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<https://doi.org/10.18297/etd/3867>

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THE GLASS COFFIN:
GOTHIC ADAPTATIONS AND THE FORMATION OF SEXUAL SUBJECTIVITY

By

Colton T. Wilson
B.A., University of Louisville, 2013

A Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty of the
College of Arts and Sciences of the University of Louisville
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of

Master of Arts
in English

Department of English
University of Louisville
Louisville, Kentucky

May 2022

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A Thesis Approved on:

April 13, 2022

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DEDICATION

To Amirage Saling, Gloria “Mama Gee” Walker, and Papaw Rumsey Woodcock,
whose love and support are so powerful they transcend the grave.

&

For Dylan Vex, who welcomed me back into this world of gods and monsters.

You will forever be the cat to my canary.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my chair, Dr. Deborah Lutz, for her patience, sage advice, and guidance through all things Gothic. There were times I was certain this thesis—like the vampires it celebrates—would never see the light of day, and without her wealth of knowledge and experience that may well have come to pass. I would also like to thank Dr. Karen Hadley, whose seminar on biopolitics was a highlight of my graduate career and introduced me to many of the theoretical tools that helped shape this project. Also, I would like to thank Dr. Kaila Story-Jackson, whose activism and courses on LGBTQ studies inspired a young queerdo from the country to explore the connections between sexual identity, media, and political advocacy. Lastly, I would like to thank all of the family and friends that helped me survive through the most trying two years: Nanny Peggy, Sierra, Baleigh, Parker, Dave, Matthew, Alex, Reid, Dylan, and the staff of the Kentucky Care Coordination Program. When the real monsters come clawing at my door, I know I can always find a safe home in you.

ABSTRACT
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Colton T. Wilson

May 14, 2022

It is now an almost foregone conclusion that classic depictions of vampirism resonate with contemporary queer audiences. A sympathetic response to the monster's persecution is often the key factor in these arguments, yet little attention is paid to the textual details that prompt such a process of identification. This study posits that the iconography used to establish a connection between monstrosity and non-normative sexuality has its origins in Victorian Gothic fiction, whose descriptions of vampirism were assimilated into the discourse of the fin-de-siècle medical field known as sexology. Theories that defined homosexuality as an illness with physical and psychological symptoms in turn influenced Late Victorian vampire literature and its translation into twentieth-century cinematic and televisual content. An analysis of these adaptations shows how a readily accessible assemblage of grotesque Gothic symbology and popular scientific ideology help constitute a secure space for exploring queer identity I have termed the "glass coffin."

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“This is gonna be torture
before it’s sublime
Does that make it crazy?”

Caroline Polachek, “Ocean of Tears”

INTRODUCTION: GOTHIC MEDIA AND QUEER SUBJECTIVITY

In an era when the misfiling of a horror film on Netflix can result in the creation of an accidental LGBT icon—as happened to the titular monster of Jennifer Kent’s *Babadook* in the summer of 2017—it is hardly novel to make a connection between elements of Gothic literature and contemporary manifestations of queer sexuality. Dale Townshend, in his contribution to the collection *Queering the Gothic*, cleverly asserts that the predominant interpretive association of Gothic fiction with psychosexual metaphors suggests “the task of queering the Gothic has already been achieved...or...was never necessary in the first place” (12). From the Boulet Brother’s hunt for the next “drag supermonster” in reality competition *Dragula*, to the controversy surrounding Lil Nas X’s “satanic” lap dance video for “Montero (Call Me By Your Name),” one thing is clear—a large segment of the queer community identifies with, and revels in, the metaphor of the monstrous. To many, it may seem paradoxical that an already oppressed minority group would valorize the types of images that have historically played a hand in their own victimization. What, if anything, would queer people stand to gain from adopting a self-image that recognizes and incorporates depictions of sexual affinity that

have been demonized by discourses of science, religion, and literature? How might this cultivation of a monstrous queer subjectivity function, to borrow from Gothic and queer theory pioneer Eve Sedgwick, as a form of “reparative reading” that provides “room to realize that the future may be different from the present” (*Touching* 146)? In short: why would any queer person actively choose to consume media that almost inevitably involves the annihilation of the character coded as a sexual “other?”

While critics like Harry Benshoff and Jack Halberstam have explored the dualistic nature of the queer monster as a regressive and radical symbol, less attention has been paid to how these superficially negative portrayals of sexual “deviance” are recuperated on an individual and group level. Ironically, foundational tenets of feminist and queer psychoanalytic criticism are partially responsible for such oversight. Laura Mulvey’s discipline-defining theory of the “male gaze” reconceptualizes spectatorship in patriarchal culture as a process of objectification only benefitting male viewers. Expanding on Freud’s concept of scopophilia, or the “pleasure in looking” associated with sexual response, she finds that the focus on female bodies in narrative cinema reaffirms men’s autonomy by reducing women to visual fodder (Mulvey 24). Where Mulvey’s theory and its applications falter is in their unwillingness to interrogate the presumed heterosexuality of artistic content and audience composition. Nearly every supernatural being has a referent in the public imaginary intimated to be “queer,” constituting a cross-media typology of non-normative sexuality that is conspicuously absent from discussions of the male gaze. Perhaps the dependence on metaphor in place of overt descriptive elements is what causes these mechanisms to be overlooked? Gothic texts have grown to include increasing instances of varied genital contact in the centuries

since their development, but a creature's queerness is most frequently made apparent through their juxtaposition with an endangered breeding pair; traditional heterosexual bliss, the Romantic core of the Gothic, is regularly pitted against a menacing—and mincing—monster. Of course, the status quo is usually restored by the story's conclusion, when “the villain and/or monster is destroyed by a public mob or its patriarchal representatives, and the ‘normal’ couple are reinstated after safely passing through their queer experience” (Benshoff *Monsters* 37). The prevailing assumption is that these endings override any opportunity for entertainment or reflection, effectively ignoring how non-normative subcultures must necessarily engage and filter all media created by the dominant culture. Although the pains of queer spectatorship are often emphasized, the pleasures of identification have been sorely neglected. The following pages will endeavor to examine how an assemblage of grotesque symbology, popular scientific ideology, and subversive reading strategies help constitute a secure space for exploring queer identity that simultaneously embraces the emblematic difference of the monster and rejects the normalizing imperative considered typical of the Gothic mode.

To trace a genealogy for each individual archetype of queer monstrosity would ultimately undermine any attempt at isolating discreet instances of identification. In an effort to narrow the focus of this project, I have made a pair of critical choices. The first of these regards the selection of a single Gothic monster as the object of investigation: that signifier of sexual excess par excellence, the vampire. More than merely a metaphor for non-normative eroticism, the indiscriminate appetites of Dracula and his kin are reproduced in fledglings whose desires similarly strain against the boundaries of the hetero/homo binary. If the “uncanny power” of Gothic texts derives from their ability “to

reveal the mechanisms of monster production,” the figure of the vampire “represents the production of sexuality itself” (Halberstam 106; 100). To be certain, the erotic idiosyncrasies of the Victorian-era vampire are often buried beneath mounds of metaphor. Barry Mcrea finds that *Dracula* contains “little or no psychological insight” into the Count’s motives for interfering with the marriages of two English couples but argues “a careful reading of the text in terms of the generic conventions it deploys” reveals it to be “a novel about heterosexuality as it is viewed from inside the gay closet” (252-53). Gothic media from the late twentieth century is generally much more explicit in its portrayal of homoeroticism, with series such as Anne Rice’s *The Vampire Chronicles* centering around same-gender relationships and/or failed attempts at assimilation. Nevertheless, these stories still end by appearing to exterminate the threat, indicating that visibility does not necessarily override the value systems intrinsic to the Gothic (and Western culture at large). Instead, they present the possibility for a sort of doubled queer consciousness, one that delights in the liberating force of danger but also comprehends the danger inherent in liberation. It is this liminal space of spectatorship I wish to term “the glass coffin”—a nod to the concept of the “glass ceiling” that acknowledges the precarious position shared by the queer vampire and viewer—which is the focus of this study.

Much like the feminist and queer writings that have foregrounded concerns of representation and viewing, film and television have served as the most popular site of vampire narratives for the last fifty years. Many of these texts adapt now-canonical Victorian Gothic tales that would have been considered populist entertainment in their own time. J. Sheridan Le Fanu’s novella “Carmilla” was originally serialized in literary

magazine *The Dark Blue* and initial copies of Bram Stoker's *Dracula* were "sold for six shillings and wrapped in yellow cloth" (Davison 19). Though vampires first appeared in British fiction during the Romantic period, their popularization in mass-market publications of the Victorian era inspires the second of my theoretical limits. Driven by the unpretentious origins of these two fanged figureheads, this study will primarily concentrate on reimaginings of Le Fanu and Stoker's stories in mid-twentieth century exploitation cinema and daytime television. Low culture in terms of budget, subject matter, and appearance, exploitation films circulated on a secondary "grindhouse" market expected to appeal to a mass demographic less concerned with the quality of a feature than the quantity of flesh displayed. Free from the restraint foisted upon major studios by ratings boards and wealthy backers, their experimental aesthetic challenges long-held standards of representation and respectability. That many of these films have received critical reappraisal in recent years only further emphasizes the ideological slant behind their branding as vulgar entertainment. Once dismissed as cheap cash-ins, the lesbian vampire films of the 1970s now occupy a status film historians Ernest Mathijs and Xavier Mendik refer to as "midcult," meaning they have "a kind of mainstream appreciation that is high enough to not be ridiculed and yet popular enough to be widely accessible" (18). Televisual production, at least in the decades before the advent of streaming services and prestige programming, also operated on shoe-string budgets and schedules intended to maintain the breakneck pace of weekly broadcasts. Similar to other daytime programming of the late 1960s, Dan Curtis's Gothic soap opera *Dark Shadows* "shot live on tape, five days a week, with limited rehearsal time," permitting it to attract both "middle and working class housewives and a juvenile audience of approximately eight- to

fifteen-year-olds of both sexes” (Worland 172; 170). Situating the evolving representation of the queer vampire within contexts which mirror their earlier circulation and reception allows for a consideration of how the original texts differentiate types of sexuality—and the connection these depictions have to contemporaneous developments in science and social planning—as well as how such classificatory gestures have persisted into present public memory.

This claim of an ideological cross-pollination between representations of monstrosity in Victorian fiction and psychosexual models of queer identity contradicts previous efforts to dissociate the two discourses. Robert Mighall’s *A Geography of Victorian Gothic Fiction* faults literary critics for lionizing psychoanalytic theories of subjectivity. Critiquing how this “pull to interiority” obscures issues of history and environment, he offers an epistemological analysis which explores how notions of progress in nineteenth-century science and geography produce their opposite in order to “locate the past and represent its perceived iniquities, terrors, and survivals” (Mighall xi; xiv). For Mighall, the fear at the heart of the Gothic is one of evolutionary decay and social decline, embodied by monsters with markers of foreignness, superstition, and criminality. With the clarification of this central theme, he claims that the equation of vampirism and sexuality in modern culture and criticism operates on the mistaken assumption that two divergent spheres of knowledge share comparable goals. While a scientific field such as sexology endeavors to isolate, explain, and correct abnormalities in the social fabric, Gothic fiction imagines the continual threat to these regulatory systems. Consequently, the horror in vampiric texts “derives not from the emergence of some erotic anxiety played out on the symbolic screen of representation” but “the failure

of the erotic and the sexological to contain and explain away the monstrous and the supernatural” (227). Curiously, for a polemic focused on recentering the treatment of the past in Victorian Gothic literature, Mighall pays little attention to the ongoing influence of Gothic-inflected psychological theory on other cultural institutions. Whether the association of alternative sexualities and monstrosity is indeed attributable to the texts themselves (or serves as a gross misreading of their context), the understanding of the Gothic as a psychological, subjective mode has permeated the public consciousness for over a century—or at least since Freud utilized Hoffman’s *The Sandman* to explicate his popular theory of the uncanny (136). When considered in tandem with discourses of history and science, it becomes evident that psychosexual interpretations of life and literature also produce their own systems of knowledge; a fact further supported by the persistence of psychoanalysis in the disciplines of gender and queer studies. Therefore, it is not a question of “correctness” of interpretation that will be considered below, but rather how media influenced by these discourses have helped to construct queer ways of being, knowing, and surviving in a world that makes you monstrous.

To some, my lived experience as a queer consumer of horror media might bring my ability to conduct a balanced, impartial reading of Gothic texts into question—and rightfully so. In his article “Seduced and Abandoned: Lesbian Vampires on Screen, 1968-1974,” David Baker claims that critical literature has unjustly restricted the title monster to two mutually exclusive interpretations, as either a manifestation of male insecurity or a potential tool for feminist rebellion. For Baker, the impulse to homogenize stems from a lack of critical distance in essays largely penned by queer women authors, “an overinvestment in the figure of the lesbian vampire herself within these particular

narratives” (Baker 556). Examples of this purportedly problematic proximity appear throughout academic theory and queer popular culture. The title of Nina Auerbach’s 1995 monograph *Our Vampires, Ourselves*, and self-styled lesbian vampire Annie Rose Malamet (of the *Girls, Guts, & Giallo* podcast) provide only two of many cases in which monstrous fictions are mapped onto an individual or group identity. Useful for understanding the blind spots produced in the process of self-recognition, Baker’s analysis unfortunately stops short of asking a more fundamental question: what drives queer culture’s intense attachment to depictions of their vampiric counterparts? Rather than merely viewing this closeness as a source of bias, I would like to consider it a key strategy of minority media consumption in a homophobic society. Under this light, the complicated critical response to lesbian vampires anticipates Laura Westengard’s elaboration of reparative writing as a queer, Gothic cultural practice that “pieces together the shards of traumatically fractured cultural objects and experiences to create new monstrous practices that attend to the horrors of humiliation, invalidation, and the undercurrents of a society in which queers are always already cathected to death” (41). My hope is that the following pages even partially convey how powerful queer audiences become when they are seduced by hegemonic representations and then abandoned to their own devices.

CHAPTER I

THE CONFINING COMFORT OF THE COFFIN: VAMPIRES AND THE CLOSET

Tracing the vampire's century-spanning journey from folkloric fearmonger to parasitic pervert to deified deviant reveals a shift in structures of power and their processes of acculturation. English Gothic fiction emerged in a post-feudal Britain recovering from the overhaul of its economic and class systems. The move toward a capitalist economy in the eighteenth century resulted in a redistribution of wealth and the creation of the middle class. Gothic literature, with its depiction of the aristocracy as antiquated and barbaric, illuminates the dark fears of regression plaguing this upwardly mobile segment of society. Christopher Baldick argues that the vampire tale in particular functions to exorcise these anxieties "because it encapsulates for a more democratic age a fantasy model of decadent aristocratic cruelty which we need to sacrifice over and over again" (xxi). Yet, the creature rarely poses a direct threat to large financial institutions and their assets. Rather than draining bank accounts, Dracula and his kind drink from the emblem of capitalism's expansion: the middle-class, nuclear family. Michel Foucault details the processes by which the bourgeois family unit was instated as the central concern of social, legal, and scientific institutions in the nineteenth century, namely through exercises of a nascent power he terms "biopolitics." Prior to the seventeenth century, tradition placed the responsibility for individual discipline in the hands of a sovereign with "the right to take life or let live;" during the rise of Western liberal

democracy over the next two hundred years, “the problem of life began to be problematized in the field of political thought” and the scope of political power expanded to also focus on regulation, or “the power to make live and let die” (Foucault *Society* 241). The twin tools of industrialization and colonization required for capitalist profit resulted in the reconceptualization of humanity as a mass population whose equilibrium is necessary to both drive and meet exponential demands for consumption. To ensure productivity, reproductive practices and the discourses surrounding them became central considerations of the State and its public institutions. Discussions of sex moved from the bedroom and bordello to the boardroom and beyond. It is at this cultural crossroads that both modern sexuality and Late Gothic literature arise (and intersect).

The application of the regulatory and disciplinary mechanisms of biopolitics to the newly formed “social body” led to the development of the Victorian science of sexology. One of several fields tasked with the imperative to “medicalize the population” through a focus on public hygiene, sexology gained influence through institutions designed to “coordinate medical care, centralize power, and normalize knowledge” around the “problems of reproduction” (Foucault *Society* 244). Foucault, famously undermining the axiom that Victorian culture repressed discussions of sexuality, cheekily paints a portrait of the nineteenth century as sex obsessed. As such, State apparatuses of education, medicine, and law disseminated information surrounding prohibited practices—including any non-procreative sexuality activity—to inculcate the masses with an ideology that bolstered capitalism by promoting acts of self-discipline and self-regulation. The need to identify and categorize “proper sexuality” via a process of negative definition produced “a dispersion of sexualities, a strengthening of their

disparate forms, a multiple implantation of ‘perversions’” (Foucault *History* 37).

Foucault’s bold reversal of rhetoric has often been misinterpreted to suggest that queer experience prior to the nineteenth century only manifested as a series of acts and not a discrete, personal identity. Instead, the Victorian era should be understood as the moment when non-procreative sex became increasingly scrutinized and policed at a larger sociopolitical level, functionally isolating it as a marker of individuation and (inadvertently) signaling a new need for subterfuge. Encompassing an absolute otherness to be internalized across all social strata, sexuality “was tracked down in individual behavior, pursued in dreams; it was suspected of underlying the least follies, it was traced back into the earliest years of childhood; it became the stamp of individuality” (Ibid 146).

At the same moment these biopolitical techniques of differentiation began to isolate and persecute certain identities, they also produced the possibility for reappropriation. Sharon Marcus has shown in *Between Women* how heteronormative Victorian culture could condone and exploit homoeroticism in the service of patriarchy—even condoning the practice of female marriage. However, she is careful not to position her discoveries as a substitute for earlier understandings of Victorian eroticism, but as a parallel history coeval with a legacy of pathologization (Marcus 22). Alongside such genealogies stands a subcultural tradition of collectivity predicated on a familiarity with predominating depictions of deviance. Forced to scavenge for representation, incipient forms of queer culture endured and internalized undue horrors to cultivate an alternative subjectivity rendered visible by the overlap of medicine and monstrosity.

Considering the conjunction of increasing literacy rates, public hygiene campaigns, and the boom in cheap horror serials called “penny dreadfuls,” it is no

coincidence, to quote George Haggerty, that “the cult of Gothic fiction reached its apex at the very moment when gender and sexuality were beginning to be codified for modern culture” (2). More than merely a fictional threat to thrill the reading public, Victorian vampire fiction surreptitiously conveys the message that any threat to capitalist imperialism is a danger to life everywhere. If the Gothic’s preoccupation with corrupted bloodlines is positioned as a literary expression of biopolitical philosophies on population management, then monsters are its “meaning machines,” inextricably tied to anxieties surrounding heredity and reproduction (Halberstam 21). Hence the well-worn trope of the endangered straight couple whose resolve is tested and reinforced by their eventual triumph. Understood in Foucauldian terms, both Gothic fiction and its creatures function as technologies of power, demonstrating the limits of propriety by showcasing the most excessive images of its opposite. The monster becomes a stand-in for all undesirable forms of difference through the exercise of “Gothic economy,” a characteristic use of metaphor which “constructs a monster out of the traits which ideologies of race, class, gender, sexuality, and capital want to disavow,” conjuring the “perfect figure for negative identity” (Ibid 102; 21). Capitalist production’s increased demand for efficiency even extends to its fictional threats, with all deviations from the white, middle-class, heterosexual norm understood as expressions of genetic deficiencies passed on through improper breeding. The vampiric threat of degeneration waits in the dark recesses of one’s own body and must be stamped out at an individual level to avoid the consequences of exposure. Stephen King spectacularly dramatizes this “implantation of perversion” in *Salem’s Lot*, his homage to *Dracula*. During a dialogue between a priest and protagonist Ben Mears, the former explains that actual vampires have survived into the modern day

because the Manichean concept of absolute external Evil has been replaced by multiple internalized evils. Pointing to the popularization of psychoanalytic concepts as the impetus for this change, the priest declares the devil, “at least according to the Gospel According to Freud, would be a gigantic composite id, the subconscious of all of us” (King 329). In Victorian vampire fiction it is no longer simply the aristocracy who typify monstrosity through their connection to an archaic past; every citizen is instructed to become both the living dead and the monster hunter, killing off those parts of themselves which do not serve the obligations of Empire.

Influencing and influenced by the mass-market, sexology (and later psychoanalysis) made its theories of degeneracy intelligible by repurposing pre-existing notions of subjectivity and monstrosity popularized in Gothic literature. Haggerty traces this reciprocal exchange between discourses of non-normative sexuality in his revolutionary study *Queer Gothic*. He claims, as early as *Castle of Ontranto*'s eighteenth-century troping of the damsel in distress, the primary source of fear in Gothic texts surrounds the violation of sexual mores; consequently, the mode “offer[s] the one semirespectable area of literary endeavor in which modes of sexual and social transgression were discursively addressed on a regular basis” (Haggerty 3). The perceived corruption of “The Dark Ages” is recast in explicitly sexual terms, with the interchangeableness of incest, rape, necrophilia, and sodomy implicating all “perversions” as equally responsible for cultural decay. These renderings of destructive passions recapitulate and reinforce arguments that any attempt to bridge the gap between discourse and daily life under a biopolitical regime requires the self-policing of non-normative traits. Becoming a scrutable subject always already involves a process of

subjection, meaning there is “no ‘subjectivity’ not shaped by violence and defined by loss” (30). The disavowal of all desires outside of State-sanctioned procreation engenders an effect of “melancholia” in Early English Gothic texts and their progeny—a psychic state characterized by dejection, anhedonia, and a perpetual longing for the uninhibited sense of self sacrificed to achieve personhood. Subjectivity within capitalist constraints can, only be secured by mobilizing “a fear of sexuality as terrorized and terrorizing” (28). Le Fanu stages this scene of subjectification on a microcosmic scale in “Carmilla.” The titular vamp’s charged declarations to protagonist Laura—herself nineteen and in the prime of fertile womanhood—equate eroticism with violence, shame, and parasitism. “[I]f your dear heart is wounded, my wild heart bleeds with yours,” Carmilla confides; “In the rapture of my enormous humiliation I live in your warm life, and you shall die—die, sweetly die—into mine” (Le Fanu 263). Laura’s ambivalent response registers the complex web of negotiations required to maintain her position in polite society. Any ounce of pleasure is balanced by a pang of guilt: “I was conscious of a love growing into adoration, and also of abhorrence. This I know is paradox, but I can make no other attempt to explain the feeling” (264). To obtain selfhood in a biopolitical system is, therefore, to continually wrestle with this irresolvable conflict between desire and disgust.

Stories of “unseemly” female friendships like that of Carmilla and Laura appear throughout Victorian Gothic literature, but it places relationships between men under the greatest scrutiny. Sedgwick relates this literary development to the establishment of male homosocial bonds as the primary structure for patriarchal capitalism. Stewards of all public life, middle-class Victorian men engaged in exchanges of property—including the

women of their household—to secure social standing (*Between* 25). Such close connections are generally triangulated through female conduits to prevent the possibility of their being misconstrued, as can be gleaned from Quincey Morris’s letter to Arthur Holmwood in *Dracula*. Written upon learning of the latter’s engagement to the mutual object of their affection, Lucy Westenra, Morris recalls intimate moments when the men “told yarns by the camp-fire in the prairies; and dressed one another’s wounds” (Stoker 52). Any air of homoerotic camaraderie is, however, quickly contradicted by his congratulatory invitation. Along with Seward, Lucy’s other suitor, he proposes another night by the campfire to “drink a health with all our hearts to the happiest man in the whole wide world, who has won the noblest heart that God hath made” (Ibid.)

Unfortunately, homoerotic tensions are not always so easily defused. Homophobic ideology and its physical counterpart of violent homosexual panic appear in Victorian Gothic texts as a regulatory mechanism for such social interactions decades before “the homosexual” would coalesce into a distinct sexual category. The stalking of central male characters, followed continuously by cruel doppelgangers and other man-like monsters, most often concludes with an attack that destroys either one, or both, of the participants. The later classification and medicalization of same-gender attractions have their basis in these tropes. It makes little difference that sexual exchanges between men stop short of explicit textual detail, since State-sanctioned homophobia does not require the preexistence of queer men—instead its power is derived “from its potential for giving whoever wields it a structuring definitional leverage over the whole range of male bonds that shape the social constitution” (Sedgwick *Between* 86). Control of the masses is made

possible in part through popular literary discourses which locate the responsibility for restricting intimate connections and personal beliefs at the level of individual interiority.

Sexological theory's bifurcated understanding of queerness as a larger social disease *and* diagnosable individual trait appears in the aftermath of this biopolitical shift. The category of the "urning," a "third sex" posited by Karl Heinrich Ulrichs in the mid-1800s, repositioned male homosexuality as a natural, inborn impulse caused by the development of a female psyche in a male body (Kennedy 3). Initially intended as a tool for advocacy, the principles of urning theory were quickly distorted to serve State institutions. Italian criminologist Cesare Lombroso appropriates the notion of inbred abnormalities to construct a theory of biological atavism in his foundational study *Criminal Man* (1876). Merging elements of anthropology and psychology with pseudo-sciences such as physiognomy, Lombroso elaborates on the phenotypical signs of moral degradation and equates queerness with other forms of criminal insanity that manifest as confused gender expressions. An inability to abide by the guidelines of social decorum is described as a form of developmental delay. Homosexuality, linked to a child-like conception of physical gratification, is made to be synonymous with the abuses of pederasts, depicted as a physically inferior stock who possess feminine features and "go out in public laden with jewels, their necks exposed and their hair curled. Combining wicked habits with exquisite taste" (Lombroso 73). Though not always classed as sexual deviants, criminal women are similarly "weaker than the insane and more often masculine looking" (Ibid 57). Richard von Krafft-Ebbing combines Ulrich's work with contemporaneous discourses on disease and criminality in *Psychopathia Sexualis* (1886) to delineate a homosexual "type." Same-gender attraction is presented as the confluence

of “improper” activities like childhood masturbation with a congenitally weakened nervous system, resulting in misdirected desires accompanied by neurasthenia, an ill-defined “group of medical symptoms” characterized as a “sort of mental lassitude” (Watson-Williams). The prescribed cure for this melancholia-in-disguise is simply abstinence, a small salve for the alienation from self and society. Ultimately the root of queer inclinations was interpreted as both an unseen hereditary taint, which hypothesizes an “*acquired* abnormal inclination for the same sex in ancestors,” and a localized threat of individual “abnormal psycho-sexual constitution” (Krafft-Ebbing 222;186). “Carmilla” similarly suggests Laura’s ancestry is to blame for her weakness to vampirism. She and Carmilla are revealed, via matrilineal succession, to be descended from the same family of Austrian nobility (Le Fanu 294). Rumored to have died out with its male heirs, the Karnstein birthright lives on in Laura, capable of impacting thoughts and physical drives. Deprived of other options, her eventual betrayal of Carmilla becomes the method of reducing the possibility of contagion for both herself and the local community.

However foolhardy it might appear to assume that specialized scientific material on psychology and sexology was accessible to lay audiences, Stoker’s prose is littered with allusions to these discourses. In a conference with Jonathan and Mina Harker, Professor Van Helsing diagnoses Dracula as “predestinate to crime” due to his “child-brain,” proclaiming his hope “that our man-brains that have been of man so long and that have not lost the grace of God, will come higher than his” (Stoker 293; 292). These words loosed from the lips of a medical doctor, albeit one created by an untrained author, come as little surprise. It is Mina’s reply which gives cause for a pause. Noting that “Lombroso would so classify him,” she echoes the good doctor’s assessment of Dracula’s

criminal character and “imperfectly formed mind” (Stoker 293). Halberstam reads this moment as testimony that, during the Victorian era, “ideas of criminality and degeneracy were familiar to an educated readership rather than specialized medical knowledge” (93). Yet, “familiarity” is hardly strong enough to describe Mina’s engagement with popular theories. Her contribution to the conversation signifies a sincere belief in the principles of early psychopathology. Having absorbed their ideas on internal life into her own personal dogma, she cannot help but to conceive of the vampire’s curse as the consequence of an innate biological inferiority. Pioneering sexologist Havelock Ellis would attempt to recuperate the concept of inborn homosexuality in *Sexual Inversion* (1896), published a year before *Dracula*, by positioning queer desire as one inevitable and unchangeable outcome of sexual maturation. However, the advent of psychoanalysis and Freud’s eventual stranglehold over psychosexual theories of development once again recast non-normative sexuality as a mental illness stemming from genetic predisposition and damaging cross-gender identifications. Given the emphasis of sexological efforts and their general mission to weed out polluted—and polluting—bloodlines, what other monster but the vampire could assume the preeminent position in the pantheon of queer perversion?

One major outcome associated with this new equivalence between evil and psychosexual aberration is the further partitioning of public and private life, creating a figurative space commonly known as “the closet.” As a cramped, dark space with room for only one occupant, the closet signifies a state of in-betweenness, an awareness of one’s queer identity necessarily coupled with a fear of consequence for making it known. Building on her earlier argument that “most patriarchies structurally include homophobia,

therefore patriarchy structurally requires homophobia,” Sedgwick declares that predominant models of modern Western epistemology “are structured—indeed, fractured—by a chronic, now endemic crisis of homo/heterosexual definition” (*Between* 4; *Epistemology* 1). The imposition of this sexual binary in the late-nineteenth century had cultural ramifications far beyond the scope of biological reproduction, shaping discourses around disclosure and secrecy, decency and criminality. Such a confluence of opposing critical definitions is evident in England’s 1885 Labouchere Amendment, which made all “acts of gross indecency” between men a criminal offense (Castle 6). Colloquially known as the “Blackmail Charter” owing to its use in extortion scandals, the law weaponized male homosexuality by portraying the poor pervert as the cause of his own undoing. Survival within a biopolitical system depends, then, on a withholding of knowledge about the self and a willful ignorance about the lives of others. Sedgwick, however, is careful to remind us that ignorances are actually “produced by and correspond to particular knowledges and circulate as part of particular regimes of truth” (*Epistemology* 8). Thus, while male desire is overtly effaced, queer women are conspicuously absent from most Victorian legislation and literature. As patriarchy filters eroticism through a masculinist lens, lesbianism is rendered unrepresentable by its assimilation into a theory of homosexuality where maleness is the default. The refusal to even acknowledge non-normative female desire produces what Terry Castle has termed a “ghosting” effect, by which queer femme experience is “made to seem invisible...by culture itself” (4). A reversal of the methods used to diffuse tensions around male homosociality, the spectralization of sapphic passion equally serves to support patriarchal definitions of gender-appropriate behavior. Whether male, female, or non-binary, the

closet stands as a generalized symbol for the split subjectivity queers require to navigate the minefield of capitalist morality, with the glass coffin representing a genre-specific response to the splitting of private and public spheres of knowledge.

The constant self-policing of speech and action necessary to maintain the boundaries of the closet often presents as a form of hypervigilance which psychosexual theories term “paranoia.” Since homophobic culture requires that conversations around queerness “have as their *first* referent a psychology and sociology of prohibition and control,” members of both minority and majority sexual groups are compelled to relentlessly monitor their surroundings for suspicious activity (Sedgwick *Between* 116, emphasis in original). For queer people, this involves more than simple self-restraint; it also means suffering in silence during—and sometimes participating in—disparaging discussions about their secret identity. Westengard employs the concept of “insidious trauma” to name the damaging effect caused by “the repetitive, daily injustices and vulnerabilities queer communities have faced but that have not been widely acknowledged” (15). In contrast to traditional models of trauma that attempt to locate its origin in an inciting event, a theory of insidious trauma recognizes a gradual accretion of psychological distress in response to daily microaggressions. The air of antisocial despondency central to medicalized discourses of queerness has, then, been misinterpreted as a defining characteristic of a condition rather than a response to “the overwhelmingness of existence in a heteronormative, homophobic society” (Westengard 5). Sexology and its offspring of Freudian psychoanalysis have so thoroughly established the link between same-gender attraction and mental illness as to completely cover the traces of their machinations. A reasonable fear of being watched is transformed into a

self-conscious narcissism-cum-neuroticism that allows medical institutions to “reinscribe homophobia and control sexuality through paranoia-as-diagnosis” (Ibid 38). Gothic literature itself is partly to blame for normalizing this false equivalence, given that its tales of sexualized terror are so imbued with an atmosphere of suspicion as to constitute a subcategory of the mode Sedgwick calls “paranoid Gothic.” In these stories the male protagonist’s brush with perversion typically takes the form of a homosexual panic that viciously reaffirms his straightness, suggesting that the paranoid Gothic “is specifically not about homosexuals or the homosexual; instead, heterosexuality is its subject” (Sedgwick *Between* 116). Paranoia is therefore clearly experienced by those on both sides of the hetero/homo divide, marking it as a precondition for existence under a biopolitical regime. Placing the concept within these parameters allows for a redefinition of paranoia as “a description of a subjectivity that filters various fears and desires through an overwhelming belief in both the power and the utter powerlessness of the individual in capitalism” (Halberstam 120). Removed from sexological and psychoanalytic apparatuses of differentiation, the wary watchfulness of queer people can be understood as a kind of “productive fear” that acknowledges their position as “a subject who watches as well as a subject who is watched” (Halberstam 124). Nested within this new understanding of paranoia as queer subjectivity is the greater opportunity for a reappraisal of the closet and its centrality to more modern depictions of vampirism.

CHAPTER II

LOOKING AT (AND LIKE) THE VAMPIRE:

LESBIAN SUBJECTIVITY IN SPANISH GOTHIC FILMS

Fuzzy strains of acid jazz combine to a fuller sound as a ship appears anchored in twilight waters, its bow oriented toward the viewer. The camera lingers briefly before abruptly cutting to images of a brunette woman in black lace. She lounges languidly on a couch of the same shade, an absurdly long red scarf draped around her neck, conjuring mixed associations of sensuality and blood flow as it sways in an unseen breeze. The woman reaches toward the screen as if grasping for the body of a lover, beckoning them to join in her ecstasy. These sequences repeat in montage before the camera focuses on another trawler, floating without a glimpse of shore in sight. Another swift transition relocates the action to a cabaret, where the same brunette performs a striptease featuring a mirror and nude female mannequin. Actions suggestive of same-sex eroticism are intermittently interrupted by pans to the audience, where a man (Omar) anxiously watches his female companion (Linda) as she sits captivated, the cinematography repeatedly returning to her fixed gaze. As the performer removes her own clothing she places the discarded articles on the nude figure, and what initially registers as a mannequin is revealed to be a living woman as she returns the attention with a light caress. The pair bring the routine to an end with a bit of necking and applause from the audience finally breaks the spell over the female spectator. Visibly unnerved, she denies any excitement to her suspicious male partner. A final transition finds them asleep in bed,

implying a shadowy subtext to her statement—the desires elicited by her viewing of the performance don't translate from the discreet darkness of the cabaret into the domestic, heterosexual space of their shared bedroom.

I begin with this lengthy description of the opening scene in Spanish director Jess Franco's *Vampyros Lesbos* (1970) as a means for identifying a number of the competing sexual tensions that are often overlooked in debates surrounding the lesbian vampire subgenre. Commenting on the way this introduction implicates both the film's protagonist and viewers in the dynamic of voyeurism, Aurore Spiers claims this exclusive focus on a woman's act of looking at a similarly sexed body "modifies the gender dynamics of that voyeuristic moment...shift[ing] the power from the male viewer...to the female spectator" (174). As I will show, Spanish lesbian vampire films generate the safe space for queer viewing I have earlier called "the glass coffin" precisely through their combination of radical filmmaking techniques and conservative Gothic tropes. Such a claim runs counter to much of the discussion surrounding exploitation cinema, commonly understood as depictions of female sexuality curated by and for male audiences. Writing on the mainland European style he refers to as "Exploitation Gothic," Xavier Aldana Reyes notes that Spain's "key addition" to Gothic cinema is "its amplification and exploitation of sensuality and violence," a response to increased demand among youth audiences spurred by the relaxation of censorship laws (*Gothic Cinema* 188). Criticism on the lesbian vampire film, a form of Exploitation Gothic most popular in the 1970s, generally articulates the need to "dispense with any notion that the demographic targets of the subgenre are lesbians," finding it "laughable" to assume such texts would appeal to anyone but "male heterosexuals who...like to see beautiful women biting each others'

tits” (Thrower 237-238). Conflating intent and response in a move that sidesteps any notion of agency, this logic is challenged by the bevy of women theorists whose work is discussed below. Their investment in the subversive potential of the female monster stands in direct opposition to arguments that subsume all lesbian vampire films under a singular masthead of patriarchy, emphasizing the possibilities that arise from the imbrication of a hegemonic discourse in flux and the ambivalent sexological productivity of Gothic monstrosity.

Although the mapping of monstrosity onto non-normative sexualities is most often associated with images of male queerness, sexological literature employs similar rhetoric to characterize desire between women. Much more abbreviated than treatises on the male “sexual invert,” medical theories of lesbianism most often code it as a pathological and horrific response to failed heterosexual fulfillment. In his widely read treatise *Psychopathia Sexualis* (1886), sexological pioneer Richard Von Krafft-Ebing defines the lesbian “type” as sex workers and other “degenerate” women who, “unsatisfied with intercourse with impotent or perverse men, [are] impelled by their disgusting practices” to prey on other women (429). Vampirism’s association with lesbianism predates, and likely shaped, the view of same-gender female eroticism as predatory and non-productive. Tamar Heller has shown how *Carmilla* plays on the correlation of hysteria with an insatiable, misdirected sexual appetite, as the introduction of a female companion into Laura’s otherwise secluded life facilitates a “story of hysterical contagion whereby one hysterical girl infects, and creates, another” (79). Apart from the prejudice that classifies them as perverse based on their partner’s gender, the sapphic vampire is made more monstrous through the categorization of specific erotic

interactions. Her focus on orality for stimulation and exsanguination places pleasure above procreation by signifying a protracted cycle of copulation during menstruation, the “kiss of blood” playing into cultural myths that “women’s monthly loss of blood was associated with their pale, weak image” (Case 72). With victims susceptible to contagion because of presumed biological inferiority, the inevitable destruction of the villain in lesbian vampire tales invariably casts containment as the most effective measure for preventing the spread of deviance. Defeated using methods touted by rational men of science, the creature’s elimination serves less as retribution than protection against further damage to the heterosexual mindsets and reproductive capacities of fertile female protagonists. By marrying medicalized definitions of female monstrosity to the Gothic’s key strategy of closure, the endings of lesbian vampire narratives predictably assuage the fears of destabilization they incite, imparting a moral message that normativity triumphs over the threat of difference.

The eradication of the lesbian vampire provides a less comforting lesson for those queer women who identify with the monster’s rebellion; for them, it signifies the dangers inherent in the explicit characterization of erotic desire as marker for identity. Qualifying this connection between sexuality and subjectivity, Foucault finds that the establishment of sex as a natural compulsion is itself an ideological strategy that obscures the mechanisms of oppression by enabling individuals to “conceive power solely as law and taboo” (155). To recognize queerness as an ontological state is to be interpellated as a subject of the medicolegal discourses that define it, thereby risking highly visible forms of sanction or diagnosis—all of which reinforce the supremacy of heteronormative social institutions. The fate of Countess Irina Karlstein, the titular seductress in Jess Franco’s

Female Vampire (1973), seemingly illustrates how this process of subjectification is structured to ensure complicity in the policing of oneself and one's community. Irina ostensibly internalizes the ideology that her voracious bisexual appetite is harmful to society, and she drowns herself after ordering all queer creatures under her command to "return to the shadows, once more to the world of darkness, so as to put an end to nightmares of phantasms and vampires" (1:33:37-59). Yet, the final shots of the film hint that Irina has survived her suicide, recasting her retreat as a strategy for self-perseveration in a world where knowledge of her kind is used to hunt and harm them. The confusing conclusion to *Female Vampire* resembles the ambiguous endings of many lesbian vampire films, undermining assertions that queer monsters are always tidily dispatched. If Foucault's logic of perverse implantation is placed alongside the ambivalent moral schema of Gothic literature—which must by necessity represent the very qualities it demonizes—the monster can morph into a site of (dis)identification with the possibility for recuperation. Like the perversion it personifies, the visibility of the explicitly lesbian vampire engenders a lexicon of accessible images integral to processes of self-recognition and resistance.

To position lesbian vampire films as politically subversive texts *as well as* schlock is not meant to paint them as categorically feminist or queer-affirming. Early work by lesbian critics ties the brief popularity of the subgenre to tensions wrought by the inception of Second-Wave Feminism, gay rights movements, and the global sexual revolution. Whether they represent the privilege of male creators who "felt secure enough in their power and that of their primary male audience to flirt with lesbianism" or "the insecurity the feminist movement generated in male spectators," films like *Vampyros*

Lesbos, Female Vampire and Vicente Aranda's *The Blood-Spattered Bride* (1972) trade in the Gothic troping of queer female sexuality as pathological parasitism (Zimmerman 156; Weiss 26). Adapting and remixing famous Victorian narratives, they rely on the same stock of sexological/psychoanalytic theories as their predecessors, trading in the thrills of illicit eroticism before restoring the normal order of heterosexuality. Where prior feminist criticism has erred is in its elaboration of criteria for the "success" of a lesbian vampire film. Solely basing the potential for subversive readings on the lead monster's survival, their work obscures the Gothic's core principle of multiplicity by oversimplifying unclear narrative resolutions and audience reactions. Citing a lack of attention to the contradictory responses she may elicit—ranging from arousal and repulsion to feelings of emasculation—Baker reads the lesbian vampire as "both spectacular, pornographic titillation for men *and* an acknowledgement that women can assert their own desires" (Baker 556 emphasis in original). Gothic's doubleness, after all, goes beyond preoccupations with reflections and doppelgangers, structuring the tensions between fear and pleasure that constitute its affective core. If, as Glen Ward posits, "exploitation cinema can be seen as an instance of [the] discursive multiplication" elaborated by Foucault, then the wider circulation of the lesbian vampire subgenre supplies a virtual catalog of traits and behaviors popularly linked to lesbianism's manifestation as a discrete category of sexual identity (146). The following sections will interrogate how the protagonists in *Vampyros Lesbos* and other films both invest in and invert monstrous depictions of queer sexuality, capitalizing on the protection afforded by the undead's particular manifestation of the closet, the glass coffin.

While often treated as an anomaly within the Spanish film market, director Jess Franco's catalog of sexploitation shockers exemplify changes in film production and distribution during the final years of Francisco Franco's fascist dictatorship. For decades Spanish cinema, split between the poles of State-sponsored "official" cinema and neorealist leftist groups like the New Spanish Cinema, promoted a conservative vision of filmmaking in the service of nationalist ideals (Spiers 170). Franco's ability to stray from these styles arose as a direct result of changes in governmental oversight. Referencing the appointment of a new Undersecretary of Cinema in 1962 and the financial disappointment of New Spanish Cinema's costly productions, Reyes identifies a "crisis in national filmmaking" which resulted in "the survival of cost-effective genres such as comedy (for local audiences) and horror (for local and international audiences)" (Reyes 191). The introduction of tax incentives for foreign production companies further decreased the cost of already bare-budget exploitation flicks, encouraging the system of European co-productions which fostered Franco's fledgling career. Tatjana Pavlović resolves the apparent paradox of creating transgressive content with the financial backing of a fascist state by explaining that Spain's efforts to shore up its failing regime offered "some of the best economic and political conditions in Europe for foreign film investment" ("Latent Durability" 124). This newly transnational model of filmmaking permitted Franco to challenge the normative models of aggressive masculinity and feminine domesticity perpetuated in nationalist narrative cinema. Populated with ineffectual men and self-possessed women who find fulfillment outside the bounds of heterosexual intimacy, his films borrow from a global register of social attitudes to represent the "complexity of the historical moment" in which "relatively fixed

conceptions of female sexuality are in a state of flux” (Baker 556). Reactionary but never wholly regressive, Franco’s “horrotica” contemporizes Gothic aesthetics while keeping with the mode’s traditional lack of narrative fixity, maintaining an openness of form which allows for a reassessment of the lesbian vampire’s plight (Pavlović 113).

One of three pictures in his oeuvre featuring a blood-sucking femme fatale, *Vampyros Lesbos* is Jess Franco’s gender-swapped adaptation of Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*. Jonathan Harker is replaced by blonde bombshell Linda Westinghouse, a real estate agent who suddenly finds herself experiencing orgasmic dreams that heavily feature the cabaret performer described above. An assignment to assess the estate of Countess Nadine Carody leads Linda to visit the woman’s offshore villa, where she is startled to find the figure from her nocturnal visions. Following a dinner in which Nadine recounts her history with Dracula as a means for alluding to her vampiric (read: lesbian) nature, the two openly exchange flirtations. The Countess then drugs Linda’s wine, intending to covertly feed on her, but she balks at the prospect of violating such an empowered woman’s consent, waits for Linda to rouse, and seduces her. Upon waking from her post-coital reverie, Linda finds Nadine’s inert body floating nude in a swimming pool—one of Franco’s stylish approximations of a coffin—and flees under such a state of panic that she loses consciousness. Suffering from memory and blood loss, she is taken to the asylum of psychologist and occult aficionado Dr. Seward whose nymphomaniac ward Agra also has a hidden history with Nadine. Seward divulges his obsession with locating the vampiric personality he has dubbed “The Queen of the Night,” but is unable to wrangle any information out of his patient before she recuperates and is released to Omar’s care. Linda is soon summoned by Nadine, who initiates her into the ranks of

lesbian vampires through a rite involving blood drinking and bodily contact. When Omar starts displaying symptoms identical to those experienced by Linda it is assumed he has fallen victim to the same supernatural force and a vampire hunt commences. While Omar, Seward, and his assistant failingly attempt to track Nadine, the vampiress begins to sever the bond with her previous lovers in preparation for her eternal unlife with Linda, who, unbeknownst to all, has been kidnapped by Agra's murderous husband Memmet. After eliminating Seward with the aid of her silent male servant Morpho, Nadine is unable to locate her mate and returns to the island, where her refusal to drink from another source leads to a speedy deterioration. Linda eventually escapes by murdering Memmet and flees to the island, where she refuses to join Nadine, choosing instead to gorge on her lover's blood before driving a stake through her heart. The men arrive as Linda exits the villa, and as they depart on a ship Linda dismisses Omar's suggestion that the events were nothing more than a bad dream. "No," she declares, "it wasn't a dream, unbelievable as it may seem. Even if there is no explanation. The pain will fade in time...but the memory will remain...for as long as I live" (*VL* 1:26:38-59).

Considering both its name and content, it is easy to surmise that *Vampyros Lesbos* is steeped in sexological motifs which seemingly cast queer female desire as the monstrous displacement of heterosexual urges. One telling scene early in the film sees Linda recount her dreams to a male psychoanalyst. Bemused by the fact she has reached climax during dreams about another woman, the man comforts her by insisting the predicament is quite common and the cure resides in finding "a better lover" (*Vampyros Lesbos* 10:21). Ward positions this diagnosis alongside larger conversations surrounding the female orgasm, brought about by studies that determined clitoral pleasure to be more

stimulating than vaginal penetration. In an effort to assuage concerns that women could experience sexual pleasure without men, medical texts encouraged a focus on mutual completion for marital couples. Alas, the only images of heterosexual lovemaking in the film are either dispassionate or protracted, insinuating that “Linda’s desire for, and willing seduction by, a more satisfying female partner is driven by disappointment with Omar,” seemingly reiterating “the belief that most lesbians are thwarted or confused heterosexuals” (Ward 161). Recalling Castle’s figuring of the lesbian as an apparition called up so she may be exorcised, the therapist’s pronouncement apparently disregards the validity of female homoeroticism, rendering it invisible as it is reinscribed within a heteronormative system of logic. Rather than pulling from *Dracula*, this moment more clearly resembles a passage from “Carmilla.” Perplexed by Carmilla’s excessive fawning, Laura questions whether her female companion may in fact be “a boyish lover [who] had found his way into the house, and sought to prosecute his suit in masquerade” (Le Fanu 265). As Ardel Haefele-Thomas concludes, “Laura’s musing about Carmilla’s gender epitomizes the way that same-sex desire often gets mapped back onto the heterosexual paradigm” (105). Yet, Ward’s reading of Linda’s diagnosis derives from a truncated version of the scene—one which ignores a self-reflexive stroke characteristic of the film’s Gothic origins. Before he is able to dispense his advice the camera pivots behind the therapist, revealing the notes taken throughout Linda’s confession to be nothing more than incomprehensible doodles (*VL* 9:55). Playfully undercutting the authority of medical discourse and its predominantly male practitioners, this visual flourish is the first hint male speech, including the sexological principles it espouses, is fallible. Linda may

inadvertently heed the man's advice, but that new lover is demonstrably not the gender his cure anticipates.

Aside from her short sojourn on the therapist's sofa, Linda most often appeals to Dr. Seward for medical counsel. An amalgamation of both Stoker's namesake psychiatrist and the vampire hunter Van Helsing, Seward is touted as an expert in esoterica. For the great doctor, there seems to be no distinction between vampirism and lesbianism. When Linda, frightened by Omar's incapacitated state, seeks Seward's help in determining a solution, he dismisses any concern that she as a plainly heterosexual woman could be responsible for his decline. "You are a charming girl," he proclaims, "but you haven't got the slightest idea about occultism" (*VL* 52:25-33). Instead, he assures her Omar will recover without issue, and it is herself she should be concerned with: "I know who can get in touch with these forces, and who can't. Your friend will never cross over into their world. That's why he won't fall victim to these forces. With you, Linda, it's different" (53:04-53:25). Here vampiric transformation is construed as some supernatural recruitment strategy, with the underlying irony that Linda has already been initiated into Nadine's world. Unaware of her entanglement, Seward instructs Linda in what he declares the only foolproof method of freeing herself, decreeing the vampire's body will disappear if the brain is destroyed. Diverging from Dracula's novelistic death—in which Mina witnesses "Jonathan shear through the throat; whilst at the same moment Mr. Morris's bowie knight plunged into the heart"—it is nevertheless intended to result in "a body crumbled into dust" (Stoker 324). However, the unfolding of events suggests this scenario is little more than a jealous attempt to eliminate a source of knowledge which his gender makes inaccessible. Linda is not only able to destroy Nadine

by another method, but Seward's climactic meeting with the Countess betrays his true motives. "I want to be one of you. Help me fulfill my wish," he pleads before reciting a vampiric incantation; "Our words have no power when you say them," she responds, before having him killed (*VL* 1:08:45-58). By calling attention to the gap between Seward's dialogue and its lack of effect, Franco once again suggests the reality of lesbian experience cannot be assimilated into the language of medical discourse.

In contrast to the medicalized speeches of patriarchal figureheads, the women in *Vampiros Lesbos* are conspicuously reticent about discussing their sexual habits. Linda's initial therapy visit notwithstanding, her conversations with Seward only ever allude to same-sex desire under the guise of vampirism. Franco never depicts his female characters conversing in public, and, in spite of the salacious title, the word "lesbian" is not uttered once. Instead, editing techniques such as voiceover and montage facilitate forms of non-verbal communication between women. Connecting such "distortions at the level of film form" to his treatment of transgressive themes, Spiers interprets Franco's surrealistic style as rejecting "classical ideals of continuity in favor of disruption and excess" (180). Nowhere is the subversive potency of this method more obvious than in the burlesque that opens the film. Shots of Nadine's dance initially appear to reinforce the symbology of Gothic sexology, as she is shown watching herself undress. Her actions evoke a pervasive medical myth Zimmerman argues is "implicit in most of these films and in our culture as a whole: that lesbians and homosexuals are narcissists capable of making love only to themselves" (155). However, the camera only lingers momentarily before turning to focus on Linda's transfixed gaze, a look of mixed recognition playing across her face. In her examination of Gothic imagery in lesbian pulp novels, Laura Westengard forwards

the notion that such texts used identifiable stereotypes to fashion “containment crypts” for so-called “twilight lovers.” Ostensibly functioning to make deviance detectable to the layperson, these measures unintentionally provided a cipher for the women they demeaned, creating a “virtual subcultural location in which lesbians found representation and recognized themselves as members of a community” (Westengard 85). Given the popular correlation of homoeroticism and narcissism, Linda’s reaction to the mirror dance expresses a furtive acknowledgement of similarity that requires no speech, and the remainder of the performance solidifies this as a moment of sexual awakening. Nadine’s blank canvas of a model becomes an uncanny substitute for Linda herself, increasingly animated as the seductress dresses the form in garments taken off her own body. Franco’s final cut to the ship at sea suggests a complete coming-to-consciousness: a vessel navigating unfamiliar twilight waters, Linda has embarked on a journey only navigable by the knowledgeable. The trawler pointed toward the audience at the film’s first flicker implies the viewer too can take this voyage, but only if they know the signs well enough to read the map.

Though she may never openly label herself a lesbian, Linda exhibits few reservations about private intimacy with another woman. Her initial surprise at happening upon the figure from her dreams in a form-fitting swimsuit gives way to comments about the Countess’s “nice view”—a statement made more suggestive by Franco’s quick cut to her sun-soaked body (*VL* 20:22). Butted up against this clever cropping, Linda’s next statement comes off as a kind of coded test. Disclosing she has a strange feeling “I’ve been here before, and that I know you,” Nadine responds, “I have the same feeling. It happens quite a lot.” (20:30-40). Apparently mollified by her companion’s response,

Linda needs no convincing when she is invited to join Nadine in a round of skinny-dipping and nude sunbathing, a sequence Ward identifies as the one scene truly “evocative of nonphallic bliss” (163). In keeping with Franco’s non-linear editing techniques, Linda’s travel to the island and seduction by Nadine are intercut with images of a scorpion inching toward a moth, with the latter’s purposeful flight into a net implying the thrill in being an object of sexual conquest. Linda never hesitates to heed Nadine’s psychic beckoning, even after fleeing in fright. Summoned from slumber beside Omar, she completes the initiation ritual without question or comment, surprising even Nadine with her willingness to commit: “Did you realize it was blood?” she asks after Linda drinks deeply from a chalice, receiving only a recitation of the vampiric oath and a kiss in reply (*VL* 49:28-50:16). It is this absence of hesitation surrounding homoerotic desire that makes Linda’s terror at glimpsing Nadine in the pool so instructive. Borrowing from Sedgwick’s model of Gothic paranoia, her reaction could be interpreted as instance of homosexual panic, but I would like to instead position Linda’s distress as a response to the dangers of a fixed sexual identity. As shown in her interactions with both the therapist and Omar, Linda’s sapphic urges are illegible within a binary system of sexual classification; so long as she doesn’t fix her desires with a name, no one can prohibit the direction of her gaze. If vampirism and lesbianism are synonymous, then the glassy waters of Nadine’s surrogate coffin literalize the alternative space she occupies, dissolving the barrier of invisibility that prevented her existence from becoming problematic. Linda’s horrified answer to this coming out of the closet is not an indication of disgust or self-loathing, but an act of self-preservation in keeping with Halberstam’s notion of female paranoia as a “productive fear which marks the female within Gothic as

a subject who watches as well as a subject who is watched” (127). She is not afraid of loving women—she is frightened by the prospective loss of freedom and mobility.

Given the fate of those women in the film whose difference can be deciphered, Linda’s reaction is entirely justified. Agra is only ever depicted as an institutionalized madwoman, although a diagnosis for her condition is never provided. Her husband Memmet claims she visited Nadine on the island and “came back crazy,” but the continual conflation of queer sexuality and monstrous pathology calls the veracity of her “disease” into question (*VL* 1:14:16). Nadine’s downfall is similarly hastened by her reincorporation into heteronormative ideologies of procreation. She recounts how she once reveled in an unrestrained form of polyamory before her romantic attraction to Linda barred her from avoiding categorization: “Many were captivated by me. Many women. I bewitched them. They lost their identity. I became them. But then I met Linda. Now I’m under her spell.” (42:55-43:18). Now inhabiting the concrete identity of the lesbian, Nadine adopts a patriarchal model of monogamy-as-ownership and severs ties with her other trysts. It is this perverse presentation of passion as possession, and not some sort of internalized homophobia, which incites Linda to stake Nadine after declaring “I don’t want to belong to you” (1:21:52). After all, Linda has already undergone an irrevocable transformation, a piece of information conveniently kept from the surviving male characters. Her pointed silences and half-statements about encounters with Nadine call to mind Laura’s “conscious self-censorship” in descriptions of her relationship with Carmilla, effectively avoiding the ramifications of “rampant male paranoia about female sexual knowledge” (Heller 86). Linda’s closeted vampirism lends an air of dramatic irony to her lackluster reunion with Omar. There may indeed be “no

explanation” for him, but she has learned a lesson from Nadine’s inexorable defeat, a sure proof way of perpetuating her pleasure and the lifespan to which the film’s final words refer. Choosing to remain in a liminal state of death and desire allows Linda to circumvent the compulsion to confess that Foucault identifies as a structuring principle of modern sexual discourse (61). By knowingly and willfully inhabiting the third space between straight and lesbian, life and death—the realm of the glass coffin—she resists definition under the medicalized gaze and carries on with the chance of creating her own community. Whether intentional or merely a byproduct of Franco’s competing anxieties about the role of men in sexual modernity, *Vampyros Lesbos* suggests that that one of the safest ways for queer women to find each other is to register and then co-opt the theories and signifiers used to oppress them. Like Linda sucking sustenance from Nadine’s veins, the film supplies a surreptitious source of knowledge, and with it the possibility of a subversive lesbian subjectivity.

CHAPTER III

LESSONS FROM A SELF-LOATHING VAMPIRE:

DARK SHADOWS AND THE QUEER HORRORS OF ASSIMILATION

Originally broadcast on ABC Networks from 1966-1975, early episodes of Gothic soap opera *Dark Shadows* reimagine classic “Female Gothic” texts, with producer Dan Curtis borrowing from *Jane Eyre* to design protagonist Victoria Winters (Worland 170). Victoria, hired to serve as a governess for young David Collins at the ancestral estate of Collinwood, quickly finds herself embroiled in the private affairs of David’s father, Roger; his sister, Elizabeth Collins Stoddard; and her daughter, Carolyn. Though singular amongst other soaps for its Gothic atmosphere, *Dark Shadows* initially aired to low ratings. Heeding the advice of his teenage daughters, Curtis opted to steer the show in a supernatural direction by delivering his own spin on Stoker’s Count: the vampire Barnabas Collins (Owens 355). First appearing in “Episode 210,” Barnabas is an undead Collins ancestor believed to have perished abroad in the eighteenth century—a fiction he manipulates to infiltrate the household disguised as a long-lost “cousin from England” (“211”). The privilege afforded a member of the wealthiest clan in Collinsport, Maine provides its own alibi, allowing him to evade detection as he exsanguinates local women. Although envisioned as a temporary adversary, Barnabas became an instant cultural icon. Images of actor Jonathan Frid sporting the role’s trademark cloak, cane, and ring graced the covers of teen magazines and TV Guides. Barnabas eventually “proved so popular that he became the show’s central protagonist,” requiring a retooling of the character

which emphasized “regrets about his monstrous status” (Benshoff 18). The result is a non-linear romance narrative reliant on a pastiche of genre elements. Flashback sequences achieved via astral projection reframe Barnabas’s condition as an obstacle for traditional intimacy and alternate with present-day efforts to restore his “natural” impulses using mad science. The ultimate goal, one shared by many a Gothic novel and soap opera, is to reform the bad boy and make him into marriageable material.

For all of its reliance on the broad strokes of earlier texts, the romantic rescripting of Barnabas achieves one particularly novel feat: the thwarted heterosexual lover and his monstrous nemesis are consolidated into a single, cognitively dissonant character. In her study of Gothic television, Helen Wheatley asserts that cult appeal of *Dark Shadows* derives from its “indulgence of melodramatic identification,” humanizing its macabre creatures through relatable relationship woes that “elicit viewer sympathy and engagement” (155). The reactions to this approach are somehow more eclectic than the source material itself. Despite the exclusively heterosexual pairings of the show proper, many fan testimonies and tributes treat Barnabas’s closest male friendship as a romance. Previous research has often simply chalked the possibility for such responses up to the fundamentally “queer nature of Gothic horror” (Benshoff *Dark* 110). While useful, these analyses are limited by their wholistic approach, reducing complex spectatorial dynamics to a dogeared dictum of “vampire equals sexual Other” without delving into the details that lend themselves to such a reading. In the following chapter, I will argue that this ability to recontextualize the heteronormative marriage plot of *Dark Shadows* stems from its incorporation of vampiric signifiers inextricably linked to popular medical discourses surrounding male same-sex desire. Approached by queer viewers well-versed in the ways

biopolitics deploys monstrous images to demonize erotic experiences outside the scope of heterosexual reproduction, Barnabas's determined search for a bride comes to resemble a series of attempts to contain and control knowledge about individual sexual deviance.

If heterosexual men have been erroneously identified as the exclusive audience of lesbian vampire films, the heterogeneity of *Dark Shadows* fandom also indicates an appeal beyond the accepted parameters of soap opera consumption. In keeping with the subgenre's focus on domestic relations, the promotional paratexts of soaps anticipate a "certain kind of expected audience," i.e., middle-class, Caucasian housewives (Wheatley 22). *Dark Shadows* is, therefore, unique in both its inclusion of Gothic creatures *and* its popularity with adolescent spectators—two interrelated indicators of a shifting cultural paradigm. As a period of prosperity in post-war America gave rise to the Baby Boom, a generational model emerged that defined the (predominately white) teenager as a social class granted certain rights regarding transportation, courtship, and employment (Benshoff *Dark* 70). Popular media from the 1950s onward increasingly centered the experiences of young adulthood, with the newly mobile teen becoming an especially important demographic for studios supplying the drive-in circuit. The agency afforded to Baby Boomers engendered the counterculture movement of the 1960s, whose search for an epistemological alternative to the conservative viewpoints of prior generations prompted a widespread "revitalization of interest in...occult phenomena" (Owens 352). Themes of vampirism and witchcraft consequently began to appear in mass media marketed toward young adults, leading to an explosion of genre films that filtered juvenile fears through horror tropes and fostering a youth-oriented "monster culture." (Benshoff *Ibid*). Fed on a diet of B-Movie fare and subscriptions to fan magazines like

Forrest J. Ackerman's *Famous Monsters of Filmland*, a generation of children were primed for their foray into the foreign world of soap operas.

Naturally, the broadcast standards of the 1960s assured that content primarily aimed at adults still adhered to strict guidelines regarding nudity and suggestive content. Even in the absence of more explicit material, the mating rituals of the All-American monster were restricted by mid-century censorship statutes that forbid the depiction of non-normative sexualities. Thus, there is no sequence of male homoeroticism in *Dark Shadows* to rival the unambiguous lesbianism of *Vampyros Lesbos*. Nevertheless, queer viewers continue to articulate an awareness of how the series shaped perceptions of their own nascent sexual identity. One fan recalls how watching Barnabas “struggle with his vampirism as I struggled with my sexuality, hiding it from his family as I did, and trying to find love in all the wrong ways which I SO DID, spoke to me on a deep level” (Collins). The instinctual equivalence of monstrosity and perversion evident in this and similar statements might even help explain the program's appeal to the closeted men that populate its cast. Sadly, there is a significant segment of *Dark Shadows* fans who would prefer such discussions stay buried. Gio Sue, administrator of the Facebook page “Jonathan Frid Was Gay and That's OK,” reports receiving daily hate mail and being banned from chatrooms after posts about the actor's sexuality were deemed “not on topic” (Nahmood). These gatekeeping maneuvers, though unsettling, aren't unfamiliar; they merely regurgitate the logic of “homosexual panic” intrinsic to Gothic media. It is this expectation of vilification within a homophobic culture that allows queer viewers of *Dark Shadows* to repurpose derogatory stereotypes into a source of individual and community identity. When approached from the protected perspective of the glass coffin,

the sexualized symbology native to the Gothic transforms Barnabas's tale of unrequited love into an allegory for the cycles of abuse, both external and self-inflicted, perpetuated by assimilationist responses to queerness.

The first hints of queer goings on at Collinwood occur in the moments before Barnabas is freed from his centuries-long captivity. Episode 210 opens on a confrontation between grifter Willie Loomis and his compatriot Jason McGuire, the mastermind behind an extortionary marriage plot targeting Elizabeth Collins. Previously, the behaviors of the two men have been restricted by their financial dealings with the family matriarch, preserving the "erotic triangle" Sedgwick cites as the fulcrum for male homosocial relations within capitalist patriarchy (*Between* 47). This domestic equilibrium is upended when Willie develops an obsession with a portrait of Elizabeth's opulent ancestor, Barnabas. Although completed prior to his transformation, the figure of Barnabas is depicted as already possessing conventionally vampiric traits; a visual shorthand presumably intended to foreshadow his supernatural backstory. Yet, in adhering to a well-worn description of vampirism, the painting necessarily perpetuates ideologies that have historically associated the monster with bourgeois anxieties surrounding same-gender sexuality and social degeneracy. Thus, Barnabas's pallor may prefigure a fabled sensitivity to sunlight, but it also aligns with medical studies that categorize "the homosexual" as a "delicate, pale, very neurasthenic man" (Krafft-Ebing 329). To a modern eye, his ostentatious ring, necklace, and broach—heirlooms legend claims he was "known for" wearing—have more in common with the decadent dress of a Victorian dandy than expected from the heir to a colonial fishing empire ("211"). Willie, a cold-blooded con artist, is ostensibly only attracted to the expensive accessories on display in

the portrait. Completely mesmerized by these emblems of capitalist success, he undertakes a treasure hunt that ultimately exposes the grueling sacrifices one must make to earn them.

Visibly dejected after hearing Barnabas died in England with no record of his belongings, Willie is reinvigorated by reports that other Collins relatives are buried with their jewels in nearby Eagle Hill Cemetery. After his attempts to infiltrate the stone sepulchers in the main room of the family mausoleum fail, a careful search of the building unearths a wooden coffin concealed behind a false wall. Thinking he has hit the proverbial jackpot, Willie joyously celebrates his discovery, but that mood quickly changes once the lid has been removed. The camera shifts perspective to show him screaming as a hand sporting the jewelry from the painting thrusts out of the coffin and seizes hold of his throat (“210”). Of course, according to the accepted historical records of the Collins clan, the reappearance of these gems—and Barnabas along with them—should be impossible. Alas, the villainous vein of the vampire’s early appearances leads to a focus on current events, leaving these inconsistencies to be resolved through a flashback sandwiched into a later season. This scene reveals that Barnabas was entombed by his own father as a means to protect the family name and business. Angered by his son’s inability to control base urges, he berates Barnabas for not thinking of “the shame, the scandal” that knowledge of his vampirism will bring upon the family (446). To ensure the continued prosperity of the Collins line, he wraps Barnabas in chains before unceremoniously placing him in the box that will serve as his resting place for the next two hundred years. Albeit absent of any bloodshed, the moment’s message is clear:

attraction to anything outside of the constraints that foster capitalism is a threat to the stability and comfort of all middle-class Americans.

Ask any queer *Dark Shadows* enthusiast their favorite romantic pairing and the answer is likely to be the non-canonical couple of Barnabas and Willie. Their tumultuous “friendship” has inspired an entire subcategory of unlicensed fan productions, including video essays that “reimagin[e] the Barnabas/Willie/Jason story line . . . , making it seem as though Willie is dumping Jason in order to be with his new lover Barnabas” (Benshoff 110). Given both character’s onscreen pursuit of exclusively female love interests, this attitude might sound outlandish. Yet, the measures taken to obscure any inklings of intimacy between the two unwittingly support such a supposition. As the person that unwittingly freed the vampire, Willie is forced to assume the role of psychically indentured servant and snack. In a presumed ploy to prevent allegations of homoeroticism, Barnabas is never shown feeding directly from his crony’s body. Instead, toward the climax of each encounter, as fang prepares to penetrate flesh, the picture invariably freezes and fades out. Though this editing trick leaves their physical interactions unseen, the chosen method—the notorious “fade to black” soaps employ to transition from sex scenes—is enough to spark the imagination of a discerning queer spectator (Lambe and Perse 47). The sexual subtext associated with the technique is reiterated in similar scenes featuring female victims. A close-up prior to Barnabas’s unpictured attack on waitress Maggie Evans sees a look of pleasure cross his face before the image is replaced with an empty screen (“226”). With these stylistic cues clearly construing vampirism as a sexualized act, the men’s shared living space opens them up to further scrutiny. Willie, although initially coerced into joining households, willingly

chooses to continue serving Barnabas once that thrall is broken—going so far as to misdirect a group of townsfolk who almost stumble upon his nightly feeding (“230”). The two cultivate a comfortable domestic routine, with Willie handling daytime errands and Barnabas keeping watch for unwanted visitors throughout the night. A relationship that was once built on a backbone of coercion gradually morphs into a found family.

When it seems the men might settle into something that could resemble a romantic relationship, Curtis cleverly introduces his Van Helsing analogue, Dr. Julia Hoffman. A psychologist and hematologist, she is brought to town by irregularities found in a sample of Maggie’s blood taken after her attack. Julia’s academic fascination quickly grows into a passionate devotion to Barnabas, creating conflict amongst the three over the optimal means of maintaining their safety. After discovering that Barnabas’s plans for Maggie have escalated from mealtime to murder, Willie rushes to warn her, but is stopped at every turn. First, he is mistaken for an intruder by her father and shot, causing him to slip into a brief coma. Then at the hospital, just as he starts to stumble through his narration of the story, the camera suddenly cuts to a consultation between his doctors and the Collins family. While the audience is prevented from hearing the details of Willie’s confession, they are certainly made privy to the diagnosis that follows. Attributing his description of events to an unhealthy fixation on Barnabas, his physicians determine he “must have been deranged all along but was able to maintain the outward appearance of sanity” (329). Having fulfilled his role as a secondary queer antagonist, Willie is summarily shipped off to Windcliff Sanitarium, and the heterosexual peace of Collinsport is temporarily restored.

An archetypal appearance and male minion may be what initially encourage viewers to interpret vampirism as queerness, but Barnabas's disastrous dating record seals the deal. Although he and Willie continue to cohabit once the mesmeric hold has diminished, Barnabas is incapable of maintaining a consensual relationship with any of his scripted love interests. Nowhere is this more evident than in the succession of unsuccessful attempts to reunite with his supposed soulmate, Josette du Pres. Early episodes of *Dark Shadows* make brief references to Josette as the daughter of a wealthy plantation owner from Martinique. Local legends claim she committed suicide following the death of her husband, Jeremiah Collins, causing her ghost to haunt the grounds of Collinwood ("5"). Faced with the need to retrofit a new male lead into a preexisting romantic framework, Josette's history is revised in subsequent seasons to incorporate an engagement to Barnabas. Almost imperceptible amidst the high drama of a vampire hunt, this single alteration shapes every event that follows. After efforts to summon Josette's spirit are fruitless, she is revealed to have a doppelgänger in the person of Maggie Evans. Convinced Maggie is a reincarnation of his lost love, Barnabas subjects her to a series of hypnotic sessions intended to provoke some sort of past life regression. "You will become her," he instructs, "and we shall experience all the joy that was denied for so many, many years" ("236"). The long-awaited days of domestic bliss are short-lived, as Maggie develops a tolerance for vampiric compulsion and escapes. Unwavering in his pursuit of the ideal heteronormative partnership, Barnabas sets out to woo Victoria, hoping she will act as an adequate conduit for Josette's spirit. These plans are similarly spoiled when a séance transports Victoria back to 1795, where she learns the truth about Barnabas's condition: his vampirism is a punishment inflicted by Josette's maidservant,

the witch Angelique Bouchard. In response to his rejection of her advances, Angelique curses Barnabas, declaring he will “never be able to love anyone, for whoever loves you will die;” a prophecy fulfilled after Josette, horrified by her fiancé’s monstrous makeover, inadvertently falls to her death (“405”).

Capitalizing on the Gothic figuration of non-reproductive sexuality as a contaminating force, the series seems *straightforward* in its condemnation of extramarital affairs. However, for the portion of the audience accustomed to seeing their desire denigrated in common discourse, Barnabas’s struggles bear a strong resemblance to sexological theories that imagine queerness as a form of failed heterosexuality. It is clear from his actions that the identity of his partner is less important than their female gender. Clinging to the patriarchal figuring of women as the property of their male partner, he treats Josette, Maggie, and Victoria as interchangeable pawns in the quest to reaffirm his normative masculinity. The vampire’s desperate attempts to secure a wife stand in stark contrast to the calm of his homosocial household, suggesting a “want of sexual sensibility for the opposite sex, even to the extent of horror, while sexual inclination and impulse to the same sex are present” (Krafft-Ebing 222). When flirtations with female characters fail to fix his problems, Barnabas arrives at the foregone conclusion that some internal defect is to blame for his misfortunes. Determined to eradicate the part of himself that is preventing a happy heterosexual ending, his search leads him to explore more invasive methods of medical intervention.

The treatments devised for full-blown vampirism diverge from previous portrayals of pathology in the series. Whereas Willie was institutionalized for an illness perceived as purely psychological, the experimental procedures performed on Barnabas

indicate his condition is a combination of inborn mental and physical factors. This diagnosis mirrors nineteenth-century medical texts that contend queerness is a “congenital abnormality, to be classed with other congenital abnormalities which have psychic concomitants” (Ellis 206). Both the interest in a cure for vampirism and the therapies prescribed are predicated on a biopolitical standard which, through an emphasis on heredity, makes heterosexual reproduction a precondition for personhood. If “the blood is the life,” as Renfield famously raves, then the fluid flowing through Barnabas’s body is its converse—a pollutant that prevents him from continuing the Collins line (Stoker). Julia’s description of the comingled human and vampiric components in a lab sample as an “unholy union” clearly draws on these established connections between genetics and degeneracy (“265”). Accordingly, her regimen includes a cycle of plasma transfusions intended to replace the “bad blood” in Barnabas. While the procedure is effective the results are provisional, as it initiates a rapid aging process that is only reversed by draining the veins of Collinsport’s youth. Uncertain how to proceed, Julia seeks the assistance of Dr. Eric Lang, whose Frankensteinian efforts to animate an artificial lifeform dubbed “Adam” have heretofore featured in a separate subplot. Barnabas is injected with an experimental serum that rejuvenates his appearance and suppresses his hunger, prompting the proclamation he can now “live as any other man” (“467”). Cautioning the shots alone may prove insufficient in maintaining this change, Lang persuades his patient to consider more permanent alternatives: “In the mastery of modern medicine,” he advises, “you will find your best hiding place” (Ibid). His investment is far from altruistic, however, since the choice to use electrical current to detach Barnabas from his supernatural lifeforce is so that the energy can be rerouted into

Adam's inert form. Obviously indebted to Mary Shelley's application of galvanic science in the creation of her creature, the images of electrodes attached to the vampire conjure up associations with an equally Gothic medical procedure: electroconvulsive therapy (ECT). A type of "conversion therapy" that involves "pairing negative stimuli 'shock' with the unwanted psychosexual response" while rewarding normative reactions, ECT rose to prominence as a psychiatric treatment for homosexuality in the decade before Barnabas was introduced (Ford 77). The events that unfold over the course of the experiment imitate the operations of this carrot-and-stick approach. Lang is conveniently killed in front of Barnabas and Julia is slotted back into the role of scientific savior. Though she succeeds in turning a vampire human and bringing Adam to life, the procedure stops short of a total transformation. Barnabas, finally presented with the prospect of the nuclear family he covets, is unable to return Julia's affection. Much like the excess of peer-reviewed experiments which find "no scientific evidence exists that conversion treatments work," every futile stab at self-correction only serves to underline the violence inherent in assimilationist practices whilst emphasizing the immutability of queerness (Beckstead 91).

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