatively small degree, then one is disqualified from membership in the elite white race. As such, the one-drop rule erased the truth of hybridity by maintaining only two distinct racial classes, white and black. Despite the fact that mixed-race individuals are neither black nor white, but rather a combination, a hybridization, the one-drop rule insists that they belong in one of the two groups.

Similarly, the Silks and Katharine Dahlman attempt to argue that Shori is not Ina, but human. In an eerily similar strategy, they suggest that Shori cannot fall between the two species and be an in-between hybrid of both Ina and human and instead attempt to categorize Shori as solely human. The crux of the trial is implicitly Shori’s status as true Ina, which will either justify the Silks’ actions or condemn them. Milo Silk begins the trial by emphasizing that the purity of the Ina must be maintained, subtly attempting to shunt Shori outside the realm of Ina justice: “May we remember always that our strength flows from our uniqueness and our unity. We are Ina! That is what this Council must protect” (232-233). Later, when Shori asserts that she is Ina, just as Ina as any of those gathered at the trial, Russell Silk becomes apoplectic, revealing the depths of his hatred for Shori: “‘You’re not Ina!’ He shouted. He slammed his palm down on the table, making a sound like a gunshot. ‘You’re not! And you have no more business at this Council than would a clever dog!’” (238). It becomes obvious with this outburst that the Silks believe, because she is not pure Ina, that Shori is so utterly inferior as to be not just not-Ina, but not-human. Katharine Dahlman also reveals her deep hatred and prejudice

against Shori when she screams during the council, “You are their descendent, but because of their error, because of their great error, you are not Ina!” and “We are Ina. You are nothing!” (271-272). The Silks and Katharine are determined to banish Shori to the inferior category of human because she is not “pure” Ina.

In echoing the rhetoric of the “one-drop rule,” Butler clearly analogizes the hatred of Shori for her hybrid nature as half-human-half-Ina to racist hatred of mixed race individuals, even blurring the line between the two. Both reveal the falsity of binary constructions of race and species and therefore threaten the position of the superior group. White society has used these binary categories to reinscribe their superiority to others along racial lines. Similarly, the Ina have constructed their binary opposition to humans to reinforce their own superiority. However, these hierarchies are determinedly false. Furthermore, the categories themselves are false since purity of race, and perhaps even species, is impossible.

Shori’s racial identity becomes a signifier for her species. As Strong notes, Shori’s dark skin becomes a marker of her humanity and her hybridity, which blinds some Ina to the overwhelming similarity between Shori and other, non-hybrid Ina (14). Therefore, some Ina’s resistance to Shori corresponds to critical race theorists’ argument that minor physical traits are emphasized over common “higher-order traits” (Delgado and Stefancic 8). In Shori’s case, her dark skin is an easily-discernable physical trait that distinguishes her from other Ina. However, far outweighing this difference in appearance are her similarities to other Ina, primarily her shared need for blood to live—that essential vampiric thirst. However, what the Ina choose to dwell on are the ways in which she differs from them, primarily her skin tone and her ability to stay awake during the day

and endure exposure to sunlight. Shori is arguably much more similar to her fellow Ina than her fellow humans, but the Ina refuse to recognize these deep similarities just as white racists fail to see similarities in other races past physical differences.

Butler also calls to mind the fraught history of anti-miscegenation fervor and laws. As Peggy Pascoe outlines in her examination of the role of anti-miscegenation laws in the construction of race, the idea of miscegenation was rooted in fictions, two of which bear relevance to *Fledgling*: that race actually exists and, correspondingly, that it can be determined or measured and that it is possible to keep races distinct and maintain racial purity (7, 8). The Silks exhibit belief in both of these falsities, albeit more in terms of species than in terms of race—at least on the surface. They are deeply committed to their belief that Ina and humans are two distinct species and that while they may intermix in terms of sexual play, they cannot be mixed in terms of procreation. As Russell Silk proclaims during the trial, “We are not them [...] Nor should we try to be them. Ever. Not for any reason. Not even to gain the day; the cost is too great” (292). Additionally, in her analysis of miscegenation, Pascoe notes that authorities were much more concerned with interracial marriage than interracial sex and that “the law was usually inclined to step in only when interracial couples began to claim the public respectability and the property and inheritance rights that went with marriage” (12). Shori, in demanding recognition and protection from the Ina political system, provokes outrage and disgust in the Silks and other like-minded Ina. Similarly, they seem particularly concerned with her future offspring and, as Ali Brox argues, attempt to prevent her progeny from gaining legitimacy. They attempt to kill her and then, later, to discredit her as a true Ina, partly in an effort to prevent her from mating, most likely with the Gordon

brothers, and producing *legitimate* offspring. As Brox observes, “If she commits to breeding with them, Shori’s sons would be Gordons and their potential hybrid status would be legitimized because the births would be natural, not genetically engineered, and because the Gordons are a long-standing and well-respected Ina family” (404).

Brox also notes that the conflation of race and species when it comes to Shori’s hybrid status evokes the racist theory of the nineteenth century that different races may in fact be different species (397). Brox briefly discusses the potential opposition to Shori reproducing that “they fear that her child would prove that Ina and humans are a single species” (398). This revelation would destroy, or at the very least deeply damage, the belief that some Ina hold that they are an inherently superior species to humans.

Not only is Shori realized as the racial Other in order to challenge racial binaries and hierarchies, but also she is realized as sexually queer and challenges heteronormativity. The vampire’s primary association has been with deviant sexuality, which was always in clear contrast to humans’ superior and normal heteronormativity. However, Butler creates a new paradigm in *Fledgling* that challenges normative conceptions of sexuality. In creating a parallel society of Ina on Earth, Butler also creates a separate normative system regarding sexuality and family. In Ina society, the stigmatic human practices of homosexuality, polyamory, and even pedophilia are the norm. All Ina are inherently pansexual and polyamorous, and since they as “children” had sexual relationships with their adult human symbionts, they have also all engaged in what humans would view as pedophilic relationships. (I use the term “pansexual” to refer to the Ina’s sexuality because it is implied that they are not influenced by gender identity or presentation in the selection of their symbionts. While all of the symbionts described in

the novel conform to either masculine or feminine gender presentations, it is strongly implied that Ina would care little if a human symbiont was transgender, non-binary, or any other non-normative gender identity.) If holding Ina to human standards of normal sexual behavior, the Ina are clearly aberrant and non-conforming. However, Butler encourages the human reader to acclimatize to the norms of a different society over the course of the novel. As Elizabeth Lundberg notes, intimacy and belonging are thoroughly queered in Butler's vampire world such that, "in the world of the Ina, people who are attracted only to those of the opposite gender, like people who object to nonmonogamy, are exceptions" (574). Ultimately, Lundberg sees this project as an incredibly radical one which encourages readers to imagine a "fully queer world":

By revising reproduction and family as deeply queer, *Fledgling* grants its readers a glimpse into one vision of what a fully queer world might look like: still positioned as an outsider perspective (since the Ina and their symbionts live separately from other people), queerness is nevertheless fully assumed to be vital and automatic for humans and Ina both in their intimate practices and as a fluid yet recognizable form of social organization. (575)

Whereas Butler uses Shori's hybridity to complicate notions of race and species and their binarization and hierarchization, what she does with sexuality appears, at least at first, to be more of a simple reversal. Whereas the heteronormative is usually cast as the Self and all those who are not heteronormative constitute the Other, in *Fledgling* heteronormativity itself becomes the Other. Additionally, the norms of Ina society seem

to be more amorphous than our traditional, strict definition of the sexual norm as heterosexual, monogamous, and between two similar-aged partners. The Ina present as pansexual and as such, heterosexuality becomes the Other to this more expansive, fluid approach to sexual attraction and relationships. Similarly expansive and fluid is the Ina's polyamory, which means that they engage in multiple open sexual relationships. This seems, at least in part, to be borne of necessity because an Ina cannot survive off the blood of only one human symbiont—nor would that symbiont survive very long. Therefore, because the sexual and blood relationships—and feelings—are so intertwined for Ina, they require multiple partners, both for sex and sustenance.

Wright, Shori's first symbiont, expresses the resistance of the reader to accept these different sexual norms. He expresses biphobic resistance to Shori's sexual tastes: "Swing both ways, do you?" he asks with "terrible bitterness in his voice" (85). Wright, with his human indoctrination of heteronormativity, has great difficulty accepting that Shori is pansexual, and even more so that she is polyamorous and sustains sexual relationships with multiple humans simultaneously. Despite his initial resentment of her non-normative sexuality, Wright accepts Shori's next two symbionts, Brook and Celia, both women. However, he demonstrates anger when Shori takes Joel as a symbiont, confessing, "I don't mind the women so much I guess...I can't do this, Shori. I can't share you" (157). This seems to raise numerous issues for Wright: Joel is also male, which under hetero-monogamy would mean he is competition, and Joel also has dark skin like Shori. Wright angrily remarks to fellow symbiont Brook, "You know she never even told me he was black" (162). Because Wright is still functioning under his human assumptions of heterosexuality and monogamy, he cannot accept Joel. In the

heterosexual, monogamous human world that Wright has grown up in, Joel would be competition for a potential mate. Joel also seems to share more with Shori than Wright does: he also has dark skin and he has an extensive knowledge of Ina society. If this were a competition with only one winner, Joel, objectively, has more to offer Shori: he looks like her and he can help her reintegrate into Ina society because he has more knowledge of it. Shori and the other symbionts urge Wright to forget about these human norms and prejudices because they simply do not apply in Ina society; however, he is unable to do so. A lifetime of indoctrination is not easy to reverse, as Butler demonstrates through Wright's struggle to let go of his human normative assumptions.

Queerness manifests not only in the sexual relationships and orientations of the Ina, but also in their family arrangements. Again, this becomes most evident in Shori and Wright's relationship where the traditional heteropatriarchal roles are disrupted. Loeffler argues that within the relationship between Shori and Wright traditional gender roles are renegotiated with Shori assuming the more masculine role and Wright taking on the more feminine role. As Loeffler astutely observes, this represents not just a renegotiation of traditional gender roles in our society, but, more specifically, clearly reverses the gendered relationship of vampire narratives: when Shori bites Wright and feeds on him, it "juxtaposes Shori's 'masculine' role with the white man's bodily vulnerability—a portrayal that reverses the trope of the aggressive male vampire 'predator' and his helpless feminine victim so frequently found at the centre of feeding scenes in classic vampire fiction" (114-115). Shori is the more physically powerful partner in the relationship, by virtue of her being Ina, and she comes to function as the protector of Wright, as well as her other symbionts. Whereas she provides the physical protection,

Wright comes to provide emotional support and care. Loeffler sees the assumption of these responsibilities as marking him not only as the feminine partner, but also as a maternal character: “Since he thus takes up the role of the loving caretaker, his new position becomes increasingly reminiscent of normative behavioural patterns surrounding dominant constructions of motherhood” (117). She also notes that this is “an unusual reversal of the mammy stereotype,” as it is typically the black, female character that assumes the role of care-taking and mothering, specifically for a white family (117). Citing this interesting reversal of gender roles, Loeffler argues that *Fledgling* undermines and challenges heteropatriarchal conceptions of the nuclear family, an opinion that Morris also argues for.

Morris sees the Ina family structure as inherently challenging heteropatriarchal systems of power: “Butler depicts Shori and her Ina kin’s notion of family and intimacy of all sorts as profoundly queer because they actively reject the trappings of heteropatriarchy at work in the larger society” (159). In terms of broader family structure, Ina live segregated along gender lines, with males of multiple generations living together, with their symbionts, and females doing the same. Symbionts are attached to one Ina, but are free to have relationships, marry, and procreate with other symbionts. Ina collect symbionts of all genders, races, and ethnicities as they do not seem to be bound by sexual preference in the same way as humans. As other critics have stated, the relationships and families that the Ina construct with humans are not only subversive in terms of heteropatriarchal norms, but also defy norms of the vampire genre: “This reconfiguration is in fact an Afrofuturist feminist paradigm shift that challenges the ways in which

vampire stories often devolve into thinly veiled romanticizations of patriarchy” (Morris 160).

Conclusion

Thus, Butler, building off Gomez’s precedent, produces the vampire as racially and sexually non-normative in an effort to challenge the normative systems which marginalize individuals who are non-white and non-heteronormative. Whereas nineteenth-century vampires were coded as non-white and non-heteronormative in order to produce the vampire as monstrous and to reinforce the norms of whiteness and heteronormativity, Butler uses her black, sexually queer vampire to question the validity and stability of these norms. As such, Butler does not produce her racially and sexually deviant vampire as monstrous, but rather as a progressive figure who embodies a hopeful and better future. Implicit in Butler’s interpretation of the vampire is a critique of previous narratives that have used racial and sexual coding to produce monstrosity and a re-appropriation of the vampire, with all of its deviances, for radical political purposes.

-CONCLUSION-

Monsters are meaning machines. They can represent gender, race, nationality, class and sexuality in one body.

-Halberstam, *Skin Shows*, 21-22

...every age embraces the vampire it needs.

-Auerbach, *Our Vampires, Ourselves*, 145

Perhaps to some it may be surprising to realize the depth of the vampire's symbolism, his ability to negotiate and signify certain racial and sexual identities. But vampires are indeed "meaning machines." In the vampire's early years of the nineteenth century, he was weighted with identities of racial deviance and sexual Otherness. He was produced in clear contradistinction to British society—characterized as white and heteronormative—and he bolstered the construction of normativity. He was the monstrous threat that invaded, but never conquered. In threatening normativity, he demonstrated its necessity. Therefore, while the vampire himself was coded as non-normative—both in terms of race and sexuality—the effect of the vampire was to inscribe the value and necessity of normativity.

Similarly intended to reinscribe the dominance of normative sexual and racial identities, Meyer's remodeled vampire in *Twilight* serves as the pinnacle of whiteness and heteronormativity. In constructing her vampire thus, Meyer transplants the vampire from his gothic origins to a thoroughly romantic context. The vampire is no longer the monster, but his ability to bear meaning persists. However, his purpose is now to model the allure of whiteness and heteronormativity instead of threatening to destroy it.

While previously used for normative purposes, in Butler's *Fledgling* the vampire becomes the radical figure that he always threatened to be. Butler's vampire not only is

black and sexually queer, but also she successfully challenges and subverts normative systems of race and sexuality. So, finally, the radical potential of the vampire is realized and Shori succeeds in destabilizing the hegemony of whiteness and heteronormativity.

The vampire has become a truly dominant figure and symbol in our society. From *Buffy* to *Twilight*, from *The Vampire Diaries* to *True Blood*, the vampire is everywhere. While most know of *Dracula* as a source-text for these contemporary vampires, the true depths of the vampire's history are left unplumbed by most. But when one learns how the vampire was first produced and refined, one is able to place modern-day vampires in the context of a two-hundred-year long history. And much is revealed in doing so. For example, while many have noted the racism imbued in *Twilight*, when placed in the context of the history of vampire narratives, one realizes that the racism has been reversed in terms of who is marked as the racial Other. While the vampire of *Dracula* was the racial Other and subject to racist backlash, Edward Cullen is so white that he literally sparkles and suffers no racial discrimination.

But why should we care about the figure of the vampire? As many critics—although the foremost among them is certainly Nina Auerbach—have argued, the vampire directly reflects contemporary social contexts and issues. Therefore, the vampire is a way for us to excavate and examine the most pressing and anxiety-producing issues of our present day.

That *Twilight*, a regressive and dangerous appropriation of the vampire for conservative and prejudiced ends, achieved such staggering, widespread popularity perhaps suggests that its message resonated with readers. Or, even if that was not the case, a considerable number of people have now been exposed to the conservative

ideology woven into the series. On the other hand, Butler's radical vampire, with all of the exciting challenges that she poses to normative life, was mostly confined to the niche audiences of science-fiction, feminist texts, and African-American literature. While Shori provides a heartening counterpoint to Edward Cullen, she reached far fewer readers. And this is a tragedy. I fully believe that literature both reflects society *and* has the power to influence—even change—society. And books like Butler's *Fledgling* have the potential to effect considerable change. However, with limited popular impact, that power too is limited.

Personally, I am much more inclined to Butler's progressive—even radical—interpretation of the vampire. The vampire has always been a figure weighted with the potential to disrupt normativity, but Butler truly realizes and demonstrates this essential threat of the vampire. Butler's *Fledgling* reveals the true power of the vampire: to challenge normative systems and effect progressive change. This is the vampire I want. This is the vampire that scares me—in all the best ways—and inspires me. And, given our current political climate, this seems to be the vampire that we all need.

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