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Homonormativity and the Contemporary Vampire

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Cover Page Footnote

Christine Prevas received an MPhil in English Studies: Criticism and Culture at the University of Cambridge, and a Bachelor of Arts in English and Drama from Kenyon College. Their research focuses on queer and transgender theory in genre fiction and popular culture. This paper was presented in part at the International Vampire Film and Arts Festival in Sighișoara, Romania in June of 2018.

**Homonormativity and the Contemporary
Vampire**

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*“Not everyone wants to dress
up and play human, Bill.”
— True Blood, “Mine”*

“What if I’m not the hero?” Robert Pattinson intones, stone-faced, early on in the 2008 film *Twilight* as Edward Cullen, the eternally teen-aged vampire heartthrob. “What if I’m the bad guy?” The question, while once irrelevant to the vampire — a monster whose only motives were drinking human blood and producing more of their kind — has become a cultural touchstone, the primary concern against which the vampire is defined. The past two decades have seen a shift in the portrayal of vampires. No longer are the vampires of popular culture horror movie monsters, unwillingly transforming humans and sucking their blood until the hero stakes them through the heart and good triumphs over evil. No longer are they the brooding

antiheroes of vampire-centric dramas like Anne Rice's *The Vampire Chronicles*. Instead, these contemporary vampires are, despite Edward Cullen's protestations, heroes, aligning themselves with human protagonists in spite of the monstrous circumstances in which they have found themselves, through bad luck, misfortune, or regrettable mistakes. The reign of the contemporary vampire, however, is not just a curious shift in the cultural landscape, but a specific trend which reflects the precarious position of queerness in contemporary society — a trend made explicit by the narrative focus on the morality of sex and the traditional nuclear family. The contemporary vampire stands at a crossroads which aligns itself with the complicated position queer communities face due to the timbre of political debates on marriage equality and homophobic discrimination.

I define the contemporary vampire, here, as a vampire who abstains from — or, attempts to abstain from — drinking human blood. Spike and Angel of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* who, in fits and starts, choose to drink from blood bags rather than attack humans, are one of the earliest examples of this trope, but it finds its footing most firmly in the first season of the HBO series *True Blood* — named after the synthetic bottled beverage “TruBlood,” the vampire equivalent of a meal replacement shake — and in the Cullen family of Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* saga, who hunt animals, rather than humans, for blood. This abstinence from human blood is the form in which the contemporary vampire separates itself from its monstrous

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predecessors, the departure which allows characters such as Edward Cullen to become heroes and love interests to their human counterparts. Though the act of abstaining from human blood requires constant, careful self-regulation and often causes great pain or displeasure, it has come to be expected of vampires, a prerequisite for their inclusion in contemporary fiction as likeable or sympathetic characters. On a narrative level, it is only logical: it is difficult for a character to be seen as a good person if they regularly kill or injure human beings. However, with an eye towards the long tradition of vampire literature which precedes it, this trope reveals the concerning connection between the sublimation of desire for human blood and a repression of other “perverse” desires.

In vampire literature, the physical act of drinking blood is a queer sex act, imbued with homoeroticism which often verges on pornographic. In Anne Rice’s *Interview with the Vampire*, for instance, when Lestat feeds he is described as “sucking hard, his own back arched and rigid, his body rocking back and forth . . . his long moans rising and falling in time with the slow rocking” until he, in essence, orgasms: “his whole body tensed . . . And then he slowly sank to the floor . . . ‘Ah... God...’ he whispered, his head back, his lids half-mast” (Rice 135). Even in Stoker’s *Dracula*, the mouth of the vampire is a queer erogenous zone, simultaneously both yonic and phallic with its red, voluptuous lips and hard, penetrating white bone, which, as Christopher Craft has noted, “fuses and confuses . . . the gender-based categories of the

penetrating and the receptive” (Craft 109). Whether the vampire’s victims are male or female, they are subject to a queering of the sexual act by encountering an organ that is simultaneously mouth, vagina, phallus, and even possibly anus, with the “rank,” nausea-inducing scent of Dracula’s breath (Stoker 24). As such, abstinence from the act of drinking human blood becomes abstinence from the queer sexuality to which the vampire is historically connected. A rejection of that which makes the vampire monstrous — drinking blood — is also a rejection of that which the vampire has long represented: the omnipresent threat of repressed queer desire.

The “abstinent” vampires of contemporary TV and fiction — most prominent in “paranormal teen romances” — eschew their morally dubious vampiric nature in favor of an arguably harmless alternative. In doing so, they are permitted to be heroes: because they do not kill or wound humans, the fact that they are vampires no longer condemns them to being villains. They are defined not by their identity, but by their behavior. And thus, in true “love the sinner, hate the sin” fashion, the abstinent vampire is worthy of love when removed from the enactment of queer sex, when resisting the temptation of queer desire. It is no coincidence that these abstinent vampires are also frequently defined by an engagement in monogamous sex with heterosexual love interests, an act which epitomizes the concerted effort to distance “good” vampires from queer sex acts and queer desire altogether.

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The existence of moral redemption for vampires draws a defined line between “good vampires” and “bad vampires” — those who don’t kill humans, and those who do, explicitly marked as heroes and villains respectively. The act of drinking human blood becomes a defining marker of moral character, an unforgivable act precisely because it is shown to no longer be necessary. This dichotomy, read alongside the queerness of blood-sucking, echoes a similar cultural distinction: the “good gay” who, according to Michael Warner, “would not challenge the norms of straight culture, who would not flaunt their sexuality, and who would not insist on living differently from ordinary folk,” as well as its shadow, the “bad queer,” “who has sex, who talks about it, and who builds with other queers a way of life that ordinary folk do not understand or control” (Warner 131).

The contemporary vampire story, then, is consumed by its concerns about queer desire and queer ways of life; its narrative aims become entangled with a cultural necessitation of reaffirming the monogamous, nuclear family and the preeminence of reproductive sex and the sublimation of queer desire. It betrays a cultural obsession with assimilation and the maintenance of traditional values; in the wake of changing political tides with regards to the LGBTQ community, it epitomizes a culture of homonormativity¹ which

¹ Homonormativity is defined by Lisa Duggan as “a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions, but upholds and sustains them, while

prioritizes, to the point of exclusion, “the most assimilated, gender-appropriate, politically mainstream portions of the gay population” (Duggan 44). Both HBO’s *True Blood* and Stephenie Meyer’s *Twilight* saga, written against the background of the fight for marriage equality in America, epitomize the dichotomy of good vampire/bad vampire, or good gay/bad queer: both feature a vampire who does not want to be a vampire, and whose rejection of those acts which traditionally define vampirism permits them to be the “hero.” In doing so, both champion the sublimation of queer desire, and the reaffirmation of traditional patriarchal family structures by providing their “heroes,” their good vampires, with the chance to reject vampirism and queer desire all at once, and to be rewarded for it with heterosexual love interests, traditional families, and happy endings.

Mr. Mainstream

Set two years after vampires have “come out of the coffin,” revealing their existence to human society at large, *True Blood* is concerned from its inception with assimilation into human society. In the opening scene of the show, a TV screen displays an interview with Nan Flanagan — a representative of the “American Vampire League” — on a talk

promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored on domesticity and consumption” (Duggan 50).

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show; Nan is a pretty, white, affluent-looking blonde woman whose words emphasize a desire to be seen as normal: “We’re citizens, we pay taxes, we deserve basic civil rights just like everyone else . . . We just want to be part of mainstream society” (“Strange Love”).

Despite the heavy-handed parallels between *True Blood*’s vampires and the LGBTQ community — a sign in the show’s opening credits proudly declares “God Hates Fangs,” and the references only get less subtle from there — the show’s focus still centers on the heterosexual romance of a vampire, Bill Compton, and a mortal waitress, Sookie Stackhouse. Their courtship is laden with old-fashioned Southern chivalry, far removed from the queer sexuality of the vampire. Bill is “an old-school Southern gent” (Tyree 32) who lived his formative, pre-vampire years as a Confederate soldier in the war-torn South. He is a highly traditional figure in everything but his vampirism; even the non-traditional fact of his vampirism is nearly negated due to the fact that Bill is, as *True Blood*’s vampires call it, “mainstreaming.” He is, as the other vampires derisively observe, “Mr. Mainstream” (“Mine”): he does his best to blend into human society, drinking “TruBlood” instead of actual human blood and spending his evenings in the local bar in the town of Bon Temps instead of at Fangtasia, the vampire bar in the nearby city of Shreveport. He does not kill, he has never turned a human being into a vampire, and he does not drink human blood without consent; he is appropriately ashamed of his fangs. He is constantly, consciously

aware of the fact that he is “not human,” and yet, because of his attempts to mainstream, he is, in Sookie’s words, not “a very good vampire” either (“The First Taste”). Bill’s mainstreaming is related directly to his place as the hero of a heterosexual love story: he earns his heroism by denying his vampiric instincts and by placing himself in a safely heterosexual relationship.

Not all of the vampires in *True Blood* pursue heterosexual relationships; in fact, there are several explicitly homosexual or bisexual vampires. However, most of these queer vampires are not “mainstreaming” — they are not the vampires who drink TruBlood and want to be “just like everyone else.” Instead, these vampires are as explicitly and unabashedly evil as they are queer. As Michelle Goldberg writes in a review of the show, “most of the vampires we meet are arrogant, perverse, and cruel—everything the far right believes gays to be” (Goldberg). Violent, bloodthirsty and queer, the vampires who refuse to mainstream suffer none of the pangs of shame that Bill does regarding their status as evil, over-sexed monsters. In fact, they embrace their sexualized monstrosity. Among these vampires is Malcolm Beaumarchais — a vicious bisexual vampire who comes to Bon Temps with the hope of luring Bill into his “nest.” He is a deliberate foil to Bill’s moral and sexual integrity.

Malcolm’s nest consists of three vampires: Malcolm himself; a bisexual African American woman named Diane; and a bald, tattooed man named Liam. The three of them share two “fangbangers,” humans who let vampires feed from

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them in exchange for sex: a woman and a gay man. This queer grouping, polyamorous and bisexual, enforces not only the vampires' disdain for living in groups which imitate heterosexual family dynamics, but is also regarded as directly responsible for their moral turpitude:

Sookie: They're all so—

Bill: Evil. Yes, they are. They share a nest, and when vampires live in nests they become cruel, more vicious . . . Whereas vampires such as I, who live alone, are much more likely to hang onto some semblance of our former humanity. ("Mine")

The morally questionable, non-monogamous arrangement of vampires living together in queer groupings is explicitly responsible for an enhancement and exaggeration of their monstrous behavior. And Bill, hanging on so tightly to his former humanity, is painted in contrast as their morally upstanding opposite. His sexual and vampiric abstinence, in living alone, is implicated in a kind of moral victory over vampires who allow themselves to be monsters.

More broadly, indulgence in perverse sexual pleasure, in the world of *True Blood*, is directly connected to the consumption of blood — whether through the vampire's sexualized act of drinking blood, or through human consumption of vampire blood, which is classed as a drug called "V," and is notable for its strong, Viagra-like aphrodisiac effects. Because of the transactional relationship between vampires and fangbangers, the exchange of blood is nearly always connected to sexual acts, and

certainly Malcolm, Liam, and Diane engage in sexual acts with both their fangbangers and with each other. The nest's gratifications of lust are markedly non-reproductive: the one on-screen instance of sex within the nest involves Liam receiving oral sex from the female fangbanger, and most of the other implied acts are homosexual in nature. Further, the series makes clear that vampires who live in nests are driven by pure animal lust and desire, and not by "higher" drives such as love. When Bill, on the other hand, has sex with Sookie, it is because he loves her, and the two have vaginal intercourse — if not directly reproductive, then at least approximating the act. Even though Bill drinks her blood while they have sex, she is the only mortal whose blood he drinks, and the heterosexual monogamy of their relationship legitimates the act. It is not merely lust, but something higher and more admirable than the acts in which the nest engage. The sublimation of sexual desire into something higher — love — sets apart "mainstreaming" vampires from the others, and this sublimation is directly signified through monogamy.

Even Eddie — a character doubly closeted in his position as a "mainstreaming" gay vampire — engages in sexual acts with only one person, a queer black sex worker, drug dealer, and line cook named Lafayette. Though Eddie has sex with a man, his explicit desire for love and monogamy from Lafayette marks their sex as less depraved than the nest's perverse, polyamorous acts of lust. Eddie tries his best to confirm that these sexual acts are more than just acts of lust, asking, "You like me,

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don't you Lafayette? . . . I'd hate to think it's just business for you when you come over," to which Lafayette responds, "You think I fool around with all my business associates?", seemingly confirming in Eddie's mind the monogamy of their relationship. Eddie's sexual acts — which occur completely offscreen — are far less perverse than the sexual acts of Malcolm, Liam, or Dianne; when Lafayette commands Eddie to show him "what a dirty old vampire you is," Eddie responds with a surprisingly chaste kiss before the scene fades to black ("The Fourth Man in the Fire"). The preference given to monogamy and sex as a manifestation of love rather than mere physical pleasure typifies the perception that, as Valerie Lehr articulates, "ideologically, monogamy is the preferable form of human sexual relationship because within a monogamous relationship human beings learn to control their desires and direct their energy into useful social purposes" (Lehr 57). What is disagreeable about queer and vampiric sex is not just its perversity, but its indulgence in sexual gratification, its lack of "control." The sublimation of base sexual desire into the higher emotion of love is presented as the "correct" way of handling desire, just as the assimilation into human norms by drinking "TruBlood" rather than human blood is the "correct" way of handling vampirism. Sexual desire outside of love-driven and preferably heterosexual monogamy is, in contrast, condemned as a direct source of evil.

Through Malcolm, Diane, and Liam, *True Blood* does acknowledge the self-detrimental

hypocrisy of trying to achieve acceptance by changing yourself; they articulate a specific set of issues with Bill's desire to assimilate:

Diane: Not everyone wants to dress up and play human, Bill.

Liam: Yeah. Not everyone wants to live off that Japanese shit they call "blood" either. As if we could.

Bill: We have to moderate our behavior now that we're out in the open.

Malcolm: Not everybody thinks that was such a great idea. And not everybody plans to toe the party line. Honey, if we can't kill people, what's the point of being a vampire? ("Mine")

For them, it is not worth living a half-life, hidden, restricting themselves to a synthetic diet and engaging in the kind of self-policing that Bill must undergo every moment of every day, just for the sake of an attempt at conditional equality. They articulate the complicated problems that lie behind homonormative strategies of achieving limited equality, nearly bringing to light the consequences of a politics based on assimilation. However, *True Blood* does not give heed to Malcolm, Liam, and Diane: it slaughters them. First, they are exposed by one of their fangbangers to Hepatitis D — a strain of Hepatitis which the show establishes will weaken vampires, allowing them to be restrained and

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drained of their own blood.² Then, the three are killed in a fire set by a group of white, hyper-masculine men who evoke the conventional image of perpetrators of homophobic hate crimes. Bill's parting words to them when he leaves them in their house to return to Sookie — "If you insist on flaunting your ways in front of mortals, there will be consequences" ("Mine") — ring not only with his own unspoken threat, but with the suggestion that because they refuse to assimilate into human society, they deserve the gruesome end they meet.

J. M. Tyree makes note of the "unusual kind of horror" in *True Blood* that is "inflicted *on* and not by vampires" (Tyree 34). This violence, such as the "lynch mob" who go after and burn Malcolm's nest, and the kidnapping and violent murder of Eddie by two V addicts, are as horrific as any of the acts committed by vampires in the series. Tyree implies, through these, that vampires are the victims of the human/vampire struggles in *True Blood* just as much as humans are; that, in fact, perhaps the vampires are more sympathetic than the humans are. However, no one is upset over the deaths of Malcolm and his nest, and once it is revealed that Bill was not among them when the house was burned, no one — not even the viewer — is expected to care. Similarly, Eddie's kidnapping and death may create a sympathetic character, but Eddie is not the same breed of vampire as the nest; he is

² Hepatitis D, propagated by the promiscuous and unsafe exchange of bodily fluids, also explicitly echoes the history of HIV within gay communities.

yet another “good gay” meeting his tragic but unavoidable end. The violence inflicted on vampires serves less as a way of creating sympathy, and more as a means of putting the dangerous Other in its place. After all, the show is quite clear in its message that, with vampires who refuse to mainstream are around, no one is safe.

True Blood's resentment of the queer, polyamorous lifestyle of its evil vampires stems from a larger concern: its conservative nostalgia for the traditional family in a world in which that family can no longer exist. In the troubled town of Bon Temps, no one has typical families. Sookie and her brother Jason were raised by their grandmother after their parents died; Sookie's best friend, Tara, has an abusive alcoholic mother and no father to speak of; even Sookie's coworker Arlene parents her two children with a man to whom she is not married, and who is eventually revealed to be a serial killer. These troubled family dynamics are concentrated in the figure of the vampire, and in Bill's desire for the family structure he once had. In looking at an old picture from before he left to fight in the Civil War, Bill remembers the family he once had:

Bill: My human life ended before I had the chance to come back home.

Mayor Norris: But you became a vampire after that, right? Couldn't you go back to your family then?

Bill: No, that wouldn't have been possible. (“Sparks Fly Out”)

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Bill's traditional family — a wife and two children — is located in the nineteenth-century past; he is removed from it by his vampirism and by a temporal dislocation from the world in which he belongs. In the twenty-first century, this traditional family cannot be regained. Bill became a vampire, the show reveals, during a non-consensual encounter in which a vampire woman attempted to seduce him and, rejected, attacked him, feeding from him and then forcing him to feed from her. The exchange is explicitly sexual, as she straddles him and moans, "Take me in you, feel me in you." However, it is also motivated by Bill's love for his family: he only drinks when she tells him, "Do you wish to see your family again? Your wife, your children?" He returns to his family, but she tells him, "You know you can never enter. Do you wish to see them grow old? Grow feeble and die, while you remain the same, year after year? . . . They are as good as dead" ("Sparks Fly Out"). Bill sheds a single tear of blood as he looks on at his family and then turns to leave them, knowing one thing: the family is, and forever will be, lost to him. Vampirism is responsible for the destruction of not only Bill's personal family, but the ideal of the traditional family as such, and, by proxy, queerness is presented as a *prima facie* cause for the corruption of the traditional family. Bill's nostalgia over the picture of his wife and children is figured as the nostalgia of an anxious culture in which the heteronormative nuclear family is no longer able to call itself the only valid structure for living arrangements.

A Lion in Lamb's Clothing

These two concerns — of the contrast between sexual gratification and love, and of the rapidly dissolving ideal of the traditional heterosexual family — provide a similar thematic cornerstone for Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* saga. In *Twilight*, heterosexual love and the nuclear family are the primary goals of most, if not all, of the characters considered "good." Meyer's strict distinction between the "good" vampires — self-regulating, abstinent, and heterosexual — and "bad" vampires — uncontrolled and uncontrollably queer — reifies much of what is seen in *True Blood*. However, in *Twilight*, these two concerns do not only coexist: they are directly related to one another, as the heterosexual family becomes a reward for the sublimation of sexual and queer desire.

Twilight emphasizes the distinction between "good vampires" and "bad vampires" early on when, while researching vampires online to discover the truth about Edward Cullen and his family, Bella discovers a specific strain of "good vampires" — "*Stregoni benefici: An Italian vampire, said to be on the side of goodness, and a mortal enemy of all evil vampires.*" "It was a relief," she thinks, "that one small entry, the one myth among hundreds that claimed the existence of good vampires" (Meyer, *Twilight* 135). The Cullens are the epitome of these "good vampires": as Edward explains to Bella, "just because we've been... dealt a certain hand... it doesn't mean that we can't choose to rise above — to conquer the boundaries of a destiny that none of us wanted. To try to retain

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whatever essential humanity we can” (307). They abstain from human blood, instead choosing a “vegetarian” (188) lifestyle of feeding only on animals — and even then, they are “careful not to impact the environment with injudicious hunting” (215); almost a parody of self-regulating neoliberalism, not only do they refrain from drinking blood, but they even engage in eco-friendly hunting practices. They do not kill and they do not turn humans into vampires except when it is absolutely necessary. They are humane monsters — humane enough to be very nearly human. In fact, they are completely, idyllically domestic and non-threatening.

In contrast, those vampires in the series who do feed on human blood are, more often than not, “savage” (291), nomadic creatures. While the Cullen family is just that — a family, with a beautiful and permanent house, dutifully attending to their careers and high school educations — the antagonists of the series’ first book delimit the animalistic circumstance of the vampire who cannot or does not conform to the Cullen’s “humane” way of life. Unlike the Cullen “family,” these three vampires — two men and one woman, a *ménage à trois* in contrast to the even pairing of the Cullens — are a “pack” (375), a “coven” (400). They are described, not as “boys” and “girls” as the Cullen siblings are when Bella first encounters them (18), but with dehumanizing and clinical language as “the first male” (375), “the other male” (375), and “the female” (401). They are “barefoot” (376), and their style of walking is “catlike” (375) in contrast to the

Cullens' "urbane stance" (376); they are not a safe, welcoming family like the Cullens, but an animalistic "troop of predators" (375). These other vampires, "bad" vampires who feed on humans and behave as vampires are expected to behave, are wild, uncivilized, and unforgivable in their desire to prey on humans; by embracing both the queerness and the monstrosity of the vampire, these three are made unpalatable to humanity.

"Good" and "evil" in the *Twilight* Saga are explicitly connected to the idea of "family" and "coven," respectively. Because the Cullens do not drink human blood, they are able to blend in, to be almost human. As Ashley Donnelly notes:

The vampire sublimates their urge to feed with animal blood and their urge to fight with friendly wrestling and family baseball . . . Sublimation and denial allow them to blend in and function in society, not as aberrations but as "normal" citizens. (Donnelly 182)

As with Bill Compton, this sublimation of desire — for blood and for sex — is essential for creating a humanized vampire. For the Cullens, however, the sublimation of desire not only renders them worthy of having an ideal family, but is explicitly demarcated as that which allows them to form deep bonds of love at all. In *Breaking Dawn*, one of the vampires directly connects the Cullens' abstinence from blood to their ability to form emotional connections: "I have witnessed the bonds within this family—I say *family* and not *coven*. These strange golden-eyed ones deny their very natures.

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But in return have they found something worth even more, perhaps, than mere gratification of desire?" (Meyer, *Breaking Dawn* 717). The two are not coincidental — they are directly and intentionally linked: "Abstaining from human blood," one of the vegetarian vampires tells Bella, "makes us more civilized—lets us form true bonds of love" (603). Because the Cullens deny their vampiric desire to feed on human blood, they gain the ability to create a civilized family, rather than a coven — the family which, as in *True Blood*, is generally barred to the vampire.

Breaking Dawn, the saga's conclusion, revolves almost entirely around marriage and childbirth — two major institutions from which both vampires and queers have, historically, been excluded. However, Edward's participation in both of them is his reward for the successful sublimation of his queer desire. Though Edward hungers for Bella's blood for much of the beginning of *Twilight*, he quickly conquers his vampiric instinct to feed from her when he decides that he loves her more than he wants to eat her. By conquering the instinct to feed on her, Edward is able to have a heteronormative family with a wife and a daughter; he is able to sexually reproduce and to have an extended family in both the Cullens and the Swans — or, as Kathryn Kane argues: "Edward, having refused his fangs, is endowed with a fully working phallus" (Kane 114). If Bill Compton and the mainstreaming vampires of *True Blood* promote homonormativity and assimilation, Edward Cullen serves as allegory for the popular conservative Christian belief that

homosexuality can be “cured.” Certainly, Edward — who is filled with self-loathing and views himself as an irredeemable monster — takes assimilation farther than Bill Compton does, completely denying his craving not only for human blood, but also for sex of any kind until he is safely committed in a heterosexual marriage.

Edward and Bella’s wedding in *Breaking Dawn* is as “traditional” as possible — at least, “aside from the bride and groom” (*Breaking Dawn* 41). Bella even gets a “real honeymoon” (65) complete with a private island, being carried across the threshold, and literal bed-breaking sex. But not only are they afforded a traditional wedding unimaginable for any other vampire; more importantly, Bella and Edward can have what no other vampires can: a child. Unlike other vampires, their sex is reproductive; it results in an admittedly abnormal pregnancy, but a pregnancy nonetheless.

Because vampires traditionally cannot procreate through reproductive sex, they must proliferate by spreading vampirism to living children; these children, once turned, are children forever, who can never grow or change. In the *Twilight* saga, these children are known as “the immortal children” (33). They are “beautiful . . . endearing . . . enchanted” (33) but ultimately unable to be taught or controlled. Because these immortal children are unnatural and uncontrollable, the act of their creation is punishable by death. The inclusion of the immortal children in *Breaking Dawn* creates a strict division between the kind of non-reproductive proliferation of death associated with creating new

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vampires, and the distinctly reproductive creation of an actual human-vampire hybrid child. Bella and Edward's daughter, Renesmee, can grow and change, unlike a vampire. She is, Meyer stresses, "one of a kind" (586). Because she is conceived by a vampire who assimilates as best he can into human culture, hiding the most unsavory traits of the vampire, her birth represents something the vampire has never before had. Looking at his daughter, Edward is able to say what no vampire has said before: "I am her father. Not her creator—her biological father" (586).

The existence of Bella and Edward's daughter fundamentally alters the queer resonance of the vampire. In a culture that sees marriage, cohabitation, and parenting as the ultimate goals for a happy life, it is impossible not to see Edward and Bella's reward as a direct result of their perfect sublimation of desire and their rejection of mere sexual gratification outside of wedlock. A vampire with the ability to procreate is a vampire with a choice: assimilate and be worthy of family, respect, and equality, or fail to assimilate and suffer the same kind of fate suffered by Malcolm's nest in *True Blood*. With this ultimatum at hand, the benefits of assimilation seem undeniable; yet they are only possible through a sacrifice of choice, a never-ending regulation of self.

Where once Bella's desire to become a vampire might have been seen as a desire for freedom, an echo of the interviewer's desire at the end of *Interview with the Vampire*, it now indicates a much less liberating expression. The kind of vampire

Bella becomes is not, as she phrases it, a “crazed killing-machine.” She wishes, upon becoming a vampire, “What if, like Carlisle, I never killed a single person? What if I could be a good vampire right away?” (466). She gets her wish, certainly, but only through constant self-monitoring. She must wear contacts to make herself appear human until her eyes fade from crimson to amber; she must stay away from her human family until she can learn to fully assimilate; she must consciously slow down her movements so as not to disturb humans with her supernatural speed. Through Bella’s adjustments to her new life as a vampire, the reader comes to understand the constant, painful effort and self-regulation required to deny the nature of the vampire and to masquerade as human — to become a “good” vampire, she must always be worried about being mistaken as a “bad” vampire.

The Cullens, in their assimilation to human culture, are hardly vampires. Certainly, they are not in any way “queer” — “they do not disrupt the dominant social order, instead they bolster it” (Kane 104). The *Twilight* saga as a whole seems to celebrate nothing but heteropatriarchal norms — and the participation of the queer-coded vampire in the novels extends this celebration to homonormativity. As Kathryn Kane argues:

The books are part of a cultural backlash against queer figures. They are part of a social discourse that mandates that if gay and lesbian people are to be seen, they must, like the Cullens, make themselves visible within the narrative of dominant ideologies

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of normalcy . . . They reject gender fluidity. They eschew homoeroticism. They embrace a rigid worldview that restrains the troubling possibilities of queer. (Kane 116-17)

Twilight exclusively celebrates heterosexual romance that remains chaste until, and always result in, marriage.³ After all, *Twilight* ends not with Bella becoming the monster she desires, but with a ritual reaffirmation of heteropatriarchy: “prom” (*Twilight* 484). Even when Bella has herself become a vampire, the series’ primary focus is on the fulfillment of the heterosexual institutions of marriage and parenthood. The figure of the vampire in *Twilight* is certainly not queer; if any homoerotic legacy remains, then the vampire is restrained to Sue-Ellen Case’s “polite categories of gay and lesbian” (Case 3). As the vampire has learned to sublimate its desire, it has become domesticated and homonormalized. It challenges nothing, it disturbs nothing; the only thing the abstinent vampire does is reaffirm the primacy and righteousness of monogamous, heterosexual love. No longer is the vampire a threat to heterosexual norms, or even an alternative option to the heteronormative lifestyle.

³ Even the heterosexual couples of the Cullen family — Emmett and Rosalie, and Alice and Jasper — are married; Alice and Jasper married shortly after Alice was turned into a vampire, and Emmett has married Rosalie several times over the course of the decades they have been together. Though they live under the same roof, Meyer is quick to confirm that none of the couples are related to one another by blood; only Rosalie and Jasper “are brother and sister” in the eyes of the community (*Twilight* 20-21).

The assimilation of the vampire into human culture denies its radical queer roots and instead bolsters anti-queer, heteronormative hegemony.

The problem with the figure of the “good gay,” who these abstinent vampires reflect, is that by normalizing one portion of the LGBTQ community — the portion that can easily assimilate into straight culture — we further stigmatize and marginalize the portion that cannot or does not want to assimilate; we leave them “looking more deviant before a legal system that can claim broader legitimacy” (Warner 143). By permitting the existence of a form of self-policing homosexuality which is not only non-threatening to hegemonic heterosexuality, but actively reinforces and privileges it through assimilation, homonormativity criminalizes those who cannot or will not conform; by permitting the existence of a form of vampirism which does not rely on human blood, the contemporary vampire does the same. In popular vampire media such as *Twilight* and *True Blood*, the radical potential of the vampire as a monster who disrupts binary distinctions of male/female, life/death, and even human/monster dissipates as the figure of the vampire is de-queered through heterosexual romance and assimilation. And in a culture that calls for a queer subject who is “born this way,” for whom sexuality isn’t a choice, and who is divorced in the public eye from visible acts of queerness, it is not only the vampire who has been de-queered, but it is the homosexual he represents, too.

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