"What are you?" Fear, desire, and disgust in the Southern Vampire Mysteries and *True Blood*

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Among the monsters that populate written pages, stages and large and small screens, the figure of the vampire, often both dashing and terrifying, most clearly evokes the emotions fear and desire. The two guiding emotions are particularly closely intertwined in the many contemporary vampire narratives which are based in the romance genre rather than in traditional horror. The intermingling of the emotions occurs on two levels: inside and outside the text itself. Focusing on the latter—the reader, viewer and listener's affects—Jeffrey Cohen argues that the "escapist fantasies" the monster provides as well as the "fantasies of aggression, domination and inversion are allowed safe expression in a clearly delimited and permanently liminal space" (1996: 17). This space, then, is figured not as the monster itself, but as the audience's temporary experience. Significantly, many discussions about vampire texts follow in this vein, with focus on what the monster represents to the listener, reader or viewer and seeing the experience of the text itself as a site of emotional meaning. In what follows, interest is rather in how fear and desire are mapped onto a liminal body, and how characters voice these emotions and act according to them.

Whereas vampire representations of earlier time periods may have provoked fear and repulsion simply because "vampirism as such was evil" (Carter 1999: 27), there is a noticeable trend in contemporary narratives to represent vampires as attractive, romantic heroes. These sympathetic vampires, rather than being based on the Dracula figure, are modeled on the early 19th-century Romantic instantiations created by John Polidori and Lord Byron, and they have ties to the glamorous vampires as envisaged by Anne Rice (Williamson 2005: 29-50). In contrast to Rice's novels, however, romance and love between human and vampire (rather than between vampire and vampire) are now in focus. Such is the case in Charlaine Harris' as yet unfinished Southern Vampire Mysteries series (2001 —), and Alan Ball's adaptation in the hitherto five seasons of the HBO-series *True Blood* (2008-2012). Despite

differences on the plot level, the adaptation is fairly faithful to the novels in terms of setting and, with a few exceptions, characterizations. In the following discussion written and visual text will often be seen as forming one, more or less cohesive, text world, which will be seen in relation to other, past and contemporary, narratives to tease out the vampire's function, particularly in the depictions of fear and desire. Of interest is also how the emotion of disgust is figured in the text world, both in relation to the seeming paradox inherent in human attraction to the revenant, and to the vampires' reaction to the prolonged contact with humans in the supposedly multicultural society.

Rather than seeing the affects as automatic responses, thus reading both vampires and human characters from a psychological angle, the emotions will in what follows be approached from the political cultural studies perspective as outlined by Sara Ahmed in *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. Ahmed maintains that "emotions should not be regarded as psychological states, but as social and cultural practices" (2004: 9) and that they are shaped by repetition. Rather than being biologically unavoidable responses inherent in the subject, fear, desire and disgust stem from the tradition with which the object (the vampire in this case) has been represented within a culture. That is, emotions are "shaped by contact with objects, rather than being caused by objects" (Ahmed 2004: 6). To apply highly political theories to popular culture is not intended to in any way trivialize the important claims Ahmed makes regarding racism, but rather to show how patterns reoccur and have similar effects in the studied text world. Readings of how different forms of Othering occur throughout the SVMs and *True Blood* thus illuminate how emotions are evoked in the meeting between human and monster.

Bodies that fear

Through its literary and cultural history, the figure of the vampire has reflected various anxieties and fears connected to the invasion of either bodily or geographical space (or commonly, both). In the contemporary "post-colonial, post- or trans-national world," such as the one depicted in the text world, the vampire is increasingly useful in reflecting "anxieties [which] focus on the struggles of integration rather than expulsion" (Muth 2011: 76). No longer threatening the outside borders of the nation, the vampire is figured as already part of it, which entails, on the part of

humans, different, albeit still fearful, forms of encounters. One of Ahmed's central arguments is that both individual and collective surfaces are made in the meeting between bodies; meetings which create rather than enforce already existing boundaries. She suggests that we "think of the skin as a surface that is felt only in the event of being 'impressed upon' in the encounters we have with others" (Ahmed 2004: 25). It is only when surfaces are felt that a distinction can be made between self and Other. In contrast to the majority of traditional vampire narratives, where the nature of the beast is initially unknown and only gradually revealed to the human protagonists, intermittent meetings between humans and vampires strongly emphasise the difference between an individual self and an Other, but it is seldom the case that humanity at large becomes aware of the supernatural existence.[1] That is, the body of the community as such is rarely impressed upon by the body of the vampire group. In contrast, vampires in the Southern Vampire Mysteries and *True Blood* are a known reality: the "legally recognized undead" (Harris 2001: 1). The outing of the new minority is a fairly recent, global event, the "announcement … made in hundreds of different languages, by hundreds of carefully picked personable vampires" (Harris 2003: 5). The temporal contact between humans and vampires is limited, but it still entails an ontological shift by which surfaces of bodies are strongly felt, and boundaries between self and Other erected.

In the meeting between bodies in the text world, differences abound, but vampires also attempt to emphasize potential similarities, both positive and negative, to forge links between themselves and humans. The new minority group insists on vampirism as being brought on by a virus, which aligns them with other groups whose conditions are involuntary. Issues of free will and choice, rather than traditional vampiric determinism, forge another link and are predominantly

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[1] In these types of narratives, the process of uncovering the vampire's true nature often constitutes the main plot, and there are many contemporary texts which reiterate it. Bram Stoker's novel *Dracula* (1897) and Joel Shumacher's film *The Lost Boys* (1987) can be mentioned as examples of texts which dwell at length on the identification of the monster and its weaknesses and strengths. In narratives contemporaneous with the text world considered here, and with a similar focus on romance, such as Stephenie Meyer's Twilight-saga and L. J. Smith's *Vampire Diaries*, the human protagonists have an awareness of vampires, but the supernatural element is kept secret from the larger community.

connected to the possibility of mainstreaming: subsisting on the synthetically produced Tru Blood. The blood substitute radically decreases the vampiric threat, and comparisons with human atrocities further the image of the unharmful Other. In *True Blood,* vampire spokesperson Nan Flanagan appears on *Real Time with Bill Maher* and when asked about vampires' alleged "sordid history of exploiting and feeding off innocent people," turns the tables to human history. "We never owned slaves, Bill, or ... detonated nuclear weapons" (2008: 1.1 "Strange Love"). These moves align the text world with other narratives in which the "'good vampire' is defined as such by his or her interaction with humanity," and in which fear and hate caused by the human characters' meeting with the Other is "called into question by measuring vampiric 'evil' against the evil perpetrated by humanity" (Carter 1999: 165-66). In the text world there is thus a conscious strategy on the part of the vampires to on the one hand downplay the threat they pose and represent themselves as victims, on the other to relativize the threat they do pose.

The global community has reacted in various ways to vampires coming out and illustrated different levels of tolerance of the new minority. Sookie Stackhouse, the (initially) human protagonist and narrator in the novels, reports that the US has "adopted a more tolerant attitude" than many other nations, but it is also established that regional differences play a part in what reactions are seen as permissible (Harris 2003: 6). The sociocultural Othering of the vampire in the American South, and then particularly the small Louisiana town of Bon Temps, plays into the long, although by no means unique, history of segregation of various minority groups.[2] Reading vampire texts through the lens of regional fiction, Evangelia Kindinger suggests that the "deviance" of the regional setting, seen in relation to the supposedly heteronormative and cohesive larger American nation, "is enhanced and elaborated on through the presence of supernatural and monstrous characters" (2011: 17). Vampire presence in the regional setting, and the emotion of fear evoked

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[2] Maria Holmgren Troy reads *True Blood* in conjunction with Jewelle Gomez's *The Gilda Stories* (1991), parts of which are also set in the American South, arguing that very particular aspects of the past, such as slavery, are usefully illuminated through the vampire protagonists' position "between memory and history: [they are] remembering subjects as well as embodiments and transmitters of the past" (2010: 71).

in human/vampire contact, highlight a long history in which differences between individuals have been enforced. Bon Temps, where inhabitants keep close tabs on each other and have a shared history which locks people into roles,[3] is represented as "less tolerant" of sexual and ethnic minorities than cosmopolitan cities (Harris 2002: 9). Ignorance and homophobia have free reins when customers at Merlotte's bar accuse the gay cook Lafayette of contaminating their food with AIDS (2008: 1.5 "Sparks Fly Out"). When African American Tara suggests to policemen that she is in a relationship with a white man, she reflects that: "Race is still a button you can push" and that "mixed couples" are frowned upon despite the changing times which see an increasing number of vampire/human relationships (2008: 1.4 "Escape from Dragon House"). Discourses of racial segregation and sexual prejudice thus work as a backdrop to fearful feelings towards vampires. Reactions to the new minority group in many ways mirror previous structures, evoked by long histories of contact between bodies, and reiterated by those who have something to gain from hate and fear.

Despite these tensions and prejudices, human inhabitants come together in the face of approaching disruption from the outside. As Ahmed discusses in relation to the emotion hate, the creation of a cohesive community is dependent on individuals' love for something (a nation, an idea) in relation to which other subjects' "'unlikeness' from 'us'" identifies Others (2004: 44). Despite differences in sexuality and skin colour, the common denominator in the text world becomes humanity and a sharp contrast forms in relation to the non-human (or used to be human). The threat to the temporarily cohesive community, the shared space, is often figured "as a border anxiety: fear speaks the language of 'floods' and 'swamps', of being invaded by inappropriate others against whom the nation must defend itself" (Ahmed 2004: 76). In *Dead Until Dark* this anxiety is verbalized by a lawyer who states the necessity of "a wall between us and the so-called virus-infected. I think God intended that wall to be there, and I for one, will hold up my section" (Harris 2001: 264-265). The metaphorical wall is intended to shield self from Other, same from different, and to avoid the vampiric

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[3] See for example Detective Andy Bellefleur's struggle with his professional role due to "the old connections, the shared high school, the knowledge of each other's family" (Harris 2001: 87-88).

body impressing upon the human. The stress on sections being upheld by individuals also works towards the idea that the protection of the human community is a joint effort.

The fear of the Other articulated on collective levels in the text world is aptly illustrated through attitudes expressed by members of the Fellowship of the Sun, an organization which consistently stresses an oncoming threat and consequently "works to secure the relationship between [the] bodies" of self and Other (Ahmed 2004: 63). Focusing on killings allegedly perpetrated by vampires, the Fellowship maintains and kindles the image of the vampire as a "bloodsucking abomination" (1:12 "You'll Be the Death of Me") and it is described as being to vampires, "[w]hat the Klan was to African Americans" (Harris 2002: 104).[4] Its leader uses a Christian rhetoric arguing that "hating evil is really loving good" (2009: 2.3 "Scratches") and repeatedly comes back to this binary with good, predictably, connected to light and the sun, and evil to darkness and night. The military approach of the Fellowship's boot camps and the stress on obedience emphasize the border anxiety and in time develops into a full out war scenario, exposing the hypocrisy of an organization which on the surface stresses peace and the importance of doing God's work.

Through both individual and collective reactions, characters in the text world illustrate the social and cultural practices which produce and reproduce a fear of the Other. The human characters have previously, in Ahmed's terminology, felt their skin as a surface in relation to other minority groups, but their past, shared history has also meant that their attitudes because of the sociopolitical climate need to be hidden. The character Maxine Fortenberry provides a succinct example as, even though full of contempt for a whimsical array of demographics, such as Methodists, Catholics and ladies who wear red shoes, she is also hateful towards African Americans. Racism is the only form of hate she tries to hide, with the line "hush, that's a secret," and her reason for her emotions is age-old: "That's how I was raised up." The personal history cited here is illustrative of the social and cultural practice by which she has been instructed to hate African Americans, but she is not ignorant of the

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[4] In the fifth season of *True Blood*, the KKK, which here functions as an analogy, takes concrete shape. In response to increasingly violent vampire attacks, a local Bon Temps Chapter forms.

changing times making statements to this effect impermissible. Her view of vampires, that they are "wrong, wrong, wrong [and] devils" is on the other hand not an emotional reaction she strives to hide (2009: 2.9 "I Will Rise Up"). For Maxine, like the lawyer and the Fellowship of the Sun, the difference, not in degree but in kind, between human and vampire makes for a more accepted outlet of emotive, hateful expressions.

Romance, deadness and danger

Cultural and social constructions of Otherness are central even in contemporary vampire narratives which focus on relational, romantic attachments. What is different in these texts can also be perceived as deeply attractive, or even be a prerequisite for this attraction in a culture in which outsiders (in some contexts) are less stigmatized. As Milly Williamson argues, the contemporary vampire "has become an image of emulation [offering] a way of inhabiting difference with pride, for embracing defiantly an identity that the world at large sees as 'other'" (2005: 1). The main vampires in the text world, Bill Compton and Eric Northman, are depicted as objects of love and desire, but simultaneously as very different. They can be labelled "heroic antagonist[s]," the oxymoron signaling characters that are simultaneously "admirable and subversive" (Heldreth and Pharr 1999: 1). Romantic conventions influence how these heroic antagonists are portrayed, but also how Sookie is placed in relation to them. In contrast to other human characters in the text world, Sookie has expanded knowledge and abilities to assist the vampires in various ways. The romance staples of overcoming odds, of portraying the human character as able to disarm potential threats because of attraction or love, and of depicting her as extraordinary thus work to stress not only why Sookie is drawn to the outsiders, but why they are drawn to her.

The attraction between Sookie and the main vampires also hinges on the depiction of her as an outsider. The novels' first-person perspective and the initial voice-over in the TV-series, along with a continuous focalization, establish that Sookie is the character inhabiting the normative role. In a fictional world increasingly populated by supernaturals of various kinds, she is initially the human touch stone, with a liberal attitude to the marginalized, non-human groups she comes

into contact with. Further, she is characterized as relatively open-minded about ethnicity and sexuality, yet she displays human (perhaps familiar) shortcomings in some of her views.[5] But Sookie is also literally open-minded in that she has access to other people's thoughts. Her telepathic gift enables her to overhear bigoted opinions, demeaning views about herself, and secrets that people have no desire to have known. In the text world there are few stereotypical traits and no cultural script governing attitudes and reactions to telepaths, arguably making Sookie into one of the main sources of fear. The question "what are you?" is not, as would be expected, asked of vampires (or even the lesser known supernaturals in the text world), but rather, and repeatedly, of Sookie herself.[6]

Sookie's ability, or "disability" as she characterises it, along with the fact that she is revealed as part fae, place her in a marginalized position and make it difficult to unreservedly read her as the norm (Harris 2001: 2). She is considered (both by others and herself) as an aberration and is repeatedly referred to as a "freak" (Harris 2001: 217; 2002: 60). Her and her family's struggle with her Otherness has given rise to feelings of embarrassment and shame (see e.g. Harris 2001: 51); emotions which naturalize her gravitation towards other outsiders. Ahmed states that shame can be read as "*the affective cost of not following the scripts of normative existence*" leading to an individual seeking to "enter into the 'contract' of the social bond" (2004: 107, original emphasis). Sookie enters into one kind of social bond whereby the vampires offer a sense of togetherness, and inclusion in the vampire community offers a release from the shame since the scripts of normative existence in their company is substantially rewritten.

The friendly, romantic or erotic appeal of the vampires' Otherness may seem at odds with the fact that they are dead (or undead) and that the meeting between human and vampire bodies should produce disgust rather than desire. Drawing on Julia Kristeva's discussions about abjection, Ahmed suggests that what is perceived as disgusting is not alien to the subject: "what threatens from the outside only threatens

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[5] Especially in the Southern Vampire Mysteries where the reader is privy to her thoughts, it is made clear that she is quick to jump to conclusions, sometimes based on peoples' actions, sometimes because of her lack of exposure to ethnic and sexual difference.

[6] See for example *Dead Until Dark*, where Bill asks this question at least three times (Harris 2001: 13, 27, 32).

insofar as it is already within" (2004: 86). The corpse, or the revenant in this case, is therefore likely to provoke disgust as it is the negation of the living body. In the text world, however, the issue of deadness is initially downplayed by the suggestion that vampires suffer from a mysterious virus. Rather than being dead, they simply manifest allergic reactions to, for example, sunlight, garlic and silver. But this version, or "propaganda" as Sookie's employer Sam terms it, becomes untenable as additional categories of supernaturals make their appearance in Bon Temps. Sam (himself a shape shifter) concludes that, "I'm sorry, Sookie. But Bill doesn't just have a virus. He's really, really dead" (Harris 2001: 252). Sookie later reflects that she has been "happier [believing that] Bill had some classifiable illness" (Harris 2002: 63), but his deadness does not make her terminate the relationship. Genre plays an important part in changing attitudes because with the general change from horror to romance comes a shift in focus from the vampire as signifying the dead body to it representing a figure of immortality. Rather than representing "deadness or dead things" the contemporary, romantic vampire trope represents "death as transformation" (Bosky 1999: 218-19). Sookie's own position as an outsider explains why she would desire transformation and the text world's partial grounding in traditional romance downplays potential disgust in favor of an idealization of the immortal state.

Even as threats are diminished, and as deadness shifts to signal a sought-after transformation, there are tendencies in vampire fiction to continue the stress on potential dangers. In connection with audiences, Fred Botting argues that a lingering "negativity suggests a reason for [their] continued emotional investment in figures [even when] horror cedes to romance, and revulsion to attraction" (2008: 4) and the same can be maintained regarding characters in the text world for whom the emotions presuppose each other. In their initial meetings, Bill himself draws attention to the lingering traces of negativity, and tries to instil fear in Sookie. "Vampires" he says, "often turn on those who trust them. We don't have human values, you know" (Harris 2001:13). In connection with another human/vampire couple, Sookie reflects that Hugo "might be in sexual thrall to Isabel, he might even love her and the danger she represented" (Harris 2002: 125). In a situation featuring Hugo in *True Blood*, he reflects that: "It's addictive, isn't it? To be desired by something that powerful" (2009: 2.7 "Release Me"). Similarly, Talbot,

another human, "liked that he had won the heart of Russell Edgington, a being who could kill easily, who deserved to be feared" (Harris 2003: 164). The very Otherness which comes into being when the meeting of bodies establish boundaries is here portrayed as a source of a powerful attraction. The human characters are singled out by Bill, Isabel and Russell; dangerous, extraordinary beings, which in turn means that the humans can be perceived as extraordinary too. The danger and lingering negativity are thus constructed both from the inside by the monsters themselves, and from the outside by humans, the latter construction serving to maintain and enhance the human's own desired apartness, and following similar lines as the romantic script.

Stereotypes, stickiness, and sympathy
The diversity of the literary vampire trope and the plethora of popular culture vampires in novels and on screens today necessitate in-text delineations of the specific vampire conventions at work, and of what stereotypes do and do not apply. Ahmed argues that fear is produced by "the repetition of stereotypes" (2004: 63), that is, to experience fear of what is approaching, the object drawing near has to have been perpetually (mis)represented. The stereotypical representation of the literary vampire involves various genealogies and strengths which are designed to Other the trope and establish the vampire as fearsome even at a first glance. But in many contemporary vampire narratives there are also tendencies to play with and subvert stereotypes to create unique representations. Subversions of this kind presupposes associations characters, readers and viewers have in common, however these come from a literary and cultural tradition which shifts and changes throughout history. As Cohen argues, "the undead returns in slightly different clothing, each time to be read against contemporary social movements or a specific, determining event" (1996: 5). With an eye to what each new incarnation is clothed in, the traditional vampire myths serve an important function. They become a backdrop to the new and enable discussions about what specific cultural moment this new is born into. This connects to Ahmed's idea of stickiness "*as an effect of the histories of contact between bodies, objects, and signs* […] what sticks 'shows us' where the object has travelled through what it has gathered onto its surface, gatherings that become part of the object" (2004: 91, original

emphasis). Even though the vampires in the text world are a reality rather than myth, the human characters' reactions and curiosity are influenced and aroused by traditional and contemporary vampire stereotypes; a varied history of figurative contact with the vampiric body. In a meta-textual sense, that is, the fictional characters are highly aware of other fictional texts, such as *The Addams Family* or *Interview with the Vampire* (Harris 2001: 101), or *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (2008: 1.3 "Mine"), and prone to draw conclusions based on these experiences. It is thus the history preceding the present—what the vampires concretely or symbolically have travelled through—which makes reactions in the now make sense.

Some often reiterated stereotypes are modified, which aligns the text world with general developments in vampire narratives. A.J. Grant describes 19th-century vampires as "theologically evil, having made an eternal pact with the devil […] morally evil, in the sense that they *intend* evil [and as resembling] natural forms of evil—earthquakes, floods, fire and lightning—because they strike randomly" (2011: 64, original emphasis). In contemporary narratives, on the other hand, the "theological framework is abandoned altogether" and with it "the power of crosses, rosary beads and holy water." Vampires have acquired a morality, and they no longer "strike arbitrarily" but rather find specific (and often not innocent) victims (Grant 2011: 65). The secularization Grant illustrates has the effect that the text world's vampires are not adverse to crosses or other religious symbols and many of them do not intend evil, but are rather represented as moral, conscientious citizens who aim for peaceful coexistence. In many cases where vampires choose human blood instead of the synthetic option, the randomness of attacks is eliminated as humans volunteer for thrills.

Other stereotypes are revealed to be true and they make vampires simultaneously vulnerable and threatening. The text world's vampires still have to sleep under ground or in coffins, they burst into flames in the sun, and stakes through their hearts are as effective as in the countless analogues in the literary tradition. On the one hand, these traits work to signal an enhanced Otherness, on the other, they render vampires vulnerable because they conform to the cultural tradition within which the trope has been represented. Human characters know about these limitations, and consequently know how to destroy the monstrous Others. Stereotypical vampire strengths that are retained in the text world

are the vampires' ability to manipulate minds and turn humans. Ahmed maintains that "fantasies [of fear] construct the other as a danger not only to one's self as self, but to one's very life, to one's very existence as a separate being with a life of its own" (2004: 64). Rather than a fantasy, the vampire's power to turn human into monster is a literal illustration of the self being subsumed, but the text world's vampires initially rarely use this ability. Bill is forced to do so once as punishment for having taken another vampire's (un)life, and during his centuries-long existence, Eric has only sired Pam. However, the human characters' fantasies of this fear have been perpetuated and reinforced by the repeated stereotype and consequently holds the possibility "to justify violence against others" (Ahmed 2004: 64). That is, although rarely literalized, the threat of turning is anticipated and used to unite the human characters against the Others.

Despite these potential and literal threats, the vampires in the text world conform to another stereotype, found in many contemporary narratives: the sympathetic vampire. Using Rice's tormented Louis as an example, Botting argues that the late 20th-century vampire is often depicted as "a solitary wanderer seeking companionship and security, intensely aware of his difference and fascinated by the frailty and mortality of the humans around him" (2008: 77). The representation of the romanticized outsider may, as noted, produce desire rather than fear, but the stereotype is similar to the fearsome vampire subverted in the text world, as in Bill's self-reflexive pronouncement: "I AM a vampire, I'm supposed to be tormented." Bill's torment, however, is not necessarily produced by a search for belonging, but rather by the blurred boundaries between human and vampire. Bill says: "When I was made one was forced to live outside society. As an outlaw, a hunter. Humans were prey and nothing else" (2009: 2.4 "Shake and Fingerpop"). The co-existence between different species portrayed in text world has confused the categories of hunter and prey and given rise to a postmodern identity crisis.

Bill is not the only vampire in the text world to voice this view. At the end of his undead existence, the ancient vampire Godric states that "I

don't think like a vampire anymore."[7] This lack of a stable identity has altered the perspective he has on the vampire species, and the identification with humanity leads to his view that: "Our existence is insanity […] We're not right" (2009: 2.9 "I Will Rise Up"). Godric is represented as an authoritative character, having lived a long life and executing power over large groups of vampires, but he is also characterized as a "renouncer" who has "betrayed" vampires and "allied himself with humans" (Harris 2002: 104). Like Bill's wish for a return to more clearly defined roles, Godric's condemnation of vampires as an aberration works to re-enforce the boundaries between human and monster. This tendency to question the blurring of boundaries and reclaim some of the vampires' monstrosity may be read as somewhat of a backlash to the increasingly sympathetic vampire representations in contemporary culture.

"We Are Vampire"
A backlash of a more concrete kind comes towards the end of the third season of *True Blood* as Russell Edgington rips the spinal column out of a news caster on live television, effectively undoing the careful PR strategy presenting vampires as unharmful neighbours next door. A terrified audience looks on as Russell, like Nan Flanagan in the first season, nods to the proclivities humans and vampires have in common. In this scene, however, the aim is not to forge links between vampires and humans, as Russell concludes: "in the end we are nothing like you. We are immortal." His attack has interrupted a news segment about the increasing support for vampire rights, through the work of the American Vampire League, and he finishes off by referring to their perpetuated smoke screens, asking: "Why would we seek equal rights? You are not our equals. We will eat you after we eat your children" (2010: 3.9 "Everything is Broken"). At this stage in the narrative arc, humans and vampires have lived in close proximity to each other for a long time, and Russell's attack illustrates a clear regression from the initial coexistence

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[7] The TV-series conflates two novel characters in the figure of Godric. As a renouncer, he corresponds to the character Godfrey; as Eric's Maker, he corresponds to the character Appius Ocella.

to a state in which humans are openly considered as beneath the vampires, albeit in this instance only by one individual.

But Russell is not alone in holding this view; on the contrary, a theme of hierarchies develops throughout the narrative and connects to Ahmed's discussions about disgust, an emotion which, in contrast to fear which can be produced also by a distance between bodies, "is clearly dependent upon contact" (2004: 85). A prolonged "relationship of touch and proximity between the surfaces of bodies and objects" may give rise to reactions which single out objects as "'lower' than or below the subject, or even beneath the subject" and allow for a distinction between "more or less advanced bodies" (Ahmed 2004: 85, 89). Several vampires voice views to the effect that humans are pets or cattle, and Eric tells Sookie that vampires "for hundreds, thousands of years have considered [themselves] better than humans, separate from humans" and that they have the same "relationship to humans as humans have to, say, cows" (Harris 2005: 214). Ideas of emotional refinement further this distinction between animals and higher beings. The vampire known as the Magister, for example, argues that "humans … are incapable of feeling pain as we do." Feeling pain could arguably be construed as a sign of weakness and as a vulnerability, but the Magister simultaneously states that the human incapability stems from their "quite primitive" state (2008: 1.11 "To Love is to Bury"). These statements all echo colonial and racist discourses through which groups are depicted as occupying different rungs on a developmental ladder, and where less advanced bodies produce disgust.

The move back to segregation between humans and vampires effectively undermines the text world's initially promising depiction of multiculturalism, but it is complicated at the very outset by vampire's attitudes to mainstreaming. Nicole Rabin (while focusing solely on the first two episodes of the TV-series' first season), argues that *True Blood*'s "critique [of] pluralist, post-race ideologies," depict vampires as threatening because they "are literally mixing blood within their bodies like multiracials" and that mainstreaming becomes a way of "passing" in the multicultural society (2010: n. pag.). While Bill initially appears to embrace mainstreaming not only in his dietary choices but in his conscious efforts to educate humans in vampire ways and share his knowledge of the past, several of his kind resist this approach. Eric, for example, keeps himself aloof, feeds on human blood with relish and

quips about Tru Blood that "It'll keep you alive, but it'll bore you to death" (2008: 1.9 "Plaisir d'amour"). A rogue vampire, not abiding by the strict rules of the minority community, emphatically states that he, and others of his ilk, have no desire to go to sports events and "disgustingly human … barbecues! We are Vampire" (Harris 2001: 152). In line with the new status for vampires as a legally recognized minority, this will to live apart, to enforce boundaries, is equated with the reactions of conservative humans. These, "the backward-looking undead," continuously strive for segregation and secrecy and regard positively "a return of persecution of their own kind" (Harris 2002: 106-107). Like human communities at the early stages of co-existence, this type of vampire needs antagonism to create a sense of togetherness amongst themselves. As Bruce A. McClelland argues, the resistance to assimilation can be construed as a fear of "the gradual disappearance of those cultural features that provide the vampire community (or any community, for that matter) with a sense of identity and cohesiveness" (2010: 83). It is only by being apart that the community can be united and the emotions of love and hate—effects of cultural processes rather than their starting points—are clearly linked to the formation of a particular group mentality. Both the backwards-striving vampires and organizations like the Fellowship of the Sun love their own kind and its supposed superiority, while hate and disgust for the Other and inferior surface with prolonged contact. Passing as human, that is, is depicted as problematic at the outset, laying the foundation for more violent outbursts of disgust at later stages in the narrative.

In Ahmed's discussions about multiculturalism, Otherness is crucial, but there are provisos attached to how it is to be maintained and acted out. "The others can be different (indeed the nation is invested in their difference *as a sign of love for difference*), as long as they refuse to keep their difference to themselves, but instead give it back to the nation, through … mixing with others" (2004: 134). The vampires' tendencies to withdraw suggest a violation of the multicultural contract. This narrative strand is at focus in the fifth television season when extremists within the vampire community isolate themselves, keep human beings as livestock in pens and turn to apocryphal texts in which "God is a vampire," thus leading the visual text down a dark path (2012: 5.10 "Sunset"). No longer constrained by mainstreaming limitations, vampires are instructed to feed off humans, to procreate (in the sense of indiscriminately turning

humans), and to assume what is seen to be their rightful place at the top of the food chain. Although several individuals resist this development, the cliff-hanger ending in which Bill, once the paragon of mainstreaming, seemingly turns into a vampire deity, suggests a continued plot development in which the initial promise of the multicultural society is revealed to be always already hollow.

Conclusion

As the fictional universe in both novels and TV-series expands with the inclusion of more and more varieties of supernaturals, it emphasizes that what is different is perceived as dangerous. Once the nature of vampires is established (or so it seems), along comes another category; a fairy, perhaps, or a goblin, and with it a new set of rules, myths and stereotypes to relate to. Ahmed argues that "[t]he more we don't know what or who we fear *the more the world becomes fearsome*" (2004: 95, original emphasis). As the focalizor of the text world, Sookie learns bit by bit, and the reader/viewer along with her, to relate to these new groups, but a telling quotation from the fifth novel illustrates that peace of mind does not necessarily come with expanded knowledge: "*If vampires exist, what else could be lurking just outside the edge of light*" (Harris 2005: 11, original emphasis). At this point, Sookie, and again the reader/viewer with her, knows that fearful reactions produced by the contact between human- and vampire bodies can be tempered by the realization that no two vampires are alike, but their mere existence still brings with it frightening possibilities of other Others appearing.

While emotions are not commonly discussed as forms of power, sustained close readings of texts show that the reiteration of affective terms, along with the depiction of how bodies are pushed together and pulled apart, do illustrate forms of social and cultural power. The political implications of "attending to emotions" in Ahmed's analysis reveal how larger discourses of racism structure and limit the movement of bodies in contemporary society and culture (2004: 4). In the case of the studied text world, power is initially connected to how vampires rhetorically are made fearful and hence marginalized and restricted by the human bodies that fear. Parallel to discourses of fear, the romantic discourse depicts these same bodies as desirable and attractive, also

because of their marginalization and the relief from societal norms their outside position can offer.

The vampire as a fictional construct has a long history and has come to stand for a number of fears and desires; culturally constructed and maintained by the repetition of stereotypes. Stereotypes are also featured in the text world, but with a handful of important modifications and subversions which on the one hand forge links with earlier instantiations of the trope, on the other illustrate a meta-textual, postmodern play with signification. Further, the oscillation of power, resting first in the hands of the human characters with the vampires as a minority group, and gradually moving into the grasp of the vampires with the increasingly pronounced differences between frailty and strength, clearly illustrates how the movement of bodies is policed and critiques the text world's initial promise of a multicultural society, with ample room for both the living and the undead.

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