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Vampire narratives: Looking at queer-centric experiences in comparison to hetero-centric norms in order to model a new queer vampiric experience

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Vampire Narratives: Looking at Queer-centric Experiences in Comparison to Hetero-centric
Norms in Order to Model a New Queer Vampiric Experience

by

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Thesis

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Dedication

I also would like to pay special tribute to my mother who was one of my biggest fans and I want to dedicate this work to her. Not only was she supportive, but she was also a writer and I want to thank her for getting me into the fields of Literature and Writing that have forever changed my life and perspective. Thank you for showing me how transformative writing and literature can be.

In loving memory of Nicole Wallace Heikkila

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Abstract

This thesis examines vampire narratives such as *Twilight*, *The Vampire Diaries*, *True Blood*, *From Dusk Till Dawn*, *The Gilda Stories*, and *Fledgling* using queer and sexuality studies frameworks to look at salient patterns in the texts. The project focuses on how gender performances take place in the text, what the performances mean, and what the implications of them are. In addition to gender performance, in the thesis, I also look at how vampire narratives influence and transform binaries related to gender and sexuality. Furthermore, while popular narratives such as *Twilight* are fan favorites, there are other alternatives for vampire narratives that dismantle and obliterate a hetero-centric patriarchal view and instead opt for a queer-centric, open, and non-misogynistic message. Texts like *Fledgling* and *The Gilda Stories* reveal just how transforming the vampire is as a queer figure who opens up discussion about what constitutes “healthy” and “fulfilling” ways to live.

Table Of Contents

Dedication	ii
Acknowledgments.....	iii
Abstract.....	v
Introduction.....	1
Chapter 1: Gender Performance and Feminine Masculinity	16
Chapter 2: Found Families and Normalizing Polyamorous and Queer Structures	40
Chapter 3: Compulsive Heterosexuality and Queer Vampires	57
Conclusion	73
Works Cited	77

Introduction

Niklaus Miklaeson is a vampire first appearing in *The Vampire Diaries*, a show directed by Julie Plec which first aired on April 21, 2011. The vampire imparts, “Don’t underestimate the allure of darkness...Even the purest hearts are drawn to it” (“Because of The Night”). While this character is speaking in the context of a particular TV episode, his words stand and perhaps give insight into how appealing the vampire can be. Vampires typically may be classified as dark and dangerous beings (especially when they had first begun to show up in prose). Contemporary authors have drawn on nineteenth century texts to use vampire figures for contemporary political ends. The fictional Niklaus in this show directed by Plec claims the appeal around darkness can touch even the purest of hearts. For me, this is the case. My passion for the vampire has led me to see where the alluring vampire figure draws us.

Monsters themselves are apparent in every culture. Vampires are an especially transformative and progressive kind of monster. While vampires have become popular, they are still “monstrous” to a degree. Moreover, as Patricia MacCormack puts it, “Monstrosity points out the human as the icon of what normal is, and thus the monster as what is not human” (MacCormack 293). Michel Foucault in *Discipline and Punish* (1975) argues that humans label others as monstrous when codes of social and legal conduct are transgressed (101). Likewise, fictional monsters such as the more well-known Pennywise written by Stephen King is monstrous for murdering children. In this case, several social and moral codes are broken which would lead most viewers to concur that the villain in this narrative is not only evil but monstrous. These examples are clear-cut in their depiction of good and evil, non-monstrous and monstrous; by this I mean there is a lack of narrative room for the possibility of transforming something or someone beyond the simple label of monstrous. Monstrous creatures such as zombies,

werewolves, and vampires have all become part of pop culture. *The Twilight Saga* sold over 120 million copies and the films have grossed around \$192.7 million (*The Twilight Saga*). *Train to Busan* (2016), a Korean zombie film, grossed over 98.5 million for the box opening (*Train to Busan*). Clearly monsters remain at the center of popular narratives.

What I consider in this thesis is how the vampire figure can question, subvert, transcend, and muddy up various binaries pertaining to sexuality and gender. Le Fanu's *Carmilla* (1872) is an example of a vampire narrative that troubles the sexual binary. Carmilla preys on women, subjecting them to her "love" while she does not seduce men. In *The Tale of the Nine Tailed* (2020) written by Lee Myung-han, Lee Rang (Kim Bum) is a gumiho/human hybrid who shapeshifts into various people.¹ He is not limited to his own body when he shifts but can transform into anyone. Another interesting monstrous character in *The Nine Tailed* is the Imoogi (Kim Tae-yul) who consistently tries to obtain the main leads reincarnated lover. But during the entire series, he becomes focused on Lee Yeon (Lee Dong-Wook), who is his born enemy. Even so, Lee Yeon, an thousand-year-old gumiho, enables the blurring of binaries when he consistently asks the other to pay attention to him and "play" with him versus his lover. The Imoogi and Lee Yeon pair end up both being penetrated by the same sword at the end of the series. While the series does not explicitly name "queer" relationships, there are subtle hints as to elements that could be considered "queer" and that break traditional gender binaries. Similarly, the thousand-year-old gumiho, Lee Yeon, makes a comment that he doesn't care what gender his past lover is reincarnated as. Here we see examples of more modern "monsters" that blur, transcend, and complicate binaries of gender and sexuality.

¹ For more information on the gumiho refer to Lee Sung-Ae's "Lures and Horrors of Alterity: Adapting Korean Tales of Fox Spirits."

Eighteen and nineteenth century vampire tales in Europe typically presented vampires as evil. Late twentieth and twenty-first century narratives, however, have figured out ways to mine and subvert inherited popular tropes of the vampire for a variety of political purposes. As I will show, these newer narratives are especially interested in exploring and attempting to transform earlier binaries of gender and sexuality in vampire stories. In fact, the blood sucking figure has garnered itself several movie and TV franchises like *True Blood* (2008), *The Vampire Diaries* (2009), *The Originals* (2013), *From Dusk Till Dawn* (2014), and many more. Many of these franchises have dedicated fanbases, often centered around specific characters in the narratives. One franchise that shows a dedicated fanbase stems from *The Twilight Saga*. Fans from around the world come together to express enthusiasm and interest in Stephanie Meyer's Cullen Family. Another example would be the active fanbase surrounding Julie Plec's heroic Salvatore brothers, Damon and Stefan.

I aim to explore contemporary vampire narratives with a focus on queer spaces and possibilities. The vampire figure attracts not only popular attention from fans but also attracts scholarship since the vampire figure can be so transformative. The transformation of these figures from simple "monsters" into more queer and ambiguous beings who break binaries and does not push forward a patriarchal code but transgresses what we may consider "norms." Vampire narratives such as Octavia Butler's *Fledgling* and Jewelle Gomez's *The Gilda Stories* complicate the lines of gender, sexuality, and performance while at the same time narratives such as Stephanie Meyer's *Twilight*, Robert Rodriguez's *From Dusk Till Dawn*, Alan Ball's *True Blood*, and Julie Plec's *The Vampire Diaries* establish and encourage monogamous and hetero-centric experiences that limit queer possibilities in order to reinforce patriarchal and misogynistic values. Vampire narratives that subvert norms of gender and sexuality reveal queer possibilities

for lifestyles and forms of relationship outside of these norms. These subversions are complex and sometimes incomplete. In narratives such as *The Gilda Stories* and *Fledgling*, the vampire is able to resist dominant ideologies while the vampire largely adheres to patriarchal ideologies in *Twilight* and *From Dusk Till Dawn* even where the figure would seem to trouble these ideologies.

One of the benefits facing any research on the figure of the vampire is that there is a wealth of scholarship on the subject. And while the vampire figure is a relatively small part of monster studies, it is still important to bring forward new insight regarding the vampire figure. Fresh readings not only complicate existing scholarship but also reframe existing scholarship in relation to understudied texts like *From Dusk Till Dawn*. While some previous scholarship looks at the individual texts I examine here, none looks at these specific texts together: *True Blood*, *From Dusk Till Dawn*, *Twilight*, *The Gilda Stories*, *The Vampire Diaries*, and *Fledgling*. That is where the need for the argument I am advancing comes in. While sexuality and gender are commonly explored topics within vampire scholarship, I offer a different way to look at how sexuality, gender performance, and family structures are being utilized in the text: what are the implications of the authors' choices in depicting vampires? What gender performances do these texts display and what are their cultural implications? How are these choices influencing cultural representations of family? Instead of giving ground to only heteronormative versions of the vampire such as those depicted in *Twilight*, my primary analysis explores more queer texts in connection and contrast to queer representations of this popular monster.

One text I focus on is Jewelle Gomez's republished version of her 1991 novel *The Gilda Stories* (2016). The story centers around the life of a vampire named Gilda. The story is split into several parts that have significant age gaps/years between them. These snippets show Gilda's

journey and discovery not only of her own identity but also the process by which she learns how to relate with those around her. On her journey, she spends time with her found family members such as Bird, Sorel, and Anthony. I will focus on texts like this to show how they often break binaries of gender and sexuality and upturn traditional family structures based on these binaries.

Another one of the primary texts I use is *Fledgling* by Octavia Butler. This narrative focuses on Shori, who is an Ina. Inas are essentially vampires. At the start of the novel, the protagonist, Shori, wakes up with no memories of a traumatic experience where the female Ina side of her family was murdered. She then catches a ride from a human named Wright, who eventually helps her on her journey of finding out about what and who she is. While doing so, she comes into contact with other Inas while also figuring out who has sent others to hurt not only her but the people she loves. My approach in analyzing *Fledgling*, and other stories will be to compare stories of the vampire to those that promote hetero-centric and patriarchal ideals.

Alan Ball's *True Blood* (2008), which was broadcasted on HBO, primarily takes place in Bon Temps, Louisiana. The show is based on the novels written by Charlene Harris (2001). Sookie Stackhouse has always been able to read people's thoughts, making her the town "freak." Yet in this narrative, vampires have also been "out of the coffin" for years. The author introduces Bill Compton, who comes back to Bon Temps many years after his turning, entwining himself with Sookie. When Sookie uses her gift to try to help solve the murders of several human women in her town, she gets caught up with Eric Northman and Pam, vampire maker and prodigy. Sexuality, gender performance, and family structures are complicated in this text, although most iterations reinforce harmful patriarchal values.

Julie Plec's *The Vampire Diaries* was originally broadcasted on the CW from 2009 to 2017. The narrative centers on the heroine Elena Gilbert when the two male leads Damon and

Stefan Salvatore move back into their hometown. In the past, the two brothers were turned into vampires by Katherine. Elena exactly resembles Katherine, and both are played by the same actress (Nina Dobrev). The Salvatore brothers come back to the town they once lived in, both actively trying to win Elena's love while also dealing with several supernatural challenges. *Vampire Diaries* reveals a complex family structure that defies the typical nuclear family structure. Yet aside from this, the text primarily aids in eliminating "queer" possibilities to promote hetero-centric and patriarchal ideals.

Robert Rodriguez's *From Dusk Till Dawn* is a contemporary Netflix remake based on the 1996 movie *Dusk Till Dawn* by the same director. The series focuses on the Gecko Brothers, Seth and Richie, who are on the run, eventually getting involved with the Fuller family whom they take hostage to get them across the Mexican border. Kate and Seth are the children of Pastor Jacob Fuller. The narrative in this vampire story is distinguished from later and more famous vampire stories, like *Twilight*, in its complex characterization. This is especially evident in the character Santanico who is an older culebra (the show's name for the vampires). Santanico is initially stuck at the strip club "Titty Twister" on the border of Mexico and uses the Gecko brothers to get out while embarking on several quests and journeys. The name of the bar itself enforces a clear binary, reflected in the actual act of stripping, wherein women with breasts perform for their entirely male clientele. As we will see, Robert Rodriguez complicates traditional notions of women sex workers as powerless, but in other ways, he narrative still reiterates harmful patriarchal ideals.

Stephanie Meyer originally wrote the *The Twilight Saga*, and the novels have garnered various directors over the years. *Twilight* (2008) was directed by Catherine Hardwicke, *New Moon* (2009) was directed by Chris Weitz, *Eclipse* (2010) was directed by David Slade, and

Breaking Dawn Parts I and II (2011-2012) were directed by Bill Condon. The fictional protagonist, Bella moved from Arizona to Forks, Washington to stay with her dad. The novels and film focus on a love story between human Bella Swan and vampire Edward Cullen. We also get to see Bella interacting with the other Cullen siblings: Alice, Jasper, Emmett, and Rosalie. Along the way, the Bella and Edward with intervention from the Volturi, a powerful family that enforces the rules in the vampire world, primarily in the second novel/film and beyond. Bella and her allies also face backlash from the local werewolves who help to protect the town of Forks. Jacob Black is the primary werewolf in the series who also becomes one of Bella's closest friends and at one point, a love interest. As the series progresses, Bella becomes pregnant after consummating her marriage with Edward. She eventually has her child and in response, the Volturi once again threaten the family. Meyer uses the narrative to reinforce patriarchal values that accentuate femininity and the nuclear family. I explore what is interesting about this vampire narrative and assess the shortcomings of its overarching patriarchal message.

Before proceeding, I want to discuss the various ways in which I use the complex and analytical term "queer." Generally speaking, "queer" can mean anything outside of the norm. I steer clear of the more general sense of this word, to focus on connotations of the word specifically connected with gender, sexuality, and social norms. Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royale, reveal the complicated nature of the word "queer" and its many uses (215). One claim they make is that queer "has the advantage of being an inclusive term which gains in prestige and power just in so much as it shakes up our codes and coding's of male and female, or masculinity and femininity, or bi-, hetero and homo" (217). In other words, as a term, "queer" challenges inherited social binaries. In this sense, "queer" becomes pertinent to my investigation. Just as Bennett and Royle point out, our sexual identities are not as "natural" and self-evident as we

might like to think (217). To simply say one narrative such as *Twilight* has no queer possibilities would be too simple; I view the ways in which there may have been queer possibilities that the author Meyer refused to use. The definition Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick provides in *Tendencies* (1993) is especially helpful. She states that the term “queer” can refer to “the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone’s gender, of anyone’s sexuality” (8). In other words, queer refers to multiple possibilities instead of one limited option; in terms of the vampire narratives, “queer” alludes to what could be there, what is there, and what writers are doing, knowingly or unknowingly, with their texts. When I use the term “queer,” not only do I refer to non-normative forms of LGBT+ sexuality but invoke Kosofsky’s definition and apply it to the core texts of my investigation involving gender performance, family structures, and sexuality.

Ideology plays a major role in my analysis of these texts. After all, what is going on in the text reflects ideological standards and norms that are reflected in how the characters are written. Ideology creates patterns of adopted values and beliefs, essentially acting as the foundational processes that influence mindsets of groups and individuals. Louis Althusser makes the claim that “an ideology always exists in an apparatus” (695). In other words, ideology is always at work and performing in everyday life. Furthermore, Althusser makes an important claim that the practices that help ideology function are “governed by the rituals” where practices are transcribed, and those who do not follow the ideological structure are “wicked” (696). In vampire stories, ideology influences what we label as “good” or “bad.” It informs, for example, why most viewers would categorize a scheming murderer like Victoria from the *Twilight* series as “evil” but Santanico *From Dusk Till Dawn* as more misunderstood than outright “bad.” The

web of indirect and direct messages the various vampire narratives produce can be understood by examining what ideology is being elevated.

Alongside ideology, it is important to investigate and identify social standards and norms that influence ideological apparatuses. Patriarchy, defined as a practice where “men hold power in all important institutions in society and...women are deprived of access to such power” is one important facet of this discussion (Stuart 4). This male-dominated system determines social codes and structures, especially how they relate to women and their liberation. Women in Butler’s *Fledgling* and Gomez’s *The Gilda Stories* defy typical patriarchal influences by being independent and working against a world that prescribes to patriarchal norms and gender binaries that associate women with weakness and dependence. Narratives like Meyer’s *Twilight* sustain patriarchal norms such as the nuclear family headed by the patriarch Carlisle Cullen. Robert Rodriguez’s *From Dusk Till Dawn* places Kate Fuller in the damsel role who needs saving from the Gecko brothers. Elena from *The Vampire Diaries* becomes the item the Salvatore brothers desire and fight over. Patriarchal attitudes affect not only gender performance in the narratives, but also sexuality, identity, and family formations.

Judith Butler’s theory of gender performativity also informs my work, as my language has already suggested. In response to her theory, scholars such as Miriam Meyerhoff who offers further insight into the complicated nature of gender and performance. Meyerhoff argues that saying that “gender is performative” is too simple of a way to explain “how we understand gender, and how we position ourselves as gendered or sexual beings in relation to others is achieved through the repetition and enactment of these activities” (2). In other words, the way we understand and label gender can be defined through the repeated actions that people carry out. But if a performative view of gender claims that gender and sexuality are socially

contingent, then that also means that the binaries of masculinity and femininity only exist in the bounds of their expressions and how they can be defined. Butler bases her theory on Goffman's discussion of religious rituals. I depart from Butler in a sense that I not only want to see how gender performances determine perceptions of gender, but to look more at what some performances are missing and how they transcend or reiterate misogynistic ideals. I look at the complications that arise from gender performances versus simply categorizing them. While rituals are an important aspect in looking at performance (how characters are acting in the text), these rituals are not the only method for noticing and finding patterns and insights into how gender is being performed. There are more than just ritualistic interactions (as Meyerhoff refers to) for us to consider. And, yes, binaries of gender have been established in society, especially North America, but these vampire narratives are not simply there to categorize who fits into what. To clarify by way of an example, while Stephanie Meyer's *Twilight* adamantly tries to force characters into existing gender and sexuality binaries in service to its patriarchal message, Gomez's *The Gilda Stories* give expression to other possibilities. Indeed, vampire narratives such as *Fledgling* and *The Gilda Stories* displace the idea that gender even needs to be performative. While Judith Butler would agree that gender performance "troubles" an essentialist view of gender, I want to complicate what the gender performances are showing us in the vampire narratives: who is performing what and what are the underlying implications, ideals, or values that are present? The authors have made a choice to either progress or regress. For example, via Shori, Octavia Butler in *Fledgling* challenges binaries of gender, sexuality, and familial structures. For example, she is not limited to heterosexuality; instead, she defies the compulsive hetero-centric social code and opts for a "queer" way of life. Even so, not all

vampire narratives are as equally progressive in their binary breaking such as Alan Ball's *True Blood* Russell Edgington, a powerful gay vampire, is written as a heatless villain.

Another scholar who influences my theoretical framework is Jack Halberstam, who produced scholarship on female masculinity. He points out that "masculinity seems to extend outward into patriarchy and inward into the family" (936). And while masculinity is typically seen in those frameworks, masculinity does not only need to apply to only "men." As Halberstam focuses on masculinity and how it "leaves the white male middle-class body," they also discover the idea that masculinity does not only need to be present in a negative and male oriented sense, but that masculinity can also apply to other identities. Female masculinity is prevalent in the vampire texts explored in Chapter 1. Instead of masculinity only being owned by men, texts such as *Fledgling* promote female masculinity. For example, Shori is strong, powerful, and dependent to a degree. She is also masculine in her protective actions. Gilda from *The Gilda Stories* also acts as a more androgynous yet masculine force. She is strong physically and mentally. She also tends to dress in a more androgynous style and holds quite a bit of power and high place in her family. Like Gilda, Bella from *Twilight* (the film and novel) does not fit into the category of "feminine, but often takes on a more masculine appearance while she is human. Chris Weitz writes Bella in *New Moon* in longer sleeve shirts (primarily dark) with jeans. She does not wear more feminine pieces of clothing like light skirts or dresses. And while the woman's appearance is only one part of masculinity, there are several other facets to be explored more in chapter one.

Moving onward, my thesis is broken up into three main chapters. In my first chapter, I look at gender performances in the several vampire narratives. I examine villainous female characters in *Twilight*, *The Gilda Stories*, and *The Vampire Diaries* in relation to patriarchal

ideological norms. I am especially interested in narrative endings as sites where social norms—and their potential subversion—come into view. I also focus on gender expression through the texts. I focus on how central the representation of clothing is in each narrative. The clothing analysis also aids my investigation when I investigate the performance of femininity and female masculinity.

Chapter 2 tackles the implications of familial structures in the narratives: How are families formed? What constitutes a relationship or family in these narratives? What patterns and forms of closure are given prominence? These questions drive the second chapter, where I take a dive into definitions of kinship focusing especially on Mary Fitzpatrick and F.S. Wamboldt's work in relation to definitions of family who provide some insight. Chapter 2 is organized around the various texts (*From Dusk Till Dawn*, *Twilight*, *The Vampire Diaries*, *The Gilda Stories*, and *Fledgling*) in order to examine how relationships are structured in each narrative. *From Dusk Till Dawn* and *The Vampire Diaries* maintain normative structures whereas *Fledgling* and *The Gilda Stories* implode hetero-patriarchal structures.

Chapter 3 addresses heteronormativity in *Twilight*, *True Blood*, and *From Dusk Till Dawn* while also addressing the presence of non-heterosexual relationships in *The Gilda Stories*, *The Vampire Diaries* and *Fledgling*. Stephanie Meyer, Julie Plec, and Robert Rodriguez mostly employ the vampire to service heteronormative ideals, while writers such as Jewelle Gomez and Octavia Butler have mobilized vampires to express and promote queer relationships. I also look at how Plec and Ball employ the “bury/kill your gays” trope in the narratives that are harmful and problematic. Yet, as I have been suggesting so far, most narratives are progressive in some areas and regressive in others. My thesis sheds light on the complexities of these narrative possibilities and limitations.

The focus of this thesis is not the history of the vampire; however, it is necessary I bring up some of the important aspects of the vampire and how the figure initially came to be and how the vampire was seen which feeds into later gender performances. Vampire tales began to appear in Eastern Europe from the sixteenth-seventeenth century. Barker tells us that the vampire “usually took a form of a person who had died but who then returned from the grave to torment their family and neighbors, often visiting them at night and lying with them. They did not often suck the blood of their victims, and they drank from the heart rather than the neck” (111). Peter Day notes that the word vampire first “entered the English dictionary in 1732, its first appearance (in a London periodical) occasioned by a rash of vampire sightings documented in several parts of central and eastern Europe (“Getting to Know the Un-dead: Bram Stoker, Vampires, and Dracula” 3). The concept of the vampire was seen as a virus in early European history, one that created a “vampire hysteria.” Further on, Day notes that Empress Maria Theresa “intervened after a new outbreak of vampirism had been reported in Silesia, sending her chief physician Gerard Van Sweiten, in 1755 to investigate” which ended up being false (3). “Vampirism” was conflated with superstitious beliefs that spread via word of mouth.

European ideas about vampires were found in text in John Polidori’s “The Vampyre” (1816.) “The Vampyre” holds a unique position in literary history, as it was the first story “to successfully fuse the disparate elements of vampirism into a coherent literary genre” (Day 6). The main character Aubrey meets Lord Ruthven. The Lord falls for an inn keeper’s daughter and she is found with her throat slit; it is assumed it is the work of a vampire. Polidori’s short story ends with Ruthven killing Aubrey’s sister. Her sister is found drained of blood. Meg Barker points out that vampires have long “helped people to make sense of their world” (111).The

vampire then became a narrative and imaginative entity that instilled fear, showing up in cultural texts as a fully embodied entity like Polidori's "The Vampyre."

By looking at the ways vampires were shown in previous centuries, we can see just how much the vampire figure is used and how it can continue to be used. We can see vampires "as vectors...[who] are consequently part of the history of infectious diseases" (Groom 10). The image of vampires as carrying "disease" appears in Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897) and Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla*. This perception includes the notion that vampires have "venom" or have some sort of "special" blood that aids in the turning process. In that regard, vampires "infect" someone. Hence the idea of infection predates the idea of the virus. *Dracula* utilizes the cultural anxiety of disease and invasion as a primary tool that connects to the vampire figure since the Count spreads "vampirism" through his bite, infecting those he feeds from. Similarly to *Dracula*, *Carmilla* preys on women especially. She slowly deteriorates female victims like Laura, making her past victims weaker when infecting them when she bites them. They start to go mad. Just like *Carmilla* slowly sucking out the life of woman in various towns, Stephen King's *Salem's Lot* also has similar narrative. His work focuses on the town turning into a town engulfed by vampires. Even family members turn one another until the majority of the town is engulfed. The film *Daybreakers* (2009), by Michael and Peter Spierig, utilizes the vampire figure in order to focus on the spread of the vampire virus. Set in the future, vampires have become the new normal after a virus breaks out. Due to most of the population being vampires, there is an extreme shortage of available blood. Humans who are caught are put into "blood farms." The premise of the movie centers on a vampire who searched for a cure; hence, the only way to save the population is to eradicate the "vampire" virus. Overall, while these narratives focus on the

vampire as a carrier of disease, this is only one iteration of how writers use vampire figures to comment on cultural anxieties.

It will also be a focus of this thesis to investigate where the vampire has diverged in history as a one-dimensional, blood-sucking, and corrupting monster to the vampire figure today, who is more complex and less one dimensional. The vampire figure can be utilized as a metaphor for exploring the carrying and transmission of disease. The concept of vampires representing the spread of a virus has faded; it is not entirely applicable to our current period, where fears seem less about the spread of illness than the contagion of social anxieties surrounding corrupting forms of sexuality and gender. Instead, I suggest that the vampire figure is used to identify and track culture anxieties. Vampires are used to resist “dominant ideologies in transformative ways” (Wilson 81). Instead of labeling vampires as monstrous like in narratives such as *Dracula* and *Carmilla* suggest, vampires have been emerging as far more complex figures and, as a result, have become far more relatable. Focusing on several vampire narratives in television and novels will shine some light on the complexity of the vampire.

Chapter 1: Gender Performance and Feminine Masculinity

This chapter establishes how characters are “performing” and how their performances are either enabling and promoting binaries or complicating social norms, and what the end results of the performances may be hinting at. Vampires have often been a conduit for complicating gender norms, but that doesn’t mean that all vampire narratives I look at are as equally transformative and norm breaking as others. Gender norms are often identified “through talk (and other forms of social action)” (Meyerhoff 3). Alongside talk, gender norms are also reinforced and enabled through actions and fashion. While looking at fashion, I also move on to discuss Adrienne Rich’s work on compulsive heterosexuality and how Meyer’s work fits several facets of compulsive heterosexuality. Meyer’s *Twilight*, Rodriguez’s *From Dusk Till Dawn*, and Plec’s *The Vampire Diaries* all rely on the common trope of the damsel in distress, while works like Butler’s *Fledgling*, Ball’s *True Blood*, Gomez’s *The Gilda Stories* have more than a damsel in distress in their narratives. Particularly in relation to fashion as one important form of “social action,” I explore how gender is constructed in vampire texts. The concept of motherhood is also featured in this chapter as it appears across various narratives. Motherhood is primarily desired, celebrated, and praised in *Twilight*. Hence, Meyer writes Bella as being persistent when performing as a mother and Rosalie, one of the Cullens, as a mother in training.

When it comes to women especially, there are defined categories or constant representations that become typical in the patriarchal cultures of northern Europe and of the United States. The defined categories are apparent in texts such as *Twilight*, *Dusk till Dawn* and *True Blood*. In *Gender in the Vampire Narrative* (2016), Amanda Hobsons argues that there is a common trope of “vamp to vixen to victim to savior to slayer” and that “the construction of womanhood and gender is often an underlying and keenly powerful narrative within the vampire

trope” (7). This is very true, but it’s important to also bring light to works of vampire narratives that complicate gender performance and binaries. Instead of focusing on works that enable stereotypical lines of thinking such as Meyer’s *Twilight*, I also want to embrace works like Butler’s *Fledgling* and Gomez’s *The Gilda Stories* that break down harmful patriarchal modes of thinking. Hobson’s observation is applicable to characters like Victoria from the *Twilight Saga*, Katherine from *The Vampire Diaries*, and slightly less applicable to Eleanor from *The Gilda Stories* and Santanico *From Dusk till Dawn*, who are women with more developed backstories unlike Victoria. Eleanor is tempting to those she wants. *Twilight*’s portrayal of Victoria is one dimensional, but *The Gilda Stories*’s representation of Eleanor is more nuanced and complex. We get a more nuanced presentation of women in general in *Fledgling* and *The Gilda Stories*. In other words, Victoria is the low point and undeveloped norm in comparison to other vampire women I look at.

Stephanie Meyer’s *Twilight* has Bella adhere to conventionally feminine strictures. This conformity is apparent right from the beginning of the text when she moves to Forks. She takes care of her father and the house; she cooks and cleans. And while these stereotypically caretaking activities become more minimal as the series progresses, it is a prominent element of the first novel and film *Twilight*. Bella spends her days doing her assignments and attending school primarily in the first two novels and films. *Twilight* generally displays gender performances that align with the binary of masculine and feminine. While she dresses more masculine than other female characters in the story, at the same time, she does not actively fit into Halberstam’s concept of female masculinity either. The female vampires within the Cullen clan maintain a clean and positive image on the surface. Bella acknowledges the beauty of the Cullen family in *Twilight* when she notes that they are dressed in designer clothes: “I couldn’t

imagine any door that wouldn't be opened by that degree of beauty" (32). Bella, by contrast, often opts for more neutral, worn down and basic clothing. While Bella is written by Meyer and directed by Hardwicke, Slade, Weitz, and Condon, as being more androgynous with her fashion, by the end of the story, she adheres to the more feminine fashion ideal. In this development of the heroine's fashion, Meyer promotes a toxic societal perception of beauty, which in turn reinforces a harmful narrative that femininity is one of the most important features for a woman to be successful.

Meyer continues to use femininity as a marker for beauty in a way that promotes a patriarchal mindset. For example, when Bella meets Rosalie, she says, "She had a beautiful figure, the kind you saw on the cover of the *Sports Illustrated* swimsuit issue, the kind that made every girl around her take a hit on her self-esteem just by being in the same room" (18). Bella is clearly taken back by Rosalie's initial and feminine appearances. She is simply beautiful. Not only do the Cullen women dress nicely, but their physical beauty is highlighted on multiple occasions. Meyer writes the narrator, Bella, fawning over Rosalie's beauty to foreground the idea that vampires are simply beautiful, and that female vampires especially need to look beautiful and presentable for those that view them.

Meyer continues driving forth the toxic message of women conforming to beauty standards in *Breaking Dawn*. Meyer feeds into the harmful societal stereotype that women must conform to some form of flawlessness as a measure of beauty. Bella herself comments on her changed look once she becomes a vampire, seeing that she finally attains beauty that matches the other Cullens. She says, "The alien creature in the glass was indisputably beautiful, every bit as beautiful as Alice or Esme" (155). In other words, Bella is bewildered by her own appearance. Bella says, "At first glance, I couldn't find my face anywhere in the smooth, perfect planes of her

features" (155). Bella has left her old self in terms of appearance which seems to be necessary in this vampire narrative. Those who are turned into immortals must harbor some form of beauty, erasing the physical flaws that could be found with humans. For Meyer, immortals must be strikingly beautiful because they are supposed to be flawless physically. In this way, Meyer reinforces a patriarchal and toxic image of beauty through the beautiful Cullens---to be a Cullen (as with Bella) is to be physically perfect in terms of facial features. The text insinuates that women should actively try to fit into a certain conventional beauty standard.

Another parallel between fashion and the performance of ideal femininity can be found in Gomez's *The Gilda Stories*, but it is far more queer than heteronormative. Eleanor is always adorned in beautiful gowns and dresses. These dresses often accentuate her femininity and typical beauty, and when she actively adheres to and enjoys her feminine performance, she feeds into the patriarchy. When she goes to the dress shops with Gilda, she works to have Gilda embody a more feminine look. She begins to dress her up by taking her to dress shops and showing her off at parties. In this case, Eleanor exudes the typical feminine expression of beauty but she is also trying to mold Gilda who, left to her own devices, does not choose highly feminized clothing. Eleanor also is adhering more closely to the ideology of patriarchy and its view that women need to look "feminine" or a certain way to exist.

Although Eleanor does adhere to typical feminine beauty standards early on, later the story complicates the binary of "male" and "female" gender roles. Gomez writes lesbian desire as a foundational piece of the narrative, making the text push further away from a heterosexual foundation. Gilda becomes enthralled with Eleanor when she meets her for her looks but later on also for the way she dresses. When Gilda first meets Eleanor, Gilda consistently comments on Eleanor's natural feminine beauty. She makes note of Eleanor's "full, wide mouth" painted red,

her “russet curls,” and her “deep blue satin” velvet dress which caught her attention (65-66). Gilda is clearly taken back by Eleanor’s appearance of feminine beauty even before she really gets to know her. Just as Bella was taken back by Rosalie’s beauty, Gilda recognizes the feminine ideal where dress and person merge. As Gomez writes, “Eleanor and her dress sparkled as she stood” (67). Not only does her dress stand out for Gilda, but Gomez continues to emphasize Eleanor’s adherence to patriarchal views of beauty when Linear takes Gilda dress shopping with her. In both texts, *Twilight* and *The Gilda Stories*, female characters who are successful are beautiful, a narrative pattern that reinforces patriarchal ideals. The emphasis on women’s outward appearance in these texts also endorses rivalry and criticism between women. Hence, there is a sort of judgment or comparison between women who adopt a more feminine style and those who do not. For example, Bella finds herself lacking in Rosalie’s presence, while Eleanor picks at Gilda about her attire. Gilda was open with Eleanor, telling her, “I’m afraid I will be comfortable in gowns only intermittently,” to which Eleanor responds with, “But surely you’ll wear dresses” (66). Eleanor refers to Gilda as a “bloomer girl” as well, huffing when Gilda doesn’t want to conform entirely to female fashion to put on an act. She wants to coach Gilda; since she is successful at embodying female beauty standards, she wants Gilda to also embody the same ones. When Eleanor adheres to the patriarchal embodiment of beauty in her performance of feminine social activities, she is clearly servicing of patriarchal values. Therefore, when Eleanor does something similar, that must also be in the service of patriarchal values when trying to have Gilda adopt her style.

At the same time, Gomez also complicates the narrative by having Gilda act in a more masculine way when she first sees Eleanor. For example, when she saw Eleanor spin in her dress, the text reads: “Gilda put the woman's hand to her lips before she thought about it...then

continued planting a lingering kiss on Eleanor's hand" (67). Gilda once again focuses on what Eleanor is wearing and how she has put herself on display. Interestingly though, Gilda does not entirely act feminine in a typical sense. When asking for Eleanor's hand, she kisses it. This is a social act that typically would be done by a male suitor, but Gomez writes Gilda kissing Eleanor's hand. While Eleanor's typical feminine beauty becomes a selling point Eleanor wants Gilda to purchase and mimic, Gomez throws in a wrench when it comes to gender performance. She complicates Gilda as a character and subtly allows her to break the gender binary through kissing Eleanor's hand.

Even though Bella becomes a strong female vampire who makes decisions, that does not make the *Twilight* texts progressive, nor does it attempt to use female masculinity in any way that is genuine. Meyer does not truly defy that binary by the end of the series while Catherine Hardwicke, director of the *Twilight* film, only utilizes female masculinity in a superficial sense. For both director and author, Bella is only masculine in so far as her wardrobe early on. In fact, most of her narrative focuses on her fitting into the role of a damsel and following through with the performance of that script. Bella is the "prey" within the first three novels. James, Victoria, and the Volturi also take an interest in Bella. Not only do the James and Victoria want to harm Bella, but so does her future boyfriend Edward at the time. In Catherine Hardwicke's script of *Twilight*, she is nearly killed by her own boyfriend; he tells her that her blood is like his "own personal brand of heroin." While he doesn't kill her and his goal isn't to harm her, Edward is still clearly looking at Bella as prey in terms of his desire to consume her. Meyer tries to write Bella as being more masculine in terms of her appearance, but that is where any sense of her masculine essence stops. She continues with being the victim, especially in *New Moon* when Edward and the Cullens leave after her birthday incident. Bella seeks out danger by riding on a motorcycle

with a random man, cliff jumping, and throwing herself off a motorbike. Although these actions all indicate female agency, they are performed only with the aim of seeing Edward in moments of high distress. In this regard, Bella is very masochistic. We only get a shift away from this characterization in *Breaking Dawn* after she becomes a vampire and is able to claim some of her power. Bella remains nurturing and loving and kind with her child; she is the mother figure in her household. While Bella ultimately emerges empowered through her “physical transformation into a lethally dangerous, physically near-invincible and combat-ready vampire,” she is thus still performing as a female (217). Meyer writes Bella as being empowered through her vampiric transformation where she can be powerful and strong, but she is limited to protecting her nuclear family.

Meyer uses her Saga to promote a patriarchal attitude that a good marriage and baby equal a happy ending. The novel to some degree gives voice to unconventional femininity in Bella, but only to correct that performance to then reaffirm the patriarchal ideology of the novels’ worldview. While other authors have used vampire tales to undermine patriarchal norms, Meyer ultimately reinforces the patriarchal norms of her dominate culture by making Bella fit into and dedicate her existence to a maternal role. The question of motherhood comes up repeatedly in the texts I examine here. For example, Bella would rather die than not become a mother. The emphasis on motherhood becomes the primary plot device in the last installment of *The Twilight Saga*, ultimately becoming the end game for the narrative that leaves the viewer with an image of a heteropatriarchal family. Typically, a feminine figure is seen as nurturing or motherly, and there are elements of this in narratives like *Twilight*. For example, Bella would rather be broken and ripped open than not have the baby. While she stands up to her husband, and in that sense, seems to exert agency, here again her agency is only masochistic. She would

risk her life to obtain the title of mother. She becomes dedicated completely to being a mommy vampire. For example, in *Breaking Dawn* (2008), Bella is clearly defensive about her daughter as soon as she finds out she is pregnant. She says:

From that first little touch, the whole world had shifted. Where before there was just one thing I could not live without, now there were two. There was no division—my love was not split between them now; it wasn't like that. It was more like my heart had grown, swollen up to twice its size at that moment. All that extra space, already filled. The increase was almost dizzying. (51)

Even before she has the baby, we see her acting as a mother and defending her unborn child. While Edwards sees the danger in her frail human body carrying the hybrid human/vampire offspring (and perhaps he only does so because he is insistent that Bella is first and foremost a weak victim, prey to those around her), Bella does not understand his fear: “He didn't care about the baby at all. He wanted to hurt him. The beautiful picture in my head shifted abruptly, changed into something dark” (54). She focuses on her unborn baby, and Bella's sole purpose is now to have the baby; she is there to bring life into the world at the risk of her own. She is sacrificing herself; Bella is acting as a “good” mother would. Hence, her narrative endorses the traditional patriarchal ideals of motherhood and family.

One complication that derives from the above thought is the argument that Meyer's work is progressive since Bella has control of her own body when she chooses to have the baby despite Edwards protests. During her entire pregnancy she had both Edward and Jacob telling her to change her mind. Edward and Jacob's input over Bella's body makes the text more patriarchal; they want to have the final say in her body versus her having the final say. And while

the men in this series do ultimately respect her choice over her body, they make good points. Not only does Edward not want her to have the baby, but Jacob even refers to the baby as a “killer” when he witnesses how weak and emaciated the baby makes her. Meyer highlights and glorifies male characters who try and force their say over Bella’s body. In turn, she glorifies Bella existence as a mother in order to perpetuate a patriarchal mindset. Thus, even the woman’s choice in defiance of male demands is in service to a feminine ideal; Bella disobeys Edward’s wishes but still heeds the broader requirements of a patriarchal society by sacrificing her own health in order to obtain motherhood.

Moreover, Adrienne Rich’s work on compulsive heterosexuality applies to Meyer’s work. Not only are Bella and Alice being looked at as prizes, but Bella is dealing with people trying to have a say about whether her child lives or dies. The more problematic performances of male dominations and control ultimately aid in the establishment of compulsive heterosexuality in the text. They form a more patriarchal and misogynistic patterns. Jacob and Edward are not the only males who want to have a say when it comes to Renesmee. Aro, the leader of the Volturi, finds out that Bella has a child. While he only thinks the child was turned (versus being born from a human female), he already sets out on trying to obtain and destroy Bella and Edward’s child. In this case, Aro’s prominence harms Bella. Aro wants “to control or rob them [Edward and Bella] of their children” (639). Aro wants to rob Bella of her child because of miscommunication about the child’s origin, a miscommunication which is later cleared up. Even so, Meyer writes Aro in a way that is not only foreboding, but also creepy and excessively patriarchal in its view of the potential for powerful men to rob women of their choice and their children. Meyer uses Aro as a conduit for enforcing elements of compulsive heterosexuality that aims to control the bodies of those deemed less powerful than he is.

Both the novel and the films call attention to and prioritize the patriarchal notion of women being used in order to further a man's needs and, in this case, Aro's need and desire for power. As noted before, Aro acts as the head of the Volturi: the most powerful coven of vampires. Their word is law. His coven is made up of vampires who hold special gifts such as Jane who can make others feel pain and Alec who can deprive people of their senses. Aro is selfish in this regard, and that does not stop when it comes to the Cullens. He seeks out Bella and Alice as prospects for their respective gifts. While Bella acts as a shield (i.e., she is not affected by the powers of other vampires), Alice is able to see into the future. To read this in the framework of Rich's theory, Aro wants to control the women because of what they can "produce" (Rich 639). For him, the women can add to the power of his patriarchal rule. He wants these women because of their powers and what they can do for his coven. It is telling that he first desires to claim Bella in *New Moon* when she is still a human; he cannot seem to see her memories (his power) when he touches her hand. She will make for an "intriguing immortal," he notes. And later on, in *Breaking Dawn Part 2*, Aro looks at Bella and Alice on the battlefield before he leaves and says, "such a prize." He directly correlates with Bella's worth to her capabilities and objectifies her as prize. He wants to take ownership over Bella because of her capabilities and how they can ultimately make his coven grow more powerful to hold control. Meyer as well as director Chris Weitz perpetuates the patriarchal notion that women can be used to further a man's needs. In this case, Aro's needs are power.

Meyer also emphasizes oppressive patriarchal ideas in the character of Rosalie, who is described as taking on the role of a mother in training. While Bella becomes entranced with motherhood and eventually performs it after her transformation, Rosalie also acts as a motherly force. She is Bella's sister-in-law who desperately wants to be a mother since she was never able

to bear a child while human. Rosalie's time to be a mother comes as soon as Bella dies on the table after giving birth. In the moments when the first mother Bella is rendered an emaciated corpse, Rosalie steps in as a mother figure who is gentle with her child. In Condon's *Breaking Dawn*, we see her rock the baby in her arms near the fire. She looks like a mother: docile, gentle, and sweet. Her role becomes that of a mother and caregiver while Bella is going through her transformation. Motherhood once again becomes a primary established performance and plot device for *Twilight* which adheres to typical expectations of gender.

Meyer does not let all female vampires in her text fit into being docile. When she does depart from normative characterizations of women, however, Meyer ultimately recuperates the female characters who are unruly and defy the patriarchal notion of femininity. Meyer's character Victoria is the opposite of Bella. Victoria doesn't get much screen (or book) time, and her role in the narrative roles appears limited to villainous prop. Her very existence suggests "aggression, strength and danger" (Guanio-Ulur 216). She does not act like a "woman" in the sense that she does not act quiet or docile. Revenge is her driving force and, in the end, it becomes her downfall. She also performs in a more masculine way when she sires her own newborn army in David Slade's *Eclipse*. She takes on a role similar to Carlisle or even Aro, insofar as she holds power as the head of her coven. Victoria's coven is more matriarchal than patriarchal, but this is one of the elements that leads to Victoria's downfall. She doesn't hold a position of head of household for long. She is subsumed within the narrative's overarching patriarchal ideology when she dies because of defying the role of being a "good" woman.

In Meyer's *Eclipse*, Rosalie is used to show the more docile version of what a vampire woman can become in order to endorse a patriarchal attitude. It is interesting to note that before Rosalie softens into her maternal role, she shared some traits with Victoria. Rosalie was

assaulted in her human life; hence she becomes vengeful---she has every right to do so---after she is turned. Meyer also reveals Rosalie is upset by the fact she never got to live out her human years with a husband and a family. She wants revenge because her chance to bear children was taken away. Meyer uses Rosalie's bitterness and then softening to further the misogynistic message that women should be good mothers—and indeed, will become monstrous when they cannot. In the third volume of the tetralogy, *Eclipse*, Rosalie looks back on her past traumatizing experience. She was assaulted by her fiancé Royce and his friends: “They left me in the street, still laughing as they stumbled away. They thought I was dead” (160). From this traumatizing experience, Rosalie uses her newfound transformation to take back the power she was stripped of. In a “complacent tone,” Rosalie explains how she murdered five humans (later she corrects the number to seven):

I did murder five humans... If you can really call them human. But I was very careful not to spill their blood—I knew I wouldn't be able to resist that, and I didn't want any part of them in me, you see. I saved Royce for last. I hoped that he would hear of his friends' deaths and understand, know what was coming for him. I hoped the fear would make the end worse for him. I think it worked. He was hiding inside a windowless room behind a door as thick as a bank vault's, guarded outside by armed men, when I caught up with him. (163)

In this moment, Rosalie shows slight restraint in terms of not drinking the men's blood. Arguably, she does take her power back by killing, but she does not go on living to continue an endless cycle of revenge. The fact that Rosalie is making a conscious effort to not tempt herself but to also get revenge, reveals that she is a more nuanced female vampire. While she is not adhering to the role of being docile, she is showing some restraint here, unlike the men who

assaulted her. She can take back some of her power in both the novel and book, eventually getting her anger out and adhering to the more humanlike lifestyle of the Cullens. Meyer primarily writes female vampires as being motivated by revenge. While Jasper, Emmett, and Edward do kill James, they are not driven by revenge in the way Rosalie and Victoria's stories are. Eventually, Rosalie heals and chooses a lifestyle that does not put humans at risk unlike Victoria. Hence, despite the resonance of her early character with Victoria, Rosalie eventually conforms to the feminine role of mother and gentle vampire.

Julie Plec's vampire story, *The Vampire Diaries*, uses the character Katherine to promote the patriarchal mindset that uncontrollable women are driven out of spite and revenge. Her story is full of pain, but she is not as one dimensional as Victoria. In fact, Katherine is evil on the surface. A better term to describe her is vindictive as she wants to always save herself and is willing to harm others. Katherine is motivated by revenge, similarly to Victoria and Rosalie. For example, Plec writes her as revenge driven when she turns Caroline, one of Elena's best friends, into a vampire. In this case, she performs the narrative role of villain. By turning someone into a vampire for revenge, Plec's characterization of Katherine could be categorized as vindictive like Victoria who turned others to create a newborn army in order to avenge her dead lover. In the second episode of season two, Caroline is turned into a vampire against her will ("The Return"). She has no consent over what Katherine does to her. At this moment, Katherine is exhibiting and adhering to a patriarchal ideology that dismisses consent and devalues the agency of women even when it depicts women in positions of power. If one is powerful enough, one can take what they want, thus Katherine takes Caroline's humanity just as we will see Bill does to Jessica in *True Blood*. And while Katherine does exhibit strength and power, she still falls into practices

that encourage patriarchal ideologies that depict women who defy binaries as being uncontrollably monstrous and revenge driven.

Plec continues to reinforce the harmful patriarchal ideal that women are driven by revenge and “unruly” women cannot be trusted. Katherine further resembles Rosalie in that she also has past trauma (this itself is a repeated convention in vampire narratives). Katherine catches the attention of the Mikaelsons, the first ever vampires in *The Vampire Diaries*. She becomes their target for Klaus, one of the Mikaelson siblings, to complete his hybrid transition of vampire and werewolf by draining her. In season two, episode nine, we learn more about Katherine’s past life. After running away from the Mikaelsons she comes back to find her entire family brutally mutilated. She sobs and cries as she clings to her mother, a display of emotion which is by far her most effusive in the show. Plec writes this scene in such a way that Katherine is given clear motivation for her actions; here again, the implication is that Katherine’s sole motivation is revenge. Even so, she is another female vampire who went through severe trauma at the hands of a man. While Katherine may be sneaky, she is also very complex and multidimensional. Instead of only being a villain (as Victoria remains in the narrative of *Twilight*), Katherine blurs the lines between good and bad. Yet we may ask: at what cost? Ultimately Plec writes Katherine just as Meyer writes both of her characters. She enables a patriarchal ideal that depicts “unruly” women as being uncontrollable and revenge driven.

A similar dynamic appears in Robert Rodriguez’s *From Dusk Till Dawn*. Santanico Pandemonium is a female who has endured similar kinds of trauma as we have seen in the stories of other female vampires. Rodriguez does offer a slight revision from the problematic “unruly” recuperated trope that we saw in *Twilight* and *The Vampire Diaries*. But her depiction results in her eventually walking off the screen, and thus out of the narrative, in the final scene depicting

her alive. As mentioned, we find Santanico at the strip club “Titty Twister.” Unsurprisingly, given this setting, at first the narrative emphasizes her conventional femininity. This is to be expected as she works at a strip club called Titty Twister. The fact that she is stuck performing at the Titty Twister is ironic; she has to service the vampire lords by luring men into the bar so they can feed. The vampires not only earn money from having her strip, but they also earn their meals from the men she entraps. For example, we see an instance on the stage in season one episode, episode six (“Bizarre Tales”), where Santanico controls the room as she gives a solo dance on stage. Before knowing more about the story, she appears to be a human woman performing for the male gaze, yet our understanding of this performance is complicated when we learn later that she dances to lure people in to feed on them. She uses her feminine charms in order to lure Richie to this place and to eventually help him free her from the vampire lords. By using him to go through the labyrinth beneath the Titty Twister, he can get access to a way out to break the curse that holds her there. And while she does murder people in the bar, she isn’t simply one dimensional like Victoria. Rodriguez develops another model of female agency through Santanico when letting her get revenge on those who kept her imprisoned for so long. This text is more feminist forward in the sense that Santanico is eventually able to regain her own autonomy and act as a matriarchal head to several other vampires who look up to her; she is not driven by revenge at the end of season three as Victoria is (and statically remains) in Meyer’s *Eclipse*.

In *Fledgling*, Octavia Butler authors an even more explicitly progressive and feminist vampire story. Much more than the mass-marketed vampire stories we have examined above, Butler dismantles typical representations of gender performance. Instead of females playing a more subservient role in the scheme of relationships, female Inas are more in charge of household affairs than male Inas. This dynamic is touched on when Shori gets an explanation in

regards to how Inas find mates, live together, and thrive. Instead of the male being head of the household, females are the heads of their own households and live away from males. And while Inas of one gender may visit Inas of another gender, they do not inhabit the same domestic space. Furthermore, instead of males competing for a female mate's attention, it turns out that, in previous years, the female Inas were the ones, who a long time ago, “competed. It's like the way males have competed among humans” (115). Instead of the male Ina being the initiator or “dominant” in the regard of facilitating and fostering relationships, that role is held by the female Ina. Monique Dixon also notes that “while female Ina do bear and care for the children as human females do, the assumption that they would also be the ‘weaker’ sex and take on the stereotypical role of human women does not apply” (41). Butler refuses to implement the stereotype of women being the weaker sex and ultimately writes-Ina who break gender barriers and harbor matriarchal power. In Butler’s world, female vampiric qualities are heightened and stronger than that of the males. For example, the “females' [venom] is more potent than the male's” (115). The female Inas are a dominant force while male Ina are submissive. Through this detail, Butler implements a more immersive transformation of the vampire figure. Essentially, Butler can prioritize female Ina as being just as powerful and even more valued than male Ina. This message is not something we see in other narratives like *True Blood* or *Twilight*. Butler’s text takes a far more feminist approach that works to imagine how a vampire society might organically honor and value women.

Gomez’s *The Gilda Stories* displays a similar use of fictional vampires to resist patriarchal binaries. While Ina cannot be made through biting or exchanging of blood in *Fledgling*, the option for vampire creation is possible in *The Gilda Stories*. We get to meet Gilda

(the first Gilda) and Bird alongside other female vampires who are part of Gilda's family.² The women are strong; they are not subject to the will of men or a vampire equivalent of patriarchal force. This autonomy defies the typical narrative of female submissiveness and male domination. For example, the first Gilda is the head of her family, and she gives her progeny, the next Gilda, the gift of immortality. Instead of a male vampire being in power, it is the females in this society who are in control of family and kinship. For example, the original Gilda is the head of her house/family unit while men do not infiltrate their immediate family. Instead of a man being the head of the "household," Gilda is. Hence, Gomez like Butler refuses to adhere to a typical patriarchal structure. Her story envisions other forms of living.

Now, there are of course evil or morally darker female vampires in all of the series who also defy typical gender performance binaries as Gilda and Shori do. For example, in *The Gilda Stories*, the character Eleanor is very vindictive in her twisted games of love and narcissism. She presents as the typical femme fatale: she is beautiful, alluring, and dangerous. She captures the room and takes control; she is a dominant presence. For example, when they meet, Gomez writes, "She seemed to consume Gilda in one glance, her evaluation evinced in a thin smile that was both remote and enticing" (58). In other words, Eleanor clearly captures the room and Gilda's attention which she then in the future uses to manipulate Gilda. This is like the exchange in *Twilight* when Bella comments on Rosalie being like an airbrushed model, but Bella's inner monologue is not nearly as flirty; if Bella's words contain a queer subtext, it is clear that neither Bella nor Meyer are aware of the innuendo. With Gilda, there are more overt suggestions of mutual sexual enticement. This is another upside to Gomez's work which laces in a space for

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queerness while Meyer totally closes off a space for a queer awakening. Eleanor also makes sexually suggestive comments to Gilda such as “You’re more willful than I’d thought. Will you fight me on where we have tea as well?” Gilda responds by saying, “Not at all, I’m in your hands” (67). In this instance, Gilda speaks in innuendo even as she becomes obedient and gives herself over to Eleanor in an act that begins their toxic relationship. Eleanor may be less evil than Victoria, but she is also a vindictive character. Unlike the fate that awaits Victoria in *Twilight*, Gomez’s text offers sympathy for the powerful, traditionally feminine but vengeful vampire. She is clearly much more than a simple villain.

In *The Gilda Stories*, Gomez has Gilda perform in a way that undermines patriarchal and misogynistic norms in a subtle way. Gomez sets up the possibility for tension between Eleanor and Gilda when Samuel, one of Eleanor’s previous companions, warns Gilda. He has been used and tricked by Eleanor. While we do not get his specific story, his case reveals Eleanor as a dominant force. She not only tries to control Gilda but has influenced and controlled Samuel in the past. He tells Gilda, “She’s a deceiver...She bewitched me just as she bewitched her [Samuel’s wife] before she gets tired of her company. She’ll do the same with you” (69). Not only does Samuel warn Gilda, but Anthony, another member of the family, reveals “Eleanor took Samuel’s wife. She did this against all reason,” and Gilda defends her to Anthony when she claims that “she’s grown wiser” and the death was a result “of her inexperience” (85). Gilda is forgiving. She is acting in a more “feminine” way that confirms her adherence to the social norm. Eleanor is ultimately a tragic figure who is successful with implementing and adhering to patriarchal-induced femininity. But this conformity does not save her. Eleanor was too detached from humanity. She was no longer able to be recuperated and put back into society. And while she does dismantle some gender stereotypes by holding power and influence over others, she is

also vindictive similar to other evil vampire villains we have seen in more mainstream texts. Gilda defies the bounds of gender through her own fashion and more masculine actions. Gomez's narrative reveals that unlike Eleanor, Gilda can perform her identity in a way that pushes away from more patriarchal and misogynistic norms.

Unlike *The Gilda Stories*, or *Fledgling*, Rodriguez's *From Dusk Till Dawn* does display typical gender performances, similar to that of *Twilight*. Kate Fuller operates as a docile, sweet, and nurturing woman in the series. She is treated as somewhat of a rarity, prize, or commodity—another woman who is to be acquired and possessed. While she is under the supervision of the Gecko brothers, Richie Gecko becomes enamored with her before meeting Santanico. He has daydream visions of Kate as they interact. These fantasies put her in a compromising position as a sexual object for his pleasure. For example, in season one, episode four, when Richie goes down to the pool and initially is going to kill her, he “sees” (hallucinates) Kate say, “Richie, would you take off my bikini for me please?” While this doesn't actually happen, Richie imagines it, and the fantasy is given narrative space. The fantasy puts him at ease when he thinks Kate wants him in a flirty way. Furthermore, Rodriguez portrays Kate as not maintaining her innocence through the entire series; she does reinforce some tired tropes while being the damsel in distress. Similar to Elena from Plec's *The Vampire Diaries*, Kate is the “prize” to be won and controlled by the two brothers. While she does get close with Richie and kiss him, she also gets close with Seth. Kate is torn between the two brothers, but she is ultimately bossed around by both. When Richie does become a vampire he also continues to boss Kate around under the guise of keep her out of harm's way. Even so, no matter which brother she is around, she ends up listening to them and obeying. In the second season, she is with Seth, taking care of him as he strives to keep them afloat. He acts as the “head” of their little household while she often is told

to stay behind and stay in the shadows to not be “hurt.” He often cautions her to not get involved, as happens in season one when she wants to find out who killed her coworker Maudette. In *True Blood*, which we will examine below, the narrative offers a different narrative. Sookie becomes involved with more vampires against Bill’s wishes---Sookie acts of her own accord while Kate does not.

However, writer Robert Rodriguez show does offer a scene that promotes a more feminist outlook, but fails to do so for a majority of the series. Kate finally gets her body back after being possessed by Amaru, and she replays the memories in her head of the people she had harmed. She begins to exhibit signs of her old self and performance in a giving and sacrificial way. Similar to Bella, she wants to sacrifice herself to save those she loves and cares for. She tells Amaru (the woman who possessed her), “You made me kill. After all that I’ve done I deserve this walk...in the eyes of the people I love” (“Dark Side of the Sun”). Kate declares as she steps towards the other side (the literal other supernatural world) to walk. Seth Gecko supports her decision even if he may lose her, and she tells him that it’s “time to let go partner.” Kate does this all on her own, sacrificing herself to try and take down the vampire lord who had possessed her. Even while there are glimmers of a feminist message in Rodriguez’s work, I find this text to be far more conflicted and contradictory. Kate could return to her own realm because she turned back and became more of an “acceptable” woman. Kate’s sacrifice becomes prominent, and Rodriguez reveals a push towards more autonomy, pushing, that is, away from the patriarchal perception that a man must make all decisions for a woman. Despite feminist moments, the series ends up being more regressive than it is progressive.

Plec reinforces the stereotype of a self-sacrificing and righteous woman through her portrayal of Elena. Like *From Dusk Till Dawn*, her TV series promotes an unsatisfactory

feminist message. In David Slade's *Eclipse* while Edward and Bella are on the mountain, Victoria tries to kill Edward to get to Bella. When she nearly succeeds in killing Edward, Bella distracts her with the smell of blood by cutting her own wrist. Bella thus sacrifices her safety for the man she loves. Plec, similar to Rodriguez and Slade, uses the trope of the self-sacrificing woman to further the narrative of what a good woman should act like. In Plec's *The Vampire Diaries*, season 2, episode 21 ("The Sun Also Rises"), Elena lets Klaus use her as his sacrifice in the ritual in which he attempts becoming a hybrid. While she doesn't die, her intentions are to have Klaus stop hurting the people she loves. She acts as a loyal and loving woman when she aids in the process of putting others before herself. In this sense, Kate, Elena, and Bella all engage in acts of selflessness and loyalty in sacrifice of their own well-being. The characters adhere and push forward the narrative of women being good only when they are willing to act in the interests of the greater good or for "love."

Alan Ball's *True Blood* reinforces the disintegration of female autonomy yet again in its first season with the story line involving Jessica Hamby. We first meet her in season one as a scared church girl who is only seventeen years old. She was taken and forcefully turned into a vampire by Bill as a punishment for him killing one of his kind ("I Don't Wanna Know"). She is stripped of her autonomy at this point because she is a simple means to an end for Bill. Jessica is a prop to punish Bill; she is a woman who is being used for a man's intention to harm another man. In this scene she weeps, begs, and cries for help. While she does this, the narrative would seem to pin her as the damsel in distress similar to how Kate is entrapped in her limited role in Rodriguez's *From Dusk Till Dawn*. In this scene of *True Blood*, the vampires become visibly aroused as Jessica is bitten and screams for help. It is clear that there is a metaphorical rape occurring as Bill groans loudly when he tastes her flesh. While he doesn't want to turn Jessica,

his body has a reaction of gratification that we hear and see on screen; he is celebrating his domination over her as well as the gaining of control over her body. The dripping blood and the way Jessica pushes him away reveal her resistance to male dominance even though she cannot stop her transformation.

Not only does Ball's scene of Jessica's transforming disintegrate female autonomy, but the scene also promotes the patriarchal attitude women's bodies are subject to men's sexual desires and fantasies. This scene also acts as a metaphorical loss of her virginity; because she is a virgin when she turns into a vampire, she remains a permanent virgin in her undead state ("I Don't Wanna Know"). Ball's script reinforces the patriarchal concept of domination over a woman's body while also fetishizing Jessica's virginal status in her undead afterlife. As Jane Kubiesa points out "She will heal every time she is penetrated and will therefore return to her maiden state each time she has sexual intercourse" (4). Jessica is always a virgin physically to those with whom she is intimate. While she is strong willed, powerful, and dominant, she is still a fantasy of female innocence and submission when her perpetual "virginity" is considered. Her turning is problematic—in some ways like Meyer's depiction of Rosalie, who cannot bear children and whose tragedy unfolds as a direct response to sexual trauma. Jessica is turned as a virgin and *into* a forever virgin against her will, infusing her character with a male-centered obsession and perspective with her innocent and violated body. In this sense, she is a classical patriarchal sexual fantasy. *Twilight's* Rosalie is unable to bear children, a fact that likewise encourages the reader's obsession with her physical, female body. Ball controls Jessica's body similarly. Jessica is stuck at the cusp of adolescence and adulthood, an embodiment of patriarchal male fantasies that the viewer takes place in. In her vampiric transformation, she is

released from the bounds of contemporary life but at what cost? While she may be free from her human life, she is also a patriarchal dream.

While mass-market author Stephanie Meyer conforms to expectations of a male-dominated society, Butler and Gomez's narratives liberate the figure of the vampire even more. Meyer's work encourages gendered performances as they relate to patriarchal ideals. Some of these ideals include motherhood and determining how a good woman should act. Meyer's narrative continues to aid the problematic trope of women needing to be self-sacrificing, pure, and gratifying to the desires of (male) others in order to be "good" women. *Vampire Diaries* leaves viewers with a similar message. Elena is portrayed as a martyr several times; she is written as a victim that needs saving from various men. Robert Rodriguez also perpetuates patriarchal ideals by having Kate conform to these stereotypes of feminine submission and self-sacrifice. I have suggested that unlike most of these narratives, Butler's *Fledgling* engages with patriarchal ideas only to contest them. Gomez's *The Gilda Stories* is similar to *Fledgling* in that it works to not perpetuate patriarchal ideas that linger in a male dominated society. In contrast, Butler and Gomez demonstrate the potential of vampire narratives to articulate fully feminist visions of female autonomy and reimagined bonds of kinships.

Chapter 2: Found Families and Normalizing Polyamorous and Queer Structures

The first chapter introduced several vampire narratives and explored sexuality and narrative representations of gender performativity. This chapter focuses on the way families and kinships are defined in vampire narratives. Several vampire stories such as Gomez's *The Gilda Stories*, Butler's *Fledgling*, and Ball's series *True Blood* push back against heteronormative and typical nuclear family structures and work to normalize polyamorous and non-heteronormative kinship structures. Butler and Gomez reveal that family structures do not need to be typical, patriarchal, or heteronormative to be beneficial or healthy. It's important to normalize queer family structures to break away from the heteronormative and patriarchal codes that have been so engrained in media and in life. I specifically look at families connected by bonds other than genetic relatedness. In Butler's *Fledgling*, I dive into the polyamorous structure of Shori and her symbionts. In Ball's *True Blood*, I look at Jessica and Bill's relationship, which borders on the line of platonic but also teeters into the realm of quasi sexual. In Gomez's *The Gilda Stories*, my primary argument is that this narrative promotes a more queer-centric view of family that saves Gilda in the end. Unlike in Gomez's work, patriarchal and hetero-centric relationships and kinships are pressed forward in *Twilight* and *From Dusk Till Dawn*. In *The Vampire Diaries*, the family structure becomes more complicated, but it once again devolves into a hetero-centric and patriarchal message.

For the sake of this chapter's argument, I want to begin by situating a few definitions for these terms. Firstly, "family" in relation to this chapter includes structures or webs of relation whether related by blood or by emotional bonds. I view family as being reflective of close ties that bind together different people. Furthermore, an element that is important to the vampire families in this text includes the turning process. Vampire narratives utilize the process of

turning as a possible addition to the standard form of sexual bonding between partners and parent-child bonds.

Although the figure of the vampire can be used in ways that promote heteronormativity, several different writers have mobilized vampires to express and promote a queer family structure such as Gomez and Butler. Standard definitions of family are too limited for my investigation. For example, Franz Neyer and Frieder Lang suggest the typical familial structure is validated through only genetics (310). While legal expressions like “next of kin” do mobilize the biological and genetic experience of kinship, such colloquialisms do not prohibit us from looking at range of different expressions of family in diverse situations. Patricia Noller and Mary Ann Fitzpatrick focus on defining the family relationship in a more transactional way: they stress “the shared systems of meaning in the family, the common beliefs, the views of family history, and approaches to the social world in general” (13). Furthermore, Mary Ann Fitzpatrick and Frederick Wamboldt define family as a “a psychosocial group constituted by at least one adult member and one or more others who work as a group toward mutual need fulfillment, nurturance, and development” (425). While these definitions shine light on how one can constitute a family, I find that Fitzpatrick and Wamboldt’s definition best fits best suits my analysis. Their definition encompasses a range of people who can be in a family, hence the definition is closest to a looser family such as meant by the term “found family.” Fitzpatrick and Wamboldt offer a more nuanced take on what constitutes a family, and their insights shape my own.

Narratives such as Rodriguez’s *From Dusk Till Dawn*, Gomez’s *The Gilda Stories*, and Butler’s *Fledgling* depict family units that work to pursue fulfillment, development through shared approaches and common beliefs (some more than others). While *From Dusk Till Dawn*

does depict some unconventional family units, Rodriguez still centers and finishes the show with a more patriarchal and heteronormative ending. Furthermore, family may not be “blood” related in *Dusk Till Dawn*, *Twilight*, and *True Blood*, but the family does grow together and they make commitments that center them together as a unit with intersubjective cooperation. Gomez and Butler ultimately push away from the patriarchal family structure in their narratives as a major plot device.

I want to note before going into depth about the series *From Dusk Till Dawn* that there is a lack of scholarship on this specific narrative. As I first suggested in the introduction, it is important to return to the cultural figure of the vampire considering understudied narratives. At first glance, *From Dusk Till Dawn* complicates a typical patriarchal family structure, but by the end gives the viewer another patriarchal family structure in its place. Scott is Kate’s brother who is also taken hostage by the Gecko brothers. He is not related by blood to his family. He is also the first one in his family who is turned into a culebra, making him more of an outsider than those like Carlos who has been a Culebra for decades. In Rodriguez’s *From Dusk Till Dawn*, I focused on the heteronormative moments; in this chapter, I will focus on *From Dusk Till Dawn*’s construction of family. The Fuller family which includes Kate, Scott, and Pastor Jacob is eventually subjected to a rift in their family structure that is already patriarchal. In the first season, the Fullers stand side by side even after the notorious Gecko brothers utilize them as bait and cover to get over the Mexican border. The initial patriarchal structure eventually rolls around into another patriarchal structure. While Jacob Fuller dies near the end of season one, Scott becomes a culebra. We see him eventually drift away from his sister Kate who is human; he begins to work for Carlos, a very old and powerful culebra who was part of the infamous “Titty Twister” strip club/bar which worked to lure humans to their death to feed the vampire

population. This TV series begins with a classical patriarchal family going on vacation, although one of the main characters, Scott, is adopted. While the father in the human family died, Scott becomes a vampire and effectively a son in an equally patriarchal family headed by the vampire Carlos.

Just like in *From Dusk Till Dawn*, Bella is not related to the Cullens by blood. But instead of becoming part of the family like Scott does via adoption, she becomes part of the family via heterosexual marriage. The important point to emphasize is that she still fits under the rule of the Cullen patriarch, Carlisle. She is seen as a member of the Cullen family, not necessarily the head or having a defining role within that found or chosen family, but simply being a Cullen after her marriage and transformation. The Cullen family, including Bella, is made up of heterosexual pairs, each of them monogamous. Each female vampire is paired with a male vampire mate (Alice and Jasper, Rosalie and Emmett, Carlisle, and Esme). Furthermore, there is a mom and dad (Carlisle and Esme) that are paired off to one another romantically while also being labeled as siblings. This set up is quite complicated in that the quasi-incest elements are somewhat overlooked and forgotten about by the readers and viewers. Notably, no one in the family is related biologically, until Bella's unlikely child is born. While *Twilight* has a found family, the family is very nuclear and heterosexual. Its structure only reaffirm heteronormative and patriarchal norms. None of the couples are queer in a sexual sense. Kate's relationship with the Gecko brothers from *Dusk till Dawn* creates more space for questioning and pushing against these normative structures of family. Yet even while Rodriguez attempts to create a new family structure, he ultimately gives the viewers just another version of a heteronormative and patriarchal family.

Rodriguez's *From Dusk Till Dawn*, like Meyer's *Twilight*, ultimately promotes compulsory hetero-centric experiences as the only possible source of familial bond. The story does this through the bond between the brothers and Kate. While Kate is at first kidnapped by the brothers, their relationship ends up becoming more complicated. Richie ends up seeing Kate in a sexualized way. Kate's traumatized bond with the pair becomes apparent as she stays by the brothers' side, (primarily Seth's side). What seems to draw the three together is their shared feeling of lacking control. When they're at "Titty Twister," Richie comments on something Kate previously said to him: "You're sad that your life was upside down, well maybe this is where you're supposed to be" ("Place of Dead Roads"). While Kate doesn't see the image Richie does, he reminds her to look closer and that "under the surface it's really beautiful." While Richie is not entirely part of her family yet, moments like this enable a closeness between the pair that hint at the possibility of being even closer in the future.

While Robert Rodriguez explores some transgressive relationships in his narratives, heterosexual pair bonds remain the defining ground for his work. In the beginning Kate wants to leave and get back to her more traditional family. While she begs Richie to let them go, Richie reminds Kate that being at the bar feels like home. When the kiss takes place, it is presented as somewhat taboo; it is a turning point that sets up the dichotomy between the brother's dynamic with Kate as it shifts. Her relationship with Richie gets complicated as she eventually stays with the two brothers (there is no direct reference to them having sex, yet the possibility of erotic intimacy remains). There is a connection to draw between this narrative and *Fledgling* where we see Shori and her "family" made up of the symbionts she feeds from and has intimate moments with. The difference would be that Butler's story includes both men and women. For Rodriguez, he limits the relationship as a heterosexual bond, offering no queer possibilities.

Rodriguez's *From Dusk Till Dawn* promotes hetero-centric experiences as the only source of patriarchal-familial bonds. This message is apparent with the crystallization of Kate and Seth's relationship. At the end of season one, both can be seen driving off while Kate asks Seth if he needs "some company." This suggestive cliffhanger leads into the next season where Kate is working alongside Seth as his partner in crime who aids in his drug addiction. She is the one who penetrates through his skin, leaning him back on the bed. And while the brother that she is with shifts, this change from one man to another doesn't take away from the fact that the series pushes forward a monogamous structure within the first two seasons. Problematically, the series also aids in pushing forward a vision of family closeness as a kind of Stockholm Syndrome; one learns to love one's captor(s). The eventual relationship among Kate, Seth, and Richie not only seems unhealthy but it equates to a patriarchal setup where the men are in charge. Even though Kate's new family is anything but ordinary, the family structure in question is still problematically patriarchal.

While Rodriguez's *From Dusk Till Dawn* is less determinedly heteronormative as the *Twilight* narratives, it is still not nearly as liberatory as the novels written by Butler and Gomez. In vampire stories the possibility of turning someone into a vampire adds another possible kind of affiliation to the standard forms of sexual bonds and parent-child bonds. For instance, Gilda, the first version, adds members to her family such as Bird, another vampire. Upon knowing her time has come to pass on, she eventually passes on her name and some of her essence through transformation to the "new" Gilda. In *Dusk Till Dawn*, Richie does not add Kate to his "family" in this same sense. Another difference to mention when comparing these narratives is the lack of consent when it comes to turning people into vampires or feeding; consent is far more prioritized in *Gilda* and *Fledging* versus in *From Dusk Till Dawn*. For the narratives with more consent,

those relationships enable more queer possibilities. Shori finds validity in consent with her symbionts such as Theodora. While Gilda feeds on people who do sleep without “consent,” she leaves fulfilling dreams in place. Richie from *Dusk Till Dawn* feeds, leaving nothing in place. *From Dusk till Dawn* may not feature normative family structure, but it places an emphasis on hetero-centric family structures.

Gomez does not use the typical nuclear and patriarchal family structure when writing about a family. Gomez writes Gilda as a character who establishes her found family in a non-normative way. She achieves a found family like the one Shori finds. We get to witness a fascinating and passionate relationship between the first Gilda and the second Gilda, who eventually takes over her predecessor’s name. Early on, we get to see just how the first Gilda relates to the girl she finds: “More importantly, Gilda saw herself behind those eyes—a younger self she barely remembered, one who would never be comfortable with having decisions made for her” (16). Gilda recognizes some of her own traits in the girl. The second Gilda is not related to the first Gilda but becomes related through exchanges of blood, a common vampire motif that troubles the very notion of kinship as blood relation. The first Gilda begins to hint at the fact her time is limited, that she is perhaps seeking a replacement with the family. Early on in the novel, the first Gilda speaks to the second Gilda about her feelings and concerns:

But you were such a child, so full of terror, your journey had been more than the miles of road. When I picked you up your body relaxed into mine, knowing part of your fight was done. I sensed in you a spirit and understanding of the world; that you were the voice lacking among us. Seeing this world with you has given me wonderful years of pleasure. Now my only fear is leaving Bird alone. (41)

First Gilda begins her confession of feeling by pointing out a level of intimacy between the young girl and herself. The first Gilda acknowledges how full of terror the second Gilda was while on the run and has already killed a man who tried to rape her. Gilda is upfront about her concerns such as leaving Bird alone; she is upfront about asking the new Gilda if she wants to change. This is not the case when it comes to *The Vampire Diaries*, *True Blood*, or *From Dusk Till Dawn* where consent isn't the main priority and many people who are turned do not actually have a say. Once again mass market narratives like Plec's *The Vampire Diaries* and Meyer's *Twilight* are ultimately repressive, but feminist writers have still found ways to use vampire tropes for liberatory ends.

Gomez prioritizes consent as a means of family construction in her work. Not only does the first Gilda share blood with the second Gilda, but she gets consent and permission to do so. Unlike *The Vampire Diaries* Katherine who turns others out of revenge back in chapter 1, the first Gilda is more careful than that. Furthermore, she reminds the second Gilda that "In choosing you must pledge yourself to pursue only life, never bitterness or cruelty" (42). This is only one line within her declaration, but she hides no details about the way in which the new Gilda should live.-As we see the declaration from Gilda progress just before the exchange of blood, she states: "Power is the frightening thing, not death. And the blood, it is a shared thing. Something we must all learn to share or simply spill onto battlefields" (42). Blood is not to be hoarded and it is not something to treat lightly. Bird and Gilda share the same creator, hence they are connected via their maker. Unlike other vampire narratives such as *From Dusk Till Dawn*, Gomez queers her family structure by prioritizing consent and blood sharing to cement consensual and not traumatic familial bonds.

In Gomez's *The Gilda Stories*, I want to also look at how familial bonds are cemented. The exchange of fluid links the family together. The first moment there is an exchange is when the first Gilda turns the second Gilda:

She clung to Gilda, sinking deeper into a dream, barely hearing Gilda as she said, and “Now you must drink.” She held the Girl's head to her breast and in a quick gesture opened the skin of her chest. She pressed the Girl's mouth to the red life that seeped from her. (44)

The scene is intimate. It blurs the basic conventional idea of a “family” structure, but that doesn't mean that these two are not family. Gilda has her feed from her own breast, a spot that is private and connoted with maternal care. In addition, Gomez describes the blood that comes out as “life that seeped from her.” The second Gilda easily consumed it. I think this scene blurs the lines making it difficult to see this relationship as only familial. At the same time, I do want to point out that there is no blood relation in terms of heritage or family line. This relationship is similar to that between a mother and a daughter in which the original Gilda looks out for the second Gilda. They share each other's blood in order to fulfill the transformation and become like family even where there is no actual blood relation. As in Meyer's *Twilight*, the Cullens are not blood related and they are together in pairs, intimately. The Cullens pass in Forks as mom, dad, kids even if the reader quickly knows that the relationships are otherwise. While the Cullens are cemented together by their vampiric transformation, Gomez places an emphasis on vampiric transformation but does not then limit the bounds of transformation to a heteronormative structure. In fact, gender and sexuality have no say in how the second Gilda adds to her family. Gomez this way allows for the queer-centric found family foreclosed by the patriarchal plot of *Twilight*.

Gomez authors a shared level of respect, as well as healthy and functioning relationships. Before she was turned, her predecessor made sure to reiterate the lifestyle she adheres to and that Gilda should adhere to as well. She reminds Gilda:

“Betraying our shared life, our shared humanity makes one unworthy of sharing, unworthy of life.” Gilda spoke easily. She had not known how deeply she felt the lessons she had learned. (57)

While the first line is Gilda speaking to the new Gilda, the next is one where Gilda reiterates her own style of living to her family member Sorel. There is a comradeship of trust, respect, and sharing life rather than killing. In this regard, the family is a close-knit unit that works together. Furthermore, we see Gilda utilize this way of life and choose good just as her family members did. While she feeds, she leaves fulfilling dream images behind. There is never a take that does give. As Jeffrey Weinstock points out, the act of “non-fatal sharing of blood that happens alongside sharing of dreams and life force” which “includes a mutual benefit to both individuals who are involved” (“American Vampires” 213). This atypical family structure is powerful and strong and benefits all do those involved. Gomez reveals a queer-centric family structure that is successful and beneficial.

Furthermore, Gomez not only crafts Gilda’s queer structured family, but she also promotes Sorel who is an extended member of Gilda’s family. He is a longtime friend of the original Gilda as well as the second Gilda. Like the first and second Gilda, Sorel is conservative in who he turns. He doesn’t do it so easily such as we see in a narrative like *The Vampire Diaries* where Damon Salvatore turns people out of spite. Plec reveals a vampire who is driven by

revenge to add to his progeny, yet this isn't the case for Sorel in Gomez's work. For example, Anthony is upfront with Gilda about Sorel's refusal of turning others into vampires so easily:

No, he has been rather cautious in that respect. Which some say is foolish. Many create new family members as if gathering an army around themselves. This is not what we mean by family. (63)

The quotation reveals the unique and conventional family and kinship structure in this piece is when Anthony acknowledges that Gilda does not need Bird to fit one role, but that Bird can fit many in the family structure: "She can be mother, father, sister, lover—but she cannot create the family for you. You are part of our family, and you will create others to be a part of it. This is no one's mission but your own" (183). Anthony makes an interesting point that refuses the typical family structure that includes rigid roles: mother as mother, sister as sister. But as with Gilda's relationships and fluidity in her life and travels, her own family members are not stuck to one role. And in this instance, Bird can be more than a lover. She can be more than a sister or friend. And while Gilda does not always have contact with Bird over decades, there is still a connection there of shared blood that keeps them close. In that regard, they are kin. They shared the original blood of their shared creator. In essence, they have become genetically similar in their consumption of their maker. And while this structure is non-heteronormative, Gomez shows it functioning for her characters. Gilda maintains her boundaries; she maintains her humanity. She does not take from humans without giving back and she does not add to her family without careful consideration just as Sorel does. While her family is more found than mainstream normative, she prioritizes who is part of it. Gomez's work reveals not only a fictional vampire character who embodies the highest ideals of ethics and compassion. The family structure does

not need to be nuclear, patriarchal, or even conventional to succeed (which we also see later on in Gomez's narrative where Gilda turns others to be part of her family).

Alan Ball's *True Blood* script tries to perpetuate the idea that Jessica and Bill have a familial relationship but the previous quasi-gang rape scene may reveal otherwise. Even while they have a relationship, Alan Ball's script goes about it in a very problematic and anti-feminist way. Through the metaphorical rape of Jessica and how she is treated after she is transformed, Ball perpetuates the patriarchal idea that women are there to be used for their bodies. But Bill acts anything but fatherly at first; he drinks and turns her and wants to leave her. She no longer is the church-going girl next door, but she finds out she can drink and have sex with practically anyone. She lets loose, and instead of Bill watching over her, he puts her in the hands of another male vampire Eric, practically selling her off. When he finally "gets" her back, he immediately has a few rules; no killing, no feeding off of humans, and to follow a curfew. And while Ball's script may try and show Bill as being a good "father" figure, we cannot forget how terribly he acted with her in the first place. While Ball may mask the horrificness of their first moments together, I don't want that to go unnoticed. The fact that the pair become so attached even after what Jessica net through also perpetuates the patriarchal idea that women should be controlled.

Ball's *True Blood* reveals Jessica and Bills bond as inseparable as the season go on. By making this bond so important and major in the series promotes relationships that are built on borderline rape, abuse, and stripped autonomy. Bill does become protective of Jessica later on, unlike how he was when she first turned her and "gave" her to Eric. While under attack from a witch who casts a spell to force vampires to walk in the sun and die, Bill purposely uses silver chains for both of them to secure each other in the night. Bill has a sense of ownership over Jessica; he created her, but he also has watched her grow from the timid 17 year old into a

mature vampire which is very problematic. It teeters into the line of grooming. Ball promotes a patriarchal ideal that romanticizes abusive elements in a relationship.

Alan Ball's *True Blood* on the surface might reveal unconventional family structures, but they ultimately aid in repetition of a more nuclear and patriarchal familial structure. Sookie is also a part of the very interesting yet weird relationship between Bill and Jessica that adds to reinforcing a hetero-centric family structure. While Sookie dates Bill, she consistently wants to be a part of Jessica's life as she navigates life as a vampire. In this way TB emphasizes its support for non-conventional family structures. Sookie is similar to Bird in that she embodies a sister, a friend, and a mother for Jessica who she stays close to after Bill's death. Jessica is by no means her blood daughter in any way, but Sookie wants to protect her as one. In this case, the family dynamic structure comes to a painful end. The family structure between Bill, Jessica, and Sookie is not a conventional structure. But it does remain hetero-centric and reinforces the importance of a male head of household just as we have seen with Carlisle in Meyer's novels.

Shori in *Fledgling* needs blood like any other fictional vampire, but Butler sets up non-heteronormative family structures through the vampire bonds in her novel. For Butler's Ina, female-headed polyamorous families are the norm. Ina are usually required to have several symbionts in order to live. This group of symbionts typically includes humans of several races and genders. The relationships are both non-monogamous and non-heteronormative in this world. She discovers that not only are there rewards for her, but also for the symbionts she chooses. The symbionts give her blood, but in return they can become "healthier, stronger" and their lifespans are lengthened by "several decades" (63). Butler does not shy away from describing sex in the novel, nor does she shy away from embracing and experimenting with the representation of sexuality. Furthermore, the familiar networks, in general, destabilize any kind

of neat family notion. The novel demonstrates “a queer, polyamorous model of belonging” (Lundberg 573). Additionally, Shori also is not limited as to the gender of her symbionts who are both male and female. As Lundberg also points out, the pleasures she provides when feeding “are not gender specific” (574). For example, she feeds and gives to Theodora; a woman, Wright, a man; and Brooke. In Butler’s *Fledgling*, we can see Shori may be unaware of who or what she is for a while, but we also see she isn’t inherently evil. Shori isn’t aware at first that Ina naturally treat their symbionts badly. She becomes aware of the possibilities of how Ina can treat their symbionts when Brooke warns Shori that “not everyone treats symbionts as people” (131). While Shori may not know much about her past, she exists in the present where she actively is seeking information to inform her of her past. While doing so, she gains symbionts on the way. Butler writes Shori in a way where she is not concerned about her symbionts gender. By doing so, Butler’s work sets up a non-heteronormative family structure that is inclusive.

Butler does not shy away from writing out Wright’s reaction to Shori’s nonchalance’s about her symbionts as being an issue. Butler has made her work even more realistic since Wright is at first threatened by the possibility of Shori being non-monogamous and queer. But Butler does not make Wright out to be a homophobic villain by the end of the novel but has him grow into a more understanding and accepting person while being a part of Shori’s family. Butler uses to make her larger point is when she writes Wright becoming passive aggressive in his comments when it comes to Shori’s sexuality. When she initiates adding symbionts who are women, he says things like “Swing both ways, do you?” (85). But when another male is brought in, he changes. He seems threatened by the existence of non-monogamous relationships. He tells her, “I don’t mind the women so much I guess. I kind of like the two downstairs. I was hoping you’d get all women---except me. I think I could deal with that...I don’t think I can do this,

Shori. I can't share you" (Butler 232). Problematically, Wright is okay with other women given their "womanly status," but when another male is in the picture, he feels too threatened. He doesn't want to share her, hence imparting the idea that he owns her. And although his mindset isn't this extreme at the end, there is still some clear pushback when it comes to Shori's lifestyle. Even so, Butler is able to reinvasion how relationships and kinship can work in a healthy way that is non monogamous. She does this in the last scene of the novel where Shori and her symbionts are together. Shori has a moment where she thinks: "That's what mattered Theodora was avenged and the rest of my symbionts were safe" (310). While the conventional nature of relationships is pushed by Butler, the vampire narrative works to show the positives of a non-monogamous relationship even through loss.

Another element that stands out is when Shori is learning about her family, and that she has multiple members who also have multiple symbionts. For Butler, monogamous structures do not need to be present for a familial relationship to work. For Butler's Ina, mothers are supremely important. While motherhood as a concept is also vital in Meyer's *Breaking Dawn*, motherhood for Butler is not patriarchally charged. For example, When Stefan, Shori's brother, is describing how Shori was conceived, he tells her that "our mothers were three sisters...and one human woman who donated DNA" (83). Not only is the typical family structure dismantled early in the novel, but it's a norm for Butler's vampires. While Shori's family was murdered, that doesn't mean the dynamic wasn't working. In fact, the dynamic was working so well that it lead to other Ina, the Silk family, fearing Shori's very mixed race existence. At the end of the novel, Shori's newly created poly-family seems to work. Shori goes out with her symbionts to rest with them; they bring snacks and drinks and all talk. The picture we get to see is one of calmness, respect, and communication (287-290). While the nuclear and patriarchal dynamic in *Twilight*

works, so does the polyamorous and unconventional structure in *Fledgling*. In fact, this type of relationship and depiction reveals a family/kin unit that embodies “fulfillment, nurturance, and development” (425). The symbionts and Shori want to fulfill their life and values together, they want to develop and grow with one another. And Octavia Butler provides not only a unique take on the vampire figure, but explicitly confronts the boundaries of what can typically be constituted as a healthy and working family structure.

Both Meyer’s *Eclipse* and Plec’s *The Vampires Diaries* perpetuates the patriarchal idea that women need saving and that they should be selfless and benevolent. While Plec’s does not show a typical nuclear family (in the first episode we see that Elena and her brother lost their parents not long ago and their aunt raises them), we do see the typical arrangement of a stronger male hero taking care of a weaker female relative. Like Bella, Elena is human and, in that regard, more fragile in comparison to vampire counterparts. Melissa Ames points out that Bella, just like Elena, is cast as a “martyr” (47). While these women are “martyrs,” they are saved by men. For example, Bella in the first novel/film goes to her old ballet studio to save her mom and to also prevent James from going after Edward. She ends up nearly dying but is saved by Edwards sucking the venom from her: “the fire was gone” (Meyer 491). The part is romanticized when Edwards consumes her blood, similarly to Slade’s film *Eclipse*. Bella cuts her own wrist with a shard of rock to catch Victoria and Riley’s, the co-leader and current lover of Victoria’s, attention so Seth, one of the werewolves, can take out Riley and Edward who can finally kill Victoria. She acts as a martyr, but Edward is the one who ultimately kills Victoria and comes to Bella’s side. Similarly, Elena puts herself in danger to save her friends when Klaus Mikaelson comes into the picture. Her blood and her death triggers his hybrid transformation to part werewolf. And at the end of the scene where she is in the witches’ circle to be used, she is

eventually saved by the Salvatore brothers when Klaus leaves (“The Sun Also Rises”). Now, why does this relate to family structures? These texts all reinforce the traditional idea that women need a hero to save them. Taken together these texts embody and perpetuate stereotype of the female form needing saving, the female form needing to offer herself a sacrifice because she is benevolent, selfless, and feminine.

Additionally, if we look at the last installment of the series, *Breaking Dawn*, there is a scene in the film where Alice shows Aro a vision. This vision is set off by Carlisle being killed right in front of the Cullen family and the other clans who support the Cullen family. The alternate reality is so gruesome and unbelievable it only remains a vision and doesn’t come to life, unlike when Bella had her baby that ripped her apart internally. It’s a reality that cannot happen because for Meyer, the patriarch is what keeps the Cullen family together. When the “head” of the family is murdered, there is a visual disruption within the film for example. Esme cups her hands over her mouth and screams. The children are in shock, expressions of surprise turning to anger as everyone charges the Volturi.

As noted previously, the Cullen looks to all intents and purposes like a patriarchal nuclear family. Although the children have their own partners, they appear to their neighbors as their siblings, this appearance of the “family” reinforces the mid-century American ideal family norm with a father who is a doctor and a mother who is mostly silent. There is a certain idealization of the traditional “patriarchy implicit in the Cullen family” (Stevens 11) that Meyer promotes. The patriarchal structure becomes reinforced in the Cullen narrative. The idealized image of protection and security through the males of the Cullen family. As Stevens points out, the Cullen males are successful in their “ability to protect Bella from the dangers of James” (13) and eliminate the threat. Carlisle can be classified as a classic hero. Typically, there were two

categories of a hero: proper and dark. In this case, Carlisle falls into the proper hero roles. He is “the proper hero is law-abiding, compassionate, kind, and monogamous” (Kruger et al. 306). In this sense, Carlisle being placed as the hero also enables the typical nuclear structure. Meyer wrote him as the sole head of the household with a quiet wife and several “children” promoting a toxic patriarchal mindset.

Chapter 3: Compulsive Heterosexuality and Queer Vampires

Queerness or queering when it comes to the vampire isn't new. In Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's *Tendencies* (1993), she states that the term "queer" can refer to "the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone's gender, of anyone's sexuality" (8). In other words, queer complicates and challenges gender and sexuality binaries. Vampires have been used to express sexual fears as well as social ones. In Ken Gelder's *Reading the Vampire* (1994), nineteenth century literary vampires already represent sexual excess and transgression. For example, texts like Le Fanu's *Carmilla* (1872) focus on the "queer" behavior of the vampire. Carmilla's erotic advances towards Laura are explicit. For example, she declares "love" (36) easily while also caressing and stroking Laura.

Unlike in earlier nineteenth century texts like Le Fanu's *Carmilla*, twenty-first century narratives do start to dismantle the idea that sexual prowess is automatically and inherently evil. Burton's *Dark Shadows* (2012), for instance, does not sanction Barnabas for his sexual adventures. Barnabas Collins, who transformed into a vampire in the eighteenth century, breaks the heart of a witch who traps him in a coffin. Barnabas wakes up two centuries later to find his childhood estate in near ruins and the newest family members living there. Barnabas is shown to be a bit of a playboy, enjoying the sexual excess of his endeavors with different women. Nonetheless, he isn't inherently evil and instead, he protects his family from harm. He helps to increase morale in the community. Instead of showing Barnabas as a blood-sucking monster who spread vampirism or unwanted advances, Burton's Barnabas blurs the conventional idea that sexual excess equates with immoral behavior.

In the analysis that follows, I again start with *Twilight* as my first text to foreground the excessive heteronormativity of this extremely popular and culturally influential set of texts. My aim is to highlight the importance of queer interventions into the vampire mythos. The novel *Twilight* actively reinforces hetero-patriarchal ideals. Meyer's plots reinforce the idea that only heterosexual pair bonds are natural, even for vampires. Scholar Adrienne Rich, in "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence" (1980), reveals that compulsive heterosexuality aids in gender oppression through the control of female "consciousness" (674). For example, Bella in the novel and on screen is passive. She is painted as vulnerable and fragile while Edward is painted as aggressive, dominant and physically strong (Schippers 91; 94-95). We see this on multiple occasions: when Edward saves Bella from being hit by a car, saves her from being bitten by his "brother" Jasper, when he saves her from James and so on. The repetitiveness solidifies the heterosexual relationship between the two leads. It creates a "norm." Bella being the vulnerable and passive love interest of a male vampire, works to reinforce patriarchal social practices that romantically control women and determine and contain expressions of sexuality.

Meyer reinforces this harmful heteronormative agenda via many plot lines. The relationship between Edward and Bella is intense and quick; it is "love at first sight." Within the first book as well as the film, Bella states that her love for Edward is "unconditional" and "irrevocable" (195). Meyer paints Edward as being a contemporary version of a perfect boyfriend who embodies "spectacular masculinity" (Radway 128). He is not only superhuman, but he is indisputably attractive. And he shows a deep devotion and faithfulness to Bella. As pointed out in chapter 1 and 2, Edward is painted as hyper-faithful; he is a virgin who has saved himself for the right one: Bella. Instead of being "polyamorous" as Shori is in *Fledgling*, he limits his relationships to monogamy. His monogamous status along with the features of

immortality and masculinity make him the “ideal boyfriend.” In Edward, Meyer paints the picture of the classic Prince Charming. The text thus pushes stresses a narrative that prizes heterosexuality and monogamy, limiting the sexual potentials of the vampire figure. By contrast, Butler and Gomez enable queer interventions that open up more narrative possibilities.

Like *Twilight*, *Dusk Till Dawn* offers little in the way of queer healthy relationships. Initially, the Gecko brothers are shown on the screen as being very masculine. They are tall, broad, and consistently utilize a lot of physical strength in order to get what they need done. There are no past scenes that reveal them dabbling outside the bounds of heterosexuality. We see the intense reinforcement for heterosexuality through Richie’s feelings and lust first for Kate and then Santanico. And as mentioned earlier, Kate’s relationship with the Gecko brothers pulls between platonic and romantic. Yet there is no room in that relationship to reveal a healthy interpretation of a queer awakening. This isn’t to say that all the heterosexual relationships in this narrative symbolize the possibility for a healthy lifestyle. In fact, Santanico and Richie have their issues; they become toxic, backstabbing, and betraying one another at different points to earn power in the culebra world. Rodriguez does include instances of more toxic heteronormative relationships as well, but all of this story’s queer representation devolves into farce.

Rodriguez does utilize sapphic love in the narrative, but only to show deceit and betrayal which perpetuates a queer-phobic mindset. For example, in the third season when Amaru takes over Kate's body, we learn that the culebra are considered as a lower class of “vampire.” They were enslaved and used for the sole purpose of the Xibalbans (a demon/vampire race). Amaru is the queen. Venganza Verdugo (a culebra) plots the queen's downfall. She betrays Amaru in order to set her people free. We don't get actual scenes of Venganza and Amaru’s past, but their intimate moments are clearly alluded to. Amaru while in Kate’s body asks, “Do you remember

the river of blood in Xibalba where I'd take you to bathe me?" She is clearly calling upon an intimate memory and Venganza is quick to deflect what by saying she does not "want to remember." It is clear that Amaru is hurt, and that at least to a degree she loved the culebra servant. She even tells her, "Yesterday, I still loved you," and Venganza reminds her of the hierarchy: "A slave can't love her master" (Rodriguez "Matanzas"). So far, we can see a clear one-sided relationship here for love. Amaru is determined to get revenge, and she is clearly worked up over the woman she loved. She calls Venganza out for luring her to her death and states, "I trusted you and you betrayed me...now before you die. Admit it to me, admit that you loved me, that you worshipped me" ("Matanzas"). Instead of Venganza admitting her feelings or giving validation to their sapphic relationship, she continues to deny her love as ever being genuine. One of her final lines before she takes her own life is when she tells Amaru, "I played the part, to free my people." One implication here is the fact that queerness is used as a tool to gain freedom. Another implication that stems from her death is that Venganza couldn't live with the thought of acting "queer" again. Instead, even upon her death, she refuses to admit she truly ever loved Amaru. On the surface level, Venganza uses queer identity as a way to save her people; she uses it as an act of deceit. The text gives voice to sapphic love, but it falls short in expressing a genuine representation of it. Ultimately Rodriguez treats sapphic love as riven with deceit and betrayal. We could say that queer identity is being used here to further an agenda: Venganza's plot of revenge. The non-normative "couple" we get is forced, toxic, and ultimately the furthest thing from a healthy lifestyle.

The Gilda Stories by Gomez is far more reflective of the possibility for healthy queer relationships. One element that embodies the positive relationship of vampires who practice non-compulsive heterosexuality in this narrative is the act of feeding and sharing blood. I would

describe Gilda's choice of vampires "benevolent." For Gilda and Bird for example, "the non-fatal sharing of blood that happens alongside the sharing of dreams and life force" and includes a mutual benefit for both individuals who are involved (Weinstock 213). We see this benevolent nature in *The Gilda Stories* multiple times. One example comes from the middle section of the novel when Gilda notices a young prostitute, a woman who is weak and crying. While feeding, she realizes the girl feels "lost in isolation" (Gomez 122). Gilda "held the girl's body and mind tightly, letting the desire for future life flow through them both, a promising reverie of freedom and challenge" (123). Thus, Gilda leaves the woman with aspirations and hope she didn't have before. She adds this woman to her family. Gilda, like Shori, is not hindered by gender when it comes to who she claims as part of her family. We do not get to see their relationship grow in the future are left with the intimate transformation scene the first Gilda changed the second Gilda. She feeds from people as she travels, not tied down to specific people, and not at all gender specific in her feeding. In a way, her sexuality is fluid, but she doesn't place an emphasis on the act of sex itself. Gilda's perception of sexuality as something that perhaps doesn't need a label but defines the bounds of heterosexuality. And at the end of the novel, she begins to find her way to her family, showing that her lifestyle is healthy and positive in comparison to the destroyed and collapsing world around her. She looks off into the sunset as she then turned to safety which ends up bring the family. Gilda goes back to be with such as Sorel and Anthony and Bird. The world is no longer structured as it once was, and having her non-normative family to go back to is what drives Gilda's survival, and it's the queer aspect of her family that aids in her being able to save herself and escape the dangerous world around her.

While Gomez is unusually progressive in her vampire narrative compared to the other texts we have examined, at one point the story does show some negative representation of queer

sexuality. This is most apparent in the figure Eleanor. She is not as moral or ethical as the rest of her kind, but she is not a flat, one-dimensional character. Anthony tells Gilda about Eleanor: “Her game is to instigate destruction and watch the pieces topple rather than wield the sword. She thrives on the energy fueled by rampant jealousy and competition. She is one of those who does not bother to remember the faces” (82). Sorel reiterates Eleanor’s callous nature when he says: “Eleanor partakes of the joy of our existence merely through the exercise of this power...Don’t underestimate the magnitude of her need” (82). And when Gilda is faced with Eleanor’s scorned lover Samuel, Eleanor doesn’t try to rescue Gilda, but instead insists that Gilda be the one to kill him. While she craves the power and the death she could watch, Gilda does not give into the primal desires. She tells Eleanor, “I’m no longer a servant, Miss Eleanor. We been freed” (99). As Shannon Winnubst points out, “Rather than feeding on fear, Gilda and her family detest the act of killing as a part of their feeding ritual” (11). Her choice to not feed on fear is the very that guides Gilda into being more ethical vampire. Winnubst further argues, “These vampires feed on and feed hope, not fear. And, in sucking the blood from mortals bodies (an act that the mortal is never conscious of), they inspire greater hope and resolve for love in the world” (11). But Eleanor uses her allure to instill instability and fear; she actively works to pit those around her against one each other. Eleanor may have embodied a non-monogamous style, slipping from one person to the other, but she is also manipulative, hurtful, and dangerous. Gilda, although dangerous at times, doesn’t opt to feed off of fear or hurt. Gilda simply wanted to live. Furthermore, Gilda is shown as a queer entity who embodies and inspires “greater hope.” So unlike what we see in the vampire narratives produced by major international corporations (in bestsellers, films, and television shows), Gomez is able to use her vampire stories to envision a different world in which queer love is ethical.

A narrative that stands out starkly for its othering of the queer vampire and general lack of queer representation is *The Vampire Diaries*. While Elena, Stefan, and Damon form a bond by the end of the series it is an awkward love triangle at first, exemplary of the triangulated desire Sedgwick famously theorizes in much of Western culture. Even so, the series is ultimately heteronormative and establishing heteronormativity as a compulsory setting. One major criticism of *The Vampire Diaries* from fans, is not the initial lack of queer representation, per se, but the use of the “kill your gays” trope. A general quick survey on twitter showed a common pattern of TVD fans calling out and being frustrated with the show killing off queer characters and possibilities.³ One example comes from user @sam15lc’s tweet: “Call Out The CW for their 54% kill rate of queer women across all their shows, shout out to TVD for their 100% kill rate 4/4” (2016). Likewise, user @elliotalterson tweets “people that are super critical of canon lgbtq rep yet still support the trash trilogy of tvd [*The Vampire Diaries*], spn [*Supernatural*] and tw [Trigger Warn] that only bait and kill their gays.” It is clear that is outrage among the treatment of queer identities in Plec’s *The Vampire Diaries*. In *The Gilda Stories*, queer relationships like that of Bird and Gilda are not a primary focus. Nora and Mary in *TVD* are part of the heretic coven, turned by the Salvatore’s mother. They have been together for many years, but they do not really have redemptive qualities. The women first appear in season 6, episode 7 (“Do You Remember the First Time?”). It isn’t long before these women, and the heretics start to wreck havoc on Mystic Falls; they feed off humans, torture other vampires for fun and treat hunting as a game (“Day One of Twenty-Two Thousand, Give Or Take”). In essence, they represent the dark side of the vampire. And while Nora does toy with the idea of doing better and being better, but Plec ultimately represents the villainous trop of the queer couple. In episode “Days of Future

³ For more tweets/posts utilize key words such as queer, tvd, vampire diaries, cw and kill in order to find more tweets similar in nature.

Past" (2016) Mary and Nora end up taking their own life together in the process of trying to story the Phoenix Stone Curse. Plec ultimately adds to the "bury your gays" trope to further a hetero-patriarchal stories.

Julie Plec furthers the "kill/bury the gays" trope to promote a heterosexual norm. Nora and Mary's death could be seen as an act of martyrdom because they died ruining an object that caused pain and torment (the Phoenix stone). In a way, Mary and Nora destroy the sword. In the last scene, Mary admits to Nora she is "already dead, my love." The last image we get is of the car blowing up with them inside. While some of this plot is surface-level sensation, that doesn't take away from the narrative pattern of queer spaces in order to highlight the queer characters as evil and needing recuperation. And while the deaths of these characters are heroic to a degree, they didn't need to die. Plec's representation in particular reveals a negative portrayal of queer relationships. The characters who are queer cannot coexist in a world where the dominant focus is on heterosexual couples such as Stefan, Damon, and Elena who are "good." These queer spaces provide no safety, but instead work to provide sacrifice. Plec's queer representation sends a negative message, and ultimately reinforces the heterosexual norm.

In *True Blood*, director Alan Ball offers up an authentic portrayal of a deep southern town. He tackles issues of homophobia while offering up an array of queer identities. Furthermore, Ball's usage of more profane language are reflective of what queer individuals can and do go through. Not only is there a queerness to several character's sexualities, but also queerness when it comes to the various ideas of supernatural creatures. Take for example, the female lead, Sookie Stackhouse. For example, Sookie is labeled a "freak" because she can read minds. The town depicted by director Alan Ball is less tolerant of "sexual and ethnic minorities" than larger cities (Leavenworth 40). We see instances of homophobia when patrons of Merlottes'

(the local bar) make comments about Lafayette (an openly gay human man). In the first season alone, the slur “faggot” is used several times. The general negative attitudes of the townspeople and their treatment of those with queer identities reveal and reflect harmful stereotypes. But how else are queer identities and sexualities explored in the text?

Ball’s Russell Edgington is the king of Mississippi. He is a very powerful and well-respected, gay older vampire. But he is also limited since vampires do not have as many rights in *True Blood* like humans do. As the season progresses, he grows darker and more sadistic when his husband is killed by Eric Northman in a plot to get revenge for his family who was murdered by werewolves that Russell controlled. Similar to Plec’s Norah and Mary in *The Vampire Diaries*, the main queer representation in Ball’s *True Blood* writes the major queer character as outwardly evil. We see so when Russell makes his feelings about vampire rights and humans in the block quote below. For him, humans are there for food, and vampires remain superior. Russell goes against the vampire league which tries to bridge humans and vampires together. This is clear when he rebels against the American Vampire League when he goes on live TV and rips the news anchor's spine out (yes, literally rips it out). He then broadcasts live to the world:

Ladies and gentlemen, my name is Russell Edgington, and I have been a vampire for nearly 3,000 years. Now, the American Vampire League wishes to perpetuate the notion that we are just like you, and I suppose in a few small ways we are. We’re narcissists. We care only about getting what we want, no matter what the cost, just like you. Global warming, perpetual war, toxic waste, child labor, torture, genocide! That’s a small price to pay for your SUVs and your flat-screen TVs, your blood diamonds, your designer jeans, your absurd, garish McMansions! Futile symbols of permanence to quell your quivering, spineless souls. But No. In the end, we are nothing like you. We are ...

immortal. Because we drink the True Blood, blood that is living, organic and human. And that is the truth the AVL wishes to conceal from you, because let's face it, eating people is a tough sell these days. So they put on their friendly faces to pass their beloved VRA [Vampire Rights Amendment]. But make no mistake, mine is the true face of vampires! Why would we seek equal rights? You are not our equals! We will eat you, after we eat your children. Now time for the weather. Tiffany?" ("Everything is Broken")

Russell's monologue stirs fear in human viewers. He advances forward the narrative that vampires are terrible, that they are "narcissists." And he even calls out the current state and issues of the human population such as environmental disaster. He makes sure to establish his dominance and power by reminding those watching that his kind are immortal, insisting that mortals are inferior. Russell is truly evil, and Ball adds to the queer-phobic motif that those who are queer are painted as evil, and that they need to be recuperated. The issue here is the most notorious and well-known gay vampire in the series, Russell, is a murderous psychopath who embodies the worst characteristics of a vampire. In Ron Becker's "Guy Love: A Queer Straight Masculinity For a Post-closet Era?" (2009), he points out that this show's gay characters "conform to the demands of a commercial medium steeped in hetero-centric genre formulas," which cater to their advertisers (125-126). However, I take issue with the queer-phobic motif. While Becker is not saying this is good, he points it out to bring attention to the issue. I don't think there needs to be a conformity to the multinational corporations or a commercial medium. Writers like Gomez and Butler show it's possible as authors of novels published by independent presses that they don't need to rely on dangerous queer-phobic tropes to write a good narrative. Texts produced with the funding of the multinationals like *Twilight* and *True Blood*, however, tend to rely on dangerous tropes such as "evil queers" and "bury your gays." Alan Ball's

representation of queer characters and their outcomes in *True Blood* only add to the trope that places queer identities outside of the norm because they are dangerous.

Alan Ball's *True Blood* adds to the "bury your gays" trope that becomes an anti-queer normative. Eddie Gautier is a gay male vampire who sells his blood to others to get company from other males. He is well behaved and nice; he stays home to watch his favorite series and never hurts anyone. He isn't inherently attractive like all of Meyer's male vampires. Eddie is eventually killed after Jason Stackhouse and his girlfriend, Amy ("Plaisir d-amour") hold him hostage for his blood which acts as a drug. One concern is that Ball makes the decision to kill Eddie. Again, we are seeing the homophobic trope of "bury your gays" in action. Furthermore, he is killed by Amy a cis female. Essentially, Amy's "love" for Jason is what she used as an excuse for killing Eddie. If she didn't, he would have "turned" them in. Here is an instance in which heterosexuality and the bounds of obsession become dangerous. Eddie is not a physical threat when he was covered in silver, yet he was killed by a straight woman. Ball explicitly reinforces the "kill/bury" your gays trope just like in Plec's *The Vampire Diaries* when he has a straight cis woman kill one of the only good queer men.

While *True Blood* does give screen time to non-conventional family structures, the show lacks in representations of healthy queer identities, sexualities, and family structures. While Russell becomes primarily villain and the "token" gay character, Bill and Eric become the "heroes" and protagonists. Ball reinforces the notion of the patriarchal ideal by having Bill and Eric save the day multiple times. Both are dark heroes with dark pasts and histories, yet they are positioned in the narrative as the characters the audience roots for nonetheless. Like Edward and Jacob from Meyer's *Twilight*, Bill, and Eric serve as "protective" boyfriend/love

interests who defend the female lead. They also work to stop Russell and prevent needless death. Also, like Edward, Ball uses Bill and Eric to embrace the heteronormative covenantal structure. Far more than *Twilight*, *True Blood* is positioned to show queer vampire relationships as being healthy and avoiding stereotypes; however, a closer analysis of the narrative shows a failure to carry through with this potential.

Butler's *Fledgling* reveals a healthy non-conventional family through Shori's growing polyamorous circle. The act of feeding from each added member in Shori's circle becomes a conduit of queer demonstration. The act of biting is a personal, pleasurable, and intimate. Shori knows to "avoid hurting anyone" and that she "would have to find several people to take blood from" (14). She feeds from Theodora and Brooke as well, not caring about the gender of her symbionts. In comparison to Ball's *True Blood* highlight just how radical Butler's *Fledgling* is. Instead of only feeding off of one human like Bill does with Sookie in *True Blood*, Shori feeds off of several others in order to sustain her health. The relationship is both non-monogamous and non-heteronormative for Shori. The symbionts give her blood. In return they can become "healthier, stronger" and their lifespans are lengthened by "several decades" (63). Shori's relationships evoke a more sexual nature. The feedings themselves assuage Shori's hunger while also becoming a pleasurable experience for the humans who provide the blood she needs. Furthermore, the familiar networks formed by one vampire and a group of symbionts models a family structure that contravenes mainstream ideals. The novel demonstrates "a queer, polyamorous model of belonging" (Lundberg 573). As Lundberg also points out, the pleasures she provides when feeding "are not gender specific" (574). For example, she feeds and gives to both females and males, including Theodora, Wright, and Brooke. In Butler's *Fledgling*, Shori may be unaware of who or what she is for a while, but she isn't inherently evil. Shori isn't aware

at first that Ina can truly treat their symbionts badly. She becomes aware of the possibilities of how Ina can treat their symbionts when Brooke warns Shori that “not everyone treats symbionts as people” (131). Naturally, she wants to treat hers right and she does when she continuously checks in on them and gets their insight. The novel as a whole shows that a heteronormative structure really isn’t the only way to have a working and healthy relationships.

Wright, a white male and Shori’s first symbiont, struggles to accept the Ina-symbiont polyamorous family structure. His reaction represents what we might see as the expected response from a cis male who may be threatened by the idea of a queer identity. Although he isn’t entirely aware of what he is getting into with Shori, he can’t seem to say no or stay away. It’s one of the aspects of being symbiont. And he seemingly can’t get enough of her. Because he was her first symbiont (before she knew what that was) he ultimately felt like had a claim over her. Wright “had her first.” But Shori can’t survive on the blood of one person. Wright becomes passive aggressive in his comments when it comes to Shori’s sexuality. When she initiates adding symbionts who are women, he says things like “Swing both ways, do you?” (85). But when another male is brought in, he changes. He seems threatened by the idea of non-monogamous relationships. He tells her, “I don’t mind the women so much I guess. I kind of like the two downstairs. I was hoping you’d get all women – except me. I think I could deal with that...I don’t think I can do this, Shori. I can’t share you” (Butler 232). While I have discussed this quote in chapter 2, it’s very important to also bring up here since sexuality is also addressed in the quote alongside the hinting at family structures. He does not want to share her, specifically her body in a sexual manner. Problematically, Wright is okay with other women, but when another male is in the picture, he feels threatened. He doesn’t want to share her, with another male which suggests that he feels he owns her in some way. Hence, he does harbor a patriarchal

attitude that makes him want to have ownership over Shori. And although his mindset isn't this extreme at the end, there is still some clear pushback when it comes to Shori's lifestyle. Even so, Butler can re-envision how relationships and kinship can work in a healthy way that is non-monogamous. She does this through the last scene of the novel where Shori and her symbionts are together. Shori has a moment where she thinks: "That's what mattered, Theodora was avenged, and the rest of my symbionts were safe" (310). The conventional narratives that tend to surround heteronormative relationships and kinship is not invoked by Butler. Instead, her vampire narrative works to show the positives of a non-monogamous relationship even after a major character loss in that non-monogamous structure. By the end of the novel, her and her surviving symbionts are with one another, healthy and happy. In this way, Butler portrays a polyamorous and multi-gendered family as stable enough to survive the loss of one of its valued members.

If we look at the act of biting as a metaphor for desire, we can see that biting in several narratives either enable queer experiences or ignore them. In other words, the vampire bite is queered in some narratives while not in others. For example, "In the vampire's bite, there is violence, eroticism, and fertility... teeth itself is an organ built to feed corporal desires, nutritive and erotic" (Miller 312). In terms of the vampire bite being queer, we see vampires feed not only for food, but for pleasure, eroticism, and consent. In this fashion, the bite of the vampire can be said to be queered. One text where the vampire bite is not queered is in Meyer's *Twilight*. There are not instances of feeding where vampires feed to give a human pleasure. Instead, the need to feed is only treated as animalistic and painful. James and Victoria feed off of men in the *Twilight* texts. Their feedings are not erotic in the sense of explicit sexual pleasure as with Shori and her symbionts. The bite is limited just as the narrative and sexuality in the novel is limited to

heterosexuality. And while Victoria and James are seen as the evil vampires, they are also heterosexual just as Bella and Edward. I do want to point out, they also had Laurent who was a member of their small clan. One could read Laurent, James, and Victoria's relationship as possibly polyamorous. For example, a deleted scene in Hardwicke's *Twilight* show Victoria and James making out as Laurent watches. None of these vampires end up surviving. It's possible Meyer was subliminally revealing this possible queer relationship as being unhealthy, evil. Furthermore, one reason for that coven's death is not only their murderous intentions, but the possibility of discovering a non-normative sexuality through one another. And at the end, Bella and Edward push forward the heteronormative structure that is praised as the only healthy lifestyle.

The act of biting in *In True Blood* pushes forward a hetero-patriarchal ideal similarly to Meyer's *Twilight*. While biting happens between different and same sexes, there is an array of reactions. Some humans, for example, go to the bars in hopes of being fed on ("fang-bangers"), while others in *Twilight* work as assistants for the Volturi in the hope of being turned into vampires, but never are. Some humans are used against their will with vampires like Lorena and Russell who have little regard for human life. Humans in vampire clubs often offer themselves up in exchange to be bitten and to be given vampire's blood. While vampires in Ball's *True Blood* feed, their blood also can be exchanged. Not only can they bite their victims or willing participants and create pleasure, but they can also give pleasure via their own blood. Some of the benefits include getting high, vivid hallucinations, and euphoric feelings that mimic taking drugs. In Gomez's *The Gilda Stories*, the vampire can choose to feed off fear, hurt, and pain or to feed off the human and leave them with dreams, hopes, and positive feelings. And in Butler's *Fledgling*, the Inas bite is incredibly euphoric and sexual. In that sense, *Fledgling* is radically

proactive with fluid exchanging. While in that novel, vampires can't be "turned" (they are born), in *True Blood*, turning takes place when both participants exchange blood. In some ways, this is like *The Vampire Diaries*. Yet unlike in Plec's *The Vampire Diaries*, Butler's *Fledgling*, Gomez's *The Gilda Stories*, and Rodriguez's *From Dusk Till Dawn*, the vampire bite cannot be described as queer. Biting merely reinforces—it adds titillation to—the heteronormative plot.

Overall, the works that push against the hetero-patriarchal ideal are Butler's *Fledgling* and Gomez's *The Gilda Stories*. While Ball's *True Blood* does give us queer representation, it is far more harmful. The two main gay characters are either evil and villainous (Russell) or good (Eddie) but are still killed at the end of the day. Just like Ball, Rodriguez reinforces a queer-phobic attitude when writing out Vengenza's act of sapphic love only being used as it is full of deceit and betrayal. In *Twilight* (2001), Meyer's version offers nothing in the sense of a positive queer-centric narrative. In Catherine Hardwicke's directing of the film *Twilight* (2009), the scene that possibly even could allude to queer characters is only release as a deleted scene. Similarly to Alan Ball's use of "kill/bury the gays" trope, Rodriguez's *From Dusk Till Dawn* and Plec's *The Vampire Diaries* add to that trope. Amaru is queer, but she is evil and while Norah and Mary are also painted as vindictive and are killed at the end.

Conclusion

Not only are vampire stories in commercial media popular, but they also offer a glimpse into the landscape of possibility. While vampires are often used to reflect and reinforce current anxieties and conventional narratives, vampire figures can also bring to light new possibilities. When I say possibilities, I am referring back to the “open mesh of possibilities” in the vampire narratives directly related to sexuality, gender performance, and family structures (Sedgwick 4). This thesis has called attention to the complexities of this “open mesh” in several influential cultural texts. Vampire figures often emerge within existing social binaries, yet they also break them. Although the focus of this thesis has not been on the literary history of the vampire, an arc of progress suggests that the early eighteenth and nineteenth century perceptions of vampires as disease transmitting, evil, one dimensional monsters, has shifted to a twentieth and twenty first century representation that shows a more nuanced figure. Famous texts such as *Dracula* specifically focus on anxieties around sexuality and liberation, primarily female autonomy. Le Fanu’s *Carmilla* deals with anxiety around non-normative sexuality, specifically lesbian relationships. Stephanie Meyer’s *Twilight* enforces and reiterates a heteronormative structure that is deeply embedded through each installment. While some vampire texts promote hetero-centric experiences, I shed light on texts that depart from a hetero-patriarchal experience such as Gomez’s *The Gilda Stories* and Butler’s *Fledgling*. These twentieth and twenty first century texts let us see fulfilling and healthy representations of non-normative gender, sexuality, and family structures.

In addition, the female leads such as Shori not only have queer relationships, but they also control their own agency and works as the head of their households. For instance, she fits into while modifying the role of paterfamilias, much like Carlisle Cullen. Unlike these patriarchs,

she asks for her polyamorous circle's opinion on what the family does. Gomez's Gilda and Butler's Shori are the heads of their family units, yet they are not participating in a patriarchal mode. These women embody "feminine" masculinity while "performing." Bella on the other hand, performs in a way that promotes femininity and docility through motherhood and her vampire transformation. Like Bella, Jessica from *True Blood* also promotes the hetero centric experience through her transformation into a vampire, her conversion, and her constant state of being a virgin. Kate Fuller does end up finding herself in a non-normative "family" with the Gecko Brothers, but ultimately, she wields the damsel card, needing to be saved by them. Elena, while headstrong and powerful at times, especially as a vampire, is still the center of attention for the Salvatore brothers and is little more than a prize to win.

Family structures have been an important part of the "possibilities" these texts reveal. When it comes to narratives like Meyer's *Twilight*, and Rodriguez's *From Dusk Till Dawn*, family relationships are typically heteronormative. Narratives like these promote a hetero-centric experience that reinforces patriarchal ideals that influence the family. For example, Seth and Richie act as the head of the household like Carlisle in the *Twilight Saga*. In Julie Plec's *The Vampire Diaries*, family structures may be complicated at times, but Plec once again reinforces patriarchal ideals that promote a nuclear and monogamous family structure. Even while there are occasional hints at queer identities and desires, the more conservative texts never seriously explore any "queer" narrative possibilities. Unlike the previous works, Butler's *Fledgling* and Gomez's *The Gilda Stories* completely obliterate the nuclear and patriarchal family structure. Butler's Shori allows readers to see into a non-monogamous family that promotes consent and vulnerability. Gomez's work promotes the same ideals, particularly focusing on the importance of family and how family does not need to be based off of any gender binaries.

Once again, it is also too simple to say that *The Gilda Stories* is only progressive or that *Dusk Till Dawn* is only regressive. These narratives are more complicated than that. For example, *Twilight* is less complicated in terms of showing queerness as a conduit for healthy relationships and lifestyles. And while one can argue that Bella becomes powerful and in charge after her transformation, she is still dedicated to the feminine ideal of motherhood and resides under the power of the patriarchal system that determines kinship. Narratives like *From Dusk Till Dawn* and *True Blood* offer some push and pull. Kate *From Dusk Till Dawn* may be a helpless woman at times, but she is strong emotionally. She does want to be in control of her own autonomy, which she is when she chooses to “die” and not be turned into a vampire. But the narrative also lacks queer representation most of the time, and when there is queer representation, it does not last long. This is like *The Vampire Diaries* which catapults the main queer couple, Nora and Mary, into sacrificial roles as scapegoats and martyrs. Rodriguez uses queer identities as a farce. The only queer representation is associated with scheming. Vengenza only acts like she is in love with another woman to save her people, hence she lies about her sexuality when it works for her. Rodriguez completely denigrates homosexuality in the show, yet also reveals more queer family structures. Even so, the show still gets back to the heteronormative and patriarchal structure that it had early on.

All these narratives complicate gender, sexuality, and performance in some way, but Plec’s *The Vampire Diaries*, Rodriguez’s *From Dusk Till Dawn*, Meyer’s *Twilight*, and Ball’s *True Blood* ultimately reinforce hetero-patriarchal ideals. Texts like *Fledgling* and *The Gilda Stories* allow us to imagine a world where queerness can be a norm, and a healthy and fulfilling aspect we can picture as a norm, or at least hope can be a norm one day. Narratives like *Fledgling* and *The Gilda Stories* show us that queer-centric representation is important and that

we do not need to adhere to a hetero-patriarchal set of ideals. Perhaps with future vampire narratives, we'll be able to see queer voices and stories uplifted and becoming the new norm.

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