The Southern Vampire in American Popular Fiction

Paper submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of “Master in de Vergelijkende Moderne Letterkunde” by Anthony Hudders

Supervisor: Prof. Dr. Gert Buelens
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Ever since I started to read English novels, vampires have intrigued me. It is with great pleasure then, that I have researched this subject.

I would like to thank my supervisor, Gert Buelens, for allowing me to write my masters dissertation on this fascinating topic, and for providing me with encouragement and assistance. Many thanks also go to Stijn Praet for his helpful suggestions on additional primary and secondary literature.

While I was doing research, my conversation with Brad Moore provided me with additional and much needed insight into racial sensitivities in the United States.

Many thanks go to my parents, who have assisted me in any way they could while I was writing at their house. Mother’s cooking was a delight after years of surviving on frozen dinners and take-away meals. Father’s magnum bottle of Champaign was a resourceful incentive; I am looking forward to opening it. I have also much appreciated their cat, for keeping me company during nocturnal writing hours.

I am especially grateful to Jeroen, who encouraged me to keep on writing, and applied gentle pressure when needed so that I could deliver this project in time. It seems like it worked.
**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

1. INTRODUCTION 3  
2. A CHRONOLOGY OF AMERICAN VAMPIRE FICTION 5  
3. SOUTHERN GOTHIC 15  
   3.1. Early British Gothic 15  
   3.2. American Gothic 19  
   3.3. Southern Gothic 22  
   3.4. Southern Vampire Gothic 27  
4. SLAVERY 32  
   4.1. Voodoo and the Vampire Slaveholder 32  
   4.2. The Slave Vampire 45  
5. RACE 54  
6. RELIGION 73  
7. CONCLUSION 85  
NOTES 87  
WORKS CITED 90
1. INTRODUCTION

Vampires have never been so popular in mainstream media since the release of the first *Twilight* movie in 2008. The film, based on the eponymous novel about the budding romance between a hundred-year-old vampire and a conflicted teenage girl, has led to a seemingly tireless incorporation of the vampire trope in cinema, television series and popular literary fictions. The idea of the vampire as a conflicted being struggling with its own nature has become completely normalized, to the extent that most of the vampires in recent media are portrayed this way.

The notion of the sympathetic vampire goes back to Anne Rice’s *Interview with the Vampire* (1976), a novel that has had immense influence on subsequent publications of vampire fiction. Besides the employment of the vampire as a “narrative self,” the novel’s second most conspicuous characteristic is its setting in the Southern region of the United States. The South, with its history of slavery, secession and segregation provides a fertile playing ground for vampire fiction. Rice’s example has given rise to an entire body of work that equally employs these two key characteristics: the sympathetic vampire and the Southern setting, for which I propose the denominator “Southern vampire fiction.” In this paper I will discuss the common grounds of these works of Southern vampire fiction, in three distinctive parts.

The first part outlines a chronological overview of American vampire fiction, beginning in 1975 and ending in 2008, with the release of the Southern vampire series *True Blood*. Special attention will be given to the works that feature a Southern setting, and to the extent in which authors are either using innovative or familiar narrative techniques. This
segment also provides a first introduction to the works that will be treated in the following chapters.

The second part attempts to place Southern Vampire Fiction within the genre of the Gothic novel, beginning with the earliest representatives of British Gothic, and ending with Southern American Gothic. All the while, the historical and social dynamics that account for the emergence of such fictions will be addressed.

The third part focuses exclusively on Southern vampire fiction, by exploring how and to what extent the South’s regional concerns are addressed in these works. These concerns are slavery, race and religion. Each issue will be treated separately, with a discussion of the works that bear a significant relevance to it.
2. A CHRONOLOGY OF AMERICAN VAMPIRE FICTION

I will start my discussion of the Southern vampire trope with an outline of vampire fiction to demonstrate how each work was influenced by the ones preceding it, but in its own turn had a major influence on the ones following it. It is difficult to prove that one author borrows from another, but a chronological overview gives insight into the development of the Southern vampire trope into its current form. Although there were other works of vampire fiction in the United States before this time, I will start my overview in 1975, the year in which two works were published that put the vampire genre on track for the next 35 years.

In Stephen King’s ‘Salem’s Lot (1975), set in a small North-Eastern US town, an ancient vampire, Kurt Barlow, posing as an antique dealer, slowly turns the entire town into vampires. In contrast to the other works that will be discussed in this overview, King’s vampires are still described in the gothic terms of “the terrifying”. As an author of a large body of horror novels, King’s work is truest to the original intent of gothic fiction. His vampires are nothing less than monsters, perceived only as terrifying by the protagonists in the story, and by the readers. They are “so horrible that they may look retrograde” (Auerbach 155). While vampirism is given to only a chosen few in future vampire fiction, King’s vampires spread like a disease, causing chaos as they spread. Vampirism is represented like an epidemic, brought to the American continent by a dubious passenger from the Old Continent. The story would become an unwitting omen to the rise of AIDS in the United States in the early 1980s: the foreign vampire as patient zero.
That same year, Fred Saberhagen’s *The Dracula Tape* (1975) was released. This novel “allowed a witty and humane Dracula to tell his own story, one that exposed the sadistic idiocy of the vampire-hunting men and the profundity of his love for Mina”. (Auerbach 131-32) Contrary to King’s monstrous vampires, Saberhagen’s Vlad is humane and explains that his actions have been misinterpreted by Bram Stoker. Auerbach argues that Vlad is “the type of the new vampires who, for the first time, belong in the age that bred them. (132)

In 1976 *Interview with the Vampire* appeared, the novel which was to be a milestone for the Southern Vampire trope. In the story, the vampire Louis is interviewed by an eager listener, the boy, and the entire novel is continued from his point of view. Ken Gelder mistakenly argues that Rice was “possibly the first writer to narrate her stories in the first person from the vampire point of view” (Gelder 109), but the following fragment from Saberhagen’s *Dracula Tape* proves otherwise:

> You will accuse me of the death of Lucy Westenra, I suppose. Ah, I would swear my innocence, but what is there to swear by that you would now believe? Later, perhaps, when you have begun to understand some things, then I will swear. I embraced the lovely Lucy, it is true. But never against her will. Not she nor any of the others did I ever force. (Saberhagen 3)

At first glance, Rice seems to owe a lot to Saberhagen, but while the latter continued to work with the vampire mythology as elaborated in Stoker’s *Dracula* (1897), Rice invented a new mythology for the vampire: the existentialist vampire, seeking to understand his own nature and ultimately failing to do so. The major innovation is that
Rice’s vampire fiction explains “how it feels to be a vampire”. (Lloyd-Smith 126)

Another important addition Rice made to the genre is choosing New Orleans, Louisiana as the backdrop for Louis’s story, and thus, the Southern vampire trope came into being. The story begins in pre-Civil War New Orleans in 1791 where Louis is the son of a wealthy plantation owner. Gelder explains that Rice portrays the city in this era as “...somewhat at odds- a place where different ethnicities interact ‘freely’ with one another [and] where class differences are dissolved (everyone is suitably aristocratic)”. (Gelder 110). Louis is brought over to the world of vampirism by the diabolical Parisian vampire Lestat. The choice for a foreign protagonist as Louis’s maker illustrates how American vampire fiction still relies on the tradition of European vampire fiction. However, Louis breaks free from his maker and eventually sets out on his own journey.

Rice would go on to write nine additional vampire chronicles. The second, *The Vampire Lestat* (1985) retells parts of *Interview with the Vampire*, from the perspective of Lestat. This is basically the same narratological technique observed in *The Dracula Tape*.

Similarly, at the end Lestat’s tale, the reader is led to believe that Lestat’s motives were not as evil as Louis would have him or her believe in the previous chronicle. In *The Vampire Lestat*, the protagonist goes in search of his own vampiric origins as well, but he succeeds in his goal, unravelling the mystery of the first vampire. The major existentialist themes of the first chronicles are “resolved” in this way, and from this point on, the chronicles lose much of their stamina. For her last three chronicles, Rice returned to the southern gothic roots of *Interview*, choosing New Orleans and its surroundings as the favoured setting again. The Vampire chronicles came to an end in 2002, with *Blood Canticle*. Despite the declining quality of her work, Rice did spark an interest for the
vampire as a misunderstood other, paving the way for other works that would represent vampires as a metaphor for minority groups.

In 1987, two movies appeared that invigorated the vampire genre even further: *Near Dark* and *The Lost Boys*. These stories are somewhere between the vampire’s point of view and that of the vampire as a hostile other. The protagonists of both stories, Caleb in *Near Dark* and Michael in *The Lost Boys*, find themselves midway the transformation into a vampire. *The Lost Boys* - and arguably, *Near dark* - introduces a new species of vampires that exemplifies the most important paradigm-shift of the 1980s: the half-vampire.”(Auerbach 168) These half vampires still have hope to become human once more. Caleb is cured of vampirism by a blood transfusion performed by his father, while Michael’s salvation lies in slaying the head vampire. In both movies, vampirism is initially represented as something a teenager could take an interest in: a wild ride full of passion, coming to them in the form of an attractive, yet conflicted vampire girl.

However, it is ultimately revealed that vampirism is a curse, which must be overcome. After their short trip to “the dark side”, the protagonists, and the vampire girls that drew them in are turned human as before, and order is restored.

Even though Rice portrayed New Orleans as a city full of different ethnic groups, until the release of *Merrick* (2000) the *Vampire Chronicles* do not feature any African Americans that are turned into vampires as protagonists. It is not surprising then, that the African American vampire as a supernatural “other” would eventually rise up to join the ranks of fictional vampires.

This occurred in 1991, when Jewelle Gomez’s *The Gilda Stories* was released. The novel featured a black, lesbian vampire as its protagonist. Gilda began life as a slave girl on a
Southern plantation in the early 19th century. This causes the novel to question the issue of slavery and the continuing effect this has on African Americans. Gilda is a direct witness of slavery, and she carries her early memories with her, wherever she goes. Poppy Z. Brite’s *Lost Souls* (1992) was a second milestone for the genre of vampire fiction. Where Rice infused her chronicles with a latent homoeroticism, Brite purposefully chooses explicitly homosexual characters for her story. With Rice, she has the main setting of New Orleans in common, but another perspective of the city is brought to the fore. This is a different kind of New Orleans, far from Rice’s romanticized view of the past. The sultry Southern history is present, but now it is juxtaposed with a gnawing fin-de-siècle sentiment. For the vampire protagonists, this version of New Orleans is the ideal setting to live out their existentialist doubts and decadent behaviour. Brite wrote two more novels set in the same setting. Her second novel, *Drawing Blood* (1993), is an exploration of the gothic haunted house trope, featuring once more the fictional town of Missing Mile, a dilapidated Southern town in North Carolina. Her third novel features homosexuality even more prominently and more explicitly portrayed, but the novel is made even more subversive by its two main protagonists: two homosexual, cannibalistic serial killers suffering from HIV, with a penchant for necrophilia. Of all the authors discussed in the paper, Brite may be considered to be the most subversive. Her work has a distinctively subcultural feel to, exploring the mindset of the gothic subculture that constantly flirts with vampirism. Her work may seem on the trashy side, but she equally tackles the existentialist themes that Rice dealt with, albeit free of the Christian morals Rice’s work is filled with.
After these important reworkings of the genre, a number of popular novels are released that take over many elements of the abovementioned works. The popularity of vampire fiction rises, creating many clones to Rice’s *Vampire Chronicles*.

An important writer in this respect is Laurell K. Hamilton. Her *Anita Blake, Vampire Hunter* series start off with the release of *Guilty Pleasures* in 1993.³ This novel employs the narratological structure of the detective novel, set in a world where vampires have revealed their existence to the world. They are a normalized part of society, as a new minority group. The main character, Anita, is a woman with special gifts, having the ability to raise the dead. She is a supernatural detective, solving problems that are the result of the new supernatural presences in the world. Anita is erotically involved with a powerful vampire and this relationship causes her to be more and more entangled in a supernatural web of intrigue.

Unlike the Works of Rice, Brite and Gomez, Hamilton’s *Anita Blake: Vampire Hunter* series cannot be considered as literature. They are versions of popular fiction in its purest form, where each instalment of the series follows the same structure around the premise of a whodunit, with the perpetrator revealed in the end in an unlikely twist of the story. It is important to note though, that it is the women who play the role of detective here, and the vampires take the place of the femme fatales in the storyline. This makes the novels interesting for their use of gender reversal.

When a certain trope in literary fiction is successful in terms of sales, it does not take long for a television station to come up with a series of its own. In 1997, Joss Whedon’s *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* was a big hit from the start. The show, based on an earlier movie of the same name, features Buffy Summers, a seemingly normal blonde teenage
girl, gifted with super strength to fight vampires and keep order and balance in the world. Like Anita, Buffy is romantically involved with a vampire, the constantly brooding Angel. Awfully reminiscent of Anne Rice’s Louis, Angel is burdened by a human sense of morality. The show was carried on until 2003.

In 2000, Anne Rice’s Merrick returned The Vampire Chronicles to New Orleans, and finally featured an African American character, the witch Merrick, as a central protagonist. Merrick is asked to call up the ghost of Claudia, the child vampire Louis loved and lost. True to the spirit of a Southern gothic tale, Merrick introduces voodoo mythology into the Vampire Chronicles.

Charlaine Harris, a writer of detective novels and thrillers, noticed how Hamilton’s vampire hunter novels were a big success, and attempted to rival the success of Hamilton’s books. Harris does not hide that she is writing mainly for commercial purposes. When asked in an interview why she shifted to the genre of vampire fiction, she states that she “wanted to give [her] career a shot in the arm.” (Harris "Mystical E Interview") She succeeds with the publication of Dead until Dark (2001), the first in a series of novels called The Southern Vampire Mysteries, which owes much to the structure of Hamilton’s books. An important similarity is that the story is set in a fantastic universe, where vampires have revealed their existence to the world. This is but a recent development though, brought about by the invention of synthetic blood by Japanese scientists, which replaces the vampires’ need for blood from human beings. In the books, much attention is given to the public’s reaction to this new “minority group. Other similar story elements include a young woman with supernatural gifts, in this case telepathy, romantically involved with a powerful vampire. Each storyline is again built up as a
whodunit, where the perpetrator is revealed in the end. Harris does add another unique element to this tried recipe: the Southern Gothic setting. Smith argues that a lot of contemporary works can be seen as heritage gothic (Lloyd-Smith 125), and Harris novels are just that, borrowing from the gothic tradition of previous work, setting up a world that is familiar to readers, and which creates expectations due to its location. The books were a huge success, and Harris’s story was converted into a TV show for HBO (see infra).

In 2002, Rice released another Southern Vampire Chronicle, Blackwood Farm, about the young Anthony Blackwood and the events that lead to his transformation into a vampire. The story is told from his point of view, and we are presented with an archetypal southern setting: an old family mansion, close to New Orleans, surrounded by a swamp. Its inhabitants, the Blackwoods, are burdened by the dark, secret history of their ancestor, Manfred Blackwood. It is an ―old money‖ family, that still relies on mainly coloured servants to take care of the household. In terms of its setting, this novel may be truest to William Faulkner’s Southern gothic universe (especially the novel Absalom, Absalom!), by which Rice claims to have been influenced greatly.

In 2005, the late Octavia Butler published Fledgling. Again, this story is told from the perspective of a vampire. However, this time the young vampire, Shori, starts out with memory loss, and must trace back her origins all over again. Moreover, she is black, something that is not common for the race of vampires in the fantastic universe of Fledgling. Shori is genetically engineered to be black, enabling her to walk in the sun more easily. Here, blackness is an advantage, but Shori’s skin colour sets her apart from other vampires that have a distinctively “Arian” look: pale, blond with blue eyes. The novel explores the issue of racism through the vampire community’s reaction to a black
vampire in their midst. Although the novel does not rely on a sense of place to convey a particular meaning, since each chapter is set in the vampire’s gated communities, the issues that are tackled through this work can be associated with much of what has been written in Southern writing, particularly in the case of racist attacks on African Americans.

Finally in 2008, the television show *True Blood* is first aired on HBO, based on Charlaine Harris’s *Dead Until Dark*. Director and producer Alan Ball, known for *Six Feet Under* and *American Beauty* added many elements to the series of which the most noticeable is the bigger role for Lafayette, a queer, African American character, and the addition of several other African American characters that were either absent in the novel, or had a different racial background. Tara, for example, is Caucasian in the novels, while in the televised version she is a self-conscious African American. Ball gratefully continues to explore the gothic setting of the South, drawing on both the region’s history and its present condition to present vampires as a new minority group, often comparing their integration into American society to that of homosexuals.

Recently, the TV Show *The Vampire Diaries* (2009), based on a series of novels by L.J. Smith, was aired. The show is aimed mainly at teenagers, much like the movie *Twilight* (2008), based on the novels by Stephenie Meyer. The show deserves to be mentioned in this overview, because it features a Southern town as its setting. Although there is an attempt to create a sense of place, *The Vampire Diaries* does not manage to convey the particular sentiment of a Southern Gothic setting. This is most likely because of the heavy restraints an American television show aimed at teenagers suffers from. For this reason I will not carry this show into my discussion, as it adds very little new elements to the
evolution of the vampire genre. Mainly, it repeats tropes from *Twilight*, *True Blood*, and *Interview with the Vampire* in a diluted and easily digestible manner.
3. SOUTHERN GOTHIC

The vampire has been through many transformations throughout the last century. He emerged as an evil power-hungry villain in the 19th century to resurface as a sympathetic hero in the 1970s. From here on he went from doubtful existentialist creature to sexy teen idol in the popular movies that are in cinemas today. Intense as this metamorphosis may be, it roots can still be traced back to that body of work called Gothic fiction.

3.1. Early British Gothic

Though most readers do not have a hard time recognizing a text as Gothic, or having “Gothic” properties, the genre itself is hard to define. The word “Gothic” brings to mind ancient castles harbouring a great dormant evil in the dungeon, curious monsters hidden in the shadows, and the innocent damsel in distress who is on the run from such threatening entities. These expectations find their origins in the gothic literature of the 18th and 19th centuries, when the genre had its period of bloom.

Literary theorists today agree that the first Gothic novel was The Castle of Otranto (1764), written by Horace Walpole. The story explores the now classic themes – especially in Southern Gothic – of haunted castles and disastrous bloodlines. The tale was written in the Enlightenment period, “in the midst of Augustan ideals of classical harmony, public decorum and reasonable restraint”. (Jackson 95). It may seem odd that this rational era spawned the first Gothic novel, but Rosemary Jackson argues that it is
precisely by excluding the irrational from everyday life, that the Enlightenment had at the same time confined “an entire reservoir of the fantastic”. (95) Essentially, this means that the Gothic finds its inspiration in that which a society tries to suppress and repress, because “like any other text, a literary fantasy is produced within and determined by, its social context”. (Jackson 3) As the product of a time where firm rational boundaries are placed upon society, the Gothic essentially explores these boundaries by transgressing them in stories. This results in a preference for extremes of “cruelty, rapacity and fear, or passion and sexual degradation.” (Lloyd-Smith 5) Leslie Fiedler gives the writings of the Marquis de Sade as an example of this mechanism, saying that “de Sade shed new light on the ambivalence of the inner mind, revealing the true darkness and terror implicit in the drive which the neo-classical age […] had been content to celebrate as simple ‘pleasure’ or ‘gallantry’.” (Fiedler XIX) This “ambivalence of the inner mind” would be further explored in the Gothic novel through the trope of the Doppelganger, where a protagonist is confronted with an evil, morally bankrupt version of himself: an internalized version of “the other”. The clearest literary example of this trope is The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde (1886) by Robert Louis Stevenson.

What readers experienced and may still experience with Gothic novels is related to what Aristotle called “catharsis” in his work Poetics. In an essay on her earlier works, Anne Rice explains how gothic tales may be “dark stories”, yet ultimately act as a “moral compass”:

[...] such stories are transformative. They invite the reader on a journey which reflects perfectly the formula of Aristotle for great drama: as one reads, [...] one
feels pity and fear, and eventually experiences catharsis. One is taken to a place, through the literary experience, to which one might not have ever gone on one’s own. I feel strongly that dark stories demand that the audience earn the transformation; they require a certain suffering on the part of the audience as the price of eventual affirmation.” (Rice “Essay on Earlier Works”)

When Rice wrote this essay she had only just converted to Christianity, which explains why she puts so much emphasis on the moral value of the gothic stories that influenced her Vampire Chronicles. It is true though, that the Gothic tale often ends with a restoration of order, where the unnatural invading forces are destroyed or returned to wherever they came from. That is another distinguishing feature of the genre: although the Gothic may stray far from a nation’s moral codes, ultimately it always seeks to reinforce it. Bram Stoker’s Dracula (1897) may challenge and transgress late 19th C Britain’s sexual morality, but Dracula is ultimately destroyed and the nation’s moral values are upheld. Likewise, Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu’s Carmilla (1872) explores lesbian attraction by having its protagonist Laura flirt – albeit obliquely – with Carmilla. In the end though, the latter is identified as an evil vampire and she is destroyed, saving the fortunate Laura from a demonic lesbian union.

Rice’s emphasis on morality ignores what Gothic tries to do initially: to strike fear into the hearts of readers, if only momentarily, by writing about that which a society tries to ignore or repress. It is precisely this fear that attracts readers, and not what they might
learn from it. Lloyd-Smith explains that the Gothic mode owed its popularity in the 18th and 19th century to Edmund Burke’s notion of “the Sublime”:

Burke [...] helped to redirect attention to the aesthetic power of the “Sublime,” showing how even the emotion of fear might be pleasurable in the right context. What had been seen previously as barbaric, monstrous, or terrifying could alternatively be experienced as sublimely affecting through its production of powerful emotional reactions in the observer. (27)

As can be expected, every nation has its own particular anxieties, based on its history, and its contemporary set of moral values. As a society evolves, so do the themes of the Gothic novels it produces. In an interview for the Belgian state television in 1989, King explains that, while he was influenced by the early Gothic stories, he couldn’t “relate” to them:

For me the trick was to find some kind of bridge between this sort of Gothic horror stories that were written in the 18th Century and the world that I live in today, the modern world. *Frankenstein* was never a book that really excited me. *Dracula* was, but they’re both set in Europe and there’s a feeling of antiquity about them: the castles, moors, and I don’t live in that world.

For his second work, the vampire story ‘*Salem’s Lot* (1975), King decided to bring the vampire to America, and have it prey upon the fears and repressed feelings of the 1970s:

It might be possible to bring, for instance, a vampire to America, and I wrote a novel called ‘*Salem’s Lot*, where a European vampire comes to a small Maine town, Jerusalem’s Lot, and settles in and opens an antique store, and turns this
whole town of boarding house owners, and barbers, small town policemen, into vampires. And it worked like a bomb! (King)

That King chose to have his vampirism introduced into the United States by means of a “European vampire” demonstrates how he acknowledges the influence of the British Gothic novel. Similarly, Rice had her American vampire protagonist Louis join the ranks of the undead by means of the European vampire Lestat in *Interview with the Vampire*, released one year after ‘Salem’s Lot. This also indicates that the American vampire trope had not yet achieved independence from its European counterpart at that time.

3.2. American Gothic

This brings us to the American Gothic, which is inevitably different in its form from its British counterpart. A first major difference would be the geographical conditions. The United States being a relatively young nation, it lacks the ancient castles and monasteries that are the favourite playing ground for the British Gothic. Fiedler criticizes an early American Gothic writer (I. Mitchell) who in 1811 tried to imitate the setting of the British Gothic:

[Mitchell] was able to imagine a gothic country house on Long Island; but such a structure in such a place remains not merely unconvincing but meaningless. The haunted castle of the European gothic is an apt symbol for a particular body of attitudes toward the past which was a chief concern of the genre. The counterpart of such a castle fifty miles from New York has lost all its point. (Fiedler 129)
To create a credible “fantastic universe” wherein the American Gothic could present its particular anxieties, it did not suffice to replace the British settings with American ones such as the untamed wilderness, or remote houses in newly claimed land. As Fiedler demonstrates, some early “Gothicists” tried this but failed to deliver a “proper” American Gothic. Lloyd-Smith points out that the American Gothic truly came into its own when it adapted to its specific cultural conditions and social context:

Rather than a simple matter of imitation and adaptation, [...] certain unique cultural pressures led Americans to the Gothic as expression of their very different conditions. Among these [...] pressures were the frontier experience, with its inherent solitude and potential violence; the Puritan inheritance; [...] and very significantly, racial issues concerning both slavery and the Native Americans. (Lloyd-Smith 4)

Fiedler argues that “American literature was from the first “a Gothic fiction, non realistic and negative, sadist and melodramatic – a literature of darkness and the grotesque in a land of light and affirmation.” (Fiedler 29) For Fiedler, one of the chief concerns of the Gothic lies in its attitudes towards a nation’s past, and in the United States, that past is haunted by the enslavement of the African American man.

Fiedler sees the signs of the collective trauma of slavery in one of the most prominent American Gothic writers: Edgar Allen Poe. Poe wrote before the American Civil War, which was to have a profound effect on the self-identity of Southern Americans, and the way they were perceived by Northerners. The novel Fiedler focuses on is *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket* (1838). The story is about the – unwitting – journey of exploration undertaken by Gordon Pym. The events take a turn for the worse as Pym is
confronted with mutiny, shipwreck, and cannibalism. The story contains two main “black” or “black-skinned” antagonistic figures: the black cook who leads the mutiny on Gordon’s ship, and the black-skinned natives Pym encounters on the South Pole. The latter are killed by the arrival of a mysterious shrouded figure, with a skin colour that has “the perfect whiteness of the snow”. (Poe 217) This illustrates how the dichotomy of black and white is used to symbolize respectively evil and good. But in a nation where black men are held as slaves by white men, the text gains another, more disturbing meaning. Lloyd-Smith discovers in *Gordon Pym* “a racism, subtly etched throughout”, emerging “on occasion with demonic energy.” (Lloyd-Smith 46) For Harry Levin, Poe’s choice of a black and white dichotomy is no coincidence either: “Such effects do not preexist in a vacuum, although the artist may obtain them subconsciously; he chooses one shade, rather than an alternative, because it bears some connection for him and for others.” (Levin 28-29)

According to Fiedler, *Gordon Pym* is the first novel which “uses Gothicism to express a peculiarly American dilemma identifying the symbolic blackness of terror with the blackness of the Negro [sic] and the white guilt he embodies.” (Fiedler 378) Moreover, Fiedler identifies Poe as a Southern author, writing for a Southern public:

[…The South moved him [Poe] at the deepest personal level. Insofar as *Gordon Pym* is finally a social document as well as a fantasy, its subject is slavery; and its scene, however disguised, is the section of America which was to destroy itself defending that institution. (378)
For Fiedler, it is only natural that a Southern author (as Fiedler defines Poe) “discover that the proper subject for the American Gothic is the black man, from whose shadow [The United States] have not yet emerged. (378)

3.3. Southern Gothic

Poe may be a Southern writer of Gothic fiction, but he does not qualify as the typical Southern Gothic writer, since he wrote in a pre-Civil War era. For a better understanding of Southern Gothic, one must first look at the concerns of the region, which have their roots in the American Civil war.

According to Mackay, “one of the most important concerns in the study of Southern literature is the nature of the Southern landscape and how this bears on definitions of the South as a distinct geographical, socio-political and cultural space.” (Mackay 1) While the South certainly has a few unique geographical properties such as the bayous in the Mississippi River region, the swamps and the plantations, the particularity of the Southern landscape is mainly defined by its troubled history. What matters is the meaning that the landscape has come to embody.

Corner Vann Woodward delineates the South as a region that is defined by guilt over its troubled history, as opposed to the general American identity which originally defined itself in terms of innocence: “The self-image implanted in Americans was one of innocence as compared with less fortunate people in the Old World. They were a chosen
people and their land a Utopia on the make.” (The Burden of Southern History 20) The clearest reference to this myth is found early in American history, with John Winthrop’s utopian sermon in 1630, wherein he expresses that the new colony would be “a city upon a hill”, to serve as an example for other nations. Woodward explains that Southerners have participated in this ideal since the Declaration of Independence, but “for half that time they lived intimately with a great social evil and the other half with its aftermath. It was an evil that was even condemned and abandoned by the Old World, to which America’s moral superiority was supposedly an article of faith.” (The Burden of Southern History 21) By “a great social evil”, Woodward refers to the first of the South’s two “unpardonable sins”: slavery. (Roland 4) The pre-Civil War South had a plantation economy that relied on slaves to perform most of the manual labour. As a nation that grew wealthy by exploiting African Americans, at a time when the moral bankruptcy of this system had been recognized in the rest of the United States, the South could make no claim to the myth of American innocence and moral complacency.

Moreover, the South’s refusal to abolish slavery resulted in the South’s second unpardonable sin: secession. Eleven of these “slave states” seceded to form the Confederate States of America: South Carolina, Mississippi, Florida, Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Texas, Virginia, Arkansas, Tennessee and North Carolina. The secession marked the start of the American Civil War, lasting from 1860 to 1865, which resulted in heavy losses for the Southern States.
Woodward explains how the American people have never been on the losing side of war\(^8\), which is why “success and victory are still national habits of mind.” But after the Civil War, Southerners could no longer participate in this myth, since they were now “the only Americans who had known the travail and humiliation of being conquered and subjected to military occupation.” (Roland 4) Woodward explains this in further detail:

> This is but one among several American legends in which the South can participate only vicariously or in part. [Southern history] includes not only an overwhelming military defeat but long decades of defeat in the provinces of economic, social and political life. Such a heritage affords the Southern people no basis for the delusion that there is nothing whatever that is beyond their power to accomplish. They have had it forcibly and repeatedly borne in upon them that this is not the case. (The Burden of Southern History 19)

After the Civil War, the South tried to deal with the now free African Americans, by installing the segregation statutes or ‘Jim Crow’ laws in 1877. This led to a racial ostracism that extended to churches and schools, to housing and jobs, to eating and drinking. Whether by law or by custom, that ostracism extended to virtually all forms of public transportation, to sports and recreations, to hospitals, orphanages and prisons, and asylums, and ultimately to funeral homes and cemeteries. (Woodward The Strange Career of Jim Crow 7)

From this moment on, the entire public sphere was segregated, but contrary to what the laws claimed to do, creating a “separate but equal” status for Africans Americans, race relations were not appeased. The laws resulted in African Americans being left to use the more inferior accommodations of the public sphere. Moreover, as racial integration was
now made legally impossible, white Southerners held on to their racial prejudices of African Americans. What is perhaps even more disturbing, is the rise of violence in the South. Infuriated by the so-called “equal rights” that were given to former slaves, several white Southerners vented their anger on random African Americans, by lynching them. Klarman reports that “by around 1890, race relations in the South had begun what was to be a long downward spiral. The number of blacks lynched each year rose dramatically.” (10)

These concerns - slavery, the Civil War, and its aftermath - are at the heart of the burdened Southern identity. With a troubled past of this magnitude, Southern writers had all the ingredients to produce frightening tales. The most influential and prolific writer of Southern Gothic novels is the Nobel laureate William Faulkner. His novels - including *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936) - are set in the Southern state of Mississippi. In this region, Faulkner created an imaginary province called Yoknapatawpha County, with its equally fictional county town Jefferson. Lloyd-Smith recognizes in Faulkner a “profoundly Gothic writer, working out of a dispossessed region afflicted by loss of a grander history than its present condition.” (116) Faulkner’s Gothic landscapes include Southern transformations of the original British gothic: “haunted swamps, lost plantations, and defeated Southern towns.” (Lloyd-Smith 117) Many of Faulkner’s works investigate the conflict between the Old South and the New South. The Old South is the South from the pre-Civil War era, with its slavery, plantation system and aristocratic pretensions. The so-called New South
was proudly proclaimed a few years after the Civil War by an entire covey of young southern boosters. [...] Their New South was a South said to be refashioned in the likeness of the victorious North: a South of industry, commerce, and hustle - a South outdoing the Yankees at their own game yet retaining the charm and graciousness of the Old South. (Roland 4)

But the outlook for “the New South” was not as optimistic as expected in the early years after the Civil War. The South’s economic position remained precarious until World War II, when it finally made its actual transformation, experiencing “revolutions in its economy, politics, and race relations.” (Roland 5) At this point the South would define itself as a new kind of economic region, changing from the “Cotton Belt”, heavily relying on plantations, into the “Sun Belt”, an economy now based on industry. Morton Sosna argues that

the social changes [World War II] brought […] were vast and far reaching. The accelerated urbanization and industrialization wrought by a massive modern war, which greatly affected the entire United States, would have a particularly dramatic impact on the South. (Sosna XV)

However, old habits die hard in the South. While the region may have gone through a lot of changes since the Civil War, the mentality of Southerners is less apt to change. Henry Steele Commager says it is even “possible to study the Civil War period in contemporary Southerners… [because] they retain the psychology and vocabulary of that period.” (Commager, as cited by Roland) Related to the Southerner’s focus on the past, is an increased interest in family relations and blood lineages that go back to the times of the Old South. “Southern fiction swarms with grandfathers and grandmothers, great-
grandfathers and great-grandmothers, and so on ad infinitum. The strengths and weaknesses of the present generation are seen as a legacy from its forebears.’(Roland 12)

When the Southern concerns for blood lines and racial bigotry merge, the theme of “miscegenation” emerges in the Gothic mode. This racially biased term designates interracial marriage and sexual intercourse. The children that come from interracial unions provide another irrational fear for the old-fashioned Southerner’s segregated mindset:

Faulkner [realizes that] not murder only but miscegenation, too, must preside over the relations of black and white to produce the full gothic shiver. More shocking to the imagination of the South than the fantasy of a white man overwhelmed by a hostile black world is the fear that finally all distinctions will be blurred and black and white no longer exist. (Fiedler 394)

In this conflicted Southern universe, the European vampire found a willing victim who would go on to spawn many others of its kind: the Southern vampires.

3.4. Southern Vampire Gothic

Vampires thrive in the most conflicted regions: “In Stoker’s version of the myth, vampires are intimately linked to military conquest and to the rise and fall of empires.” (Arata 627) Since the South, with its Civil War history, has been defined as a place of great conflict and social injustices, it is no coincidence that Anne Rice chose this region as the setting for Interview with the Vampire, the most influential work of vampire fiction since Bram Stoker’s Dracula.
Interestingly, *Interview’s* main storyline begins and is played out in the Old South in 1791, predating the Civil War. Louis tells the eager interviewer where he comes from:

“We were living in Louisiana then. We’d received a land grant and settled two indigo plantations on the Mississippi very near New Orleans.” (Rice *Interview with the Vampire* 7)

He goes on to say that these plantations had a lot to do with him becoming a vampire.

In Louis’s interpretation of his life’s events, his maker Lestat was interested in him because of the plantations his family owned, being attracted to the wealth and the endless buffet of slaves they offered. As is the habit for a quintessential Southern Gothic, Rice treats the subject of slavery in her work. This time, however, we are treated to a primary witness of slavery: the Old South slave-owner.

The vampire offers interesting new possibilities for the Southern Gothic. Drawing on the genre’s fancy for history and forefathers, it can now have its Southerners from the past re-emerge in the New South as vampires. The vampire can thus be seen as a new Rip van Winkle⁹, emerging from a deep slumber to find his region a changed, New South. By drawing “upon the languid, decadent traditions of American plantation life, Rice breathed new life into the “arguably tired genre” of vampire fiction. (Lloyd-Smith 62)

In an interview, Rice admits the influence of Southern authors like Faulkner, placing her within the literary tradition of the Southern Gothic:

I was always a Southern writer…. Books that I have cherished and loved are books like Faulkner’s *The Sound and the Fury*. Reading over and over the language in that book and loving it. I feel my writing has always been very much influenced by those lush Southern writers. (Diehl 63, cited by Kinlaw and Kasee)
Jewelle Gomez treats a similar setting from a reversed perspective. In *The Gilda Stories*, the vampire protagonist begins life as a nameless slave girl in a Mississippi plantation. She flees from this place, and finds refuge in a brothel led by a mysterious woman. The woman is of course a vampire, and after a long learning period, she turns the girl into a vampire. The woman commits suicide soon after, and the girl is given the name of her maker: Gilda. The biggest change from Anne Rice is the perspective: we are now witness to the slave’s perspective instead of that of the slave-owner. Another important difference is that Gomez’s vampires do not kill. Rather, they choose to “share”. Whenever Gilda takes blood from human beings, she repays them with inspiring dreams. A recurring motif in the novel is the resurfacing of Gilda’s fragmented memories from her life in the plantation, each time revealing a bit more, but never in detail, of her past.

A year later, Poppy Z. Brite published *Lost Souls*, which was to become a favourite in the subcultural Gothic circles. “*Lost Souls* takes a new look at the vampire legend, introducing a gang of nihilistic vampire Gothic punks […] as well as a Southern rocker with psychic gifts.” (Carter 427) The Gothic punks include Twig, Molochai and Zillah. The latter of this vampire threesome is the father of Nothing, a fifteen year old boy who, as a baby, was left at a human family’s doorstep in a small town in Maryland. This suburban environment ultimately becomes suffocating for him, and he goes to New Orleans in search of his biological parents. Another vampire character is Christian, the oldest vampire in the novel, who works as a bartender in New Orleans. The human protagonists of the story are Steve and Ghost. They live in the fictional town of Missing Mile in North Carolina, where they form a music band called *Lost Souls?,* from which the
novel derives its name. Ghost is on the threshold between the natural and the supernatural, because of his psychic gifts. His music serves as a beacon for the young Nothing, “pulling him down south, down along the ways the trains travelled, down through the green land.” (Brite 93) Brite’s novels do not attempt to give meaning to a troubled past. Instead, that past works in on the environment, particularly in the case of New Orleans, and the half-deserted town Missing Mile. Of the three major Southern vampire fictions mentioned here, Lost Souls is most firmly rooted in the present. Lloyd-Smith explains how the novel seems to relate to the contemporary themes of a modern society:

- Poppy Z. Brite’s novels and stories similarly accept the possibility of vampirism while exploring the consequent angst of its practitioners. Such works seem to invite speculation about their relation to AIDS, teenage dislocation, homosexual alienations, just as the fantasies of the 1890s bear some reference to syphilis, or the notions of racial decline[.] (126)

The vampires’ historical insight is not put to use here. What’s more, they do not seem to possess any. All that concerns them is the next day, as they hunt for blood, drugs and sex in a decadent, dying world. Another major difference with the works of Rice and Gomez is that Brite’s vampires are a race, able to interbreed with human beings. In other words, one does not become a vampire in Brite’s universe; one can only be a vampire by birth.

As different as these Southern fictions may be, all three have one aspect in common: the sympathy for the vampire. Brite, Rice and Gomez present a vampire protagonist that readers are supposed to relate to, enabling readers to know how it feels to be a vampire.
This raises questions about the Gothic nature of the text though, for isn’t the vampire supposed to be the villain in the Gothic mode? Lloyd-Smith proposes to view such fictions as “Heritage Gothic”, “a use of now conventional tropes that is legitimated simply through previous practice.”(126) He continues to argue that this form of Gothic entails “a loss of coherence and purpose; a ghosting of the original Gothic.” This paper will argue that there is simply a change of purpose, and that the stories retain coherence in their own right. These Southern vampire fictions draw on the history of the South because not too long ago, “the black man” was first enslaved, and then perceived as “the hostile other” (see supra for Poe’s black and white dichotomy).

The abovementioned novels employ the vampire trope to offer a voice to “the culturally silenced, and the repressed events of American history”. (26) In other words, the vampires will come to represent minority groups: African Americans, homosexuals and even the gothic subculture. “[S]uch novels extend contemporary respect for the integrity and civil rights of minority groups to that misunderstood and feared minority, the race of the vampire.” (Carter 632) It may be due to the conservative nature of the South that a couple of Southern writers wrote about these themes using the vampire as an intermediary. In the next chapters, we’ll investigate the particularity of the Southern vampires through the recurring themes of slavery, race, and religion.
4. SLAVERY

4.1. Voodoo and the Vampire Slaveholder

Slavery may be the South’s most persistent burden to this day. Its refusal to abolish this cruel system in the nineteenth century was the cause of much of the region’s downfall, lasting until World War II. This makes the subject of slavery of keen interest to any writer of the Southern Gothic. Rice was the first to relate this topic to the vampire in a Southern setting, and many authors have since followed her example.

One of these authors is the relatively unknown Karyn Kay Zweifel. She published a collection of short stories called *Southern Vampires: 13 Deep-Fried Bloodcurdling Tales* (1995), aimed at young adults. One of these stories, *Madame Lalaurie*, is based on the rumours surrounding the historical figure of Delphine Lalaurie. She was a Creole woman who entertained lavish parties in the highest spheres of social life of Antebellum New Orleans in the early nineteenth century. Her qualities as a socialite are not what she is remembered for, though. Delphine Lalaurie became infamous for her vicious treatment of slaves. As the rumours of her abuse increased, a mob eventually came to her house in the Rue Royale and half-destroyed it. This caused her to flee to France, where she presumably died. The reports of the incident and of her death vary greatly though, and the cruelties attributed to Madame Lalaurie became even more grotesque in the tales that were told afterwards. Zweifel imagines a first witness to the atrocities committed, Uncle Philip. By means of a letter he advises his niece against moving into that very same house
in the Rue Royale, because “the anguish of her victims lives on”. (Zweifel "Madame Lalaurie" 69) As proof of Madame Lalaurie’s acts, Uncle Philip tells what he has seen in her attic:

What we saw in that attic is too gruesome to describe. That woman had systematically tortured, with the most hellishly contrived instruments, untold numbers of slaves. She had not stopped at torture, either. We found evidence of activities which no Christian, no rational being, would engage in. (67-68)

Moreover, Uncle Philip believes that Madame Lalaurie has been corrupted by the “warm, humid vapours” of New Orleans, turning her “into a monster.” (68-69) He continues to talk about other rumours: that “she had a curious desire, or even need, to hurt people. To see their blood. Perhaps even to taste it.” After this conjecture, he reassures his niece, telling her that “if Mme. Lalaurie was a vampire or a ghoul or just an evil woman, she is gone now.” But the details of her death give Uncle Philip even more reason to see in the woman a potential vampire. While boar-hunting in France, “a boar fell upon her, piercing her chest with its tusks. She was staked through the heart, which, as everyone knows, is the best way to kill the vampire.” (69)

By portraying Madame Lalaurie as a vampire, Zweifel creates a Louisianan counterpart to the legendary Elizabeth Bathory. She was a countess in the late sixteenth century in Hungary. Like Lalaurie, she enjoyed a high social status, and rumours spread about her supposed cruelty. In the stories that are told of her, she is said to have killed numerous young girls and to have bathed in their blood to preserve her youth. Many fictional works\textsuperscript{11} have portrayed her as a vampire, and her story supposedly inspired Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu to write \textit{Carmilla}. (Curran 74-75)
At the basis of Madame Lalaurie’s story lies an outrage over her treatment of slaves, and arguably slavery itself. Portraying her as a vampire – of the cruel, British Gothic kind – hints at the connections between the trope of vampirism and slavery. At the heart of the Bram Stoker vampire lie such themes as exploitation and power, themes that are easily connected with slavery and colonization. Stephen Arata even argues that *Dracula* can be read as a narrative of “reverse colonization”, expressing both fear and guilt over the subject of colonization:

The fear is that what has been represented as the “civilized” world is on the point of being colonized by “primitive” forces. [In such narratives,] a terrifying reversal occur[s]: the colonizer finds himself in the position of the colonized, the exploiter becomes the exploited, the victimizer victimized. They are also responses to cultural guilt. In the marauding, invasive Other, British culture sees its own imperial practices mirrored back in monstrous forms. (Arata 623)

Arata argues that Dracula “colonizes” the bodies of the British men and women he turns into vampires. But he can also be said to *enslave* them, holding them in his power, and exploiting them either for blood, or to advance his goals.

This returns us to Rice’s *Interview with the Vampire*. When the plantation master Louis is turned into a vampire by the European Lestat, representing an invading force, his body is subsequently enslaved. Hereby, the former master becomes the slave of the foreign vampire, who then uses Louis’s resources for himself, effectively “colonizing” him. When Louis grows tired of Lestat’s cruelties, he wants to find other vampires and share their company instead. Lestat advises against this, knowing that vampires do not enjoy
the company of others: “if you find one or more of them together it will be for safety only, and one will be the slave of the other, the way you are of me.” Lestat reveals the true nature of their relationship, and Louis cannot accept this at first: “I’m not your slave,’ I said to him. But even as he spoke I realized I’d been his slave all along.” To which Lestat replies: “That’s how vampires increase . . . through slavery. How else?” (93)

For Louis, this existence as another’s slave is a terrible burden, robbing him of his free will and the ability to make his own choices. This is mirrored in his description of the slaves: “Slavery was the curse of their existence; but they had been not robbed yet of that which had been characteristically theirs.” (56)

Being turned into a vampire offers Louis a different perspective on the slaves who work on his plantation. While he was never a vicious slave abuser like Marie Lalaurie, he did fear their “African appearance and manner” (31), and thought of them as “childlike savages barely domesticated by slavery.” (32) But he quickly adds, that in believing this, he “made a bad mistake.” (32) After his transformation, he can no longer be out during daytime12, and so he must give more responsibilities to his slaves. This practical concern, and his own experience with a form of enslavement, gives him new insights:

We had a large plant then for the making of the indigo dye, and the overseer's management had been most important. But I had several extremely intelligent slaves who might have done his job just as well a long time before[.] […] I studied them clearly now and gave the management of things over to them. (31)

Ironically, the slaves will bring the downfall of the plantation masters. While Louis tries to maintain a “vegetarian” diet, only feeding on the blood of animals, Lestat prefers to
hunt the neighbouring Freniere Plantation for “slaves and chicken thieves.” This does not go unnoticed with the region’s population. (48) However, the slaves are the first to realize that there is a connection between the killings and the strange behaviour of their masters. Louis says this is because “their experience with the supernatural was far greater than that of white men.” (56) When prowling around the plantation one night, he overhears a conversation which will in turn make him fear the slaves:

The slaves knew now we were not ordinary mortals. In hushed tones, the maids told of how, through a crack in the door, they had seen us dine on empty plates with empty silver, lifting empty glasses to our lips, laughing, our faces bleached and ghostly in the candlelight[.] […] Through keyholes they had seen Lestat's coffin, and once he had beaten one of them mercilessly for dawdling by the gallery windows of his room. ‘There is no bed in there,’ they confided one to the other with nodding heads. ‘He sleeps in the coffin, I know it.’ They were convinced, on the best of grounds, of what we were. (56)

This eventually causes the slaves, gathered into a mob, to attack the plantation mansion. The vampires are then forced to end their existence as plantation masters. Louis tells how Lestat goes after the gathered slaves, leaving “such ruin and death behind him no one could make a story of that night at Pointe du Lac.” (64) They then leave for New Orleans, where Lestat will turn a young girl named Claudia into a vampire, creating a “Gothic perversion of the nuclear family.” (Benefiel 261)

Another point of interest in Interview is that each vampire’s first victim is a slave or at least related to slavery. As a lesson to Louis before turning him, Lestat makes him
witness his killing of the Pointe Du Lac plantation overseer. (19) Subsequently, Louis’ first victim is chosen from a group of runaway slaves. (32-35) Later on in New Orleans, Claudia’s first is a young slave boy. (103) Adding this to the relationship of slave and master that exists between vampires, this indicates a particular attraction of the vampire towards the slave as an ideal victim.

In the Southern Gothic mode, the plantation becomes a Gothic site. Its connection to the South’s greatest burden, slavery, makes it a site of both fear and guilt. This guilt is embodied in the persona of Louis, who constantly laments his own existence, and frequently apologizes for his formerly biased views on the slaves. But the fear that fuels the plantation as a Gothic site does not exist solely due to the history of social injustices. The fear is also based on the cultural identity of the slave as a foreign other: “the slave cabins of Pointe du Lac were a foreign country, an African coast after dark, in which not even the coldest overseer would want to wander.” Karyn Kay Zweifel uses the plantation setting to its full Gothic extent, in the short story Old Sue (1995). The story is set exclusively in the slave settings of the antebellum South: cotton fields and slave cabins. Here, an old slave woman, Old Sue, is rumoured to be a vampire, who snatches away slave children in the night to assure her longevity. The word “vampire” is not used, but is hinted at through the use of words and actions that are associated with the vampire myth. A young slave boy is bitten by “dis [sic] thing”, and upon examination has a puncture just below his earlobe. ("Old Sue" 10) The creature’s true form is never revealed, it is only described as a “shadowy, dark form, bent and thin”, with wings. (14) The threat of the mysterious vampire-like creature is juxtaposed with a more real threat for the slaves of
Cotton prices were sinking fast, and every slave heard rumours of others being sold and sent away to an unknown future. These whispered stories set everyone’s nerves on edge.” (11) This proves again the connection between the theme of slavery and the vampire trope.

But the way Old Sue portrays a bloodsucking creature in a plantation setting is also connected to that other undead creature from popular culture: the zombie, a mindless walking corpse doing only its master’s bidding. Contrary to the Hollywood version, the myth of the zombie was derived from “a combination of a number of African and Caribbean folk terrors that wandered around in the tropical night.” (Curran 181) One such folk terror was the “Modulo, a humanoid creature from Zulu lore, who entered houses at night to drink the blood of sleepers through its incredibly long fingernails.” (Curran 181) More importantly, zombies are linked in the popular mind with Voodoo, “a religion found in West Africa, the Caribbean, and some parts of America. (Curran 127) Curran explains the origins of Voodoo:

Voodoo is a slave religion that adapted to the servile conditions amongst the peoples that were carried from the West Africa coast by European slavers. They brought indigenous religions, often centred on natural forces that became moulded into their servile situation in the plantations into which they were subsequently sold[.] [...] Voodoo, and variants of it, flourished on the plantations, [and] around American slave ports, primarily in Louisiana (New Orleans) and in the realm of the Rice Kings in South Carolina (Charleston) - anywhere where slaves concentrated in large numbers. (127)
The foreign religion was feared by the Americans who came into contact with it. Whether because of an actual belief in its power, or because of the sacrifices it was said to require: “There were always whispers of blood sacrifice (usually animals or cockerels) in some areas of the city, and, there were sometimes tales of strange practices imported from ancient Africa.” (Curran 138) Though Interview’s Louis does not mention “Voodoo” specifically, the description he gives of the slaves’ cultural habits correlates with Curran’s description of Voodoo, which entails a fusion of French Catholicism and African pagan beliefs:

They tolerated the baptism and modest garments imposed on them by the French Catholic laws; but in the evenings, they made their cheap fabrics into alluring costumes, made jewelry of animal bones and bits of discarded metal which they polished to look like gold.” (56)

Louis also admits that he feared their otherness: “and when they sang, they sang African songs which made the fields exotic and strange, always frightening to me in my mortal life.” (56) In the late eighteenth century, Voodoo was indeed feared by the populace.

Curran reports that

As early as 1782, Governor Galvez of Louisiana specifically forbade the importation of slaves from Martinique, because he believed them to be “steeped in Voodoo” and that they would make the lives of the citizens of New Orleans and of the state in general “very unsafe.” A decade later, several slaves from Santo Domingo were publicly burned in New Orleans for practicing “the heathen rites of the Voodoo.” (129)
In the last two decades, Voodoo and slavery have become regular features of Southern vampire fictions. In 1996, *Interview with the Vampire* was turned into a Hollywood movie, and foregrounded scenes of slaves engaged in voodoo more prominently than originally presented in the book. The scene of main interest here features a camp fire, African Americans dancing around it, chickens up for sacrifice and the sound of drums. A similar scene was staged nine years earlier in *Angel Heart* (1987), a movie set in New Orleans that relies on popular notions on and fears of Voodoo to produce Gothic shivers.

Poppy Z. Brite refers to New Orleans’s history of slavery and Voodoo to create a Gothic atmosphere of mystery and old magic. Brite mentions the historical figure of Marie Laveau, who was reputed to be a “Voodoo queen” in nineteenth century New Orleans. Though accounts vary on who the woman actually was, her reputation has lived on into contemporary popular tales. Curran provides a historical background for this figure:

She seems to have been a mixture of black, Native American, and white and, it is said, boasted a regal ancestry in each. […] During the mid-to-late 1850s, Voodoo fever was at its height in New Orleans with Marie presiding over what were rapidly coming to be known as “shows” in various parts of the city. These drew large crowds, a good number of them from the white districts, and were always fuelled by strong liquor and sexuality. (Curran 148)

Both liquor – Chartreuse is the vampires’ preferred drink - and sexuality are prominent in the novel. Interestingly, Brite first mentions both Madame Lalaurie (see supra) and Marie Laveau in the same paragraph:
But where else did slave spirits still lament in the Royal street house of sadistic Madame Lalaurie, where else could one still smell the lingering sweat of a slave woman chained to a stove all the years of her life? Where else did crows flap over the crumbling ruins of St. Louis cemetery and settle, inky and baleful of eye, on a tomb slashed with hundreds of red X’s – X’s for voodoo curses, X’s to invoke the wrath of Marie Laveau, the Voodoo queen who had stayed young forever? (Brite *Lost Souls* 62)

This further illustrates the connection between slavery and Voodoo, as two sides of a coin to generate a Gothic setting in popular fictions.

Voodoo becomes a central element in Anne Rice’s seventh vampire chronicle: *Merrick*. The story is told from the perspective of the newly made vampire David Talbot and features once more the vampires Louis and Lestat from *Interview*. The main character of interest is the eponymous Voodoo witch Merrick. She describes herself as being able to “pass for white” (13), and David describes her appearance in terms that allude to the history of slavery in the South:

She might have been a Spanish beauty to anyone outside of this bizarre part of the Southland, where the history of the slaves and their free descendants was so full of complex alliances and erotic romance. But any New Orleanean could see African blood in her by the lovely café au lait of her skin. (*Merrick* 13)

Merrick is called upon by the vampire Louis, who enlists her ability to summon spirits. She does this by means of Voodoo rituals. The art of Voodoo was passed down to her through her ancestors, whose origins go back to the time of slavery and Civil War.
Merrick speaks highly of her forefather, “The Old Man”, putting him on par with the legendary Marie Laveau: “The Old Man, that's all I ever called him. He was a Voodoo man in the Civil War. He went back to Haiti to learn things and when he came back to this town they said he took it by storm. Of course, they talk about Marie Laveau, but they talk of the Old Man too.” (194) Later in the novel, it is revealed that Merrick used her abilities to attract Louis to her, so that he would turn her into a vampire. Louis tells David what Merrick’s Voodoo spell has done to him: “I mean it, it's as if I never knew love or grief before I met Merrick. It's as if I'm Merrick's slave.” (418) Rice’s familiar use of master and slave relationships is here brought to yet another reversal: the former plantation master now founds himself enslaved by the magical rituals of a slave Religion. When Merrick finally becomes a vampire, the tropes of Voodoo and the vampire merge into a single fictional character.

While *Guilty Pleasures*, the first novel in the *Anita Blake*, vampire Hunter series, contains no relevant references to slavery, Voodoo is a central part of the supernatural experience. The eponymous protagonist Anita has necromantic abilities. The way she performs this magic art has close associations with popular assumptions of Voodoo. Anita raises zombies from the dead, for instance, by means of blood sacrifices and the use of a “gris-gris”, which is a quintessential element of voodoo: “Voodoo often placed a reliance on […] gris-gris (charms). These concentrated the forces of the loa [Voodoo spirits] through tangible elements - for example, rooster’s feet, black crows, and other such items.” (Curran 136) In the following quote from *Guilty Pleasures*, Anita is trying to raise a zombie: “I smeared blood along the beads, fingertips finding the soft brush of
feathers worked into the string. The gris-gris needed blood, I could feel that, but not goat blood.” (Hamilton 193)

Sookie Stackhouse, the protagonist in *Dead until Dark* is romantically involved with the vampire Bill Compton. He is the typical white Old South gentleman, and even fought on the side of the Confederation during the Civil War. Sookie’s grandmother takes a keen interest in him. She is involved in an association called “The Descendants of the Glorious Dead”, which is a gathering of Southern people whose ancestors were Civil War soldiers. The name that is given implies a kind of pride for this past, while the war was fought to *defend* the institution of slavery. When Bill comes over to visit Sookie, her grandmother asks him if her ancestors, whom he knew, owned slaves.14 When Bill confirms that they did, the woman is excited, saying “that is exactly the kind of thing my little group would love to hear!” (Harris *Dead until Dark* 54) The Descendants of the Glorious Dead do not seem bothered at all by the South’s great burden, and the interest they have in the Civil War seems to verge on a sentiment of nationalistic pride. Bill even speaks at a conference for this association, and enraptually them with a heroic war story of one of their ancestors. (141) In light of the South’s troubled history, pride seems out of place. In an interview for *Southern Scribe*, Harris talks about the region of Mississippi, where she was born and grew up. The following excerpt sheds some light on the Southern attitude towards the past:

> It was about as Southern as you can get, with both the best and the worst implications. It took me many years to balance out the facts that even if you love a
place, you don't have to conform to its mores, and even if you hate the traditions of a place, you can still be proud of the positive parts. ("Southern Scribe")

It seems strange, tough, to be proud of something as traumatic as the Civil War. While the Descendants are the only ones to display this attitude, their motivations are never fully explained or juxtaposed with the South’s great sins of secession and slavery. Harris seems to be turning a blind eye to the region’s concerns; they seem missing in this novel.

Of course, Harris writes a type of supernatural crime fiction that is easily digestible for readers, but the lack of attention – even outright ignoring of – this concern is a notable absence in this Southern fiction. However, the novel’s setting, Bon temps, is a fictional Southern rural town, which incorporates precisely the clichés of the South as a backwards region that continues to live in the past. This attitude is a key characteristic of the Southern Gothic mode, and – as Harris’s novels were such a national success – is still savoured by readers in the North.

Another notable absence is the lack of Voodoo. *Dead until Dark* is the first novel in a series called the *Southern Vampire Mysteries*. This suggests the use of quintessentially Southern characteristics. Bill Compton is indeed a Southern character, if only superficially. However, the novels feature an entire host of supernatural creatures, ranging from werewolves to fairies, and even goblins, but no Voodoo. The lack of Voodoo seems odd in a Southern fantastic universe that relies on just about every cliché of the supernatural.

*True Blood*, the televised version of *Dead until Dark* does feature Voodoo. The subject is presented here through the persona of an African American woman, Miss Jeanette, who uses her arts to exorcize demons, essentially helping people to “put their life back on the
rails.” The woman is eventually proven to be a hoax, and ironically works in a pharmacy where she gets most of the ingredients to make her potions. It is surprising that in the fantastic universe of *True Blood*, where vampires, werewolves and witches exist out in the open, only Voodoo is proven to be nothing more than superstition. Because the woman does eventually help people with what she is doing, the latter example may be regarded as a “positive” working of Voodoo. However, the onscreen experience of the ritual exorcism provides Gothic shivers that go back to the time of the plantations.

4.2. The Slave Vampire

The previous examples of fictional works have demonstrated how slavery and Voodoo come together to create a Gothic experience. While some novels, like Rice’s *Interview* seem to suggest a kind of justice that has been enacted on the former slave master, most popular vampire fictions do not aim to make a higher statement about the history of slavery. Lloyd-Smith argues that such works “do not ask to be read as allegories, in part because of the postmodern “emptying out” of significance and the substitution of mild free floating “affect” for deep feeling. *Something* is evidently at stake, but it is difficult to say what that something is.” (126) Indeed, it may be hard to maintain the logic that the slave master “gets his due” and learns from this experience, if he himself is turned into a powerful creature that has been associated with exploitation since Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*. Moreover, *Interview*’s vampires frequently feed on nameless slaves, yet readers are still supposed to sympathize with these tragic undead.
A notable exception on this “emptying out of significance” is Jewelle Gomez’s *The Gilda Stories*. Cedric Bryant places the novel at the end of the African American Gothic tradition, which extends back to early nineteenth century slave narratives and forward to Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* (1987). He also argues that both Morrison and Gomez “represent a significant Africanist presence – as producers of, and not simply as subjects in, the prevailing modes of Gothic and grotesque narrative. (541) Indeed, Gomez may be one of the only African American writers to use the vampire trope as a means to renew the slave narrative. While Octavia Butler’s *Fledgling* also features a protagonist that looks like an African American, she is regarded this way because of external views on the colour of her skin. However, due to memory loss, she has no sense of cultural and racial history (see infra). Gilda, the protagonist of Gomez’s novel, both carries and represents African American history. She even “carries” this history quite literally. One of the perks of Gomez’s vampires is that they must remain in contact with their native soil.15 As Gilda travels all over the United States, she carries the Mississippi soil with her, and even lines her shoes and clothes with it. This serves as a metaphor for the way people remain bound to their roots and origins, no matter how far they are removed from them in time and space. When Gilda meets a girl who comes from Mississippi as well, she feels connected to her, and slavery is brought back to her mind: “Her friendship with Savannah rested on the earth from which they’d come, the place where their many mothers had first bent beneath the yoke.” (131) Gilda’s roots lie in the first half of the nineteenth century, where she was born as a slave girl in a Mississippi plantation. At the start of the novel she is nameless, like the numerous plantation slaves whose names are now forgotten. When we first encounter her,
she has just escaped from the plantation. To encourage herself to keep on running, she remembers what her mother said about the white men that held them as slaves: “They ain’t been here long ‘nough. They just barely human. Maybe not even. They suck up the world, don’t taste it.” (Gomez 11) From her mother, the girl learns that these people devour the worlds they live in, while failing to understand and appreciate its qualities. This quote suggests a criticism on the consumerism that is inherent in American society, a society that is burdened by its history of slavery and the treatment of native Indians. The use of the words “sucking up” also indicates yet another reversal of perspectives. The plantation masters are represented in terms of the Stoker vampire: exploitative and inhuman.

The girl’s flight is interrupted when a white man, whom she refers to as “the beast from this other land”, tries to rape her. She kills this man, and the girl is then found in a state of shock by a vampire called Gilda:

Gilda had seen a runaway slave only once. Before she’d recognized the look of terror, the runaway had been captured and hauled off. She stared deeply into the Girl’s dark eyes and said silently, You needn’t be afraid. I’ll take care of you. The night hides many things. (13)

Gilda is the owner of a brothel called Woodard’s, a place where women, instead of men, are firmly in control of what happens indoors. The place becomes a safe haven for the girl. Under the tutelage of both Gilda and her Native American lover Bird, she learns to read and write. But Gilda wants to instruct her so that she can be turned into a vampire. The girl is given a choice in this matter, and accepts. Gilda gives the girl her first drops of vampire blood, and then goes out to end her own life. Her lover, Bird, is subsequently left
to “complete the circle”, which makes Bird her vampire “mother”. The girl then becomes Gilda, and for a while she and Bird remain together. Bird instructs her how she needs to feed, when the hunger comes: “And as you take from them you must reach inside. Feel what they are needing, not what you are hungering for. You leave them with something new and fresh, something wanted.” (50) Gilda continues to live by this rule her entire life, all the way into the year 2050, retaining both the lessons from her human and her vampire mother. It is a vampirism that is based on “sharing”, instead of exploiting. Gilda’s experience with slavery causes her to be on her guard for anyone who still continues to exhibit exploitative behaviour. These are the main antagonists for Gilda and her “vampire family”: anyone, whether vampire or human, who has not learned lessons from history and continues to exploit others for personal and selfish gain.

One of these antagonists is the vampire Eleanor, whom she meets in Yerba Buena in 1890. Gilda quickly becomes enthralled with this beautiful woman, despite several warnings that Eleanor gets a thrill out of getting others to do her bidding: “Many things are within our power. To draw others close, to enrapture them, is a simple one. Eleanor partakes of the joy of our existence merely through the exercise of this power.” (84) Eleanor’s true nature is revealed, when she commands Gilda to kill another vampire for her. Gilda is shocked by this, and answers with a resentment that stems from her experience of slavery: “I’m no longer a servant, Miss Eleanor. We been freed.” (99) Gilda meets another exploitative vampire in Boston in 1955, where she works as a beautician in the South End district. The district is predominantly comprised of African Americans, and so are the characters that are featured in this slice of Gilda’s life. Gilda is a confidante to the prostitutes of the neighbourhood, who frequently visit her shop for a
new hairstyle or the occasional chatter. Gilda becomes directly involved in human affairs when Toya, a young prostitute, seeks refuge with her to escape from her violent pimp, Fox. At the sight of seeing a young African American woman “enslaved”, she is enraged: “A rage swirled inside of Gilda, flushing her skin with heat. The scars across the girl’s face made Gilda hunger to feel Fox’s throat between her fingers.” (135) Scars are associated with enslavement for Gilda. She still remembers seeing “the deeply etched whip marks that had striped her mother’s legs”. Earlier, she asks Bird: “Why white people feel they got to mark us?” (23) But Fox isn’t white. He is both an African American, and a vampire, and he is the only antagonist who enrages Gilda to such an extent. Indeed, from the perspective of Gilda, who has lived a part of her life as a slave, Fox is a depraved figure. As a pimp, he enslaves young women, abuses their bodies, has their bodies used by others, turns them into a “commodity”, and even takes pride in this position. Moreover, as an African American, he has learned little from history, recreating slavery in his own community. As a vampire, he is even more dangerous, because he is part of “the others”, who have not learned the lessons Gilda received, and “thrive on commitment to the abject converse of that lesson.” (62) One of Gilda’s early lessons illustrates how the nature of vampires is juxtaposed with the nature of men, to make a statement about the latter:

But for men to need war to make freedom ... I have never understood. Now I am tired of trying to understand. There are those of our kind who kill every time they go out into the night. They say they need this exhilaration in order to live this life. They are simply murderers. They have no special need; they are rabid children. In
our life, we who live by sharing the life through blood of other have no need to kill. It is through our connection with life, not death, that we live. (45)

The different antagonists serve to illustrate that slavery can occur with anyone, in any place, and at any time. It can come in the form of a beautiful lover, or in the form of the grotesque pimp. Contrary to what she believed as a young girl, enslaving others is not exclusively done by white men, as the example of Fox illustrates. Gomez’s version of the vampire myth serves to illustrate that the notion of “sharing” as opposed to “enslaving” is a lesson that needs to be learned. If Gilda were to blindly follow the hunger that she feels as a vampire, she as well would exploit and murder others. However, she has learned from others, from books and poetry, and from personal experience, that one “chooses” to act differently, and that by learning, human (or in this case vampire) nature can be turned to greater goals and transcend itself.

Through the trope of the vampire, Gomez reflects on how slavery is a cultural trauma for the African American identity. The Gilda Stories can be read as a trauma narrative, due to its focus on memories, the working of the past on the present, and the way certain events “trigger” Gilda’s memories from her life in the plantation. Ron Eyerman explains how slavery became a cultural trauma for African Americans:

As a cultural process trauma is mediated through various forms of representation and linked to the reworking of collective memory. The notion of a unique African American identity emerged in the post-Civil War period, after slavery had been abolished. The trauma of forced servitude and of nearly complete subordination to the will and whims of another was thus not necessarily something directly
experienced by many of the subjects of this study, but came to be central to their attempts to forge a collective identity out of its remembrance. In this sense, slavery was traumatic in retrospect, and formed a “primal scene” which could potentially unite all “African Americans” in the United States, whether or not they had themselves been slaves or had any knowledge of or feeling for Africa. (1)

While the African-American identity is a collective matter, Gilda incarnates the collective trauma of enslavement into a single individual traumatic experience. The vampire’s immortality and unchangeability allow Gilda to be a first witness to slavery, and thus she is and remains traumatized as she goes on. Gilda still has a deep connection to the African identity, through her mother, who is described as having a “Fulani face”. “The Fulani represent a remarkable diversity of habitation, culture, ethnic composition, and lifestyle. Further, for several centuries they maintained political, religious, and military power over several parts of western Africa.” (Ndukwe 9) Even at the end of the novel, when Gilda is over two centuries old, this connection remains important: “Her essence as an African still shone through her soft, wide features.” (223) Gilda’s mother embodies a lost connection with the African continent, one that was severed due to slavery. The mother is not given a name in the novel. This allows her to serve as a universal African mother figure in the narrative. Similarly, Gilda was nameless as a slave girl, equally embodying a collective history of slavery into a single identity.

As Gilda matures, so does the African American identity in the United States. Gilda frequently reflects on this throughout the novel. In 1971, she is working for a small theatre group, where she meets her new companion, Julius. He is interested in Gilda’s perspective on history, finding in her a maturity he has rarely encountered. 1971 was also
the year of the Attica prison riots. These riots were the result of racial issues inside the prison: the majority of the inmates was African American, while all correctional officers were white. The riot fully broke loose when George Jackson, a member of the Black Panthers movement was shot to death by correction officers. Gilda connects the Attica prison riots in 1971 to her experience of slavery:

Gilda understood: Attica filled the headlines. She too, tried to push the news of death out of her mind. She’d seen pictures of inmates killing and be killed, lined up in the prison yard, and the image was always the same as her memories of the slave quarters: dark men with eyes full of submission and rage. (169)

Gilda is afraid that the death of George Jackson might indicate a return of slavery: “The movements of the sixties had fueled Julius’ vision of the future, too, but to Gilda, George Jackson’s death this past September signaled the end of that era. […] The horror of slavery appeared to reap endless returns.” (180)

At the end of the novel, the story becomes dystopian. In 2050, Ecological disasters have brought the world to the edge of destruction, and the vampire’s existence has been discovered. Moreover, Gilda must now flee from hunters, who seek her out for the blood she carries: “The full transfusion of their blood gave eternal life to the hungry rich, who now sent out the Hunters to capture them. Once transformed, however, the wealthy broke the one commandment held by her kind: never kill one’s creator.” (235) Previously, Gilda had been free from human interference. Now, she and other vampires are subjected to another form of exploitation. Gilda survives, though, and she turns another human into a companion, who follows her into an uncertain future.
As a concluding note on the theme of slavery in vampire fiction, I would like to mention Grahame-Smith’s *Abraham Lincoln, Vampire Hunter* (2010). The book is based on an absurd premise. It is a mock biography of Abraham Lincoln, by reimagining his battle with the Confederation as a battle against vampires. The author intentionally portrays slaveholders as vampires: "I see them as sort of one and the same[.] Both creatures, basically slaveholders and vampires, steal lives — take the blood of others — to enrich themselves." (Grahame-Smith)
5. RACE

The abolishment of slavery in the South has ultimately led to segregation. Despite state attempts to promote racial integration, Southern blacks still live in parallel public spheres. However, Roland explains that this is now due to habit: “The South’s two main ethnic groups, southern whites and southern blacks, are so large and so long established in the region that their homogeneity is natural and familylike.” (Roland 17) Even the literature of the South seems to remain segregated. The white authors discussed in this paper rarely present a black protagonist and vice versa. We will first look at a few of the abovementioned works to see how “segregated” Southern vampire fiction is, and what attitudes towards racial diversity are displayed.

In *Lost Souls*, no African American character is present. This is rather odd, considering that in 2000, New Orleans was comprised of over 67 percent of African Americans. (US Census "New Orleans (city), Louisiana") This may be because of the novel’s focus on Gothic subculture, which is a predominantly “white” phenomenon: Kids dress in black and try to look as pale as they possibly can, modelling themselves after vampires. The monotone music of the Gothic scene that flirts with death and suicide is the opposite of the lively music African Americans produced in New Orleans. This is demonstrated when the vampire Christian visits a Goth club. He reminisces about seeing Louis Armstrong there, when the place was still a Jazz club:

> Once he had seen Louis Armstrong standing there on the sidewalk with his shirtsleeves rolled up, talking to a crowd of friends. [... ] Christian remembered
the slow laughter, the white eyes that shone out of faces blue-black with sweat
[...]. Now the figures that waited uneasily on the sidewalk were as white as white
could be, with eyes smudged black and ripped black clothes, little ghosts, like
photonegatives of the dusky dancers who had once swirled all night to bright jazz.

(63)

On her personal website Brite states that she was not entirely satisfied with the way she
has portrayed New Orleans. ("Questions & Answers") She does not explicate whether
this is due to the lack of African Americans in the story. However, on the same webpage,
she makes a humorous statement about a possible “dream cast” for a movie version of
Lost Souls: “I’m tired of all this pale-faced Goth stuff. Here's my new and genuinely
brilliant [...] dream cast[.]” She then adds a list of black celebrities, mostly rap musicians,
including Snoop Dogg, Chris Rock and Li’l Bow Wow. The quote should be interpreted
with a high dose of irony, even if she adds that she is “one hundred percent serious.”

Brite’s desire for a complete turnover results in the casting of African American
characters, mainly from the hip-hop cultural scene. Goth music, inherent to white culture,
and hip-hop music, inherent to black culture, are regarded as binary opposites.

Despite this lack of “colour”, the subject of race is still treated: in Brite’s version of the
vampire mythology, vampires are a race. They are not undead, but they do possess
immortality and increased regenerative abilities. A human cannot become a vampire, but
the two races can “interbreed”. However, the woman – whether vampire or human – who
delivers the vampire child is always killed in the process. Jessy, the human mother of the
young vampire Nothing, dies in this manner. When Steve’s girlfriend Ann is impregnated
by the vampire Zillah, Christian feels he should warn her:
“He could tell her the truth. That Zillah was of another race, a race whose seed was bloody poison. That Zillah’s baby would rip her apart inside and she would die as Jessy had died fifteen years ago, her thighs sticky with blood, her eyes rolled back silver-rimmed in her head.” (246)

The catastrophic result of interracial human-vampire intercourse in this novel bears a connection to the Southern fear of miscegenation. But pregnancy itself becomes the greatest horror. This will be examined in the next chapter on the issue of religion.

In contrast with Brite, Rice presents a version of New Orleans that is full of racial diversity. With the exception of Merrick, the role of a vampire protagonist in the chronicles is reserved for a white character, but there is a lot of interaction with characters that are of mixed racial heritage. This is the case in Blackwood Farm, the penultimate instalment of the vampire chronicles, set in and around present day New Orleans. Most of the novel’s storyline focuses on the protagonist Quinn’s life prior to his turning into a vampire. Quinn is the lastborn descendant of the wealthy Blackwood family. He and his family live in a mansion that is haunted by a troubled family history. This haunting is quite literal, as Quinn sees the ghost of his ancestors at regular intervals. The servants in the mansion, including Jasmine, are coloured:

Because African and Spanish and French and Anglo-Saxon genes were all scrambled in the lineage of Jasmine's people before they came, and down through the years by marriage to other people of all colors, Jasmine's family are all different shades of yellow, red, brown and black. (Blackwood Farm 125)
Miscegenation is no cause of concern for the Blackwoods. On the contrary, Quinn describes the mixture of features in Jasmine’s appearance as “magic”, and is positively enthralled by it. Since he spent most of his life inside the Blackwood mansion, with an entourage of private tutors and coloured servants, he seems oblivious to the racial sensitivities in the South. When he flirts with Jasmine, she tells him that “once you go black, you never go back.” (323) He had never heard this rather common expression before though. Moreover, Quinn asks Jasmine to sleep with him in a manner that some readers might interpret as racially biased, but it indicates precisely both Quinn’s inexperience and lack of concern over the issue of race: “Be my chocolate candy. I’m real unsure of my masculinity.” (352) Quite surprisingly, Jasmine accepts this awkward invitation, and unbeknownst to Quinn, a child is born from this union. When Quinn returns from a tree-year journey in Europe, he sees this boy for the first time:

I remember that a darling little boy came in, a charming Anglo-African blending of blue eyes, distinguished African features and curly blond hair, who told me proudly his name was Jerome and that he was three years old, on both counts of which I congratulated him, wondering who in the world were his parents. (611-12)

Jasmine’s revelation that Jerome is Quinn’s son is cause for great celebration. The child is officially recognized and given the Blackwood family name. In Faulkner’s Southern universe, miscegenation and the fear it generates become the downfall of a family. In Rice’s New South, “miscegenation” connects families instead of destroying them, which neutralizes one of the Southern Gothic’s major fears. When Quinn is turned into a
vampire, it is left to assume that Jerome eventually will become the new owner of the 
Blackwood mansion.

In Rice’s New South, racial bigotry seems to have all but vanished. However, the South’s 
history of lynchings is brought up when Quinn’s great-aunt, Aunt Queen, tells him stories 
about the family’s past:

‘You can imagine the tension, Quinn, with Jerome, a black man, taking on this 
responsibility, and Rebecca being locked up there in the dark, calling him a "nigger"
and threatening to have him lynched and every other thing she could think of through 
the door. There were lynchings in those days, too. They didn't happen hereabouts that 
I know of, but they happened. [...] The Irish poor were never great lovers of the black man[.] (274-75)

Rebecca was the lover of the Blackwood patriarch, Manfred. She was a prostitute before 
she met Manfred, and hoped to marry into the family. Aunt Queen sets her outside the 
Blackwood lineage and attributes her racism to both her lower class and her Irish descent. 
She is implying that wealthy Southerners were less prone to racism, which is most 
definitely not the case in a Faulknerian Southern universe.

In Harris’s *Dead until Dark*, most of the narrative is set in the fictional town of Bon 
Temps in present day Louisiana. The plot is devised around the mysterious murders of 
young women and the developing love story between Sookie and the vampire Bill. Harris 
creates a fantastic universe wherein vampires “came out of the coffin,” and are 
considered a minority in American society: “We had all the other minorities in our little 
town – why not the newest, the legally recognized undead?’ (1)
The protagonist Sookie works as a waitress in a bar called Merlotte’s. She is telepathic, which enables her to overhear the thoughts of the patrons. In the privacy of their thoughts, the visitors at Merlotte’s frequently reveal themselves as conservative and backwards, with little regard for minorities – vampires in particular. Many of the townsfolk react to vampires the way they would to blacks or homosexuals, and Sookie’s observations reveal that race relations are still strained in this rural town. For example, when the first murder victim is found, the white police officer Kevin fears that if the killer were a black man, this would make the relationship he has with his black colleague “even more tense.” (85)

The novel features one black vampire: the newly arrived, flamboyant Diane. She is a former lover of Bill Compton, who is Sookie’s love interest. When Sookie first meets her, Diane is in the company of two other vampires, Malcolm and Liam, who do not “mainstream” like Bill does. In the novel, “mainstreaming” refers to drinking only artificial blood, and keeping a low profile to fit into human society. Sookie is worried that the new vampires’ behavior will aggravate the town’s prejudices towards vampires: “Folks in Bon Temps were getting accustomed to Bill, but the flamboyant Malcolm and the equally flamboyant Diane caused quite a stir. My first thought was that this wasn't going to help people get used to Bill and me.” (158)

There are some major parallels between the way the black vampire Diane is represented, and the fears that were generated by the arrival of the Black Panther Movement in the mid 1960s. The movement was an American black revolutionary party founded in 1966 in Oakland, Calif […] The party’s original purpose was to patrol black ghettos to protect residents from acts
of police brutality. The Panthers eventually developed into a Marxist revolutionary group that called for the arming of all blacks, the exemption of blacks from the draft and from all sanctions of so-called white America, the release of all blacks from jail, and the payment of compensation to blacks for centuries of exploitation by white Americans. ("Black Panther Party")

News of this leftist party’s developments must have been alarming in the South. For conservative Southerners, accepting blacks into society was one thing, black revolution another. The movement was largely a matter of black men, instead of black women. Leading member Elridge Cleaver had a particular task in mind for the women in his party:

In an October 1968 speech delivered at Stanford University, Cleaver told the women in the audience that “you have the power to bring a squeaking halt to a lot of things that are going on, and we call that pussy power. We say that political power, revolutionary power grows out of the lips of a pussy.” (Jones 33)

Jones notes that while some Black Panther women indeed propagated the “pussy power” slogan themselves, other women “left the movement because of incidents of sexual harassment” or because it was a “macho cult.” (33) Nevertheless, the notion of “pussy power” in the form of a black, highly sexual woman generated fears in some white journalists who reported on the Black Panthers. Michael Staub gives an example of such a journalist, Gail Sheehy\(^{21}\), and points out inconsistencies in her assumptions:

[Sheehy] implied that the Panther Party was really run by women […]. And Panther women were the most dangerous Panthers of all. [T]he contradictions proliferated. Panther women were both “uncontrollably aggressive . . . man-
haters” and into “Pussy Power,” defined as “the concept that a woman’s function is to use her body to entice men into the Panther Party.” (Staub 64)

When Sookie first sees Diane, she describes her in terms that mirror Sheehy’s idea of the Black Panther woman:

The door was opened by a female vampire. […] She was at least five feet eleven and black. She was wearing spandex. […] I thought she looked cheap as hell and most likely absolutely mouthwatering from a male point of view.

"Hey, little human chick," the vampire purred. (68)

Diane seems to have walked right out of a 1970s blaxploitation film in terms of appearance. In terms of character, she makes gratuitous aggressive remarks towards Sookie and generally behaves in a matter that seems uncontrollably aggressive. Malcolm, the leader of their group, constantly has to keep her in check: “Malcolm caught her by the arm and propelled her from the room before she could cause more damage.” (158)

In Bon Temps’ rural environment, blacks live separated from whites, but Sookie’s comments imply that this is not due to habit, but because of racism: “Blacks didn't come into Merlotte’s much, but if any black was absolutely safe there, it was Diane.” (156)

However, Diane’s greatest threat seems to come from her full blown sexuality, which is intimidating even to Sookie. Notice also that Diane’s manner of speaking is described using the feline verb “purr”, which adds to the characteristics that mark her as a stereotypical Panther woman. Lafayette, the black and openly gay cook at Merlotte’s is in awe of this woman, but equally fears her: “I saw Lafayette goggling through the hatch in open admiration, spiced by a dollop of fear.” (156)

When Sookie recounts what exactly Liam and Malcolm have been doing to get the townsfolk against them, she says that they
have been feeding on humans in public – without actually killing them. Diane on the other hand, has been “dancing naked in Farmville.”

These elements, both from Sookie’s observations and the conservative community’s reactions, indicate how a black woman in touch with her sexuality is still a subconscious fear for a conservative white society.

Eventually, the townsfolk get tired of the vampires’ behaviour. While they gradually accepted Bill because he made an effort to fit in, the threesome’s “outrageous” and “offensive” behaviour earns them a death sentence. Moreover, Malcolm was publicly too proud of being a vampire, and renounced humans at the same time: "Some of us don't want to go to—baseball— games and ..." (here he was searching his memory for something disgustingly human, I could tell) "barbecues! We are Vampire!" (158)

After this display of antihuman pride, an “angry mob” sets out to burn the vampires’ daytime resting place, which kills all three of them. But even if the vampires were portrayed as highly unsympathetic, they had not killed anyone to the knowledge of the townsfolk. This disproportionate reaction to “maladjusted outsiders” - and the way rural townsfolk take matters into their own hands - brings to mind the South’s history of lynchings. The word “lynching” is not used in the novel, but it does come up in the fourth instalment in the series. At the end of Dead as a Doornail (2005), Sookie finds out that a vampire she trusted had tried to kill her. When he attacks her at Merlotte’s, the patrons intervene, and he is quickly staked to death. Afterwards, Sookie compares what happened to the vampire, to lynchings. She both expresses guilt over the South’s history of lynching, but at the same she expresses a desire to let go of that guilt, saying that what happened to the vampire was entirely justified:
Of course, it was tempting to think this was an echo of the terrible old days, when black men had been lynched if there was even a rumour they’d winked at a white woman. But, you know, the simile just didn’t hold. Charles was a different race, true. But he’d been guilty as hell of trying to kill me. I would have been a dead woman in thirty more seconds, despite my diversionary tactic, if the men of Bon Temps hadn’t intervened. (Dead as a Doornail 372)

Returning to the Panther movement, the mob’s course of action bears some similarities with the way US government put a halt to Black Panther activities. In 1969, the Black Panthers were considered a threat to the internal security of the country by the FBI. This resulted in several raids on Panther Party offices and one raid at a private home. “The latter resulted in the deaths of Fred Hampton and Marck Clarck, leaders of the Chicago Black Panthers, as they were shot in their beds during a predawn raid.” (emphasis added) (Stohl 249) Stohl also reports that the deaths that resulted from this government campaign “were considered accidents and the destruction of the Panthers was considered necessary and acceptable by the overwhelming majority of the American people. (249) When the vampires are murdered in Dead Until Dark, Sookie is shocked by this, but the rest of Bon Temps does not object to their passing. Moreover, the police officers at the murder scene are not in a hurry to solve this case:

"Can you call this murder, Sam?" He shook his head. "I just don't know, Sookie. Legally, killing the vampires is murder. But you'd have to prove arson first, though I don't think that'd be very hard." We could both smell gasoline. There were men buzzing around the house, climbing here and there, yelling to each
other. It didn't appear to me that these men were conducting any serious crime-
scene investigation. (180)

At the end of the novel, it is revealed that the murderer of the young women is a man –
Rene Lenier - with a profound hatred for all vampires, and those who consort with them.
The murdered women had had a reputation of being “fangbangers,” which is slang for
women who sleep with vampires. Due to Sookie’s affiliation with Bill, she was targeted
to by the next victim. She manages to overpower the killer, though, and he is brought
over to the authorities. Rene’s blind hatred towards anyone who has intercourse with a
vampire is connected to the Old Southern fear of miscegenation. However, because Rene
is portrayed as a madman, it is not miscegenation, but his insane reaction to it, that poses
the greatest threat.

Dead until Dark illustrates how a white author uses the vampire as a metaphor for racial
minorities. However, the conclusions that would arise from such a comparison would
ultimately be conservative. Harris’s depiction of the vampire threesome, with the black
vampire Diane as the most conspicuous, serves as the ultimate nightmare to a
conservative Southern society. Moreover, Harris’s allegory is ambiguous: sometimes the
plight of vampires is compared to that of African Americans, at other times – and
especially in True Blood – to that of homosexuals. (See chapter 6 on religion)

While the metaphor demonstrates some viable concerns about integration and acceptance
of minorities in the South, the comparison is equally insulting to those minorities. In
Harris’s fantastic universe, vampires are still vicious creatures, with a desire to kill
humans. The vampires that do integrate into society, like Bill, can do so despite and by
forfeiting their nature. Of course, Harris’s *Southern Vampire Mysteries* are a clear case of heritage Gothic, but if they were to be interpreted in terms of a proper Gothic tale, they would reveal a serious inclination towards conservatism on the author’s part.

It is remarkable, that when African American authors use the vampire as an allegory on racial minorities, the metaphor is more thoroughly worked out to function into a coherent narrative that serves to generate understanding for “the other.” Both Jewelle Gomez and Octavia Butler rework the vampire mythology, by making the relation between vampire and human beneficial for both parties. They create African American vampires who do not need to kill and do not want to unless defending themselves. When they feed on humans, they give something back. Contrary to other vampires who only take, they “share.” Gomez’s vampires repay humans with inspiring dreams. Butler’s vampires are more radically different. They are a separate race called “Ina,” and have a written history that goes back ten thousands of years. Their relationship with humans is symbiotic. The Ina grow emotionally attached to their humans – called “symbionts” - and vice versa. When Ina feed on humans, it is a pleasurable experience. Moreover, humans that stay connected to their Ina gain increased longevity and become impervious to diseases. With this deliberate reworking, Gomez and Butler reflect on the issue of Race more effectively.

Though slavery is the central issue in *The Gilda Stories*, Gilda frequently reflects on racial issues as well. When she is still human, in the 19th century, she visits the Rue Bourbon in New Orleans. There, she is met with disdainful regards by coloured shopkeepers:
It was some time before the Girl understood that these graceful, cold women shared her African blood. She had been so confused and upset by it that she cried as Bird tried to explain the social system of New Orleans, the levels of deceit and manners that afforded the fairer-skinned their privileges and banished the darker ones from society. (28)

Gilda - in this fragment still called “the Girl” – is used to the prejudice of white men, but the way the coloured women treat her proves even more shocking to her. She becomes afraid of going back to town, feeling ashamed of herself: “She didn’t understand her own fear of these people who […] simply dismissed her as a slave.” (28) Bernice, the African American cook at Woodard’s, explains that she has no reason to be ashamed of her dark skin: “What you shamed about is them folks thinkin’ they white and they ain’t. Thinkin’ being nasty to dark folks is gonna help make them white. That’s a shame alright.” (28) After this talk, she goes back to town and demonstrates her knowledge of different languages, to prove that the coloured women were wrong in their prejudices.

Despite her experience with slavery, Gilda has no hatred for white men. She enjoys racial diversity, but realizes that many others do not share this perspective. When sitting in a bar with her vampire friend Anthony, she reflects on this:

Anthony gripped his cup with tense fingers. Gilda reached over to touch his hand.

As always she marvelled at the darkness of her flesh next to the whiteness of others. It seemed an extraordinary gift – this variety in textures and hues. She failed to understand how it instilled such fear and horror in others.” (208)
In 2020, Gilda lives in a dystopian world where cities are emptying, and people are no longer able to work the land to provide food for themselves: “Many had starved there, unable to read the weather or rotate crops.” (222) Even faced with these immense challenges, Americans are still concerned with race: “You think you got problems? Citizens here are still trying to decide if brown people and white people should eat sitting at the same table. Which is pretty funny since there ain’t that much food to speak of.” (225) By having her protagonist live into a grim future, Gomez emphasis the moral lesson of her work, by showing “what could happen,” if things remain as they are.

*Fledgling* is not a work of Southern fiction, apart for one comment about Ina in the South, the Southern sense of place is not evoked. The setting starts out in an area near Washington, and ends near San Francisco, but little is told about these geographical surroundings. However, since the novel’s major theme is the issue of race; which makes it highly relevant for this dissertation. The Ina are exclusively white. There are no “coloured” varieties of the Ina, since they cannot interbreed with humans. However, due to genetic experimentation, Ina scientists were able to mix human and Ina DNA. The scientists’ goal was to bring forth Ina that could withstand the sun better. Normal Ina are completely unconscious during daytime hours and burn quickly when exposed to sunlight. For this reason, black women in particular were chosen to donate DNA, as their skin has more melanin than white women, enabling them to withstand the sun’s rays much better. The protagonist, Shori, is the successful result of these experimentations. The story is narrated by Shori in the first person. When she begins her tale, she is lying in a cave, with no memory of who or what she is. She ventures out, and finds her first
human symbiont, Wright. Through interaction with him, she discovers her instincts, her need for human blood and human companionship. Through Wright, Shori’s appearance is specified: she looks like a ten year old girl, and what is more, she is black. When Wright tells her this, she realizes that her skin colour must be the result of scientific experimentation:

“Ordinary sun exposure burns your skin even though you’re black?”

“I’m ...” I stopped. I had been about to protest that I was brown, not black, but before I could speak, I understood what he meant. Then this question triggered another memory. I looked at him. “I think I’m an experiment. I think I can withstand the sun better than ... others of my kind. I burn, but I don’t burn as fast as they do. It’s like an allergy we all have to the sun. I don’t know who the experimenters are, though, the ones who made me black.” (O. E. Butler 37)

She eventually finds her father, Iosif. Like all Ina, he is very pale, has blond hair and clear gray eyes. He informs Shori about their race: “[Iosif] said that physically, he and most Ina fit in badly wherever they go – tall, ultrapale, lean, wiry people. They usually looked like foreigners, and when times got bad, they were treated like foreigners – suspected, disliked, driven out, or killed.” (136) Because of their appearance, Ina are treated as foreigners all over the world. When times are troubling, they become more subjected to racism and prejudice – something Gomez remarked as well in The Gilda Stories. This makes Shori a minority within a minority group because her general appearance is more human than Ina: not only is her skin darker, she is also a lot shorter than she should be for her age.
With Iosif’s help, Shori discovers that the cave where she woke up was located near her Ina community. This is a place where a group of Ina live with their symbionts, usually separated from the rest of humanity. Shori’s community has been completely destroyed. She is the only survivor of a massacre, and everything was burnt to the ground. Her father then takes her to his own community, and offers her to stay there. As soon as Shori leaves to go and tie up a few loose ends, her new home also comes under attack. Upon her return, the entire complex has been burnt down and everyone – including her father – was murdered. With the help of some surviving symbionts, she sets out for another befriended Ina community.

When she arrives there, she is welcomed with open arms by an Ina family, the Gordons, who admire her unique qualities. There, Wright has already developed some theories on the mysterious attacks:

> It’s happening because some human group has spotted your kind and decided you’re all dangerous, evil vampires. Or it’s happening because some Ina group or Ina individual is jealous of the success Shori’s family had with blending human and Ina DNA and having children who can stay awake through the day and not burn so easily in the sun. Or it’s happening because Shori is black – and racists – probably Ina racists – don’t like the idea that a good part of the answer to your daytime problems is melanin. (153)

When the Gordon community too is raided, it turns out that Wright’s third theory was the right one. While the Ina are sleeping during the day, Shori manages to subdue another group of human attackers. They are identified as the same humans who destroyed both
Shori’s and Iosif’s communities. However, they had been “compelled” to destroy the Ina communities. Ina have the power to command their human symbionts, but maintain a strict code not to abuse this ability. Apparently, a group of Ina had forced a random group of humans to do their bidding. Their motives become clear when Shori interrogates one of the surviving attackers:

I decided he was getting more relaxed. “Victor,” I began, “do you know me? Who am I?”

He surprised me. “Dirty little nigger bitch,” he said reflexively. “Goddamn mongrel cub.”

“Because I’m dark-skinned?”

“And human,” he said. “Ina mixed with some human or maybe human mixed with a little Ina. That’s not supposed to happen. Not ever. Couldn’t let you and you ... your kind .... your family ... breed.” (179)

At this point, Shori understands that not all Ina are content with her existence. The “bad” Ina turn out to be the Silk family, who are obsessed with racial purity, treat their symbionts like slaves, and do not want human DNA to be introduced into any Ina family line. This connects the novel to the characteristic Southern themes of race and miscegenation. When the Silks’ implication is revealed, a trial is held at the Gordon community. Ina families from all over the United States are called to attend, and each family is described in terms of the region they come from. When Harold Westfall, an Ina from South Carolina is introduced, the South’s stereotypical image of intolerance and conservativeness is reaffirmed:
Harold Westfall was also married to his first for legal as well as social reasons. He lived in South Carolina and felt that anything he could do to seem normal and unworthy of notice was a good thing. He and his family had been in South Carolina for 160 years, and yet I got the impression he was still not comfortable there. I wondered why he stayed. (240)

At the trial, the Silk family tries to make Shori’s testimony invalid, by stating that she is human instead of Ina, and the Silks do not think highly of humans: “You’re not Ina! [...] And you have no more business at this Council than would a clever dog!” (244) The Silks defend themselves by saying that they have only the welfare of the Ina in mind, but also by degrading the human race:

What matters most to us, to every member of the Silk Family, is the welfare of the Ina people. We Ina are vastly outnumbered by the human beings of this world. And how many of us have been butchered in their wars? They destroy one another by the millions, and it makes no difference to their numbers. They breed and breed and breed, while we live long and breed slowly. [...] But we are not them!

However, for all their eloquent excuses, the Silks turn out to be nothing more than racists. When the trial is declared in favour of Shori, a member of the Silk drops all pretences of civility and launches himself at her:

They held him while he struggled beneath them, screaming. At first, it seemed that he wasn’t making words. He was only looking at me and screaming. Then I began to recognize words: ‘Murdering black mongrel bitch …’ And ‘What will she give us all? Fur? Tails?’ (306)
Shori’s abilities are a blessing, rather than a threat to the Ina community, but the Silks were too blinded by their ideal of racial purity to see this. Moreover, their fear of miscegenation brings out the worst human qualities in them. The language they use – with derogatory expressions like “Dirty nigger bitch.” - is the language of white human racists. The attacks did not simply happen because Shori had human DNA, they happened because she is phenotypically black, and that was a bridge too far for the conservative and bigoted Silks. While the story could have easily been told with a white protagonist, the use of a black protagonist creates a more powerful allegory on racial issues. The tale itself is universal, but the references it contains are specifically aimed at the history of blacks in the United States.
6. RELIGION

The classic Stoker vampire is extremely vulnerable to all manner of Christian religious symbols, ranging from a phobia of crosses to a harrowing allergy of holy water. At first glance, the South would be a dangerous environment for the vampire, since Religion is one of the region’s most enduring and distinguishing characteristics.

“The South today continues to represent the nation’s strongest commitment to Biblical literalism and orthodox Protestantism. The Southern Baptist church (the largest Protestant denomination in the country, with over twelve million members) is the foremost manifestation of this sectional religious outlook. It has been called the "folk church" of the South.” (Roland)

For this reason, a large portion of the South is known as the “Bible Belt”, a term first coined by essayist Henry Louis Mencken in 1924. (Roland) The South has retained this affiliation with Religion in present day. Roland states that “Southerners are likelier than non-Southerners to believe in the immortality of the soul and the promise of reward and threat of punishment after death and to believe that religion holds the answers to the great problems of the world.” (9)

While the Stoker vampire would not last long in this Christian environment, none of the Southern Vampires in the above-mentioned works are susceptible to religious symbols. In Interview, Louis even states that he “rather like[s] looking on crucifixes in particular.” (Rice 27) In Lost Souls, The vampire Christian also says that a crucifix has no effect on him: “I you touched me with that, it would not burn me. It would not blacken my skin. It would not poison my essence. I have nothing against your Christ. I am sure his blood
tasted as sweet as anyone else’s.” (Brite 89) Interestingly, the vampires in the Anita Blake: Vampire Hunter series retain their classical weaknesses to Christian symbols. The novels are set in Saint Louis, Missouri, which is a borderline Southern region, and the city is generally not included in the regions that form the Bible Belt. This indicates a substantially different treatment of the vampire mythology, when the narrative is set in a Southern religious environment.

However, Religion is still a cause of concern for the Southern vampires, but the greatest threat now comes from fanatics who take their religion too seriously. Moreover, Southern vampire fiction may not be Christian in nature – with the notable exception of Anne Rice, but is often haunted by the presence of Christianity, or of religious groups, and the lifestyle these groups impose on others. This places the Southern vampires solidly into the Southern Gothic mode. An example of a Southern Gothic writer who is highly concerned with religion is Flannery O’Connor.

[H]er Gothicism stems from the intensity and passion with which she works out the implications of what might be called a sort of fundamentalist, or even Puritan, Catholicism containing an inspiring terror of the possibility of grace and the fallenness of the World. (Lloyd-Smith 122)

According to Llyod-Smith, O’Connor displays a “mordant wit” in her Southern fictions which is based on the following view: “If religion were to be taken seriously, the consequences must be terrifying”. (123) The people who take religion too seriously become a threat to the vampire, who is an extremely “un-Christian” other. When the theme of religion emerges in Southern vampire fiction, the narrative often becomes an
allegory on the inability of conservative religious groups to accept minorities, and homosexuals in particular. However, in other works, the vampire is a figure trying to connect with a Christian concept of God, burdened by a sense of religious guilt over his own nature. This too, can be read as a metaphor for homosexuality, as homosexuals are often excluded from religious practices.

With each instalment, Anne Rice progressively presents more Christian themes in her *Vampire Chronicles*. In *Interview*, the vampire Louis is on a quest for redemption, seeking to end his state of misery and trying to reconnect with a world he is excluded from due to his nature. Looking back on *Interview* in 2007, Rice states that the novel was about living in a world which has rejected God:

> The major theme of the novel is the misery of this character because he cannot find redemption and does not have the strength to end the evil of which he knows himself to be a part. [*Interview with the Vampire*] reflects for me a protest against the post World War II nihilism to which I was exposed in college from 1960 through 1972. It is an expression of grief for a lost religious heritage that seemed at that time beyond recovery. [...] In 1976, I felt that the vampire was the perfect metaphor for the outcast in all of us, the alienated one in all of us, the one who feels lost in a world seemingly without God.

This certainly constitutes a large portion of the narrative. When Louis visits a cathedral in New Orleans, he laments the lack of a true religious experience: “God did not live in this church; these statues gave an image to nothingness. I was the supernatural in this cathedral. I was the only supermortal thing that stood conscious under this roof!
Loneliness. Loneliness to the point of madness.” (158-59) He then confesses his sins to a priest there, revealing himself as a vampire. The priest does not believe him at first. But when Louis shows his fangs, the priest is repulsed by him: “His face infuriated me, his fear, his contempt, his rage. I saw in it all the hatred I’d seen in Babette.” (162) This experience frustrates him to such an extent that he ends up killing the priest, leaving him more miserable than before.

The priest’s reaction is an allegory on the treatment of homosexuals and other minorities by the Church. As in many other contemporary works of vampire fiction, Rice’s vampires are portrayed as bisexual. The way Louis is turned into a vampire is described using a distinctively “queer” terminology: Lestat moves “like a lover” and Louis is “taken” by him. When the pair moves to New Orleans, Louis grows tired of Lestat. In an effort to “save their marriage” Lestat turns the five year old girl Claudia into a vampire. At that point, they constitute a Queer family, with Louis and Lestat allegorizing gay adoption. However, in Interview, Louis finds no solace in the embrace of a same-sex partner, and the “adoption” of Claudia takes a turn for the worse when she tries to kill Lestat.

In the 1960s, when gay civil rights movements were still struggling in the United States, Fiedler wrote that “overt homosexuality carries with it, however, still the sense of taboo, and is almost always rendered therefore, in gothic terms.” (452) When Rice wrote Interview in 1976, Gay rights had already made serious progress. However, the way Louis despairs due to his new nature is highly reminiscent of Leslie Fiedler’s statement on “post-Faulknerian” Gothic fiction in the 1960s:

The child and the freak haunt such literature, images created out of the homosexual’s conviction of the impossibility of love; and they move, not yet
fallen into a world of acceptance and differentiated sex, through a society in
which passion leads only to thralldom and suffering. (Fiedler 453)

Louis’ vampirism – as a metaphor for homosexuality – indeed only leads to thralldom, as
he finds himself in a master and slave relationship with Lestat. He constantly suffers due
to his nature, which makes normal humans hate and fear him, and finally, Claudia, who is
both a child and a freak, remains a haunting presence in the *Vampire Chronicles*. To
conceive a child by natural means is impossible for two men, but not for two male
vampires. By turning Claudia into a vampire, Lestat creates a child that is born of his
blood. However, his creation becomes a Gothic perversion of a normal child. Claudia
quickly forgets the early years of her mortal life, and she grows up unburdened by a sense
of human morality. This in turn makes her a merciless killer, and she eventually tries to
kill her own creator, Lestat.

*Lost Souls* is set in a Southern universe where overzealous Christians are portrayed as
“the others” All religious characters in the novel are fundamentalists, hypocrites, or both.
When the vampire Christian applies for a bartending job in Missing Mile, the owner is
curious about his name: “Christian, hm? Were your folks Holy Rollers? That could drive
anybody to a life of bartending.” (130) The half-abandoned town of Missing Mile is cut
off from the rest of the Bible Belt, and it is to this place that Nothing is drawn.
When Nothing is first introduced, he is fifteen years old and living with his adoptive
parents – who have named him Jason – in a suburban area in Maryland. From the start, he
is presented as different from the other teenagers in his school. He is different because of
his vampire nature, but his budding nature is presented in terms that are similar to the
emergence of homosexual feelings. Nothing’s otherness alienates him, and he creates a safe haven in his bedroom, where he smokes pot, drinks whiskey, and reads poetry by Dylan Thomas. He also enjoys a particular form of tension relief, which consists of inflicting razor wounds on himself, and sucking his own blood from the wound: “he sucked at his own blood because that was what comforted him, when he grew too lonely, too hungry for something he did not know. (76) This mirrors a sort of self-cutting that is the result of depression, but Nothing does this because he is a vampire.

In class, when Nothing interprets a fragment from *Lord of the Flies* (1954) in terms of same-sex desire, this is met with laughter and the derogatory phrase: “what a fag!” (31) He defends himself by saying “fuck you,” and is the only one to be reprimanded in the principal’s office. James Thomas Sears wrote a comprehensive study on growing up gay in the South, wherein he presents a few examples of alienated gay teenagers and the dynamics their sexuality produces in a classroom environment:

The story was always the same. He would enter a school and the students would harass him immediately. If he defended himself, either verbally or physically, he was taken to the Dean’s office and reprimanded. The adults often added to his torment by their indifference or by making innuendoes or other subtle remarks about his homosexuality. (Sears XII)

As a necessary modus vivendi, Nothing stops trying to fit in. His apathy attracts a group of Goth teenagers, whose lifestyle is focused on bisexual experimentation and a general disinterest. He insists on being called “Nothing” by this group, which illustrates his nihilism. However, he soon grows tired of them as well, and sets out for Missing Mile,
where he hopes to meet Ghost, the singer of the band *Lost Souls?*, whose songs bring him comfort.

While hitchhiking, Nothing is picked up by an albino man. When he gets in the car, he notices a “green plastic Jesus” on the dashboard, with eyes painted red in the likeness of the albino’s pink-red eyes. This gives the icon a monstrous quality. When Nothing says that he is headed for Missing Mile, the albino responds: “Heard about the place. Maggot’s nest of sin, nightclubs and bars, fast women.” (120) He then asks Nothing whether he has “been saved,” and gives Nothing a tract to read which is titled *Saved by the Blood of the Lamb*. For the entire ride, Nothing is forced to read the tracts while fearing for his own life. The albino forces him with a crazed intensity: “I could tell you were a sinner from the minute you climbed in. Christ shows them to me, and it’s my duty to save them. I got to do it. I got to do it.” (120-21) The albino calls him a “sinner”, but he actually means “gay.” When the car stops, the albino wants Nothing to satisfy him orally. For Nothing, this comes as a relief after the religious brainwashing he has just been put through, and he does not object to performing this service. When the deed is done, the albino lets him go and pays him “five lousy dollars,” treating him like a cheap escort. (124)

Firstly, this fragment is a criticism on evangelical institutions that claim homosexuals can become heterosexual through prayer. The following quote is derived from the newsletter of a Christian “healing ministry” based in the Southern state of Florida: “That is, a homosexual can become a heterosexual; the homosexual orientation can be changed through prayer for inner healing and the power of the Holy Spirit. This solution, too, we believe, accords well with what Scripture teaches.” (MacNutt)
Secondly, the fragment criticizes the hypocrisy of evangelicals that preach against homosexuality, while engaging in male to male sexual intercourse themselves, albeit safely “in the closet.” Just recently – in May 2010 - the Southern Baptist minister George Rekers was caught recruiting a twenty year old male escort on the internet. Similarly showered with media attention was the case of the evangelical preacher Ted Haggard, who also hired a male escort in 2006. (Rich)

Thirdly, this fragment reveals one of the “queer” perks of Brite’s vampires. When Nothing swallows the albino’s sperm, he feels nourished by it: “Something about it settled his stomach and made his whole body feel good.” (123) He then recalls what a friend once told him: “Did you know [...] that come has almost the exactly the same chemical makeup as human blood?” (124) Brite’s vampires do not need to survive on blood alone; they can equally get nourishment ... from sperm. Fellatio thus delivers a “quick snack” for vampires, which makes the comparison to male homosexuality all the more obvious – especially since all vampire protagonists in the novel are male.

Besides being strongly opposed to same-sex intercourse, religious groups in the South also make a big issue out of abortion, believing in the sanctity of all life, including foetal life. In Lost Souls, the mother of a vampire child never survives the pregnancy, and a growing foetus is described as a monstrosity: Inside Ann, two specks of life had glued themselves together, and deep inside her where all was raw and red and wet, something came alive, a microdot of meat, part human, part strange. [...] [T]he infinitesimal blob of meat stretched and began to grow.” (224)
In the Bible Belt, where abortion can only be performed under restricted circumstances, pregnancy becomes a major fear for women who do not want to conceive. Some of these women might resort to illegal, clandestine abortion, which comes with greater health risks. In *Lost Souls*, three characters get pregnant, and all three die because of it. The first woman is Jessy, Nothing’s mother and fifteen years old. She carries on with the teen pregnancy and dies in childbirth: “Jessy screamed until she could scream no more, and her eyes showed only the whites with their silvery rims, and great gouts of blood poured from her.” (10) The second is the vampire Richelle. Her story is told by another character and she is not an active part of the narrative. Knowing what could happen if she got pregnant, Richelle had decided to remain celibate. However, a boy rapes her and she ends up pregnant. “Half-mad with fear,” she tries to get rid of the foetus, and kills herself in the process:

She tried to cut the child out of her body. I found it in the ruins of her belly, half-hidden behind coils of entrails. It was shrivelled, bloody, long dead. It was still tiny, as large as a red bean. But I found it because her fingers were cupped around it. She had been trying to pull it out. She did not want to die with it still inside her. (278)

The third character is Ann, Steve’s girlfriend. She gets pregnant after sleeping with the vampire Zillah, and is overjoyed to carry his child. She does not realize what will happen to her, though, so Steve and Ghost intervene and bring her to a shady magician, Arkady, who claims to have created a concoction that can save her, and get rid of the foetus. To no avail, because Ann still dies in the process:
Ann lay on her side, twisted into an attitude that was painful to look at. Her neck craned stiffly back. Her face was a grimace of pain. Crusted rivulets of blood ran from the corners of her mouth. [...] The sheet behind Ann’s hips was a black nightmare of blood. [...] Cupped in Ann’s hands, half-encased in a glob of gelatinous blood, Ghost saw a pale shape no larger than a red bean: the dot of an eye, the veined bubble of a skull, tiny fingers like the petals of sea anemones.

Whether the pregnancy is carried through or not, all women die in horrible circumstances. Two of the pregnancies occur in a context that would justify abortion: the first is a teen pregnancy; the second is the result of rape. Moreover, the horrific descriptions of the foetuses bring to mind the pictures of aborted foetuses that religious anti-abortion groups use to discourage women from having an abortion. The use of this recurring theme in the novel indicates that pregnancy in the Bible Belt becomes a concern in itself.

From the very first page of *Dead Until Dark*, a connection is made between vampires and homosexuals, by stating that vampires have “come out of the coffin.” This is an obvious pun on “coming out of the closet,” an expression that is used when a homosexual reveals his sexual orientation to his environment. Though the vampire metaphor is supposed to be understood in more universal terms, the comparison alludes to homosexuals more directly when religion is introduced.

Like many contemporary vampires, those in Harris’s novels are portrayed as bisexual. Moreover, vampires seem more sexually active than humans. Like homosexuals, they have their own bars, and even have their own pornography. When Sookie watches the
late night channel in *True Blood*, “fangbangers” is the latest niche in adult movies. When humans ingest vampire blood – called “V” – it functions like a hallucinogenic Viagra drug. The vampires are both feared and admired for their sexual prowess. They become the ultimate - and obvious - fantasy of sexual transgression.

In Harris’s *Living Dead in Dallas* (2002), the second novel in the *Southern Vampires Mysteries*, The Fellowship of the Sun is first introduced. They are a religious group bent on the destruction of all vampires, using “God’s ultimate weapon”: the sun: “What the Klan was to African Americans, the Fellowship of the Sun was to vampires. It was the fastest-growing cult in America.” (93) The cult is led by Sarah and Steve Newlin. The two use their marriage as an example for others, constantly promoting their relationship in the sermons they give. The Newlins are a parody on Evangelical preachers, who have always opposed gay Civil Rights movements, and the rights they seek in society. The Fellowship of the Sun combines the worst excrescences of the conservative South: the violent action of the Ku Klux Klan and the moral righteousness of evangelical preachers.

In *True Blood*, the vampire allegory shifts more obviously to the plight of homosexuals. Frequently, news fragments are shown about the advancement of “vampire rights,” that bear a striking resemblance to media coverage of gay issues. Among those is a fragment that shows a vampire woman getting married to a human man. Along with the premiere of the TV show, HBO launched several mock-websites, including that of the Fellowship of the Sun. On their site, Steve and Sarah address the immorality of “inter-species marriage,” and express their concern over the sanctioned marriage of humans and vampires. To counter this legislation, Steve quotes the bible, saying that marriage only
lasts “till death do us part,” something vampires – being undead – do not apply for.

("Reflections of Light")
7. CONCLUSION

I began my dissertation with an overview of influential American vampire fiction since 1975, pointing out key works and the publications these works subsequently influenced. Given that the archetypal vampire trope finds its origins in the genre of Gothic literature, I first researched the characteristics of the genre. This revealed that the quintessential Gothic novel is an expression of the repressed feelings and history of the society in which it is produced. Passing through the American Gothic, I continued to narrow the field of the genre down to Southern Gothic, and attempted to place Southern vampire fiction within this literary tradition. True to Southern Gothic’s hallmark, Southern vampire fiction indeed touches upon many of the South’s particular concerns, including the issues of slavery, the civil war, race and religion.

At the same time these novels rework vampire mythology, casting the vampire as a misunderstood minority in the conservative South. This particular employment of vampire trope contradicts and interferes with a complete identification of vampires with minorities, since the majority of the authors I discussed continue to cast the vampire as a murderous creature. The introduction of the term “Heritage Gothic,” as a continued genre denominator explains this loss of coherence and purpose. Lloyd-Smith advises against reading such works as allegories.

After a logical approach to the meaning of the vampire as an allegory for minorities, I came to conclude that this is indeed a valid statement regarding to the works of Anne Rice, Poppy Z. Brite, and certainly Charlaine Harris. However, the two African American authors that present an African American vampire, Octavia Butler and Jewelle Gomez,
attempt a more thorough reworking of the vampire mythology: their vampire protagonists do not kill and do not want to unless to defend themselves. In doing this, both these authors demonstrate an increased awareness of cultural and racial sensitivities, creating narratives that generate understanding for cultural, racial and sexual minorities more efficiently.
Notes

1 Meanwhile, Anne Rice has converted to Christianity and has committed herself entirely to Christian literature, the most recent result of this being Christ the Lord, Out of Egypt (2005).
2 Rice’s second novel, The Feast of All Saints (1979), is about the “gens de couleur libres”, who lived in New Orleans before the Civil War. They were of mixed racial heritage, being the descendants of the European settlers of Louisiana and people of African descent.
3 At this time, the Anita Blake: Vampire Hunter series has reached its 18th instalment.
5 Merrick is actually “coloured”, she states in the novel that she can “pass for white”.
6 Manfred was the name of the doomed patriarch in The Castle of Otranto.
7 For an analogous example of this mechanism in present day, one need only look at Japan, a country with an extreme set of social and moral boundaries. At the same time, Japan produces a wide variety of Manga comic books, which contain graphic representations of extreme sexual and violent conduct.
8 Since 9/11, this American myth has had difficulty enduring. In Precarious Life (2004). Judith Butler explains that Americans have lost “the prerogative, only and always, to be the one who transgresses the sovereign boundaries of other states, but never to be in the position of having one’s own boundaries transgressed.” (39)
9 Interestingly, the vampire manga series Hellsing (1997-2008), written and illustrated by Kouta Hirano, features a vampire called Rip van Winkle as one of the minor antagonists in the story.
10 Like Faulkner, Brite creates a fictional town to serve as the setting for three of her novels: Lost Souls, Drawing Blood and Exquisite Corpse. Faulkner is mentioned in Lost Souls. One of the minor characters, Eliot, is writing a novel about a rural family in Virginia. By referring to Faulkner it is implied that Ann, who is sleeping with him, isn’t too fond of this subject: “Eliot had written his doctoral thesis on William Faulkner, and had never really gotten over it.” (106)
11 One of these fictional works is the movie Daughters of Darkness (1970), wherein Countess Elizabeth Bathory and her lesbian lover choose a newlywed couple in Ostend, Belgium as their victims of choice.
12 Rice’s vampires are extremely vulnerable to sunlight. They are completely unconscious during the daytime hours, and a single ray of sunlight can burn them to cinders.

13 “[A]ny study of [Marie Laveau’s] long career as Voodoo queen is fraught with difficulty and contradictions because she may not have been one person at all, but three (there were at least two), all of whom took the name Marie Laveau.” (Curran 147)

14 In *True Blood*, the African American character Tara asks this question.

15 In Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*, the count needs to sleep in his native soil, but it is never fully explained in the novel why he needs to do this, or what he might gain from it. While most writers of contemporary vampire fictions have dropped the idea, others have elaborated upon it. Chelsea Quinn Yarbro, for instance, kept this requirement for her vampire protagonist, Saint Germain, in the *Saint Germain* cycle, of which *Hotel Transylvania* (1978) was the first novel.

16 Yerba Buena was the former name of San Francisco.

17 Gilda uses the language she employed as a slave girl here, which has a different vocal rhythm and grammar.

18 The documentary *The Order of Myths* (2008), by Margaret brown, on segregation during the Mardi Gras festivities perfectly illustrates this subject.

19 Louis Armstrong (1901-1971) was a highly influential American Jazz trumpeter and singer from New Orleans.

20 Quinn even loses his virginity to the ghost Rebecca.

21 Gail Sheehy wrote an article on the Black Panther Party for *New York* magazine.

22 In *True Blood*, Diane, Liam and Malcolm meet a similar fate. However, they are presented more vicious than in the book. When Bill visits the threesome to make them stay away from Sookie, they have just killed a human woman. The corpse is hanging upside down, so the blood can drip into the container under it. The vampires only show amusement at the death of this woman, which “justifies” their destruction more easily.

23 Shori’s memory loss is an important part of the narrative. The reader knows as little as Shori does, and as she learns about the Ina, so does the reader.
Ina gather an entire group of symbionts around them. This way, they never take too much blood from the same person.

Rice’s fixation on religion reaches its peak with *Memnoch the Devil* (1995), wherein Lestat meets God, the Devil, and even drinks the blood of Christ.

Each state has different regulations with regards to abortion. In some states, abortion is entirely illegal. Other states do allow abortion if the mother was a victim of rape, or if the pregnancy endangers the mother’s life.
Works Cited


The Southern Vampire in American Popular Fiction


<http://www.southernscribe.com/zine/authors/Harris_Charlaine.htm>.


The Southern Vampire in American Popular Fiction


