“WE HAVE ALWAYS BEEN VAMPIRES”: SYSTEMS OF FEAR AND DESIRE AND TENTACULAR NETWORKS IN VAMPIRE LITERATURE

A thesis presented by

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to the Department of English

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts degree

in the field of

English

Northeastern University

Boston, Massachusetts

April, 2017
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ABSTRACT OF THESIS

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April 2017
ABSTRACT

The vampire has proven itself immortal as both a subject of literary and critical interest and as a feature of its monstrous Otherness. Its timeless tale is one that belongs to Donna Haraway’s category of “finnicky and disruptive” stories—an ongoing cultural narrative of our world “that doesn’t know how to finish.” Using the critical works of Donna Haraway and Clifford Siskin to delineate two key terms—networks and systems, respectively—this project frames the vampire Other as a recurring and sublimated reflection of the individuated subject. By examining Sheridan Le Fanu’s *Carmilla*, Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*, H.P. Lovecraft’s short story “The Shunned House,” and, finally, Richard Matheson’s *I Am Legend*, this project will explore the “tentacularity” of the vampire network, or what Haraway calls “life lived along lines.”

This project considers how literary epistemologies figure the subject/other binary within a continuously expanding ontological scope regarding the vampire’s threat to subjective networks: *Carmilla* explores the local and interpersonal; *Dracula* contends with provincial infection through information and knowledge; “The Shunned House” confronts fungal and interspecies anxieties; and, finally, *I Am Legend* recognizes global, immunological realities. Together, these stories constitute a vampiric cultural imaginary that mirrors the self and, in doing so, allows the self to remember its ancient identity within alterity.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I owe a great debt of gratitude to my advisor, Professor Laura Green, who consistently challenged me and offered remarkable insight at every turn. Her inexhaustible knowledge of Victorian studies and gothic literature, an inspiration to me from my undergraduate education and on, has consistently humbled and guided me. Her awareness of the larger critical conversations currently taking place and expertise in developing academic voice has fundamentally informed my (admittedly purple, at times) prose and authorial voice. I would also like to extend similar appreciation to Professor Patrick Mullen, who has been a consistent and impactful presence in my studies at Northeastern for several years.

I would like to extend additional thanks to Professor Julia Flanders for her unwavering enthusiasm and support of my fantastic ideas and half-baked notions. I would also like to thank my cohort for their warmth and collaboration in times of need; the academy is made richer by your brilliance. Collective gratitude is due to each faculty member who helped me along the way, and I cannot possibly name them all.

Last, but not least, I would like to thank my partner Jess, my family, and my beautiful friends for helping me to overcome the many hardships I’ve encountered along the way. Without their support and empathy, I, like some vampires of myth, may have never emerged from the dark oubliette of my labors to enjoy the light of day.
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I: “We Have Always Been Vampires”: Systems of Fear and Desire and Tentacular Networks in Vampire Literature

We like to think of ourselves as being civilized, but beneath the thin veneer of modern culture there flows, deep as any subterranean stream, man's secret craving for the supernatural and the taboo; it is instilled in each of us by the timeless lore of the past, which no matter how sophisticated our lives may become continues to dominate our emotions and influence our minds (23).

- Brian Frost, from *The Monster with a Thousand Faces*

The vampire is insidiously difficult to precisely place in terms of provenance—both etymologically and folklorically. Ethnolinguistically, it is best understood by way of a network of terminologies: Eighteenth and Nineteenth century German and French poetry and literature make common reference to creature, possibly men, known as “Vampyr,” who were largely synonymous with “killer” in terms of the threat that they represented; Wumpir, the Slavic/Czech word Ubyr or "upír," most closely translated as "someone who bites,” predating the European “killer” by countless centuries. More than the mere utterance, however, the ontology of the vampire is culturally ubiquitous: the zombie-like Jiangshi of China; the grisly Brahmarāk Śhasa of India; the hybrid werewolf-vampire *Loogaroo* of French-African Vodun; Baobhan Sith of Scotland; *mullo* (literally “dead”) of Romania; "Aluka" (leech) or "Motetz Dam" (blood sucker) of Jewish tradition. To name them all would require a separate text altogether, a task that Brian Frost enthusiastically takes on in his text *The Monster with a Thousand Faces: Guises of the Vampire in Myth and Literature*. By way of distinguishing between utterance and ontology, the vampire can be understood as a cultural and local accretion of a universally held sentiment. How that sentiment is nominalized and how it articulates itself is historically contingent; what is
perhaps more consistent, however, is the underlying causation behind the phenomenon: human fear. Fear is what drives much of our formulation of monstrousness, of otherness, of subjects that threaten the imposition of an “outside” to the interiority of our own worlding process. However potent it may be, fear as a through-line is nothing without its concomitant taboo; that is, desire.

Donna Haraway’s *Experimental Future: Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* explores one of the most technologically impactful eras of human development—the “now” of the Anthropocene and Capitalocene. Her text does not directly divulge moments of vampirism, nor does it narratively introduce vampires as phenomena; instead, her critical vocabulary provides a framework for the fear-desire complex that pervades vampire literature. Her theory of worlding and the future terrapolis conjures a limitless plurality of political, biological, and social exchange systems that make up the world that humans struggle to contain and define. She refers to this plurality as “tentacularity,” for which she provides a lengthy explanation:

The tentacular are not disembodied figures; they are cnidarians, spiders, fingery beings like humans and raccoons, squid, jellyfish, neural extravaganzas, fibrous entities, flagellated beings, myofibril braids, matted and felted microbial and fungal tangles, probing creepers, swelling roots, reaching and climbing tendrilled ones. The tentacular are also nets and networks, it critters, in and out of clouds. Tentacularity is about life lived along lines— and such a wealth of lines— not at points, not in spheres.

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1 For more on “worlding” see Martin Heidegger’s *Being and Time*. Here, Heidegger chose the gerund “worlding” to mean (roughly) “bringing-near.” The process of worlding has also been defined by an equally oblique term “ongoingness,” and Haraway discusses this term at length in her essay “Staying with the Trouble.” For all intents and purposes, we will regard worlding as synonymous with any given subject’s state of “being-in-the-world.”

2 In his 1919 essay “Das Unheimliche,” Sigmund Freud expounded upon the cognitive dissonance that the human psyche experiences when confronted with the strangely familiar, that which is both the subject of one’s lust and revulsion.
inhabitants of the world, creatures of all kinds, human and non-human, are wayfarers’; generations are like ‘a series of interlaced trails.’ String figures all (31).

She concludes by proposing a final world-state that she calls the “Cthulhucene.” This human-inhuman world is non-spherical and interlaced; it is essentially a more “livable” world for the hybrid subject—namely, the vampire subject—one where dualisms such as harmony and disharmony are defunct. In this terra (earth) polis (city), all is absorbed into a whole that paradoxically allows for the persistence of the individual. “In Terrapolis, shed of masculinist universals and their politics of inclusion, humans are full of indeterminate genders and genres, full of kinds-in-the-making, full of significant otherness” (11). Humans contain repressed multitudes and belong to a continuum of natural orders: plant, animal, telluric matter, stardust. The desire to be absorbed into this indeterminacy communicates itself via a fear impulse: If the individual constructs her identity by measuring sameness and difference, is indeterminacy death itself?

Clifford Siskin’s recent book System: The Shaping of Modern Knowledge offers a conception of “systems” that complements Haraway’s “tentacularity.” Systems are double; they are conceptual, abstractions and constitutive materials of the world we live in. He explains system as a “genre—as a form that changes shape and function over time.” Depending on what it attempts to totalize, system might figure as enlightenment or new perspective:

To the earth and its moon, Galileo had added a second system—and that made all the difference. It changed how the first was understood. If all heavenly bodies revolved around the earth, then the moon was like the sun and the planets—just another part of a single and comprehensive ‘system of the world.’ But seeing Jupiter as a system with its
own moons cast the earth and its moon in a different light: as a system unto themselves, the moon assumed a new status as the only body to revolve around the earth (8-9).

This form of system helps us to explain using the language of science and material the world that we live in and its relation to orders of systematization. Yet system can also become a thing of blame configured by simplification and misdirection. As the saying goes, “you can’t beat The System,” whoever or whatever comprises that abstraction. Generically speaking, “system” operates within my analysis of the vampire as the sum of alterity, the blameworthy traits that describe the Other and justify their punishment and exile. Systems are constrained by nature, providing a foil to Haraway’s liberated Cthulhucene; evolving out of a systemic world and into a tentacular one demands the loss of value systems based in fear and desire.

The vampire threatens to collapse the boundaries and power structures that isolate cultural and moral systems that regulate what ought to be feared and what is acceptable to desire. What’s more, subjects as represented in vampire texts are no longer able to exist in isolation can no longer exist in blithe isolation from the monstrous Other. Indeed, the subject is both audience and architect—willing or unwilling—to the vampiric imaginary as an accretion of subjective sublimated fears and desires. This opens up the possibility of the horrible, threatening commingling of once discrete domains: the present-tense of “worlding” enmeshing with apocalyptic futures, the utopian and the dystopian blurring into a troubled potential reality. In this alternate future for the post-human subject, the permeability of the boundaries of, as Haraway contends, “base and superstructure, public and private, material and ideal” is not only unstoppable, it becomes desirable (165). In other words, the vampiric imaginary looms as an alternative to master narratives. It conceives of a future wherein the individual is consumed by
the ecstasy of contagion, appropriation, infection, and, perhaps finally, the type of fractal
intersubjectivity that Haraway’s “Cthulhucene” so potently figures.

Part of what makes vampirism so compelling as a cultural and literary subject is its
insistent and slippery multivalence; although fundamentally predicated upon fear and desire, the
vampire embodies different “scopes of otherness” as they relate to historic worlding processes of
particular literary moments (otherwise figured as Hegel’s phrase “the spirit of his time,” or
“zeitgeist”). 3 I will show here how the vampire, beginning with the publication of Sheridan Le
Fanu’s Carmilla in 1872 and onward to Richard Matheson’s I Am Legend in 1954, comes to
represent alternative worlding processes. The “constellation-of-things” that Haraway and Siskin
represent in their combined critical vocabularies—data, systems, networks, string figures,
tentacles—vampirically reproduces, self-replicates, and threatens to diminish the self-importance
of the human in the Anthropocene.4 Indeed, critical practice commonly relegates the vampire
specifically within the Gothic imaginary5 as the quintessential “Other” figure. The Other often
assumes a thematic valence determined by its moment of production. The diachronic literary
progression of these valences in this paper is comprised of the common, and often overarching,
themes of homosexuality (Carmilla), metropolitanism (Dracula), epidemiological connectedness
(The Shunned House), and germ theory and the exchanging of the adamic for the atomic in the
post-human utopian future (I Am Legend). This project aims to explore the intersections of these

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3 My own term.
4 We might be compelled to consider a bank of related, but not homogenous, terms that will aid our cause, including:
5 “Gothic literature may be seen as expressive of an existential terror generated by a schism between a triumphantly
secularized philosophy of evolving good and an abiding obsession with the Medieval conception of a guilt-laden,
sin-ridden man. In part, Gothic themes represent a quest for a theory adequate to world perceived as mind. In the
absence of any satisfactory theory that accounted for the existence of evil and pain, the Gothic tale could at least
embody the world felt, if not perceived, as mind” (Thompson, 37).
themes as well as their superimposition upon a triangulation of interrelated social systems: individuated identity, local cultural situations, and, universal human fears.\(^6\)

The vampire network as a phenomenon greater than my corpus of texts resists the prescriptiveness implied by a determinately ordered system. One size does not fit all, and the dark “code of conduct” that governs the vampire—a maxim perhaps: “Drink blood. Not too much. Mostly Humans”—is nearly entirely amendable and mutable.\(^7\) As a result, the unifying principle of the vampire is its excessive nature, its disinterest in boundedness, and the attendant periodic issues-at-hand that are addressed, transgressed, and, perhaps, redressed by way of the vampiric network and its tentacularity.

*Carmina* (1872) explores the immediate fear of the loss of the individuated self\(^8\). Our examination of the plasticity and systemic nature of vampirism will begin, then, with the necessarily personal and often erotic vampirism of the individual. The merging of the self with other “selves” (later to become a “Them” and “We” in the vampire novel) does away with, as Bruno Latour says in his essay “On Actor-Network Theory,” the “tyranny of distance” \(^3\). Laura and Carmilla, brought together less by fate and more by a network of inevitabilities, threaten to converge and, consequently, subjugate the stark individualism put forth by the gothic novel.

Take for example the reckless egotism and singularity of purpose in Charles Maturin’s *Melmoth the Wanderer*: Melmoth’s survival is contingent upon purely selfish acts. Although the Mephistophelean pact he is bound by is “vampiric” by nature (he must find someone to inherit

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\(^6\) Although this formulation is my own, it is a derivative of a tripartite system put forth by Mathias Clasen in his essay “Vampire Apocalypse: A Biocultural Critique of Richard Matheson’s I Am Legend.”

\(^7\) Michael Pollan says in his ecocritical expose *In Defense of Food*: “Eat food. Not too much. Mostly plants.” My intention here is to show that any given “code of conduct” is historically and socially contingent.

\(^8\) Emily Bronte’s *Wuthering Heights* has been critically examined for similar reasons. One popular interpretation figures Heathcliff as a “psychic vampire” who feasts upon Catherine’s emotions. It is hard to imagine that this wasn’t at least a minor influence for Le Fanu, in addition to Coleridge’s *Christabel*. 
the pact else be damned), he is not interested in unity or intersubjectivity. By contrast, the vampiric network appears to have no clear genesis nor terminus, but for the purpose of my examination of the phenomenon I will begin with the most local figuration possible. *Carmilla* provides just that, taking place fairly exclusively within an estate (a *schloss*) and between two subjects. Laura and Carmilla are bound by systems of patriarchal values and mutually suffer in unactualized desire and fear. From here, I will generically progress onward into more socially diffuse vampiric networks that are shared endemically rather than individually.

Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* (1897) will be used to directly address the intellectual and social functions of the vampiric network. In particular, the epistolary format of *Dracula* and the theme of “knowing” makes up the network shared by *Dracula*’s cast of characters. This threat to the purity of the subject’s private identity and knowledge reasserts the now well-understood *fin de siècle* fears associated with the monstrous Other and compound them with a novel perspective of new world networks. Stoker’s characters fear that Dracula’s intellectual infection, carried by humanity and its contrivances and technologies, might evict God from his position of power as a master narrative. If this were to come to pass, the new world that would arise would be ruled by the interconnected vampire swarm. Ultimately, it may not be a question of whether it will transpire, but instead how willing humankind is to recognize and accept its new vampiric future.

Traditionally, the subject fears ontological obsolescence; the vampire embodies this anxiety, threatening to de-individuate the subject from her social context and integrate them into a networked circuitry/homogeneity. However, the vampire is not generically limited to Gothic and Victorian literature. H.P. Lovecraft’s lesser-known short story “The Shunned House” (1924) delves into the occult side of the vampire as it converges within the genres of horror and Science Fiction. Themes of psychic vampirism, polyglotism-as-vampiric network, and the endemic
threatening to become epidemic pervade this piece of Weird Fiction. Within this story, Lovecraft’s typical and generic fare—anemia deaths, a vampiric giant that astrally projects its energy-leeching powers, and mania born of ancestral infection—will inform our discussion. In addition to the previously mentioned critical frameworks of Latour, Haraway, and Siskin, Sari Altschuler’s theory of the spread of disease, which I will draw from her talk “Gothic Medicine in the Age of Cholera,” provides additional theoretical framework. Her essay establishes an exciting new epistemology for understanding the spread of disease and its connection to how we perceive scales of social and epidemiologically bound worlds. Imagining the vampire/vampiric as more than folkloric phenomenon and, instead, as a part of both the literary and cultural imaginary will allow us to remap the vampire as a theory and ontology of networks rather than isolated instances.

To conclude my discussion, I will discuss the global/pandemic vampire and the post-human eschatology of Richard Matheson’s *I Am Legend*. Brought on by a sudden and virulent bacterial outbreak combined with roaring winds caused by, ironically, chemical bombs meant to exterminate disease-propagating insects, *I Am Legend’s* world-consuming “microbial” vampire represents the apotheosis of the fear-desire complex that *Carmilla, Dracula, and The Shunned House* all contain. Notably, Matheson’s text is also a network of overlapping literary genres; it combines traditional elements of gothic horror and romance—towering grey buildings, crushing isolation, sudden and bizarre events—with science fiction. Neville, the protagonist, must contend with his own subjective isolation in parallax with the socially cognizant vampire and its dangerous, post-human world. The modern subject is constantly on the move in a shrinking world. The manor will not guard her, nor will his dominating architectural mastery and immunological triumphs. The vampire as an ontology of epidemiological interconnection is
latent and inevitable; it is becoming and is come. Ultimately, what is at stake is humankind’s importance and its lack of sameness with the world. Disease, germ, and microbe do not acknowledge sameness and difference; they are nonselective. Humbled as we are with our inability to triumph over disease, does the literary vampire’s utopian vision represent a perverse hope and alternate future? Or is this truly the end for humanity, a dystopia? Moreover, is the distinction between these two critical mass states lost when the world being characterized moves from the Anthropocene to the vampire Cthulhucene?

Currently, dangerous contractions and expansions of the world are taking place. The Anthropocene is faced with, and reacting systemically to, global-scale, extinction-level events: global warming, the mounting threat of nuclear winter, overpopulation, antibiotic-resistant infections. By contrast, lofty, utopian notions of intersubjectivity and sympoiesis only seem plausible within the conceptual locus of critical literary alternities or “alternate realities.” So, what are the real stakes for the subject-as-reader? Bram Stoker and Sheridan Le Fanu were both very much subjects of Victorian anxieties, and each pits post-industrialization middle class values and the deification of the sacred, indivisible self against the vampiric threat of “knowing” one another on different scales. As A. Wohl remarks in his book The Victorian Family: Structure and Stresses, “The essential, unknowability of the individual, and society's collaboration in the maintenance of a façade behind which lurked innumerable mysteries, were the themes which preoccupied many mid-century novelists.” It is no wonder, then, that the concerns of late 19th century authors developed such a close relationship with the fear-desire structure of the unheimlich—the familiar unknown. Lovecraft, as was his tendency, coined his own brand of

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9 My intention here is to evoke alterity as a feature of and semantic component of alterity; alternate worlds are also Other worlds, but that we see ourselves in the Other figure makes alterity more conceivable and threatening.
10 Freud, Sigmund. "Das Unheimliche". (1919).
unknowability of the ancient forgotten Self, the cosmic unknowable. His process was no doubt infused with post-WWI anxieties regarding the potential for cultural exchange, such that had never previously taken place on such an earthly, unavoidable scale. Matheson’s dystopian utopia—a subjectively combined vampire-occupied world—reflects the growing concerns about annihilation without possibility for survival, much less the formation of an idyllic post-human society, in light of 1945’s Trinity Test and an increasingly atomic world. The dire straits that humankind has found itself in could be a direct result of literary and cultural appropriation of vampire networks as an express mode of sublimating, rather than actualizing, universal human fears and desires. Haraway believes that the human subject must reckon with the fact that as an apex predator, a privileged category, it will never stop being hunted despite the totality of its technologies and theologies. To persist in ignorant self-importance would be to remain a prisoner in a cell of his own making—the Anthropocene. Siskin furthers the metaphor, nesting algorithmic knowledge-making and world-constituting systems within networks, and those networks within further internetworks. The collapsed boundaries of the vampire’s network force the narcissistic subject to acknowledge the composite nature of their personhood. The subject is kin with all, from the doomsday devices he has made to the natural world that he designates as a resource-commodity, and membership in the vampire network is no longer a matter of being bitten or infected. Belonging to this knowledge-net is congenital; recognition, however, is the only choice that is not an illusion. Humans must wake up to the dark night that has always been in them. To remix Friedrich Nietzsche’s quote: God is undead, and the vampire made him.
II: Strange Love and Systemic Sacrifice in Sheridan Le Fanu’s *Carmilla*

“Were you near dying?”

“Yes, very—a cruel love—strange love, that would have taken my life. Love will have its sacrifices. No sacrifice without blood” (45).

- *Carmilla*

Sheridan Le Fanu’s *Carmilla* is replete with literary gothic elements, featuring “spacious corridors, winding stairs, and dark corridors” (99), ruined schlosses, flittering shadows, and skulking beasts. As a novel, it is paradigmatic late Victorian *fin de siècle* literature and is thematically comparable to Robert Louis Stevenson’s *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886) and Oscar Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891). These stories troubled over decadence and humankind’s sudden loss of grasp over a well-ordered world as well as the trouble of multiple identities. Briefly, *Carmilla*, which was inspired by Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s long poem *Christabel*, goes: a carriage crash outside of the protagonist’s vast estate necessitates the sudden and unexpected boarding of a mysterious girl named Carmilla. Her arrival is timely—Laura, the female protagonist, has found herself less one friend: Bertha Rheinfeldt has died due to unknown circumstances—perhaps a wasting illness—leaving Laura the captive of her father’s isolated manor. Laura and Carmilla very quickly develop a convivial (and erotic/romantic) fixation with one another. During Carmilla’s longer-than-intended stay, Laura begins to suffer from what appears to be a wasting disease. Her symptoms, as her occult-wise physician remarks, resemble those of someone who has suffered from nocturnal visitations from a vampire. On their way to get away from the stresses of manor life, General Spielsdorf, Laura’s father’s longtime friend, abruptly intercepts their stagecoach. He tells a tale of woe that
mirrors Laura’s own travails, nearly word-for-word. A girl named Millarca (an obvious anagram of Carmilla) visited his own Schloss not a few months before Laura’s own visitation. He explains that she is a relative of the ruined Karnstein estate, and that Millarca-Carmilla has maintained the wicked legacy of her ruined family by feeding on humans both physically and emotionally.

Much to everyone’s shock and horror, the realization dawns all too slowly upon both Laura and her father, perhaps due to their overdependence upon beliefs about the natural, ordered world, that Carmilla has been nocturnally feeding upon the one current idol of her carnal and biological desire: Laura. Endowed with this knowledge, the three—now joined by the ecclesiastic that the General summons, Baron Vordenburg—abruptly determine the location of Carmilla’s slumbering vampiric cadaver and decapitate her, thus ending her rein of tyranny. Laura, it should be noted, reflects upon these events via the casebook of the occult Doctor Hesselius. Her concluding statement is a poignant one and leaves us feeling as if there is dark, unfinished business:

It was long before the terror of recent events subsided; and to this hour the image of Carmilla returns to memory with ambiguous alternations—sometimes the playful, languid, beautiful girl; sometimes the writing fiend I saw in the ruined church; and often from a reverie I have started, fancying I heart the light step of Carmilla at the drawing room door (117).

*Carmilla* can be read as a novel of networks of systems; generically, however, it is a gothic horror inflected by Victorian sentiments. Laura is often bowered by her dark chambers and attended to by easily perturbed and superstitious servants and maids. Her father and the other narrative patriarchs, the General and Baron, form a regulatory triangle that suppresses Laura’s subjectivity. However, the dichotomy formed by these two seemingly competing
networks/systems—Laura/Carmilla and Laura’s father/General Spielsdorf/Baron Vordenburg—are subtended by a greater system: the vampiric network.\textsuperscript{11}

Clifford Siskin’s reflections on \textit{systems} shares much in common, both etymologically and ontologically, with my theory of the vampire network.\textsuperscript{12} He provides a critical aperture through which “old” systems might be reimagined using the ontologies of the present: “My turn to the temporality of system adds an ironic twist: seeing systems from the past depends on deploying new systems (algorithmic, digital) in the present” (18). The old systems that are in place in \textit{Carmilla}—and that resonate into subsequent vampire tales by dint of provenance—might be retrofitted with present theories and vocabularies for understanding the complex social systems of the vampire: infection becomes intersubjective, analog is refigured as digital, autopoetic becomes sympoietic, and patriarchal-plutocracy yields to egalitarian-democracy. The framing narrative, written by physician and occult-believer Doctor Hesselius, appears to confirm the possibility of these dual systems. His account is described by the anonymous presenter of the medical papers as “involving, not improbably, some of the profoundest arcana of our dual existence, and its intermediates” (1). The reader enters the narrative, which is itself a network of framing devices, with a sense that nothing has been “fixed” by its recollection: the vampire is a reality, and you, dear reader, may already be a subject of its domain.

\textbf{Infectious Love, Merging Subjectivities, and the Unknowable}

\textsuperscript{11} Ken Gelder’s theory of triangulation figures into my critical analysis: “The ‘erotic triangle’ is refigured in this story: it now consists of two women—one daughter and one guest—and one man or one group of men (fathers and father-figures). The level of paranoia is thus increased: the very fact of such a triangle threatens these fathers’ ascendancy over their otherwise dutiful daughters, and the guest has to be evicted” (60).

\textsuperscript{12} Meaningfully distinguishing between networks, systems, assemblages, ecologies, and constellations can be semantically fraught; for the purpose of this paper, they will neither be assumed to be synonymous nor discrete. The differences may be subtle, and I will rely upon context to mark difference.
‘I have been in love with no one, and never shall,’ she whispered, ‘unless it should be with you….‘Darling, darling,’ she murmured, ‘I live in you; and you would die for me, I love you so’ (65).

After Carmilla’s arrival, Laura finds herself suddenly and irresistibly infected by Carmilla’s various affectations. She, like her father, attempts to naturalize this transfer of behaviors: “The precautions of nervous people are infectious, and persons of a like temperament are pretty sure, after a time, to imitate them” (95). Naturalizing fantastic occurrences as merely uncanny, a lynchpin of patriarchal behaviour within gothic novels—consider, for example, Ann Radcliffe’s *The Mysteries of Udolpho*—is one of the fallacies insisted upon by both Laura and her father. The vampire and its correspondent social network in *Carmilla* constantly flirts with its own imbricated nature: they are strange and beautiful creatures of love and hate, that cause revulsion and lust, that want everything and nothing at once. Laura, lacking the vampire’s knowledge, is tortured by her affectedness: “‘Are we related,’ I used to ask; ‘what can you mean by all this? I remind you perhaps of someone whom you love; but you must not, I hate it; I don't know you--I don't know myself when you look so and talk so’” (34). She can no longer recognize herself because she refuses to see herself in the Other that is Carmilla. Laura’s infected “in-between-ness” functions as a generic, thematic, and narrative liminal state. In other words, *Carmilla* as a novel is as in-between and “networked” as the story it contains. G.R. Thompson describes this hybridity as “dark romanticism,” a genre that “deals with the tormented condition

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13 Tzvetan Todorov has, in the long history of gothic criticism, provided a now seminal theoretical axiom in his book *The Fantastic*, by which we might best understand this literary tradition: “The fantastic therefore leads a life full of dangers, and may evaporate at any moment. It seems to be located on the frontier of two genres, the marvelous and the uncanny, rather than to be an autonomous genre. One of the great periods of supernatural literature, that of the Gothic novel, seems to confirm this observation.” (40)
of a creature suspended between the extremes of faith and skepticism, beatitude and horror, being and nothingness, love and hate” (33). In vampire canon, it is common for victims to begin to sympathize or even behave like their captors. *Carmilla’s* defining trait as a novel, however, arises from the topic of physical likeness—partial merging of consciousness’ and vital materials/flesh. Sheridan Le Fanu lodges the task of situating totalizing systems and othering in the patriarchal and colonial, epitomized by Laura’s father and General Spielsdorf. First, Laura’s father expresses a hybrid sense of awe and lamentation when he detects this otherness in his own daughter:

> Carmilla was looking charmingly. Nothing could be more beautiful than her tints. Her beauty was, I think, enhanced by that graceful languor that was peculiar to her. I think my father was silently contrasting her looks with mine, for he said: ‘I wish my poor Laura was looking more like herself’; and he sighed. (58)

Later, when Laura and her father encounter General Spielsdorf en route to the ruined village of Karnstein, the General expresses a similar sentiment regarding his daughter’s altered appearance before her death:

> My dear child began to lose her looks and health, and that in a manner so mysterious, and even horrible; that I became thoroughly frightened. She was at first visited by appalling dreams; then, as she fancied, by a specter, sometimes resembling Millarca, sometimes in the shape of a beast, indistinctly seen, walking round the foot of her bed, from side-to-side (96).

That she has “lost her looks” is indicative of her consumption by otherness; she is haunted, visited, and plagued by the vampire. Infection, then, is best understood as an intimate connection
or commingling between persons or things; as a concept, it is remediated, partly, by the fact that it appears to shed its epidemiological perniciousness by way of re-construction rather than ultimate deconstruction of its host(s). Infection is categorically partial; its host, to be considered infected, must continually withstand and accommodate the foreign body without completely succumbing. To cross over completely, at least as far as Carmilla is concerned, is to become completely known and intersubjective; Carmilla, a vampire of in-betweens—young and old, fierce and tender, vital and undead—appears to paradoxically covet the near-death state of her human subjects. Laura, like Carmilla’s previous victim-lover, is destined to die once she has been drained; she will become yet another failed attempt at subjective fusion because she can view, but not recognize, herself in the vampire Other.

Carmilla’s simultaneous thirst and inability to reconcile the paradox of a singular, yet somehow still separate, consciousness suffers repeated insults by human systems of knowledge and understanding. One such totalized system is mortal death without hope for reanimation, the death of the flesh and of the body. Death, as the vampire understands it, can go one of two ways: the subject allows themselves to die and, they hope, pass into an afterlife or they choose to remain on earth, immortal, exiled, and ongoing. Yet for Carmilla, neither of these death networks are fully knowable. She does not readily identify as a vampire that belongs to a “kind” of subject, the goal of which is to propagate and instate intersubjectivity, nor does she accept that she by necessity arose from humanity. Until she meets Laura, Carmilla has been completely alone, an orphan of each potential domain of belonging. Her fixation is immediate and uncompromising: “I have been in love with no one, and never shall," she whispered, "unless it should be with you” (29). Laura cannot reciprocate because neither she nor Carmilla have identities of their own:

What she did tell me amounted, in my unconscionable estimation--to nothing.
It was all summed up in three very vague disclosures:

First--Her name was Carmilla.

Second--Her family was very ancient and noble.

Third--Her home lay in the direction of the west (13).

She will not disclose her “true” identity because there isn’t one. This functions not only as a narrative necessity (it is formally agreed upon that they will not discuss family matters nor Carmilla’s personal history when the carriage crashes), but as an ongoing reminder of Carmilla’s failed intersubjectivity. She has no apparent self and, consequently, rebukes all that is solid or whole. Religion and its intrusions upon Carmilla and Laura’s transitive state threatens the imposition of such absolutism. Take the following moment: Carmilla experiences an angry outburst, presumably in response to Laura’s funerary hymns, "Why you must die—everyone must die; and all are happier when they do. Come home" (30). The trope at play here is, obviously, that vampires abjure that which is religious, holy, or otherwise godly in nature. However, Carmilla’s hate of god stems from her desire to keep Laura in her “home” rather than that of god. The vampire’s alternative to death signifies earthly rebirth, a new Self that has overcome “true death.” Haraway’s theory of “earthbound” foregrounds this metaphor: “We need to make kin symchthonically, sympoetically. Who and whatever we are, we need to make-with — become-with, compose-with — the earth-bound” (102). Everyone will be happier when they die, as Carmilla says, because they can finally locate themselves in the Other and redeem their desubjectified identity from colonized systems. In other words, the vampire’s form of death offers the promise of sympoiesis (making-with) rather than autopoiesis (bare reproduction).
The death of the human into earth—where it would then be remade into a connected, yet self-retaining, vampiric, undead organism— and not, as it were, into the numinous aether of the afterlife undermines the essential purpose of religion. The unnatural perpetuity of the vampire is a common theme in vampire literature. Laura often refers to the paradoxical disgust/yearning she feels toward Carmilla, particularly when Carmilla’s mood reflects her unreconciled, in-between nature: “In these mysterious moods I did not like her. I experienced a strange tumultuous excitement that was pleasurable, ever and anon, mingled with a vague sense of fear and disgust. I had no distinct thoughts about her while such scenes lasted, but I was conscious of a love growing into adoration, and also of abhorrence. This I know is paradox, but I can make no other attempt to explain the feeling” (26). Brian Frost elucidates the apparently intrinsic revulsion humans have toward such “unnatural” fates:

Man's attitude toward the Vampire, particularly the human species popularly known as the Undead, has always been somewhat contradictory—a mixture of revulsion and fascination. This ambivalence probably arises from the fact that our natural abhorrence of such anomalies is tinged with a sneaking admiration for their ability to cheat death, disgusted though we are by the means employed (Frost, 1). In other words, to be reborn and given purpose as an earthbound vampire obviates the need for an afterlife or demiurgic solution to the human condition. If this fate evokes disgust, it is not because the subject does not want gain access to the profane but instead the undeniable fact that she, more than anything, does want access. The fear kindred with this want is that the individual will be irretrievably lost in the process.
Carmilla specifically addresses the annihilation of the individual not necessarily into a vast, interconnected vampiric network, such as Haraway imagines, but instead into a personal singularity. This could be imagined in modern terms as a “peer-to-peer” network, free of any network noise that might pollute the purity of this intersubjective connection. Carmilla says to Laura as she is caught in one of her fits of hysterics: “‘You are mine, you shall be mine, you and I are one forever.’ Then she threw herself back in her chair, with her small hands over her eyes, leaving me trembling” (26). Yet, as Haraway writes, human beings are “Characterized by partial connections, the parts do not add up to any whole; but they do add up to worlds of nonoptional, stratified, webbed, and unfinished living and dying, appearing and disappearing.” (Haraway, 15) Carmilla is certainly unfinished, but her inability to identify and transcend her incompleteness is her ultimate failing. The Victorian subject shares much in common with the vampire, while simultaneously refusing the Other-reflection in the monster, in that it values the idea of the individual while recognizing and denying the rapidly encroaching dissolution of the self as a result of new technologies of the post-human.

**Systems, Networks, and Digital Love**

Sexuality in Carmilla functions at once as both a system and a network: a system in that efforts are made to narrowly define what constitutes legitimate love and a network in that love, both social and sexual, interjoins those very systems of resistance. Carmilla, as Marilyn Brock reads it, is a story about an “already decaying empire” where “fear manifests through aggressive sexuality…” (120). Systems, as Siskin posits, are historically developed for one reason: blame. In Brock’s example, systems of blame are located in the profanity of lesbian love and the potent Other. The vampiric network incorporates, consumes, and expands; it does not enact contractions of stigma, but, as in Haraway’s terrapolis, entangles and overlaps indefinitely. Le Fanu’s
network appears to be limited by his own willingness to narratively combine the competing systems of Laura/Carmilla and the patriarchal triangle. Their connection, if made, would pose an immediate threat to this colonial system, historically understood as situated in Victorian Britain. By way of their possible fusion, Laura and Carmilla would unite that which, in the tradition of patrilineal sensibilities, must not be connected. In this case, Carmilla signifies the old world (the Karnsteins) commingling with the new world (Laura and her father). Ardel Haefele-Thomas astutely describes how this blending functions in vampire literature in her book *Queer Others in Victorian Gothic: Transgressing Monstrosity*: “Vampires embody multiple subjectivities: they straddle the borders of the living and the dead, holding cleanly to neither side. In many cases, the vampire also represents queer monstrosity, racially miscegenated monstrosity or some combination of both” (78). However, Carmilla’s subjective state is problematic. As a vampire, she represents the blasphemy of transgressed species boundaries. Her subjectivity, however, is reflexive (or reflective) in that it can only be made whole by another—namely, a non-other or non-alterity.

Similar to *Dracula*’s Lucy Westenra and Mina Harker, in no small measure due to the direct influence of Sheridan Le Fanu, Laura and Carmilla’s vampiric connection—even if it remains unactualized—threatens to overwrite patriarchal systems that separate social class, gender, and sexual and bodily regulation with a vampire network. The possibility of a subject-alterity network will serve as an ongoing theme across *Carmilla, Dracula, The Shunned House,* and *I Am Legend*: the blending of cultures and selves via annihilation and consequent reconstitution into hybrid intersubjectivity. Thematically speaking, it is no accident that the

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14 Interestingly, and certainly not irrelevantly, the patriarchal triangle is itself a network as well, proving that vampiric networks need not only be shared between vampires and their “victims,” but may also be extensions of the social situations they exist in.
search party that uncovers Carmilla find her submerged in blood. “The limbs were perfectly flexible, the flesh elastic; and the leaden coffin floated with blood, in which to a depth of seven inches, the body lay immersed” (99). Blood is a shared and homogeneous substance; it is, as we will come to find, the primordial stew wherein vampiric acts of combination and “knowing” transpire. As Haefele-Thomas points out:

Le Fanu…struggles with a profound sense of ambivalence in [his] depiction of Carmilla…Adrienne Major describes Le Fanu’s conflicted view in Carmilla as a ‘sneaking sympathy throughout the narrative for the sexually vital yet languid Carmilla’...and Victor Sage calls Carmilla a ‘powerfully ambiguous text, which represents several taboos at once’ (96).

Carmilla, paradoxically, appears to be both old and new, multitudinous, a plurality of taboos and othering behaviors made flesh. Carmilla wishes to combine with, rather than utterly consume, Laura and in doing so resembles very closely Syskin’s conception of “system.” Carmilla croons to Laura in one of their more intimate moments, “I live in your warm life, and you shall die – die, sweetly die into mine” (48). Here, Le Fanu nods to the obvious and orgiastic le petit mort to make clear the erotic and inseparable nature of Laura and Carmilla’s relationship; what is perhaps less obvious, however, is the importance of word choice. Carmilla wishes Laura to die into her, to be with her solely, to become a united entity—a potent combinatorial vampire network of selves. However, Carmilla remains systematized by her inability to be known and her undisclosed history. In other words, she is a non-identity and, thereby, a non-subject. Laura is unable to see herself in the reflection of the Other because there is, like the vampire’s reflection in myth, no image in the mirror to begin with. Thus, the failed intersubjective network of Laura
and Carmilla forms the beginning of what will amount to a greater ecology of imaginative vampire alternities.

These connections not only inherently represent taboos as a matter of topicality and historical situation, but also, as we’ve mentioned, hybridity and plasticity. The vampire is not only human; she is human and creature, earthling and earth itself. When Carmilla visits Laura, she appears in multiple forms, including a dark, seemingly older woman and a “sooty black animal that resembled a monstrous cat” (47). The beastial nature of the vampire does not stop at otherness; it is the culmination of fears, taboos, and anxieties of the Victorian subject, in this case, woven paradoxically into their own selves. That Carmilla is killed does not signify the undoing of the network. Like Count Dracula after her, she has deflowered the sacrosanctity of the individuated subject by way of profane knowledge. Laura knows, as does the patriarchal trinity, that the vampire and its coven might rise again and overtake the crumbling colonial “empire of man” in its weakened state. If, as I am claiming, the Victorian subject fears being rendered ontologically obsolete, the femme fatale Carmilla, and indeed the vampire-at-large, is totemic of this anxiety. Joining the vampire’s network, willingly or unwillingly, threatens to de-individuate the subject from their default social and existential context and incorporate them into an alien vampire future. Ultimately, the alternative narrative to the “outcome” of humanity both stabilizes and makes desirable the paradoxical state of the transitive undead (and yet reborn) self as hybrid—at once an individual and socially diffuse unit of an intersubjective network.

15 See Roland Barthes’ essay “Plastic” from his collected essays Mythologies.
In his book *Network Warrior* (2011), Gary Donahue defines a local area network as “a computer network that interconnects computers within a limited area…and has its network equipment and interconnects locally managed.” One may contrast this with a wide area network (WAN), which “not only covers a larger geographic distance, but also generally involves leased telecommunication circuits or links” (5). The farthest extrapolation of these network theories is, naturally, what modern subjects refer to as the Internet. How, one might wonder, do these concepts figure into *Dracula* in a way that isn’t anachronistic? These scopes of network are critical to vampiric worlding; *Carmilla*, as we’ve observed, depends upon the concept of the network as a matter of highly localized intersubjectivity. Laura/Carmilla, the united entity, established a liaison with a patriarchal triangle, threatening to destabilize prominent items of Victorian interest, such as hegemonic heterosexuality and racial/ethnic purity. However, it is not clear that the vampiric network at play in *Carmilla* is one that exceeds autopoiesis: Carmilla aspires to merge with Laura wholly to create a singular, fused consciousness and shared Self. In short, *Carmilla* is a highly local area network of transgressive connections limited by Sheridan Le Fanu’s own writerly intention. In his book *The Living Dead: A Study of the Vampire in Romantic Literature*, James B. Twitchell provides insight into Le Fanu’s process: “As a vampire story, *Carmilla* is less diffuse than Dracula, less frothy than *Varney*, less dull than *The Vampyre*; it is, in fact, a masterful little tale. It owes its mastery in part to Le Fanu’s conscious attempt to render Coleridge’s *Christabel* into prose, especially the descriptions of the psychodynamics of

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16 “Autopoietic (self-producing) systems are autonomous units with self-defined boundaries that tend to be centrally controlled, homeostatic, and predictable. Sympoietic (collectively-producing) systems do not have self-defined spatial or temporal boundaries. Information and control are distributed among components. The systems are evolutionary and have the potential for surprising change. Since they cannot be identified by boundaries, sympoietic systems must be identified by the self-organising factors involved in their generation.” M. Dempster
perversion” (129). For Twitchell, Le Fanu’s brand of vampirism is purely metaphorical, a mere stand-in for profane subjects; the critical approach rendered here has and will continue to regard vampirism as an ontology that is not fundamentally interchangeable with the concept of intersubjectivity, but is instead an ecology that both contains instances of textual intersubjectivity and is, itself, intersubjective. These networks, of course, vary in breadth, and *Carmilla* remains fixedly within the interpersonal network; it is, in other words, highly local, intentionally constrained, and deeply personal. However, *Carmilla* is not to be considered subordinate in its limitedness. It is, rather, the nascent vampire network. The matters-at-hand are deeply intersubjective, to be sure, but Le Fanu seems to be most interested in anxiety/fear localized in the potential for a single self’s absorption into another vampiric subject. *Dracula* as both literal and figurative successor to *Carmilla* will dramatically shift the scope of its existential worries. Indeed, Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* represents an extended articulation of this network into the social/provincial intellectual network of Victorian Britain. 17

*Dracula* may very well contain moments of interpersonal vampirism, but its ultimate “reach,” stretching from the Carpathian Mountains of Transylvania to the soggy seaside town of Whitby, manages to exceed that of *Carmilla* as concerns vampiric worlding and an intersubjective web of intellectual relationships (lunatics, medicine men, lords and their ladies, gypsy sycophants, swarthy animals—all caught up in the mix). More granularly speaking, this chapter will contend with the blood-knowledge stream of *Dracula* that, as we’ve asserted

17By enacting the otherwise ambiguous term “this network,” I’m referring (at least in part) to the intertextual network of vampire literature/texts. Interestingly, intertextuality of vampirism exists between nearly all such literary works, each work subsequent relying upon prior descriptions of vampiric affect, “rules” of the vampire, systems/networks of men and vampires, and so on (to wit, I am suggesting that if Christabel informs Carmilla directly, Dracula must reflect, by way of syllogism, Christabel. Accordingly, Dracula is assumed to inform The Shunned House, and so on and so forth.) We will return to literary intertextuality as a matter of concluding this work; for now, it suffices to understand that each work herein discussed is enjoined with its predecessors and successors as a matter that exceeds mere generic (re)production.
previously, constitutes a further dilation of the vampiric network initially established by
Carmilla. The vampire network of Stoker’s Dracula is filamentary in nature. Bruno Latour
defines “nets” as a semantic component of “net-works;” that is, not necessarily as a “thing” or
material object, but as the “recorded movement of a thing.” To expand upon this definition of the
network, we might introduce Haraway’s theory of the hybrid creature (cyborg, in her case)
Simians, Cyborgs, and Women, which is itself emblematic of a “local possibility taking a global
vengeance” (316). The cyborg is an apt analog for the literary vampire; it’s seemingly endemic
nature contains epidemic potential. If Carmilla cast infection as host-to-host transmission,
Dracula realizes infectious vampirism’s ability to propagate sympoietically, or through collective
production.

Dracula’s network, despite scholarly attempts to circumscribe authorial intent and
metaphor, is highly intersubjectively constituted and continually violates and resists
containment; it is made up of blood and sinew, gender fluidity, and colliding worlds that,
concerning not only Victorian sensibilities, but also the sacredness of the individual, ought never
meet. These vampire networks are made up what Haraway calls perpetually and essentially

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18 Joseph Valente provides useful insight into what is meant by the term “blood-knowledge stream” in his seminal essay Dracula’s Crypt: Bram Stoker, Irishness, and the Question of Blood, saying “By century’s end, Bram Stoker’s Dracula sought to resolve fears about body replication, technological intervention, and population invasion, about transnational flows of bodies, blood, disease, and death (Valente 1–13).”

19 Jonathan Paul Riquelme and Theodora Goss have previously addressed what they refer to as the “technological imaginary.” In their study, which takes as its subjects of study Octavia Butler’s Xenogenesis and Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein, they astutely identify and put a name to the Otherness that is so frequently referred to by critics—that is, hybridity. They identify that the monstrous alchemy of “cross-species mixtures results in a chameleonic, adaptable hybrid whose plasticity contrasts with rigid hierarchical attitudes.” I wish to assert a new articulation of this technological imaginary in the context of the vampire network via the gothic economy of Count Dracula and his flow of knowledge and blood.

20 See footnote 16

21 See, e.g., Joseph Valente’s interpretation of Dracula as the oppressed metrocultural Irish subject from his book Dracula’s Crypt: Bram Stoker, Irishness, and the Question of Blood (2001) or Christopher Frayling’s Vampyres: Lord Byron to Count Dracula (1994), which categorizes Dracula as a “Byronic Vampire,” (in reference to Lord Byron’s Fragment of a Novel (1816)).
“breached boundaries” (293). In sum, the Draculean vampire signifies the merging of the subject with both the social and physical world—worlds that contained distinct, non-diffuse subjectivities and that once belonged solely to a safely guarded moral firmament. This constitutes, as is the contention of this paper, a continuous and diachronic amplification of the ever-growing vampire network that reflects the mounting social fears and anxieties surrounding an increasingly more global, diffuse world. My aim is to identify how Dracula and its vampiric text siblings (prior and subsequent) mutually construct one another. The paranoid subject, then, may have much to fear: the systems of blame and attempts to stabilize social norms that characterize Dracula are equally futile for the endangered, individualized Victorian-cum-modern subject. In short, the “I” of the old world may very well incorporate into a “We”—and may very well remain that way, much to the dismay of the self-ish subject.

From Auto- to Sympoiesis: Questions of (Re)production and Replication

Reproduction and replication are definitionally alike, with the exception that replication comes with the semantic baggage of nearly complete likeness in the copy it produces. Reproduction, by contrast, implies a certain combinative alchemy that causes minor difference between the offspring and its parent. Machines replicate with the goal of solipsistic production; humans and animals, however, reproduce with limitlessly defensible and otherwise tacit end goals. In other words, replication lacks the connotation of sexuality and intersubjectivity. In his book Vampires, Mummies, and Liberals: Bram Stoker and the Politics of Popular Fiction, David Glover comments on the replicative nature of vampirism in literature, “The vampire continues to reproduce itself in a seemingly endless series of copies, always resourcefully different from

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22 Dracula and its themes have been previously explored by countless scholars in terms of, to name just a few, the metrocolonial Irish subject, the old world/new world dichotomy, profane homosexual and homosocial interrelations, antisemitism and Marxism.
previous incarnations, often revising the rules of the game in order to secure a new lease of life, without ever being fully laid to rest” (137). The term “copy” that Glover uses is reminiscent of mechanical replication: vampirism spreads as a cancer would and, by way of its own singularity of purpose, ceases to be a valid method of knowing the world (epistemology). Generically, gothic horror ascribes vampirism a certain perniciousness per the wants and needs of a moral framework. Such a system of textual and narrative autopoiesis, in other words, appears to delimit just how profound and/or desirable Count Dracula’s vision for the human world truly is.

Vampirism is considered by many scholars, and perhaps even Stoker himself, to be fundamentally invasive to the Anthropocene, an intrusion of otherness upon the “true project” (or master narrative) of man and his moral quest for absolution. For Glover and others, then, the vampire is eternally self-serving and narcissistic, driven purely by an unwillingness to be unmade. Indeed, this is how many readers, past and present, regard the vampire trope, and the Victorian subject would be no stranger to the clichés and tropes circulating that put prose to the fears surrounding death, dying, and the erosion of certitudes generally characteristic of fin de siècle apprehensions. However, the vampire is not sated by bare replication; they are excessive and transgressive, comprised of contradictions and troubles aplenty. Judith Halberstam says specifically of the count’s multivalence:

Dracula is otherness itself, a distilled version of all others produced by and within fictional texts, sexual science, and psychopathology. He is monster and man, feminine and powerful, parasitical and wealthy; he is repulsive and fascinating, he exerts the

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23 Master narrative here is taken to mean the anticipated apotheosis or conclusion/completion of a master idea or ontology. This critical theory will be referred to throughout and will, with luck, naturally undergo a transformation from the Western European colonial narrative to Haraway’s theory of SF, worlding, and terrapolis, which itself is perhaps more of a counternarrative or unnarrative.
consummate gaze but is scrutinized in all things, he lives forever but can be killed.

Dracula is indeed not simply a monster but a 'technology of monstrosity' (88)

*Dracula*'s monstrous technologies—and their corresponding values of self-determinism/self-preservation—stand in a position of relief to suggest toward the inscrutability and invalidity of its antithesis; that is, the gnostic network of God and the all-consuming holy collectivity of the great thereafter. In her book *Vampire God: The Allure of the Undead in Western Culture*, Mary Hallab further elaborates upon Dracula’s “inverse network” in her discussion of the “mystery of faith” that destabilizes the fixedness of the Victorian subject’s belief system:

"Of all its meanings, then, the most obvious function of vampires like Dracula is to reconcile the reader to God's incomprehensible intentions in letting us die" (Hallab, 52).

Van Helsing’s mythic exegesis is equally as rhetorically fraught, hinging largely upon the same non-explanation:

There are always mysteries in life. Why was it that Methuselah lived nine hundred years, and ‘Old Parr’ one hundred and sixty-nine, and yet that poor Lucy, with four men's blood in her poor veins, could not live even one day? For, had she live one more day, we could save her. Do you know all the mystery of life and death? (197)

Vampire eschatology is one of eternal infection and ultimate knowing (i.e. pure intersubjectivity). This alternate narrative can be thought of as a Bakhtinian tapestry that interweaves disparate worldviews into a complex, polyphonic vampiric future. This future (but is it utopian or dystopian?) refuses a convenient solution and denounces false promises of divinity. The blood-bound self, for this future, is the “ultimate self” (consider Haraway’s theory of terrapolis-to-come), the unconstrained subject that for Hallab:

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24 Ken Gelder must be credited for invoking Bakhtin’s “architectonic” shared identity; amalgamation, concatenation, and permutation are all relevant to the formation of the literary vampire network.
all other things, even death, must make way. For whatever death may hold, a glorious Christian union with the Godhead or annihilation and eternal oblivion, these vampires would rather be alive. Carmilla and Dracula and their many modern cousins may be ravenous and sexually voracious, but we are aware that their appetites are the appetites of life itself...Even if we could believe in that happy hope in the sky or that perpetual ecstasy, we might not want them. Do we really want an eternity spent in incessant adoration or an inane euphoria? (65)

The thirst to infect is the vampire’s biological impetus, which may manifest sexually through blood exchange or psychically through knowledge exchange. The outcome in either event is the same: the newly birthed vampire-subject has traded the “happy hope in the sky” for a tangible eternal of their present being.

**Jonathan Harker: Patient Zero**

Every infection must have a patient zero, and for Dracula the ideal carrier is Jonathan Harker. The time that the Count and Harker spend in uncomfortable fraternity with one another is deceivingly brief, representing the first four chapters of the novel. However brief, Harker’s epistles (importantly) also contain much of Dracula’s immediate dialogue. Jonathan Harker, in a constant fugue state, comes to regard Dracula as his jailer and, as a matter of fact, master over his own continued existence. Much like Carmilla’s blood network, the Count’s mastery of his own empire seems to reach only as far as the walls that cloister it. He says to Jonathan in a decidedly lengthy oratory concerning his proud lineage (a section commonly leveraged by

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25 One can, if they wish, conjure the image of Francis Ford Coppola’s feckless Harker (very appropriately played by the comically deadpan Keanu Reeves) wandering about the ruined castle, a prisoner to both Dracula and his own tortured imagination. This modern take on the novel, though irrelevant in that it concerns the cinematic, is apropos to our critical intervention: It depicts the confounded, mute Victorian subject amidst the imminent and life-threatening intersubjectivity of the vampire.
critical eugenic/racial arguments): “Here I am noble; I am boyar; the common people know me, and I am master. But a stranger in a strange land, he is no one; men know him not—and to know not is to care not for” (21).  

In the gothic economy of *Dracula*, knowledge is currency; to be known is to be worthy of consideration and to be of value. Knowing, however, is not confined to the intellect; to “know” a person is to also be familiar with them—perhaps both intellectually and carnally. *Dracula* is, if nothing else, a text renowned for its overt sexuality and seminal/effluvial ruptures. One such breached-boundary is, as previously mentioned, the blood-knowledge complex. Chris McWade’s *Nietzschean reading of Dracula* provides a definition of “knowing” germane to this concept of blood-knowledge, saying:

> Indeed, much emphasis is placed on the importance of *knowing* things: under the threat *Dracula* poses to their way of life (and life itself) the protagonists take comfort in being unwaveringly confident in what they can control. The result is a will to power that typifies the late-Victorian response to threats to their perfect surface, which sat precariously atop the transgressive underbelly. (52-53)

> The connection between the vampire’s reproductive power and the subject’s guarded knowledge presents the opportunity to construct a syllogistic triangle: to share blood is to know; to know is to have sex; to have sex is to, ultimately, reproduce. The transfer of knowledge is thus both functional and libidinous. The strange land that *Dracula* refers to, of course, is England, and to insinuate himself upon its people is his intention. But how can the abhorred stranger/other

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26 From Merriam-Webster: “A member of the old aristocracy in Russia, next in rank to a prince.”
27 See e.g. Hanna Ewence’s *Blurring the Boundaries of Difference: Dracula, the Empire, and ‘the Jew,’* which identifies Count Dracula as the Jewish immigrant Other. *Dracula* “celebrates the blurring of boundaries between the British-Self and the Semitic-Other—a conclusion given credence by Bram Stoker’s own marginalised racial and sexual identity.” (1)
hope to make himself *known* in a land that reviles the intimacy and susceptibility implicit in the process of knowing and, thus, narrows the conduits by which one can engage in the act of knowing? Stoker’s conception of Victorian Britain is rife with repression, a cultural epicenter that celebrates the identity of the individual while contradictorily fixating on universally held fears. For Dracula to broadcast his blood-knowledge signal, he must become an entity/process of, as Judith Halberstam puts it, “monstrous technology:”

"...Dracula is otherness itself, a distilled version of all others produced by and within fictional texts, sexual science, and psychopathology. He is monster and man, feminine and powerful, parasitical and wealthy; he is repulsive and fascinating, he exerts the consummate gaze but is scrutinized in all things, he lives forever but can be killed. Dracula is indeed not simply a monster but a 'technology of monstrosity.' (88) endogamous?

Dracula must integrate completely with and, by way of doing so, propagate the "intellectual network" that he wishes to infect with vampirism. For the Victorian subject, this network is often comprised of and established by letters, correspondence, data, and systems. (90-91) As fate would have it, Jonathan Harker is Dracula’s best chance to do so; he is, in short, the social and intellectual vulnerability that will carry Dracula’s signal, his patient zero. But Dracula

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28 This is localized to Stoker’s *Dracula;* Peter Gay and Michel Foucault have challenged this hypothesis as a symptom of the modern subject. This subject chooses to reject past moral systems in order to frame future sexual systems as a “garden of earthly delights.” It is, then, a critically unjust claim to say that Victorian sensibilities resulted from sexual repression. The following quote summarizes Foucault’s position: “We have not only witnessed a visible explosion of unorthodox sexualities; but – and this is the important point – a deployment quite different from the law, even if it is locally dependent on procedures of prohibition, has ensured, through a network of interconnecting mechanisms, the proliferation of specific pleasures and the multiplication of disparate sexualities” (49).
does not wish to physically feed upon Harker, nor does he allow “the sisters” to do so.\textsuperscript{29} \textsuperscript{30} Harker’s weakness makes him obvious and easy prey, but in order to fulfill Dracula’s quest for infection, he must live to tell the tale. Harker’s paranoia is misguided, for it is his access to Mina, Lucy, Dr. Seward, Van Helsing, and Lord Godalming that Dracula covets, not his flesh or blood. For all he witnesses (Dracula’s wives, his bizarre spider-crawling, the wolves devouring the gypsy, Dracula’s coffin), Harker cannot offer sufficient explanations for the uncanny. Indeed, there are many “locked doors,” literal and figurative, that bar Harker from gaining access to Dracula’s vampiric knowledge. Dracula explains that it is for Harker’s “safety” that such ways are shut, cryptically explaining (if this is an explanation at all), “There is reason in all things as they are, and did you see with my eyes and know with my knowledge, you would perhaps better understand” (23). It is quite impossible, of course, for Harker to possess his vision or know with that special type of knowing that is unique to the vampire, but it is this very deficiency that makes him the ideal host. Seizing the opportunity to penetrate Harker’s intellectual and social network, Dracula invites Harker to write back to England and initiate the knowledge-network connection:

‘It will doubtless please your friends to know that you are well, and that you look forward to getting home to them. Is it not so?’ As he spoke he handed me three sheets of note paper and three envelopes. They were all of the thinnest foreign post, and looking at them, then at him, and noticing his quiet smile, with the sharp, canine teeth lying over the

\textsuperscript{29} It would be criminal to not analogize this to modern systems. What greater fear does the disciple of technology harbor than the corruption or loss of their data to a virus or, as we idiomatically say, \textit{infection}? Viruses, for the most part, are themselves vampiric. They are designed with deterministic ends: to replicate, spread, and collect sensitive, secretive data. One needs not traverse a significant metaphorical gulf to arrive at the conclusion here—the vampire is a computer virus, and the computer, as it were, is the \textit{self}. What dire consequences does this spell for the intersubjective alternate future we’ve here imagined?

\textsuperscript{30} As tacky as it may sound, I implore the reader to visit the Wikipedia entry on this subject. It is astoundingly replete, and I would do it no service by paraphrasing. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brides_of_Dracula
red underlip, I understood as well as if he had spoken that I should be more careful what I
wrote, for he would be able to read it. (33)

But it is not Harker who will be doing the writing. Harker is intellectually mastered by Dracula’s
technology (Mina reflects that the letter she receives from Jonathan is “not like him” and “makes
her uneasy” [73]). His purpose and fate, already evident by way of the presentation of the
narrative, are quite sealed: the subjective, individualized Victorian network will be infiltrated by
way of epistle, by the very act of recording and transmitting. The meta-narrative of Dracula’s
characters, starting with Harker’s journal and continuing through newspapers, diaries,
correspondences, and lab reports, function as the delivery system for his vampirism, and each
subsequent act of documentation further strengthens the infection. In other words, methods of
knowing are carriers of vampirism itself. McWade theorizes that the Victorian subject uses such
ways of knowing to stabilize their worldview:

Indeed, much emphasis is placed on the importance of knowing things: under the threat
Dracula poses to their way of life (and life itself) the protagonists take comfort in being
unwaveringly confident in what they can control. The result is a will to power that
typifies the late-Victorian response to threats to their perfect surface, which sat
precariously atop the transgressive underbelly. (52-53)

Once the outbreak has begun, it cannot be stopped nor undone or un-known. Even
Dracula’s death will not cease its relentless overthrow. Inevitably, gothic sexuality, blood, and
knowledge will commingle.31 In his seminal essay “Dracula: The Gnostic Quest and Victorian

31 Judith Halberstam provides the following definition of gothic sexuality: “Gothic sexuality, furthermore, manifests
itself as a kind of technology, a productive force which transforms the blood of the native into the lust of the other,
and as an economy which unites the threat of the foreign and perverse within a single, monstrous body. (Skin
Shows, 101)
Wasteland,” Mark M. Hennelly, Jr. posits that Van Helsing, the occult medicine man, symbolizes one of the “rival epistemologies” that is in “quest of a gnosis that will rehabilitate the Victorian wasteland.” (Hennely, 140) His epistemology, even as a “student of the brain,” revolves around the mysteries of the world and their sacred inexplicability. His rhetoric, “Do you know…?” “Can you tell me…?” (176) fundamentally depends upon not making room for response or challenge. The viciousness in the code of the vampiric virus stems from its ability to lay bare the depended-upon “mystery of faith” that underpins moral systems and social codes of conduct. McWade once again provides insight into the vampire’s ultimate power to demystify—to provide alternative answers: “The effect of the vampire in a literary work is an emphasis on the instability of structures presumed to be stable – as a liminal figure, the vampire makes plain the binary constructions of identity and morality and undercuts the notion of these as supreme systems that enable humanity to navigate the world efficiently” (50).

In the cloudy effluvium of this combination writhes a vampire future, a future that will enmesh the inter-subject and his worlding process with apocalyptic, post-human outcomes. The question remains for the Victorian, and modern, subject: Is this alternate fate—this post-human cosmology—a desirable one?

**There’s Data in the Blood**

What infection or virus, biological or digital, would be complete without a code, a technologic *lingua franca*, to communicate its ultimate design? In its most primitive state, vampirism is a simple mechanism for transfer; but what exactly is it transferring besides itself? Cancer, as mentioned earlier, replicates automatedly; it is existentially acausal and, at best, could be considered an artistic expression of entropy. Hallab describes the vampire’s lust for life as a

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32 As defined by Merriam-Webster: “The degradation of the matter and energy in the universe to an ultimate state of inert uniformity
“refusal to short-circuit the programming” that has been carefully coded into us and that meaningfully differentiates our consciousness and self from “beasts” (65). This view, although not inaccurate, is incomplete in that it essentially conflates vampirism with solipsism. To indulge appetitive desires to survive is to be animal, and to actively fear being unmade is to be human. Where, then, does the vampire fit in? As a self-appointed exile from the afterlife of Christian master narratives, he not only will master death, but also revolt against numinous master narratives. Il-Yeong Kim, in her essay “Stoker’s Dracula as a Figure of Pharmakos/Scapegoat” names Dracula as a self-portrait of ourselves, and these “selves” struggle with the desire to lead a revolution against the organizing systems that we’ve been born into. (3) From this overthrow of our systems would rise a tangible, fully realized earth-utopia inhabited by fearless, self-actualized vampires. Such vampire utopias are marked by intersubjectivity where the “I” yields to the “We” but is not entirely lost.33

Comparatively, Carmilla could be considered a “failed” vampire in that she had no such visions of utopia and delighted in the merging of the self-with-self. Count Dracula, however, appears to be more enlightened to the idea of this new world and speaks often in plural, collective terms. Harker notices his acute use of language: “Whenever he spoke of his house he always said, ‘we,’ and spoke almost in the plural, like a king speaking” (29). Dracula is also aware that blood-knowledge must both ebb and flow. This is further evidenced by the “two-way” connection he establishes between himself and Jonathan’s wife, Mina Harker, in the critically popular moment known commonly as the “matrimony of blood: “His right hand gripped her by the back of the neck, forcing her face down on his bosom. Her white nightdress was smeared

33 Richard Matheson’s *I am Legend* brilliantly blurs the boundaries between utopian and dystopian ideals. We will revisit this in Chapter 4.
with blood, and a thin stream trickled down the man's bare chest which was shown by his torn-open dress” (283).

Mina is, henceforth and until the destruction of Dracula, marked by the vampire. She is “unclean” and “may touch [Jonathan] no more!” (284) To paraphrase Dracula and his famous “children of the night” scene, she has left the city of man and joined the world of the hunter. To return to Haraway, the vampire as a monstrous hybrid “no longer need start from a humanist patriline and its breathtaking erasure and high-wire acts.” The story is transforming, in other words, and the knowers and tellers of this story are responsible for the future it assumes. What is at stake in listening, knowing, and integrating into this network is that “it can obligate us in ramifying webs that cannot be known in advance of venturing among their myriad threads. In a world of anthropozoogenesis, the figural is more likely than not to grow teeth and bite us in the bum” (Haraway, 14).
IV: Seeing Man in the Mold; or the Unnamable Psychic Vampire of Lovecraft’s *The Shunned House*

Pareidolia is the psychological phenomenon that takes place when the human subject perceives a pattern or likeness of its own image in an external object—take for example the “man on the moon” or Rorschach ink blots. Whether this is an expression of our narcissism or pure confabulation, the point is clear: we choose to see ourselves in the world. But what happens when we see ourselves in the profane, the hideous unnamable, the fearful Other? Moreover, what happens when the fearful Other is terrifyingly diffuse and unseen? Donna Haraway et al’s talk “Anthropologists Are Talking About the Anthropocene” provides an additional dimension to this question, asking not “what happens” but “how not?” In the post-Anthropocene, we are joined with the world through the “radicalism of ‘we are all lichens…’” (4) When we see ourselves in the world, in other words, we are seeing our future, our inevitable subjective shift.

Heretofore, we’ve discussed two scales of vampiric networks: one interpersonal and local (*Carmilla*), the other intersubjective/intellectual and provincial (*Dracula*). This chapter will take on H.P. Lovecraft’s deeply troubled short story “The Shunned House” in an effort to lead my discussion of vampire networks closer to both its critical and chronological terminus. Lovecraft was incredibly prolific and often wrote about unnatural and fantastic occurrences. Vampirism pervades no less than three of his stories explicitly, including *The Hound*, *The Outsider*, and our current item of intrigue *The Shunned House*. His theories of vampirism, in line with his fatalistic cosmic ontologies, were predicated upon the insignificance of the human subject to a greater,

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34 I call his story “troubled” for his invective against foreignness and racial blending. Many of the families that have fallen victim to the forces of the fungal vampire have done so as a result of their being “ignorant people.” Due to their infection by countless cultures of the Other, they would then “babble maledictions in French, a language they could not possibly have studied to any extent” (199). Lovecraft often conflated ignorance and baseness with Otherness, and “The Shunned House” is no exception.
uncaring alterity (usually inhabited by a timeless chaos-entity whose name is either unpronounceable by virtue of semantic complexity or because the very utterance eludes human conception). His depictions of the vampire would go on to inspire many of his peers and successors, including Robert Bloch’s *The Shambler from the Stars*. Despite Lovecraft’s meaty prose, it is difficult to concisely describe the vampire entity in *The Shunned House* due to its miasmic nature. Diffuse and distributed as it is—its mold runs up the chimney, its fungus “curses” the basement and grows from the earthen floor of the house like “detestable parodies of toadstools and Indian Pipes”—it bears little resemblance to the humanoid figures of vampire tradition. Lovecraft’s “Impossible Thing” is, however, more than just evil rot or malignant growth. As our protagonist and his less fortunate uncle come to discover, the fungal mass is a confluence of consciousness, a body of multiple absorbed human identities. This makes the entity both a single plant-creature made up of the sum of its parts and, horrifically, hundreds of personhoods contained within a collective (though perhaps not unhappily, as these “strange and not strange” legions manifest in a grinning aspect to the protagonist). (220) Sari Altschuler, in her discussion of humankind’s relationship to disease and epidemic, describes the fungal as “both plant and animal,” a “singular entity constituted by millions of spores and fractally dividing subunits.” In other words, if this vampire entity can form a local conglomeration in a Rhode Island basement, what is to stop it from undergoing such a subdivision? One cannot be

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35The Star Vampire, the titular beastie from Bloch’s story, is an insatiable, monomaniacal parasite. This representation of the vampire partially maps the demotion of the vampire from a zeitgeist for taboos, fears, and post-human potentialities to a witless, prosaic monster. Its monstrousness arises not from its threats to our existence and our purpose, but to our immediate safety. Bloch’s description of the vampire is as follows: “It was red and dripping; an immensity of pulsing, moving jelly; a scarlet blob with myriad tentacular trunks that waved and waved. There were suckers on the tips of the appendages, and these were opening and closing with a ghoulish lust. The thing was bloated and obscene; a headless, faceless, eyeless bulk with the ravenous maw and titanic talons of a star-born monster. The human blood on which it had fed revealed the hitherto invisible outlines of the feaster.” If nothing else, Bloch’s creature is a perfect foil to the more sophisticated vampires of Le Fanu and Stoker.
certain that any of the horrors of Lovecraft’s Mythos are past-tense or bygone; they are legion, they are not always visible or legible to the human mind, and they may have already taken over.

Accordingly, if the vampire networks of *Carmilla* and *Dracula* were, respectively, interpersonal and intersubjective in nature, *The Shunned House*, despite the well-boundedness of the story (it mostly takes place within one house), represents the fungal possibility of worldwide vampiric intersubjectivity. The scale of literary vampirism has grown in that Lovecraft writes of the forbidden knowledge granted by psychic vampirism—the overthrow of both body and mind.³⁶ Lucia-Alexandra Tudor offers additional insight into Lovecraft’s process, saying:

The short stories of this period…pointed out more and more the loneliness the Providence writer indulged in. Usually characterized not only by common everyday scenes, but also by an imaginary pantheon of gods and forces (such as Cthulhu, Yog-Sothoth, Nyarlathotep)—to which some of his friends…often contributed—these stories contain interrelations beyond the normal. (Tudor, 1)

The “beyond normal” interrelations dealt with by Lovecraft are those of humankind’s relationship with its ancestral self, that “singular entity” that beckons to the individual to return to a state of homeostasis (“we are all lichens”). For a self-described “mechanic materialist” such as Lovecraft, the notions dealt with in this paper, such as permeated boundaries, diffused subjectivities, and a collective consciousness, might appear woefully insipid, if not completely illogical. Consequently, Lovecraft’s imaginative impulse is likely toward one of finite systems, of constrained networks and closed boundaries. In his essay “From beyond: H. P. Lovecraft and

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³⁶ The occasion of this story and our critical analysis may benefit from a bank of psychobabble as a cipher for the difficult-to-define mode of psychic vampirism, including cognitive dissonance, uncanny valley, and theories of familiarity/unfamiliarity.
the place of horror,” James Kneale offers the following remediation of this unavoidable difficulty: “Lovecraft’s textual thresholds do not simply express his racist fears; they produce the narratives that dramatize his fears of contact and change” (Kneale, 120). Perhaps this is a likely story, and many have attempted somewhat less-than-virtuous apologies writing off his many conceits in favor of the importance of his work.

Vampire networks are categorically indiscriminate; they wash over man’s many projects and dissolve the walls of his house and bleed the ink of his well-ruled maps. Earth, Terrapolis, is the vampire’s house, a commune of mutually constitutive subjectivities. It is, to complement Kneale’s theory, mortared with contact and bricked with change. Earlier, I used Todorov’s notion of the uncanny (unheimlich) to explain Carmilla’s liminality and “in-between-ness.” Similar to my discussion of Dracula, Latourian actions of “flow” and movement, both indicators of the presence of an agent network, play a significant role in The Shunned House. We will also continue to meditate upon the function of fear in, and because of, the vampire network. Lovecraft’s own definition of fear synthesizes well with Hallab’s concept of the selfish identity—it is the “only one they know” (65)—in that they seem to agree upon man’s essential fear of the loss of this self, which reads as follows: “The oldest and strongest emotion of mankind is fear, and the oldest and strongest kind of fear is fear of the unknown” (Lovecraft, 1).

The intersection of fear and desire in The Shunned House occurs as a result of a suddenly awakened ecological unconscious, the complex connection of humankind with the world it inhabits—i.e. tencacularity in the Cthulhucene. Accessing this unconscious will allow the subject to fully comprehend its relationship with Otherness. Fear of the unknown, then, is also the fear of

37 “In Terrapolis, shed of masculinist universals and their politics of inclusion, humans are full of indeterminate genders and genres, full of kinds-in-the-making, full of significant otherness.” (Haraway, 11)
seeing himself staring back from the carnivalesque mirror of the Other. Less the gaining of knowledge and more a remembering, he can never return to his ignorance and must reconcile the fact that the divide between himself and the Other is purely semantic—what is referred to commonly as “alterity.”

The vampire and its network require humanity as a prerequisite to both its very existence and ultimate posthuman utopia; one cannot become a “post” without a “pre.” Matthew Taylor’s article “Universes without Us: Posthuman Cosmologies in American Literature” indexes this outcome as more a thing of desire than of fear, “For many posthumanisms, the fact that ‘it becomes harder and harder to say where the world stops and the person begins’ does not mean that persons go away. On the contrary, ‘persons’ now become the ‘world. ‘We’—or something uncannily similar—survive to enjoy the loss of our selves” (16-17). For Lovecraft and his literary subjects, the loss of one’s individualism is often tantamount to annihilation. To be relinquished of one’s selfhood—or, as is the case in “The Shunned House,” to be dredged in and incorporated by “vampiric gasses,” bombarded by foreign tongues and other’s thoughts, and blended into a slurry of identities—is worse than dystopian; it is the void itself. The nameless protagonist of The Shunned House refuses the invitation extended by this mass of consciousness, dousing it repeatedly with carboys of acid. Even so, he must ultimately confess a profound and contradictory familiarity with the unbelievable—it is at once “strange and yet not strange” (221). Lovecraft’s system, axiomatically akin to that of Van Helsing, is singular in that it is an inverse epistemology; one can never truly know or understand, and that itself is an enlightened way of knowing. Siskin precautions against such reductions, however, saying: “With its feature of parts and wholes, for example, system could be cast as a democratizing vehicle: by explaining many
things according to a single principle, it could be presented as a tool for reducing complexity to simplicity” (91).

So far, I’ve attempted to describe the literary vampire and its network using several interrelated terms—intersubjectivity, sympoiesis, “We,” “terra-to-come,” to name a few. However, its mechanism is not singular or fixed; it exists within storytelling as a challenge to binary systems, diverting our gaze into a perpetually fuzzy in-between.38 My purpose in including *The Shunned House* is twofold. I will draw parallels between two traditionally opposed systems of explanation—folklore and science; I will also use the perverse plant-animal hybridity of the fungal vampire as a metaphor for humanity’s fear of remembering their ancestral self, the subjectivity that is “of this world” rather than just “in this world.”

**Rationalism, Folklore, and the Unknown**

The story of *The Shunned House* takes place largely within a single, protracted “hideous investigation” taken up by the unnamed protagonist and his ridiculously named uncle, Dr. Elihu Whipple—so named to designate his worldliness as an antiquarian of times past. The protagonist, both man of science and aspiring antiquarian, is called to adventure by the revelations bestowed upon him by the “darker, vaguer surmises” of his uncle’s notebooks. These notes comprise an “undercurrent of folklore,” a collection of stories that seeks to totalize disparate ways of knowing through objective observation (199). The protagonist’s oft-referred to

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38In her essay “Carrier Bag of Fiction,” Ursula Le Guin offers a brilliant metaphor for this in-between state:

Conflict, competition, stress, struggle, etc., within the narrative conceived as carrier bag/belly/box/house/medicine bundle, may be seen as necessary elements of a whole which itself cannot be characterized either as conflict or as harmony, since its purpose is neither resolution nor stasis but continuing process.
scientific ontology exists in a state of superposition with this assemblage of folklore.\textsuperscript{39}

Circumscribed systems abound in his empirical worldview, referred to by their many taxonomies (energy, authenticity, forces, substances). One might quickly lose count if they attempt to enumerate each bit of scientific jargon Lovecraft evokes, even in a single paragraph:

We were not, as I have said, in any sense childishly superstitious, but scientific study and reflection had taught us that the known universe of three dimensions embraces the merest fraction of the whole cosmos of substance and energy. In this case an overwhelming preponderance of evidence from numerous authentic sources pointed to the tenacious existence of certain forces of great power and, so far as the human point of view is concerned, exceptional malignancy. To say that we actually believed in vampires or werewolves would be a carelessly inclusive statement. Rather must it be said that we were not prepared to deny the possibility of certain unfamiliar and unclassified modifications of vital force and attenuated matter; existing very infrequently in three-dimensional space because of its more intimate connection with other spatial units, yet close enough to the boundary of our own to furnish us occasional manifestations which we, for lack of a proper vantage-point, may never hope to understand. (200)\textsuperscript{40}

The protagonist subscribes to an esoteric science system, a dualism of the “knowable” and the “impossible-to-know,” that makes generous provisions for massively complex connections between energies and substances, both material and immaterial, while simultaneously foreclosing

\textsuperscript{39} A similarly eclectic blend of practices into isolated systems of treatment existed within the event known as the “New England Vampire Panic.” Tuberculosis and vampirism—disease and myth—quickly synthesized into a sort of social coping mechanism. We will discuss this more at length by way of Michael Bell’s largely important essay “Vampires and Death in New England, 1784 to 1892,” which later became his full-length book.

\textsuperscript{40} “Science says” is represented as a univocal language. Yet even the spliced character of the potent words in ‘science’ hints at a barely contained and inharmonious heterogeneity.” (204, Haraway Biopolitics of Postmodern Bodies)
upon the possibility of hybrid things like vampires and werewolves. Lovecraft’s worlds are often constructed of such extremes; the things people tend to fear are mundane, simplistic modulations of the known. What they paradoxically should fear is that which they cannot comprehend or even begin to speculate about. In this system, the vampire is relegated to the position of a “modification of vital matter” that adheres to a set of manmade rules and sciences. Monster figures like that of the vampire are derived, as Twitchell asserts, from an “amalgamation of folklore.” Scientific systems reduce these unreliable accounts and superstitions to little more than overblown descriptions of hematophagous bats and overgrown wolves (20). For it to pose a true threat to the subject and its subjectivity, in Lovecraft’s view, the Other figure must not be a hybrid of known or knowable things; it must represent absolute alternity (as can be seen in “The Color Out of Space,” Nyarlathotep,” “Dagon,” and countless other stories that make up his Mythos Cycle) and not be the result of human folkloric fabulation. The Shunned House, however, is exceptional among Lovecraft’s corpus insofar as it narrows, if not entirely dissolves, the divide between the known and the unknown. The protagonist confirms this repeatedly in his attempts to stabilize the truth/fiction narrative of his own world. His ability to distinguish

41 Haraway’s theory of SF and the “string doll figure” resembles this grotesque hybridity, made up of morally and socially profane knowledge systems.

42 Interestingly, Altschuler asserts a positive correlation between folkloric knowledge and actual epidemiological phenomena. She claims that local narratives that are structured by things like sorcery and magic (Haitian voodoo and thaumaturgy, in the case of her study) are strangely accurate and tied to theories of outbreak and real-world epidemics. Consequently, it is quite possible that Lovecraft’s process could’ve been influenced by the New England Vampire Panic that took place in the mid- to late 19th century. This reaction to the tuberculosis epidemic did not require the sensationally imagery of swarthy Balkan vampire lords and ruined Schlosses; instead, social and religious fear of infection and damnation called for a spurious cause-and-effect relationship that, as Michael Bell concludes “…suggests an uncanny connection between living and dead family members, evoking the scene at the graves of the New England vampires, where corpses appeared to be in an unnatural state, interpreted to be at least a sign, if not the actual cause, of the imminent death of kin” (133). Bell notes that in this system of belief vampires need only be in vague proximity to exert their influence, sap people of their energy, or infect them. This variety of “spectral” vampire, as it is referred to, does not deal in transactions of blood; it invades the human psyche and sustains itself in the borderlands of permeable knowledge systems such as superstition, folklore, mythmaking. Ann White, an ex-servant of The Shunned House, provides a bit of “servant gossip…alleging that there must lie buried beneath the house one of those vampires—the dead who retain their bodily form and live on the blood or breath of the living—whose hideous legions send their preying shapes or spirits abroad by night” (200).
between the conscious and unconscious breaks down first, and he can “scarcely recall what was
dream and what was reality” (216); with mantra-like frequency, he marvels at the creature’s
simultaneity, a thing that cannot be earthly, and yet stands as one of “earth’s nethermost terrors,”
contradicting himself and commingling subjectivity with objectivity, “It was of this world, and
yet not of it—a shadowy geometrical confusion in which could be seen elements of familiar
things in most unfamiliar and perturbing combinations” (218). Ultimately, that he even lives to
tell the tale, a requirement of nearly all of Lovecraft’s epistolary-form stories, is beyond his ken of understanding, “It was unspeakably shocking, and I do not see how I lived through it.” (223)

If folkloric systems are made up of old world knowledges, scientific systems necessarily instate modernity; neither will spare the human subject. “I walked aimlessly south past College Hill and the Athenaeum, down Hopkins Street, and over the bridge to the business section where tall buildings seemed to guard me as modern material things guard the world from ancient and unwholesome wonder.” (221) Yet, even as the protagonist finds solace in modernity, he reflects in his provided history of The Shunned House that the structure lies atop burial grounds. The house and its history, like the vampire, become an object of loathing not only for the grisly murders and sudden psychotic breaks it appears to have induced, but also because it awakens within the beholder dormant memories. To remember is to realize that the other and the self are differentiated as a matter of denial. Frost further qualifies this, saying that Jung’s culturally persistent theory of the archetype as “the accumulated experience of organic existence on earth…would make apparent to everyone that the underlying fear and detestation we have for the vampire is caused by our subconscious awareness of it as an ancient, universal memory” (22).

The modern subject—epitomized by the protagonist—does not wish to recover its memory of this organic existence or ecological unconscious. The fearful subject throws science at the
monstrous other, cowers within the shadows of manmade structures, and declaims the fantastic and unbelievable as perversions of the senses. It is all for naught, however, as the subject cannot unknow the monstrous knowledge gained in “The Shunned House:” subjective systems, like the house itself, are built upon an ancient foundation, a Terrapolis that is itself a “chimera of materials, languages, histories” (Haraway, 10). The soil that undergirds man’s houses contains blood, bone, earth, and salt, none of which have ever been distinct from another save for our ability to name them.

**Becoming Fungi: Gaseous Emissions and Fungal Bloom**

The vampire in “The Shunned House” is, like many of its vampire predecessors, able to assume a multitude of forms both material and immaterial. The protagonist names it alliteratively and ephemerally as a “vampirish vapor” and “exotic emanation” (221), and yet it might also “be pure energy—a form ethereal and outside the realm of substance—or it might be partly material; some unknown and equivocal mass of plasticity, capable of changing at will to nebulous approximations of the solid, liquid, gaseous, or tenuously unparticled states” (215). The cause of his descriptive caprice is unclear, and one is left to wonder whether his perception is accurate but limited by his inadequate human senses—“Matter it seemed not to be, nor ether, nor anything else conceivable by mortal mind” (221)—or if it is actively being manipulated by the psychic intrusion of the vampire entity such that he is seeing and thinking projections of its own contrivance. Its inability to be described and understood may be an error of categorization on the protagonist’s part. He is, after all, attempting to singularize a pluripotent body; the vampiric mass is at once becoming and has become the sum of its parts while those parts also diminish to a united whole. Deleuze and Guattari explain this material indeterminacy:
The anomalous is neither an individual nor a species; it has only affects, it has neither familiar or subjectified feelings, nor specific or significant characteristics. Human tenderness is as foreign to it as human classifications. Lovecraft applies the term “ Outsider” to this thing or entity, the Thing which arrives and passes at the edge, which is linear yet multiple, teeming, seething, swelling, foaming, spreading like an infectious disease, his nameless horror” (270)

If the Outsider or Other figure is also the “nameless horror,” the true horror results from giving it a name: that of the self. The subject sees himself within the writhing mass of identities and can never return to ignorance. That this mass is not exclusively formed from human clay is important; it is a plant-human, an impossible and putrid transgression of species and material form. Dracula posed a threat to the subjectivity of individual knowledge that retains the self from being absorbed into the “social” other; the unnamable fungal vampire raises the stakes, forcing the subject to reckon with his own interconnection with human and non-human things, animate or inanimate. James Kneale calls this phenomenon “potential becomings” wherein the subject confronts their own fluid existential and physical state:

“…In ‘From beyond’ there is the shocking realization that ‘strange, inaccessible worlds exist at our very elbows’, not just alongside but within our own. Mark Fisher notes that this kind of experience can be explored through Deleuze and Guattari’s ideas of seething, teeming multiplicities. In ‘From beyond’ the narrator experiences a multiplicity of entities ‘walking or drifting through my supposedly solid body’; in ‘Through the gates of the silver key’, Randolph Carter finds himself becoming ‘Carters of forms both human and non-human…no longer a definite being distinguished from other beings’…[Carter’s]
self ‘reels’ as the sense of subjectivity breaks down in the face of an experience of teeming multiplicity that comes from both without and within (although this ‘within’ clearly has nothing to do with any supposed psychological interiority). These multiples inside and outside are potential becomings, ‘all the becomings running through us’ and packs of ‘becomings-animal’ that haunt Carter’s sense of himself” (113).

Seeing himself reflected in the hideous polyps of the fungal mass, the subject understands that they have been deceived by systems of organization and blame: evolution becomes a means by which to blame animals for their barbarism. God is to blame for his plan and his intentionalism, whereas society is a measure of other’s narcissism. The subject’s true, ancient Self is miasmic and massive—a vaporous cloud that can be either observed as a single cloud or as a fractal conglomeration of water droplets and their atomic parts. Altschuler notes that scientists have often described fungal cells as “invisible,” perhaps to demote fungus as unnatural or impossible inversion of the primordial orientation of the animal-human self. Fungus represents the global potential for propagation. The protagonist encounters an “anthropomorphic patch of mold,” reluctantly admitting that it “argued at least a remote and reminiscent connection with the human shape; but how representative or permanent that similarity might be, none could say with any kind of certainty” (215).

Once the convergence of fear and desire has been located, the protagonist, a subject of modernity, must eliminate it and, thereby, sublimate his ancient recall. Resorting once more to the willful ignorance of science, the protagonist resolves to destroy the vampire by drowning it in an acid bath. The resultant chaos he describes as a “blinding maelstrom of greenish-yellow vapor which surged tempestuously up from that hole as the floods of acid descended,” a sight that will “never leave [his] memory.” The community itself naturalizes the event as a product of man,
explicable and terrible as it may be. “All along the hill people tell of the yellow day, when virulent and horrible fumes arose from the factory waste dumped in the Providence River, but I know how mistaken they are as to the source” (227). By choosing to wage war with the mirrored self of the unnamable thing, the protagonist has chosen to be in the world and not of it. He, unlike his dissolved uncle, will remain separate from the intersubjective fungal mass. Like Dracula and Carmilla before it, however, the fungal vampire can only be momentarily destroyed in this war of subjectivities. Control strategies, like those described by Haraway in her discussion of societies movement from an “organic, industrial society to a polymorphous, informative system,” tend to focus on “rates of flow across boundaries” while ignoring the “integrity of natural objects.” (163) Control, however, presupposes something that is already underway; the subject has seen itself in the mold and will eventually remember itself when it rejoins the intersubjectivity of the vapor cloud. Denial may only delay the inevitable, but for Lovecraft and the subjective narcissist it is the most optimistic and reasonable recourse possible.

43 A bit of word play seems to be at hand here. Mold is both a noun and a verb and refers to a fungus as well as a hollow container that gives shape to a liquid substance. Lovecraft’s choice to anthropomorphize mold specifically seems to suggest these numerous interpretations.
V: Going Global: *I Am Legend*’s “Full-Circle” Network and the Vampire Apocalypse

“Noadays… the lunatics, as they say, are taking over the asylum. The monsters clearly outnumber the men and posthumanity is upon us.”

- Judith Halberstam

In the final lines of *I Am Legend*, Neville, the story’s protagonist, delivers some of his most potent narrative prose as he begins to die from the cyanide capsules he has just swallowed:

“Full circle, he thought while the final lethargy crept into his limbs. Full circle. A new terror born in death, a new superstition entering the unassailable fortress of forever. I am legend” (161).

The reader has arrived at the thrilling denouement, the moment when she fully realizes the literary conceit of the books title: Neville, the last living man, has inherited the crown of the monstrous other, and though he dies, he will forever symbolize the humanity that once was. For those unfamiliar with the basic plot of *I Am Legend*, I’ve included the summary that Mathias Clasen provides in his essay “Vampire Apocalypse: A Biocultural Critique of Richard Matheson’s *I Am Legend*” in its entirety:

The story of *I Am Legend* is fairly simple. In 1976, Robert Neville appears to be the last survivor of a cataclysmic vampire pandemic that has also claimed the lives of his wife and daughter. Immune to the vampire virus and barricading himself in his Los Angeles home, Neville spends his days killing sleeping vampires and comatose infected humans, all the while struggling with deep loneliness and dejection. His systematic, yet frequently frustrated, investigation of the vampire virus offers him some purpose in life. After almost three years of bleak, solitary existence, Neville miraculously discovers another survivor, Ruth. However, Ruth is infected with the vampire virus and has been sent to spy on Neville. She is part of a group of infected people who have managed to stay alive and
keep the virus somewhat at bay with pills. Ruth and her people are establishing a new and brutal society. Because Neville is the last member of the old race and has killed many victims of the vampire plague, he is captured and condemned to public execution. (1)

I’ve chosen to begin this chapter with the parting words of Neville because the end of I Am Legend signals the beginning of the dominion of the “microbial” vampire. In the continuum of this paper’s chosen literature, this text marks the culmination of the new network, the apotheosis of the Other’s trial to enact their intersubjective agenda—hence the cliché “full circle.” In other words, it marks an ontological and existential moment of inversion. The common refrain of fear features prominently within this work, a recurrence that Clasen claims is “the defining affective feature of horror fiction.” This fear, he says, is particular to “things dangerous in our evolutionary past” (316). If Haraway’s claim that the Western origin story depends upon the myth of original unity—divinity through singularity—holds water, then the fear of I Am Legend is a product of man’s return to original unity via biological means. This new world will not be subtended by the comfort of theological myth or divinity; it is purely post-human and post-god. God is the ultimate self. He creates plagues to punish humans, kill them, and commit them to an afterlife, not to grant immortality and create earthly utopia. The vampire has, conceptually and literally, taken up residency in the vacancy left by god.

The exiled Other of Le Fanu’s Carmilla and Stoker’s Dracula can, via Matheson’s actualized vampire network, enjoy redemption, for god has been sentenced to exile. The post-god vampire subject—an “apt metaphor for the other, the mother, the subaltern, the liminal, for the allure of death, for fear of death, desire for immortality, fear of immortality, for immigration, the phallus, the vagina, capitalism, for colonization, female sexuality, male sexuality, amorphous sexuality, and probably much else” (Clasen, 318)—has retired the mantle of the symbolic and
become real via contagion. The gothic exoticism of the vampire’s past has been exchanged for Matheson’s urban horror through old civilization’s surrender to apocalypse. Latour justifies the use of apocalypse as a recurring human theme: “Why not use [apocalypse]? We know it is a trope. We know it can get us in trouble. But it also enables a kind of serious play that allows us to think things that we would have never been able to think without that trope” (Gifford Lectures). This apocalyptic end dismantles the purity of individualism. Humanity must choose to see itself in the mirrored, infected Other else remain a vestige of a bygone era of false dichotomies of the natural and unnatural. To say that the monsters outnumber the men, as Halberstam asserts, is not enough; “mankind” is an obsolete expression altogether. With his downfall—with the completion of the “full circle” process—follows the demolition of the asylum, the assuaging of fear, and the actualization of original, all-uniting desires through the formation of “vampirekind.”

**Biological Immunology as Control System**

One of the core themes of *I Am Legend* is its interest in the biological mechanism of acquired immunity and what it means to be disease-immune in an epidemiologically diffuse world. A few scholars, including Michael Bell and Laura M. Kelley, have noted that Matheson’s depiction of mass epidemics bears a close resemblance to the AIDS epidemic and its societal and biological consequences (although AIDS is a virus and *Vampiris* a bacteria). They both understand fear in this system as a result of what we don’t know—what is incurable and thus potentially unstoppable. One of the articulations of man’s ability to know, then, is his ability to destroy something. We often talk about our ability to “boost” our immune systems, to shield ourselves from disease, pain, and the reminder of mortality. Neville is unique in that he
unwittingly gained immunity to the bacterium that causes vampirism. His explanation is as follows:

While I was stationed in Panama during the war I was bitten by a vampire bat. And, though I can’t prove it, my theory is that the bat had previously encountered a true vampire and acquired the vampiris germ. The germ caused the bat to seek human rather than animal blood. But, by the time the germ had passed into my system, it had been weakened in some way by the bat’s system (132).

Neville can prove nothing about the origin of his acquired immunity. His belief, however, is that it emerged from nature, the result of some collision of forces. Interestingly, he never explains what this first “true vampire” is, nor where it might have come from. Was the first “true vampire” also a result of nature? If so, is the vampire contagion best understood as nature (them) “reclaiming” itself through the destruction of the subject (us)? The precedent for contagion as an “us vs them” dynamic finds its pedigree in earlier vampire myths. Clasen maintains that “the contagious aspect of vampirism remains an essential characteristic of the archetype,” providing the obvious example of Dracula, who “threatens not to maim and maul his victims, but rather to infect them with his disease. This is also why Dracula goes to London with its “teeming millions”: to “create a new and ever-widening circle of semi-demons” (323-324).

Neville often contemplates the purpose of his continued existence contrasted against “them.” The world of “them,” the ever-widening circle of the infected, is waging war against him and only him. That he is alive seems accidental at times, and it is difficult not to notice that his personal theory of survival conflicts with the hybrid nature of the vampiris germ. “Was the life force something more than words, a tangible, mind-controlling potency? Was nature somehow, in him,
maintaining its spark against its own encroachments?” (101). In other words, is Neville the last bastion of hope for humankind’s survival despite nature’s own self-annihilative drive? Immunity in this worldview is absurdly recursive: nature is protecting its subjects, who are part of nature itself, against itself. The delineation of the natural and unnatural is a purely human impulse, and the subject liberally assigns themselves to either pole depending on their position in the world.

Haraway describes the difficulty of separating between the natural and unnatural is mapped onto the biopolitical body, which “from the perspective of contemporary immune system discourse probes again for ways to refigure multiplicities outside the geometry of part/whole constraints. How can our ‘natural’ bodies be reimagined - and relived - in ways that transform the relations of same and different, self and other, inner and outer, recognition and misrecognition into guiding maps for inappropriate/d others? And inescapably, these refigurings must acknowledge the permanent condition of our fragility, mortality, and finitude” (4). Neville’s failure to logically and scientifically differentiate himself from the connectedness of pathways of disease emphasizes the contradictions of immunity: to become immune, you must be exposed. What’s more, Neville’s original exposure was to that of a live carrier. How then does this afford him immunity from undead carriers? His persistent and ineffective attempts to stabilize a constrained system of cause-and-effect in light of unanswerable questions regarding the natural and unnatural lead him to unsettling, messy multiplicities:

‘All right,’ he replied with a shrug, ‘that settles it. Let’s get back to the problem.’ So he did.

There are certain things established, he lectured himself. There is a germ, it’s transmitted,
sunlight kills it, garlic is effective. Some vampires sleep in soil, the stake destroys them. They don’t turn into wolves or bats, but certain animals acquire the germ and become vampires (82).

For Laura Diehl, the circularity and complexity of immunity and its relationship to organic entities relates to the retention of individuality in the face of dangerous multiplicities. “The history of immunology is a long and extremely complicated story, but it begins and ends with the problem of individuality: How does an organism differentiate native elements from dangerous invaders? How does an organism achieve and maintain integrity, erecting a Self purged of Other?” (101) Immunity in a world of compromised integrity is to know ultimate loneliness. Neville contains, albeit innocuously, the very bacterial agent that he has made his life’s purpose to understand, cure, and eliminate. Isolation from an epidemiologically compromised world may also be understood as fear of exclusion. Desperate to avoid exclusion, Neville bargains with Ruth, who he tentatively believes has also eluded the vampire plague, “There must have been others who were immune for one reason or another” (126). His fears are concomitant with those of the modern subject: Both are agonizingly trapped between an all-inclusive world in the making that they reject for its threat to the individual identity and the ironic, disabling exclusion resultant from becoming the ultimate Other figure by immunizing one’s self against perceived otherness. I will turn once more to Hallab’s definition of human identity, “For most of us, whether the self is the result of external forces or our genetic makeup, we are familiar with it and fond of it. However contradictory, confused, muddled it may be, most people have a pretty good sense of having a distinct identity of their own” (65). Not only is Neville’s sense of self all that he knows, it may be the last distinct self (in the sense that the selfish human understands it) in
existence. His fondness for an obsolete function of society, selfishness, has made him the exile figure previously represented by the vampire other.

**Comfortably Numb: Desubjectification and the Loss of Emotion**

Immunity is not strictly a biological response to physical infection; the subject can also inoculate themselves against emotions and ideas. Neville pontificates on the fraught relationship between love and sterility. In describing the “sterile, awful wanderings” of the desubjectified vampire that “no longer knows what it is to love and be loved” (132), he inadvertently draws a parallel to his own existential state, “He didn’t realize that his voice was devoid of warmth, that it was the harsh, sterile voice of a man who had lost all touch with humanity” (154).\(^4^4\) Despite his attempts to locate his identity—he searches for it in likely places: drinking debauches, animal companionship, human companionship, art, spartanism, suicidality, loss, fear, desire—he must ultimately come to grips with the fact that he is neither of humankind nor of vampirekind. Neville is immune, certainly, but he has also been sterilized and will forever be a “bachelor” in an asexual world:

And what now? What did the future hold for him? In a week would she still be here with him, or crumpled in the never cooling fire? He knew that, if [Ruth] were infected, he’d have to try to cure her whether it worked or not. But what if she were free of the bacillus? In a way, that was a more nerve-racking possibility. The other way he would merely go on as before, breaking neither schedule nor standards. But if she stayed, if they had to

\(^4^4\) Michael Foucault’s work on subjectivity and desubjectification is best outlined in his work *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. He defines this term as a “limit-experience,” or our ability to deindividuate ourselves from the limits of our own experiences and join into a “social fabric.”
establish a relationship, perhaps become husband and wife, have children—Yes, that was more terrifying. He suddenly realized that he had become an ill-tempered and inveterate bachelor again. He no longer thought about his wife, his child, his past life. The present was enough. And he was afraid of the possible demand that he make sacrifices and accept responsibility again. He was afraid of giving out his heart, of removing the chains he had forged around it to keep emotion prisoner. He was afraid of loving again (127-128).

Diehl echoes this theory, attributing Neville’s unavoidable unmaking to the very immunity that he holds dear. “His desire to retreat to some original state of purity increasingly becomes a symptom of his own disease. His ruthless militaristic individuality prevents contact with alterity, and it kills him in the end. In I Am Legend, Richard Matheson provocatively subverts scientific and fictional arguments for the centrality of the Self/non-Self recognition paradigm for becoming human” (103). Traditionally, love is thought of as intrinsically unselfish and naturally coupled with clichés of purity and wholeness. But Neville is correct: the vampire no longer needs love because it is subjectively confined. One person loves another; the post-human utopian vampire collective is symbiotic and does not need subjective qualifiers of degree and extent. Neville’s fear of loving again—or of loving Ruth—represents the universally held fear that with the breakdown of subjectivity comes the loss of individual emotions.

In his essay “The Coming Technological Singularity: How to Survive in the Post-Human Era,” Vernor Vinge explains why the modern subject (Neville and perhaps ourselves) cannot imagine themselves joining into alterity: “The problem is not that the Singularity represents simply the passing of humankind from center stage, but that it contradicts some of our most deeply held notions of being.” Once the final Other is gone, we lose the ability to appoint alterity altogether. Utopia awaits, free of the needless excess of emotion and love, pain and sorrow. This utopia, the
world that is waiting to be birthed beyond Neville’s execution, is the most dreadful possible
dystopia for the present subject. Neville feels that the present is enough because, like us, his
imagination is exhausted by the possibility of an endless, sterile vampire future—a future
without a “they.”
VI: Sanguinary Singularities

Ken Gelder poses a simple but provocative question in his preface, asking: “Why Vampires?”—a question that I, too, have contended with on many a restless night. However, simple questions rarely elicit similarly simple answers. I’ve found, hopefully not as a matter of confirmation bias, that the vampire can be found in, or else projected upon, a sprawling network of otherwise asymmetrical cultural and social loci: Someone can be said to “dress like a vampire” just as readily as one might accuse a person of being an “emotional vampire;” vampire bats are often situated as potential vectors of disease in epidemiology studies; even thermodynamic systems resemble vampiric exchanges, leeching or lending energy. The modern vampire, no longer sequestered to the damask halls, crumbling castles, and rotting houses of folklore and horror, has become equally as ubiquitous across literary genres. Anne Rice has inflated the sexual charge of the vampire into full-blown erotica in her *Vampire Chronicles*, while Jim Butcher has worked the vampire trope into his detective series *The Dresden Files*. The vampire is so pervasive that it features in the culture of our children—perhaps the last place a 19th century subject would’ve expected it to turn up—ranging from commodification (Count Chocula) to educational programming (The Count from Sesame Street) and somewhat less-than-educational programming (Stephenie Meyer’s *Twilight* series and L. J. Smith’s *The Vampire Diaries* series). In response to its recent cultural prevalence, Nina Auerbach, in her book *Our Vampires, Ourselves*, claims that the vampire has become overly abundant, saying that “vampirism is wearing down and vampires need a long restorative sleep,” a concern couched largely in her claim that much vampire literature contains antiquated gender roles and reflects hegemonic colonialization (192).
But even as the vampire is liberated from the generic strictures of its old world identity and insinuated upon unorthodox fronts, it retains its reputation as an epitomic Other figure representing the sum of commonly held fears and sublimated desires. Sam George describes the vampire as a multivalent archetypal Other in his foreword to *The Vampire Goes to College: Essays on Teaching with the Undead*: “The vampire shifts shape as the culture [it is] brought to life in itself changes form” (2). Tracing a fundamentally fluid and mutable cultural phenomenon requires viewing the hybrid as a feature of the vampire itself as well as its generic parallels; alterity for the modern vampire—say Sesame Street’s own “Count”—often invites recognition of the subject in the Other as a sounding board for anxieties concerning sexuality, ethnicity, gender, etc. That the modern subject can engage with and revel in (rather than malign) Otherness could be regarded as a chronocentric articulation of personal enlightenment or self-actualization. More realistically, necessity has proven once more to be the mother of invention insofar as the modern subject has been given no option but to confront the approaching critical mass of global connectedness of itself on an interspecies and ecological basis. This is what Haraway means with the phrase “staying with the trouble.” She upholds “thinking with” rather than against or via oppositional binaries: “To think-with is to stay with the naturalcultural multispecies trouble on earth. There are no guarantees, no arrow of time, no Law of History or Science or Nature in such struggles. There is only the relentlessly contingent SF worlding of living and dying, of becoming-with and unbecoming-with, of sympoiesis, and so, just possibly, of multispecies flourishing on earth” (40). Living and dying, as she puts it, has required us to think about, as John Miller says in his essay “Postcolonial Ecocriticism and Victorian Studies,” “…the meaning and ideological function of the term ‘human’ as we reconfigure environmental ethics for a global era of ecological crisis” (486). Trouble, crisis, danger, threat—these concepts are semantically
united by contingency. They have also been used to describe the latent vampire network that has been compounding for centuries; in other words, the vampire is best defined by their inevitability.

My blasphemy against systems of resistance and control systems concerned with rates of cultural flow is the celebration of the vampire as a network-based world of Haraway’s “SFs” (science fiction, string figure, speculative fabulation) that has arrived—or perhaps that has always been. Indeed, the cultural vampire narrative and the literary vampire are, kindred with Haraway and Le Guin’s own beliefs about “good” storytelling, the kind of “finnicky, disruptive” stories that “don’t know how to finish” (125). Forestalling the encroachment of the vampire network—decapitating Carmilla, staking Dracula, drowning The Unnamable Thing with acid, or maiming, demeaning, and attempting to explain away and cure the new vampire order—is ultimately to empower it as an ongoing threat to old, human systems of refusal and denial. Latour’s own dialectic offers an ultimatum for those who believe they can withstand this transformation: “Some are readying themselves to live as Earthbound in the Anthropocene; others decided to remain as Humans in the Holocene” (41). The petulant human child, refusing the call of the world, remains in an imagined insularity.

I.J. Good once speculated about the power of the machine to create a technological singularity: “Let an ultraintelligent machine be defined as a machine that can far surpass all the intellectual activities of any man however clever” (31). His theory of the world’s transformation was that of the technological singularity, that of the replicative rather than the reproductive.45 What he failed to understand is that humankind did not have to be destroyed by its successor but, much as Matheson imagined, could be assimilated or integrated into an intersubjective network

45 See e.g. Philip K. Dick’s Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep and Orson Scott Cards The Memory of Earth
such as that promised by the vampire’s pact. Vinge claims that this move will represent “a throwing away of all the previous rules, perhaps in the blink of an eye, an exponential runaway beyond any hope of control.” What’s more, this change will rapidly accelerate our self-awareness and interconnectedness, moving at the speed of infection: “Developments that before were thought might only happen in ‘a million years’ (if ever) will likely happen in the next century.” Good and evil, vestiges of a bygone era of isolation and discrete subjectivity, will be rejected as the framework of “immutable minds connected by tenuous, low-bandwidth links.” Local area networks of the nascent literary vampire have realized themselves in the internet and telecom systems. Yet as modern humanity worships at the altar of technology, it also sings Haraway’s “Gaia story” and recognizes itself in earthly phenomena. According to Haraway, it is here—hopelessly intermingled between now inscrutable systems of the ancient earth story and the new technological program—that “sympoiesis enlarges and displaces autopoiesis and all other self-forming and self-sustaining system fantasies” (125). Le Guin formulates the “geolinguist” in her short story “The Author of the Acadia Seeds” as a new post-human form of literacy:

“And with them, or after them, may there not come that even bolder adventurer—the first geolinguist, who, ignoring the delicate, transient lyrics of the lichen, will read beneath it the still less communicative, still more passive, wholly atemporal, cold, volcanic, poetry of the rocks; each one a word spoken, how long ago, by the earth itself, in the immense solitude, the immenser community, of space.”

When we, the subjects, see ourselves in the vampire, we also realize the tenuousness, perhaps even arbitrariness, of our perceived separate subjectivity. Neil Degrasse Tyson, in a quote that has become the refrain of amateur cosmologists, offers a reflection on the scale of
intersubjectivity: “We are all connected: To each other, biologically; To the earth, chemically; To the rest of the universe atomically.” The vampire has been misunderstood as alterity, as otherness. It is the symbolic and potent awakening of our long-forgotten “ancient self” through literature, fable, and myth as an inseparable, indivisible unit of a networked world. If Latour is right in saying that “we have never been modern,” I would like to add my own voice to his chorus: We have always been vampires.
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