Gender in the Vampire Narrative

Amanda Hobson and U. Melissa Anyiwo (Eds.)

Gender in the Vampire Narrative addresses issues of masculinity and femininity, unpacking cultural norms of gender. The text offers classroom ready original essays that outline contemporary debates about sexual objectification and gender norms using the lens of the vampire in order to examine the ways those roles are undone and reinforced through popular culture through a specific emphasis on cultural fears and anxieties about gender roles. The essays explore the presentations of gendered identities in a wide variety of sources including novels, films, graphic novels and more, focusing on wildly popular examples, such as The Vampire Diaries, True Blood, and Twilight, and also lesser known works, for instance, Byzantium and The Blood of the Vampire. The authors work to unravel the ties that bind gender to the body and the sociocultural institutions that shape our views of gendered norms and invite students of all levels to engage in interdisciplinary conversations about both theoretical and embodied constructions of gender. This text makes a fascinating accompanying text for many courses, such as first-year studies, literature, film, women’s and gender studies, sociology, popular culture or media studies, cultural studies, American studies or history. Ultimately this is a text for all fans of popular culture.

"These essays chase the vampire through history and across literature, film, television, and stage, exploring this complexity and offering insightful and accessible analyses that will be enjoyed by students in popular culture, gender studies, and speculative fiction. This collection is not to be missed by those with an interest in feminist cultural studies – or the undead." – Barbara Gurr, University of Connecticut

"Hobson and Anyiwo push the boundaries of the scholarship as it has been written until now." – Catherine Coker, Texas A&M University

Amanda Hobson is Assistant Dean of Students and Director of the Women’s Resource Center at Indiana State University.

U. Melissa Anyiwo is a Professor of Politics & History and Coordinator of African American Studies at Curry College in Massachusetts.

Cover image by Steve Anyiwo


SensePublishers GEND 8
Gender in the Vampire Narrative
Teaching Gender

Volume 8

Series Editor
Patricia Leavy
USA

Scope
Teaching Gender publishes monographs, anthologies and reference books that deal centrally with gender and/or sexuality. The books are intended to be used in undergraduate and graduate classes across the disciplines. The series aims to promote social justice with an emphasis on feminist, multicultural and critical perspectives.
Please email queries to the series editor at pleavy7@aol.com

International Editorial Board
Tony E. Adams, Northeastern Illinois University, USA
Paula Banerjee, University of Calcutta, India
Nitza Berkovitch, Ben Gurion University, Israel
Robin Boylorn, University of Alabama, USA
Máiréad Dunne, University of Sussex, UK
Mary Holmes, University of Edinburgh, United Kingdom
Laurel Richardson, Ohio State University, Emerita, USA
Sophie Tamas, Carleton University, Ottawa, Canada
Gender in the Vampire Narrative

Edited by

Amanda Hobson
Indiana State University, USA

and

U. Melissa Anyiwo
Curry College, Massachusetts, USA

SENSE PUBLISHERS
ROTTERDAM/BOSTON/TAIPEI
ADVANCE PRAISE FOR
GENDER IN THE VAMPIRE NARRATIVE

“The haunting durability of the vampire in popular culture attests to our enduring fascination with the undead as well as the figure’s rich and dynamic complexity. Amanda Hobson and U. Melissa Anyiwo have brought together a diverse and far-ranging collection of essays that chase the vampire through history and across literature, film, television, and stage, exploring this complexity and offering insightful and accessible analyses that will be enjoyed by students in popular culture, gender studies, and speculative fiction. Authors pay homage to the classics – from Bram Stoker to Buffy the Vampire Slayer – but push consideration of the vampire in new directions as well, from graphic novels to the Vegas stage, interrogating the vampire’s presence and influence across multiple spheres of cultural production, always with a keen eye on gender and sexuality. This collection is not to be missed by those with an interest in feminist cultural studies – or the undead.”

– Barbara Gurr, Associate Professor of Women’s, Gender and Sexuality Studies, University of Connecticut, and Author of Race, Gender and Sexuality in Post-Apocalyptic TV and Film (Palgrave MacMillan, 2015)

“U. Melissa Anyiwo and Amanda Hobson have compiled an impressive range of essays in this new, innovative text. As an instructor who consistently utilizes monster pedagogy in the college classroom, I deeply appreciate the range of theoretical and pedagogical applications in the volume as they will invigorate intersectional conversations about gender in regards to race, class, and culture. Of particular note is the commitment to exploring modern interpretations of vampire masculinity. This burgeoning area of scholarly inquiry speaks to the truly cutting-edge research contained in this text. I recommend it to monster researchers and educators alike.”

“This book is a valuable contribution to the field, looking beyond the current popularity of *Twilight* and *True Blood* and examining a variety of texts both historical and contemporary. Questions of gender in the vampire narrative have been pervasive but seldom fully explored, and by making this the raison d’être for their book, Hobson and Anyiwo push the boundaries of the scholarship as it has been written until now: *Gender in the Vampire Narrative* will likely be referenced for many years to come.”

– Catherine Coker, Texas A&M University, and Author of “Bella, Buffy, and the Feminist Ethics of Choice in Twilight and Buffy the Vampire Slayer” in *Slayage: The Online Journal of the Whedon Studies Association* (2011)
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acknowledgements</th>
<th>ix</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Amanda Hobson</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Dark Seductress: The Hypersexualization of the Female Vampire</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Amanda Hobson</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Hybrid Heroines and the Naturalization of Women’s Violence in Urban Fantasy Fiction</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Kristina Deffenbacher</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Men That Suck: Gender Anxieties and the Evolution of Vampire Men</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Kristina DuRocher</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. “There Will Never Be More Than Two of Us”: <em>The Twilight Saga</em>’s Monstrous Mothers</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Amanda Firestone</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Sex, Blood, and Death: Vampires and Child-Rearing</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Benita Blessing</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Beautifully Broken: <em>True Blood</em>’s Tara Thornton as the Black Best Friend</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>U. Melissa Anyiwo</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. A Feminist Bloodletting: Reading Suicide in Florence Marryat and Angela Carter</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Ryan D. Fong</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Vampiras and Vampiresas: Latinas in the Graphic Novels <em>Bite Club</em> and <em>Life Sucks</em></td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Lisa A. Nevárez</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. “You Were Such a Good Girl When You Were Human”: Gender and Subversion in <em>The Vampire Diaries</em></td>
<td>145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Rhonda Nicol</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

vii
TABLE OF CONTENTS

11. Performative Femininity and Female Invalidism in John Keats’s “La Belle Dame Sans Merci” and S.T. Coleridge’s Christabel  
   Ana G. Gal  
   161

12. The Female Vampire in Popular Culture: Or What to Read or Watch Next  
   U. Melissa Anyiwo  
   173

About the Contributors  
   193
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A special thanks goes to Patricia Leavy for her support and endless patience, whose intellectual activism inspires us to be better scholars pushing the boundaries of our pursuits. Patricia’s boundless commitment to giving back to the community of feminist scholars helps us believe that we can.

We would like to thank our reviewers for the uncompensated time they took to ensure our manuscript was as perfect as it could be.

To our “Aca-Superheroines”—the true Children of the Night—Candace Benefiel, Cait Coker, Ana G. Gal, Lisa Nevarez, Rho Nicol, and Lauren Rocha, your endless friendship, support, ideas, and obsession with vampires was the inspiration behind this book and so much of our scholarship.

Amanda is grateful for the limitless support of my amazing parents, Jo Beth and Donn Hobson, who always believe in me and remind me to dream big, and for my friends, Chris Reghetti-Feyler and Andy Feyler, because sometimes friends become family too. To Peanut Butter (Blaike Hobson), who makes me strive every day to make the world a better place, I promise that one day we’ll write a book together. To my niece (Madison) and nephews (Blaike, Noah, and Jase), I believe you can do anything.

Melissa would like to dedicate this, her third vampire text, to the women and girls in her life struggling to find their authentic selves in a sea of contradictory expectations. To my three nieces, Maeve, Freya, and Mya, astonishing bundles of intellect and joy; it’s ok to be a princess and still save yourself. To my mother, who has almost convinced me that I can, and my brother (whose incredible art is on the cover), who inspires me to believe I should.

Our gratitude goes to our contributors who have stuck with us through this surprisingly long process. Their creativity and knowledge about gender and the vampire has informed this project.

I may never see the sunrise, but I can take you to worlds beyond your dreams.—Carmilla (Sheridan Le Fanu, 1872)
1. INTRODUCTION

When you hear the word *vampire*, what does your mind conjure? You likely think of blood-drinking creatures stalking their prey in the night. You may think of a monstrous figure straight out of a horror movie, or perhaps like so many, you think of Edward Cullen and Bella Swan of the famous *Twilight Saga*. For most, the vampire is a creature of horror, fantasy, or even romance but one to be left in the fictional realms of film and pages of books; but for the scholars represented in these pages, the vampire is a creature of rich metaphors about life and death, sexuality and gender, cultural identities, and even political ideologies. J. Halberstam writes, “Monsters are meaning machines” (1995, p. 21), and the vampire is the ultimate incarnation of this sentiment. Every manifestation of the vampire explores underlying messages about what it means to be (in)human and how one navigates the world around them. The vampire, though, is a socio-cultural lens through which we can examine issues of justice and identity and one whom we recognize quite clearly as the most familiar monster because they share our faces, yet they operate as disconcerting mirrors of humanity.

In my childhood, I was given a copy of Anne Rice’s *Interview with the Vampire* (1976), a book that would help shape the course of my life as a scholar. This tale of vampires, who were the epitome of cultural outsiders, drew me into the darkness with them. They defied existing cultural norms, struggled with moral and ethical decision-making, and could live beyond natural death. It was Claudia, though, who most impacted my young mind. As she becomes a mature woman trapped in the body of a child, I could not help but recognize her inability to portray her inner life to the world around her through her physical body. It resonated deeply within the nerdy bookworm often unable to express my inner thoughts, and Claudia’s specifically gendered experience would stick with me. The exteriority of her childish body and her femininity shaped the manner in which Louis and Lestat infantilized her, even when she was no longer emotionally, spiritually, and mentally a child. No one could see beyond that physical façade to her true being, and moreover, these interactions shaped how she viewed herself and the ways that she interacted with others. As I was reading Claudia’s story,
I was vividly reminded of the times that I was informed by well-meaning adults that I could not do something or dream something because I was a girl. Claudia, I, and other girls who continue to receive those messages, internalized ideas about the cultural norms of gender and what it meant to be a girl. I could never leave the vampire behind after reading *Interview with the Vampire*. In my scholarly life and my entertainment choices, vampires would just not stay buried. Moreover, I have continued my desire to explore the intersection of identity and social issues through the image of the vampire, just as I did when contemplating Claudia’s particularly gendered portrayal.

Historically, vampires have existed in every culture, serving as reflections of the culture from which they came. Vampire tales find their place within religious texts, folklore, oral storytelling, and fictional explorations. They have long-stood as metaphors for a myriad of humans fears and desires, their struggle between good and evil, and discomfort with ambiguity and those who are different. Vampires rose within the context of folklore in order to explain that which human beings could not explain, such as coma, death, and the decomposition of bodies. In medieval times, vampires were part of the larger study of monsters. As the Christian church’s involvement in the lives of people flourished, monsters, including the vampire, became portents, displaying God’s displeasure with Man. When science began to study monsters, vampires became part of nature, even if they were aberrations of that natural world. The folkloric vampire exhibited undesirable and horrific characteristics. Vampires haunted villages infecting and killing others. Though the conception of monsters shifted over time, vampires have been an undeniable part of culture. Even after science advanced to explain that which had been previously unexplainable, vampires remained, becoming a mainstay in various fictions. Vampires, as literary trope, have pervaded cultural consciousness and invaded various genres, and they hold the fascination of the cultures to which they belong, demonstrated by the sheer number of vampire folktales, literature, graphic novels, theatre, art, films, television shows, and marketing.

In the contemporary era, there has been a sort of a bifurcation of the image of the vampire. On the one hand, we continue to see images of the monstrous vampire, who harkens to the folkloric past, a horrific killing machine. These vampires are represented predominantly in the horror and science fiction genres, such as Steve Niles and Ben Templesmith’s *30 Days of Night* (2002) and the subsequent film adaptation directed by David Slade (2007), Guillermo del Torro and Chuck Hogan’s *The Strain* (2009), and Justin Cronin’s *The
Passage (2010). On the other hand, there exists a romanticized vision of the vampire: a suave, debonair aristocrat that can be found frequently moralizing about their existence. These vampires are represented in romance and urban fantasy film and literature, such as The Twilight Saga (Stephenie Meyer’s book series 2005–2008 and film series 2008–2012), The Vampire Diaries (L. J. Smith book series 1992–1992 and television series beginning in 2009), and innumerable paranormal romance novels. There are some examples that blend these two ideas across all the genres in that the vampire is a beautiful monster. Think of many of the vampires in Buffy the Vampire Slayer (1997–2003) and Blade (1998).

Just as there has been an evolution in the representation of the vampire, there, too, have been developments in the portrayal of gender within the narrative. This volume addresses issues of masculinity and femininity, unpacking cultural norms of gender, while understanding that there is a need to examine gender non-conforming identities. When it comes to male identified vampires, the writers of early vampire tales exploited the fear of miscegenation and threats of sexual violence to the perceived fragility of white upper-class women and their social connections. Some vampire stories have featured an emasculated male vampire either feminizing or androgenising him in order to heighten the fear—highlighting the notion of the dangerous non-normative sexuality and gender of the effeminate man. This approach served to further denigrate the cultural Other—the female and the homosexual. With the vampire romance novel, the hypermasculine alpha male image of the vampire has grown in popularity yet the presence of the female vampire has frequently felt secondary, used as a plot-device for masculine dominance within the text. Throughout the history of the vampire novel, for instance, women have traditionally been portrayed as hapless victims; they are prey to the supernatural predator and motivating force for the vampire hunters, such as Mina Harker in Bram Stoker’s Dracula (1897). Female vampires often have perverted natures, prey upon children, and eschew normative reproduction and motherhood. In this way, they have been portrayed as beautiful predators, sexually and emotionally devouring their prey, standing as a perfect metaphor for cultural fears about strong, independent women and female sexuality. Indeed the female vampire represents one of the most enduring cautionary tales, with historical figures like Erzsébet Báthory and fictional iconic representations, such as Carmilla and the Brides of Dracula, all punished for their failure to conform. In this manner, the vampire is a key figure for addressing gender norms and the ways that those norms enforce cultural ideas about what it means to be a man.
or a woman. By examining gendered portrayals of vampires, these normative constructions seem arbitrary and false in their formation of ideals.

*Gender in the Vampire Narrative* offers classroom ready original essays, which outline contemporary debates about sexual objectification and gender roles, using the lens of the vampire in order to examine the ways those norms are undone and reinforced through popular culture. The vampire demonstrates conceptualizations of gender and identity that underscore issues of inequity and social interactions, and the pieces within this text attempt to unravel the ties that bind gender to beliefs about biology and the body, as well as the sociocultural institutions. Many essays address constructions of gendered identities and the intersectionality of identity factors that impact an individual’s interactions with the world, such as examining the ways in which a character’s race and ethnicity interact with her gender.

The volume opens with co-editor Amanda Hobson’s “Dark Seductress: The Hypersexualization of the Female Vampire” establishing the historical and cultural idea of the hypersexual woman. She argues that no matter what the genre, our visual culture emphasizes the voracious and dangerous sexuality of the female body and the female vampiric body. Travelling through the worlds of television, film, and stage, Hobson argues that representations of the female vampire reflect the historical commodification of the female body and thus consistently remind us of the dangers of unfettered sexuality.

Kristina Deffenbacher takes us to the urban fantasy universe in “Hybrid Heroines and the Naturalization of Women’s Violence in Urban Fantasy Fiction.” In her chapter she examines the gender-blending roles of urban fantasy’s kick-arse heroines in four core texts—Karen Marie Moning’s *Fever Series* (2006–2015), Charlaine Harris’s *Southern Vampire Mysteries* (2007–2013), Nicole Peeler’s *Jane True* (2009–2013) and Jeaniene Frost’s *Night Huntress Series* (2007–2013). Urban fantasy, she argues, provides a space in which the typically limited roles for women are expanded to counter the fairytale archetype where the heroine must wait passively for her prince to save her. By overlaying the traditional female with superhuman abilities and placing her in violent worlds, the heroines of Urban Fantasy become females capable of saving themselves while experiencing emotional vulnerability, and getting the guy without compromising their strength. In these ways, Deffenbacher effectively demonstrates that urban fantasy, as a contemporary genre, bends and blends normative expectations of gender thus presenting a “new” broader definition of femininity in the modern world.

Kristina DuRocher’s chapter “Men That Suck: Gender Anxieties and the Evolution of Vampire Men” examines the shifting roles of male vampires, by
unpacking the romantic heroes in *Dracula*, *Interview with the Vampire*, *The Twilight Saga*, and *The Vampire Diaries*. DuRocher effectively illustrates the development of the vampire male from monstrous creation to romantic hero while connecting their development to surprisingly static cultural anxieties related to the female body. Ultimately, she argues, while the surface presentation of men may seem to change, the purpose and intent remain couched in patriarchal concerns about a woman’s “proper” place.

In “‘There will never be more than two of us’: *The Twilight Saga’s Monstrous Mothers,”* Amanda Firestone takes us to the world of *Twilight* and the presentation of motherhood as the only viable option for women. By connecting Stephenie Meyer’s characters to Julia Kristeva’s work about abjection, Firestone examines the ways in which each of these “frozen women”—Esme, Rosalie, Sasha Denali—are abject mothers unable to naturally reproduce and thus are presented as monstrous in various ways. Moreover, their monstrosity is reflected in the restrictive ways they cope with Bella’s decision-making in regards to her own reproduction. Firestone argues that Meyer reproduces typical patriarchal attitudes that continue to value women only because of their reproductive abilities.

Benita Blessing, in “Sex, Blood, and Death: Vampires and Child-rearing,” takes us from the medieval period to the present day with a chapter that looks at the enduring allure of the vampire narrative to reflect parental fears. By examining different vampire tales from dramatically different periods, Blessing demonstrates the persistent role of vampire tales to express fears parents have for their children regarding sexual violation and/or premature death demonstrating the conservative, cautionary nature of the vampire narrative when presented to children and young adults.

Co-editor U. Melissa Anyiwo unpacks one of the most common contemporary stereotypes of black women in “Beautifully Broken: *True Blood’s* Tara Thornton as Black Best Friend.” By dissecting the characteristics of this archetype, this chapter explores the meanings coded into Tara’s characteristics and behaviour to illustrate the ways her character retains and expands existing concepts of blackness and black sexuality. In doing so she asks whether this beautifully broken supporting heroine offers more than a reductive stereotype of blackness, only available as the adjunct of the blond-blue-eyed heroine, or does the narrative structure of *True Blood* offer the chance for a complex non-white character and a fully rounded being?

Ryan D. Fong examines two little-known vampire texts, *The Blood of the Vampire* and “The Lady of the House of Love” in “A Feminist Bloodletting: Reading Suicide in Florence Marryat and Angela Carter.” Despite a large
historical separation, Fong argues that both texts reinforce the idea of female vampirism as a sexual threat that needs to be contained by male authorities. Yet, as his work demonstrates, both Marryat and Carter use the suicides of their female protagonists to subvert patriarchal control and revive female agency. By literally reclaiming their bodies through their deaths and thus escaping male control, Fong suggests that these two feminist authors offer both a critique of white patriarchal control and a suggestion of female liberation.

In “Vampiras and Vampiresas: Latinas in the Graphic Novels Bite Club and Life Sucks,” Lisa Nevárez takes us to the visual world of the graphic novel. As graphic novels increasingly become “accepted” modes of literature worthy of research (helped by their unending popularity), Nevárez examines the image of the Latina, looking beyond the traditional sexualized “hot tamale” stereotype to demonstrate that the graphic novel can offer an alternative vision of the vampire and the Latina, demonstrating women who thrive and survive despite their perceived gender and ethnic disadvantages.

In “‘You were such a good girl when you were human’: Gender and Subversion in The Vampire Diaries,” Rhonda Nicol analyses the emotional and social development of the three core female characters of the CW hit, Caroline, Elena, and Katherine. Through the multiple roles and storylines available to these three disparate archetypes, Nicol argues that today’s girls are no longer imprisoned in limited gender roles, complicating what it means to be female in contemporary world.

Ana G. Gal, in “Performative Femininity and Female Invalidism in John Keats’s ‘La belle dame sans merci’ and S.T. Coleridge’s Christabel,” argues that the female vampires of these narratives enact conventional femininity and fake invalidism to access their victims’ privacy, possessions, and even household. Through etiquette and a rehearsed performance of feminine scripts designed to engage the male gaze, they imagine and attempt to carve out liberatory spaces for themselves. However, as her chapter suggests, despite the female vampires’ ability to temporarily overthrow the rigid gender system, their performances are ultimately manipulated by the male poets to consolidate traditional gender roles for women as well as to promote a cult of female invalidism and passivity.

Finally, to celebrate our love of the female vampire we have constructed a list of our favourite characters from the popular culture universe, illustrating the astonishingly diverse ways in which female vampires have been seen. The list features highlights from core adaptations of Carmilla, Dracula’s Brides, images of vampiras of colour and honourable mentions from the
world of television we believe would make great tools within and without the classroom.

In the current wave of the vampire’s dominance in our cultural imaginations, vampires have become male romantic heroes with tales often reproducing and reinforcing typical gender, class, and racial expectations. Given that the vampire traditionally stood as a representation of our fears of gender and ethnicity, it seems odd that vampires remain largely white, heterosexual, and male with little focus on the ways in which they perform their gender, sexual, and racial identities. The role of women within vampire tales run the gamut of expressions, from vamp to vixen to victim to saviour to slayer. The construction of womanhood and gender is often an underlying and keenly powerful narrative within the vampire trope. At times traditional fops for limited gender norms for men and women; representations of gender in the vampire narrative traverse a large scope of expectations making it a fascinating area of discussion.

REFERENCES

A. HOBSON

   Entertainment.
   States: Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment.

*Amanda Hobson*

*Indiana State University*
2. DARK SEDUCTRESS

The Hypersexualization of the Female Vampire

INTRODUCTION

The archetype of the female vampire as the sexual temptress has been a part of vampire fiction since Sheridan Le Fanu’s *Carmilla* (1872) and the Brides in Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* (1897). Our visual culture emphasizes the voracious sexuality of the female body and more so of the female vampiric body. The vampire seductress fills our imaginations as she embodies contradicting ideals of femininity, such as fragility, strength, beauty, and power. In this chapter, I examine issues contained in the hypersexualization of the vampire and the manner in which these contemporary visual cultural examples demonstrate the reinforcement and re-envisioning of female sexuality. Engaging the symbolic connections of blood and female sexuality, this imagining of female hypersexualization occurs via the intersection of women’s political power and sexuality and through renderings of both sexual desire and sexual violence. Their representations cash in on the economic rewards of the commodification of female bodies but also on the contemporary vampire craze within popular culture. This chapter will focus on Julie Delpy’s *The Countess* (2009), Neil Jordan’s *Byzantium* (2012), and Spike Lee’s *Da Sweet Blood of Jesus* (2015). These examples illustrate the emphasis on the female vampire’s sexual desirability and her ability to use that sexuality as a tool.

In 2004, the world of the Las Vegas stage show witnessed precisely this intersection of female sexuality and vampire hype with the premiere of Tim Molyneux’s *Bite* at the Stratosphere. *Bite* was a topless female revue that entertained audiences with a hard-rock soundtrack, aerial acrobatics, martial arts, and contortionist acts. The plot revolved around a vampire lord and his harem of female vampires seducing unsuspecting victims in order to feed. In 2010, E! Entertainment described it as a “vampire vixen musical” and a “strip tease with a story,” and named working as one of the women in *Bite* as the twelfth sexiest Las Vegas job, where one cast member, Michelle, put it
dancers “seduce the audience over to the dark side” (E! Entertainment, 2010). While its eight-year run ended on Halloween 2012 (Weatherford, 2012),1 Bite highlights obvert female sexuality to titillate and seduce the audience into buying tickets for the show and even the opportunity to be brought on stage for a vampiric lap-dance. The vampire women of Bite, therefore, engage the audience members in a vision of female sexuality that is built upon the commodification of sex.2 The presence of a cadre of female vampires as the focus of a Las Vegas stage show demonstrates the immense popularity of the image of the vampire, especially that of the hypersexualized female vampire. The women of Bite and the vampires at the heart of this chapter rely on the patterns established in Carmilla and Dracula, in which the female vampire illustrates historically specific and continuing cultural fears about women’s sexuality as well as the titillation of the sexually voracious, beautiful, but deadly seductresses. The image of the female vampire emphasizes cultural obsessions with manifestations of women’s bodies and sexualities.

This vampiric female sexuality has long pervaded popular culture, religious ideology, and psychoanalysis. The reliance on the medical and psychological diagnosis of hysteria for women demonstrating a wide variety of symptoms underscored a pathologizing of female sexuality. Rachel Maines writes, “the disease paradigm of hysteria and its ‘sister’ disorder in the Western medical tradition have functioned as conceptual catchalls for reconciling observed and imagined differences between an idealized androcentric sexuality and what women actually experienced” (1999, p. 22). She argues, “Normal functioning of female sexuality was defined as a disease” by the medical establishments of the eighteenth and nineteenth century (p. 38). As medicine and psychology developed from the male model, the cultural view of female sexuality was its oddity, its utter abnormality from this androcentric paradigm. The images of female sexuality oscillate on a dichotomous framework of frigidity and hypersexuality—both must be cured and contained.

This fear of women’s sexuality particularly centres on women who embrace their sexual hungers and who act as agents of their own desire, and the female vampire embodies those cultural concerns. In discussing the “remarkable fear of female sexuality,” Bram Dijkstra (1996) writes, “The ‘discoveries’ of early twentieth century biology saddled Western culture with a vicious eroticism centered on images of the sexual woman as vampire” (p. 5). This image arises from the notion of women’s sexuality as inherently destructive if left unchecked and when not controlled by men, and vampiric sexuality is the ultimate in destructive forces. The female vampire, therefore, is the perfect
metaphor for that unstoppable force, draining her victims of vitality—their blood and sexual energy. These monstrous women slowly kill their prey, luring them into unproductive sexual encounters, draining them of blood and their perceived masculine essence—their semen, which has become a trope prominent particularly within vampire pornography of the contemporary era. Women’s bodies and their sexuality are a problematic entity enticing men to spiritually bereft and physically exhausting sexual encounters, leaving the man weakened and demoralized. In the realm of fiction, both *Carmilla* and *Dracula* tap into the cultural ideology about women’s bodies and sexuality of their particular contexts, and they also demonstrate the ways in which those concerns continue through time. These fictional tales articulated the cultural concerns about the dangers of female sexuality.

The 1897 classic novel, *Dracula*, launches a vision of the voracious appetite of the female vampire to seduce and devour. The Brides of Dracula offer sexual pleasure to the hapless Jonathan Harker, but that hedonism comes with an edge of teeth, seducing him in order to feed on his blood. Harker falls under the sway of the sexually aggressive trio of women, who stroke and entice him into passivity. *Dracula* establishes the vision of the female vampire sucking men dry, and these women have insatiable hungers for blood and for sex. While having no real agency, these female vampires hold power over men that they encounter through their hypnotic sexuality. The countless adaptations and immeasurable influence of *Dracula* continue to showcase the unquenchable destructive sexuality of the vampire and the subsequent cultural explorations and fear when that sexual appetite comes in the body of a woman.

In addition, sexual violence is indelibly linked to the image of the vampire, with the penetrative bite inflicted through coercion or preternatural physical strength. This highly sexualized act of the bite articulates fears of miscegenation, women’s sexuality, and homosexuality, and it also highlights concerns about lack of self-control and sexualized violence. Bonnie Zimmerman writes, “The male vampire has been used to suggest that heterosexuality is sometimes indistinguishable from rape … The function of the lesbian vampire is to contain attraction between women within the same boundaries of sexual violence, to force it into a patriarchal model of sexuality” (1981, p. 23). As Zimmerman notes, lesbian sexual violence is prominent within contemporary vampire fiction and film, as the seducing lesbian becomes the destroyer of other women and undermines heteronormative masculine power. This trope grows from Sheridan Le
Fanu’s 1872 character Carmilla, who uses the guise of friendship to seduce and drain her victim. It is the story of lonely young Laura and the mysterious visitor Carmilla, who befriends her. Carmilla’s sexual advances and proclamations of romantic feelings unnerve Laura, especially as her health deteriorates because of Carmilla’s nocturnal feedings. The fear established by *Carmilla* was two-fold for its era. First, the parental fear of their daughter being deflowered within the sanctity of the home. Second, Carmilla’s romantic and sexual advances articulate concerns about lesbianism, as women began to seek non-traditional careers outside of the home and roles beyond that of marriage and motherhood. In this manner, Carmilla’s lesbian desires illustrate the concerns of her era about unproductive and degenerate sexuality.

The vampire is a pre-eminently sexualized predator, who alternately uses horrific violence and smooth seduction. The vampiress is a hypersexualized image that blends that violence and seduction with fears of the destructive beauty and charm of womanhood. In this manner, vampires of all genders are very similar in that they draw in their prey through seductive charm and violence, but ideas about the female body and womanhood amplify the fears surrounding female vampires and their sexuality. Beliefs about womanhood centre on a notion of idealized feminine weakness and passivity and one specific type of weakness: the purported moral weakness manifested through the voracious and destructive nature of female sexuality. The female vampire with her heightened physical strength and her longevity move her firmly into the utterly uncontrollable category. She, therefore, embodies all of the cultural fears of women’s sexuality; especially that it is unquenchable and uncontained by male dominated institutions such as the Church, the family, and even the government. The films at study in this chapter demonstrate the fear and the fascination with the sexualized woman. The body and being of the female vampire only heightens those anxieties and that allure because of their simultaneous familiarity and alienness. In speaking of the Gothic tradition from which the vampire derives much, J. Halberstam (1995) writes, “The Gothic …inspires fear and desire at the same time—fear of and desire for the other, fear of and desire for the possibly latent perversity lurking within the reader herself” (p. 13). In the contemporary era of the vampire, films titillate their audiences by stroking that perversity through the hypersexualized feminine body costumed to stoke desire and positioned to evoke uncanny pleasure in the possibility of fear for bodily destruction and the potential for unquenchable hedonistic bliss, while reinforcing that biological weakness.
Vampires of the modern era owe much to one historical figure: Erzsébet Báthory. While scholars disagree about the exact details of her life and crimes, the fact that she lived and has influenced our image of the vampire is undisputed. Despite being accused of murdering as many as 650 servant girls, making her one of history’s most prolific serial killers, Báthory’s legend and influence is unknown to most outside of vampire enthusiasts and Hungarian scholars. Because of the stories of the prolific murders, Báthory has been immortalized, not as a mere serial killer but as a notorious vampire, whose desire for immortality and bloodlust drove her to madness. It is the legends surrounding how she killed and her supposed desire of immortality gained through ingestion or bathing in blood that have solidified her place in our cultural imagination even as her name has been obscured from history. Báthory strongly influenced the fictional vampire from Le Fanu to Stoker’s seminal tales as well as a long history of paintings, novels, and films based upon her legend.

Representations of Báthory’s life range from the fantastic to the horrific. The historical fears about the power of female sexuality to upend dynasties and bewitch men into politically and economically damaging decisions as well as the concerns over women gaining their own political agency play a key role in the history of Báthory and in one of the most recent adaptations The Countess (2009). The Countess, which Julie Delpy wrote, directed, and starred as Erzsébet Báthory, premiered at the 2009 Berlin International Film Festival. The film uses the life of Báthory as a template to overlay a plot of intrigue and vanity with a contemporary indictment of the fear of women’s political power and sexual agency, which is the core theme in all of the adaptations. Báthory is a historical embodiment and precursor to the hypersexualized female vampire that is evidenced in the characters of Carmilla and the Brides, and in Delpy’s vision, her sexuality and her power are inextricably linked together. The overarching narrative of the film articulates Delpy’s critique of cultural repression of female sexuality in the guise of a little-known historical figure. The film presents Báthory’s embrace of her own sexuality and sexual appetites as the weapon her enemies used to unseat her position of power and seize her vast land and wealth.

In keeping with Delpy’s desire to mix biography and contemporary critique of cultural views on women’s sexuality, the film both suggests historical verisimilitude while highlighting Báthory’s sexual voracity and her search for immortality combined with her desire for blood. Her curiosity about life
and death reigns as one of the prominent plot points of the film. Teenaged Báthory has a sexual relationship with a peasant boy. As a result, she becomes pregnant and is forced by her mother to hide away to give birth and then give away her child. Her mother makes her to watch the peasant boy’s execution from the window of the room that becomes her cell during pregnancy and foreshadows the end of her life. This relationship and its outcome cement, for Báthory, a connection between sex, violence, loss, and death. Blood, sex, and political power intertwine to mark the passage of growth and development in Báthory’s life and this early relationship, one that young Báthory views as love but that is framed as inappropriate given the difference in their stations, demonstrates the power of sexual relationships to her. This relationship sets the stage for her sexual and romantic relationships that bend normative constructions of sexuality in both the medieval and contemporary era.

Báthory has an arranged marriage, as tradition of her time and station demands, but she and her husband, Fenerec Nadasdy (Charly Hübner), spend little time together over the years as he was leading the forces fighting the Turks, leaving her to run the estate and broker deals with the King and other nobles and placing her in an atypical role for her time. Her traditional appearing marriage demonstrates her independence in a partnership that allowed both parties to utilize their skills—his military skill and her political savvy. After the death of her husband, others question her skills and independence, which pushed her to be more commanding over her estates and in the war against the Turks. She embraces the power of her role, even as others attempt to undermine her position and wealth, which would aid in the development of Báthory’s legend. The King and the other noblemen wish to acquire Báthory’s lands, wealth, and influence in the region. The King, for instance, had borrowed a substantial amount of gold and funds from Báthory and her husband, and with the death of Nadasdy, the King seeks a way to discredit her in order to be relieved of the debt. On top of this, Báthory’s cousin and political rival, Gyorgy Thurzo (William Hurt), wishes to seize her family’s estates. These machinations rely on cultural fears of female power as corruptible and unstable.

Freed by her husband’s death, Báthory allows her sexuality to emerge and flourish crossing lines of class and gender, adding to the image of unfettered womanhood. She demonstrates through her sexual and romantic relationships a fluidity of sexuality and desire shifting along the continuum of sexual orientation and demonstrating a willingness to engage in a variety of sexual activities, including sadomasochistic practices. Lisa Diamond (2008) writes, “Sexual fluidity …means situation-dependent flexibility in women’s
sexual responsiveness. This flexibility makes it possible for some women to experience desire for either men or women under certain circumstances, regardless of their overall sexual orientation” (p. 8). For Báthory, her sexual fluidity allows her to explore power dynamics and pleasure. It ultimately proves to be her downfall, as her detractors portray this fluidity as dangerous hypersexualization that must be corralled.

The film depicts Báthory’s fluid sexuality through several sexual relationships. First, she engages in a relationship with her female advisor—Anna Darvulia (Anamaria Mirinca). Darvulia practices witchcraft, and Báthory, though a practicing protestant in public, also participated in magical rituals in the belief that it would increase her power and vitality, adding to the concept of dangerous and independent womanhood. The whispers of the servants of the estate spread the tales of Darvulia and Báthory’s rituals and their sexual relationship, which underscored concerns about her instability and the unnatural influence upon her decision-making. This same-gender relationship offers sexual enjoyment, acts as an emotional outlet for Báthory, and is initially one of mutual desire and camaraderie. As the pressures of the political storm around Báthory intensify, their relationship deteriorates. Moreover, this relationship becomes a weapon wielded against her to prove her unfitness. The Catholic leaders use Darvulia’s link to witchcraft to demonstrate the faithlessness of women, and her political enemies use her hypersexuality as evidenced by the lesbian relationship to prove her unfitness to lead. Moreover, it is Báthory’s engagement with witchcraft that leads to her obsession with blood rituals and to drinking blood. Throughout folklore, witches were believed to be predestined to become vampires after death (Barber, 1988, p. 30) and, thus, solidifying Báthory’s positioning as the vampire of legend. As the whispers of her crimes circulated, that link between female power, witchcraft, and vampirism strengthened.

Her most sexually explicit and least sexually normative relationship occurs with Count Dominic Vizakna (Sebastian Blomberg), the eventual agent of her downfall. He teaches her how to dominate him and fulfil his masochistic need for pain and danger. She, in turn, learns to revel in her sadism through whipping him and engaging in breath play. In being drawn into a sadomasochistic sexual relationship, Báthory discovers that she can have physical power over another but also that it fills the empty voids of her life, even if it is only temporary. She is able to wield her curiosity and her cruelty by inscribing her frustration upon the body of another. Unfortunately for Báthory, Vizakna is an agent of her greatest rival Gyorgy Thurzo. Vizakna goads Báthory into taking her desire to inflict pain outside of the sexual
context, encouraging her to beat an elderly woman who approached her in the park. Adding to the idea in a way that by giving in to her sadistic desires, she becomes unable to control her impulses to draw blood and mete out pain. It is this sexual sadism combined with her desire for eternal youth that leads to her imprisonment and notoriety for heinous crimes of torturing and killing female peasant girls and young women. Báthory uses their blood as a salve against her fear of both aging and dying, which the audience sees her grapple with from childhood. She describes what she sees as the benefit of applying blood to her skin to her confidant, Darvulia, “I applied the blood, and I felt an incredible strength invading every part of my body” (Delpy, 2009). For thousands of years, blood was believed to be curative against aging, and it is this belief that drives Báthory’s bloodlust.

Báthory drains her victims in order to coat her skin in the blood. She penetrates their bodies with knives and also a large cage device with multiple spikes and channels through which the blood could rain down upon her body as she stood underneath the device. While her penetration of their bodies comes not through her bite, she revels in their blood and the piercing of their young bodies with the metallic teeth of the spikes. Báthory fills the role of sexual predator, employing her co-conspirators to procure her victims, but she alone uses the blood. Her sexual drive for blood and power cause her to pursue more victims to fulfil her needs. Her young female victims play a multifaceted role as their blood harbours additional vitality because of their youth. Their virginity also amplifies their desirability as victims for Báthory because it adds potency of the untapped sexual energy within their virginity. In addition, that her victims were young women enhances concerns about the perversity of lesbian desires just like Carmilla because the belief is that it leads to madness and homicidal tendencies. Báthory demonstrates the type of voracious appetite that her contemporaries and beyond feared and loathed in the idea of female sexuality that once it was awakened it could not be satiated. Her engagement in sexual sadism is a key aspect of her hypersexualization and leads to her eventual downfall.

The film also adds an underlying plot of her being in love with a decade’s younger man and the conspiracy to keep them apart that leads her to madness and murder. Love undermines her. Báthory engages in a brief sexual affair with Istvan Thurzo, and both confess their love for each other. Throughout their relationship, she sees the difference in their ages and is constantly reminded of her increasing age and his youth. When they begin their sexual relationship, she is approaching forty, and he is twenty-one. The camera focuses upon the differences in their ages, showing the wrinkles on her face
and hands juxtaposed to his vitality and smoothness of skin. She is encouraged to have a sexual affair with him. Yet when she wants more than just sex in the form of a relationship and marriage, her age and her believed lack of sexual desirability become the reasons that others tell her she cannot. It is her desire for youth in order to regain Istvan that unleashes her bloodlust. She turns to Vizakna and to sexual sadism in order to overcome the pain of losing Istvan engaging in bloodbaths with the fervent desire of regaining his affections. The loss of her relationship with Istvan and her sexual sadistic relationship with Vizakna are weaknesses that allow her enemies to conspire against her.

Delpy’s script offers an indictment of the disdain for women’s power and the fear of women’s sexuality. Frequently the narrative turns to articulations of gender equity and a role for women’s sexual agency. Báthory actively resists reduction to a sexual object, but she does embrace her sexuality completely for herself if not for women as a whole. During a discussion about women’s intelligence at a dinner party, Báthory states, “I agree that most women are weak … I believe that both men and women are equal but different” (Delpy, 2009). Báthory places herself in the category of women who are not weaker than men and moreover espouses the notion that sameness is not the defining factor for equality.

As she is awaiting her punishment, Báthory says to Gyorgy Thurzo, the architect of her downfall:

I will go to my grave completely sane. Your tale merely confirms that women are mad and vain and should not be given the right to rule. Your fable will keep the populace occupied for a very long time. They will be terrified of the bloodthirsty myth that you have made of me and forget about evils that are indeed very real. (Delpy, 2009)

She, therefore, reminds the viewer about their complicity in the image of her as an insane, vain murderer and also highlights the inability to reconstruct a complete historical picture of Báthory, the woman inside of the legend.

Ultimately, Gyorgy Thurzo, the King, and members of the Catholic Church use her perceived hypersexuality in order to imprison her and divide her wealth and property amongst themselves with some held back for Nadasdy’s heirs. Báthory’s life is, thus, established as a cautionary tale for other women not to attempt to rise above their station as a wife and mother and to not seek sexual pleasure. As feared by religious and cultural institutions, her downfall indicates that acting upon sexual desire leads women to unquenchable sexuality. At the most basic level, Báthory gives in to the hedonistic power of blood and sexuality, and therefore, her enemies are able to unseat her.