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**Medievalism in *True Blood***

*Natalie Grinnell*

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Much of the critical literature on HBO's series *True Blood* concentrates on the ways that the series challenges the ideals of American society by exposing its racist, classist and homophobic elements. Such analyses frequently point out the series' use of vampires as oppressed minorities who come forward to challenge the system(s) that have kept them in the dark in the past.<sup>1</sup> It is my contention, however, that this interpretation of *True Blood's* vampires ignores its pervasive medievalism, a medievalism that creates a societal conflict both broader and more disturbing than its

1. A fairly representative view may be found in Christian Knirsch's analysis, "Subversive or Conservative? Vampires and Ideology in the *Twilight* Series and *True Blood*," which concludes that "Traditional hierarchical models of class, race, and gender are undermined in *True Blood*, while they are left largely intact in *Twilight*" (67).

surface embrace of progressive politics.

In “The Tropes of Medievalism,” M. J. Toswell notes that attempts to define medievalism are often inadequate because “medievalism is both a scholarly field of study and a nostalgic impulse to rework or recreate or gesture towards the Middle Ages, sometimes in a careful and precise way but mostly making use of some standard images and motifs that evoke the medieval” (69). These images and motifs, the medieval tropes that one finds sprinkled through popular culture, include the traditional gothic (haunted castles, ruins, ghosts) along with the southern gothic attention to a lost aristocracy and its corrupted chivalry, and the wizards, orcs and dragons inhabiting the landscape of Tolkien-inspired fantasy. *True Blood* embraces all of these, presenting an ecumenical cosmos of fairies and maenads along with its vampires and ghosts, and setting everything in the unsettling landscape of small town Louisiana where modern commercial capitalism imperfectly permeates a feudal society coming to grips with the knowledge of supernatural creatures, including, of course, vampires.

In fact, it is the vampires who, at first glance, don't belong in a medievalist landscape, for vampires are not medieval. I make this assertion knowing how badly many readers and scholars would like to dispute it, either by expanding the traditional definition of *vampire* or combing through manuscripts looking for the creature's predecessors. On the contrary, the vampire is a product of the Enlightenment, a shadow cast by the

rise of scientific method and rationalist thought as filtered through the imaginations of John Polidari, Sheridan Le Fanu and Bram Stoker. Contemporary writers of vampire literature nonetheless provide their characters with medieval origins frequently enough that it is no surprise to find *Forever Knight*'s Nick Knight becoming a vampire during the crusades or to discover that *True Blood*'s Eric began as the son of a Viking king. The idea that vampires *ought* to be medieval appears to stem less from their historical presence than from a series of assumptions and stereotypes about the middle ages that make up much of what might be called modern popular medievalism. An examination of four of the more pervasive tropes will form the basis of this paper: the dichotomous stereotypes of women in the middle ages, the trope of the chivalric knight, medieval religious imagery, and feudal social and political structure.

While medievalists have broadened and enriched scholarly knowledge about medieval women to an enormous extent over the past fifty years, women in medievalist texts have rarely evolved to reflect this new knowledge, and *True Blood*'s attempts in this area, particularly with regard to its female vampires, are failures. In an interesting article about female-authored vampire literature, "Love Bites: Contemporary Women's Vampire Fictions," Gina Wisker asserts that "women vampires connote unlicensed sexuality and excess, and as such, in conventional times, their invocation of both desire and terror leads to a stake in the heart—death as exorcism of all they

represent” (167). Wisker is speaking here of the male-authored gothic texts of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but by this measure, *True Blood*, in spite of its origins in Charlaine Harris’s Southern vampire novels, is a deeply conventional fiction. Most of the female vampires in the series die, particularly those like Tara Thornton, who resist both racial and heteronormative categorization. Only two female vampires survive all seven seasons of *True Blood*: Pamela Swynford De Beaufort—generally referred to simply as “Pam”—and Jessica Hamby, and examination of their characterization reveals a stereotypical gendered medievalism.

Pam, one of the most popular characters in the program, was a prostitute and a madame before she was turned into a vampire by Eric Northman, and her dominant characteristic continues to be her sexuality. Shown in the first season to embrace sadomasochism (invoking another medievalist trope, that of torture),<sup>2</sup> she embraces sex and violence without embarrassment, even evincing a preference in Season 6 for performing sexually for the “scientists” who’ve captured her rather than being psychoanalyzed, and eventually she draws out the doctor’s own sexual desires, forcing him to admit that what he really wants from her is the same thing that everyone else wants (“Fuck the Pain

2. For a recent summary of the misconceptions about torture in the Middle Ages, see Larissa Tracy’s *Torture and Brutality in Medieval Literature: Negotiations of National Identity*, especially pages 1-27.

Away”). Pam’s independence can appear empowering: she rarely tolerates disrespect and refuses to show weakness. Nevertheless, her relationship with Eric is, for most of the series, clearly submissive. She is consistently loyal to him, but he returns that faithfulness by accusing her of betrayal and violently interrogating her (“We’ll Meet Again”). This event does provoke Pam into asking Eric to release her, which dissolves the bond between maker and child, freeing her to disobey his orders—but she never really does so. In the final episode of the series, Pam returns to her origins. Having discovered that the cure to the vampire plague is the blood of Sarah Newlin, Pam holds the human woman captive, selling the right to bite her over and over again to various vampires for \$100,000 a minute (“Thank You”). Pam’s lack of development is clear: she remains one of the dichotomous virgin-whore pairs that define women in much medievalist art and literature. Whatever more complicated feelings she expresses, she returns, again and again, to buying and selling her body and the bodies of others.

Pam’s counterpart is Jessica, a seventeen-year-old, home schooled runaway who in Season 1 is turned into a vampire by Bill Compton, a punishment inflicted on him for killing another vampire. If Pam is an eternal whore, then Jessica is literally a perpetual virgin, raised in a devout Christian home, and returning both physically and psychologically to a state of physical purity at the end of the series. Vampires in *True Blood*, as in most other vampire literature, have remarkable

healing powers, and, in fact, they return each night to the physical state they possessed when they were first transformed. Because Jessica has not had sex as a human being, her sexual explorations as a vampire come with a physical price: her hymen re-heals itself every day, rendering her, over and over, untouched. Jessica's perpetual virginity, of course, is merely physical, since she not only continues her sexual relationship with her first lover, Hoyt, but cheats on him with Jason Stackhouse, and follows that with a relationship with the vampire James Kent. Yet, like Pam, Jessica does not stray far from her initial character. Her innocence having been damaged, she becomes so disgusted with herself at one point that she refuses to feed for ten weeks, in effect fasting to purify herself from the sin of having accidentally killed four fairy girls ("Death Is Not the End"). Her disgust at her own carnality makes her an exact foil for Pam. Jessica claims that she was unable to remain loyal to Hoyt because she was too young and inexperienced when she was made a vampire ("Love Is To Die"), arguing for an emotional transformation and growth on the part of the character. But this growth is circular, for at the end of the series, Jessica is reunited with Hoyt, who has been glamoured to forget their earlier relationship. She literally begins their relationship over again, healed as if it had not been violated, and the two are actually married ("Thank You").

Neither human nor vampire, nor werewolf nor shifter, Sookie Stackhouse is a hybrid, a human with fairy blood and therefore a telepath, and before moving to the next medievalist trope, it will be

useful to examine this more liminal female character. In “Blacks and Whites: Trash and Good Country People in *True Blood*,” Victoria Amador argues that “Sookie embodies the new South’s contradictions—she is lovely, religious, unsophisticated and dutiful; yet her supernatural gifts—she is telepathic—and quick response to and acceptance of a variety of sexual pleasures offers a contemporary, liberal-minded heroine” (168). Initially, Sookie is a refreshing character, particularly in the first episode, where she is eager to meet her first vampire and quick to chastise those who exhibit bigotry (“Strange Love”). But Sookie’s blond hair and tanned limbs recall Stoker’s Lucy, establishing her as the ideal victim / love interest. Stackhouse, as a name, is emblematic of Sookie’s role in the series. An old name, one that extends back to seventeenth-century English immigrants, its literal meaning is less important than its punning connotations, for there’s scarcely a more weighty word in vampire literature than “stake.” As an enemy of vampires, a killer of vampires, Sookie does repeatedly acts as a “stakehouse” finding herself splattered with blood when she kills Debbie Pelt (“And When I Die”) and Bill (“Thank You”). On the other hand, her fairy blood makes her irresistible to vampires, who pursue her relentlessly, as if she’s a blond “steakhouse.”

Sookie’s contradictory relationships with vampires originate in her fairy nature, a plot device which embeds her in medievalist tropes. While her family has fairy blood, Sookie discovers that she’s the first female fairy in her family line, and as a



result, she's the promised bride of her parents' killer, Macklyn Warlow, the only known fairy-turned-vampire. Forced or contracted marriages are common stereotypes about the middle ages, appearing in stories ranging from *Beauty and the Beast* to *Game of Thrones*. Fortunately, Sookie has a fairy grandfather, Naill, who not only gives her the information she needs about her family's history, but joins her brother Jason to defeat Warlow. Nevertheless, Sookie's initial independence is undermined by this medievalist trope, as she, like Pam and Jessica, fades into stereotype: Sookie is there to be rescued, to be freed from an unwanted marriage, and to remain the object of unwanted and often unwise desire from powerful men and women.

If the female vampires are medievalist types, the lead male vampires are even more so, particularly Bill Compton, who suffers what Tison Pugh calls the "ultimately queer myth of southern chivalric manhood" (*Queer Chivalry: Medievalism and the Myth of White Masculinity in Southern Literature* 7). "Vampire Bill," as many of the human inhabitants call him, is a knight from the southern gothic tradition. Because of his extended life span, Bill is not merely a contemporary southern white male who turns to a "glorified vision of the Middle Ages" (Pugh 6) as part of an attempt to romanticize a lost ancestral cause. Much to the delight of the local Descendants of Glorious Dead, Bill is an actual Civil War soldier, albeit, a reluctant one, and he answers their questions with modest gentility ("Sparks Fly Out"). And like a medieval

knight, Bill's trajectory in the series is about establishing his patrimony. He returns to his plantation-style mansion because his last direct descendent has died, and he spends much of the series restoring it to its former glory, eventually arranging for his vampire child Jessica to inhabit it after his death ("Thank You"). Bounded by a cemetery on one side, this mansion functions through most of the series as a site of violence and death, even as Bill attempts to bond with his descendants and play a paternalistic role in the fate of Bon Temps.

One might argue that *True Blood* exposes the performance of southern chivalric masculinity as a hollow ritual intended to conceal the brutality of white male power, for Bill's courtship of Sookie Stackhouse is revealed to be a deliberate seduction, ordered by the Queen of Louisiana, Sophie-Anne, who needs information about rumored fairies in Bon Temps ("Evil Is Going On"). Moreover, behind his gentile façade, he can be as brutal as any other vampire, sentencing his enemies to death, refusing to rescue Sookie's friend Tara, and even arranging for Sookie to be beaten badly enough that she will drink his blood to recover, creating a psychic bond between them. Certainly, this revelation severs the relationship between Sookie and Bill, but I would argue that instead of simply puncturing the image of southern gentility, Bill's evolution peels back the southern gothic layer to reveal more medievalism, this time in the form of the sacred bond between knight and monarch. Not only is Bill perfectly chivalric in following his monarch's orders, but his

loyalty eventually results in his ascending to the throne himself, becoming King of Louisiana, and, later, the avatar of the vampires' goddess, Lilith. Moreover, like Pam and Jessica, Bill's character arc is actually a circle, and he dies to free Sookie and his descendants in *Bon Temps*, performing the sacrifice that he should have made a hundred years earlier and joining, at last, the glorious dead.<sup>3</sup>

Monarchical government is not specifically medieval, of course, but its treatment in *True Blood* is part of a set of feudal social hierarchies that create a sinister counterpoint to the human American democratic government. In "Dialectic of Fear," Franco Moretti has argued that "The literature of terror is born precisely *out of the terror of a split society*, and out of the desire to heal it" (83), an interpretation of vampire literature that reaches back to Stoker's *Dracula*, in which the advancements of the capitalist British empire are strongly contrasted with the primitive, superstitious Eastern culture Transylvania (26-33). Near the beginning of the novel, the Count himself regales Harker with oddly nostalgic stories of the bloody medieval past (52-53). Yet in many ways, *Dracula* is far less medieval than *True Blood's* vampires. Moretti points out that Count Dracula is an aristocrat only in a manner of speaking. *Dracula*

3. Eric Northman, as mentioned above, is no knight. Instead, he embodies the medievalist trope of the pagan warrior, a former Viking who is not burdened by Bill's chivalric ideals. Instead, Eric, like the medieval warriors with whom he's associated, is driven by kinship connections.

lacks precisely what makes a man “noble”: servants. Dracula stoops to driving the carriage, cooking the meals, making the beds, and cleaning the castle. Dracula also lacks the aristocrat’s conspicuous consumption: he does not eat, he does not drink, he does not make love, he does not like showy clothes, he does not go to the theatre and he does not go hunting; he does not hold receptions and does not build stately homes (90).

Bill Compton, Eric Northman and the other vampires of *True Blood*, in contrast, not only build and rebuild mansions, but exhibit an enthusiasm for exhibition that rivals that of any ancient king. Carolina Ruddell and Bridget Cherry provide a succinct description of the residences of the powerful vampires on *True Blood*:

Scenes set in Sophie-Anne’s house are usually set at night, but the amount of light negates the darkness. The overall impression is that of a Malibu-style residence that invites rather than blocks out light. This complements Russell Edgington’s antebellum residence. Beautifully maintained, filled with ancient and rare antiques, decorated in a predominantly cream and faded pastel palette, again with large crystal chandeliers reflecting the light, Russell’s house is reminiscent of an aristocratic European dwelling signifying the height of wealth and power. (“More Than Cold and Heartless: The Southern Gothic Milieu of *True Blood*” 46)

No drafty, ruined castles for these vampires; they even abandon the dark, replicating an indoor version of sunny splendor in defiance of nature itself. Here is a modern noble class, using contemporary technology to create their own fantasy worlds. What remains of gothic architecture is either restored—Bill’s mansion—or commercialized, in a camp version of the late twentieth century goth subculture. In the early seasons of the program, Eric spends much of his time at his vampire-themed club, Fangtasia, lounging on a literal throne, where humans approach him to offer their blood in a medievalist parody of a monarch hearing the appeals of his subjects (“Escape from Dragon House”). At this point in the story, Eric holds the position of *sheriff*, a medieval rank—the shire’s reeve—that predates the Norman Conquest, embedding himself in a feudal hierarchy of ranked nobility that extends up to his queen. The fact that the humans who enter this space treat him as a lord when, technically, they are not even members of the hierarchy to which he belongs, reveals much about the relationship between human and vampire. Supposedly, the United States government is considering a Vampire Rights Amendment, which would end the vampire curfew, granting them equal rights and citizenship under the law (“Strange Love”), but all along, the vampires operate within an entirely different, medievalist political structure, one that extends from the Vampire Authority at the top, through its territorial monarchs and magisters, down to the sheriffs and those who work for them.

It is this second political structure that undermines the apparent disruption of social hierarchy in the television show. Simone Knewitz writes that “It is one of the ironies of the show that the relations between humans and vampires are reciprocal rather than hierarchical, most forcefully suggested by the reverse consumption of vampire blood by humans” (“God Hates Fangs? Morality, Ideology, and the Domesticated Vampire in American Culture” 131), but this biological exchange does not create equality, even if it does recall and challenge southern racist ideology.<sup>4</sup> Even those vampires, such as Godric (“Timebomb”), who are sincere about peaceful coexistence with human beings, seem to be imagining not a contemporary, diverse society of equals, but an updated king’s body analogy, in which each member of society is organically connected to all of the others—but one with little social mobility and no tolerance for rebellion. The vampires themselves are brutal to one another, not only freely engaging in torture and execution, but in blackmail, forced marriages, rape and slavery. In “The Homosexual Vampire as a Metaphor for...The Homosexual Vampire?: *True Blood* Homonormativity and Assimilation,” Darren Elliott-Smith argues that “Vampire subculture is shown to be as judgmental, as bigoted and as

4. As Amador notes, this exchange of blood “allows for consanguinity between races and classes which would have been forbidden by miscegenation laws and social class limitation well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century in some southern states” (173).

stratified as that of their human counterparts: dominating, oppressing or preying upon other uncanny species such as werewolves, shapeshifters and fairies, whilst basing their society on a hierarchy of kings, queens, sheriffs and magisters" (147-148). Interpreting *True Blood's* vampires, then, as a metaphor for members of the LGBTQI community—in spite of the punning sign, "God Hates Fangs," in the first episode ("Strange Love")—is deeply disturbing, not because the vampires are as violent and imperfect as human beings, but because they are so much more so, and because they function within a medievalist social structure that is inherently unequal. In other words, the medievalism of the program undermines its superficially progressive politics. And Knewitz's observation that "Vampires are depicted as an Other which can never fully assimilate, living in a society with entirely different rules than human society" ("God Hates Fangs? Morality, Ideology, and the Domesticated Vampire in American Culture"132) rings true for the first six seasons of the program, until, in an odd twist, the vampires who survive the plague are indeed assimilated into human culture.

That human culture, at least in the small town setting of Bon Temps, is distinctly blue collar and working class. The inhabitants are waitresses and bartenders, police officers and prostitutes, drug dealers and road workers. Bon Temps has a mayor, but not a competent one, and doctors and lawyers seem to reside only in larger cities. Nor are these jobs romanticized. As Tara McPherson points out, "the show's engagement with labor is firmly rooted

in the working class and in a pronounced resistance to performing unfulfilling labor. Work at Mulatte's is certainly not rewarding. The waitresses are harried, at risk, poorly paid, harassed. They *die* at work...The series locates the risks and strains of labor as deadening and deadly" ("Revamping the South: Thoughts on Labor, Relationality, and Southern Representation" 347). The town's most adaptable worker, Lafayette, is also in the most hazardous position. A cook, laborer for hire, and drug dealer, Lafayette only appears to be an independent contractor, hustling a living on his own terms. His defiance of social norms—he is an openly gay, black man who wears eye shadow to work, but uses his strong, powerful body at times for traditionally masculine physical labor—is only successful among the human population. When he discovers how deadly and dangerous it is to sell V, vampire blood, to humans, he attempts to stop, but is easily blackmailed into continuing the business by the local vampire authorities ("Beyond Here Lies Nothin"). Lafayette, like the other humans in Bon Temps, is only free to go about his life, to live and work, provided doing so does not interfere with the agenda of the vampire government. The "spectrum of social class positions within vampire society ranging from royalty to bartenders" ("*True Blood*, Sex and Online Fan Culture," 50) identified by Emily Brick is really only multiple rankings in a noble hierarchy, the differences between a king, a duke and a knight. The lowest ranked vampire is still more highly ranked in this system than the most elevated human being, a point brought home



forcefully to Bill Compton when, in a strange form of *wergild*, he is ordered by the vampire tribunal to replace the vampire he kills to protect Sookie by transforming Jessica against his (and her) will ("I Don't Wanna Know").

Of course, this transformation, the very fact that vampires reproduce by draining and refilling members of the peasant class, means that there is a form of social mobility in *True Blood*: these waitresses or cops who die at work may be reborn into the aristocracy of vampirism. This is part of the fantasy, part of the horror, in the vampires coming out of the closet. Jerrold E. Hogle notes that "Gothic fictions since Walpole have most often been about aspiring but middling, or sometimes upper middle-class, white people caught between the attractions or terrors of a past once controlled by overweening aristocrats or priests (or figures with such aspirations) and forces of change that would reject such a past yet still remain held by aspect of it (including desires for aristocratic or superhuman powers)" (*The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction* 3). Some human beings in *True Blood* flirt with destruction by becoming "fangbangers," willing blood donors to the vampires. Others, like Eric's employee Ginger, have a desperate fascination and want to earn the chance to rise, to become part of this newly revealed nobility, even if it means betraying human culture or destroying human lives ("Love Is to Die").

The exception, once again, is Sookie, who never evinces the slightest desire to become a vampire. As not only a fairy, but a fairy princess,

Sookie is both royalty and a U.S. citizen. In fact, Warlow implies that they are members of the highest royalty, since he is disgusted by his vampire nature and even more so by Sookie's "friends of low birth" among the human population ("Radioactive"). Unlike the other human beings in the show, Sookie dislikes her supernatural powers and spends most of the series attempting to rid herself of them. But her fairy telepathy makes it difficult for her to fit into human society. Hearing everyone's thoughts is a torment, and the suspicion that she can do so causes many of the other human residents of Bon Temps, even her own parents, to think of her as a freak. Sookie eventually discovers that she has the ability to rid herself of her fairy abilities by focusing all of her powers into one supernatural bomb and flinging it at an enemy, a weapon that she can only use once. But social mobility in *True Blood* only works in one direction. A human might, under the right circumstances, become a vampire, but the supernatural set does not lower itself to become merely human. When Bill Compton asks Sookie to use her final weapon on him, allowing him to die and join his lost wife and children, she finds that she is unable to make that decision. Instead of becoming fully human, she simply stakes Bill instead ("Thank You").

A final medievalist trope in *True Blood* that deserves some attention is that of religion. When writing about the differences between gothic vampire tales and twentieth century books and films, William Hughes observes that "quite simply, God and theological morality do not concern the

modern vampire” (“Fictional Vampires in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries” 151), and in most cases, it would be difficult to disagree. Anne Rice’s vampire series approaches discussions of the afterlife, but backs away, leaving both the characters and the reader with mere existential doubt (*Queen of the Damned*, Chapter 8, Part 3). Another example is the turn-of-the-century television series, *Buffy, the Vampire Slayer*, which contains demons and gods, and whose hero, Buffy, rises from the dead twice and actually spends time in heaven, but when asked about God claims not to know whether or not he exists. Even Stephanie Meyer’s *Twilight*, with its repeated Mormon symbolism, stops short of actually asserting a particular set of religious beliefs for its vampires.

*True Blood*, however, is different. Religion plays an integral role in the program from its beginning. The highly regarded opening trailer, with its “I Wanna Do Bad Things” cover song, contains flickering images of church services, and it ends with a midnight baptism in a shallow pond or swamp, scenes interspersed with those of humans dancing, eating and having sex, presenting both a stereotypical view of life in the American South, and a summary of human passion and carnality among the working classes. In the first four seasons, the Vampire Authority struggles to fulfill its plan for integration and assimilation, and in these stories, human religion, in the form of the Fellowship of the Sun, an anti-vampire church or the local coven, bent on vengeance, is presented as hostile to the Authority’s goals, filled with violence and anger.

In Season 5, however, everything changes, for vampires, too, have a religion, though, like humans, they vary in how devout they are. The Authority is undermined by a passionate vampire sect called the Sanguinistas, who reject integration, and instead hold to a literal reading of the vampires' sacred book, which commands them to treat humans as prey, not equals, in order to earn the second coming of their goddess, Lilith. The religious war that plays out in this season has powerful medievalist imagery: the vampires have a set of relics, displayed as if in a medieval cathedral, that include the sacred blood of Lilith herself, and drinking even a few drops of this blood results in mystical visits from the goddess. The Authority tortures suspected members of the Sanguinistas, like Eric's sister Nora, by injecting them with silver, executing those whom they discover. But the devout destroy the head of the Authority, join with Russell, and attempt to convert hostile or neutral vampires by force-feeding them drops of the sacred blood.

It is, of course, a truth that fundamentalism is a modern, not a medieval phenomenon, but like torture, medievalist texts, beginning with Mark Twain's *Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, tend to portray the middle ages as filled with either pagan polytheists or blindly superstitious followers of an angry, implacable church. *True Blood* draws on modern fundamentalism in its portrayal of human religion, but evokes the medieval for its vampires, creating a paradoxical conflict between the two societies. The oppressed minority subjected to hostile religious sermons and physical attack by

human bigots becomes, in the last three seasons of *True Blood*, a dark parody of the medieval church that culminates in a literal resurrection when Bill Compton drinks the entire vial of sacred blood, dissolves into a puddle of bloody goo, and then reforms as an avatar of the goddess ("Save Yourself").

The end of this medievalist culture comes, appropriately enough, with a plague. A blood-borne disease, transmitted both sexually and through drink, Hep-V is an obvious metaphor for HIV—except, of course, that is an unnatural plague, a genetically engineered virus based on Hepatitis-D. Human scientists spread the plague by adding it to TruBlood, the artificial substance that allows vampires to come out to the public. Of course, similar rumors still abound about HIV, and one could argue that the plague repositions the vampires as an afflicted minority group. On the other hand, the Black Death is often portrayed in popular culture as bringing about the "end" of the Middle Ages by granting peasants more freedom to demand better pay and working conditions. The vampires, in any case, do not end as victims. In addition to destroying the scientists who create the plague, the last episode of *True Blood* brings the conflict between the medieval and the modern to a strange and uncomfortable conclusion. Ananya Mukherjea notes that "A hallmark of American Gothic is the placement of the (moral) monsters amongst the human characters, thus denying the reader the comfort of knowing the horror is not real" ("Mad, Bad, and Delectable to Know: *True Blood*'s

Paranormal Men and Gothic Romance” 109), but the conclusion of *True Blood* is uncomfortably realistic, as modern fears of corporate evil displace the terrors of creatures of the night. The most medieval of the vampires, Eric and Pam, gain control of the plague's true cure, but sell it only privately. Publicly, they market New Blood, which protects vampires against Hep-V, but only temporarily, meaning that they must continue to drink it—and therefore enrich Eric and Pam— indefinitely. These two vampires become capitalist successes, Eric dressed in a bad suit and Pam with a politician's wife's haircut, ringing in the opening bell on the New York Stock Exchange (“Thank You”). They've defeated the evil Japanese conglomerate that would have made slaves of them by becoming plastic corporate dolls themselves, keeping the true cure for the plague chained in a basement. It is an image in which “Vampirism itself threatens to become as mundane as human society” (Elliot-Smith 150).

Meanwhile, in *Bon Temps*, humans and vampires, including a nursery full of babies, gather around a long table for a feast, eating flesh or drinking New Blood. It's a vision of harmony and love that does not quite erase the preceding scene of Sookie standing on Bill's grave, splattered in his blood, having "killed" the final medievalist character. The victims and the villains become indistinguishable, and the medieval is firmly absorbed into the modern. It is as if Chaucer's pilgrims returned to the Tabard Inn for their final

feast at last, but only after having had to murder the Knight to get there.

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