Chapter 4
The Onscreen Portrayal

This chapter investigates the various social issues of urban life portrayed metaphorically mainly through the popular HBO Series *True Blood* based on *The Southern Vampire Mysteries* by Charlaine Harris and also how the notion of urban catharsis is implied in it. Based on the popular series of books by Charlaine Harris, *True Blood* focuses on Sookie Stackhouse, a young woman with telepathic abilities and the connection she forms with Bill Compton, who just happens to be a 173 years old Vampire in Bon Temps, a fictional, small town in the state of Louisiana. Sookie is considered an odd in her locality because of her telepathic abilities. As an outsider often feeling to be the only one of her kind, she greatly anticipates meeting Vampires. Sookie is the object of desire for many potential suitors; however, most of them are supernatural individuals. In the third season of the series, Sookie finds out the reason why so many Vampires were drawn to her. She is a fairy, a supernatural race wiped out of existence by Vampires centuries ago, as Vampires find fairy blood intoxicating and irresistible.

Charlaine Harris claims she wrote the books as being about a minority struggling for equal rights, though the creator of the show Alan Ball denies that he specifically designed *True Blood* to represent social issues. In the world of *True Blood*, Vampires and humans coexist as a synthetic blood drink called True Blood that supposedly keeps the need to kill humans away has been invented by Japanese scientists. It is one of the most popular shows with liberal portrayal of sex, drugs, blood, violence, comedy, and suspense. A minute and close watch makes it clear that the show is actually much more intelligent and complex below the surface, a multi-layered allegory, serving as a commentary on contemporary societal issues, ranging from homosexuality and racism to larger questions of intolerance and the role of religion.
The show is set in an alternate USA where the public revelation of the existence of Vampires offers a commentary on tolerance. Vampires have "come out of the coffin" and are actively fighting for political rights, including the right to marry humans. The Vampires in this universe are no longer simply outsiders. Since they have now become public knowledge, they can be seen more as a minority group. With humor, compassion for the vulnerability and foibles of the characters, the show delves into subjects like death and sexuality using the portrayal of unabashed carnality and raises questions about the human condition.

Throughout history one of the chief justifications offered for depriving some groups, like women or racial minorities, of their rights is that they are supposedly somehow ‘less’ than a proper human. The prejudice against Vampires is reminiscent of various forms of intolerance and discrimination. The Vampires go to their own clubs and bars so that they will not be refused service, and for traveling they use an airline that specializes in Vampire transport. Some even refuse to talk to Vampires directly. Thus, the Vampire cannot only be seen as a metaphor for a minority, but also a metaphor for a victim of segregation. An excerpt from an interview of Nan Flanagan, a prominent Vampire rights activist and key Vampire spokesperson of AVL (American Vampire League) in the first episode of the first season conforms to the situation:

NAN FLANAGAN. We are citizens. We pay taxes. We deserve basic civil rights just like everyone else.

INTERVIEWER. But come on, does not your race have a rather sordid history of exploiting and feeding off innocent people for centuries?

NAN FLANAGAN. Three points. Number one, show me documentation. It doesn’t exist. Number two, doesn’t your race have a history of exploitation?

We never owned slaves, Bill, or detonated nuclear weapons. And most
importantly, point number three, now that the Japanese have perfected synthetic blood which satisfies our nutritional needs, there is no reason for anyone to fear us. I can assure you that every member of our community is now drinking synthetic blood. That’s why we decided to make our existence known. We just want to be part of mainstream society. (True Blood Season 1 Episode 1)

In order to promote Vampire rights, the AVL actively supports of the Vampire Rights Amendment (VRA), a bill, which would provide constitutional recognition of Vampires and shield them from any kind of social or political discrimination. A letter from Nan Flanagan on the AVL website addressed to supporters of Vampire equality includes a quote from the Reverend Martin Luther King Jr.: “The arc of the universe is long. But it bends toward justice.”¹ The efforts made by this group of Vampires are met by the same opposition faced by the LGBT (Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender) community. The Vampires are despised by religious groups. People who accept the Vampires are derided as "fang-bangers" and are subjected to abhorrence and persecution. Drew Marshall is a serial killer responsible for the murders of several fang-bangers, an innocent bystander and the multiple attempted murders of Sookie Stackhouse. He is the main antagonist through the first season of the series. His intense hatred towards Vampires and the “fang-bangers” resulted in the murders of innocent ladies like Maudette Pickens, Dawn Green, Amy Burley, Sookie’s Gran, and even Sookie's cat. He justifies his crime by saying, “She deserves it, needs it, wants to die. They all do. That's why she fucks them Fangers.”² Here, monstrosity is within the humans, born of intolerance and hatred towards the others.³
Multiple characters, both human and supernatural, are homosexual or bisexual in the series. Pam Swynford De Beaufort, the Vampire progeny of Eric Northman, is bisexual. Russell Edgington, the King of Mississippi is married to a man called Talbot Angelis. Similarly, the Queen of Louisiana is shown in a relationship with Sookie's female cousin, Hadley. Lafayette, one of Sookie’s best friends is a gay who is seen in a relationship with Jesus Velasquez. The flexibility of Vampire sexual preferences as well as the fact that anybody is sexually attracted to the Vampire whose blood one has drunk regardless of their gender or sexual identity further complicates the normative, essentialist understanding of sexual orientation among the characters.

Sexual orientation doesn’t limit one’s contributions to society. Just like one’s sexuality, Vampirism also does not control one’s humanity, intelligence, and temperament in True Blood. A Vampire can be overbearing and arrogant and a Vampire can also be kind and generous. Of course there is one thing that differentiates the Vampires from minorities— it is the power to kill people and feed off of their blood. But that aside, the Vampire situation is almost similar to that of both ethnic and sexual minorities throughout history, those who have been regarded with hate and intolerance by the rest of society. In True Blood, not only is the “other” explored in traditional ways through Vampires, but also through the impact the mainstreaming Vampires have on human society, and society’s reaction to their existence and demand for mainstreaming. The audience is asked to draw parallels between the treatment of Vampires and the treatment of humans under different social conditions.

The status of Vampires are directly analogous to LGBT people to some extent in our society and Vampire-haters use normalizing power to keep them marginalized. Making an explicit analogy to the LGBT community, True Blood implies that Vampires deserve the same chance to be a part of the society as anyone else, as long as they follow the rules. This show
represents gay characters and gay-related themes that, on one hand, expose how the discursive practices of hetero-normativity function and on the other hand, transgress social and cultural assumptions about gender, sexuality and identity and thereby function as queer and viable alternatives to the hetero-normative way of living. Rodger Streitmatter (186-188), for instance, stresses that gay characters are still represented as different from heterosexual characters, foremost when it comes to the absence of representing gay sexual activity. Guillermo Avila-Saavedra (5-19) postulates that there is nothing resistant or “queer” about gay television when gays, lesbians, and bisexuals are represented as subordinate to the hegemonic supremacy of hetero-normativity. He argues that gays are depicted as merely reiterating and consolidating patriarchal and traditional notions of gender and sexuality. His argument and conceptualization of the notion queer draw on queer theory, in which the realm of popular media is considered one of the many social and cultural institutions dominated by hetero-normativity.

Queer theory, which rose with both the development of poststructuralist theory and the co-sexual gay/lesbian activism responding to the AIDS pandemic in the 1980s, aspires to undermine hetero-normativity as the basis of society. Since its inception, queer theory has sought to expose and undermine the normativity of heterosexuality, identifying normalizing power as one of the most entrenched forms of oppression in modern times. The post-World War II scientific, medical, and legal establishment routinely figured homosexuality as signaling a psychologically abnormal, morally inferior, and socially deviant human type, homophile groups and their supporters defended the "normality" of "the homosexual." The struggle over homosexuality has been grudgingly acknowledged to be a struggle among lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer individuals and groups. Queer theory emphasizes on the productive process of power that create the categories that the culture naturalizes, seeking to transform these processes and
establish more just, non-normalizing ways of being. This notion is mainly based on the works of Michel Foucault. All images of homosexuality have, to use Foucault's term, power/knowledge effects or are perceived as productive of social hierarchies. It encourages practices that violate the dominant cultural norms of sexuality and gender. In the first volume of *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault develops his notion of normalizing power by examining the emergence of “the homosexual” in western culture. He claims that the category of homosexuality is relatively recent in human history; it emerged only in the mid-1800s out of the discourses and practices of modern medicine. Any sexual act which occurred outside the heterosexual marriage was considered unnatural and sinful. The rise of modern science paved a new way of understanding those deviant ways. But rather than concentrating on the behavior, man engaged themselves in the individuals concerning about the deviant and not the deviance. The deviants became the center of attention. Through the process of monitoring and controlling, it becomes important to specify all the ways in which individuals can deviate from the norm.

Queer theorists have taken up Foucault’s analysis of normalizing power and identity in order to both explore and extend the analysis, and to make way to overcome the oppressive forces. In identifying social identity categories as the basis of normalizing power, queer theory denounces those categories. Whereas queer theory’s goal is to eradicate normalizing power, True Blood embraces it with vengeance. In a certain way they do question the ways in which the normal/abnormal distinctions are made and thus take a strong stand against discrimination. But as a matter of fact, Vampires have time and again insisted on their differences.

The goal of queer theory is to destroy the system within which hetero-normativity operates and to eradicate the very categories of sexual identity which it considers to be the foundation of gender/sexuality based oppressions. Queer theory takes aim at normalizing power
itself, the process through which dominant norms situate some people as normal and the deviants as abnormal. In stretching the boundaries of identity categories, and in seeming to disregard the distinctions between various forms of marginalized sexual identification, queer has triggered enthusiasm in a group of people, but resentment in others. In contrast to gay and lesbian studies, queer theory moves the study of sexuality

from explaining the modern homosexual to questions of the operation of the hetero/homosexual binary, from an exclusive preoccupation with homosexuality to a focus on heterosexuality as a social and political organizing principle, and from a politics of minority interest to a politics of knowledge and difference.

(Seidman 9)

Queer reading is a practice of re-reading and re-labelling texts with explicit heterosexual narrative, which destabilises heterosexual readings, often utilising narrative silence concerning characters’ sexuality, and/or homosocial environments and relationships. All takes on queer reading share a common preoccupation with the concept of hetero-normativity. Heteronormativity refers to “pervasive and invisible norms of heterosexuality (…) embedded as a normative principle in social institutions and theory” and

The importance of the concept is that it centres on the operation of the norm. Heteronormativity emphasises the extent to which everyone, straight or queer, will be judged, measured, probed and evaluated from the perspective of the heterosexual norm. It means that everyone and everything is judged from the perspective of straight. (Chambers 26)

Richard Dyer proposes,
All authorship and all sexual identities are performances, done with greater or less facility, always problematic in relation to any self separable from the realisation of self in the discursive modes available. The study of (gay/lesbian) authorship is a study of those models and the particular ways in which they have been performed in given texts. (33)

The values of queer theory would be the values of the postmodern, post-human, post metaphysical attitude in general. Specifically, popular television as a cultural site can offer resistance to the hegemony of heteronormativity.

Drawing on Stuart Hall (2005) and John Fiske (1987), who consider television and popular culture as cultural sites that both incorporate and resist aspects of dominant ideologies, they unraveled or underscored the queerness articulated within different popular television texts. For the scope of this article, *queer articulations* refer to representations of characters that connote or imply a critique or subversion of how the heteronormal governs sexual identities and/or desires. (Dhaenens 58)

The world of Vampires on *True Blood* has often functioned as a metaphor for the hidden culture of the LGBT community. The discourse of citizenship and equality, marriage rights in particular, are a clear reference to real life struggle for gay and lesbian rights. *True Blood*’s series finale conveys a message of equality with Jessica and Hoyt’s marriage. Marriage between a human and a Vampire is legalized in some places around the world. Nan Flanagan makes an explicit link between Vampire and gay rights:

FLANAGAN. We are all aware of your opposition to granting equal rights to all Americans.
FINCH. Not all. Just Vampires.

FLANAGAN. And homosexuals.

For the Steve and Sarah Newlin, intermarriage between Vampires and humans is an abomination, which might be a “fatal blow to the traditional family, perhaps even to the human race”⁶ “What would such a marriage be? Decades of childless living, never sharing the breakfast table or sunrise, a parasitic relationship where one member feeds on the other.”⁷ The marriage between Hoyt and Jessica conveys True Blood's central message of empathy for everyone.

The aspect of drinking Vampire blood is interesting in this show because their blood is a commodity of high value because of its extreme and unpredictable effects on human physiology and psychology. True Blood introduces the idea that human beings can exploit Vampires as well. The Vampires themselves are sometimes at risk from evil humans. The special power of their blood is the reason why some people trap Vampires and take all their blood which can be sold at a high price. Sookie telepathically hears Denise Rattray calculate Bill’s monetary price based on how much blood she and her husband can drain from him: “Holy shit, almost two hundred ounces . . . that’s ten thousand dollars, sweet Jesus!”⁸ The Vampire blood is called ‘V’ which is considered to be the most powerful of all drugs. According to Lafayette Reynolds, V is “pure, undiluted, 24-karat life”— which is quite ironic given that it comes from the creatures that are considered dead.⁹ Sookie narrates in the novel Dead Until Dark,

Vampire blood was supposed to temporarily relieve symptoms of illness and increase sexual potency, kind of like prednisone and Viagra rolled into one, there was a huge black market for genuine, undiluted Vampire blood. (Harris 4)

In the world of True Blood, the Vampire blood represents life, power and youth and is considered to be a magic cure to almost all the human ailments. The Vampires no longer require
humans in order to survive. The symbolism that blood holds in the show is in juxtaposition with what blood is in traditional Vampire myth. But this only reaffirms just how powerful the symbolic function of blood is in Vampire literature.

With its display of highly evident and outwardly clear manifestation of sexuality the show appears to be designed to satiate our escapist desire to watch plenty of gore, sex, and scenes of forbidden love which finds its roots in our unconscious psyche. The Vampires presented in the show are sexually hyper-potent entities who destroy all the normative gender roles. The huge popularity of Bill Compton and Eric Northman lies in their ability to provide a repository through which our most primal fantasies are gratified. Besides the Vampires, there is also another creature called as maenad which deserves our attention here. In Season 2, we are introduced to this Puritan mythological character creating a chaotic situation in Bon Temps. With her supernatural powers she indulged every citizen of the town into a lunatic stage of frenzy including drunkenness, orgies, cannibalism and self-sacrifices. The gathering around her place bears a very strong resemblance with the rave parties in the urban places of the modern age with excessive use of drugs, alcohol and sex. MaryAnn and her followers repeat a chant constantly: “Lo Lo Bromios. Lo Lo Dendrites. Lo Lo Eleutherios. Lo Lo Enorches.” Bromios, Dendrites, Eleutherios, and Enorches are names and attributes of the god Dionysus in Greek mythology. Bromios is an epithet for boisterous. Dendrites denote Dionysus connection to the trees, and with Dionysus being the god of fertility and agriculture. Eleutherios another epithet for Dionysus - it means "the liberator." Dionysus was known for freeing one from one's normal self through wine, ecstasy or madness. His divine mission was to end the world of worry and care. Enorches means dancer and the god would definitely love the revelers to dance. In fact the maenads have their own form of ecstatic dance. This dance is meant to alter the mood and to elevate the senses and
awaken the physical and spiritual self to communion with the divine and the rituals of the faith. Ball comments, “what she was preaching was basically a life of sensual fulfillment with no guilt and no shame.”

Aristotle (384 – 322 BC) is often accused of playing a part in the shameful history of denying justice to certain groups. Aristotle believed that our possession of rational intellects elevates us above every other species and our superior rationality gives us the right to exploit all the other animals, Aristotle added that we are equally entitled to “hunt” and enslave other human beings, such as the “barbarians” whom the Greeks regarded as their inferiors. Aristotle offered a similar justification for the oppression of women, whom he judged to be deficient in humanity and reason, and thus naturally, a fair game for exploitation. Ever since, the full-fledged privileged group of people have sought to justify the exploitation of women and minorities by claiming that they are less than human. Thus, in season 1, after kidnapping a harmless Vampire for the sake of his blood, Amy is incapable of seeing him as anything other than a disposable commodity, no matter how evident Eddie’s sufferings are. Amy cannot find any reason to understand his pain and is quite comfortable torturing him just because he is not one of her kind. Antonia Gavilán de Logroño, a resurrected necromancer from the early seventeenth century, comments:

Killing them is the only way to protect ourselves. At least in my time they remained hidden. Now they walk among us, shameless in their lust, their hunger. They laugh at the miracle of life. We must restore the sacred power of creation to this wounded earth. That is our only hope. (True Blood Season 4 Episode 8)

These examples clearly represent speciesism.
The Fellowship of the Sun Church’s rejection of rights for Vampires is based largely on their belief that Vampires are not persons capable of moral conduct. The issue comes up when Jason informs Sarah Newlin that he knew a Vampire named Eddie whom Jason believed was “a real nice person.” Sarah corrects him, “He wasn’t a person.” She continues; since a person would never do something so disgusting as feeding on a human being. Vampires, in Sarah’s view, lack the capacity to exercise moral judgment and restraint. The allegedly evil actions of Vampires are not different from what we ourselves do to creatures who suffer the misfortune of not being human. If we can exploit creatures that are inferior to us, why is it unacceptable for us when Vampires enjoy the same privilege?

Innocent Vampires have been killed unnecessarily by the intolerant human beings who are portrayed as more vicious monsters than Vampires in the show. Nan Flanagan comments:

After the massacre of three of our kind in Louisiana earlier this week, I think the world should take notice of the fact that we have not retaliated. And we will not. Which leaves us with the question of exactly who is hunting whom out there in America tonight? (True Blood Season 1 Episode 9)

In the sixth season, Louisiana Governor Truman Burrell adjudicates a major suppression on the state’s Vampire population. He closes down Vampire-owned businesses, declares curfew on Vampires at night, and encourages people to buy guns and ammo. Burrell announces,

I swore an oath to serve and protect the people of this state. People, not Vampires…. That is why I say to any of you who have the financial and legal means to do it, buy a gun. Buy as many as you can. Stock up on wooden bullets. (True Blood Season 6 Episode 1)
His policies—death camps, terrible medical experiments on Vampires—take a cue from the Nazis. To some extent, their discrimination of Vampires is reasonable, because all of their fears about Vampires are true at times.

The “other” has always been a key concept central to the analysis of the Vampire. The idea of the “other” is fundamentally connected to the self, and refers to the concept: that which is not the same as I/us is something other, and something to be feared. The other can be explained in terms of alienation or estrangement from someone or something, by adopting an “I – It” attitude, viewing the other as impersonal and inhuman, an “it” or “object” or “thing” (Stoehr 84). Vampires have traditionally been represented on screen as the “other” in society, embodying the monstrous, the anxieties of the time. The boundary between the “other” and “I / us” is becoming hazy gradually in contemporary Vampire literature, movies and TV shows.

The main agenda of the AVL is to persuade the world that Vampires are humans. In a PSA Eric Northman (see fig. 6) announces:

Good evening ladies and gentlemen. My name is Eric Northman. I’m a tax-paying American and a small business owner in the great state of Louisiana. I also happen to be a Vampire. Now in the past year there has been a lot of inflammatory talk from politicians warning their constituents not to trust Vampires. But think about it for a second. Who would you rather trust, a Vampire, or a politician? The truth is Vampires are as different from each other as humans are, because we were humans and we ask only to be treated as such. We welcome you into our world as well. We’re always more than happy to serve humans here at Fangtasia- and I don’t mean for dinner. (“A PSA from Eric Northman for the AVL” 16)
The irony is that most of the Vampires actually regard human beings as lower forms of life to be exploited, not much different from the way Aristotle and others regarded non-human species. As Blayde and Dunn (2010) explain, Vampires tend to think of their human companions in the same way we regard our pets – as useful, amusing, and even loveable, but never as equals. “Humans exist to serve us, that is their only value,” says the magister at Bill’s trial\textsuperscript{17}, using words that resonates the notion of philosophers like Aristotle. The human body is seen as food:

JASON. Something funny fanger?
ERIC. Yes blood bag.
JASON. Leach.
ERIC. Breather.
JASON. Dead fuck.
ERIC. Meat sack. \textit{(True Blood Season 5 Episode 12)}

Though to a significant number of humans see Vampires as soulless and morally depraved, there’s also a strong sentiment among the Vampires that they are, in fact, the superior ones. Moreover, they also possess considerable justification for this view of themselves. Vampires have more physical strength and speed than human beings. The Vampires outscore humans with their sexual abilities. To have sex with a Vampire is considered to be one of the best sexual experiences one can ever have. With its display of highly evident and outwardly clear manifestation of sexuality the show appears to be designed to satiate our escapist desire to watch plenty of gore, sex, and scenes of forbidden love which finds its roots in our unconscious psyche. The Vampires presented in the show are sexually hyper-potent entities who destroy all the normative gender roles. The huge popularity of Bill Compton and Eric Northman lies in their
ability to provide a repository through which our most primal fantasies are gratified. They have extremely heightened senses and their experience of the world is intense and complex. Thus, the assumption that the humans occupy the highest form of being is challenged in the world of *True Blood* by the existence of a species that seems to be superior to us in every way. Given the imbalance of power between human beings and Vampires, who, in addition to superhuman strength and speed, also have the power of hypnotizing or “glamouring” humans, how can humans and Vampires belong to the same social and political community and be considered as equals in society? Why would Vampires even seek equality with human beings? Pam, Eric Northman’s Vampire progeny calls human beings “pathetic lumps of temporary flesh,” apparently reflecting the attitude of most Vampires, who view our species with pity and contempt because of our relatively poor experience of life.¹⁸

In Season 3 Russel Edgington enters the news broadcasting room and with a smooth hand he takes out the spine of the news reader in just a flash of second (see fig. 7). Then he declares on TV:

> Ladies and gentlemen, my name is Russell Edgington and I have been a Vampire for nearly three thousand years. Now, the American Vampire League wishes to perpetrate the notion that we are just like you and I suppose in a few small ways we are. We are narcissists. We care only about getting what we want, no matter what the cost, just like you. Global warming, perpetual war, toxic waste, child labor, torture, genocide. That’s a small price to pay for your SUVs and your flat-screen TVs, your blood-diamonds, your designer jeans, your absurd, garish McMansions! Futile symbols of permanence to quell your quivering, spineless souls. But no. In the end we are nothing like you. We are… immortal. Because we
drink the true blood, blood that is living, organic, and human. And that is the truth the AVL wishes to conceal from you. Because, let’s face it, eating people is a tough sell these days. So they put on their friendly faces to pass their beloved VRA. But make no mistake. Mine is the true face of Vampires! Why would we seek equal rights? You are not our equals. We will eat you after we eat your children. *(True Blood Season 3 Episode 9)*

As a matter of fact, apart from their strength, speed and sexual appeal, Vampires are shown to outscore humans in a lot of other ways too. Bill Compton, who used to be a soldier in the Civil War has an ingrained politeness and charm that persuades nearly every human. He condemns warfare in a straight forward manner. In the second episode of Season 1 he comments, “The glorious dead? There is nothing glorious about dying in a war. A bunch of starving, freezing boys killing each other so the rich people can stay rich. Madness.” When he is invited to Sookie’s grandmother’s club ‘The Descendants of the Glorious Dead’, he declares:

> I’m honored to stand before you tonight. Vampires have traditionally been very private, perhaps to our detriment. But I believe, if we reach out to one another, then we can coexist, and even thrive together. I served in the 28th Louisiana infantry formed in Monroe in 1862 under Colonel Henry Gray. It was there that we learned the value of human life and the ease with which it can be extinguished. Uneducated as we were, we knew little of the political or ideological conflicts that had led to this point. But going to war was not a choice for us. We believed to a man that we had a calling to fulfill. A destiny handed down to us from above.

*(True Blood Season 1 Episode 5)*
In episode 7 of season 4, he tries to teach Jessica about the evil effects of violence when a group of necromancers try to burn all Vampires with the sun:

BILL. We are, at our core, human.

JESSICA. It’s a human’s fault we’re burning like bacon.

BILL. And she was driven to it by the acts of Vampires. All these years, we indulged our murderous impulses. Called it our nature. How could we not expect reprisal?

JESSICA. Who cares who started it? She is hell-bent on killing us. We have to kill her first.

BILL. Answering killing with killing is what led us to this. I have had one hundred and seventy five years on this earth. And I’ve accomplished so little good. (True Blood)

Bill ultimately sacrifices his life so that Sookie is not attracted to the darkness of Vampires anymore, live a normal life, grow old, and have kids. He refuses to take the antidote of the lethal disease and decides to die. Before his death Bill clarifies to Eric the reason of taking such a decision. Eric tries to change his mind. The dialogue between Eric and Bill brings out their utmost care for Sookie.

BILL. Why are you here?

ERIC. I came for Sookie. What you are doing to her is unconscionable.

BILL. I’m doing this for Sookie. Everything I’m doing I’m doing for her.

ERIC. Try listening to her then. Because this is not what she wants.

BILL. But it’s what she needs.

ERIC. She loves you.
BILL. She will learn to love someone else…. If she were not fae, she would not be drawn to us. We would not be drawn to her. In the end, you have to admit it. It’s her light that pulls us in just as she is pulled to our darkness. (True Blood Season 7 Episode 9)

He then describes a dream he saw caused by his sickness. He continues,

I dreamt that Sookie was rocking a baby to sleep. It was our baby, I suppose. She was singing a lullaby and putting the baby down for the night. And I was coming up from behind her not to be part of it, but to observe it, I guess. I looked over her shoulder and I finally saw our child. And it was a void. A black void. Sookie had given birth to death. That’s what we are, Eric. That’s all we can give her. I have lied to her, threatened her, and almost raped her. And yet, like a moth to a flame, she always returns to me. She can’t let go. I want to set her free.

When Sookie finally agrees to meet Bill before his death he states:

This disease, Sookie… it has made me feel more human than I have ever been before…. Sookie, we are born, we grow, and we learn, and we have children, and maybe we get to meet our children’s children. But then we pass on and that is a life. And if we stayed together, I would be denying you the best parts of that…. I’ve seen you around children, seen how you light up around them. I would hate for you to never know what that feels like, to have children of your own….

Because I love you too much. (True Blood Season 7 Episode 10)

True Blood, like other Vampire fiction of the new century centers on issues of socially problematic romantic relationship between humans and Vampires. Alan Ball describes that his show is about the “horrors of intimacy.”19 “And ultimately, I think, that actually is what this
show is about. How could a show about the horrors of intimacy not address love, and being in love, and what that means? Because to me Vampires are kind of a metaphor for sex.”20 Moyer comments, “What was so wonderful about getting this character, the beauty and poetry in it, is that he falls in love…. It rekindles the possibility of hope.”21

Vampires in this show, at times, surpass the humans as more responsible inhabitants of the earth. They are eco-conscious and even aware of recycling. In Season 2 Episode 1, Bill tells his progeny Jessica, “We also recycle in this house. True Blood and other glass items go in the blue container. And paper products go in the white container.” (Season 2 Episode 1)

The conversation between Russel Edgington and Eric Northman is worth mentioning here in this context:

ΡUSSEl EDGINGTON. If all the supernaturals would stop squabbling among themselves and unite, we could conquer humans in a matter of days.

ΕRIC NORTHMAN. This is your plan?

ΡUSSEl EDGINGTON. I prefer to call it my dream.

ΕRIC NORTHMAN. Well, I like this dream.

ΡUSSEl EDGINGTON. Throughout history, I have aligned myself with or destroyed those humans in power, hoping to make a dent in mankind’s race to oblivion. What other creature actively destroys its own habitat?

ΕRIC NORTHMAN. Hey, you’re preaching to the choir.

ΡUSSEl EDGINGTON. I mean, do you remember how the air used to smell?

How humans used to smell? How they used to taste?

ΕRIC NORTHMAN. I remember everything.
RUSSLE EDGINGTON. Preening little fool that he was, Adolf was right about one thing. There is a master race. It’s just not the human race. (Season 3 Episode 6)

To some extent, these Vampires are right in their opinion about man destroying the planet for their selfish motives and nonchalant attitude towards the degrading environment. In Season 3 Episode 7, Russel Edgington announces, “There is only one law: the law of nature, the survival of the fittest. And we need to take this world back from the humans, not placate them with billboards and PR campaigns while they destroy it.”

Though the Vampires are ruthless and cruel by nature, the love, respect and loyalty between the maker and his/her progeny is commendable. One’s first loyalty is always to one’s maker and it is considered that being a good maker is very rewarding.  

Like human parents and children, most Vampires take the responsibilities of being a maker very seriously. They also owe absolute allegiance to their maker. Viking Prince Eric Northman was turned into a Vampire a thousand years ago by an older Vampire named Godric. Godric takes care of Eric as his “father, brother and son.”  

His relationship to Godric is a relationship of mutual trust, love and respect as Godric says, “There are centuries of faith and love between us.” The second season of True Blood mainly focuses on Eric’s efforts to free Godric from a group of religious militants. We see the softer side of Eric for the first time at the time of Godric’s death. At first, he begs and pleads Godric and finally decides to die with him. However, Godric persuades him to leave at last. A maker is a sacred and revered entity for the progeny and their relationship, according to them, is incomprehensible for humans:

SOOKIE STACKHOUSE. He's your maker, isn't he?

ERIC NORTHMAN. Don't use words you don't understand.
SOOKIE STACKHOUSE. You have a lot of love for him. (Season 2 Episode 8)

There is often genuine affection between a Vampire and his/her maker, as there is between Eric and Pam. Pam manages Eric’s bar, Fangtasia, cares only about Eric and his problems beside her own self. She spends a considerable amount of time worrying about him and scheming on his behalf. She is even jealous of Sookie when she finds out that Eric is romantically inclined towards her. Eric comments, “She is extremely lazy, but loyal.”

Some Vampires possess a certain kind of sense of humor. Pam is rude, sardonic, cold, unequivocal but occasionally very funny. For example, in Season 3 Episode 1, when Lafayette refuses to help her and starts talking about his problems; she quickly grabs his neck and says: I don’t know what it is about me that make people think I want to hear their problems. May be I smile too much. May be I wear too much pink. But please remember I can rip your throat out if I need to.

The urban environments offer the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered (LGBT) individuals a greater sense of tolerance and acceptance than the non-urban or rural areas. But regardless of the advantages, LGBT individuals in urban centers face a unique set of problems that affect both their physical and mental health. In the opening credits of True Blood the "God Hates Fangs" sign (see fig. 8) reflects the common anti-gay phrase "God Hates Fags". Here's a shot from the opening credit sequence that shows a "God Hates Fangs" sign. If we drop the "n" it is an obvious reference to the Westboro Baptist Church's infamous placards against homosexuals.

GLAAD, an LGBT media advocacy organization, was founded in 1985 in the USA. In 2010, GLAAD (Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation) declared True Blood the most gay-friendly series on TV: "Thanks to its large cast (and often sexually ambiguous Vampires),
HBO’s *True Blood* is the most inclusive program currently on television, featuring six regular and recurring LGBT characters,” according to organization’s 2010-2011 "Where We Are on TV" report.27

For many, the fictional Vampires' quest for the same rights and social acceptance enjoyed by human is synonymous with the fight for gay rights. Some actually go so far as to argue that gay desire is really based on a death wish- gay identity and social practices lead to suicide, depression, and sexually transmitted diseases, some of which are literally deadly. One of the obvious problems with these claims, of course, is that they attribute to the nature of LGBT people themselves what is explained much more plausibly by homo- and trans-phobia in the dominant culture. Depression and suicide make sense among those who are marginalized and demonized in the culture, and who risk losing the support of family and friends when they discuss their sexual and gender identities.28 In Episode 8 of Season 4, when Bill tells a TV-reporter that “Many Vampires feel alone and confused, programmed to despise themselves by all the hateful and incendiary anti-Vampire rhetoric in the media”; there are direct parallels to the suicides of gay teenagers. But does *True Blood’s* inclusion of erotically undefined characters signal inclusivity or is it just a risqué version of “gay window advertising,”29 merely a way for HBO to simultaneously appeal to queer audiences and fascinate straight viewers without actually challenging heteronormativity?30 Do its perplexing allusions to gay rights actually serve the LGBT community as a whole, or do they merely advance the interests of white queers who are, to paraphrase Homi Bhabha, almost the same as white heterosexuals, but not quite straight?

The Fellowship of the Sun Church is an example of a hypocrite religious group which propagates only hatred and violence in the name of God. The main thrust of their preaching is that all “Vampires are an unnatural abomination” and that the Fellowship is doing “God’s work”
in attempting to rid the world of them. Their conviction that “tolerance in the face of true evil is no virtue and extremism in confronting eternal darkness is no vice” is a justification of them founding the Light of Day Institute, a paramilitary training unit founded for killing Vampires. The Fellowship’s hypocrisy becomes evident when they attack Vampires with a suicide bomber in the Dallas Vampire nest. After the attack Bill catches one of the attackers and says, “You tell the cowards who lead you, the cowards who sent children to do their killing, that the Vampires showed mercy where they had none.” In Season 2 Episode 5 Steve Newlin takes Jason into a secret closet which is an arsenal to be used against Vampires comprising of wooden arrows, silver bullets, silver bullets with holy water, wooden bullets, flame thrower, secretly planning to kill the Vampires. In Season 2 Episode 7, when Eric sets out to find his maker near the Fellowship of the Sun Church, Isabel warns him, “Don’t underestimate them. Support for their movement is growing. Their leadership camps are overflowing with self-righteous extremists, all willing and ready to die for their cause.” Nan Flanagan tries to handle the situation created by the brutality deliberately shown on TV by Russell Edgington:

NAN. This is all part of a concerted effort on the part of the right-wing fringe to stir up fear of Vampires.

STEVE NEWLIN. Oh, was it the right wing that ripped the guy’s spine out in live television?

NAN. No, but it is the right wing saying that all Vampires need to be wiped out of existence. Following that logic, Osama Bin Laden is human, therefore all humans need to be wiped out of existence.

REV. NEWLIN. Did you hear that? All human beings must be wiped out of existence. The Vampire agenda, pure and simple. (Season 3 Episode 12)
Blinded by their hatred, the Newlins of the Fellowship of the Sun Church at times act in a plain idiotic way. An excerpt from Season 2 Episode 9 illustrates this:

NAN FLANAGAN. You use your tax-exempt religious institution as an anti-Vampire terrorist enclave.

STEVE NEWLIN. The constitution gives us the right to defend ourselves.

NAN FLANAGAN. You attacked us.

STEVE NEWLIN. You murdered my father.

NAN FLANAGAN. That is an allegation. This is a fact- you and your church armed a suicide-bomber that killed Vampires and humans.

SARAH NEWLIN. We are fighting for God’s green earth and daytime and Christmas and Easter eggs and all that’s sacred and good. We are fighting for…

STEVE NEWLIN. Human rights. Human rights.

SARAH NEWLIN. May I finish my thought?

STEVE NEWLIN. What? You were done.

SARAH NEWLIN. If he is not the center of attention he just flips out.

NAN FLANAGAN. How can you have a dialogue with these people?

*True Blood* Vampires are associated with neither demons nor obvious demonic power. As in Season 2 Episode 3 Bill comments, “Most of us, Vampire, human, or otherwise, are capable of both good and evil. Often simultaneously.” Vampires have become a unique race of beings, not simply instruments through which demons press their ongoing rebellion against God and everything good and right. Even with Godric’s suicide in *True Blood*, the issue is not really
about the naturalness of Vampiric existence, but about the morality that a Vampire can possess. As Godric prepares to meet the sun, he has the following exchange with Eric:

GODRIC. We don’t belong here. It’s not right. We’re not right.

ERIC. You taught me there is no right or wrong. Only survival or death.

GODRIC. I told a lie. (Season 2 Episode 9)

The issue is right and wrong, not a question of nature but a question of choice. The death scene in Season 2 Episode 9 when Godric, Eric’s maker meets the sun is very emotional that successfully brings out the dignity a Vampire can possess. The conversation between Godric and Sookie (see fig. 9) turns to God and the afterlife, punishment and forgiveness:

GODRIC. Do you believe in God?

SOOKIE. Yes.

GODRIC. If you're right, how will he punish me?

SOOKIE. God doesn't punish. God forgives.

GODRIC. I don't deserve it, but I hope for it.

SOOKIE. We all do…. Are you very afraid?

GODRIC. No, no. I'm full of joy.

SOOKIE. But the pain?

GODRIC. I want to burn.

SOOKIE. I-I'm afraid for you.

GODRIC. A human with me at the end and human tears. Two-thousand years...

and I can still be surprised. In this I see God.

SOOKIE: Good-bye, Godric.
Godric’s behavior dramatizes an ethical standard that his human enemies, members of the Fellowship of the Son Church, can only aspire to. Here the monster is not the predator, but the humans are, who conveniently rationalize their choice by narrowly defining the moral community to include only humans and whose ethical stance is, paradoxically, more predatory and less humane than the supposed monster. In modern Vampire texts such as *The Vampire Diaries* and *True Blood*, the focus is more on retaining ties to human morals and ethics in order to mainstream.

Beyond the classic questions about evil and death, *True Blood* opens up a fresh set of philosophical queries. The perennial evils of hatred, bigotry, hypocrisy, and scapegoating of the human race appear in a fresh light when their victims and perpetrators include not only ordinary human beings, but also Vampires, shape-shifters, and other supernatural beings. The insightful conversation between Hoyt and his mother Maxine Fortenberry in Episode 9 of Season 2 brings out the hypocrisy:

MAXINE. What are you doing with Vampires anyway? They are wrong, wrong, wrong. They are devils.

HOYT. Why do you have so much hate in you?

MAXINE. I don’t.

HOYT. That’s a flat lie.

MAXINE. Who do you think you are talking to?

HOYT. My mama, who hates Methodists.

MAXINE. I got my reasons.

HOYT. And Catholics.

MAXINE. Just priests and nuns.
HOYT. African-Americans.

MAXINE. Hush, that’s a secret.

HOYT. People who don’t take care of their gardens, people who park their trucks up on their lawn and ladies who wear red shoes.

MAXINE. It looks cheap.

HOYT. Families with lots of kids and checkered curtains and cats and dogs and bait, every girl that I ever liked. And the more I like them the more you hate them.

MAXINE. I simply object to a girlfriend who will kill you and eat you. I think that’s reasonable.

HOYT. You don’t even know her. Full of hate.

In Season 1 Episode 10 Bill was ordered to create a new Vampire from Jessica (see fig. 10), a seventeen years old girl, as his punishment for killing a Vampire called Longshadow in order to save Sookie. When Jessica was turned into a Vampire, the scene showed the futility and meaninglessness of religion. The religious and “good girl” who only used to attend religious choirs and prayer groups and who never snuck out of her house kept on praying “Oh precious Jesus, God, save me, save me. Make it all a dream.” But all her prayers went unheard as she was turned into a Vampire that night by Bill against her will and her dream “Jesus will take me home to Heaven” was never realized. But after becoming a Vampire, she experiences some significant changes. She no longer remains a demure and outwardly pious teenage girl and becomes rebellious. Season 1 episode 11In True Blood, the rejection of human life is clearly exemplified by Jessica’s joy at becoming a Vampire and not having to adhere to the confining rules laid
down by her human (and oppressively religious) family. When Bill tries to make Jessica understand that she has been turned into a Vampire, he is surprised at her reaction:

JESSICA. No more mama and daddy? No more little sister? No more belts. No more clarinets. No more homeschool. No more rules. (Screaming with joy) I am a Vampire!

BILL. No, no, no, no. There are rules. That’s what I’ve been trying to teach you.

JESSICA. Crap on your rules. Crap, crap, crap. I can say anything I want now. Shit, shit, shit. Damn, hell, fuck! “Fuck”, that’s a bad one. Fuck, fuck, fuck. What’s another cussword so I can say it? I’m a damn Vampire…. It means I don’t have to sit like a lady and I can kill anybody I want. And there are an awful lot of people I’d like to kill.

BILL. No, Jessica, you absolutely cannot kill anybody you want…. With your new powers come new responsibilities.

When Bill and Jessica chain themselves in silver in order to survive an attack by a group of witches in Season 4 Episode 7, Bill says to her, “I am sorry. I have caused you so much suffering in your human life, and now in this one.” Jessica replies, “No. I don’t want you to ever be sorry. I’ve lived more with you than I ever would have with my human parents. I never thanked you for that.” The bond between the maker and his progeny gradually grows stronger.

Sookie, the heroine, however, rejects intolerance and other detestable forms of discrimination against Vampires. She says, “I just happen to think that judging an entire group of people based on the actions of a few individuals within that group is morally wrong!” When Sookie starts dating Bill, she learns very quickly how deep anti-Vampire prejudice runs. Her friends, her boss, her brother, customers at the bar, strangers- all express either their concern or
their disgust. When Tara warns Sookie, “You know they can hypnotize you,” Sookie responds sarcastically, “Yeah, and black people are lazy and Jews have horns.” In Episode 4 of the first season when Sam tries to convince Sookie, she defends her position very aptly:

SAM. Sookie, you’re gonna get yourself killed. Do you know that? Vampires think about one thing and one thing only, drinking your blood.

SOOKIE. Like humans are not blood thirsty? People want to see my brother hang for a crime he didn’t commit…. I thought you were for the Vampire Rights Amendment.

SAM. I think they should have their own bars. I just don’t think people ought to go there.

SOOKIE. Separate but equal?

In the following episode Adele, Sookie’s grandmother asserts in an affirming manner, “Well, I know that if I had a chance to know somebody who had experienced the world differently, I would see it as a blessing and not something to be scared of or hate.” Zanger lists changes in Vampires "from solitary to multiple and communal, from metaphoric Anti-Christ to secular sinner, from magical to mundane" each of which serves to demythologize the Vampire until "the new Vampire has become, in our concerned awareness for multiculturalism, merely ethnic, a victim of heredity, like being Sicilian or Jewish. Or, alternatively, Vampirism can be understood ... as a kind of viral infection, possibly like AIDS, without any necessary moral weight" (19).

The Vampire community is now divided, with traditionally monstrous Vampires such as Russell Edgington now cast in opposition to the less harmful Vampires who actually want to mainstream for the sake of maintaining their humanity – not live amongst humans for their own nefarious purposes, such as Bill Compton. Eric asks Isabel, a nest mate of Godric and Stan, what
she likes about being with a human. She says that it is their mortality that makes everything in
dlife urgent and exciting.

ERIC. Tell me, what is it that you find so fulfilling about human companionship?

ISABEL. They feel much more strongly than we do. Everything is urgent,
exciting. Maybe because their lives are so temporary. (Season 2 Episode 7)

The fact that Vampires like Bill and Eddie Gauthier are trying to mainstream is proof that it is
possible for Vampires to choose to live a moral life. It may be difficult for them, but it is hard
also for people with drug addictions or mental disorders. If we would not say that addicts and
mentally sick people must die because it’s difficult for them to do the right thing, then we also
should not make such a claim about Vampires either.³³ According to Zanger:

The 'new' Vampire possesses very little of that metaphysical, anti-Christian
dimension, and his or her evil acts are expressions of individual personality and
condition, not of any cosmic conflict between God and Satan. Consequently, the
Vampire's absolutely evil nature as objectified in Dracula becomes increasingly
compromised, permitting the existence of 'good' Vampires as well as bad ones.

(18-19)

Vampires are no longer inherently evil. But rather their penchant for blood-lust originates
from their individual senses of humanity and morality. This allows a chance for romantic
relationship between a human and a Vampire in modern Vampire texts without readers/viewers
being horrified by the choices the human makes. The Vampires of the current trend in Vampire
romances retain some aspects of supernatural myth even if they are no longer connected to
Christianity or Satan. The Vampires have no fear of crosses or holy water, but some supernatural
characteristics continue to persist. As Bill comments, “We Vampires are not the minions of the
devil. We can stand before a cross, or Bible, or in a church, just as readily as any other creature of God” (Season 1 Episode 5). They are undoubtedly more humanized than their ancestors from the past, but the mystery of the unexplained still remains attached, which is probably why they continue to lure the viewers and readers.

As Nina Auerbach aptly titled her book *Our Vampires, Ourselves*, our Vampires are ourselves, indeed. We created Vampires two centuries ago to cope with cultural fears—we personified them with those fears and staked and beheaded them away. How we use the monsters as scapegoats for our own purposes is evident in the conversation between Tara and her mother Latte Mae who suffers from severe alcohol addiction.

LETTIE MAE. I need four hundred and forty five dollars.

TARA. No way, mama. We are broke.

LETTIE MAE. I need it to exorcise the demon that is living inside me.

TARA. you need to do what normal people do. Stop drinking and go to meetings.

LETTIE MAE. I’m not a group person and the demon knows that.

TARA. does the demon know you spike your coffee? I can smell it from here.

LETTIE MAE. I can’t help it. The demon told me to finish off everything in the house today. It doesn’t want me to get exorcised.

TARA. yeah, next time you and your demon have a little chat you can tell it to go out and get a damn job. (Season 1 Episode 7)

Latte Mae is gullible, superstitious, verbally abusive and completely incapable of taking care of anyone including herself. But she blames the demons inside her for her unacceptable behavior and ends up losing a huge amount of money to a fraud for exorcism.
Now, humans in contemporary Vampire horror are represented in their full spectrum from loving and kind, to sinister, shady and immoral. No longer are the dichotomies of good and evil distinct. In Season 4 Episode1, Eric tells Sookie, “But understand this. Everyone who claims to love you, your friends, your brother, even Bill Compton, they all gave up on you. But I never did.” When Eric loses his memory in Season 4, he becomes depressed because of his Vampiric condition. He repents to Sookie, “I’ll never swim in the sun again. Never feel the heat on my skin. Never see the daylight in your hair” (Episode 4). In the following episode seeing Eric at Sookie’s house, Tara panics and tells Sookie that Eric is quintessentially an evil who is a psycho murderer, who sold her to Russell Edgington, tricked her into drinking his blood, locked Lafayette in a dungeon and tortured him. Hearing these things about his past deeds Eric comments, “Then your pain is my fault. Why are you letting me stay with you?” Sookie replies that she always knew there was decency in him, even when he was being a sarcastic smug. Amnesiac Eric forgets about his past and becomes gentle and sweet. He asks Sookie, “Am I evil?” She replies, “Well, you are not Gandhi, but no, you are not evil.” He says, “I’m clearly capable of extreme cruelty…. There is a light in you. It’s beautiful. I could not bear it if I snuffed it out.” At the time of the death sentence in the next episode, Eric speaks his last words to Bill which contradict the essence of a pure evil:

According to my progeny, I was a… I am a barbarian thug who has never respected your authority. I don’t expect you to show me any mercy…. I don’t wish to live this way…. The Vampire I used to be is a stranger to me. I have nothing to say in his defense. I’ll accept my sentence. But I have a request…. Sookie. Tell her I was born the night she found me. And because of her I went to
my true death knowing what it means to love. Tell her, “Thank you.” (Season 4 Episode 6)

The Vampire is not just a sexually attractive being, but a feasible option for romantic relationships and happiness. Vampire lovers are strong, reliable, experienced, handsome, and above all, immensely romantic. They are generally wealthy and influential alpha men who are respected or envied by mortal men. Sookie confesses, “If I’m really honest, it was not just goofy, innocent Eric I fell for. As vicious and untrustworthy as you can be, there is a goodness in you that breaks my heart… because a part of me has always wanted you” (Season 4 Episode 12). Sookie tells Eric in the ninth episode of second season, “You are a big faker. You are deep. You feel. There is love in you.” And later when Sookie had already broken up with Eric, he tells her, “I care about very few people in this world- a small handful of Vampires… and you” (Season 7 Episode 9).

Human lovers in the modern Vampire literature are generally blunt and dull in comparison to the Vampire lovers. The Vampires are ideal lovers and they are more sensible as well as passionate than mere men could be. This is evident as the female protagonists of the modern Vampire texts repeatedly choose Vampire boyfriends over human beaus. For example, Jonathan in Dracula, a recent British-American horror drama on NBC channel, does not approve Mina’s dream of a career in medicine. He does not care about her aspirations and thinks that a woman’s right place is in the house. He wishes Mina to behave like a “proper English wife.” He says to his friends, “Mate, when I slip this ring on Mina’s lovely little finger, I have every confidence that she will forget all this silliness at University and settle down and dedicate herself to more natural, womanly pursuits.” On the other hand, Grayson always praises her abilities and
qualities and inspires her to achieve success in her field. The following conversation between Mina and Grayson (see fig. 11) throws some light on this:

GRAYSON. So what’s your area of study, Miss Murray?

MINA. I’m studying to be a physician.

GRAYSON. Are you? How extraordinary!

MINA. You don’t approve.

GRAYSON. Now, why would you say that?

MINA. My father is the supervising physician at Bethlam Royal Hospital, and people would always say to me, “Are you going to be a nurse when you grow up?” and I would say, “No, I’m going to be a doctor.”

GRAYSON. Really?

MINA. Yes. And that was all very sweet and charming until I was fourteen or so.

GRAYSON. So what?

MINA. Indeed, Mr. Grayson.

GRAYSON. Two words, guaranteed to repel any manner of mediocrity masquerading as conventional wisdom.

MINA. I have a very difficult examination today, one which I may well fail, and if I do…

GRAYSON. That will be the end of your dreams?

MINA. Very much so.

GRAYSON. If there is one thing I’ve learned in all my years, in all my journeys, Miss Murray, is that when it comes to dreams, one may falter, but the only way to fail is to abandon them. (Season 1 Episode 2)
Later Grayson tries to convince Jonathan to appreciate Mina’s dreams and aspirations:

JONATHAN. I’ve known Miss Murray, Mina… for a long time. She has always been very stubborn. She insists on continuing her studies despite the fact that I now have the means and every intention of supporting her as my wife.

GRAYSON. I understand.

JONATHAN. You do?

GRAYSON. I understand that you are a fool. How can a man who wishes to defy social convention and rise above his station deny the same thing in the woman he loves? (Season 1 Episode 3)

Even the description of the leading Vampire characters vividly clashes with the description of the monster described in age old myths. For example, in Dead Until Dark, Sookie describes Bill's appearance in depth: "his lips were lovely, sharply sculpted, and he had arched dark brows. His nose swooped down right out of that arch, like a prince's in a Byzantine mosaic" (Harris 2). Later in the novel, upon meeting Eric Northman, Sookie describes him as "handsome, in fact, radiant; blond and blue-eyed, tall and broad shouldered. He was wearing boots, jeans, and a vest. Period. Kind of like the guys on the cover of romance books" (l05). In fact, most of the Vampires in the visual texts of the modern times have been played by physically attractive actors like Alexander Skarsgård (True Blood) Ian Somerhalder (The Vampire Diaries) Aidan Turner (Being Human) and Alex O'Loughlin (Moonlight) with a sexual tension around their appearance. Representation of the monster has shifted from the traditional idea of the monster, to alternative and surprising loci. In the words of Mukherjea,

Vampire boyfriends are complex instantiations of every positive aspect of masculine privilege, without personifying those more threatening facets of hyper-
masculinity — the violence or the uncontrolled sexuality. The great popularity of this genre suggests that many female readers are seeking certainty and protection and to maximize their options as women without curtailing feminine pleasures, a desire that is definitely worth acknowledging and addressing. The actual embodiment of such a fraught blend of characteristics, though, would be unwieldy, overbearing, and potentially explosive. We know very well that no human man could emulate a Vampire boyfriend, but I would argue, too, that no human man should. (Mukherjea, 2011)

The border between the two semantic fields, supernatural and human, has become blurred in the contemporary Vampire texts. The Vampire now offers something that is not so different from what is expected from a human. In contemporary culture, our relationship with the Vampire is closer than it ever has been. The Vampire is not the external “other”, the predator, which will change us or kills us. Now the Vampire lives among us, looks like us, lives like us, looks to the human, not as a source of their survival but as a source of inspiration and aspiration and the human aspires to the beauty, strength and benevolence of the ‘good’ Vampire. As Alan Ball comments:

The villains on this show have never been just evil. Everybody has something primal inside of them…. A lot of times there is good and there is bad. And good must vanquish bad. But our show is about all of the stuff in between.

We now imagine our society as integrated by using the Vampire to work through our fear and tolerance surrounding our liberalized attitudes to gender relations, sexuality, class, ethnicity and multiculturalism. The Vampires have reverted to human predation and they now show us the predatory human in ourselves. True Blood dramatizes the flaws and inconsistencies in our ethical
theory and practice. Regardless of whether we are human or Vampire, we can fall prey to the shadow and cast our evil onto others whom we do not include in our moral communities and our ethical obligations.\textsuperscript{37} no matter how many Vampires or fears we cycle through, we cannot kill the overarching concept of "Vampire."

BALL. What is it about Vampires that people love so much?

DEBORAH ANN WOLL. It talks about our society and our humanity by looking at monsters.

LAUREN BOWLES. It’s the pathos of the human condition, which is really, ultimately everybody’s search for love.

Now when we have no more fears to project onto them, we have transformed them from an object of fear to an admirable desire. These Vampires reflect our escapist desires we seek amid political turmoil, social stigma, war, or economic crisis. As Nelson asks,

The question is, can we reject predation over a sustained period of time, when it is difficult, and not just when it is convenient and easy? Can we abstain from ruthlessly feeding on each other, the creatures with whom we share the planet, and the precious and irreplaceable resources of the planet itself? As Earth’s most capable predator, the answer is a matter of life and death. (Nelson 10)

Vampires are bloodthirsty monsters and True Blood has done little to dissuade that notion. But in this show catharsis does not depend on the slaughtering of the monster. True Blood compels us to look beyond. How do we human beings make meaning to give ourselves cosmic significance? With the foreboding apocalyptic culture of the modern times along with other urban ills the metaphor portrayed by True Blood definitely offers an urban catharsis that is supposed to be psychologically necessary for our diseased times.
Notes:

1. The American Vampire League web site

2."You'll Be the Death of Me." Season 1, Episode 12.

3. One considered by members of a dominant group as alien, exotic, threatening, or inferior (as because of different racial, sexual, or cultural characteristics)

4. Mainstreaming refers to a social movement within the Vampire race, in which Vampires attempt to integrate themselves into everyday human society.

5. An acronym that refers to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender. Although all of the different identities within “LGBT” are often lumped together (and share sexism as a common root of oppression), there are specific needs and concerns related to each individual identity.


11. “True Blood Season 7: A Farewell to Bon Temps Retrospective Show (HBO).”
youtube.com, accessed on October 18, 2014

12. Here’s how the philosopher Bertrand Russell (1872 – 1970) is reported to have responded to this claim: “ It has been said that man is a rational animal. All my life I have been searching for evidence which could support this. ”

14. The belief that only members of our own species are entitled to respect or moral consideration.


19. See 11

20. See 11

21. See 11

22. Season 2 Episode 3

23. Season 2 Episode 9

24. See 23

25. Season 2 Episode 3

26. Fag is a pejorative term used chiefly in North America primarily to refer to a gay man.


28. See King.

29. “Gay window advertising” has been identified as the earliest and the most common strategy targeting gays which is carefully designed to avoid explicit gay references as well as gay stereotypes. Gay window advertising often features “average,” “normal” and straight-looking
characters of same sex who can be read as buddies or roommates by straight audiences and as gay couples by gay audiences. This advertising strategy is intended to appeal to lesbian and gay consumers without offending, or even alerting, homophobic audiences.

In the case of gay window advertising, gay audiences may enjoy the pleasures of deciphering implicit queer codes and reading ambiguous scenarios that invites their imaginations. In contrast to most heterosexual audiences who may be unaware of the gay subtexts encoded, gay audiences are more likely to be conscious of not only a gay articulation, but also the possibility of multiple ad meanings. Gay window advertising with the encoded connotative queer references works to seduce gay audiences with negotiated pleasures and may consequently acknowledge gay consumers’ unique interpretive strategies and the existence of a distinct gay culture.

30. For more on gay window advertising, see Deane Clark, “CommodityLesbianism,” *Camera Obscura* 25/26 (January/May 1991): 181-201


32. See 7.

33. “Are Vampires Unnatural?”*True BloodAnd Philosophy: We Wanna Think Bad ThingsWith You*. Andrew Terjesen and Jenny Terjesen. See Blyde.

34. Season 4 Episode 5.

35. See 34

36. See 34

37. Neumann (1969/1990) makes a lovely point about the shadow and a species-wide ethic when he says that “This living relationship with the shadow brings home to the ego its solidarity with the whole human species and its history known in subjective experience, since it
discovers within itself a host of prehistoric psychic structures in the form of drives, instincts, primeval images, symbols, archetypal ideas and primitive behavior patterns.... the encounter and reconciliation with the shadow is in very many cases the *sine qua non* for the birth of a genuinely tolerant attitude towards other people, other groups and other forms and levels of culture (pp. 96-97).
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