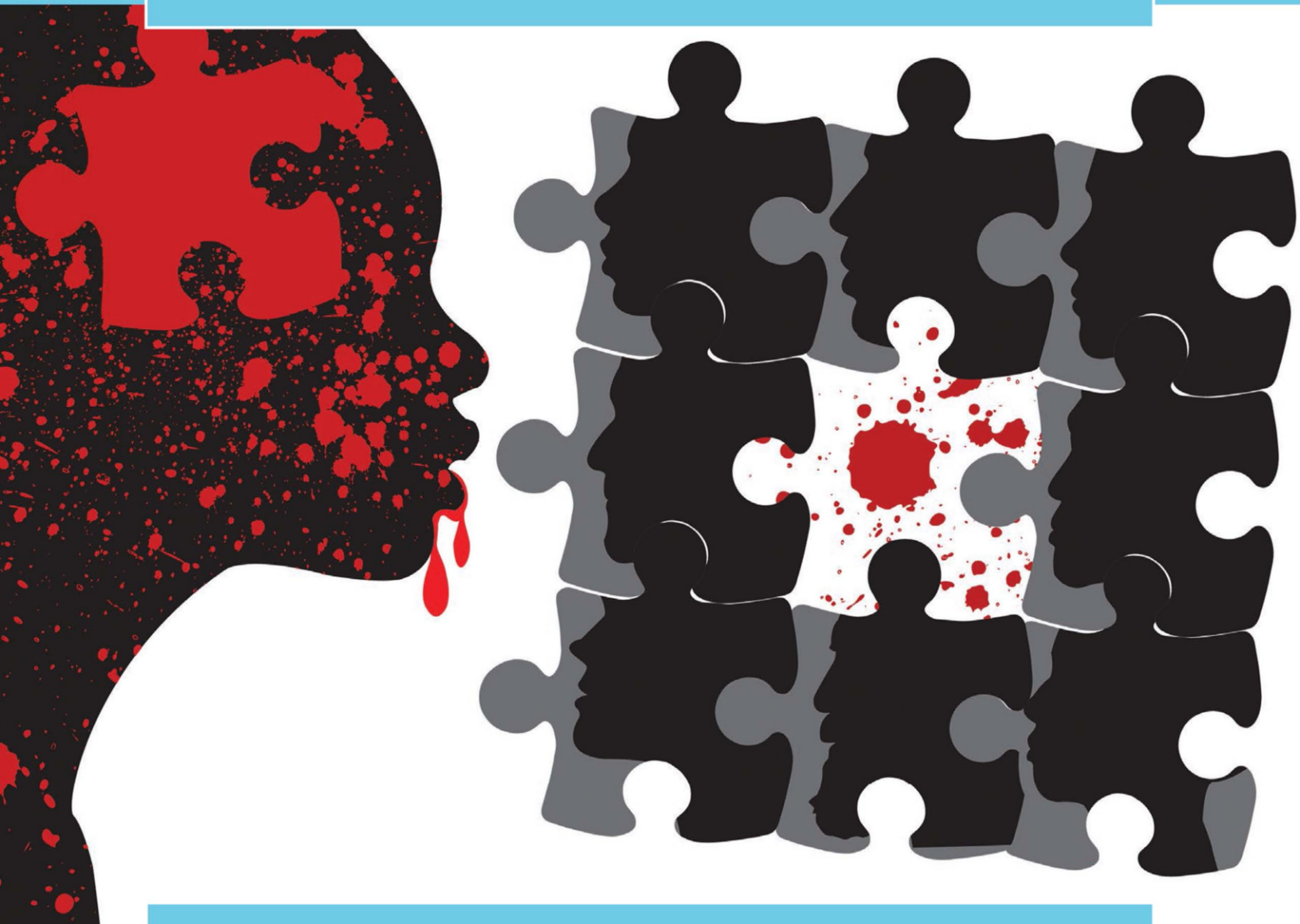


Gender in the Vampire Narrative

Amanda Hobson and
U. Melissa Anyiwo (Eds.)



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Gender in the Vampire Narrative

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Gender in the Vampire Narrative

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**ADVANCE PRAISE FOR
*GENDER IN THE VAMPIRE NARRATIVE***

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

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

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

– **Ashley Szanter, Weber State University, and Author of “‘The Blood is the Life!’: Victorian Manifestations of Porphyric Anxiety and Bloodlust Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*” in *The Journal of Dracula Studies* (2014)**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

AMANDA HOBSON

1. INTRODUCTION

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

In my childhood, I was given a copy of Anne Rice’s *Interview with the Vampire* (1976), a book that would help shape the course of my life as a scholar. This tale of vampires, who were the epitome of cultural outsiders, drew me into the darkness with them. They defied existing cultural norms, struggled with moral and ethical decision-making, and could live beyond natural death. It was Claudia, though, who most impacted my young mind. As she becomes a mature woman trapped in the body of a child, I could not help but recognize her inability to portray her inner life to the world around her through her physical body. It resonated deeply within the nerdy bookworm often unable to express my inner thoughts, and Claudia’s specifically gendered experience would stick with me. The exteriority of her childish body and her femininity shaped the manner in which Louis and Lestat infantilized her, even when she was no longer emotionally, spiritually, and mentally a child. No one could see beyond that physical façade to her true being, and moreover, these interactions shaped how she viewed herself and the ways that she interacted with others. As I was reading Claudia’s story,

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I was vividly reminded of the times that I was informed by well-meaning adults that I could not do something or dream something because I was a girl. Claudia, I, and other girls who continue to receive those messages, internalized ideas about the cultural norms of gender and what it meant to be a girl. I could never leave the vampire behind after reading *Interview with the Vampire*. In my scholarly life and my entertainment choices, vampires would just not stay buried. Moreover, I have continued my desire to explore the intersection of identity and social issues through the image of the vampire, just as I did when contemplating Claudia's particularly gendered portrayal.

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

In the contemporary era, there has been a sort of a bifurcation of the image of the vampire. On the one hand, we continue to see images of the monstrous vampire, who harkens to the folkloric past, a horrific killing machine. These vampires are represented predominantly in the horror and science fiction genres, such as Steve Niles and Ben Templesmith's *30 Days of Night* (2002) and the subsequent film adaptation directed by David Slade (2007), Guillermo del Toro and Chuck Hogan's *The Strain* (2009), and Justin Cronin's *The*

Passage (2010). On the other hand, there exists a romanticized vision of the vampire: a suave, debonair aristocrat that can be found frequently moralizing about their existence. These vampires are represented in romance and urban fantasy film and literature, such as *The Twilight Saga* (Stephenie Meyer's book series 2005–2008 and film series 2008–2012), *The Vampire Diaries* (L. J. Smith book series 1992–1992 and television series beginning in 2009), and innumerable paranormal romance novels. There are some examples that blend these two ideas across all the genres in that the vampire is a beautiful monster. Think of many of the vampires in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997–2003) and *Blade* (1998).

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

or a woman. By examining gendered portrayals of vampires, these normative constructions seem arbitrary and false in their formation of ideals.

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

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

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

Kristina DuRocher's chapter "Men That Suck: Gender Anxieties and the Evolution of Vampire Men" examines the shifting roles of male vampires, by

unpacking the romantic heroes in *Dracula*, *Interview with the Vampire*, *The Twilight Saga*, and *The Vampire Diaries*. DuRocher effectively illustrates the development of the vampire male from monstrous creation to romantic hero while connecting their development to surprisingly static cultural anxieties related to the female body. Ultimately, she argues, while the surface presentation of men may seem to change, the purpose and intent remain couched in patriarchal concerns about a woman's "proper" place.

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

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

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

Ryan D. Fong examines two little-known vampire texts, *The Blood of the Vampire* and "The Lady of the House of Love" in "A Feminist Bloodletting: Reading Suicide in Florence Marryat and Angela Carter." Despite a large

historical separation, Fong argues that both texts reinforce the idea of female vampirism as a sexual threat that needs to be contained by male authorities. Yet, as his work demonstrates, both Marryat and Carter use the suicides of their female protagonists to subvert patriarchal control and revive female agency. By literally reclaiming their bodies through their deaths and thus escaping male control, Fong suggests that these two feminist authors offer both a critique of white patriarchal control and a suggestion of female liberation.

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

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

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

Finally, to celebrate our love of the female vampire we have constructed a list of our favourite characters from the popular culture universe, illustrating the astonishingly diverse ways in which female vampires have been seen. The list features highlights from core adaptations of Carmilla, Dracula’s Brides, images of vampiras of colour and honourable mentions from the

world of television we believe would make great tools within and without the classroom.

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

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AMANDA HOBSON

2. DARK SEDUCTRESS

The Hypersexualization of the Female Vampire

INTRODUCTION

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

In 2004, the world of the Las Vegas stage show witnessed precisely this intersection of female sexuality and vampire hype with the premiere of Tim Molyneux's *Bite* at the Stratosphere. *Bite* was a topless female revue that entertained audiences with a hard-rock soundtrack, aerial acrobatics, martial arts, and contortionist acts. The plot revolved around a vampire lord and his harem of female vampires seducing unsuspecting victims in order to feed. In 2010, E! Entertainment described it as a "vampire vixen musical" and a "striptease with a story," and named working as one of the women in *Bite* as the twelfth sexiest Las Vegas job, where one cast member, Michelle, put it

dancers “seduce the audience over to the dark side” (E! Entertainment, 2010). While its eight-year run ended on Halloween 2012 (Weatherford, 2012),¹ *Bite* highlights overt female sexuality to titillate and seduce the audience into buying tickets for the show and even the opportunity to be brought on stage for a vampiric lap-dance. The vampire women of *Bite*, therefore, engage the audience members in a vision of female sexuality that is built upon the commodification of sex.² The presence of a cadre of female vampires as the focus of a Las Vegas stage show demonstrates the immense popularity of the image of the vampire, especially that of the hypersexualized female vampire. The women of *Bite* and the vampires at the heart of this chapter rely on the patterns established in *Carmilla* and *Dracula*, in which the female vampire illustrates historically specific and continuing cultural fears about women’s sexuality as well as the titillation of the sexually voracious, beautiful, but deadly seductresses. The image of the female vampire emphasizes cultural obsessions with manifestations of women’s bodies and sexualities.

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

This fear of women’s sexuality particularly centres on women who embrace their sexual hungers and who act as agents of their own desire, and the female vampire embodies those cultural concerns. In discussing the “remarkable fear of female sexuality,” Bram Dijkstra (1996) writes, “The ‘discoveries’ of early twentieth century biology saddled Western culture with a vicious eroticism centered on images of the sexual woman as vampire” (p. 5). This image arises from the notion of women’s sexuality as inherently destructive if left unchecked and when not controlled by men, and vampiric sexuality is the ultimate in destructive forces. The female vampire, therefore, is the perfect