POPULAR AMERICANIZATION OF THE VAMPIRE NARRATIVE AS EXEMPLIFIED BY THE *BLADE* FILMS, NEIL JORDAN'S CINEMATIC ADAPTATION OF *INTERVIEW WITH THE VAMPIRE*, CATHERINE HARDWICKE'S CINEMATIC ADAPTATION OF *TWILIGHT* AND RICHARD ELFMAN'S *REVENANT*

Thesis submitted to the

Institute of Social Sciences

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Master of Arts

in

English Language and Literature

by

Necmettin ZAFER

Fatih University

July 2009

For all those who are interested in vampires

APPROVAL PAGE

Student: Necmettin ZAFER
Institute: Institute of Social Sciences
Department: English Language and Literature
Thesis Subject: Popular Americanization of the Vampire Narrative as Exemplified by the *Blade* films, Neil Jordan's Cinematic Adaptation of *Interview with the Vampire*, Catherine Hardwicke's Cinematic Adaptation of *Twilight* and Richard Elfman's *Revenant*
Thesis Date: July 2009

I certify that this thesis satisfies all the requirements as a thesis for the degree of Master of Arts.

Prof. Dr. Wisam Mansour
Head of Department

This is to certify that I have read this thesis and that in my opinion it is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Arts.

Prof. Dr. Mohamed Bakari
Supervisor

Examining Committee Members

Prof. Dr. Mohamed Bakari .....

Assist Prof. Vassil Hristov Anastassov .....

Assist Prof. Lucie Tunkrova .....

It is approved that this thesis has been written in compliance with the formatting rules laid down by the Graduate Institute of Social Sciences.

Assoc. Prof. Gökhan Bacık
Director

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AUTHOR DECLARATION

1. The material included in this thesis has not been submitted wholly or in part for any academic award or qualification other than that for which it is now submitted.

2. The program of advanced study of which this thesis is part has been comprised of: courses in American Literature, including literary theory, English, American, and World Literature and Cinema in genres that include narrative literature, cinema and media arts.

i) Research Methods. The thesis incorporates research methods taught on both the undergraduate and graduate levels (by thesis advisor) during the course of the study. See ii below.

ii) Sources examined in this thesis include articles from scholarly journals, other articles such as essays, and interviews with the author in question; books on North American Culture, vampires in literature and cinema, horror literature, and monster and vampire movies in particular; thesis style guides of Turkish universities and international universities as well as many relevant books published by university presses on this subject.

Necmettin ZAFER

July 2009

University: Fatih University
Institute: Institute of Social Sciences
Department: English Language and Literature
Supervisor: Prof.Dr.Mohamed Bakari
Degree Awarded and Date: July 2009

ABSTRACT

POPULAR AMERICANIZATION OF THE VAMPIRE NARRATIVE AS EXEMPLIFIED BY THE *BLADE* FILMS, NEIL JORDAN'S CINEMATIC ADAPTATION OF *INTERVIEW WITH THE VAMPIRE*, CATHERINE HARDWICKE'S CINEMATIC ADAPTATION OF *TWILIGHT* AND RICHARD ELFMAN'S *REVENANT*

Necmettin ZAFER

Since the publication of Bram Stoker's novel *Dracula* in England in 1897, the vampire narrative has been the subject of many interpretations across the artistic spectrum. The purpose of this thesis is to explain why the vampire character has recently undergone an acute Americanization in the popular *Blade* sequels, Neil Jordan's adaptation of Anne Rice's novel *Interview with the Vampire*, Catherine Hardwicke's adaptation of Stephenie Meyer's novel *Twilight* and Richard Elfman's original feature film *The Revenant*. This thesis begins by defining what is a vampire and describing its general characteristics. When we understand the vampire's basic image we can more easily study its transformation. We follow with a chapter dedicated to explaining the actual phenomenon of Americanization. This theory expands on critic Linda Badley's idea of the "naturalized vampire". Americanization is a term we use to explain a process begun in literature but accelerated in movies. An Americanized vampire remains a blood drinker but has

lost many of its supernatural and monstrous qualities as artists have conceived it always ever closer to humanity and farther from diabolical evil. We argue that the vampire character has evolved in this way as a cinematic marketing ploy meant to appeal to a wider audience than the traditional horror movie monster. The third chapter briefly reviews the vampire's film history and the sub-genre's conventions in order to demonstrate how the Americanized vampire cinema diverges aesthetically from the horror movie genre. An analysis of the pop culture vampire presented in selected motion picture productions follows. In this way the thesis determines why these films achieved popular success by reimagining and relocating vampires within American culture.

Key words:
Vampires, American Culture, Horror Genre, Americanization, Naturalization, Cinema,

Üniversite: Fatih Üniversitesi
Enstitüsü: Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü
Anabilim Dalı: İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı
Tez Danışmanı: Prof.Dr. Mohamed Bakari
Tez Tarihi: Temmuz 2009

KISA ÖZET

BLADE, VAMPİRLE GÖRÜŞME, ALACAKARANLIK VE *REVENANT* FİLMLERİNDE VAMPİR ANLATININ KÜLTÜREL AMERİKANLAŞMASI

Necmettin ZAFER

Bram Stoker'ın 1897 yılında İngiltere'de kaleme aldığı *Drakula* romanı yayınlanmasından bu yana vampir anlatı sanatsal spektrumda pek çok yorumun odak noktası haline geldi. Bu tezin amacı da *Blade* filmlerinde, Neil Jordan'ın *Vampirle Görüşme,* Catherine Hardwick'in *Alacakaranlık* ve Richard Elfman'ın orijinal *Revenant* filmlerinde vampir karakterinin nasıl keskin bir Amerikanlaşma sürecine girdiğini açıklamaktır. Tez vampirin ne anlama geldiğini ve genel hatlarıyla karakteristik özelliklerini tanımlamakla başlıyor. Vampir imajını ana hatlarıyla anladığımızda onun değişimini daha kolay bir şekilde yorumlayabiliriz. Bir sonraki bölümde tam olarak Amerikanlaşma fenomeninin ne olduğunu açıklanıyor. Teori, eleştirmen Linda Badley'in "doğallaşmış vampir" fikriyle genişliyor. Amerikanlaşma, edebiyatla başlayan bir sürecin sinemayla ivme kazandığını açıklamak üzere kullandığımız bir terimdir. Sanatçıların vampirleri her zaman insanlığa daha yakın, şeytani kötülüklere daha uzak algıladıklarından dolayı Amerikanlaşmış vampir pekçok doğaüstü ve yaratık özelliklerini kaybederek basit bir kan içici durumuna indirgenmiştir. Vampir karakterin bu yolla geleneksel korku

sinemalarındaki canavardan daha geniş bir izleyici kitlesine ulaşmasını sağlamak amacıyla bir çeşit görsel pazarlama hilesi haline dönüştüğü fikrindeyiz. Amerikanlaşmış vampir sinemasının ne şekilde korku sineması türünden estetiksel açıdan ayrıldığını kanıtlamak amacıyla üçüncü bölüm vampir film tarihini ve alt türdeki gelenekleri gözden geçiriyor. Seçilen filmlerde popüler vampir kültürünün bir analizi sonuç kısmına doğru uzanıyor. Bu sayede, bu filmler vampir imajını Amerikan kültürü içinde başarıyla yeniden ne şekilde yarattığını ve vampirlerin bu kültüre ne şekilde tekrardan yerleştiğini belirliyor.

Anahtar Kelimeler:
Vampirler, Amerikan kültürü, Korku türü, Amerikanlaşma, Doğallaşma, Sinema,

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I have many people to thank, and I apologize in advance if I have forgotten anyone. First, and foremost, I must thank my wife for her constant love, support,and encouragement throughout my graduate career.

I feel very privileged to have worked with my supervisor, Prof. Dr. Mohamed Bakari, for allowing me the flexibility and freedom to work at my own pace and choose the subject that excites me. I owe a great debt of gratitude for your patience and friendship.

I would also like to thank Prof. Dr. Wisam Mansour, who motivated me when I felt desperate and lost my way. I owe many thanks for your pep talks.

I am lucky to have friends who like vampire movies. I thank them all. Their crazy ideas always helped me a lot in the process of writing. Some of my friends asserted that there was nothing special to write on vampires and it was a dull subject. However, it was fantastic.

Last but not least I would like to thank my friend Dr. Martin Duncan for his priceless help with proof-reading and editing.

Finally I'd like to thank my family for so much encouragement over the years.

PREFACE

Vampires have been a fascinating subject in University corridors and in the studios of Universal Pictures. The mysterious side of the vampire has drawn the attention of many artists scholars. In its celluloid voyage through time, vampires are the most utilized and manipulated supernatural subject. It has questionably lost its true nature as it has adapted in the face of changing society and values. When vampires emigrated to the USA a new age in vampire history began: this thesis charts the popular americanization of the vampire. This process has not been an overnight event. The thesis analyzes the transformations of the vampire from folklore to literature to film. The process is ongoing especially in the American cinema. An analysis of six feature films (the *Blade* trilogy, *Interview with the Vampire*, *The Revenant* and *Twilight*) demonstrates Americanization with reference to other relevant motion pictures. We offer a critique of Americanization via these films and offer commentary on future directions of this trend.

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INTRODUCTION

Vampires. For centuries humankind has been haunted by the sinister threat of the vampire. From folklore to fiction to film, the undead menace has sparked the imagination. An important reason for the creature's continuation is its mutability, a capacity for its conception to evolve according to time and place. The continuing survival of the vampire legend can be put down to the media, the varieties of vampire movies and of course, Bram Stoker. Since the publication of Bram Stoker's novel *Dracula* in England in 1897, the vampire narrative has been the subject of many interpretations across the artistic spectrum. The myth and reality of vampirism span through millennia of folklore, appearing - in some form or another - within almost every culture, religion and country. Though their origins date at least to ancient Greece and probably even farther back on the Indian subcontinent, vampires persist in the 21st century, portrayed as ever more sophisticated personae in contemporary films, books and even television series. It is a fact that through the vampire films, it still haunts our theatres and television parlours. The purpose of this thesis is to explain why the vampire character has recently undergone an acute Americanization in the *Blade* trilogy of motion pictures, Neil Jordan's screen adaptation of Anne Rice's best-selling *Interview with the Vampire*, Catherine Hardwicke's recent film version of Stephanie Meyer's popular *Twilight* novel and Richard Elfman's *Revenant* among other feature films.

Popular Americanization of the vampire narrative has been most prominent in the novel and comic books since the 1970s. Regarding the total history of this

sub-genre, however, we agree with Darryl Jones that vampires found their true home at the movies (89). Vampires have been popular characters since the birth of cinema, and no decade has passed without the production of more vampire films. It is safe to say that more people worldwide know about vampires from the cinema or television than because of literature or folklore.

"Vampires have been made to mean things," Jones correctly assesses in his *Thematic History* of the horror genre (71). "To engage with the vampire as a writer, director, producer, actor, or audience is to consciously enter this realm of fiction where we know meaning can be made rather than, as in the case with realism, appear to be found" (Day vii). By analyzing why these movies remold the Old World vampire as New World villain - or hero - the thesis aims to expose some significant aspects of North American culture via the distortion of reality which is the contemporary vampire narrative. American teenage culture, obsession with race, consumerism and fascination with technology are some of the characteristics of the Americanized vampire narrative. Also we will demonstrate why the Americanized vampire movie can no longer be considered part of the horror genre but has mutated into forms of teen romance, psychological drama and action picture.

We introduce our study with a brief definition of vampirism. This is followed by a general overview of what we mean by Americanization in the context of vampire narratives. Subsequent sections place vampire generic conventions in perspective so that the Americanization phenomenon is more clearly discernible. An analysis of the pop culture vampire presented in the aforementioned Hollywood productions comprises our monograph's main section. In this way the thesis

determines why these films achieved popular success by reimagining and relocating vampires within American culture. A conclusion reviews the findings and offers some speculation on the future of vampires in American cinema.

CHAPTER 1

DEFINITION, CHARACTERISTICS AND TRANSMUTATIONS OF THE VAMPIRE

We prefer the classic definition of a vampire as an irredeemably evil, undead monster that sustains its own immortal existence by sucking the blood of the living. The origins of vampirism are lost in antiquity and may come from Greek or Indian culture. For the purposes of this thesis, we trace the modern American cinematic vampire to its folk roots in Eastern Europe. There, during the Medieval plague epidemics, when so many corpses were improperly buried and blood running from the facial orifices was a common symptom of fatal disease, the combination of fear and omnipresent death drove people to imagine a supernatural menace in the human bodies. Since then generally there are four ways accepted to explain a vampire's creation:

1) **Predisposition**: An evil life leads to an evil undeath. Vlad Dracula is the most famous example of this sort of genesis. Satanists and others who renounce God or otherwise solicit damnation are recycled as engines of Hell on Earth. The Devil assures that neither the body nor the soul will rest in peace.

2) **Predestination:** Examples are children born out of wedlock to parents who were also born to unmarried parents, children born with teeth, people who break spiritual taboos, etc.

3) People bitten and killed by a vampire will become vampires themselves following a transformation that lasts 72 hours.

4) The dead who are buried with improper burial rituals or suicides are prone to escape the grave as vampires.

Vampirism's corrupting influence, its diabolical replacement of the human soul with purely malevolent animation, its perversion of intelligence and personality into singleminded wickedness are the features that make the condition monstrous.[1] The famous vampirologist Montague Summers clearly delimits the vampire as "a thing ineffably evil, most hideous and foul" (17). Another expert, Matthew Bunson, concurs, defining a vampire as "a villain of incalculable ego with an utterly evil and diabolical disposition" (72). The ichor that flows through a vampire's reanimated corpse is the antithesis of life-giving blood.[2] Whether the vampire was made as a result of degradation over the course of three nights buried after being killed by another vampire's bite; or whether mysteriously unborn in the crypt after an exceptionally, enormously nefarious life (like Vlad Dracula), its energy source is a destructive, supernatural force. Christians would call this force the Devil, and the American vampire is certainly a derivative of Christian lore. Regardless of their inscrutable theological or cosmological origins, vampires, thoughtful though they may be, exist to destroy life. That has been the monster's mission as understood by popular imagination and the media until its 20th century Americanization. "A core theme of vampirism is the pact with the forces of the darkness, yet another concept

[1] Some cultures consider vampirism to signify demonic possession of the corpse. However, the cinematic vampires which are the subject of this thesis always retain a variant of the personality they had when alive.

[2] All of a vampire's vital functions are animated by arcane forces so that a vampire's "blood" (ichor) is actually a fluid with negative properties that sustain undeath rather than life. This is why vampires generate no body heat, for example.

which has been borrowed from older beliefs and which became a successful ingredient of the vampire story" (Bartlett and Idriceanu 137). The vampire's earliest literary interpreters (Le Fanu, Polidori, Byron, Stoker et al.) could not conceive the monster as anything other than a servant of Satan. As we will see, however, this theme has been increasingly deemphasized or even ignored completely in the monster's American narrative conception.

With respect to the vampire's nature as a character type, we follow Brian Frost who tells us:

> Perhaps the most remarkable characteristic of the vampire is its ability to adapt to changing social and environmental conditions. Ever moving with the times, it has evolved over untold centuries from obscure beginnings - probably as some hideous monstrosity - to its present-day embodiment as a psychopathic killer with a blood fixation. And yet, despite its many faces, this multi-monster has remained basically the same - a destructive, self-seeking force. (1)

The vampire's destructive force is found in an array of powers and capabilities that vary depending on particular national folklore and creative imagination. There are different species of vampires. They are not all the same, and this thesis will demonstrate why the American vampire is distinct from its Old World counterparts.

The one common power all vampires have is super strength. A vampire has the ability to change its shape into that of animals (bat, cat or wolf) or dematerialize into mist. A vampire casts no shadows and is not reflected in mirrors. It is known to scale walls, change its size or physical dimensions. The repusulvie nosferatu

species causes impotence. Vampires are also known to command animals like owls, rats, wolves, bats, moths and the fox. Their heightened undead senses can even perceive emanations of good and evil. The vampire is also made mighty through its ability to control and manipulate nature (tides, rain, thunder, wind and fog). As Wayne Bartlett and Flavia Idriceanu remind us, "Although the creature is an unnatural freak, its multifarious connections with the natural world are a powerful part of the vampire storyteller's toolbox" (107). The most effective and devilish vampiric faculty is not its physical power but its power over the minds of the victims (159). [3]

Vampires also have vulnerabilities that vary according to popular and artistic comprehension. They cannot stand garlic, they are burned or repelled by Christian holy water or other religious icons and they are severely weakened or annihilated by exposure to sunlight. A vampire cannot enter a dwelling without an invitation. It also cannot pass through or over running water except at high or low tide. Vampires must rest during daylight hours and require their coffin contain a layer of soil from their native terrain.

However, we maintain that the vampire is essentially evil if nothing else. It is a monster that arises from the crypt to wreak havoc at night, consume and destroy not only the bodies but also the souls of the living. It is not human and therefore cannot feel emotions; it is not alive and so cannot die. "While shown romantically in stories and novels as still possessing human characterics," Bunson elaborates, "the

[3] Other than super strength and sometimes the power of flight, American vampires are quite powerless though. In the New World they are reduced to mere bloodsuckers.

vampire is nevertheless a truly alien life form, functioning on a separate plane of existence" (236). A vampire is a mystery.

Accordingly, the traditional vampire appears as a horror film character. The vampire's theoretical basis as a character in the horror genre is that it speaks as a human, dresses as a human, in many instances acts like a human. This appearance is what deceives the vampire's prey and in fact makes it all the more dangerous as a monster. But this monster's enduring appeal as a character is also found in the extraordinary features that identify it as inhuman: thirst for human blood, photofobia, regeneration, crypt dwelling, etc. The vampire's mystery is found at that the nexus of appearance and reality. Paradoxically it should horrify the moviegoer because it appears to be a human with incredible powers and immortaility, yet in fact it exists as the antithesis of humanity. A human is warm, the vampire is cold; humans have a soul, vampires are soulless; people thrive in daylight, vampires are destroyed under the sun. Not only has the vampire lost its own soul but threatens its victims (and vicariously the filmgoer) with the loss of theirs. For the overwhelmingly Christian audience that threat is worse than death. The fact that this threat arises from the grave in the semblance of the most desirable sort of people - beautiful, educated, aristocratic, seductive - multiplies the uncanny fear factor. Horror is provoked by that which the human mind cannot comprehend. A dangerous animal threatens human life and can even provoke fear of course. But snakes, scorpions, bears or sharks are comprehensible to the human mind. Zoology explains all of them. The mummy, werewolf and vampire exist and destroy human life from realms outside logical explanation. Even their existence is all but inconceivable.

The world has seen mass murderers, serial killers and psychopathic sadists. Many of these have made their way into motion pictures too. Nonetheless, even though the moviegoer may recognize the insanity of their repulsive acts, their origin is as mundane as that of the most mild-mannered milquetoast. Both the wimp and the slasher share the qualities common to all humans on the basic level. Psycho killers and torturers frighten and indeed can horrify the audience but are ultimately products of the human condition. The vampire originates in a different dimension and so must theoretically confound and terrify its victims and the movie audience with motives, abilities and a capacity for evil beyond human scope - even when possessing the semblance of a human specimen.

Bartlett and Idriceanu elaborate on this theory:

> The human mind has always swung between the fear and the fascination of the unknown, in all its representations: the future, a faraway civilisation, the Other that we find in the person next to us, and, more than anything, the great mysteries of death and afterlife. The vampire became in a strange way the embodiment of all these, an entity whose existence links two worlds that seem never to communicate, even though they meet incessantly: the world of the living and the dark realm of the dead. It has acquired everlasting life, and yet it is dead. (91-92)

Undoubtedly films and literature have contributed to the evolution of the vampire's definition. Novelists and filmmakers have deviated from the original idea of the vampire as agent of darkness in order to make it fit certain narratives (29). William P. Day affirms that "[i]ncreasingly, naturalistic explanations for the vampire are put

forth: either they have some sort of strange blood condition or they are literally another species (rather than the Devil's supernatural minions)" (3). Therein lies the basis of what we consider the vampire's Americanization according to the dictates of culture and contemporaneity.

In this century, Americanization has a variety of definitions. Theories of Americanization are sometimes amplified to include discussions of American cultural imperialism and investment abroad because the spread of American values did not end at the nation's continental borders. Famous brands such as Nike, Coca-Cola, and McDonalds, often viewed as being symbols of American dominance and influence, can be seen in different parts of the world, from the crowded street of India to the luxurious restaurants in Paris. Arthur Koestler described Americanization as "cocacolonization" in his book *The Lotus and the Robot* (referring to Coca-Cola) (1). It is possible to see the hegemony of the USA on the billboards, on the silver screen, or on clothing brand tags across the world.

The American media (especially television, film and recorded music), with the assistance of pro-American trade agreements, have disseminated American culture more effectively than other means. American TV shows are broadcast all around the world. In this respect, Americanization occurs via the subtle and entertaining imposition of Anglo-American culture, traditions and standards.

Americanization's inverse media operation is what concerns the theory behind this thesis. Theorist Paul Grainge describes Americanization as a function of the media in this way:

> In American media, the term Americanization is used to describe the censoring and editing of a foreign TV show or movie that is bought by a U.S. station. This editing is done with the aim of making the work more appealing to American audiences, and to respond to perceived American sensitivities. The changes can be so drastic that little - if any - evidence of the TV show or movie's true origin remains. (217)

In Hollywood, many foreign film productions (most of them from Europe and the Far East) have been remade for American viewers, adapting the story and setting to conform to American culture. Among the prominent examples, we can observe *Godzilla* (1998), *Point of No Return* (aka *Nikita*) (1993), *My Father the Hero* (1994) and *The Ring* (2002). The ways and reasons why movie directors have also appropriated the vampire character and made use of it according to commercial imperatives (as opposed to aesthetic ideals), lies at the core of this thesis.

The theory of the popular Americanization of the vampire narrative is based on the understanding that the vampire character is also "edited" so that it is more appealing to American film audiences. We emphasize one simple thing that is constant to the phenomenon: adaptation. Popular Americanization of the vampire narrative on film combines Hollywood producers' commercial concerns with the oldest meaning of Americanization. Before the mid-twentieth century, the term Americanization referred to the temporal and cultural process through which immigrants assimilated the customs, characteristics and language of Americans. For the theoretical foundation of this thesis, Americanization should be broadly understood as "a process by which an alien acquires our language, citizenship,

customs and ideals" (Bell and Bell 1). We consider the vampire, with its origins in Europe and beyond, as the alien who "acquires" the American idiom, citizenship, customs and ideals through a process of artistic representation that has been edited and censored for an American audience. Popular Americanization is our denomination for the aesthetic process by which the vampire character becomes less mysterious and more mundane. This aesthetic alteration is carried out principally by novelists and filmmakers but has many minor proponents in the advertising industry. All of the major figures behind this phenomenon are based in the United States of America, mostly in Hollywood or New York City. This fact is the reason why we call it "Americanization"; American artists extrapolate wildly from both the folkloric and artistic precedents established in Europe. As the vampire is transformed by creative artists into a character that ever more closely represents a human being, it also mutates out of the horror genre to currently feature prominently in plotlines for action and teen romance films. As we will demonstrate in the course of this thesis, American artists as diverse as Anne Rice, Wesley Snipes, Catherine Hardwicke and Richard Elfman have reformulated the vampire (with the support of their editors and producers) in order to make this sort of character more popular in the USA and ultimately more profitable.

This theory is clearly exemplified in the following chapters through the analysis of selected motion pictures. These films have been selected because they are Hollywood productions that feature vampire characters in non-traditional roles. The word "editing" in Grainge's definiton above is important for this thesis as it encapsulates the American tendency to homogenize artistic production even at the

expense of aesthetic value. We will demonstrate why, in the chosen vampire films, the directors manage to mold the vampire character to the needs and expectations of audiences.

Even before Americanization, the vampire had already undergone at least one major alteration. This was the change from the mindless, peasant revenant of folklore to the sophisticated, attractive fiend of literature and film. Bram Stoker's Dracula character, though not the first such suavely diabolical vampire, remains the archetype. This urbane, aristocratic genteleman or gentlewoman, of peculiar but still human appearance, is now the standard character type that obscures the vampire's true identity and objectives. Bunson explains why this transformation has implications beyond just the monster's physical appearance:

> The discovery of the vampire as a suitable motif for literary creations by the members of the Romantic movement released the undead from the boundaries of their primitive and essentially rural environment. Still rooted in the age-old terrors of death, blood, and the grave, the vampire began suddenly to function in the social, intellectual and even political world. (263)

Likewise this human appearance has been the key component through which artists have pursued Americanization, the vampire's second great transmutation (Abbott 15).[4] This object of our study is a character who has been educated and cultured as an American, and has sustained those traits in undeath. The plots and imagery of several of the films we analyze in this thesis present vampires in conflicts

[4] A very rare exception is found in the film *Thirty Days of Night*. In this movie an Alaskan town, without sunlight for an entire winter month, is besieged by a group of quasi-folkloric, feral revenants. It is also important to note that, until the ludicrous climax, the film falls well within the horror genre.

related to acquisition of political power, establishment of stability in the mainstream social milieu, or philosophical ideals.

Abbott attributes this phenomenon to "a structural reinvention of modernity in the late twentieth century" that "removed the vampire from its mythic representation, reinvented it as a modern vampire, and relocated it to America" (75). A theory for explaining the initial cause of Americanization is the Hollywood prerrogative that requires, because of a lack of creativity, the "updating" of older fictional creations and genres rather than the creation of new ones for modern social conditions.[5] It is another form of the homogenizing cultural imperialism propagated by Hollywood and American media in general. Bell and Bell propose that the twenty-first century is firmly in the hold of a global imperative that goes by the name Americanization. Perhaps it would be better described as the dictatorship of consumer society (6). By this commercial logic, even the vampire is recast to embody American fashions, attitudes and worldviews. Specific examples from the films will demonstrate our understanding of the Americanized vampire.

Nina Auerbach makes an important observation, explaining that vampires have moved to the United States of America because "vampires go where power is: when, in the nineteenth century, England dominated the West, British vampires ruled the popular imagination, but with the birth of film, they migrated to America in time for the American century" (6). Rapid industrialization led to wealth and power that are attractive to the sophisticated vampire. The energy of prosperity is the sort of vitality which vampires are driven to undermine and destroy with their degenerate

[5] A recent example, though not from Hollywood, is the reconceptualization of James Bond as a more generic action hero. His identity as lover and spy have been nearly erased from the character to make him "tougher" for a modern audience that seems to prefer more grit than glamour.

influence. The Old World vampire Lestat, from Rice's *Interview with the Vampire*, prefers to feed among the high class New Orleans aristocracy for example. A vampire's behavior naturally fits into the American model of unbridled consumerism and its resultant corruption. As various critics have suggested, bloodsucking is sometimes proposed as a metaphor for capitalism. America's unstoppable urge to consume even the planet's lifeblood of natural resources is akin to the vampire's thirst for blood. This craving is corrupting because it easily rationalizes the suspension of ethical and moral values - as the vampire similarly has no pity on her victims. Abbott goes on to explain:

> With rampant capitalism . . . came . . . the vampire continuing its quest for spatial liberation and freedom of movement, manifested in the transition from Dracula's constrained urban navigations to the freedom of the vampire to chart the shifting terrains of the postindustrial landscapes of America. (217)

Creative artists therefore populate their narratives with characters who pursue their own American Nightmare in the New World environment. In a similar way to how other genres changed to suit an American audience (the *bildungsroman* or detective novel, for examples), the vampire narrative also continues adapting to American sensibilities. We posit that these alterations have adulterated the vampire narrative's essence and diluted its artistic quality. "For every new cinema release that suggests the death of the vampire genre by pushing its boundaries to their limits," says Abbott with regard to Hollywood's appropriations, "there is one that follows to reset the boundaries. . . . The vampire is in a constant state of disintegration and renewal,"

and an important factor in this renovation is the development of an ever more American monster existing as a product of popular - not to be confused with folk - culture (5).[6]

* * *

As the Old World vampire disintegrates into unrecognizability, current criticism uses the term "domestication" to discuss the renewal of the vampire narrative in America. The most important feature of domestication is that the boundaries between "human" and "diabolical" become increasingly problematized. In particular, by the fashionable technique of channeling the narrative through the point of view of the monster, the Other, contemporary vampire storytellers invite sympathy for their characters at the same time that such familiarity diminishes the terror generated by what remains outside the viewer's frame of knowledge (Gordon 2, 5). If, as Noel Carroll theorizes, human characters regard the monsters they meet as abnormal in works of horror, the Americanized vampire is hardly horrific.[7] Human characters interact with the vampire less and less as a fantastic creature and more as if it is a part of the natural order - just another freakish consumer. In an eminently heterogeneous society such as found in the USA, vampires blend into the

[6] Folk culture is the kind that has arisen from indigenous beliefs originating in particular, largely homogenous communities. Pop culture is largely manufactured through the use of wider reaching media and tends to have a significant commercial component which is largely lacking from folk culture.

[7] "[T]he horror monster is a kind of pollutant; it embodies a crossing of borders and a transgressive mixing of categories. So far as our common-sense way of understanding the world is concerned, the horror monster is a thing that simply should not be" (Hutchings 35). This is why the American vampire is *not* a horror monster anymore. It is not transgressive, polluting or outside our common sense understanding.

populace and, as Blade reminds unbelievers in his films, “They are everywhere.” The human characters in the films we will examine in later chapters are not frightened or revolted by vampires. Sometimes they are even strangely attracted to the undead (16-17). Their emotional reactions to the vampire are ambivalent at best. The American vampire can be villainous, even threatening, but not repulsive in these films.

This is where we see a substantial reconceptualization of the sophisticated fiend as a sinister friend. As Carroll remarks about the most famous vampire of all:

> [E]ven those creatures like Dracula though they may not, in the main, be portrayed as *perceptually* loathsome, are nevertheless still disgusting and impure; one doesn’t require perceptually detectable grotesquerie in order to be reviling. Dracula strikes Harker as sickening though his appearance is not literally monstrous. (52)

Our thesis thus studies the Americanization of the vampire narrative as a transformation not only of the vampire character itself but, as the character’s traits have brought it more in harmony with humanity, the vampire film genre has splintered into narratives that no longer qualify as horror or fright films. Day offers an interesting assessment of the vampire’s Americanization as an essentially humanizing process:

> The central event in vampire stories over the last thirty years is the vampire’s transformation from monster or object of covert fascination into a protagonist embodying our utopian aspirations to freedom, self-

> acceptance, self-expression, and community outside the restrictions and limitations of conventional middle-class American society. (33)

Beginning with Jordan's interpretation of Rice's vampires, and now again with Hardwick's *Twilight*, the vampire sub-genre has become a vehicle for social commentary (Benefiel 262).

Americanization has been "a kind of entropic reductivism, a dialogue of attrition and subtraction, softening and smoothing over the hard-edged definitions of the vampire. . ." (Zanger 18). There has been no revolutionary change in the vampire character as it appears in American big screen narratives. Rather, as Zanger explains, writers and directors have gradually eroded the vampire's extraterrestial, supernatural essence through a creative dialogue that has seen artists negotiate with the monster, coaxing it away from Hell and back towards humanity. In theory the vampire's hard edges are smoothed over and softened, its awesome powers are subtracted, its menace is reduced as it is Americanized. In order to gain a better appreciation of why this has happened, our second chapter will provide some historical and conventional perspective on the vampire genre in American film and literature.

CHAPTER 2

SCREENING BLOODY MURDER

In this chapter, we will address the nature of the horror genre and development of character and setting representations within the Hollywood movie industry's production of vampire movies. First we provide a brief historical background of the horror movie. Essentially there are three major categories of cinematic horror: the supernatural (which includes vampires, ghosts, witchcraft and demonology); psychological horror (such as Alfred Hitchcock's movies); and massacre movies featuring psychopathic slashers (Hayward 188). This thesis is concerned with the first category, though aspects of psychological horror and the massacre film are sometimes present in the vampire sub-genre. Supernatural horror is the easiest genre to distinguish from other movie genres. Horror movies have their roots in the eighteenth century Gothic novel (psychological and slasher horror are distinctly post-World War II phenomena). Many critics have seen gothic literature as providing an important source for the horror film. Previous to gothic literature, monsters were usually the means by which an artist held his audience's attention while he prepared his protagonist for heroism. The monster was there to be destroyed, and if it could scare readers first that was a bonus, because they would then appreciate the hero even more. With the advent of gothic aesthetics though, "we forget the victims and even the hero, but we remember the monster" (Twitchell

25). Noël Carroll presumes that "[h]orror is, first and foremost, a modern genre, one that begins to appear in the eighteenth century. The immediate source of the horror genre was the English Gothic novel, the German *Schauer-roman*, and French *roman noir*" (4). There is a general consensus that the Gothic novel started with Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otronto* in 1765. Since then many other gothic books were written, establishing the criteria and heralding the horror genre. There are many German films such as *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, *Nosferatu*, *The Student of Prague* and *The Golem* that contain gothic elements but were not classified as horror movies upon their release in 1913 because the term was not common at that time. Because of the horror film's European heritage, it is not considered particularly a Hollywood genre (unlike the Westerns which are based on and in U.S. history), so Hollywood's deviation from the gothic formula is not such a surprising development. Horror cinema proper was born in the early 1930s when the term "horror" became widely used and understood by the film industry, critics and audiences (Hutchings 9).

The classic period of the horror genre that spans from 1931 to 1936 saw the dominance of German and American expressionism. The difference between these two can be understand by this quote from D.W. Griffith: "The American School says to you: 'Come and have a great experience!' Whereas the German school says: 'Come and see a great experience!'" (Monaco 316). The American School was more active and energetic than German cinema. The eleborate lighting techniques and heavy shadows were borrowed from German silent cinema by Hollywood. This "'German Style' proved highly effective in suggesting a world in which dimly seen

and dimly understood forces constrained, controlled and attacked its [the rational, material world's] unsuspecting inhabitants" (Tudor 28).

Andrew Tudor theorizes that horror films serve

> as a kind of populist surrealism, rearranging the human body and its processes, blurring the boundaries between homo sapiens and other species, responding uneasily to new and almost incomprehensible developments in science and the anxious challenges they pose to the familiar structures of society, religion, psychology, and perception. (114).

These movies follow a three-part narrative pattern familiar from other popular genres: instability is introduced into an apparently stable situation; the threat is resisted; the threat is removed and stability is restored. "As in the cinema more generally," Tudor says, "this pattern has undergone some modification in recent years. Absolute closure (threat removed and stability restored) is no longer obligatory, and the notion of what constitutes a proper ending is no longer as restrictive as it once was" (18). For example some vampires escape destruction, if they were ever endangered at all, at the conclusion of popularly Americanized vampire narratives.

The orthodox pattern of the vampire movie starts in 1931 with *Dracula* (Dir. Tod Browning). Within this parameter, the vampire terrorizes the surrounding countryside, catches victims (mostly women), and is defeated by brave men. This plot device inspired and constituted the structure of most of the vampire movies in

the following years. *Dracula* is important not only in the history of horror films, but for American cinema in general. Skal gives us some perspective:

> *Dracula* would eventually be recognized as a key American film, though not for the usual reasons. In the European tradition of filmmaking, the irrational and macabre had been part of the cinema since its inception. For all its artistic deficiencies, *Dracula* liberated the dormant impulse in America, reestablishing an essential connection between film and the unconscious, and quietly transformed our imaginative life forever. (127-8).

Any wider study of the horror film genre must surely appreciate Skal's observation. As Tzetvan Todorov theorizes in his treatise on the fantastic in literature, the modern human intellect's confrontation with the uncanny or macabre is a fundamental combination used to stimulate sensations of fright or horror (47). Through his cinematic interpretation by Bela Lugosi, Dracula embodies the fantastic for the first time in American cinema and simultaneously frightens the audience with the ghastly, irrational scourge of vampirism. "Dracula is, after all, the first product of the classic genre and the undoubted base-line for subsequent vampire movies," Tudor reminds us. "During the 1931-1954 period a quarter of supernature-based films feature vampires, and most of them owe a clear debt to his film, the first film of their kind" (162). The other examples of this period include *Dracula's Daughter* (1936), *Mark of the Vampire* (1935) and *Condemned to Live* (1935). It is important to note that *Dracula's Daughter* suggests homosexuality in the vampire narrative for the first time since Feuillade's prototypical *Les Vampires* series of short silent films

(1915-1916). This theme of sexual deviation, always present in the vampire narrative since the publication of Sheridan Le Fanu's novel *Carmilla* (1871), reoccurs occasionally throughout the twentieth century narrative interpretations before becoming much more prominent by the time of Jordan's *Interview with the Vampire*.

The War Years did not add anything new to the vampire genre. The vampire film and horror genre in general were in recession during the 1940s. A film made in a specific year can be studied relevant to the events that might have caused or influenced its creation. If so, it is no wonder that the vampire movies of this period took place on the battlegrounds instead of in old castles or underground.

The 1950s was the time when "outer space" entered the horror genre. Alien invasions are the common threat represented in the horror movies of that decade. This is due to the exploration of science and the space rivalry between America and Soviet Russia. The filmgoing audience perceived horrifying threats would most likely come from the mysterious unnaturalness of space or the catastrophic misapplication of science. Vampire movies, on the other hand, suffered lack of creativity as they did in the 1940s. The films *Dracula* (1958) and *The Brides of Dracula* (1960) were nothing more than updated versions of the classic Dracula themes (Hayward 187). Film critic David J. Skal offers a reason for this: "Despite its perennial popularity, *Dracula* is strangely incomplete in its evocation of the Count, which may explain why its stage and film adaptors have relentlessly embellished the story - and then embellished the embellishments" (83). The

vampire movies produced in the 1950s and 1960s, mostly by England's Hammer Studios Limited, can be considered stagnant, totally generic.

Motion pictures depicting madness and insanity influenced the horror genre with the Alfred Hitchcock's productions of the 1960s. Many of these horror movies offered representations of extreme psychological states. Filmed attempts at a representation of the vampire's psyche would only appear in the following decade however.

Many horror critics and historians view the 1970s as a "golden age" of horror production. The old horror genre was already dying or dead. The clichèd representations of murder and mayhem were slowly disappearing or being transformed. Importantly for the horror genre, film theory since the 1970s has relied heavily on structuralist and Saussurean-derived linguistic models. Like books, films can be considered as texts for reading by viewers or critics. As "read" by many critics using this approach, the vampire movie showed, in the 1970s, its first hints of shifting away from the traditional patterns that had defined the sub-genre since Browning's *Dracula*. Initially structural criticism identified (and identified with) the sexual dimension of vampirism. In the 1970s the female body (signifier) was seen as sexual potential of vampirism (signified) within the American mindset filtered through the prism of the film projector. *Blood and Roses* (1962), *The Vampire Lovers* (1970), *Twins of Evil* (1971), *Countess Dracula* (1971), and *Lust for a Vampire* (1971) deal with the sexual encounters between female vampire and female victim. These lurid movies evidently gave new commercial life to the tired vampire film sub-genre (Tudor 64). However, this tendency to associate the female body

with vampirism was short-lived: vampire movies produced after the 1970s hardly ever touch on this theme.

We consider structuralism a valid instrument and will use a similar theoretical approach for our study of popular Americanization of the vampire narrative in film. Our method of analysis is to "read" signs such as costumes, lighting, soundtracks, action sequences, paraphernalia,setting and dialogue. After watching and rewatching the movies carefully we will identify the ways the vampire characters signify a distinctly American cinematic aesthetic prepared for popular tastes.

Our survey comprehends that while Americanization has brought about major changes in the setting, characterization, plot and action of the vampire narrative, its cinematic components have devolved at a slower pace. That is to say, elements such as lighting, special effects, music and camera techniques have remained more consistent since the production of F.W. Murnau's *Nosferatu* (1922) than the actual stories themselves. Murky minor key music, lightning streaked skies and gloomy locales are still the general province of celluloid vampires, even though these elements no longer qualify as strictly gothic nor enhance a frightening atmosphere. This paradox - traditional cinematic principles underpinning the exploits of naturalized vampire characters - is an important factor in Americanization. Producers seem to believe that while the movie audience wants to see a more human vampire, it is still conditioned to expect the technical conventions that formerly marked the vampire as a monster operating in the horror genre. We will examine the effectiveness - or failure - of conventional technical strategies as a

means of representing the demystified, demythologized, secular vampire who now dominates motion picture narratives.

We will discuss the 1970s as a turning point in more specific detail in the next chapter. For now we take a brief look at the horror genre from the 1980s to the 2000s. Due to technological developments, the undead monsters finally found a way from their undergroud passages to the light of day in the 1980s. Special visual effects and technical advances in the field of animatronics presented the monsters in realistic, full color, close-up. The 1980s were marked by the growing popularity of horror movie sequels. *Poltergeist* (1982) was followed by two sequels and a television series. The seemingly-endless sequels to *Halloween, Friday the 13th* (1980), and Wes Craven's successful supernatural slasher *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (1984) were the popular face of horror films in the 1980s. Nonetheless, the eighties was a quiet period for the vampire compared to the glut of the seventies. Smaller studios were disappearing fast, but the bigger ones were beginning to take the vampire character seriously again. The most famous vampire movies of that time were *Fright Night* and *The Lost Boys* (both 1987). The Blade trilogy owes much of its aesthetic to these movies because the premium on action scenes first entered the sub-genre with these two movies.

Beyond such technological, organizational or stylistic changes, Hollywood's essential business has remained the same since the release of the first Dracula movie: to entertain the audience and make a profit. Hollywood producers argue that they give the filmgoing public what it wants, implicitly claiming to be benevolent. Film scholar Richard Maltby theorizes that people go to the movies to watch their

own emotions played out onscreen (30). Considering this intention, critic Charles Derry asks why are horror films so popular if they play on a negative emotion such as fear:

> Certainly horror films connect with our profound and subconscious need to deal with the things that frighten us. In the way they work upon us, films are much like dreams, and horror films are like nightmares. Some horror films deal with our fears more directly than others, but in general, horror films speak to our subconscious and - as do our dreams - deal with issues that are often painful for us to deal with consciously and directly. (162).

Therefore horror movies have to be organized so that viewers will feel afraid in a sequence and pattern that they find satisfying. Very importantly for this thesis, Maltby also notes that although Hollywood once promoted the idea of an undifferentiated audience, the film industry has classified its audiences for decades and no longer pretends that any film can have universal appeal (30).

In light of these factors, there were two main problems facing the Hollywood directors in the 1990s. First, the generation of the 1980s had already grown up practically without new vampires and no longer were afraid of the blood and morbidity of the previous decade. Second, the horror genre wore itself out with the proliferation of nonstop slasher and gore films in the eighties. The primary objective of the horror film - to give the spectator the thrill of being frightened by terror and violence - went dull as audiences became accustomed to formulae and ever greater amounts of gore. Instead of creating new ideas, the directors preferred to change

pre-existing character types according to the expectations of their audiences and to fit comfortably within the cultural paremeters of American society and commercial security. Our theory is that *Interview with the Vampire* and *Blade* are the results of this sort of creative conformity. Hollywood producers have come to the conclusion that audiences want to see characters like themselves - whether the character is bad or good. The logical result of this creative direction is the subject of this thesis: popular Americanization of the vampire narrative.

CHAPTER 3

THE VAMPIRE AS NATURALIZED CITIZEN

The vampire has a long cinematic history of coming to America in search of new blood. His first visit was to New Orleans in *Son of Dracula* (1943), and then again in *The Return of Dracula* (1957) to Southern California. These characters were European vampires, but their stories allowed for a change of continental setting and established the American vampire's preference for city life. In Bram Stoker's tale, Count Dracula had already set the example of the vampire who blends into the modern urban milieu, thus becoming a greater threat. In these mid-twentieth century American Dracula stories set in Louisiana and California, the vampires terrorize a complete cast of American human characters (Twitchell 145-7). *The House of Dark Shadows* (1970), *Count Yorga, Vampire* (1970), *The Return of Count Yorga* (1971), *Blacula* (1972), *The Velvet Vampire* (1971), *Grave of the Vampire* (1972) are all films that feature vampires on the loose in a contemporary American setting. As we explained in the first chapter, this setting allows the monster to pass as simply another urban eccentric or outcast, one more odd group or weird individual among thousands.

A new trend in vampire stories began with the films *Count Yorga, Vampire*, *Blacula* and Stephen King's novel *Salem's Lot* (1975). In these narratives vampires from the Old World arrive in the U.S.A. and vampirize victims in a thoroughly American setting. Count Yorga, Prince Mamuwalde and Kurt Barlow are the fictional antigenitors of the American vampire (Zimmerman 104).

'*Salem's Lot* narrates what would happen if a vampire settled in a small American town. King's vampire lord Barlow arrives in New England from France in much the same way Count Dracula made his way to London: "Their invasion seems to follow the old xenophobic *Dracula* pattern: two evilly suave Europeans, Barlow and Straker, come to the Lot and open an antique store. Identified with un-American attributes like wit, homosexuality . . . Barlow and Straker seem as contaminatingly foreign as Bela Lugosi was [in Browning's *Dracula*]. . ." (Auerbach 160). Barlow is a purely evil invader in his relentless persecution and destruction of his human victims, and his fiendish intelligence is applied only to this sinister purpose (Bunson 230). However, although he is European, Barlow is attracted to and exacerbates the evil already present in Jerusalem's Lot. There he senses a vacuum for a sort of deviltry that America deserves. King's popular novel was the first to show that the vampire can be a fully-realized antagonist on American soil (Day 136).[8]

Count Yorga's case is very similar to Barlow's, except that he operates alone and has invaded America from the West. *Blacula* is a more interesting movie because its casting of a Black man as the undead invader and inserting his character into the African-American community is a more explicit and dramatic step into Americanization.

In this narrative, the African Prince Mamuwalde is vampirized by Count Dracula while on an abolitionist crusade in Eastern Europe. Centuries later he is revived in Los Angeles. Mamuwalde is not an American vampire but, like Mister

[8] King's narrative is also somewhat foreign in its old-fashined premise: a traditional, classic portrayal of vampirism.

Barlow and Count Yorga, he introduces vampirism to America. Unlike Barlow however, Mamuwalde is an early representative of the romanticized vampire Other, characterized by "a certain mournfulness" that influences the vampire creations of Anne Rice in particular (Hutchings 114). He is one of the first good-natured vampires of any geographic origin, "a noble character of considerable dignity whose vampirism afflicts him like a disease, and he detests what he has become" (Day 42). The ambivalent vampire arrives in the New World with Mamuwalde. Later American vampires in the works of Rice and Meyer, among others, inherit a part if not all of his tortured psyche.

Day also views Mamuwalde as a character who embodies the social condition of the African-American as second-class citizen. In Watts he is marginalized twice over: as a Black male and as an undead monster. This unique narrative portrays a strange variation on the story of African-American anti-hero forced to crime and murder by the circumstances of racism (42).

Linda Badley calls this new breed the "naturalized vampire" (144). We can say the monster has been naturalized in two ways in order to become American: 1) the normal meaning of naturalization in the sense of a foreigner gaining American citizenship; 2) Vampires have become less supernatural beings and more human, natural. Vampires like Blade, Edward Cullen or Louis are not undead who have been transported to America from overseas points of origin, the way Count Dracula arrived in London or Barlow arrived in New England. They are American monsters who speak without accent and are totally familiar with the habits and behavior of American people. Edward Cullen attends high school like the typical American boy,

Blade cracks wise like an African-American, Louis fondly remembers the delights of the creole culture he enjoyed when human. These are vampires born, died and undead in the American milieu, so they are characters with whom an American audience can readily relate. Though they still possess some powers such as superhuman strength, their overall supernatural profile is diminished. The Americanization of the vampire has definitely made this a type of character more prone to human impulses, emotions and attributes than any other monster depicted in mass media.

As Katherine Ramsland's subtitle ("Humanizing the Inhuman") makes clear about the Americanization of the vampire, the undead monster "has developed from a creature ruled entirely by instinct and need into a complex being with an inner life" (33). She continues to explain how the creeping crypt-dweller of Europe, the horrible devourer of souls, has ironically become more fit for consumption by the American audience:

> We show vampires as more human, more accessible, less blatantly evil than before. Once audiences cheered for the vampires [sic] destruction. Now they often see a vulnerable side and root for him to escape the stake. In many of today's stories, vampires have left the Transylvanian aristocracy and moved into town as one of us - although with a certain extreme panache. (33)

In the process of becoming one of us, the American vampire is socialized and humanized as he is secularized and disempowered. If the early artistic representations of vampires defined these antagonists as monsters because of their

existence outside human categorization, the modern American vampire is more human (Blade is indeed half human) or at least closer to humankind because of a diminished supernatural capacity and, more importantly, emotions closer to those normally attributed to people in the course of everyday life (Phillips 21). "Where once the vampire was the corporeal embodiment of satanic activity in the world," Bunson reflects, "today it is the reflection of the contemporary society's morbid preocupations with aging and death" (263). This character now has the capacity for self-examination, self-judgment and moral ambiguity (Zanger 22-23). The humanizing social dimension shows the vampire narrative as it retreats from manichaean representations. The vampire's evil, 35 years after Barlow and his unholy antigeny terrorized New England, has become an unworthy characterization in America.

* * *

Many historians consider the 1970s and 1980s a time of intense transformation of lifestyles and artistic modes in the United States of America. Following the stimulus of other, greater cultural change in the USA, the vampire narrative also has influenced and been influenced by trends in the culture. Likening Americanization to the fight for homosexual rights, for example, Skal says: "Just as the younger generation of gay activists reclaimed the epithet 'queer' as a badge of honor during the AIDS wars, so was the negative vampire identification similarly embraced, rehabilitated and defanged" (348).

Regarding this rehabilitation, Zanger explains, “It seems clear that with each demythologizing transformation, the new vampire moves more firmly in the direction of that single perceptual domain we call the ‘human’, into greater contiguity with us as readers” (20). Thus, that planter is a vampire; that soul brother is a vampire; that rock star is a vampire.

No artist has done more to americanize the vampire in this way than Anne Rice with her *Vampire Chronicles*. Rice’s shift of the vampire narrative to a first person story told by the vampire himself necessitated, according to Katri Lehtinen, that the modern American vampire cannot be wholly evil (5). His blood craving, like so many aberrant desires unleashed in the USA, is relativized, even rationalized, as another strain of the popular “go for yours” or infamous “look after Number One” mentality of the “me” generation.

Rice’s vision pioneered the replacement of human characters as protagonists and antagonists in the narrative. In her *Vampire Chronicles*, “the victims are as indistinguishable from each other as McDonald’s hamburgers - and serve much the same function” (Zanger 21). Zanger calls this the decentering of vampire-human relationship, and it is a key feature of Americanization. Whereas in European narratives and even in its few early American representations (most notably in the *Weird Tales* pulp magazine published during the early 20th century) the vampire is always strictly an antagonist at odds with human protagonists, Americanization has softened and smoothed over this once rigid scheme.

However, although vampires have replaced humans at the center of the vampire narrative, some sort of violent conflict is still an essential component in this

sort of story. The American vampire "is eminently contemporary - and divided, a citizen of our time, murdering rationally, or wantonly, or sadistically, out of self-interest, out of calculation, out of hysterical bloodlust, or out of all of them together" (Zanger 23). Though there are some important exceptions we will discuss below, the emphasis of the American vampire's nature is still on her need to kill and the action(s) that her hunger engenders.

Nonetheless, violent and blood-crazed as it may be, the American vampire has lost its metaphysical, evil dimension. Zanger theorizes this to be the case because contemporary artists reason that the more similar the vampire is to the American audience, the greater its appeal (18). This convergence of monster and human is to a large degree a result of secularization. "As 1960s American culture demonstrated an increasingly secular view of the world," Michael Grey observes, "more cinematic vampire victims died as a result of their lack of faith. As humanity confronted dangers of loss of faith, however, the vampires lost some of their magic arsenal" (4).[9] Along with its supernatural dimension, the monster has lost most of the powers we catalogued in Chapter 1. It is no longer an essentially magical being but rather a sort of freak (much stronger and faster than the average person, perhaps cursed with extrasensory perception or mind reading ability), an outsider.

Another important trait of the Americanized vampire is her tendency towards communal rather than solitary existence. Notwithstanding Count Dracula's housewives, the Old World vampire narrative was that of a vampire alone. The grouping of the American vampire group is similar to a family structure, as seen in

[9] Bartlett and Idriceanu even go so far as to judge secularism as the key phenomenon in the vampire's continuance: "The modern vampire myth survives by sucking the blood out of Christian taboos" (173).

films like *The Lost Boys* (1987) and *Interview with the Vampire* (Benefiel 265). They form communities of outsiders, like freaks in a traveling circus, and in this way can demonstrate interactions analagous to those that would occur amongst human characters. For the American vampire, "to be solitary is to be exposed, to drift toward death," as in fact is exemplified by Mamuwalde or George Romero's eponymous character in *Martin* (1976) (Auerbach 177).

When they coexist communally, vampires can express themselves in ways other than killing and producing other undead. This is an important narrative device through which they are humanized by offering insights into their actions. Also with this development we encounter one of the important ways that the vampire's Americanization changes the genre in which the monster is depicted on screen. As James Twitchell says in *Dreadful Pleasures*, "Horror monsters exist without explanation. Jack the Ripper, The Boston Strangler, and Charles Manson just are; likewise, the vampire, the Frankenstein monster. . ." (34). On the contrary, the modern American vampire narrative wants nothing left to mystery. Auerbach theorizes that the vampire's naturalization has occurred because natural evils are worse than the supernatural in America: "The visionary novelists who resurrected and remade vampires know that there are social forces more frightening than Dracula: tyranny, dullness, brutality, unbelief, mass self-deception and self-destruction" (155)

What is certain is that the vampire has lost its pre-modern, gothic characteristics in the Americanization process. It is irrational no longer, hardly mysterious (Abbott 2). Day's assessment is a significant source for the analysis we will make in the next chapters:

> [T]oday we have good vampires, bad vampires, ambiguous vampires, lonely vampires, vampires who only drink cow blood; we also have reluctant vampire killers and vampires who kill other vampires. Vampires have become contemporary American figures unrelated to the Transylvanian prince; while some vampires still wear the cape and speak with the European accent, more and more often they are the homeboys and homegirls of American culture rather than immigrants. (2-3)

The gothic boundaries of the supernatural thus give way to American freedom in terms of a loosening of generic conventions and deemphasis of the monster's dedicated evil intentions (Abbott 82).[10]

The vampires, their enemies and allies go to great lengths to describe themselves. They reveal their psychology in the American "tell all" spirit of divulgation. In doing so, the vampire's horror threat recedes, and her movie becomes an action story, a romantic drama, perhaps a suspense film or even comedy. A fine example is the film and television series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1992; 1997-2003). This narrative is set in Sunnydale, a mid-size city in the U.S.A. It is outwardly a very ordinary place, and the eponymous heroine faces the problems of a typical teenage girl: trouble at school, uncertainty about her direction in life, sexual

[10] Abel Ferrara's film *The Addiction* is notable for being a rare - if not unique - American vampire narrative that uses the vampire theme to allegorize the problem of the human tendency to evil action.

emotions in a culture that teaches her to repress sexuality (Bartlett and Idriceanu 45-46). One of Buffy's foes, Spike, is a punk rock vampire who is likewise meant to appeal to the average teen viewer as someone like them or like people they encounter in their environment. Spike is irreverent like any rebellious teenager hopes to be; he is portrayed as a pop culture figure from his hairstyle all the way down to his boots (Abbott 3).

To summarize, it is worth quoting at length from Zanger's authoritative explication:

> Taken together, these shifts - from solitary to multiple and communal, from metaphoric Anit-Christ to secular sinner, from magical to mundane - demythologize the vampire, transform it from Satan's agent on Earth into someone who more nearly resembles a member of a secret society or a subversive political association, perhaps the Masons or the Ku Klux Klan. No longer embodying metaphysical evil, no longer a damned soul, the new vampire has become, in our concerned awareness for multiculturalism, merely ethnic, a victim of heredity, like being Sicilian or Jewish. . . . It should be noted, however, that the new vampire, although 'ethnic' in one special sense, does not come to us like Dracula from some mysterious foreign clime, preferably Eastern, but is resolutely American, appearing as a Louisiana plantation owner in *Interview with the Vampire*, a rural redneck in Kathryn Bigelow's film *Near Dark* (1987), a New England Brahmin in the television series *Dark Shadows* (1966-1971), or a California teenager in Joel Schumacher's film *The*

> *Lost Boys* (1987). This new, demystified vampire might well be our next door neighbor, as Dracula, by origin, appearance, caste, and speech, could never pretend to be. (19)

All of these demystified types, the degenerations that came down from Mister Barlow, Prince Mamuwalde and Count Yorga, continue even after their masters have been destroyed in earlier narratives. "These floundering, directionless killers pay occasional lip service to Dracula, but they have no access to his individuality, his efficiency, even his tyranny. Rather, they are . . . utterly American vampires. . ." (Auerbach 161). Only later in the degeneration of vampires that Blade hunts, or the Cullen family, do these monsters find direction and an identity soaked in American blood. The foreign element is smoothed out, domesticated.

Since the 1970s, the naturalized vampire has been "unleashed on the expanse of the American landscape, fragmenting into a series of subgroups based around a range of urban settings, each time reinventing itself to suit its new location" (Abbott 137-38). It seems that to suit the hype and hipness that Hollywood wants the American vampire to embody, the city's fast-paced energy is the force that secularizes and humanizes vampires in the easiest way for audiences to digest. The importance of Sunnydale as the setting in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* is also applicable to other American vampire narratives:

> [T]he world of the vampires is threateningly close to the world of the audience as the action is much more likely to take place in a dark urban alley or a building at night than in an old castle or church. The technique is highly efficient: it is one thing to believe that some region at the end

> of the world may be the home of monsters, and quite another to discover that your high school is infested with vampires who are extremely likely to attack you in your campus dormitory. (Bartlett and Idriceanu 79)

The misty mountains and deep dark forests of Transylvania and other isolated, wild settings are replaced by American cities like Toronto, Los Angeles, New Orleans, New York City and fictional cities like Santa Clara or Sunnydale. Vampires blend into the metropolis, where they easily find victims and subterranean hiding places. Their crimes are camouflaged by the many other murders and disappearances common in American cities. The urban social scene is very nocturnal, so nightlife suits the undead's schedule. Furthermore, cities are where power is concentrated, which attracts vampires as Auerbach notes above. With only the strange case of George Romero's *Martin* and the recent exception which is Hardwicke's filmed version of *Twilight*, no American vampire film has managed to approximate the vampire to humanity outside of a big city setting. Tudor comments on the importance of this development in the Americanized narrative, explaining the impact of the new settings:

> The divorce of the classic vampire narrative from its period context partly undermines its 'other-worldly' character. Vampirism is no longer a matter of peasant superstition in mid-European folk memory. These vampires stalk their prey in downtown Los Angeles . . . they have become part of our everyday environment, no longer safely insulated in mythic history. (65-66)

In the American metropolis vampires devolve from their metaphysical roots in absolute evil at the same time that their monstrosity is softened and smoothed over by city streets and secularism. Nonetheless, they still tend to operate from a space represented as somewhat outside of mainstream America. Therefore we can see the American cinematic vampire as Black ghetto prowler (*Blacula*), Vietnam War "veteran" (*Deathdream* 1974) nightclub owner (*Blade*) or gang member (*The Lost Boys* 1987, *Blood Ties* 2006).

Notwithstanding the urban tendency, there is another scenic variation on Americanization that locates the vampire as a Western frontiersman: *Near Dark* (1987), the *From Dusk til Dawn* trilogy (1996-2000), *John Carpenter's Vampires* (1998) and *The Forsaken* (2001). These films insert the vampire into the Western genre by making the monster analagous to the violent, lawless drifter who terrorizes people isolated in small towns. As antagonists in this sort of narrative, they represent American idealization of the outlaw, outsider or fugitive (Day 35). The Western is combined with horror film to form a true American hybrid that allows the vampire character to become another predator in the wide open spaces of the untamed New World. While there are some echoes of the European vampire's rural roots in this Western representation, it is important to note that the characters from all these films operate as outlaw gangs in the American way. Furthermore, in the general sense of Americanization that applies to all representations, urban or rural Western, these gangs act in ways that closely resemble human behavior. The primary difference is that while the roving gangs of the traditional Western movie are motivated to malice by an urge for personal profit, the Western vampire bunch

kills strictly for blood. Not unlike so many other psychopathic killers from American cinema, the New World vampire - especially as Western gang member - is often reduced to a mere engine of destruction that functions to keep action on the screen (Zanger 21).

Auerbach comments on the vampire characters in *Near Dark*, arguably the best example of the vampire Western:

> [N]othing in *Near Dark* is un-American or antidemocratic; no one visits glittering Europe or worships jeweled Egyptian statues. [Director] Bigelow's vampire gang careens around the Southwest plains in a series of banged-up vans; Caleb, the stricken young hero, tries to take a bus from Texas to his Oklahoma home, but he is too sick to travel; these vagrants cling to their American roots, moving only in aimless circles. Their origin is the Southwest itself: Bigelow fixes them in the Western genre, with its rigid polarization of good vs. bad, settlers vs. aliens, the family home vs. the open spaces. Cast in this primary American melodrama, deprived of exotic countries and times, Bigelow's vampires play melodrama's traditional villainous role. (187-88)

The American vampire as plains drifter could be understood as the archetypal New World vampire. "It's no less American to be a vampire than to be a cowboy," declares Day (145). Auerbach certainly makes a convincing argument for their American authenticity, and there are enough films within this sub-genre to warrant further study.

There is a significant body of vampire Westerns, but we have determined the urban vampire gang as the motif that filmmakers continue to develop into the 21st century. The idea of the urban vampire gang, meant to resemble either the exclusive cliques teenagers group themselves into or organized crime cartels, began in American cinema with films like *Fright Night* (1985) and *The Lost Boys*. This representation was standard for the sub-genre by the time of *Blade*. Rather than a solitary, stalking consumer, the Americanized vampires gang up like Bloods, Crips, Hell's Angels or Latin Kings. The audience then probably sees the celluloid vampire not so much as a demonic horror but like one more predatory menace from the periphery of society. Blade's smirking, posing enemies and the delinquent Lost Boys are examples of the rough, street gang vampire aggrupation.

Although even the most refined American vampire has always been capable of bloody mayhem onscreen, Americanization has "cured" the character and his human servants of the traditional afflictions that accompany a vampiric presence. As the vampire has lost most of its supernatural powers in America, also absent are the scenes of pestilence, insanity and profanity that had dominated the *Nosferatu* films for instance. The feral Old World vampire, exuding corruption, cannot breach Hollywood except for the irregular ordeal suffered by the townspeople in *30 Days of Night* (2007). As outcast and bloodthirsty as the American vampire may be, nearly all its permutations are sterilized, humanized, secularized so that its representation is that of, at worst, a vicious antagonist, never a *force* of evil.

We posit that part of the reason for this disinfected version of the vampire in America is because it would be incongruous with the predominant image associated

with Americanization: a beautiful villain. Beginning with Langella's 1979 Hollywood remake of *Dracula*, the vampire became a bad but slick, pretty boy as necessitated by high production values and audience expectations for a leading man (since nearly all important vampire roles are for men) (112). It is not difficult to understand why viewers of the vampire character McIver, for example, from the *Blade* television series, may even see him and similar vampires as role models. He is admirable not because he is a vampire, but rather because he dresses in designer fashions, he is well-groomed, is a fine arts connoisseur, travels by private jet, is attractive to women and wields power. To analyze this sophistication of the American vampire, Marcus Coates makes plain:

> [W]here future vampires are to become highly mobile creatures who move with fluidity from country to country seemingly at there [sic] whim, the folkloric vampire is tied to its native soil and feeds from its race and, worse still, from its immediate family. . . . Later vampire pursuits, such as: international travel, indiscriminate feeding, consumerism, extreme aestheticism and the obsession with beauty gives these later un-dead an air of glamour. (41)

Of course, glamour is one of Hollywood's foundations, so the pretty boy vampire, portrayed by Tom Cruise, Brad Pitt, Frank Langella, Stuart Townsend or Stephen Dorff has become the dominant film image.[11] The characters they play are incapable of releasing any deadly plague in their settings (sickness is so disenchanting), and the only people they drive crazy are young girls gone mad with

[11] Dorff himself is quoted in the Chicago *Sun-Times* as saying, "Vampires to me have always been sexy."

adolescent adoration. Meg Reed Thompson's rhetorical question highlights the glamour factor as it americanizes the vampire narrative through the thematic concern of human characters who wish to be turned into vampires: "Suppose someone came to you and said you can be attractive, brilliant, wealthy, fascinating, and you can live forever. Would you turn it down?" In *Interview with the Vampire* the answer is often "no". Picker likewise notes that contrary to the vampire of European folklore, the American cinematic vampire has a "kinder, gentler image" precisely because of Hollywood's glamorous portrayal of this character type as tormented, romantic "bad boy", urbane gentleman or superhero (2).

Having established our concept of the Americanized vampire as a potential neighbor or classmate, we move properly into practical film study to analyze the vampire's celluloid representation as an American character. Our analysis of these tendencies in the *Blade* trilogy, *Interview with the Vampire*, *Twilight*, *The Revenant* and other movies will precisely contemplate the reasons why glamour combines with filmmaking technique to Americanize the vampire. In this way the thesis from now on cites direct examples to show how an ancient monster has evolved into such a prominent character in a particular genre of modern motion pictures.

CHAPTER 4

DEADLY FANGS OF KUNG-FU: THE *BLADE* TRILOGY

The Marvel Comics Group character Blade is highly representative of the film history phenomenon we discussed in the last chapter. Blade was created for Marvel in 1972 by Marv Wolfman and first appeared in the *Tomb of Dracula* serial. The serialized comic book format, international though it may be, is an art form more highly developed in the USA than any other country except for perhaps Japan. Blade's origins in comic books make him a natural candidate for big screen adaptation. Since the 1978 production of the *Superman* movie, live action adaptations of comic books have been a regular sub-genre of Hollywood adventure films. The Hollywood cinematic format cannot capture the plot complexity of the average comic book nor allow for extensive character development. However, even though something is always lost in the transfer of comic book art to live action (i.e. using human actors instead of animated drawings) on the big screen, superheroes seem to be made-for-movies characters because of their outsize personalities, propensity for violence and fantastic escapades.

Blade originated in a horror comic, but he is conceived as an action hero: vampire hunter. As such, his character is driven on a mission to make the world safe for humankind by exterminating vampires. Blade himself is half vampire, half human. The inspiration for his crusade is in the desire to avenge his mother, who died giving birth to him after she was bitten by a vampire. Blade is utterly ruthless

and extremely violent. He is pledged to preserve human life, but he has no compunctions against brutalizing people who ally themselves with vampires. His initial urban appeal was as a strong, streetwise African-American hero placed as the protagonist of an action-adventure narrative. Blade surely demands our close attention because he embodies much of the spirit of urban American culture (Abbott 191-92). Regarding Blade's rare dark complexion in the vampire genre, Lehtinen offers a reasonable explanation for the racial aspect of Americanization: "Secularization is one key issue here," she says in reference to the nature of America's multi-ethnic secular society. "A more important factor is the shift in the balance of social power. Forces such as the Black Movement, feminism, and gay and lesbian movements changed society radically," thus allowing for Blacula and, later, a Blade (4).

Issues of race and corrupted authority help define Blade as an American vampire. "Just as one cannot disassociate *Blacula*'s emergence in 1972 from the Watts riots," posits Abbott, "*Blade* similarly carries the legacy of a post-Rodney King Los Angeles. The film is rife with associations with the King affair, and historically to the Watts riots, particularly in Blade's seeming opposition to the police force" (192).[12] Dressed in black leather, dark sunglasses and sporting tattoos and a stylized box-fade haircut, actor Wesley Snipes plays Blade as the tough, African-American male able to strike cool poses and speak clever one-liners. This image appeals to the urban moviegoer but also catches the attention of the suburban or even rural American viewer who goes to the movies to catch a glimpse of hip

[12] African-American motorist Rodney King was beaten viciously by White Los Angeles policemen after they stopped his car in 1991. The assault, captured by an eyewitness on videotape, sparked riots after it was broadcast on television.

urban style and street violence. Blade appears outwardly familiar, but is still the "Other" in the sense of his fantastic nature. "The Daywalker", as he is called by his vampire foes in allusion to his ability to function normally under sunlight, is not a true vampire, but that fact in itself is another reason why his films are good examples of Americanization. Likewise, the "real" vampires he encounters in the trilogy also represent several trends we classify as Americanization. By studying the characters, settings, plots and film devices of the *Blade* movies, we can better understand the vampire's Americanization.

The first *Blade* movie was directed by Stephen Norrington in 1998. This film establishes a formula that would continue throughout the trilogy and sustain a television series. Blade partners with technician Abraham Whistler (Kris Kristofferson) to hunt the monsters and foil their schemes. An important innovation Wolfman brought to the vampire genre is the regular use of high technology (weapons, computers, futuristic skyscrapers) in the struggle between hunters and hunted. As Abbott has observed, the *Blade* films exhibit the American fixation on high technology as a way of solving problems. Whistler, Blade's accomplices and enemies harness technology for such purposes as combat, finding a cure for vampirism or plotting vampiric world domination (199). Technology's importance to this narrative goes hand-in-hand with the film medium itself; Blade alters the vampire paradigm simultaneously as the sub-genre changes horror cinema. "In the age of technology," assert Bartlett and Idriceanu in their wide-ranging study, "it is technology itself that has helped perpetuate and enhance the impact of vampirism on our imagination via the silver screen" (40). The mechanisms of fear have lost their

effectiveness with the advance of technology in the *Blade* trilogy. Technology supplants superstition.[13] For example, the vampires use mobile telephones to communicate with their underlings and each other. Dracula's telepathic link with Mina Harker and his encoded letters to the madman Renfield are outmoded in the Americanized narrative.

The release of the *Blade* films also coincided with the emergence of heavy metal music as a mainstream genre. This aggressive style, cultishly consumed by teenagers, became associated with vampire films and themes. "Monsters, especially vampires," observes Linda Badley, "had become required mascots or totems for heavy metal groups. . ." (114). Taking a cue from the heavy metal "headbangers", with their theatrical aggression, dark clothes and obsession with violent imagery, vampires in American cinema, and particularly in the *Blade* trilogy, tend to gather in cliques that take the anti-social fantasies of heavy metal to their extreme of alienated angst and frenzied destruction.

The focus on action impacts the viewer's imagination by shifting the vampire's filmed representation away from the impenetrable darkness of supernatural evil and into the realm of special effects spectacle (vii). According to this aesthetic, fast cars and motorcycles are also prominent in the trilogy. The American fixation with vehicular speed and power, and the high value placed on oversized automobiles like the General Motors Corporation sport utility vehicle Blade's team drives in *Blade Trinity* are clearly evident as key components of the

[13] Another vampire hunter narrative, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, portrays an organization called the Initiative that also uses technology to hunt and destroy vampires (Bartlett and Idriceanu 126). Likewise, Blade's teamwork and tactics are copied by the vampire hunters in *John Carpenter's Vampires*. The influence of *Blade* on the vampire hunter motif is unquestionable.

Blade franchise's action imagery. The all-black bikes, cars and trucks clearly match the leather costumes preferred by the hero, signifying the way technology practically merges with Blade as he efficiently uses it to pursue and wipe out vampires.

Even from the opening scene many of the trademark *Blade* movie devices are presented to differentiate the film and its characters from those of the traditional vampire narrative. The modern metropolis by night is the standard scenery in these films. Norrington's camera pans over the darkened cityscape, establishing the city's size but also, paradoxically, a strange sort of emptiness; it is a city with empty streets where the lone pedestrian is easily at risk of attack from vampires hiding in shadows. As Auerbach perceptively notes above, vampires are drawn not only to America but to American cities because they are attracted to the source of power. Dracula arises from his deserted crypt in *Blade Trinity* but spends the rest of the movie plotting vampire supremacy in a big city. The strategies he began in Stoker's narrative reach their apotheosis as part of his kin's overall Americanization.

Back to the trilogy's opening scene, a young couple in a car come racing down the street at high speed, the girl behind the wheel. Their destination - a surprise says the girl to the goofy young man's query - is a meatpacking plant underneath of which a full-fledged, clandestine rave is underway. This discoteque of the damned is operated by Blade's vampire enemy Deacon Frost (Stephen Dorff). Frost is portrayed as young and rebellious - like the American teenage audience for whom the film is primarily destined. Deacon Frost runs clandestine vampire discoteques and resides in a modern high-rise apartment building. There are some references to gothic horror in the gloomy underground chambers and passages of the

Blade trilogy, but most of these are New World locales meant to be settings more hip than horrific (Abbott 4).

The couple and all the dancers at the rave are young and beautiful. They are meant to represent the sort of audience the producers want for the *Blade* franchise. This appeal to youth culture, by making the movie's characters themselves the sort who would be readily accepted by mostly teenage viewers, is one of the strategies of Americanization. These vampires are totally socialized in a way that approximates them to the audience.[14] The boy in the car is not repulsed or frightened by the girl - a vampire - because she is attractive and seems to be leading him to a good time.

The Americanized vampire, in this case, is represented as the carefree, extroverted, pleasure seeker. The raving vampires not only dance but simulate sex, kiss and jump for joy when the basement's sprinkler system sprays them down with a bloodbath. The human boy has obviously been brought to the rave in order to be consumed, but the vampires that surround him do not initially seem like a threat. They are humanized by their behavior and appearance.[15]

Blade raids the party and gives the audience a first look at his cinematic methods. In this crisp, quick-cutting, fast-paced action scene that sets the standard for the series, vampires disintegrate instantly in a special effects display when shot or cut down by Blade's weapons. In old vampire lore and other narratives, the

[14] The *Blade* comic book has also adapted this approach of regularly placing vampires in social siutations that mimic those of humans at their hedonistic best. It would seem that this reverse influence of the film series on the comic book is for the purpose of appropriating the most appealing aspects of the Hollywood productions in order to sell more magazines.

[15] It should be noted, however, that Norrington's quick-cutting camera, and the overall gloom, are used creatively to give a sense that the ravers are not exactly what they seem when viewed from the boy's point of view. Norrington gives hints (a snarl, an evil, glinting pair of red eyes) of malice in the scene that still alert the audience to something unearthly.

monsters are notoriously difficult to locate and destroy. Blade makes it look like exterminating insects. In order to sustain the action spectacle, the filmmakers recur to the generic Hollywood action sequence in which the hero's multiple assailants are dispatched easily to show Blade's efficiency. The main difference is that, these opponents being some sort of vampires, implode when hit by silver bullets and sword.

In a later scene, when news of the raid reaches Frost in his high-tech tower, he asks the messenger, "How many dead?" as if he were speaking about people who were killed by a mad gunman. This is significant, because it demonstrates the naturalization trend we mentioned above. In the *Blade* films vampires are hardly considered supernatural creatures but act, exist and "die" almost as humans do.

Deacon Frost himself, as if a vampire could be addicted to nicotine, smokes cigarettes onscreen as any person compelled by this vice. Like Blade, he wears a leather jacket to present the image of a fashionable "bad boy" girls find attractive. More importantly for the film's plot, Frost's master plan is not the perpetuation of his "business" empire but a grab for greater personal power. He is what the *Blade* movie universe calls a "turned" vampire - once human but turned into a vampire by another monster's bite. Whereas Blade is the vampires' enemy, their is also an internal rivalry between the turned vampires under Frost's leadership and another group described as "purebloods". The pure bloods are characters who were "born" vampires, a contradiction in terms never explained during the whole length of the film series. Blade's genesis is understandable because he was born at precisely the moment when a vampire's ichor began to invade his infant bloodstream. The so-

called purebloods remain the kind of puzzle that exemplifies the way Americanization has substituted true supernatural mystery with incoherent plot devices.

What is obvious and effective is that the pureblood vs. turned vampires gang conflict is analagous to the the sort of internecine or ethnic rivalry that has been part of American culture since large numbers of Irish immigrants began arriving in the 19th century.[16] Hutchings has also noticed the racial connotations of the bitter pureblood/turned rivalry:

> Within the film, the half-blood designation clearly has a racial element - with the racial purity of the "full-blood" vampire contrasted unfavourably with the impurity of the half-blood/half-breed - and a class dimension as well, with Frost figured in this respect as an insurrectionary figure from the lower ranks of an intensely hierarchical and conservative vampiric social order. (108)

References to racial differences in the USA are displaced onto fantasy-based divisions between humans and vampires and between one set of vampires and another category of vampires (108).

In an attempt to raise his status and enhance his powers, Deacon Frost studies an arcane vampire text that the purebloods boast is beyond his comprehension. The filmmakers do make some attempt at presenting a type of true mystery in the form of the ancient texts that Frost decodes by computer in the vampires' archives. The combination of the esoteric element with high technology is a trademark of the

[16] See Martin Scorcese's film *Gangs of New York* (2002) for a good fictional representation of this phenomenon.

Blade franchise. The Americanized vampire is attuned to information technology and even listens to techno music through the headphones of his personal listening device as he waits for the computer to process the translation. However, it is always the facts of the technology itself rather than the occult knowledge (rapidly flashed across the computer screen as page after page of glyphs next to a barely visible English translation) that dominate the visual representations of the vampires' "secrets".

Also as noted above, Deacon Frost and his pureblood rivals are organized and operate in way which, through the director's visual clues, present a cross between organized crime and American corporate culture (not to suggest that there is so much difference between the two!). Their extensive organizations plot grand schemes; blood consumption is always on the periphery of their motivations. Blade's enemies gravitate to leadership, aping the tyrants they parody (Auerbach 7). Frost and Eli Damaskinos, the vampire lord in *Blade Trinity*, entangle themselves in the sources of power and exhibit megalomaniacal intent (101). Throughout the *Blade* movies and TV show, vampires meet in dark boardrooms and dress in suits, there is an obvious hierarchy headed by a *capo*, large amounts of money finance their structure and infrastructures. It would not be too much of a stretch to say that these representations are influenced by the classic American *Godfather* film trilogy directed by Francis Ford Coppola. For example, when Frost bites and kills his incompetent human lackey, police officer Krieger, it is reminiscent of so many movie scenes when the angry boss kills the bumbling henchman in front of other associates so that they can see he does not tolerate failure. It is in these scenes of

sinister scheming, rivalry and betrayal that Norrington and subsequent *Blade* movie directors subtly elaborate their theme of corruption sucking at America's vitality. Bartlett and Idriceanu trace the idea of vampire conspiracy all the way back to the plague epidemics of the Middle Ages, when people believed Satan's servants were literally causing calamity (139). The purebloods mention that they have a truce with humanity, for example, thus implying a literal deal with the devil that Abbott says is a condemnation of the corrupted authority that undermines the American dream. A policeman, meant to serve and protect people, will ally himself with vampires again in *Blade Trinity*. Black Blade, the ultra-marginalized, ultra-urbanized Daywalker, can therefore be interpreted as the peoples' hero who comes crashing in to clean up the corruption in a direct way that leaves no trace of the bloodsuckers. He is a vigilante above the laws that keep the majority of people weak and drained, at the mercy of parasitic capitalists who meet around huge tables in high-rise buildings and the police who enforce their exploitative order.

In a later scene, below that night sky, the camera pans over a montage of vampires busy imitating the nocturnal human nightlife of hustlers, pimps and prostitutes. Though not representing a network of relations as complex as that suggested by Frost's gang or the pureblood cartel, scenes like these maintain the impression of vampires imitating or even duplicating the signs of the American underworld. Deacon Frost's gang, furthermore, is made up of vampires apparently representing various American ethnicities, giving the impression that at least the monsters, in their undead state, have overcome typical American racial discrimination (Abbott 181).

Despite the occult, apocalyptic plotline involving Deacon Frost's attempt to reincarnate himself as a blood god, the undead nature of vampires is not clear in the *Blade* trilogy. To a certain degree the *Blade* narratives draw on a history of scientific (or pseudo-scientific) explanations of vampirism.[17] As sophisticated weaponry and computer systems are displayed in the films as tools for vampire advancement or destruction, biology is also used to explain the vampires' blood craving. But neither a totally supernatural nor convincingly scientific description is proferred by any of the trilogy's characters to clarify questions such as why some vampires can survive in sunlight and others cannot. As Americanized vampires these are flexible, undefinable creatures mutating as they adapt to the demands of the New World's cinematic imperatives. What mysteries persist from the vampire's folkloric origins are reduced to vague, insignificant plot devices at best.

For example, in a scene where Blade and his doctor discover the vampires' subterranean library, the large, papyrus styled pages of the Book of Erebus - the vampire "bible" translated by Frost - are pressed inside glass plates and suspended throughout the room. When Blade's vampire enemies confront him there, they have no qualms about battling their foe with martial arts amidst the ancient, arcane texts. As bodies go flying around the room in a whirl of kicks, punches and flips, the occult Book of Erebus is reduced to nothing but a set piece for comic violence mayhem as the glass panes are repeatedly smashed to pieces. According to what we stated earlier, action trumps any sort of supernatural representation as the vampires are knocked about like any other sort of action flick thugs. Here there are no

[17] Dom Augustine Calmet, the abbé of Senones in Lorraine, France, was the first to attempt a scientific elucidation of vampirism: *Treatise on the Vampires of Hungary and Surrounding Regions* (1746) (Bartlett 20).

shambling revenants or skulking specters: these are dynamic action figures kung-fu fighting. Their so-called bible, potentially a source for a deeper, stranger and more interesting vampire plot, is shattered along with any pretension of Old World hermeticism. Even when flying skeletal spirits erupt from the bodies of the pureblood vampires during the ritual Frost directs in order to empower himself with the spirit of the blood god, such special effects seem meant as another demonstration of action movie showmanship rather than an attempt to reclaim and represent the vampire's diabolical essence.

Norrington does retain some classical elements of the horror film and even references another director's technique from an earlier vampire movie. The lighting in most scenes is usually dark and creates a menacing mood. In *Blade* the moon is photographed as a full, looming presence at night. The moon revives and the sun destroys. The changing influence of heavenly bodies is an index of restlessness on Earth. Moonlight reminds the audience of the natural world's presence and the supernatural energy that supposedly empowers vampires even in the modern urban setting (Auerbach 123). Likewise, Norrington's fast-motion photography of the daytime sky turning to night is a technique used earlier by Werner Herzog in his 1979 *Nosferatu* remake to give an impression of nature disturbed from its normal course, which is, after all, characteristic of the vampires' perverted existence. The vampires in the *Blade* movies, easily destroyed as they are, still retain their folkloric ability to regenerate and their superhuman strength, both of which are aspects of the energy they absorb overnight. Nevertheless, in the second *Blade* movie the vampire

continues to develop in ways that take the narrative farther away from archetypal standards and more towards the American model we have identified.

* * *

Guillermo del Toro's *Blade II* maintains the basic aesthetic concept of the first film. After rescuing his partner Whistler from vampires, Blade joins forces with a team of purebloods called the Bloodpack. Their mission, commissioned by pureblood vampire leader Eli Monteskinos, is to hunt down and destroy a new, mutated species of vampire (the reavers) that threatens to consume human and vampirekind alike. However, this action-packed plot of unlikely allies, betrayal and revenge does not depend so much on America for its settings (mostly indeterminate urban areas and Monteskinos' isolated, ultra-modern fortress) as for its sensibilities. The wisecracks, tatoos and leather, replications of gang and nouveau gothic culture all synthesize American youth culture as reflected and produced by Hollywood.[18] Grafitti is painted on the wall. Likewise, this narrative is again soundtracked with pulse-pounding hip hop beats and heavy metal music to accompany the frantic action.

The key functions of film music in mainstream cinema include signifying of moods and emotions, the establishing of settings and characters, and interpretation of narrative events (Gorbman 73). Music is important in the *Blade* trilogy because

[18] By "noveau gothic" culture we mean the fashion of dressing all in black, dying the hair pitch black, piercing the skin in numerous places, avoiding sunlight and suntan, and listening to various alternative music styles far outside the mainstream. People immersed in this subculture seem to purposefully cultivate a gloomy or "gothic" atmosphere around themselves.

the sounds of underground nightclub culture - techno, metal, trance - replace the sinister minor key strings, piano or organ of traditional horror films with modern, urban sounds. With this change of soundtrack, the vampires are enabled to dance and carry on in their discoteques similar to the young audience. Even when the movies' scenes are outside the vampire nightclubs, this music's throbbing beats and heavy dynamics complement the action sequences and overall sense of conflict. This is literally the music of darkness.

In *Blade Trinity*, Abraham Whistler's vampire hunting daughter Abigail listens to trip hop through her i-Pod while preparing for battle. Another of the Nightstalker team comments to Blade that those tunes "pump her up" for fighting. We should not go so far as to say the film's producer's are promoting these music styles for consumption after the audience leaves the theater, but certainly a direct reference like that made by the Nightstalker characters meant to assure the typical American teenage viewer that Blade's allies are "cool" because they listen to the same tunes. From the basement and warehouse rave sites to other murkily filmed scenes to the dim theater, *Blade*'s soundtrack echoes the faux sinister aspirations and pretentious rebellion of large segments of American youth culture.

An action scene that uses exemplifies music's usage occurs early in *Blade II* when Blade battles motorcycle riding vampires on dark city streets. Heavy metal blares over a leaden backbeat as the motorcycles screech, rev and crash. By this point in the trilogy, as we watch Blade defeat his enemies again, it is evident that vampire destruction is an excuse for cinematic special effects display to represent

the vapires' disintegration. The *Blade* trilogy is nothing if not an example of Hollywood's tendency to privilege style over substance.

The Bloodpack characters of *Blade II* also embody this tendency. Like Deacon Frost's gang from the first film, they are a multi-ethnic team of fantastically attired and coiffeured vampires. However, there is almost nothing in their appearance to suggest vampirism in a direct way. Indeed, the audience never even sees their fangs. Their constitution as undead is only overtly revealed when they are incinerated by sunlight or otherwise destroyed in some spectacular way. They have tattoos and and strut around with the sort of cocky, musclebound swagger and swivel-necked glares typical of U.S. Marines or Special Forces fighters. For all intents and purposes they are action movie combatants nearly like any others. Furthermore, Blade's tense confrontations with these suspicious allies are analagous to the macho tensions that characterize rivalries between street gang leaders. The aspect of might-makes-right competition represented by Blade's claim to leadership can be considered a metaphor for the same spirit that drives much American foreign policy. Blade leads only because he is more powerful than the others and makes a point of demonstrating his might. When he does knife tricks in the face of one particularly arrogant Bloodpack member and then slaps him in the face, we see an example of Hollywood adopting and reinforcing a keystone of American political discourse: the show of force as the prerrogative of self-righteousness.

Another American character type to appear in *Blade II* is the irreverent, slacker, "tech geek" youth. Scud, Blade's technician who has replaced the kidnapped Whistler at some point between the first film and its sequel, enhances the

film's comic element as the stock sidekick. Most importantly for our discussion, Scud represents the technically savvy yet alienated young adult American: plugged into computers but tuned out of meaningful, personal adult relationships. "Yo, 'B'!" he salutes his partner Blade on several occasions in the manner that American kids consider cool. But the bond between them is hardly friendship, forged more out of utilitarian necessity as are so many Amercian business partnerships. It is not such a surprise then when Scud turns out to be a traitor when the narrative reaches its climax. Having no discernibly human ethics or values, just being a technologically savvy boy more engaged with machines than with his fellow humans, Scud was perhaps always a likely character to ally himself with the undead.

The film's antagonists, the reavers, are at once representative of Americanization and curiously folkloric vampires. They embody Americanization in the way that they are described by Nyssa, the Bloodpack's scientist, as being incontrolably addicted to blood. She likens their behavior to that of human drug addicts.[19] In fact, their subterranean dwelling places, emaciation and viciousness indicate the social deviation of crack or heroin addicts. On the other hand their truly monstrous appearance, tattered clothes or nudity, mindless shrieking and wailing remind the viewer of accounts of Old World revenants. These mutant vampires, manufactured in the New World melting pot of America, is emblematic of the ambivalence at the root of vampire narratives since the 1970s. "I made peace with what I am a long time ago," Nyssa, a pureblood vampire, tells the half-breed Blade.

[19] Even Blade exhibits the desperation of a sick man urgently in need of his medicine every time in the trilogy when he is deprived of the serum that inhibits his own bloodthirst.

This caring, even sensitive, female character speaks for many American vampire characters when she ironically sounds so human.

Blade, though dedicated to defending humanity, is still not at peace with himself nor with the people he fights to protect by the time of *Blade Trinity*. In the third film's plot, directed by David S. Goyer, Blade is pursued by the police for the murder of a human familiar. This predicament by itself is a sign of the vampire's Americanization because even an expert vampirologist cannot distinguish between human and vampire (though the kill-or-be-killed pace of Blade's fights leaves little time for careful study of his opponents). The law enforcement authorities are of course disinterested in any talk of vampires and simply label the film's hero a sociopath. In America Blade is another sort of crazy man, not a respected scholar like Doctor Van Helsing.[20] Also true to American culture and its haste to condemn the Other are the scenes that show the print and television media focusing on Blade's exploits and even presenting subjective judgments disguised as news analysis. The film's pundits talk of keeping the streets safe and other crime and punishment rhetoric that Americans have long since ago absorbed into the collective psyche as an acceptable reactionary discourse. The urban fears find a target in Blade rather than the true threat of vampires who stalk the night. Precisely in line with what Abbott mentions above about the theme of corrupted authority in the *Blade* films, the police chief who appears on television to condemn Blade is in fact a human agent for the vampires. Likewise, after he is captured by the police Blade is "diagnosed" by a psychiatrist who also works for the vampires. Although vampires

[20] Professor Van Helsing would also probably not be welcome in anti-intellectual America, a point played to darkly comic effect in Richard Elfman's *The Revenant* (1999), briefly discussed in chapter 6.

have used human pawns dating all the way back to *Dracula*, the American vampires of the *Blade* films once again represent a network of iniquity that undermines human society on a greater scale than what is possible by an unwitting Jonathan Harker or insane Renfield. The plague brought by these American vampires is not of rats and disease but rather a malaise that infiltrates the civil institutions of contemporary urban America.

This subversion is most apparent in a scene from *Blade Trinity* when Blade and Abigail confront the crooked Police Chief Vreede at a ghastly warehouse where the vampires preserve hundreds of humans in a catatonic state so that they can be consumed later - like food kept in a refrigerator. Chief Vreede tells the vampire hunters, "We're doing a service," by rounding up homeless people around America and storing their bodies in a "processing center in every major city." The chief's role in this scheme subverts his function as a man whose true mission is to serve and protect people. His sick "clean up the streets" discourse, typical of American right-wing ideology, perversely rationalizes a conviction that he is actually fulfilling his duties in the correct way. Updated for the American cinema but linked to the first great vampire story, Chief Vreede, like Renfield, acts out society's madness (Auerbach 165).[21] But this vampire induced insantiy is maybe worse than Renfield's ranting and raving in *Dracula*, especially since the chief is African-American - a member of the group from which most of those homeless people would be kidnapped.

* * *

[21] In another instance of a *Dracula* plot device referenced but heavily modified for the *BladeTrinity* narrative, domesticated vampire dogs replace - for comic relief - the wild wolves, bats and rats originally commanded by Dracula.

Despite the fact that *Blade*, *Blade II* and *Blade Trinity* were filmed by different directors, collectively they exemplify several modes of contemporary Americanization of the vampire:

- Audio and visual references to American youth culture, and this culture's appropriation by the vampires and their adversaries alike
- The vampires' organizations are analagous to American business and/or organized crime cartels. These organizations subvert and corrupt legitimate institutions in order to further vampire schemes
- Dialogue often favors ironic one-liners and other flippant remarks typical of colloquial American English, especially in the stylized human interactions of Hollywood movies.
- An emphasis on tehnology, speed and action over substance and depth. The supernatural element of vampirism is severely diminished in favor of scientific explanations and action movie solutions.
- Vampire behavior, fighting styles and "personalities" are hardly distinguishable from those of the human characters (the savage reavers of *Blade II* nothwithstanding)
- Blade's urban cool and African-American modes of expression (speech, dress, hairstyle, etc.) mark him as possibly the most American of all vampires, though more a product of a witch's cauldron than the melting pot.

CHAPTER 5

"BRING US INTO THE NEW ERA": *INTERVIEW WITH THE VAMPIRE*

Neil Jordan's 1994 adaptation of Anne Rice's vampire novel is an example of the more psychological aspects of the vampire narrative's shift in focus in the American context. This film presents the story of Louis de Pointe du Lac, a wealthy Louisiana planter vampirized by the French vampire Lestat de Lioncourt. Their conflict revolves around Louis' ambivalent initiation into undeath and the complicated relationship between the two vampires. While Lestat has exuberantly embraced his identity and power as a vampire, Louis tries to resist the attraction of evil and maintain some sense of human ethics. The story is told through the narrative device of Louis' automortography recorded by a journalist. As he tells his death story, the film presents the scenes as extended flashbacks. Even though the setting changes to international locales, especially Paris, Louis' American nationality is always significant to the plot. Furthermore, as the *Blade* films diverted the cinematic vampire into the action genre, *Interview with the Vampire* also stands decidedly outside the horror genre as the original in a separate class of films.

As Terence Rafferty already observed, *Interview with the Vampire* is "less a horror movie than a luxurious reverie on horror-movie themes" and "vampire mores." Rice's screenplay abandoned the conventions of horror and suspense in favor of a seductive "fairy-tale darkness" imbued with homoerotic undertones and a sense of danger - definitely not terror (141). Rice herself confirms that she thinks a

vampire "is a romantic, enthralling image. Vampires are tragic; they are not pure evil. They have a conscience, they suffer loneliness. . . . I always saw them as romantic and abstract" (Ramsland "Interview" 34). By making her vampire characters abstract beings disengaged from a source of evil power, Rice is a major contributor to the Americanization phenomenon. It is true that Louis, Claudia, Armand and Lestat are not cursed, soulless or diabolically evil. They can enter churches, gaze on religious symbols and see their reflections in mirrors.[22] They are lesser vampires. However, as romantic, tragic, conscientious characters, they act and think in ways that make them something other than human (Zimmerman 106).

From this uniquely American perspective, we can consider *Interview with the Vampire* as a post-human vampire narrative (Day 9). Undeath is post-humanity in this narrative. Rice's characters are humans in death rather than the aliens of Bunson's definition.

> The post-human vampire most often equates nature with primary biological desires such as sex, aggression, and hunger, along with the notion that our intellects are our most distinctive human quality. Post-human vampires are material beings without the need for ethical choice, because their needs and desires define their behavior. (83)

[22] *Interview with the Vampire* also testifies, like the *Blade* films, to the Americanization of the vampire as a result of advancing secularism (Bartlett and Idriceanu 29). As noted above, Louis tells the interviewer that he even enjoys gazing on crucifixes. In another scene however, it is not the sound of European folklore's chiming bells but rather the voodoo drums of Louis' slaves that disturb the vampire Lestat (Bunson 216). The *vodunsi*, who are true believers in a much more earthbound religion than Christianity, seem to present an alternative counteraction to vampirism. Alas, Jordan's film does not explore the spiritual reasons why African-Americans are so much more sensitive to the vampires than the European descended Louisianans. The African community is presented visually as the only humans capable of confronting the vampires. However, it is Louis himself who grabs a torch from one of his slaves and sets fire to his own mansion in an attempt at self-destruction foiled by Lestat. The slave insurrection is thus presented only as a device for changing the setting and plot direction.

As material beings these vampires, abstract as Rice may imagine them to be, are made-to-order for the material world of the USA. Aggression, sex and consumerism (hunger) are hallmark obsessions in America. Intellect, in this case, we read as ego because of the fundamentally anti-intellectual current that runs through American culture. Though Lestat tries to convince Louis to accept his post-human exemption from ethical choice, Louis' humanity traps him in a tragic dilemma: "Louis is torn between his need to kill in order to 'survive', and his awe for human life. His greatest punishment is that unlike many other vampires, he still retains a conscience as if something of his former self lives on" (Bartlett and Idriceanu 150). The crisis of conscience is one of the narrative's features that appeals to viewers who are not engaged with the film as horror story but rather as unusual, homoerotic, human drama. "We hear the stories of Louis and Lestat, and we know why they do the evil that they do because *we can understand it in terms of our own lives*. The texture is familiar, and in many ways, *they are like us*" (our emphasis)(Smith 12). The "texture" Smith refers to in this case is the confessional or tell-all mode which has followed in the distorted wake of New World psychoanalysis. It is comprehensible to the American audience not because Rice has created original vampires so much as she presents the viewer with peculiarly disturbed post-humans afflicted in ways familiar to fans of daytime television. Day quotes from *The Boston Globe* to highlight the appeal of Rice's characters to American society's outsiders: "Her refugees from the sunlight are symbols of the walking alienated, *those of us* who, by choice or not, dwell on the fringe" (our emphasis)(43). Louis' interview is similar to the sort of discourse publicized by people who, unable to achieve the necessary

introspection or meditation required for healthy self-assessment, submit themselves to the scrutiny of strangers in a desperate grab at affirmation.

Jordan's representation of Rice's vampires embody a central tension in contemporary America, which is to be an individual with a differentiated, self-constructed identity ("be yourself" being a common expression of this attitude) while simultaneously conforming to a discourse that overwhelms the individual with a public culture based on the mind and soul-numbing "American values" of consumerism and egotism (the "me generation" attitude of greed, stimulated by Reaganomics, had peaked shortly before production began on this film)(Day 46). When explaining why he can read people's minds but Louis cannot, Lestat says, "The Dark Gift is different for each of us." This telepathic power differentiates Lestat from Louis, even though they are both vampires and regardless of the fact that Lestat made Louis. It is evidence of individuality and speciality in vampirism. However, Lestat also scoffs at Louis' excruciating attempts to differentiate himself from other vampires by resisting his thirst for human blood. Lestat urges him to be a normal, happy consumer instead of a self-disciplining ascetic. This tension, expressed through the tribulations of vampires, was never a thematic concern in the vampire narrative before Americanization.

The existential debate between vampires can only take place because they are together in the first place. Another reason why this movie is representative of Americanization because the vampires operate in groups. Some approximate a bizarre family (Louis, Lestat and Claudia) and others are a sinister theater troupe (Armand and his Theatre des Vampires). Despite the fact that not all the action

takes place in America, the element of the undead collective is a prominent feature in this narrative.

Brian Frost also affirms that *Interview with the Vampire* is part of a recent trend to increase the quotient of realism in vampire narratives, making the monsters more like humans by stripping them of most of the supernatural attributes with which they were associated before Americanization (116). In one concession to the gothic vampire narrative, Neil Jordan films many scenes at night to establish the mood and link his movie to the traditional vampire film. San Francisco by night, New Orleans and its environs are all photographed with care to convey the nocturnal spirit of New World locations, whether set during colonial times or the late twentieth century. Louis is even turned into a vampire on a fully moonlit night. Images of the full moon are perhaps the only common denominators in the many movies surveyed for this report. Directors seem fascinated by its capacity to intimate the convergence of the natural world with mysterious phenomena. It is the strange symbol of all night prowlers and continues to illuminate even the vampire narratives that no longer associate these refugees from sunlight with the supernatural.

In Jordan's movie there are only rare glimpses of superhuman power (levitation, scaling vertical surfaces, super strength) presented in scenes clearly intended to remind the viewer that the characters he beholds are inhuman or, in the words of Sandra Tomc, ultra-human (96).

A symbol of the Americanized vampire's loss of power and conviction is Louis' diet of rats when he is resisting the urge to drink human blood. Whereas Dracula could control vermin, the depraved American vampire is reduced to

consuming them as a last resort (Bartlett and Idriceanu 104). The vampire narrative's own decadence is also evident in these scenes through the character's definitive transmutation: the secure commander of hundreds of rats has fallen to be an insecure consumer of the odd scurrying rodent snatched from filthy New Orleans streets.

* * *

To play one of the two main post-human or ultra-human characters in this narrative of self-discovery, Jordan cast Tom Cruise as Lestat de Lioncourt. Despite the fact that Lestat was a native Frenchman in life, having Cruise act the role is a key factor in this narrative's American quality. As Tomc observes:

> [T]he vampire's transformation had its corollary in a process of domestication, a process that seemed to be cemented with the casting of Tom Cruise, a squeaky-clean icon of normative masculinity, in the role of the amoral, sexually ambiguous Lestat. . . . Once a menace to the conclaves of average America, he was now a resident. (96)

Cruise as Lestat is the vampire as naturalized citizen of the USA. Though Lestat is a dangerous killer, Cruise's manic acting and *Top Gun* good looks reduce the sensation of a real threat, a horror. As the vampire was once a menace, he is now the wild pretty boy who fascinates the American audience, especially females and male homosexuals. Rice herself initially protested the casting of "All-American" Cruise as Lestat (Ramsland "Interview" 173). But Hollywood's bottom line of

ticket sales stimulated by star power trumped her objections (after viewing the completed film she admitted to having been wrong to criticize Cruise). Once again, we see that extrageneric considerations unique to American narrative prerrogatives have contributed to the monster's New World evolution.

Brad Pitt's Louis also has an "All-American" look that distinguishes his character from others portrayed on film in a New World context previous to this film's release in 1992:

> He has the wistful look of a suburban boy who has ventured into the city on a Saturday night. . . . It would not have surprised the interviewer who spotted him in an alley in San Francisco to learn that he had come up from a town on the Peninsula and that he still lived at home with his parents. (Beebe 196-97)

Of course Louis truly is American, so Pitt's casting is not as controversial as Cruise's. However, as Beebe points out, pretty as Pitt is, his suburban boy looks help the audience see him not as an undead devourer of souls but rather as someone just like us. His inner conflict then also seems like something natural and realistic, even though the dilemma - to kill or not to kill human beings for sustenance - is outside the experience of all but an insane handful of filmgoers.[23]

It is logical then that Lestat and Louis, as post-human, naturalized vampires, likewise maintain a relationship similar to human relationships. In this case, nearly

[23] Louis' quandary is all the more typically (or ironically) American because this creature who was a slaveholder when alive now, as a vampire, suffers such a moral dilemma about the preservation of human life. It is "realistic" that the only unwilling victim whom Louis kills on film in the entire movie is his African maid. Even though the audience is made to understand that Louis eventually gives in to his need to drink human blood from any race, the implication of his visibly devouring the Black girl is that she, being an African slave, is fair game because she does not quite qualify as a human being according to the American colonial mindset.

all scholars have chosen to interpret their partnership as a sort of homosexual relationship without actual sexual intercourse. For the American audience this is a character type easily accepted and, if the critics are to be believed, even expected: "Debatably," says Michael Grey, "the vampire film's metaphysical context allows a wide American audience to accept homoerotic protagonists with fewer qualms than normally evincible" (4). In the scenario presented by *Interview with the Vampire*, Pitt and Cruise can play at homosexuality while projecting that behavior onto and through the actions of post-human characters. The audience - and presumably Rice's legion of homosexual fans before all others - can therefore watch the homoerotic anguish of two good-looking, All-American men playing the parts of vampires who behave like men. This sort of conundrum is at the core of the vampire's Americanization. Even the "threat" of homosexuality is smoothed over by the monster's romantic allure as represented in this queer narrative.

Furthermore, the variation on the role of vampire's victim dramatizes the complicated psychology of a person who wishes to become a vampire, as represented early in the film when Louis, near death after Lestat's attack, inversely sucks the vampire's blood in order to receive the macabre "gift" of vampirism. This scene and situation suggests a sort of harmful psychosis such as co-dependent relationships (Bartlett and Idriceanu 43). Maria Pramaggiore explores the significance of this ambivalence as an important aspect of the way the characters are interpreted as post-human in *Interview with the Vampire*: "The monsters are as enticing as they are despicable, and their victims' fear is matched by an equally compelling desire to give themselves over to the powerfully transgressive energies

associated with creatures who defy all boundaries" (25). We argue that it is the human aspect of these creatures that is so attractive to audiences because they can ignore the despicable monster Lestat when his transgression is so cleverly disguised as a hedonist's right. The scenes in which Louis and Lestat cavort with, kiss and finally kill prostitutes in New Orleans are examples of Pramaggiore's viewpoint. The girls obviously believe they are in the company of high class gentlemen. They sense no putrid breath from the vampires nor cold, clammy skin. They are not disgusted as Jonathan Harker was in Dracula's presence; in short they are undisturbed. The audience sees murderous Lestat as despicable because of the way he plays with his victims, yet in another way his behavior is somehow appealing. If the viewer does not know that he is watching a film protagonized by vampires, then it is reasonable to suspect that many men would want to be in Lestat's position of having attractive women under his power. It is also not too far a conjecture to think that a good number of women would enjoy being kissed by Tom Cruise. When the vampire's behaviors and complexes are so closely approximated to those of the film's viewers, we call this Americanization of the vampire narrative.

In her review of new vampire scholarship, Joan Acocella raises the question of how the viewer or reader may understand the Americanized vampire's behavior and motives: "How can we have sympathy for the Devil and still regard him as the Devil?" (105). Much more than mere rhetoric, this query encapsulates the strange new space in which New World narratives have located the vampire. Disconnected from religion and only relatively evil, the American vampire is no longer a diabolical fiend. Lestat and Louis, Armand and Claudia are not represented as

devils because the American audience does not want to gaze upon its devilish self but rather prefers to hide its vicious tendencies behind excuses of confused identity, depression and moral relativism. In post-Rice films, vampires experience pain, nausea, remorse and existential conflict (Badley 113). While these sensations are universal, our research reveals that their attribution to vampire characters has become an overwhelming thematic element of the American vampire narrative.[24] The viewer of this subgenre is now regularly required to watch a cinematic formula that encourages her to comprehend undeath in terms of her own life.

* * *

Interview with the Vampire is a narrative that addresses how the vampire *becomes* American. Lestat arrives in Louisiana as a French vampire but is gradually Americanized as events influence him. Louis tells the interviewer that some thirty years into undeath "a new world had sprung up around us, and we were all Americans now." Despite the fact that Lestat frowns on democracy, even the undead must follow the flow of history. What Louis basically proclaims is that there was a zeitgeist, a sense of a different culture developing in America. Some of the same forces that were remaking Old World culture into American culture are those which we are indicating as elements in the Americanization of the vampire narrative: secular humanism, relaxation of the class system, consumerism.

[24] Herzog's 1979 *Nosferatu* is a rare vampire film made outside the USA that presents the monster - and Klaus Kinski's Count Orlock certainly is physically repulsive - with emotional concerns similar to those of humans. This is not a post-human vampire, but still shows the influence of the American trend towards naturalization.

America symbolizes change in *Interview with the Vampire*. The French vampire Armand welcomes Louis to Paris precisely because he perceives Louis brings a fresh worldview to the stagnant, jaded, Old World undead milieu. "Ah! Two New World vampires come to bring us into the new era!" he announces when receiving Claudia and Louis in the Theatre des Vampires. In a similar way that Anne Rice considered the traditional vampire narrative held no more interest, her Parisian vampire lord Armand believes the future is to be found in Americanization. Armand knows that his own human soul is long lost, but in Louis he senses a different type of vampire outside the traditional paradigm: a vampire who retains his human soul. "Louis, you are the first spirit of your age," he tells his visitor from abroad. "I need you to make contact with this age." Armand's plea is rebuffed by Louis ("I'm not the spirit of this age"), but Rice and Jordan certainly use this vacillating character to make contact with and develop a new style of vampire storytelling that exhibits a spirit for the modern American cinema.

Jordan makes this clear in the film's final scene. Lestat suddenly appears from nowhere and jumps into the back of the reporter's car while the frantic man zooms away from the interview room. Lestat shoves the interviewer aside, takes the steering wheel and turns on the radio. The Rolling Stones' classic hit "Sympathy for the Devil" begins playing as the camera gradually ascends to a bird's eye shot of the car crossing the San Francisco Bay Bridge. This is a most appropriate ending because indeed the filmgoer is asked, one more time, to sympathize with the newly inspired, madcap Lestat. Except for the antique clothes he still wears, he is now headed full speed ahead into the New World: driving an automobile as all

Americans are encouraged to do, listening to rock and roll music, and set loose in the liberal atmosphere of Northern California, the farthest frontier of American potential. As he laughs joyfully and the soundtrack plays, it is very difficult at this point to still regard him as the Devil.

CHAPTER 6

HOT-BLOODED COLD ONES: LOVE AT *TWILIGHT* AND *THE REVENANT*'S LUST

If Louis de Pointe du Lac has at least one direct descendant it is surely the vampire Edward Cullen from Catherine Hardwicke's 2008 feature film *Twilight.* Based on the wildly popular novel by Stephenie Meyer, this thoroughly Americanized vampire narrative tells the romantic story of a vampire and a girl who fall in love and must deal with the consequences of their daring affair. Edward Cullen and Bella, the teenage girl who loves him, meet in high school. As explained in previous chapters, Americanization depends on naturalizing the vampire characters so that they seem to be humans who "live" in ways that make them fascinating to the audience. In this case, the creation of Edward as a high schooler is a direct appeal to adolescent girls. Shortly after Bella discovers he is a vampire, Edward tells her, "I don't want to be a monster." Like Louis, he wants to retain his humanity so that he can feel the emotion of love. Much of the film's suspense is created by Edward's heroic - yes, heroic - attempt to restrain himself from consuming Bella even though all his vampire instincts tell him to suck her blood. Ironically, this exercise in discipline and restraint is the very epitome of the American puritan ideal. Jennie Yabroff, in her review of this motion picture, believes that the American vampire's newfound morality and ability to resist the

craving for human blood reflect the conservative ideology that currently dominates American culture in general. Following this direction, "America has taken the vampire story and tied it to teen romance" (9). In a similar way to how author J.K. Rowling and her cinematic interpreters remove wizardry from the realm of ancient esoterism and tie it to British private school life in the *Harry Potter* franchise, the vampire narrative clearly and completely runs itself out of the horror film genre and into teen angst with *Twilight*.[25]

The setting is Forks, Washington, a typical American small town. The wide open spaces of the Pacific Northwest are photographed luxuriantly in this film. Except for the constant rain, there are no hints of the gothic aesthetic in *Twilight*. The constant natural lighting even allows for an innovation in the vampire film: Edward does not disintegrate in the dull daylight but rather his skin sparkles as if he were a sort of woodland fairy. In order for him to fulfill his role as American hero, like Blade, he must not only survive in the sunlight but suffer no loss of superhuman strength, speed and endurance.

In the now well-known standard of Americanized vampire film narratives, Edward is part of a vampire "foster family". It is not entirely clear how the Cullens came together, but they are united in their code against killing humans.[26] They first appear as Edward's siblings attending the same Forks High School. These vampires appear as an outsider clique at the high school. They have extremely pale skin, dress in white and drive expensive cars. The Cullens are presented as being weird and

[25] The premise of *Harry Potter* is that sorcerers study magic at school with classmates, teachers and exams. The *Potter* series modernizes the traditional understanding of wizardry. Its producers make light of the iconic image of the misanthropic, mysterious, solitary practitioner (and maybe an apprentice) of arcane arts.
[26] The Cullens hunt and feed on the blood of wild animals.

unusual but not otherworldly. The father figure of the clan, Doctor Cullen, is amazingly the antithesis of a vampire because of his healing capacities. Although the human characters regard the Cullens as odd or freakish, the bourgeois undead group is mostly integrated into the social fabric of Forks.

This sophisticated vampire group resides in an immense home filled with fine art and music. As we have already pointed out, the Americanized vampire's desirability is always associated with material wealth and refinement. *Twilight* is remarkable because of the way it contrasts the affluent, united Cullens with Bella's broken family. It seems to suggest that the post-human Cullens are a more secure model of familial stability than the human units around them. No household is observed closely in the way it would be in a real family drama, but the film is still very much preoccupied with domestic dynamics. In one scene, when Bella goes to visit Edward's house for the first time, the "family" is busily engaged in cooking an Italian meal for the human girl. This scene, perhaps meant as an Americanized update of the scene in which Jonathan Harker dines alone under observation from Dracula, presents the audience with an image of normality that defies the sinister menace intended by Stoker's interpreters.

In a sequence that takes Americanization to the maximum, the Cullens play baseball. "Since when do vampires like baseball?" Bella asks Edward. "Well, it's the American pastime," is Edward's tongue-in-cheek response. By practicing sport - albeit with superhuman abilities - instead of evil, the Americanized vampires of *Twilight* affirm an unpretentious tendency towards human behavior. The single-minded sinister purpose of blood sustenance is reduced to little more than a nuisance

for these post-humans. It is significant that their game is a long scene in which they all appear together, working as teams. Baseball is an apt recreation for the New World vampire because it again reinforces the image of vampires as being characters whose interests (fun competition) filmgoers can understand in terms of their own lives. The viewer cannot leave the theater and then throw supersonic speedballs or catch the ball while floating in mid-air of course, but the idea is still that the Cullens, despite these fantastic abilities, are a fun-loving American family.

The romantic liaison between Edward and Bella is the film's central focus or "inner" narrative. However, tensions and open conflicts between different groups drive the "outer" or secondary plotline. As per the standard device in the Americanized vampire narrative, the Cullens are in conflict with another vampire group. These three evil vampires feed on humans. Their function in the film is to provide a powerful threat that the Cullens must counteract with violent action. However, the criminal aspirations of these vampires are far removed from the complex schemes hatched by Blade's antagonists. More akin to the character types we reviewed in the section on the vampire western, Laurent, James and Victoria are outlaws who commit more mundane crimes. Murder for sustenance is expected of course, but their villainy is also quite conventional as it includes kidnapping and blackmail. James, whose special power is tracking by scent, mimics the stereotyped cinematic psycho killer when he taunts and videotapes captive Bella's painful

ordeal.[27] In the Americanized vampire movie of 2008, the damsel in distress is not rescued by a human hero but is actually saved from one vampire by another. This is a remarkable distortion of roles in a vampire narrative and easily shows how American films totally reform the undead monster.

The Quileutes ethnic group of Native Americans is another group in competition with the Cullens. This is probably the first vampire film to prominently feature Native Americans. The Quileutes traditionally live very close to nature and so therefore recognize the presence of the supernatural when it invades their environment. In an important flashback scene, Bella's Quileutes friend Billy tells her his people's legend of "The Cold Ones" - vampires. The legend depicts the tense encounter between Quileutes and the Cullens over hunting rights. A truce was established, but suspicion and obvious rivalry agitate characters from these groups whenever they cross paths in the film. Both groups live on the margins of Forks and mainstream society. This incorporation of vampires into Native American folklore is an original development in the Americanization phenomenon. Through this aspect of the narrative Hardwicke dates her vampires to the Old West (as the viewer understands by the Quileutes' freedom and the Cullens' dress in the flashback) and links them to the very essence of America.

At another essential level, this film promotes the American fixation with the automobile and other technologies. While fast cars and computers do not have such

[27] The vampires of *Twilight*, similarly to those in *Interview with the Vampire*, are presented as having individuated superpowers. James is "the tracker", Edward can read people's minds just like Lestat, one of Edward's sisters is clairvoyant. These powers are somewhat derived from the catalogue of traditional, even folkloric, vampire abilities. However, in the Americanized vampire film, the powers are meant to verify the inhumanity of the characters rather than reinforce the monstrosity of vampirism.

an important role as in the *Blade* films, Hardwicke still uses them as indispensable aspects of the vampire film. Edward's quick, compact car (and the other expensive automobiles driven by the Cullens) contrasts starkly with the run-down, rusty pick-up truck Bella drives. In one scene when Bella is endangered by a gang of drunken would-be rapists, Edward comes roaring to her rescue behind the wheel. He arrives in this manner ostensibly to hide his vampire identity. However, Hardwicke photographs the scene as if to show Edward as the archetypal action hero from a Hollywood action film. The car becomes a mechanical extension of Edward's power. Once more we can see that the Americanized vampire film aesthetic always presents images of vampires appropriating actions that the audience can identify as "just like us".

Technology figures prominently in Bella's discovery of Edward's identity too. Throughout the film's first half, Edward secretively evades Bella's questions and refuses to disclose information that could expose vampirism. Whereas in the classic vampire narratives the undead are mysterious because of the supernatural aura that surrounds them, in this story the vampire's enigma is cultivated out of oblique, inane dialogues meant to mimic clumsy teenage courtship. Unable to penetrate her boyfriend's personality and finding her friends to be not much help either, Bella does what almost any American teenage girl would do in 2008: she searches for answers on the Internet. The scene that shows Bella seated in her room, surfing web pages related to Quileutes folklore, combines images of traditional americana with the New World's computerized marvel to establish a link that connects the ancient secrets of vampirism to the modern age. With this Native

American folklore revealed on a computer screen, Hardwicke's movie adopts an Americanization strategy similar to that which Stephen Norrington used earlier when introducing the electronically data filed Book of Erebus or Whistler's computers in *Blade*. Technology unlocks secrets in these movies and suggests to the "Information Age" viewer that every answer really can come from a computer.

After Edward's vampirism is known to Bella, the theme of what it really means to be an American vampire is focused in a few conversations between the protagonists. "How long have you been like this?" Bella asks as if Edward's undeath were a disability or chronic medical condition. In fact, as we have already noted, Edward's post-humanity is presented as no more than another way of being American. Edward being "like this" does not repel or frighten Bella anymore than if she had discovered he were, say, an ex-convict. She desires him even without being hypnotized, seduced or propositioned. Just as the New Orleans prostitutes were not repulsed by any fetid breath when intimate with Lestat and Louis in *Interview with the Vampire*, Bella eagerly kisses ice-cold Edward. The overwhelming reason why this story appeals to such an immense audience is that the vampire becomes everything a young girl could wish for.

In the film's climax, his vampirism even becomes a force for good. As Bella lies near death after being bitten and "envenomed" by James, Edward has one chance to save his love. He must also bite Bella but somehow suck the ichor out of her blood so that she will not be damned - if damnation is the right word to describe vampirism in this sort of narrative. This is a risky decision for Edward because he

fears that his hunger for Bella may not allow him to stop sucking her blood, thus provoking the same fate he wishes to prevent.

Twilight is a Hollywood love story after all, so the successful operation is never really in doubt, despite Hardwicke's attempt at suspense. With this scene of sacrifice, vampirism is unequivocally portrayed as a force for love and goodness in the American cinema. At this precise point in the movie, human girl is closest to being a vampire and vampire boy is most natural. Both characters are precariously balanced on the threshold between humanity and monstrosity, and in this predicament the fundamental ambiguity of the American vampire narrative is most acute.

Bella and Edward's awkward romance arguably represents the last vestige of human-vampire relationships. They attend the senior promenade together in the narrative's romantic denouement. In this scene, while dancing close together to the background sound of a pop ballad, Bella proclaims her love for Edward, offers her neck and asks him to turn her into a vampire so that they can love one another for eternity. He is tempted but does not accept. With this expression of sensitivity and self-sacrifice, Edward achieves a superiority over manhood that marks him as a titan of teen romance who could not plausibly exist onscreen if he were not a vampire. We agree with Hutchings who says, "It seems that the transformation of the vampire from villain to something altogether more positive is now complete" (45). Edward's capacity to resist his strongest urges confirms him as either the ultimate American vampire or the first post-human hero.

* * *

A decade before *Twilight*, director Richard Elfman filmed a different take on vampires in love with his darkly comic *Revenant*. Actually it is more appropriate to say that Elfman's highly sexualized Los Angeles vampires are a lusty lot who take Lestat's hedonism to even more outrageous extremes. The setting, images, themes and characters of this little known movie are eminently representative of nearly all the devices we have discussed above. Elfman constructs a film that self-consciously americanizes vampire characters yet mercifully does not take his premise too seriously.

The Revenant is a story about a large group of vampires who have established residence in Los Angeles under the fearsome, organized criminal leadership of "The Count" - Dracula himself. Identical to the vampires from the *Blade* trilogy, Dracula has aligned his cartel with the political establishment so that he can corrupt the law in his favor. As always in their Americanized version, vampires mimic the lifestyles of affluent humans. In this film they disguise themselves as art dealers and, taking a cue from *Blade* again, nightclub proprietors. They drive cars and smoke cigars. One vampire changes into a demonic shape in a preposterous scene when she is gang-raped by vampire hunters whom she has racially insulted. The vampires' blood drinking is also quite savage. However, these are the only sorts of scenes when the vampire characters exhibit inhumanity. The undead have systematically infiltrated L.A. high society and, as we have seen in the other films above, the result of this is naturalization.

The conflict comes from two outside sources. The lone rebel vampire Dallas comes roaring back into town like Blade in his black muscle car. Dallas had been

forced to leave town because of a disagreement with Count Dracula. He returns thinking that enough time has passed so he can rejoin vampire society, but when he takes the vampire prostitute Nico as his lover, he runs afoul of Dracula again. Nico is the rogue "Hollywood Stalker" whose feeding imperils the other vampires' dissimulation. Dracula wants to destroy the reckless, young vampire, and Dallas does everything in his power to protect her. This plotline allows for yet another typical scenario in which rival undead cliques antagonize one another. In the *Blade* trilogy the purebloods square off against turned vampires; Louis and Claudia engage violently with the Theatre des Vampires in *Interview with the Vampire*; the Cullens fight with James and Victoria in the finale of *Twilight*. American vampires are nothing if not factional. Their lack of unity is nearly always a fundamental plot point in these films.

Elfman adds a new element to the vampire vs. vampire device in *The Revenant*. Those who became undead in America resent the likes of Count Dracula and other foreign-made vampires who believe themselves superior and entitled to rule. The fact that vampires can express a sense of American nationalism must be the most blatant evidence we have seen of the vampire narrative's Americanization. In one characteristically hot-headed discussion with Dallas, who has informed her of Dracula's banishment order, Nico expresses her rage at "wetbacks telling American citizens what do do!" Later on, she directly challenges Dracula, shouting at him on a Hollywood street, "I'm American, and no fucking bag of shit foreigner is going to run me out of my own country!" These outbursts confirm that Nico is still driven by a human soul which would not only distinguish but proudly defend a nationality,

citizenship. Furthermore, on a symbolic level, as all the European characters are either destroyed or disgraced by the end of the film, Nico's attitude seems to assure the audience that the American way - even in vampirism - must prevail.

A threat to all the vampires comes from the arrival of Dr. Frederick van Helsing, the vampire hunting descendant of Bram Stoker's Abraham van Helsing character in *Dracula*. Rod Steiger plays Van Helsing for comic effect, portraying the crusading scientist as out of his element in America. This Van Helsing with his thick Viennese accent is not a respected figure in Los Angeles but is harrassed by the police and obliged to ally himself with the Crip gang. Whereas Van Helsing is the epitome of authority in *Dracula*, a narrative in which the persecution of the vampire villain is the main plotline, his Americanized version is marginalized. The relationships between vampires are central to *The Revenant* as they are in nearly every American vampire film. Although Van Helsing's interventions are important to the plot, he is rightfully portrayed as a sort of anachronism and a total foreigner. When his Crip henchmen play loud hip-hop music through the radio in the van he drives, Van Helsing complains in his germanic accent, "I cannot tink wit zat noise playing!" His African-American deputy, Time Bomb, answers: "It's an American thing, just chill." This is only one of several instances in this movie when the Old World character types, plot or vampire clichés openly clash with - and are overturned by - American sensibilities.

The Revenant is also a remarkably American vampire film for its strong sexual content. Bare-breasted females dance sensuously to heavy metal music in Dracula's club; Dallas and Nico somehow manage intercourse in a full moonlit sex

scene filmed slowly in the graveyard; Nico is bisexual, and Elfman shows several shots of her passionately kissing other female vampires. Of course everyone in the media knows that sex sells, and it has always been subtextual in the vampire narrative as well. But vampirism's implicit sexual suggestion in movies before the 1970s achieves explicit representation in this film. Elfman's characters thus embody not only post-humanity but a libidinous, post-puritan polyamory that stands diametrically opposed to Catherine Hardwicke's romantic storyline in *Twilight*. We repeat again for good measure: the representation of undead monsters who can feel amorous desire is a phenomenal innovation within this subgenre. It is one more way in which filmmakers have subverted the audience's capacity to watch and consider vampires as diabolical beings. When Nico confessess to Dallas after their lovemaking, "I didn't know that vampires could do sex," it is another fantastic revelation only to be found in the popular Americanization of the vampire narrative.

CONCLUSION

One hundred years after the publication of Bram Stoker's famous novel *Dracula*, the vampire narrative shows the most radical departure from its basic premise in American motion picture features released during the last 15 years. The *Blade* trilogy, *Interview with the Vampire*, *The Revenant* and *Twilight* are examples of what we observe as the popular Americanization of the vampire narrative. Auerbach believes that "every age embraces the vampire it needs" (145). If so, then the so-called American Century has accepted the post-human vampire, a creature that is as close to humankind in thought, spirit and action as a monster could ever be. Americans need this lively, new, natural representation of the vampire to function in the vanguard of human potentiality as protagonists and antagonists in exhausted film genres. The post-human character is more and less than a person. Vampires can mimic humanity in different sorts of scenarios found in the typical Hollywood film, but their range of actions can alter the normal scheme of such narratives so that extremes of negative behavior (blood thirst, etc.) and positive behavior (saving human lives, etc.) provide alternative plotlines.

Through Americanization, vampires can be superior fighters (Blade), lovers (Nico and Dallas), bon vivants (Lestat) or boyfriends (Edward). "Anne Rice's Louis and Lestat . . . are superior beings whose lives the mortal reader is too ensnared to emulate" (147). Auerbach rates these characters as presenting an image of an individual who is superior to the filmgoer because, as a *consequence* of their cursed

existence, they are refined, elegant, eternally beautiful - everything a person could wish for *including* undeath. Though the post-human condition enslaves the vampire with bloodthirst, the Americanized narrative presents the monster as much more liberated, unrestricted by ethical and physical requirements that constrain the average viewer.

Humanity's convergence with post-humanity brings the vampire to a natural state contrary to standards of the supernatural. As superpowered post-humans rather than supernatural hellspawn, the vampires we have studied correlate to mainstream society more with every motion picture production. Yabroff's comments about Edward Cullen are generally appropriate for describing many of the new breed of all-American undead: "[H]e is exactly the vampire we want right now: sure, he's strong, he can fly and his skin sparkles in sunlight, but more important, he's not going to go and do anything stupid with his 401(k)" (9). That is to say, he or she will fit into the fabric of American life. "Perhaps," muses Day, "that is the vampires' fate, to fade into a low profile, becoming cultural and imaginative good citizens" (172).

We have shown that not all American vampires qualify as "good citizens" even within this new paradigm. Nevertheless, with the undead's waning supernaturalism, the cinematic vampire is rarely a being of absolute evil anymore. Versions of the celluloid vampire until the late twentieth century are meant to be frightening because they violate all the standards of humanity. But as Phillips theorizes, the Americanized vampire is less frightening now exactly because it is always closer to the norm of humanity as it exists in contemporary culture. Louis

and Lestat (in Michael Rymer's *Queen of the Damned*) grant interviews, Blade is the child of mixed parents, the Cullen "family" plays baseball together. These narratives abandon the concept of the vampire as a character who embodies transgression and violation. The boundaries between the netherworld and the natural world, once destabilized by Count Dracula, Count Orlock, Count Yorga and Carmilla, practically disappear into a homogeneous Hollywood Americana in the cinema of the last 15 years.

A notable exception that offers a way forward (backwards?) for the American vampire is Abel Ferrara's strange feature *The Addiction* (1995). In *The Addiction*, Ferrara presents vampirism as an allegory for the human tendency to abandon morality in favor of evil. Filmed in black and white in New York City, this movie implies more supernaturalism than most American vampire narratives that explicitly portray vampires as flying figures who bare fangs and hurl each other around the set. Annabella Sciorra is brilliant, seductive and awfully sinister as the vampire Casanova. She still smokes cigarettes just like Deacon Frost, but as she stalks the Big Apple's streets this character emanates a subtle malignancy more overpowering than the fiercest karate kicks.

Her victim, philosophy graduate student Kathleen Conklin, never actually dies from Casanova's bite, but still becomes a vampire because of her inability to reject evil when given the chance. Her transformation from human to blood addicted devil is a study in the corrupting nature of evil. "What choices do we have?" she asks her creator in the denouement. "It's not like we have options," Casanova answers appropriately. Humans do have options for the directions they

take in life; vampires really have no choice but obey the fiendish blood thirst of undeath. This comprehension has become rare to the point of irreconcilability with the American motion picture industry. The Americanized vampire has so many *more* options even than human characters. *The Addiction* is a gloomy, oblique, inconclusive, independently produced art film. In its indeterminate portrayal of vampirism as an allegory for the powerful attraction of evil, Ferrara's movie is a rare American narrative to restore the vampire character to something close to its mysterious roots.

By and large though, the genre has suffered and continues to decline into popular Americanization. The vampire is increasingly variegated as a film persona and therefore is artistically developed as an imitation of other character types (superhero, conflicted existential anti-hero, loverboy, patriotic streetwalker) rather than cultivated within the parameters of its own archetype. Count Dracula's "absolute evil implied and depended on the existence of an absolute good," Zanger pronounces:

> His ultimate violence was done not to the temporal bodies but to the eternal souls of his victims. Lacking such an option, our new secularized, metonymic, increasingly contiguous vampires must content themselves with bloodier and bloodier slasher killings, and lose with each additional murder some of their original mythic integrity, so that finally they threaten to merge indistinguishably with all the other nightmare monsters and murderers haunting and splattering our popular culture. (26)

Or maybe just as bad, the undead threaten to become totally indistinguishable from the mundane and mediocre realities of the New World's normal waking hours. The violent vampire Zanger describes is still prevalent on the silver screen, but the secularized, metonymic vampire already shows signs of becoming an exceptionally good citizen in the example of *Twilight*.

For a conclusive example we refer to George Romero's intriguing independent film *Martin*.[28] This narrative tells the story of a teenage boy who believes he is an 80-year-old vampire. He arrives in a small steel milling town outside of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, to live with his uncle and cousin. Martin is only a pseudo-vampire, a human blood drinker who thinks he is undead but is obviously a psychotic human being. In a way his madness does make him monstrous, and he kills people to satisfy his insane hunger. Ironically, his devoutly Catholic Uncle Kuda believes wholeheartedly - even fanatically - that the boy is a true, supernatural, undead Old World vampire.

Little does Kuda know that by the time of *Martin*'s release, such characters were no longer to be found in American cinema. We view *Martin* as a film that prophesies the demise of the vampire as a viable character that can stand on its own merits in the current cinema. When Kuda confronts his "Nosferatu" nephew with garlic and the cross, Martin tells him calmly and regretfully, "It isn't magic. Things only appear to be magic. There's no magic ever." This scene and these lines could

[28] Our research shows that the most compelling versions of the Americanized vampire are produced independently of the Hollywood studio system. It would seem that because they are not as enslaved by commercial imperatives, directors like Romero and Ferrara can appropriate the vampire theme to delve into topics of psychosis and evil without bowing slavishly to popular tastes. If the vampire has a future as a character type in American cinema, its most creative direction will most likely be seen in independent films like theirs.

just as well apply to all representations of the vampire in American cinema since the 1970s. Vampires are portrayed to the audience as having powers, as superhuman and immortal. But the mystery and magic are gone from their motion picture appearances, sold like a sack of groceries from Tata Kuda's store. Martin is indeed "A Vampire for Our Age of Disbelief" as the film's promotional tag reads. In the movie's finale Tata Kuda drives a wooden stake through Martin's heart and then buries him in a hole full of garlic in the backyard. Of course vampires have arisen from the crypt time and again to entertain movie audiences. A softer, smoother Edward Cullen will also return to the sound of pop music. Even so, we say this genuinely haunting scene shows us that the authentic monster finally rests as rotten worms' food in the wasted rustbelt of America.

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