

Exploring
the Southern Vampiresses
of Southern Gothic Literature
through Kristeva's Abject Theory

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ABSTRACT

For the French literary theorist Julia Kristeva, abjection refers to a person's rejection of an object which blurs the distinction between the self and other. The horror, the shame, the disgrace, the taboo, the perverse – the situations, objects, and thoughts that we inherently separate ourselves from because they are too disgusting, too horrible, too distasteful to associate ourselves with – are the facets of our lives that we repel and reject. They are parts of ourselves that we cast off and separate from in an effort to maintain social order. For example, women's bodies (from which all human life stems), human waste, blood, and death are all examples of the abject. Essentially, any object that causes a strong reaction or causes a person to feel threatened can be termed abject. Thus, vampires in their very basic nature can be considered abject due to their relationship with blood: the extraction and exchange of it with their victims. The term signals attention to the abject, but when analyzing the female vampire as an abject, one must consider multiple layers of societal and cultural norms in order to completely dissect the abjection. This thesis focuses on the novels, *Interview with the Vampire* by Anne Rice and *Dead Until Dark* by Charlaine Harris. *Interview with The Vampire* displays one of the main characters, the fearless vampiress, Claudia, as headstrong, cunning, and adventurous, while *Dead Until Dark* offers further commentary on Sookie, a woman who uses her clairvoyant powers to assist vampires; as Sookie Stackhouse, although not a vampiress, survives and shows that the powerful vampiress must still die by the hands of men. To investigate the abjection of female vampires, this thesis also will focus on Julia Kristeva's psychoanalytic definition of the abject alongside Barbara Creed's definition of the monstrous feminine in order to demonstrate how Claudia's character encompasses the feminine abject. She is trapped in the body of a child, while being a daughter, a companion, a rebel, and above all, an undead. With fascination and horror, readers

and audiences around the globe have watched as her story was brought to life by Rice and popularized by modern culture. I will argue that vampiresses are the epitome of the abject as defined by Kristeva and Creed, and by placing the vampiress in the South, social and cultural and societal issues revolving the feminine and sexual desire are brought to the forefront. By exploring the background of vampirism, abjection, horror, gothic, and Southern gothic in relation to the characters of Claudia and Sookie, I will analyze the connections among them. Ultimately, I will demonstrate how the 70-year-old Claudia exemplifies one of the most abject female vampire characters in Southern Gothic literature and how Claudia's abjection enables a reader to make the connections between horror, abjection, the Southern gothic, and the monstrous feminine. In this thesis, I will also demonstrate that the vampiress of the South poses a threat to the male dominated society, thus often leading to their downfall, or even their death at the hands of men.

Table of Contents

| | |
|---|---------|
| Introduction: Vampires..... | Page 5 |
| Chapter One: Abjection, the Monstrous Feminine and the Other..... | Page 9 |
| Chapter Two: The South as Object..... | Page 17 |
| Chapter Three: Horror and the Gothic versus the Southern Gothic.... | Page 22 |
| 4.1 Horror..... | Page 22 |
| 4.2 Traditional Gothic..... | Page 23 |
| 4.3 Southern Gothic..... | Page 25 |
| Chapter Five: Sexuality of Southern Vampires..... | Page 27 |
| Chapter Six: <i>Interview with the Vampire</i> : Claudia..... | Page 32 |
| Chapter Seven: <i>True Blood/Dead Until Dark</i> : Sookie, Bill, Sophie-Anne, and Abjection..... | Page 41 |
| Conclusion..... | Page 49 |
| Pedagogical Reflection..... | Page 51 |
| Bibliography..... | Page 57 |

1. Introduction: Vampires

The vampire, one of history's most notorious mythical creatures, has been said to exist since the 1300s (Bundasen 1). A vampire can be defined in several ways, and according to the *Merriam Dictionary*, the word *vampire* has three definitions: "the reanimated body of a dead person believed to come from the grave at night and suck the blood of persons asleep," "one who lives by preying on others," and lastly, "a woman who exploits and ruins her lover¹." For this thesis, I use the definition of the vampire as: "one who lives by preying on others," as this is the definition that fits the paradigm.

Vampires, immortal and seductive creatures, have been the subject of *New York Times* bestsellers and mega-blockbuster films, and in 2022, they continue to be a global phenomenon. The idea of the vampire transformed from a monstrous, ugly figure to a seductive, often queer, and wealthy figure who could manipulate others to allow him to assimilate into society with relative ease. Film and television representing vampires have transformed the vampire not just into one kind of vampire, but arguably hundreds, and the most common factor they share is the "need for blood" (Bundasen 11). As film critic Anthony Magistrale states, you now can find the "Old-World Count in search of new plasma markets, lesbian vampires, extraterrestrial vampires, dominatrix vampires, prostitute vampires, redneck-cowboy vampires" (38). This flexibility indicates that the viewer is likely able to relate on some level to the vampires pictured on television nowadays. In addition, it demonstrates how much demand for this kind of entertainment there is.

¹ To give several examples, in Jewish culture, there is known to be the "Estire" which is a female-specific vampire that preys on Hebrews. In Romania, there are said to be the "Pricolici," a hybrid of a vampire and a werewolf. In Cambodia, "the ab" is said to detach her head each night and live off of human organs. In Ireland, it said that the "Abhartach" survives off blood and lives underneath the ground, coming out to feed.

In present times, authors entice American readers and viewers with the Southern vampire, set in the deep south, surrounded by isolated plantation homes, intricate graveyards, and a conservative, traditional culture that enables the audience to become entangled in a juxtaposition of disgust and fascination and is used to “deliberately address the region’s haunted history” (Austin v). Books such as *Interview with the Vampire* and *The Southern Vampire Series*, have also become television series or movies which have enraptured audiences with their overt sexuality, blatant immorality, and magical immortality.

Stories of vampires have been cultivated in almost every culture. The word “vampyri” was first coined in Vienna in 1725 when a supposed vampire, Peter Plogojowitz, was rumored to have come out of his grave and killed nine townspeople days after his own burial. It is believed that he drank the blood of those he killed, and once his body was inspected in his grave, it was stated that his body appeared alive “...The hair and beard--even the nails, of which the old ones had fallen away--had grown on him; the old skin, which was somewhat whitish, had peeled away, and a new fresh one had emerged under it...[there was] some fresh blood in his mouth...” (Groom 29).² Before that, in the 1600s, a Croatian man named Giure Grando reportedly exited his grave and walked into the homes of his friends (24 Groom). Further reported cases exist documented in Hungary, Poland, and Russia in the 1600s (Groom 25).

Other stories of vampirism have been linked closely to religion and its ability to save people from the evil that vampires embody. Branches of Christianity, particularly Catholicism, claimed to be the preventative measure to combat enticement and fear regarding vampirism (Bundasen 7). The Church promoted protection from illness and epidemics—specifically those believed to be caused by vampirism. For example in 1737 on the island of Lastovo in Croatia,

² Due to the massive fear generated from this case, Peter was staked and burned to ashes; this form of assuring death proves how much fear the vampire created in society.

the entire population fell ill with dysentery. Immediately, vampirism was named the culprit.³ Upon hearing of these cases, many priests began to state vampires could very well be the cause, thus spreading even greater fear, and Catholic priests began to oversee exhumations and cases. Though aspects of this remain (the cross and the holy water ward against vampires), the modern vampire stories I focus on in this thesis have differentiated themselves, mingling gothic, horror, and Southern gothic with contemporary political and ethical concerns. Thus, when scholar Katharine Austin, in her thesis “Interview with the Southern Vampire: Reviving a Haunted History in Contemporary Film and Television,” asserts that vampires can be classified as marginalized figures and that they are no longer seen as monsters, but as “social outcasts,” audiences can understand the growing popularity of vampire literature, films, and television, and how their increasingly bold themes of overt sexuality, violence (both by women and imposed upon women), and ambivalence of women depicts women as the outcast, the Other (Austin 5). Vampires as figures of the “minority” have put a twist on the traditional Dracula stories by bringing awareness, not only to vampires as abject, but to society’s negative reactions (abjection) to marginalized populations as “the other.”

Within the past two decades in the United States, there has been an overall uptake in books, film, and media regarding vampirism, but specifically vampiresses. Why has the figure of the vampiress gained more attention? With vampires who are women, desires are not suppressed, power is obvious, and the ability to overtake a man is a frightening prospect. The vampiress displays her sexuality, carnal needs and desires, and “this portrayal uncovers fear of that world just outside the boundaries of society,” (Saleh 2017). This is a world “where the female body is powerful, women have agency, and they continually violate the boundaries that are crucial to

³ Bodies that presented an overwhelming amount of blood and swelling were assumed to be the bodies of vampires.

civilized existence” (Saleh 2017). For example, when the female character in *Twilight*, Bella, becomes a vampire (ironically during childbirth), we can see her transformation from a timid young woman to a powerful woman driven by her maternal and bodily needs. The reader also sees others around her immediately trying to suppress her and her desires, and her having to defend herself. This exemplifies how stepping into this alternate world creates a space for the examination of what is driving the fascination, the abjection, and the blatant identification of “Otherness” in women, in particular those who take charge of their own carnal needs and desires.

However, all vampires highlight contradictions within our society; for instance, consider critics such as Franco Moretti, who believes the vampire to be an symbolic figure for capital, but also a figure that represents both “desire and fear” (79). Within vampire literature, readers and viewers are able to live in new, paranormal worlds with seductive creatures who live forever. This creates a contradiction. Abjection begins to pull the viewer away in horror, at an attempt to withdraw their thoughts away from bodily functions, while also pulling them in by seduction, binding the two ideas for the viewer, in contradiction as well as in defiance of societal norms.⁴ Thus, audiences can explore the psyche as well as further comprehend what it means to be abjected from society (Creed 59). Although there exists plenty of scholarship⁵ discussing Claudia and her Otherness, there is none that compares her abjection to that of Sookie’s while also tying together the abject, the monstrous feminine, and the Southern Gothic genre. Following this chapter, I will present definitions of abjection, the monstrous feminine, and the Other in relation to vampiresses. In the third chapter, I present the reasoning behind why Americans may view the Southern United States as abject through literature. Following this, the comparisons between the

⁴ There are many reasons why humans are attracted to the paranormal, but at the core is the idea of experiencing love with someone who has supernatural powers, someone who can protect and care for their partner in a world that is far different from reality (Dyer).

⁵ There are over 8,000 peer-reviewed articles written mentioning Claudia.

genres of Gothic and Southern Gothic are made to clarify how we categorize these novels. The sexuality of Southern vampires will then be discussed in an effort to tie their sexualities to their abject natures. Most importantly, Claudia's character will be thoroughly analyzed and her bodily abjection is tied to the previous theories, allowing for a comparison and contrasting section regarding Sookie towards the end of the thesis. Lastly, a pedagogical reflection and syllabus tie together how a course on the subject of vampiresses in the South is pertinent to today's high school educational world.

2. Abjection, The Monstrous Feminine and The Other

Barbara Creed, in *The Monstrous Feminine*, discusses the way the audience is drawn to the abject through the horror film genre. She writes,

Viewing the horror film signifies a desire not only for perverse pleasure (confronting sickening, horrific images/being filled with terror/desire for the undifferentiated) but also a desire, once having been filled with perversity, taken pleasure in perversity, to throw up, throw out, eject the abject (from the safety of the spectator's seat) (Creed 59).

Vampires, in their very basic nature, are considered abject because of their desire and need for blood to survive, and many critics have equated the general vampire with abjection.⁶ However, when analyzing the vampiress as an abject figure, one must consider multiple layers of societal and cultural norms in order to completely dissect the abjection. In her study, *The Powers of Horror*, Julia Kristeva introduces the term "abject" to describe the human response to something that can neither be defined as belonging to the "self or the other." She believes that the abject is

⁶ There have been several other scholars who have equated vampires with abjection. In *(Re)Cognising the Body: Performativity, Embodiment and Abject Selves in Buffy The Vampire Slayer*, for instance, Rob Cover argues that vampires (and other creatures) in the television series are abject because of the subjective lens through which the teenage characters view the "demons, vampires and monsters,"; because the monsters in the show are not "coherent" bodies and are not similar looking to the human characters, Buffy and her friends view them as abject. In addition, Cover uses the terms wholeness and fragmentation to determine how the transformation of certain monsters in the show draws us to abjection. For instance, a human transforming into a vampire is an abject process—the human body dies and expels its own substances. This argument of the transformational human to vampire process being deemed as abject holds true especially in *Interview with the Vampire*, particularly when Louis is turned by Lestat.

“opposite” to the self (Kristeva 1). Critical theorist, Alyssa Putzer elaborates Kristeva’s definition. She explains, “The abject threatens our very conception of ourselves, specifically within a Euro-Christian context, in the reality we have created and the stability and boundaries that we have built and drawn and the language that we use to identify what makes us different, and what makes others, “Other”” (Putzer). Moreover, the abject is what originates from the body, or an inner boundary and exits the body and into an outer boundary such as vomit, blood, or feces (Kristeva 101). This definition helps to explain the abject nature of vampires with their thirst for blood and the necessity in which they must extract it from their victims, and how it crosses borders of the body and crosses boundaries from the living to the undead (Saleh). Furthermore, this serves to introduce the vampire as the “Other.” Kristeva argues the abject is about “the fundamental opposition between I and Other or, in more archaic fashion, between Inside and Outside” (Kristeva 7), making one side or the other these boundaries between living versus dead a clear indicator of Otherness, whereas vampire abjection is in between these boundaries; it cannot be identified as one or the other.

Vampiresses may also be considered abject because they often reject societal norms, including normative heterosexuality. As women, vampiresses become more abject because they are deemed both sexual and animalistic (qualities women are not meant to express freely), and in modern literature and film, vampires “are increasingly depicted as marginalized figures striving for redemption and human connection...within this shift from monster to social outcast” (Austin v). Kristeva equates the abject with eroticism— building off of Freud’s commentary on a wound; this connection between abjection and eroticism also bridges the gap between abjection and the monstrous feminine. Kristeva questions, “The erotization of abjection, and perhaps any abjection to the extent that it is already eroticized, is an attempt at stopping the hemorrhage: a

threshold before death, a halt, or a respite?” (55). However, in the end, the abject vampiress is often killed by a man (perhaps threatened by her non-conformity), reinforcing that female abjection is a threat, even in fiction.⁷

The average vampiress would be understood by patriarchal society as unladylike and monstrous, and likely categorized as a sexual deviant or femme fatale because she has bodily desires such as extreme hunger and sexual urges, which she rarely represses. The vampiress must drink blood. The vampiress must often murder others. The vampiress is capable of hurting men, and is uncontrollable. This idea can be traced all the way back to the Bible, with the story of Eve, and her ability to hurt men (and all mankind) for not being obedient. Her lack of obedience then led to her punishment, banishment of her and Adam from paradise and her pain in childbirth⁸(Guzzo). This relates back to the case of Bella (*Twilight*), in which her extreme pain and possibility of death in childbirth is what caused Edward (the male vampire who still got to make the decision for Bella when to change her) to change her into a vampire, in order to save her and his unborn child. In saving her, he creates a “monster” with stronger desires and with a need for blood. The irony here is seen in the similarity as well as the contradiction between Eve and Bella. They are both punished for disobeying Godly or societal rules. Eve for being tempted by the snake in Garden of Eden, and Bella for her temptation of the vampire and for conceiving a child with him. The contradiction lies in the idea that Eve was banished, further oppressed, and her sins passed on to all womankind, while Bella is punished by becoming more abject, more estranged from her family and others, yet stronger and even more powerful than the men in her life showing how the female vampire’s abjection is intensified.

⁷ In *Dracula*, Lucy is killed by the men, so too in *Interview with the Vampire*, and multiple women are brutally murdered and raped in *Dead Until Dark*.

⁸ “Unto the woman he said, ‘I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children’ (King James Bible).

Kristeva explains that the abject can be equated with “the threat of her [women] taking control of her own power and not letting herself be defined by borders,” which also means the abject can further be defined as the physical (85). Physically speaking, examples can consist of spit, feces, urine, blood, pus, bile, or ejaculation. In examining these bodily functions, abjection is ultimately what society fears and finds uncomfortable discussing (Kristeva 85). In more abstract terms, the abject represents what is considered outside the norms of societal boundaries. For instance, homosexuality can be deemed abject because it is considered unnatural in reproductive terms, and the bodies of vampires can be considered abject because they are undead.

These physical boundaries can take on another form as in the example of food. Kristeva describes her own reaction to the dislike of hating a certain kind of food. She hates the “skin” of the milk because it reminds her of her own skin—but also because it seems foreign—as if it should not be there. In swallowing the milk, the milk goes inside the body, becomes part of the body, until it is digested and leaves the body in a different form (Kristeva 2-3). The food and water, even, that keeps us alive, are the very things we can consider will become abject because they will be digested and exit our bodies in a different form. There is an irony present in the idea that the vampire’s rejection of food as a sustenance contributes to its abjection, but the food and water that leaves a living person also becomes abject. Kristeva writes, “It is as if the skin, a fragile container, no longer guaranteed the integrity of one's "own and clean self" but, scraped or transparent, invisible or taut, gave way before the dejection of its contents” (53). In order to survive, the human body needs to function via intake and outtake. Vampires represent abjection because of their refusal of food and water and their need for blood. Thus, they remain trapped in a cyclical process of inescapable abjection.

By addressing the vampire in modern television and literature, authors and film directors/writers are addressing this cycle. Lehmann, one of the directors of the *True Blood* television series in an interview has stated that vampires have become “a metaphor for whatever societal outsider you want to slot in there: gays, or blacks, or liberals in the South” and no one who wrote the script was very invested in vampires “because the show is deeper than that [it is] a satire on societal boundaries” (Pond). The boundaries being crossed tend to be transgressive. By using the vampire (or vampiress) as a metaphor, audiences are drawn into a world which places women as the Other and as the abject in a predominantly male dominated society. As can be seen in *True Blood* through the abjection of females who choose to have sex with vampires, and then through the ultimately abject Claudia, the woman-child trapped forever in a child’s body in *Interview with the Vampire*, and *Carmilla*, as the “first” vampire, women are constantly thrown into the position of the abject and the transgressive Other when they their character challenges traditional roles as women, and they become a threat to the norms and boundaries laid out not only by society, but mostly by men, and men fear them. Kristeva explicates fear by viewing it as an emotion that is meant to protect. In questioning what causes fear, she hints that it could be the death drive—and the death drive, in some sense, perhaps desires fear. She writes, "Significance is indeed inherent in the human body" (Kristeva 10). And later she states, "I am afraid of being bitten." Fear and the aggressivity intended to protect me from some not yet localizable cause are projected and come back to me from the outside..." (Kristeva 39). This is the only instance in which Kristeva writes about the act of biting. Surprisingly, there is no section on vampirism.

Since the 20th and 21st centuries, much progress has been made regarding the rights of women, however, the patriarchy remains dominant. This is evident in the recent (June 2022) overturning by the Supreme Court Decision of *Roe v. Wade* in its ruling on *Dobbs vs. Jackson*. A

woman's body has historically been controlled by the patriarchy, and when a woman's body, *especially* a woman vampire's body, disturbs or challenges boundaries, the abjection of the body is highlighted. This focus on the woman's body and the fear (or pleasure) it may elicit in viewers and readers derives from the term Kristeva's definition of the abject. Kristeva explains, "The abject thus at once represents the threat that meaning is breaking down and constitutes our reaction to such a breakdown: a reestablishment of our "primal repression." The abject has to do with "what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules" (Kristeva 4). The examples of Bella and Claudia are prime to help audiences clearly see that these women (before they become vampires) did not have control over the destinies of their own bodies. Bella, in fact, begs Edward to turn her into a vampire for a long time before he finally relents when her life and the life of his child is in danger during childbirth. Claudia, whose character will be analyzed and discussed in her own section, also has no control when Louis, the vampire who becomes her father figure, decides to "save" her by changing her, rather than letting her die. The crux: she is only five years old when the dominant male makes this decision for her; she becomes stuck in the body of a five year old for eternity. Even Bella's infant daughter, already abject for being a vampiress, experiences the male domination when a werewolf "imprints" on her, meaning he will be her protector, without her consent or the consent of her mother. These storylines exemplify that even the abject male, the vampires, the werewolf, have the need to assert their dominance over the females who are threatening the status quo (or boundaries) of the patriarchy.

Abjection is related to Otherness in that the Other usually causes the viewer or other "normal" figures in a movie or book to feel abjection at the sight of the Other. However, abjection is not equivalent to the Other. Writer and scholar Giles Gunn, defines the "Other" as a

term for a person or entity who is believed to be different in a significant way (usually physically) from the dominant group or society who identifies them as different. The Other is viewed as strange or not fitting in with the rest of said group. Generally, Otherness has been best figured out by monsters and characters in science fiction: for instance, the aliens in *War of the Worlds* would be deemed as Other; and usually, these figures present a danger to the planet or part of society (The Gothic Network), but in this case, the strong woman, the vampiress, the women seeking pleasure for pleasure's sake becomes the Other. There are essentially two types of the "Other," and one is an internal other, whereas one is a radically different Other. Horror film critic Robin Wood explains that Other does not always mean a monster; sometimes the Other can be internal. These examples may include: women, generally, working-class and lower class, and other cultures/races besides the white man, as well as children. Abjection and Otherness have similarities: they both frighten the viewer; however, Otherness has clearer borders. The other is not familiar; but abjection is familiar (Wood 31).

An important distinction to make about an abject entity is that it also does not have to be a living being. As Kristeva states, "The corpse, seen without God and outside of science, is the utmost of abjection. It is death infecting life. Abject" (4). The confusion and disorientation that derives from viewing a dead body comes from the fact that the body might still look very much alive, yet the spirit of the person is no longer. The most obvious physical images of the abject are: the dead corpse and blood from a cut/wound that eventually heals itself. However, when concerning vampires, there exists: the undead corpse and the consistent blood wounds inflicted upon victims that often turn them into the undead. Vampires demonstrate abjection mainly because they are undead. (Thus when Claudia and the women in *Dead Until Dark* are killed,

they assume, according to Kristeva, a terminal abject state: they become corpses.) For Kristeva, death is the ultimate abjection. She says:

If dung signifies the other side of the border, the place where I am not and which permits me to be, the corpse, the most sickening of wastes, is a border that has encroached upon everything... The corpse, seen without God and outside of science, is the utmost of abjection. It is death infecting life...Abject. (Kristeva 3-4)

Not only that, but death almost always evokes a feeling of horror in the reader or viewer. Abjection relates to horror in that the reaction to abjection is horror, a point Kristeva repeatedly makes. The problem is that Kristeva never actually defines what horror means, and a definition is needed to connect the South to abjection. The *Cambridge Dictionary* defines horror as: “an extremely strong feeling of fear and shock, or the frightening and shocking character of something.” When the abjection of vampiresses crosses the threshold into horror, and the woman becomes the monster, the audience must decide what to do with the information. When tasked with separating the woman as the victim who “runs/run away from the male monster,” the audience sees her differently because she has now become the monster, and the woman crosses over from the abject to the monstrous-feminine. This depiction is defined by Barbara Creed which identifies women as the evil. Creed explains that in many ways the woman’s role as the monstrous has evolved from stereotypes of women, especially in relation to their sexuality (Vilchez 9).

Creed also believes that the abject applies to horror for three big-picture reasons: 1) horror almost always includes corporeal abjection—meaning that there is always a dead body, or imagery of death 2) borders which may differentiate from any things in opposition to one another, for instance: the monster attempting to assimilate into humanity is abject—but these borders may vary (could be morality borders, could be borders of the body, borders of normal vs

irregular sexual preferences, etc) the body of the mother or idea of the maternal body is almost always in question in the horror film. The monstrous feminine is horrific and this horror is realized through the sexual desires of the women characters, who tend to be either virgins or have an extremely active sex life. Creed asserts that there are a variety of different appearances of the monstrous feminine which all reflect female sexuality: “archaic mother, monstrous womb, vampire, possessed monster, witch, and castrating mother” (Creed 48).

By examining the female as abject, it is imperative to point out the idea that horror crossects with the abjection, pushing the “ border is between the normal and the supernatural, good and evil” (Creed 58), and separating out, penalizing, and often holding accountable by way of death, the women who dare challenge their gender roles, who follow their strong sexual desires (Creed 59), and who place fear in the heart of the male dominated society which is a reality for much of the world, but especially the Southern United States.

3. The South as Abject

Novels and films such as *Interview with a Vampire*, *The Southern Vampire Mysteries* (TV form: *True Blood*), *The Vampire Diaries*, and most recently, *The Southern Book Club’s Guide to Slaying Vampires*, have proven that placing vampires in the American south is an intentional, profitable, and attention-drawing decision that piques the interest of viewers and readers alike. Some authors have even concluded that “vampire texts set in the American South perform a complex and at times paradoxical function, promoting feelings of nostalgia for an imagined South as well as engendering processes of critical self-reflection” (Austin vi).

The first vampire novel⁹ to take the lead in the southern states was the 1976 novel *Interview with the Vampire*.¹⁰ Rice, who grew up in New Orleans, used the historically vampiric city as inspiration for her novel.¹¹ As Rice created a new vampire, one who questioned his own ethics and place in history, other writers became intrigued by the landscape of the South as a vehicle for exploring the vampire.¹² Audrey Niffenegger writes in the introduction that one can note similarities between Rice's debut novel and *Dracula*, however, Rice has created vampires who are "philosophical" and "wish to understand why they exist" (2). Perhaps, Rice desired to write about a vampire who is more human and capable of feeling, one who wants to examine his Otherness. Rice accomplishes this goal, furthermore, she invents a modern version of the Southern Gothic vampire and a child version of the Southern Gothic vampire, who becomes the vampiress who experiences abjection to the fullest extent by literally straddling and exceeding the rules of age and physicality. By creating Claudia, the most abject of vampires, Rice explores not only the abject, but the Other, in a unique and poignant way. By choosing a character who physically does not change, Rice also mimics the fundamental qualities of the South, which, as writer Bruce Catton describes is "a static society which could endure almost anything except change" (Catton, 353).

⁹ Published May 1976 by Alfred Knopf

¹⁰ The novel has sold over eight million copies.

¹¹ Jacques St. Germain was a socialite who lived in the French Quarter of New Orleans in the first decade of the 1900s. In 1903, an unnamed prostitute jumped out of the second floor window of his home and fell onto Royal Street. She was in a complete frenzied state and said that Jacques bit her neck; later, she was assumed to be insane and sent to the hospital for an examination. Jacques did not make it to the police questioning the following morning. He was never seen in New Orleans again. Jacques did not take many of his personal items with him. Crandle also writes that the police, "...discovered a series of open but corked wine bottles...they discovered the large collection of bottles were filled with...wine...along with good quantities of human blood" (Crandle 59).

¹² In 1991, *The Vampire Diaries*, by LJ Smith, introduced us to the Salvatore brothers, Damon and Stefan. The television series came out in 2009, one year after the *True Blood* series. In a fictional town in Virginia, the Salvatore brothers revisit their old stomping grounds. The brothers are over 500 years old.

In 1991 came *Dead Until Dark* (2001) by Charlaine Harris. In this TV adaptation, “True Blood,” as well as in the novel, people consume vampire blood, which is meant to cure sickness, increase libido and even make them better-looking. When the synthetic blood called “True Blood” is created, vampires feel like they can live out in the open, thus introducing us to Sookie Stackhouse, a telepathic waitress living in fictional small-town Bon Temps, Louisiana. She meets Bill Compton, a vampire, who is of immediate interest to her because she cannot hear his thoughts.¹³ Though Sookie is not a vampire, she faces being defined as abject due to her telepathic ability and her interest in vampires, specifically Bill. From the very start of the novel, we can confirm that vampires, along with Sookie, are marginalized and treated as “Other” in this novel and show. However, it is interesting to note that even vampires can be marginalized or privileged. In Federica Giannelli’s thesis, “Blood Ties: Southern Vampires in True Blood,” she acknowledges that the main characters in *Interview with a Vampire* are prime examples of white men who can get away with anything, even killing and being vampires, due to their wealth and ownership plantations. So, the vampires in the *Dead Until Dark* experience their own version of racism, while the vampires in *Interview with the Vampire* use their race and privilege to their advantage (Giannelli 26).

Nevertheless, placing vampires, who are abject by nature, in the Southeast, amplifies their abjection that much more for viewers and readers alike. Sabrina Boyer, in her article, “‘Thou Shalt Not Crave Thy Neighbor’: True Blood, Abjection, and Otherness,” asserts that the setting of Louisiana is a way to highlight the abjection of the vampires as the outsiders because they are experiencing discrimination based on their physical characteristics. She asserts that the “vampire archetype is one that has established itself in our collective unconscious to represent

¹³ Their relationship is solidified in what at first appears as trust once Sookie saves Bill from his blood being drained by a couple who desires to sell his blood for drug money.

difference” (Boyer 1). This means that outliers such as minorities, women, homosexuals, vampires, or anyone who break the boundaries of societal norms are subject to discrimination. Therefore, these populations, in these novels, films, and television series, become the metaphor for the societal “Monsters” we fear: the abject.

Both *Interview with the Vampire* and *Dead Until Dark*, whose themes of the mistreatment of women, sexuality of women, abjection, and horror are set in the South. By making the decision to place these vampires in Louisiana, other subjects such as religion and race concerning the Southeast are brought to the surface. Lundberg and Geerlings (2017) discuss the return of the repressed:

...qualities of monstrous beings such as vampires, ghosts, spirits, were-tigers, shape-shifters, mythical animals...and the wild feminine... [and the] spaces from which they arise, such as heterogenous cities, derelict buildings, hospitals, cemeteries, the wilds that surround urban spaces, tropical jungles, rivers, and everyday spaces of taboo. These spaces are openings through which the repressed continues to haunt us, expressed through the fear of the ‘other’: colonized peoples, foreign cultures and their practices, the feminine, sexuality, the abject, animality, and criminality (Lundberg and Geerlings 1).

Understanding how the South represents the repression of the “Other” shows how placing the vampire there will bring awareness to the suppressed ideology and begin to challenge the status quo, albeit in an entertaining and somewhat horrifying way. This leads to the idea that The American South itself can be categorized and considered abject by American society because of its deep religious roots, its conservative viewpoints, and its high rates of violence against women. First, and most prevalently, the South is known to be devoutly Christian. According to Pew Research Center (2017), “Mississippi, Alabama and other Southern states are among the most highly religious states in the nation” (Lipka and Wormald). The term “Bible Belt,” which encompasses areas of Virginia, reaches west to Oklahoma and extends South to Texas and Northeast Florida, is an apt example of this notion. The South in and of itself is largely Christian, with over 76% of the population practicing some form of Christianity (Lipka and Wormald).

According to the *Bureau of the United States Consensus*, the entirety of the American South includes North Carolina, Virginia, South Carolina, Mississippi, Florida, Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Texas, Virginia, and Arkansas, Tennessee, but, for the sake of this thesis, the main state focused upon is Louisiana, the setting for the two Southern vampire novels analyzed.

New Orleans is known as a romanticized city in the setting of *Interview with the Vampire*, but Louisiana can also be identified for its conservative views. Studies show Louisiana has high rates of sexually transmitted diseases which could be a result of the fact that sex education is discouraged and is mandated to promote abstinence, creating a separation of it from other states who have embraced well-rounded sex education for its population (Beahm).¹⁴ Thus, causing the South to suffer from Otherness, with its highly religious and conservative views as opposed to other parts of the country, which makes the rest of the United States view it as foreign. Furthermore, “Louisiana’s rate of women murdered by men remains 77% higher than the national average” and “5th among every state in the nation in the number of domestic violence homicides” (Smothers).

However, it is not just the way that sex education is addressed or the high rates of domestic abuse in the South that deems women in the south as abject, it is also the mistreatment of women’s employment capabilities and financial expectations. According to the *Institute for Women's Policy Research*, in Louisiana, it is estimated that women will not have equivalent pay until 2115. Currently, 19% of the Louisiana state legislature consist of women-identifying representatives. In addition, according to the National Alliance of Mental Illness (NAMI,) one-third of women in Louisiana have experienced domestic abuse. These statistics prove that women are not

¹⁴ According to *Louisiana Health Hub*, in the past several years, the state has ranked within the top five states for highest rates of Chlamydia, as well as the fourth highest rate of HIV and it is possible that the lack of sexual education might contribute to this pandemic.

treated equally throughout southern states such as Louisiana. Furthermore, the United States generally views the South as its own region, and many Americans hold prejudiced views of the Southeast. Yet, many Southerners still take pride in the South's "Otherness" and the cultural differences the South harbors. The inescapable past of the South is tied to the emotional turmoil found in the aftermath of the loss of the Civil War, and Julia Kristeva's definition of abjection can apply to physical spaces or marginalized groups—not just physical bodies. Additionally, we may call the South abject because it is alienated geographically and culturally, and at one point *was* separate from the United States during the four year secession¹⁵ and had its own borders.

4. Horror, and the Gothic versus the Southern Gothic

4.1 Horror

Penguin Book of Horror Stories (1985), J.A. Cuddon defines horror as: "a piece of fiction in prose of variable length which shocks or even frightens the reader or perhaps induces a feeling of repulsion or loathing." A more recent definition of horror, according to *The Cambridge Companion to American Horror*, is that horror fundamentally is "body-horror," meaning that it relates to physicality and our fears regarding what can happen to endanger our bodies and therefore our existence. While the genre of Gothic literature has always encompassed elements of horror, it is the Southern Gothic genre that confronts horror through realistic plots (Leslie Fiedler). After all, what is more horrifying than something that could *actually* happen? Ultimately, abjection is horrifying because it *can* happen in reality, it happens all the time, in the form of marginalized populations: homosexuals, people of color, and women.

¹⁵ The secession encompassed eleven states which considered themselves separate from the Union.

Creed asserts that the horror film allows the audience to ruminate in a “perverse pleasure” of confrontation. The audience watches horrible images which terrify them, and enjoy their perversions from the safety of the movie theatre, or from the between the pages of a book, not having to actually process what is being presented to them as the symbolic nature of horror and the abject (Creed 59). Kristeva explains that this attraction to horror is an attempt to explore the abjection in society while keeping the abject subject separate from its audience. She views the separation as a ritual in which people are reminded of the abject element, but then are able to dismiss it from their minds once again, making the boundaries stronger between the abject subject, its derivative, and the audience (Kristeva 58).

As Creed (54, 58) explains, “the abject must, nevertheless, be tolerated for that which threatens to destroy life also helps to define life. Further, the activity of exclusion is necessary to guarantee that the subject take up his/her proper place in relation to the symbolic.” She says, “A crucial point is that abjection is always ambiguous. Like Bataille, Kristeva emphasizes the attraction, as well as the horror, of the undifferentiated” (Creed 54, 58). Thus, it is through horror, that the audience can experience the themes of abjection safely, and with perverse fascination, without taking responsibility for the exclusions of the Other. By watching, with disgust, the audience may express their own horror at the abominations of the woman as the abject, the crimes against her, and the monstrous feminine created.

4.2 Traditional Gothic

It is significant to identify the categorical genres of vampire literature in order to explain their relation to the concepts of horror, abjection, and the monstrous feminine. The main category I will address first is that of the Gothic. As Nick Groom, author of *The Vampire: A New History*,

points out, “The cult of the vampire thrived within the emerging Gothic, as the figure was a perpetual and literal reminder that the past cannot be laid to rest, but will forever haunt the present” (92). The Gothic has been read through lenses such as psychoanalysis, post-colonialism, feminism, and Marxism; critics have also read the Gothic through Kristeva’s abject theory, in an effort to define what strays away from the “norms” of society, and this tends to be a monster.

Research on the definition of the Gothic did not gain much attention from critics until 1917 with the publication of Dorothy Scarborough’s *The Supernatural in Modern English Fiction*, when Scarborough began to explicate the origins and causes of horror/the supernatural in this specific genre.¹⁶ She demonstrates that supernatural characters are not just otherworldly—they are closer to us humans than we think. Another critic, Summers,¹⁷ like Railo, tied Romanticism together with the Gothic, believing that the benefit of the Gothic genre was to give readers an escape from reality. Gothic literature at the time was composed of novels, short stories, poetry and dramas that all seemed unlikely to occur in real life. Summers wrote,

We call our dreams Romance, and it was just this that the Gothic novelists gave to their readers. This, then, is exactly the reason why I think the Gothic novelists, with all their faults and failings, have done us an infinite service, and proved themselves true friends to those of us who care to withdraw, be it even for a short time, and at rare intervals, from the relentless oppression and carking cares of a bitter actuality. (198)

Thus, for Summers, Gothic literature keeps the dreams of man alive—yet Summers perhaps should have also said it sustains nightmares, as well, but critics had more to add to the

¹⁶ *The Haunted Castle* (1927) written by Eino Railo, probed into elements of the Gothic such as: “the haunted castle,” the Byronic hero, the male protagonist who usually saves a female character, all in all tying the Gothic into Romanticism.

¹⁷ Summers was an expert on subjects of witchery and vampirism; even as a devoted priest of the Catholic Church.

argument.¹⁸ Published in 2013, Andrew Smith's book, *Gothic Literature*, takes into account that even though the first Gothic novels¹⁹ tended to include members of a religious community as common characters, and often the novels are set in castles—that does not mean this is *always* the case. Smith rather highlights the foundational texts of Gothic literature to have one common denominator: a monster/evil force that is used to represent political, economical, or sexual anxieties. The vampiress is that monster that represents the desires of women and the anxieties of men. The Gothic genre has had a tremendous impact on literature as a whole, and as a result, it has sparked many sub-genres.

4.3 Southern Gothic

The term “Southern Gothic” has been used incorrectly by readers and researchers alike to refer to literature written by Southerners taking place south of the Mason-Dixon line. In 1935, E. Glasgow created the term “the Southern Gothic school” in an effort to depict what she believed to be violent literature written by authors from the South. Glasgow did not agree with Southern writers portraying the Gothic as what could be true-life; she believed that literature should only be considered “Gothic” if the danger within the story could not truly happen. So for Glasgow, “Southern Gothic” meant realistic aggression—not a novel that could be fiction. I disagree with Glasgow because I do not believe the genre should be defined by reality and oftentimes, authentic fears and monsters can be just as scary if not scarier than fictional ones. In 1966, Leslie Fiedler defines Gothic literature as being on par with American culture. For Fiedler,

¹⁸ However, more recent scholarship was penned by David Punter's *The Literature of Terror*, published in 1980. This book gives insight into how to read the Gothic, and Punter suggests audiences read it via a “Marxist/psychoanalytic” perspective (5 Smith).

¹⁹ It is generally conferred that the traditional Gothic began with *The Castle of Otranto* by Horace Walpole, followed by Charles Brockden Brown's *Wieland; Or, the Transformation: An American Tale* (1798).

the difference between the standard Gothic genre and the Southern Gothic genre is that the latter is often more realistic—these stories could actually happen. And to put this into perspective, the mistreatment/violence against women present in *Dead Until Dark*, unease related to sexual discourse present in *Interview with the Vampire*, and the desire for control over women present in both novels, is utterly realistic.

Several commonalities coexist among the two genres of the Gothic with the Southern Gothic: an unending sense of the past coming back to haunt the present, personal ethics, religion, and almost always a monster or dark force at play. The setting is also significant—in the Gothic, the story tends to take place in a haunted or nearly empty castle surrounded by forest, looming gray skies, and wolves or other predatory creatures. The Southern Gothic also sustains this haunting sense of place as the novels encompassing the genre take place in large esteemed homes, or on the opposite scale, worn down homes, or plantations surrounded by wildlife. Each setting in both genres focus on isolating the characters. For instance, in *True Blood/Dead Until Dark*, following the death of her grandmother, Sookie lives alone in a century old home that is run down and isolated, but far too big for one person to live. On the other hand, in *Interview with the Vampire*, Louis is isolated after the death of his brother as they live on a plantation

Peggy Bailey in her essay “Female Gothic Fiction, Grotesque Realities” separates the supernatural Southern Gothic from the standard Southern Gothic. She writes, “The Southern Gothic [non-supernatural] is fueled by the need to explain and/or understand foundational trauma, the violation or loss of that which is essential to identity and survival but often irretrievable,” (271). Bailey’s argument here is ultimately flawed. Both *Interview with a Vampire* and *The Southern Vampire Series* tackles the issue of generational trauma while also linking this to identity; and that identity in both novels are generally difficult to find. For example, in

Interview with a Vampire, many critics have noted that the novel attempts to probe homosexual relationships and tensions, while also probing a relationship between a father and daughter. In addition, if the vampire is viewed as the Other, then it is indeed true both novels are struggling with what being the Other means. In *Dead Until Dark*, Sookie Stackhouse is plagued by forming a new identity after meeting the vampire Bill and after everyone in her family but her brother dies. In addition, racism is very much a part of *Dead Until Dark*—it is evident in the novel and HBO series that Blacks are treated differently even in the 21st century and that “fang-bangers” (women who have sex with vampires) are also treated differently. Thus, the novel is also unpacking the way in which women are treated in the Southeast. It is incorrect to completely separate the Southern Gothic involving supernatural characters from the Southern Gothic in general.

5. Sexuality of Southern Vampires

Even though some critics, such as writer Stephen King, suggest that vampires cannot have sex, this is certainly mooted in the bodice-ripping, oversexed *Dead Until Dark*, as Sookie describes she knows they do as she watches several vampires grind against one another, and experiences sex with Bill (Zinoman). In fact, sexual relations in *True Blood* reflect the abject themes of the South that have already been brought to light. Incestual relations, the mistreatment of women, and the drastic age differences of an older vampire approaching a younger human are all at play. As Jason Zinoman, film critic for *The New York Times*, writes, “But the most troublingly taboo aspect of the sex lives of vampires concerns the question of consent.” It is not that the South has more instances of rape, it is rather that the rape occurring the book (that of a male character, René, raping and murdering women who have sex with vampires) displays anger at women for having desire at all. This common theme and occurrence of women being violated

works to shed light on the male dominated society in which women are repressed, and when they give in to their desires, they are at best, viewed with disapproval or stifled, and at worst, further violated or even murdered. It is not only *Dead Until Dark* and *Interview With The Vampire* that address the femicide of vampiresses; many vampiresses have been murdered by the hands of men in the origins of vampire literature.²⁰

In *Dead Until Dark*, a serial killer chooses female victims who have had sex with vampires. Killed by an unknown murderer, the reader discovers that each woman who has been murdered has slept with a vampire. Thus, these murders could be classified as hate-crimes based on the sexuality of the women. Sookie reflects on the amount of hatred shown towards Bill as she writes, “Half the patrons of Merlotte’s thought Bill had had a hand in the markings on the women’s bodies” (Harris 96). She mentions that most of the townspeople believed the women who were murdered “deserved what they got if they wanted to go to bed with vampires” (Harris 96). The first assumption of the townspeople is that Bill is the culprit simply because he is a vampire (showing his Otherness and projecting guilt on him). And those who do not believe it is Bill, believe it must be another vampire from a different town. Though the people are not happy about the murders per se, they generally shame or blame the victims for desiring to have sex with a vampire in the first place.

Even though Bill and Sookie’s relationship is nonnormative, they are heterosexual. In *Interview with The Vampire*, Louis and Lestat’s relationship is both non-normative and homosexual. If we consider Robert Phillip’s understanding of queerness demonstrating abjection,

²⁰ In *Dracula*, after Holmwood drives a stake through Lucy’s heart, Dr. Seward cannot help but reflect upon Lucy’s “purity” that has returned to her body (Stoker 246). It is interesting to note that while Holmwood kills Lucy, attention is drawn to his body, as Stoker writes, “The hammer fell from Arthur’s hand. The great drops of sweat sprang from his forehead” (246). Arthur is deemed the heroic body, the body that has completed the heroic action. In a reward for killing Lucy, he is instructed to kiss her while she is dead; this kiss from Arthur to not so much be out of an act of love, but rather an act of male dominance. He has killed the body he loved, and now that it is dead, he gets to have the final say with the body by kissing her when she is not conscious and is in fact, beheaded.

we are reminded of Kristeva's idea that abjection blurs and disarranges borders/identities. In his study of "Abjection," Phillip calls upon Judith Butler's *Bodies That Matter* to explain that homosexuality can be viewed as abject by heterosexual individuals; this is because heterosexual people could position homosexuality as alarming due to the fact that they must understand the definition of homosexuality while also "rejecting" those who are homosexual so that they can "maintain their own tenuous subjectivity" (20.) Homosexuality, through this argument, may be defined as abject, and critics such as Benefiel and Jowett suggest, Louis and Lestat are able to hide their homosexual tendencies despite exhibiting a homosexual relationship. Many different aspects of the novel suggest sexual relations, especially if one considers feeding as a metaphor for sex.

Rice uses amorous, sexual, and volatile diction throughout the novel to define descriptions of feeding, and there are many instances which display homosexual undertones.²¹ It is this diction that highlights the abject. The first time we receive an account of Louis' blood being sucked, there is a description of Lestat's mannerisms. Rice writes, "...he lay down beside me on the steps, his movement so graceful and so personal that at once it made me think of a lover" (21). It is evident from the start that the relationship between Louis and Lestat will be a tumultuous one which is interspersed with homoerotic tendencies. The lifeforce of blood being withdrawn from the body and cast out from the body is an abject act as the blood originates from the physical self. If all the lifeforce is withdrawn, the person in question will die— and death, as

²¹ It is striking to note a difference in the film version of *Interview with the Vampire* versus the novel. This main difference is the sleeping arrangements of the two protagonists, Lestat and Louis. Anthony Magistrale points out that in the novel by Anne Rice, the vampires sleep "face to face, on top of one another." But, in the film version (script also written by Rice), the characters sleep in different coffins. Instead of sucking the blood of men, they almost always are sucking the blood of women. Why make the film different from the novel? Was Rice worried that excessive homosexual scenes would deter viewers or lower ratings? In the novel, Lestat states, "Now I'm getting into the coffin...and you will get in on top of me if you know what's good for you" (Rice 26). Louis writes, "And I did. I lay face-down on him, utterly confused by my absence of dread and filled with distaste for being so close to him, handsome and intriguing as he was. And he shut the lid" (Rice 26).

has been said, is the most abject state.²² How does sucking blood mimic the act of copulation? The level of intimacy is arguably more present in a direct blood transfusion than copulation. It is rarer than sex and considered unnatural, and because the mouth is biting into the skin—literally, the teeth are entering and crossing into what ought to be a forbidden boundary separating the body’s inside from the outside world. Blood sustains life, while sex creates it—and sex does not always lead to the creation of life. When Lestat turns Louis, Lestat is “creating” Louis as a vampire— in other words, giving birth to Louis’s vampiric life, and in this way, he represents a maternal figure (Benefiel). When Lestat first turns Louis, the diction Rice uses is overtly sexual, forceful, and non-consensual.

Homosexual undertones are present from the beginning of the novel, as Louis recounts the story to “the boy,” the reporter who is interviewing Louis.²³ Louis recounts the first moment Lestat drank his blood: “I wanted to struggle, but he pressed so hard with his fingers that he held my entire prone body in check; and as soon as I stopped my abortive attempt at rebellion, he sank his teeth into my neck.” (Rice 21) Lestat is essentially asking Louis to be aware of how close to death he is. The vampire is also demanding that Louis hear the transfer of blood occurring; this scene mimics copulation. It can be said that it also mimics rape in that Louis does not consent to this action, in fact, he attempts to pull away from Lestat, but Lestat keeps his body in place and bites him anyway. There are multiple instance of homoerotic abjection occurring throughout the novel, and it is this very “threshold of death” that makes this scene the perfect example of abjection. Lestat’s desire to bring Louis this close to death is equated with bringing

²² If one’s blood is sucked to the level of derailing the body from continuing to function, then said person dies. The power of life remains in the entity that is feeding. hands. Similar to the way in which sex concludes with ejaculation (fluid leaving the body), bloodsucking concludes with blood leaving the body.

²³ The fact that Louis and the reporter are in a hotel room together hours on end is homoerotic from the start.

Louis this close to abjection, as death is the highest level of abjection. The “threshold of death” could be compared to that of an orgasm.²⁴

The abjection of Lestat and Louis exists because they are, in fact, a couple. They live together, sleep together and eat and kill together. One can sense their love-hate relationship as Louis recounts, “I did not like Lestat at all. I was far from being his equal yet, but I was infinitely closer to him than I had been before the death of my body...But before I died, Lestat was absolutely the most overwhelming experience I’d ever had” (Rice 27). This experience can be equated with the experience of sex. Later in the novel, Louis begins to fall in love with Armand, the head of the Theatres des Vampires in Paris. Interestingly enough, it is Louis’s new love with Armand that propels Claudia’s desire to seek out an intimate relationship with a woman (Jowett). As Jowett argues, Claudia does not look for sexual love in Madeleine, rather, she hopes for a new parent.

Barbara Creed writes that the role of women in horror tends to either be that of an innocent victim or an evil seductress whose monstrosity comes alive through the female reproductive system. This idea can be related to Claudia, because she lacks the ability to reproduce since she has been turned into a vampire at a young age (five years old), so she has no adult reproductive system. This, along with her bodily form, makes her abject because of her actual age (approximately 70 years old). She was never able to grow and have a normal reproductive system, have sexual relations as a human, or experience menstruation or puberty. This leads to the ultimate examination of an abject female.

²⁴ Louis goes on to describe the sensation of Lestat’s mouth on his neck, saying, “I remember that the movement of his lips raised the hair all over my body, sent a shock of sensation through my body that was not unlike the pleasure of passion...”(21). This thought confirms the pleasure that ends up being felt by Louis.

6. *Interview with the Vampire: Claudia*

Vampiresses often represent sexual desires that the patriarchy denies women in real life. One of the main characters in *Interview with a Vampire* is Claudia, a child vampire, who will serve in this essay as my first example of an abject female vampire — a type of vampire that intrigues because her abjection derives from the contradiction of her intellect maturing while she remains stuck inside a five-year-old's body. Claudia brings about a new kind of vampiress whose tragedy remains in her lack of sexual ability and stigma around her child body. In addition, her abject death is caused by the actions Lestat and Armand. Her abject existence, from her “birth as a vampire to her death by murder,” links together abjection with horror, horror with the Southern Gothic, and the Southern Gothic with abjection, as her abjection disrupts the space between borders of the self and the other. Most vampire novels include some kind of woman companion or adult bride who turns into a vampiress. As scholars Ikawati and Surabaya state, the reason why this novel is intriguing is because Rice brings a fresh perspective to the genre by adding a vampire in the body of a child.

The most abject vampire in Southern literature is Claudia, who is found by Louis²⁵ lying next to her dead mother in an open building. A ravenous Louis cannot help but feel tempted by Claudia and drains her until she “lays like a jointless doll.” By attempting to kill Claudia (without turning her), Louis also hopes to put her out of her motherless misery—to make sure she is not an orphan. But, when she is turned by Lestat,²⁶ she is made into the female vampire, abject

²⁵ It is 1791 when 25-year-old Louis de Pointe du Lac turns into a vampire at a doorstep in New Orleans, Louisiana. Louis recounts his life story during an interview with a young reporter in San Francisco in the 1960s. His story involves himself, Lestat (the vampire who turned him) and eventually Claudia, the young orphan Lestat turns, in order to ensure Louis remains with the new “little family.” (3 Niffenger).

²⁶ Lestat's manipulative behavior contrasts that of Louis. Lestat constantly steals and uses Louis for his money. Louis views Lestat as greedy; he does not fully comprehend the value of human life. Louis recounts, “No. Being a vampire for him meant revenge. Revenge against life itself” (Rice 44). We must recall Lestat's painful relationship with his father, and the burden his father left on him. Lestat belittles Louis and questions his ethical behavior throughout the novel, but especially so after Lestat reminisces on Babette. “Louis!” he said. You are in love with

by nature, but further abject because she is forever stuck in the physical body of a child while growing older and older mentally and emotionally each year; an unlawful and unnatural circumstance. While at first, the abjection is not obvious, as she is a five year old, Lestat and Louis “father” her, teaching her as well as spoiling her. However, as the years pass, she grows up intellectually, mentally, and emotionally, but she is unable to physically change into the young woman she has become. When she begins to realize this, her frustration grows, she becomes more “rebellious,” more ravenous for blood, and begins to incorporate her sexuality into her life by exploiting her child-body. Thus, she becomes abject in multiple ways: her inhumanness and monstrous female traits, her child-body, her unusual “family,” her relationship with her “father” Louis, her growing desires, her strength, her rebelliousness, and her sexuality (and perversion) all lead her to be one of the most abject female vampire characters imaginable (Benefiel 269).

Claudia’s character, because of her agony and abjection, draws in women readers.²⁷

Claudia’s lack of physical change makes us sympathize with her as she desires to experience copulation, but cannot. When Claudia asks Louis to describe the act of sex as a human, he replies, “I think that it was the pale shadow of killing” (Rice 189). Thus, scholar Benefiel equates sex with death in the eyes of the vampires in the novel. It is Claudia’s lack of sexual ability that contributes to her abject nature if we consider Creed’s view that women in horror films often are depicted either as “virgins” or “whores” (3 Creed). Claudia is a virgin, and in the

your mortal nature! You chase after the phantoms of your former self. Freniere, his sister...these are images for you of what you were and what you still long to be. And in your romance with mortal life, you’re dead to your vampire nature!” (Rice 76). Lestat, in many ways, is a master of temptation.

²⁷ When film theorist Laura Mulvey coined the term “the male gaze” she also categorized movies which tend to overstimulate our emotions: 1) horror, 2) porn, 3) “weepies.” These categories of movies and even books, overstimulate our emotions. These emotions are not “acceptable” in society, yet women tend to be those characters experiencing the emotions. Why do women tend to watch these movies and read these books? Perhaps it is because through these novels and movies, we are able to view what we experience without anyone’s judgment. The abject has a strong feminist context, in that female bodily functions in particular are ‘abjected’ by a patriarchal social order.” Women, fundamentally, inherit pain from puberty onwards. While Claudia may not feel the physical pain of puberty or giving birth, she feels the emotional pain of not experiencing either rite of passage.

novel she remains a virgin. Lorna Jowett argues that because of Claudia's unnatural/illogic bodily and mental circumstances, she "embodies the unlawful/unnatural: an attribute of the monstrous feminine." There is a bond between the monstrous feminine, abjection and horror in this instance. Creed helps to explain this phenomena. She elaborates:

definitions of the monstrous as constructed in the modern horror text are grounded in ancient religious and historical notions of abjection – particularly in relation to the following religious 'abominations': sexual immorality and perversion; corporeal alteration, decay and death; human sacrifice; murder; the corpse; bodily wastes; the feminine body and incest. These forms of abjection are also central to the construction of the monstrous in the modern horror film (Creed 51).

Claudia connects almost all of these criteria ambiguously, causing her to become the monster in the film, but also the victim; the deadly creature, but the innocent child; the cross between the hurt human child and the inhuman murderous vampire; thus, her abjection is blended with the characteristics of horror, the horror film, and the monstrous feminine.

In Wood's *Introduction to the American Horror Film*, he points out that the American horror genre tends to display sexual repression and the lengths characters go to in order to suppress their desires (Wood 76). He states that the repression of sexual desire in children is also on display. Claudia exhibits this repression, as readers can imagine being in Claudia's shoes, being treated like a doll, and feeling her frustration regarding never experiencing the pleasures that come with adulthood. Claudia's pain is not physical, it is psychological and emotional. Here, the audience, women in particular, can empathize with Claudia, despite her abjectness (or perhaps because of it), whose voice is often left out, especially because of the fact that the story is told from Louis's point of view, not Claudia's. Women may relate to this idea of being seen, but not heard, since a majority of history is told by men.

Furthermore, Claudia is judged by Louis and Lestat (they themselves having a complicated relationship²⁸) and oftentimes, they grow frustrated by her uncontrollable behavior which often resembles that of a spoiled child or rebellious teenager (Benefiel 269). At one point, Louis reflects on moments of intellectual and emotional change in Claudia, even though she still jumps in Louis's lap, and naps, and she still lets him call her "doll" (Rice 101). Louis states,

...then strange things began to happen, for though she...was the chubby, round-fingered child still, I'd find her tucked in the arm of my chair reading the work of Aristotle or Boethius...Or pecking out the music of Mozart we'd only heard the night before with an infallible ear and a concentration that made her ghostly as she sat there hour after hour discovering the music—the melody, then the bass, and finally bringing it together. (Rice 99)

Claudia's genius and intense passion regarding sophisticated subjects allows us to discern her actual age, while her body makes it hard to believe. It is evident Claudia has a drive towards pursuits of intellectual prowess; this wit is matched by her desire to kill. PhD scholar in Literary Studies Anna Koroniak (7), asserts that the novel magnifies a deeper theme of growth and development of the characters, that none of them remain "static in their personality" and the scenery changes through the years as they themselves change and grow, alluding to the idea that the novel attempts to address multiple serious themes through its characters as it disguises itself

²⁸ When analyzing Louis, it is key to emphasize his more ethical nature. Eventually, Lestat shows Louis that they can survive off of animal blood, and so, Louis while living on the plantation decides to survive off of animals from then on—that is, until Claudia. Lestat manipulates Louis into staying with him, reminding him that he does not know all that there is about being a vampire and how to conduct normal matters like business and more. "I'm your teacher and you need me" (Rice 34). We cannot blame Louis for following Lestat, after all, he cannot expose his nature to humans without fear of being hunted. When Point de Lac, Louis's plantation is burned as the slaves discover what Louis and Lestat are, Louis and Lestat retreat to Babette's plantation. Babette is a family friend of Louis. Louis kindly asks Babette to do one favor for him which is to allow them to sleep in one of the room's which she allows for one night until the next night she accuses him of being the devil. Louis replies, "I don't know whether I come from the devil or not!" (Rice 66). This quotation reiterates Louis's questioning of his own identity, and whether he represents good or evil. "I have to leave him or die, I thought. It would be sweet to die, I thought. Yes, die. I wanted to die before. Now I wish to die. I saw it with such sweet clarity, such dead calm" (67).

as a novel of pure Gothic horror, aimed at the entertainment of its disgusted, yet enamored audiences.

This can be demonstrated in the way that Claudia “cleverly” uses her prepubescent body to her advantage as Louis describes how she pretends to be a lonely orphan searching for help in order to feed and kill New Orleans folk. Louis reflects that he would even still “dress” her and she would say, “Do as you like...Only kill with me tonight. You never let me see you kill, Louis!” (Rice 101). One point of her abjection stems partially from this urge to feed. This desire is far stronger than Louis’s, and arguably stronger than Lestat’s, as well. However, one could argue that this urge comes from her desire to be like her “fathers,” to bond with them over killing, emphasizing her psychological trauma of a motherless existence and reminding the audience of the theme of abject feminine. Additionally, it could be argued that her insatiable appetite also stems from her “childlike hunger” and desire to experience the world as a child does, with unbridled vigor and enthusiasm.

Claudia’s strong desire to feed, murderous tendencies, as well as her rebellion and psychological trauma can be observed when Louis and Lestat realize she has been killing their servants. In particular, they discover a “mother and daughter together, the arm of the mother fastened around the waist of the daughter...both foul with feces and swarming with insects” (Rice 106). This scene is abject due to the bodily liquid and insects oozing out of the decayed mother and daughter, but also because of the insects and snails crawling out of the bodies. Abjection also exists because Claudia killed this mother and daughter, most likely as a reflection of the pain of her own mother’s death, building a lack of a border between her own pain and pleasure, while also foreshadowing Claudia’s own death with her “new” adopted mother, Madeleine.

While Louis and Lestat have each other, as grown men, to lean upon, Claudia has no one similar to her to speak to, nor to empathize with her. She lacks a mother or motherly figure, something that becomes more apparent as her character develops, especially when the character of Madeleine the dollmaker enters the scene. Additionally, the family in which she exists with Louis and Lestat is certainly an unnatural one, and the subjects brought up when dissecting this family dynamic relates to another key issue often discussed in Southern literature: that of incest. Benefiel asserts that this kind of family is “a subversive twist on the more normal biological reproduction of children. As the vampire turns its lover into its child, the relationship is oddly incestuous, a configuration that carries over into the portrayal of the vampire family” (263). Louis, Lestat, and Claudia are indeed a family, first and foremost. After all, Lestat claims Claudia as their “daughter” once she is turned (Rice 94). As English Professors Janice Doane and Devon Hodges understand, “This perfect staging of the oedipal moment uncovers not the girl's desire for the father so much as the father's desire for the girl child, the infantilized woman who is a perfectly obedient and dependent object of desire” (424).

Louis names them, “Father and Daughter. Lover and Lover,” proving his love for her, but also his desire for control over her (Rice 90). Jowett suggests that Claudia realizes this illogical creation of a child from a father and father. However, there is not only the father’s desire for love, there is also the daughter’s desire for love from a mother. As Benefiel reminds us, Rice based the character of Claudia after her own daughter who died of Leukemia as a young child. When Claudia meets Madeleine, a mentally-ill shop owner who sells dolls and is grieving the death of her own young daughter, Madeleine expresses her desire to take care of Claudia as a mother would, and Claudia reciprocates the feeling by insisting that Louis turn her into a vampire so she can be her “mother” (Rice 241).

All the while, Lestat and Louis realize Claudia is growing emotionally and intellectually, but they cannot wrap their mind around the growth because they still want to be in control of her. They want her to remain their child forever, adding to her abjectness because not only did they make her into a vampire in the first place, but they are also not considering her emotional health or well-being, only what they want. Lestat and Louis speak of these changes as though they are her parents and must decide what is best for her well-being. However, to make matters more disturbing, some critics, such as Benefiel, claim Louis and Claudia are lovers. References to this can be seen in the text. First, Claudia refers to Louis as her lover, and Louis digs his head into her “small chest” (Rice 116). But, at the same time, Claudia comforts Louis, and she hesitates to venture on her own life without him because she does not want him to be alone. Here, Claudia represents someone who must be there and care for Louis, falling into the stereotypical role of a woman as a companion and caretaker for man, and Louis, representing the patriarchy, does not want to give her up. Benefiel argues that this plays into a theme in which the members of the “family” can heal themselves. She says, “A gothic text positions its reader in a potential space where the psyche’s repressed desires and the society’s foreclosed issues can be engaged and thus where healing can occur” (Benefiel 270). In *Interview with the Vampire*, though, the family unit remains dysfunctional (and abject) by its very existence and circumstance.

Benefiel continues to dissect this abject family by noting that the normal family is a unit living in one household until the children grow up and leave. This vampire family does not follow these societal expectations; the family appears doomed from the beginning to be trapped under one roof, especially because of Claudia’s condition, and as Benefiel states, “...the vampire family can exist for centuries without change” (264). This family unit is abject yet again, for no one in this family will ever grow older. In addition, no one will ever be biologically related, yet

they still are a family unit. Koroniak clarifies the dynamic of the family created in *Interview with the Vampire*. She says, “Lestat was aware of this dichotomy and yet he fought this self-abjection with a grand plan to coin a human-like family. His home life with Louis and Claudia is described in lyrical, mesmerizing language” (Koroniak 8). He uses this language to describe their family and make it seem as normal and happy as possible. Perhaps he does this in an attempt to hold to the ideological familial expectation upheld in the south, showing that even creatures of the undead crave the nuclear family. Perhaps this proves they all want to be accepted into a society that inevitably will not accept them. Thus, they are trapped in a historical cycle of societal expectations and the inability of marginalized populations to meet them which exacerbates and emphasizes their abject state.

Furthermore, Creed makes several points about the ways in which the womb represents abjection, one of them being that the woman’s ability to have children connects her to an “animus” world that experiences the cycle of life. Claudia will never give birth, and she will never be a mother, but she will always be searching for a mother. Creed pushes the point that monstrous feminine often appears as a woman “who appears clean on the outside may be corrupt on the inside. The dichotomy of pure/impure is transformed into one of inside/outside” (47). Claudia does indeed appear normal on the outside, in the body of a beautiful child, but on the inside, she is calculating and commits rather evil acts. Doane and Hodges also believe that in Gothic literature, there exists a fear of the feminine—specifically the mother figure. Claudia is a monster because she kills. However, she dies by the end, being betrayed by her own fathers: Lestat, who does nothing to save her, and Louis, whose male lover, Armand, is responsible for killing her and her new mother by exposing them to the sun because he believes her age is a threat to the community of vampires. This illustrates another example of the book leaving the

reader to assume that the men continue to make the rules and the patriarchy wins. The audience must also question: why is it that Claudia must die instead of the other characters in the novel who have also committed similar violent acts? Again, this leads to the conclusion that women must be punished for their inability to conform to societal norms, even when their inability to conform (as in Claudia's case) is the doing of a male.

If we consider the family dynamic on a deeper level, the Oedipal nature of the relations is present. As Doane and Hodges argue, Lestat is the father—who created both Louis and Claudia—Louis acts as the mother to Claudia. Mimicking Oedipus's actions, Claudia falls in love with her mother, Louis, and attempts to kill her father, Lestat. But, later, she still searches for another mother figure, and in the end, it is both her and the secondary mother figure, Madeleine, who must die along with her because she is the only one that tries to protect her; this also is repeating Claudia's original death with her own mother. As Creed puts it, "the female vampire is monstrous...precisely because she does threaten to undermine the formal and highly symbolic relations of men and women essential to the continuation of patriarchal society" (60). However, in this case as in other vampire novels named, the "monster," Claudia, must die because she is abject, and because male characters view her as a threat. Armand, Lestat, and Louis are ultimately responsible for Madeline and Claudia's death as the Vampire Coven from *Theatres des Vampires* is disgusted by Claudia's child-like state after having learned she attempted to kill Lestat. From Louis's perspective, Claudia is monstrous, and he is more concerned about his relations between Armand and Lestat (Jowett). This demonstration of internal abjection is notable. Even the other vampires, especially the males in charge, find her abject, unacceptable within their society, due to her age, and her inability to blend in, thus showing Claudia's depth of

abjection within and without her community. She is the ultimate marginalized person; she does not fit in anywhere, even with her own kind.

When Armand and Louis attempt to “rescue” Claudia and Madeleine, the effort is thwarted. Louis finds Lestat holding Claudia’s yellow dress, and Louis holds it in his hands (Rice 302-303). Finally, Louis enters the doorway and finds “the blackened, burnt, and drawn thing that was Madeleine and the hand that clutched at the child was whole like a mummy’s hand. But the child, the ancient one, my Claudia, was ashes” (Rice 304). There are several different elements of abjection occurring here: the horror of death, murder—but mainly that of the physical bodies. The two figures are dead—Kristeva’s ultimate form of abjection. However, turning the body into ashes means that the corporeal form will not last—her body cannot be moved as one unit, it cannot be looked upon the same way; if it is touched, it will fall to the ground. Claudia’s body has become dust, as if there is no evidence to her once living, versus a decaying body. In her death, her corpse, her frozen hand of ash outstretched, forever grasping for Claudia, has caused Madeline’s body to also become abject. Not only is her body abject, but the idea of the horror of her trying to save her “daughter” which points the audience to the inevitability of their own deaths and their own inability to stop death at any cost for someone they love, thus, causing Madeline’s corpse to expose the audience to grief, a prominent source of abjection (Nations, et al.). In some ways, it seems a welcome death in that Claudia has finally found her mother figure to love, and they die together, at last, no longer suffering as vampires. At the same time, Louis and Lestat continue to live, insinuating their relationship continues, as well, and the patriarchy ultimately wins.

7. *True Blood/Dead Until Dark*: Sookie, Bill, Sophie Anne and Abjection

In Rice's novel, we saw abjection via the young body and lack of sexual ability in the vampiress, whereas in *Dead until Dark*, we find abjection through the brutal murdering of a vampiress in addition to her sexuality, and the Otherness of Sookie Stackhouse. In *Dead Until Dark*, Sookie Stackhouse represents abjection through her own special power—that of mind-reading. Even though she herself is not a vampire, she relates to Bill Compton because she, too, feels Otherly and is viewed in this manner by the townspeople. Claudia's abject nature stems from her lack of sexual ability, while Sookie's stems from her compassion and what she refers to as her "disability." Both Sookie and Claudia are motherless and find love at the hands of vampires. One displays freedom of sexuality, while the other is tragically trapped without it. Sookie illuminates abjection through the lens of her clairvoyant power. Another character, Sophie Anne, the bi-sexual vampiress queen of New Orleans, also displays that vampiresses are often killed by men due to their abject natures. And it is not just these two characters, the entire plot of *Dead Until Dark* revolves around a femicide of women who have sex with vampires.

In Eve Dufour's essay, "True Blood as a Platform for Lesbian Discourse," it is argued that Sophie Anne's character displays her sexuality on screen which highlights women's bodies to subtly question the desires of the lesbian character. While I agree with Dufour's argument, I would like to add onto it by proving that the reactions to Sophie Anne's sexuality are abject reactions, proving her to be viewed as abject in the eyes of men. There is no research related to Sophie Anne in regards to abjection and the monstrous feminine, but by careful analysis of two scenes in the show, I will display the character's abjection by means of the prejudiced ways men view her, in addition analyzing her gruesome death.

Sophie Anne first appears on the television show in season two. Played by actress Evan Rachel Wood, the character is depicted in the novel with bright red hair, blue eyes, and tends to

wear clothing from the Belle Epoque era. Her feminine power is exhibited through her wit and rank within the state as the vampire queen of Louisiana. When Sophie Anne joins leagues with Eric and Bill to sell the drug “V,” however, the Magister (head of The American Vampire League) mentions to all of them that he suspects someone under their rule is selling the drug, and the government suspects them. In season three, episode one, Eric refuses to relocate the supply of blood, and so, Sophie Anne in a rage of fury wraps her hand around his neck, saying, “With all due respect, I’m due a lot more respect than that. I’m sorry to compromise your manhood like this, but hell hath no fury like a vampire queen broke. Move. The. Blood.” While in the midst of this quote, she grabs Eric, quite literally, by the balls. After stepping away from him, he has an annoyed and angered expression upon his face, his vampire fangs popping out in frustration. Had her character been a man, Eric would have simply nodded his head and accepted the order. Later, (season three, episode six) in retribution for Sophie Anne’s framing of Eric, he restrains her demeaningly in a large birdcage. This also occurs after Sophie-Anne accepts Russell’s marriage proposal in an effort to relieve her of debt. This action of entrapping her in the birdcage further proves the power trip occurring within both Eric and Russell. By placing her in a cage, they are both declaring her as their property. Meanwhile, she screams, “I want my Hadley,” her woman lover, and the reactions of both men in the room (Eric and the Magister) are of smug laughter, for they are now in power. The final blow to Sophie Anne occurs when Bill Compton and American Vampire League members brutally shoot Sophie Anne. Bill desires to kill her for searching for Sookie’s blood, while the AVL wants to kill her for her illegal drug selling. Yes, he is murdering her for love, but by murdering Sophie Anne, Bill can also rise to a higher level of power. Sophie Anne’s body, like Claudia’s, dissipates into a dust that is blood red, and as Bill walks away, his

face is covered in that blood. Bill's desire for Sookie is a complicated one, also displaying abjection.

Sabrina Boyer's essay, entitled "Thou Shalt Not Crave Thy Neighbor": *True Blood*, Abjection, and Otherness," connects the Southern Vampire in particular to abjection. Boyer argues ultimately that the two main characters in *True Blood*, Sookie and Bill, "represent a border between human and inhuman" (33). I agree with Boyer, but would like to build upon this argument by pointing out that Sookie desires to grow closer to the inhuman, while Bill desires the opposite. In *Dead Until Dark*, Sookie's telepathy, which she refers to as a "disability," represents abjection. On the other hand, Bill Compton, a vampire turned while he was a Confederate soldier, represents the Other's attempt at assimilation while simultaneously being considered abject by the townspeople.

Sookie is drawn to abjection and her interest is piqued by the Otherness of Bill. Sookie uses her abjection (clairvoyance) to her advantage, whereas Bill often shies away from his abject nature by attempting to become more human. Even though Sookie does not turn into a vampire in the series, she represents female abjection by nature of her character's power, but also because of the location in which she lives, and the way in which she is treated by her town and Bill himself. The abjection occurs here as the human is almost as abject as the vampire, whereas in most vampire novels, (*Dracula*, *Carmilla*) the human does not have any abject qualities (excluding sexual preferences).

"True Blood," a synthetic blood, is meant to cure people of sickness, increase their libido and even make them better-looking. It is not until "True Blood" is created that vampires begin to not hide from society. Still, from the beginning of the novel, vampires are marginalized and treated as "Other" –whether that is garnering hateful stares from townspeople at the small town

bar, Merlotte's, or being pulled over by policemen for leaving a Vampire bar, or being accused of murder. On the opening page, Sookie reflects, "Ever since vampires came out of the coffin...four years ago, I'd hoped one would come to Bon Temps. We had all the other minorities in our little town—why not the newest, the legally recognized undead?" (Harris 1). The phrase "came out of the coffin" harks back to the queer/gay sexualities discussed in *Interview with the Vampire*.

When the vampires do come out of the coffin, questions of sexuality and non-normative sexuality come to the forefront of the small town of Bon Temps. When Bill enters the bar, no one can tell he is a vampire except Sookie, and immediately, there is a kinship between the two.

Townpeople in Bon Temps treat Sookie as though she is not only odd, but in need of empathy and attention, when truly, she would rather be left alone. A local couple attempts to drain Bill of his blood in order to sell it on the black market. By draining Bill, he would, theoretically, die.

Due to Sookie's powers, she is able to foresee the event, and frees Bill. Only a few nights later, Sookie's evening ends with an abject activity: sucking Bill's blood in order to survive. This activity emotionally bonds Sookie to Bill. The couple return to beat up Sookie after her bar shift. As she bleeds externally and internally, Bill shows up, and demands that she "Drink" (Harris 31). She recalls, "I tried to stick out my tongue...He was bleeding, squeezing to encourage the flow of blood from his wrist into my mouth. I gagged. I wanted to live. I forced myself to swallow." (Harris 31).

By accepting Bill's blood and engaging in this abject activity, Sookie grows closer to Bill. The intimate act is the first example of a grown woman drinking a male vampire's blood in this thesis so far. This example in particular can be compared to sex if we consider that Bill is the male giving sustenance to the female; he is giving while she is receiving; and she is so delighted that she falls asleep. However, it might be more complex, as Freudian confusions are at hand: if Bill is viewed as the mother figure, he is feeding the child figure (Sookie), and yet, they are

having sexual intercourse. Bloodsucking or the exchange of blood is even more abject than sex because it is an unnatural cycle between a human being and a dead body. And of course, the act of drawing blood in of itself could be deadly if enough is taken out of the body, causing what Kristeva claims to be the most abject: death itself. The first time Bill and Sookie have intercourse, blood signifies abjection as well as bonding.

Sookie is a virgin. She bleeds after they have sex. In *The Southern Vampire Series*, blood is known to cure a wide range of maladies: physical pain being one of them. Sookie says to Bill in a questioning manner, “Your blood heals.” (147). In turn, Bill volunteers his blood for her to relieve the pain. Sookie describes the action Bill takes, “I cried out, but he casually rubbed a finger in his own blood, and then before I could tense up he slid that finger up inside me...in a moment, sure enough, the pain was gone.” (146). Abjection occurs in two ways here: first, the blood coming out of Bill and second, the foreign blood then entering a new body—because this is a bodily substance that does not belong to Sookie. This act ultimately results in further emotional and physical bonding, while the reader may react with revulsion/abjection or erotic intrigue. Being that the writers of this show grew up in the 1980s, the “miniature blood transfusion” occurring reminds one of the AIDS crisis, prompting us to wonder if Bill’s blood is safe and unharmed to Sookie.

The skin, Kristeva argues, does not protect us from the world. Our skin, our bodies, can indeed be hurt, can die, if we are not careful. Our bodies really are never perfect, clean, or complete without these ongoing processes. When something occurs that upsets our relationship with our bodies: such as a large cut that bleeds, or pain from the throat from throwing up, for instance, we become significantly more aware of our mortality, and that is frightening.

When analyzing Bill's character, similar to Louis in *Interview with the Vampire*, Bill tries to be ethical and examines the way he lives. He states, "...a few times—I killed by accident...So I tried to be civilized about it, select bad people as my victims, never feed on children" (Harris 49). Thus, it is evident that Bill, when he had to feed off of humans, did his best to only feed off humans who he deemed immoral. This quotation also demonstrates how helpful synthetic blood has been—and for Bill, it has lessened the chance that he will feed and kill. Bill examines the life he leads and makes a conscious decision to live alone because, as he explains, when vampires live together they tend to be "reminded of how far from being human they are. They become laws unto themselves" whereas, vampires "who live alone, are a little better reminded of their former humanity" (Harris 72). Bill reflects on the choices he makes, taking into account how his own way of life contributes to society. Clearly, this illustrates the isolation of those who are abject, and their inability to live a "normal" existence due to their differences and their abjection.

However, Bill oftentimes remains stuck culturally in the ways of the 1860s. To reiterate, the South, especially during the time of the Confederacy was viewed as a political and geographical abject, quite literally divided from the Northern states by the Mason Dixon line. Oftentimes feeling overprotective of Sookie, Bill decides what is best for her without her having any say in the matter. This inability to adhere to Sookie's boundaries occurs multiple times; however, the most noticeable instance is when Sookie tells Bill that her uncle molested her as a young child. Bill, instead of consulting Sookie, decides to hire a hit-man vampire to kill her uncle. In an attempt to recover from this grave action and explain to Sookie how he feels about her in the middle of the novel, Bill states, "Sookie, if you knew how different you taste, how much I want to protect you..." (Harris 179). Sookie stands up for herself and creates boundaries in response, by stating, "But I have to live here, and I have to live with myself, and I have to

think about some rules we gotta get clear between us.” However, this attempt at creating a boundary between the two is not well received, as Bill does not listen to Sookie.

In a CUNY article entitled “Honor in the South,” it is surmised that before the South lost the war, men were always in power. Strictly men owned and operated businesses and plantations, so too, were men the only ones involved in politics. Women were expected to stay home, and abide by the rules of their husbands. Although Sookie might resemble the typical southern belle, as suggested by writer Evangelia Kindinger, she is strong and smart. Bill’s inadequacy in matching his behavior to the current climate in which women are being treated shows he has not made much of an effort in respecting women and their wishes.

In the midst of the murders occurring, Bill is scared to leave Sookie alone for the weekend at her house, and pays a vampire to watch after her from afar. Sookie asks, “You really think this is necessary? You know, I don’t remember you asking me.” Bill responds, “Sweetheart...I am trying very hard to get used to the way women want to be treated now. But it isn’t natural to me, especially when I fear you are in danger. I’m trying to give myself peace of mind...” (Harris 255). Bill treats Sookie as though she is a child, similar to the way in which Lestat and Louis treat Claudia for decades. This quotation displays that it is not entirely for Sookie’s wellbeing that she be watched by another vampire she does not know, rather, it is for the purpose of calming Bill’s insecurities about not being able to protect Sookie, when in reality, she does not need protection, and this is made clear when Sookie is attacked at the end of the novel.

When the murders begin to occur, Sookie turns to Bill to contemplate who it could be committing the crimes. She suggests, “...or you have someone who’s determined to kill women who’ve been with vampires” (Harris 101). Sookie catches onto the murders, bringing about patterns between them faster than the police and detectives do. However, it is not who she

expects it to be, and it is not until René is violently attacking Sookie that she realizes he is the serial killer.

Sookie is on her property alone when René discovers her in the dark. He refers to her with derogatory terms such as “bitch” and “freak” (Harris 297). Sookie, finally able to read his thoughts, realizes that René has killed his sister²⁹, and after killing her, he raped her. He completed the killing by strangling her “with her apron strings” from her waitress outfit, further proving the point that women in the South are still treated as Otherly; it is the apron strings that remain on her body, around her neck, after she is found by the police. Sexual violence is at play when René attempts to murder Sookie; he sexually assaults her by groping her. Luckily, Sookie notices his work belt attached to his waist, and eyes his knife. With quick thinking, she puts it into his chest, and states “...while he was still thinking, “I should have taken that off,” I sank the knife into the soft flesh of his waist, angling up. And I pulled it out. He screamed.” (Harris 297) Sookie is able to not only kill René, she is able to expose him and solve the mystery for the entirety of the town. She is the hero of the first book and even though she represents an abject female figure, she proves that abjection does not stop one’s will or desire to be morally ethical. Moreover, by solving the mystery, she protects women who could have been subjected to this brutal mistreatment and abuse. Ultimately, Sookie’s Otherness (her clairvoyance) is what protects her, and makes her assimilate more into the vampire community, bridging a gap between the vampires and humans.

Conclusion

While much scholarship has been written about Claudia and Sookie, none of it has addressed abjection and the monstrous feminine together.. This thesis **investigated** and answered

²⁹ The detail of the serial killer raping his sister brings about incest once again, reverting back to the idea of the South as Other, promoting the idea that incest is common.

how bodily and sexual abjection is found in Claudia as a child vampiress, while she is surrounded by an unnatural family unit. Furthermore, the setting of the abject Southeast proves why abjection generally draws in readers, accounting for the uptake in television and literature regarding female vampires in the Southeast. Claudia shares much in common with Sookie, who is treated as if she is a child by her lover, Bill. In both novels, the male characters attempt to control their lovers, blurring the boundaries between parent and child and lover and lover. Sexuality is brought to the forefront as both Claudia and Sookie are judged for their sexual lives or lack thereof. In the future, researchers might answer what continuing to place these vampiresses in the Southeast will do in terms of feminism in general, but specifically in relation to the expansion of it in the American South. I believe there is room for more analysis as to how the vampiress scares society, particularly in the political climate which is exposing the inequalities among marginalized populations, including women. Additionally, I believe in a more ambitious study, a longstanding pattern of abjection and femicide could be explored, linking *Carmilla*, *Dracula* and the contemporary novels analyzed in this essay.

A pedagogical approach to teaching a course on these terms and novels opens up a world of possibilities in terms of students learning about what psychologically drives society and humans. Below, I outline how such a course could be taught pedagogically.

Pedagogical Reflection

Why ought Southern vampiress literature be taught in 2022 to a high school senior elective class? The subject encompasses many themes relevant to today's society: the issues of the rights of women relating to their bodies and sexuality, abjection amongst women generally, and learning new concepts such as the monstrous feminine. In coming to understand why society has a fascination with vampires in the South, we will understand what society is interested in knowing. Vampires enable us to analyze political, sexual, and emotional aspects of our society. Furthermore, high school students tend to be passionate about fiction and other worlds that are created in fiction. By studying vampiric novels and film set in the Southeast, we tie together Southern history with critical theories. This is a course that blends multiple disciplines together, and therefore, it is a course that will enable students to think critically about how the different subjects they learn about might intertwine, particularly feminism.

This course is an advanced course and one that requires parental consent; I plan to teach at a progressive private high school that likely would already be teaching sexual education in the 9th grade. Parents would receive a form stating each book we are reading and each television show/film we are watching; they would then have to sign off on the waiver. To enter the course, the student must also be pre-approved with a previous recommendation by another professor to enter the course.

The film/television component of this course builds off of the reading list in that students will be able to gain a better overall understanding of how film directors and scriptwriters think versus how a creative fiction writer might think. At the end of the course, an essay is due that must combine analysis of the literature/film alongside a concept we have worked with (abjection, horror, or the monstrous feminine).

Lastly, and most importantly, the writing of the students will improve through self-critiques, in-person workshopping, and argument building. Students will come out of this class feeling confident in their ability to write, argue, summarize what they have read, and moreover, will have a firm understanding of what drives society and entertainment. By asking big questions about gender and sexuality, students will understand why vampires have continued to crawl onto the pages of best-selling literature and acclaimed films.

Syllabus: The Abject Southern Vampire: An Advanced High School Elective for Seniors

Since the 1970s and the publication of *Interview with the Vampire*, Southern vampire literature, film and television has seen an unprecedented uptake in popular culture. *The Southern Vampire Series* and *True Blood* have explored what it means to intertwine modern day vampires with the Southern Gothic. Furthermore, these vampires have been able to tackle modern societal issues of sexual orientation/education, moral/ethical values, and even epidemics. Why are we, as a society, still so fascinated by vampires, particularly those living in the Southeastern United States? Through the lens of Julia Kristeva's abjection theory and Barbard Creed's monstrous feminine, we will delve into the captivating figure of the vampire. We will be reading: *Interview with the Vampire*, *Dead Until Dark*, *The Vampyre*, *Dracula* and *Carmilla*. Alongside these novels, we will be watching certain episodes of *True Blood* (HBO). This course marries literary theory with history and English literature. This class requires parental consent.

Evaluation/Breakdown of Grade: Three-Unit Assignments

| | |
|---------------------|-----|
| Film/Episode Review | 20% |
|---------------------|-----|

The film/episode review is at least three pages double spaced. Please either use a narrative approach or a cultural/historical approach.

Research Paper 30%

The research paper must be 10-12 pages with at least seven citations. You will be graded on the quality of your argument, evidence, and organization. The research paper must engage with current scholarship on subject of vampire literature. You may choose a novel or short story we have not read in class.

Character Analysis Essay 20%

You will be graded on the quality of your analysis. This paper must be 7-10 pages in length, and must be written on one of the main characters in one of the novels we have read.

Participation/Weekly Discussion Board 30%

This grade will consider how often you contribute to the discussion and your own unique insights contributed as well as attendance. Weekly discussion/Reflections/Short Assignments also fall under this category.

What will I learn from this course?

- How to write with insight and curiosity
- How to read critically and analytically
- How to evaluate your own writing confidently
- The history of vampires
- Why society is still intrigued by vampirism
- An overview of introductory psychoanalytic theory
- How Southeastern culture has manifest itself into the present time

Course Policies

Respect in the Classroom: Treat your classmates and me with kindness and respect throughout the semester. We are here to learn from one another.

Attendance: You may have up to two excused absences. Please email me ahead of time if you must miss class.

Honor Code: All of our work is subject to the honor code, written as “On my honor, I

Delayed Work: I will deduct three points per day for late assignments. I understand that things may come up, however, it is important to grow accustomed to deadlines.

Emailing Politely: Please write a polite “Dear Professor” or “Hello Professor.” Sign off with a polite ending as well, such as “Regards” or “Respectfully.”

Plagiarism: Plagiarism is a serious infraction. Please consult OWL Purdue for any questions, but if you are still unsure, feel free to ask me.

Tentative Schedule (Sample):

Week One

M: Introduction to the history of vampirism and brief overview of novels/films/television

Reading: *The Vampyre*, John Polidori

W: Introduction to Kristeva's abject theory and history of the Southeast

Reading: *The Vampyre*, John Polidori

F: Introduction to Monstrous Feminine, Discussion of *The Vampyre*

Reading: *Carmilla*

Week Two

M: Discussion of Laura and Carmilla

Reading: *Carmilla*

W: Discussion of Abject in novel

Reading: *Carmilla*

F: Discussion of sexuality and death/Introduction to *Dracula*

Reading: *Dracula*

Week Three

M: Discussion on Harker vs. Dracula and homoeroticism

Reading: *Dracula*

W: Discussion on Dracula as Other and Lucy's femininity

Reading: *Dracula*

F: Discussion on Mina and Lucy: Abjection

Reading: *Dracula*

Week Four:

M: Discussion on Lucy and Monstrous feminine

Reading: Dracula

W: Discussion on Patriarchy in Dracula

Reading: Dracula

F: Discussion on Ending

Reading: Interview with the Vampire

Week Five

M: Overview of Southern Gothic

Reading: *Interview with the Vampire*

W: Discussion: Claudia

Reading: *Interview with the Vampire*

F: Discussion of *Madeline and Claudia*

Reading: *Interview with the Vampire*

Week Six

M: Overview of Abject Death in vampiresses

Reading: *Interview with the Vampire*

W: Introduction to Charlaine Harris, Louisiana as Abject

Reading: *Dead Until Dark*

F: Discussion of Sookie's abjection vs. Bill's

Reading: *Dead Until Dark*

Week Seven:

M: *Dead Until Dark* reading in person, break-out discussions

Watch: *True Blood* Episode One and Two.

W: *Dead Until Dark* reading in person, break-out discussions

Watch: *True Blood* Episode Three and Four.

F: *Dead Until Dark* reading in person, break-out discussions

Watch: *True Blood* Episode Five and Six.

Week Eight:

Final project due

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