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‘You are mine, you *shall* be mine, you and I are one for ever’: Sapphic Desire, Vampires, and Constructing Kinship

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Marie Theunisz

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Abstract

This thesis explores the figure of the sapphic vampire in *Carmilla* (1872) by J. Sheridan Le Fanu, *The Blood of the Vampire* (1897) by Florence Marryat, *The Gilda Stories* (1991) by Jewelle Gomez, and *Fledgling* (2005) by Octavia Butler. I argue that these texts present the sapphic vampire as the embodiment of the death drive and display ambiguous familial/sexual relationships in order to challenge heteronormative constructs of family. I utilise Lee Edelman's arguments from *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* to analyse vampiric, queer kinship as a future that does not focus on the child, and Kath Weston's *Families We Choose: Lesbians, Gays, Kinship* to unpack the concept of the chosen family and its value for queer people who desire kin, examining the way familial structures are broken down and biological ties rendered secondary to chosen ones. In Chapter One I analyse the scenes in which the vampire feeds, unpacking the use of breastfeeding imagery to show the tension between maternal roles and sapphic relationships inherent in the texts. I show how the narratives respond to idea of love and lust, as well as their troubled relationship with post-menopausal women. Chapter Two considers how, lacking a biological family of her own, the sapphic vampire creates familial bonds through recruitment or reproduction. Given the correlation these texts create between queerness and vampirism, I argue that the family building within these narratives presents alternatives to heteronormative constructs of kinship. Throughout I compare the contemporary texts to their Victorian counterparts, tracing the ways in which the depictions of queer kinship that the Victorian texts had to eradicate could be celebrated in those of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century. I will explain the significance of what has or has not changed, and how this affects or is representative of shifts in attitude towards queer people and the families that they choose. This thesis demonstrates the power of the desire that the literary sapphic vampire feels, and the value of the family she chooses.

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Introduction

In 1872 J. Sheridan Le Fanu writes in *Carmilla* of the pull between love and loathing that the main character, Laura, feels towards Carmilla, writing that her affections were:

> like the ardor of a lover; it embarrassed me; it was hateful and yet over-powering; and with gloating eyes she drew me to her, and her hot lips traveled along my cheek in kisses; and she would whisper, almost in sobs, "You are mine, you *shall* be mine, you and I are one for ever."[1]

One hundred and nineteen years later, in 1991, Jewelle Gomez writes in *The Gilda Stories*:

> This was a desire not unlike their need for the blood, but she had already had her share. It was not unlike lust but less single-minded. She felt the love almost as motherly affection, yet there was more. As the blood flowed from Gilda's body into Bird's they both understood the need—it was for completion. They had come together but never taken each other in as fully as they could, cementing their family bond.[2]

There are many differences between these two passages. Le Fanu's Laura simultaneously loves and hates Carmilla, a vampire whose own emotional confliction is conveyed by her gloating eyes yet romantic desperation, whereas Gomez's vampires are mutually affectionate, driven by love as Gilda unabashedly desires her mother-figure. Queerness is made monstrous in one, celebrated in the other. Although there is a contrast between the negativity in *Carmilla* and the overwhelming positivity of lesbian love in *The Gilda Stories,* undoubtedly as a product of changing times, the focus of this thesis is what they have in common: sapphic desire and a yearning to belong. Carmilla wants to claim Laura to ensure that they remain together forever, just as Gilda and Bird seek to complete each other. Vampiric immortality is a tool for enabling an enduring relationship, one deeper and more permanent than simply being lovers. Despite the difference of over a century, sapphic attraction and a longing for kinship are presented as inextricably entwined, refusing to fix themselves as solely one thing. Laura loves Carmilla, is embarrassed by her, is overpowered by her; Carmilla is gloating and hateful yet kisses Laura and professes her love in sobs. They shall be one forever, forging an eternal bond. Their emotions are contradictory, but they remain drawn to each other; the desire they feel for the other is irresistible. Gilda's desire for Bird, although not contradictory, is still multifaceted: her desire is like hunger, like lust, like motherly affection, driven by a want to secure their familial connection.

This kind of liminality pervades vampiric lore, particularly in regards to the female vampire. She is neither dead nor alive, villain nor hero, fiend nor beauty. She is frequently

[1] J. Sheridan Le Fanu, *Carmilla* ([n.p.]: Cavalier Classics, 2015), p. 24.
[2] Jewelle Gomez, *The Gilda Stories* (San Francisco: City Lights Publishers, 2016), p. 139.

morally grey, sexually ambiguous, and wants you as food, lover, and family. The vampire *changes* their victim, whether that is changing her life or changing her into a vampire, too. This desire to create more vampires, the longing for an untraditional family unit, creates an innately uncanny kinship as it replicates, but is not quite, the biological family unit. In an overwhelming amount of vampire literature there is some form of this—of what Kath Weston referred to as a "chosen family"[3]—families not bound by genetics, or, as ironically often said, 'by blood,' which will be examined later in this thesis, but rather families bound by love, families formed by people, queer people especially, who consider each other family due to the deep ties that they develop. They may be friends, lovers, mentors, either as supplement to a biological family, or as a surrogate for an absent one. The sapphic vampire collects and creates family units that are, in every meaning of the word, queer. The atypical family-building of the sapphic vampire results in the confusion of mother/daughter/lover roles, where the female vampire is simultaneously all roles for her victim.

In this thesis I analyse four texts. The earliest, J. Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla* (1872), often considered the first literary occurrence of the lesbian vampire, is about the title character who enters a home and becomes part of a family after a "freak" carriage accident. The household she enters has a motley collection of inhabitants: Laura, a young woman who lost her mother when she was young; Laura's father, who remains nameless; Laura's two governesses, Madame Perrodon and Mademoiselle De Lafontaine; and various unnamed servants. Carmilla's arrival could not have come at a more fortunate time, as Laura had been expecting a visit from another young woman named Bertha who unexpectedly died. Unbeknownst to Laura, Carmilla is there in order to feed off her. The bond that develops between Carmilla and Laura is described as that of dear friends but also as lovers, as a bond that transcends the boundaries of life and death: "I live in you; and you would die for me, I love you so,"[4] professes Carmilla. Laura both does and does not reciprocate, and their relationship balances between desire and disgust, between wanting and choosing. Carmilla feeds off and kills village girls, all the while gradually draining Laura with the apparent intention of turning her into a vampire. Ultimately, Carmilla is vanquished by General Spielsdorf, who is Bertha's uncle, by Baron Vordenburg, who is a descendant of a vampire hunter, and by Laura's father. Laura's account ends with her never "cured," as she shifts

[3] Kath Weston, *Families We Choose: Lesbians, Gays, Kinship* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991)
[4] Le Fanu, p. 33.

between recalling Carmilla as a monster and as the young woman she loved. She misses Carmilla up until her own death.

The Blood of the Vampire (1897), by Florence Marryat, takes a unique approach to the pathology of the vampire. This story follows Harriet Brandt, a young woman who is holidaying after leaving the convent she had been in for most of her life. Harriet hails originally from Jamaica, and, attributed to her unfamiliarity with British society, develops uncommonly close bonds to those around her: first, a mother, Margaret, and her infant; multiple young men; then the Baroness Gobelli who insists on bringing Harriet into her home: "She's like a daughter of the 'ouse to us!"[5] Unbeknownst to even Harriet herself, Harriet drains the life force of those she is emotionally dependent upon, murdering people she would consider family as a result of a vampiric genetic trait she inherited from her half-Black mother, who inherited it in turn from her slave mother, who was bitten by a vampire bat. However, this vampirism is attributed not only to the genetic trait, but also to Harriet's father's murderous streak and her mother's love for blood. The narrative ends as, after accidentally killing her husband, Anthony, Harriet takes her own life and leaves her considerable inheritance to Margaret. This novel raises intriguing problems with dependency, heredity, and family that is not, by blood, your own.

Jewelle Gomez's *The Gilda Stories* (1991) is the first contemporary story I examine, as it follows a young Black Girl, recently escaped from slavery, who is rescued by a mysterious white woman, a vampire named Gilda (who, for the sake of clarity, is referred to as "the first Gilda" throughout this thesis). The Girl becomes a surrogate daughter for the first Gilda and her lover, Bird. Despite the initially idyllic lifestyle they lead, the first Gilda craves 'true death' (as the vampires are undead and may live eternally, it is not uncommon for older vampires to wish to end their lives, which is what the 'true death' is—a permanent ending) and therefore the Girl is not intended solely as a daughter. The first Gilda intends for the Girl to be a replacement companion for Bird. To enable this kind of substitution, the Girl is changed into a vampire in a blood-exchanging process that involved both Bird and the first Gilda and, at the first Gilda's wishes, the Girl takes the name of Gilda, and the first Gilda takes her own life.

The narrative focuses on small moments in time, each chapter taking place in a different period. When she meets the first Gilda, it is 1850. There is then a large time skip, and the next chapter is set in 1890, when Bird leaves Gilda in order to reconnect with her

[5] Florence Marryat, *The Blood of the Vampire* (Brighton: Victorian Secrets, 2010), p. 129.

Native American origins, and so Gilda, now alone, travels to meet some of their vampiric family, Anthony and Sorel. In 1921 Gilda moves away, forging a connection with a widow named Aurelia who, under Gilda's influence, regains purpose in her life through activism. However, Gilda leaves Aurelia abruptly as she wants to turn her into a vampire, wants to love her, but feels that Aurelia belongs in her own time. The next chapter takes place in 1955, as Gilda owns a beauty salon, protecting the friends she has made from a sinister vampire, and she meets with Bird for the first time in over sixty years. In 1971 Gilda works in a theatre and meet Julius, a young Black man who desires Gilda and, after much convincing, Gilda turns him. Then, in 1981, Julius leaves Gilda to go explore the world with Sorel and Bird, and Gilda meets a young woman that she attempts to distance herself from due to her desire. This does not last: the young woman is Effie, a vampire who is much older than even Sorel. Effie joins their family, and Gilda moves away to live with her. By 2020 Gilda has become a famous author and struggles with the idea of moving again. Eventually she decides to go meet Nadine, a deaf woman and activist who is Aurelia's great-granddaughter. The story ends in 2050, when vampirism has been discovered and, as the planet deteriorates due to severe environmental degradation, the rich pay for ships to the moon and enlist Hunters to kill vampires for the properties of their blood. Gilda, fleeing Hunters, comes across Ermis on the brink of death and changes her. Gilda is injured and Ermis, following the words she can sense from the rest of the family, transports Gilda to Machu Pichu. There their vampiric, eternal family will meet, all of them together for the first time. This time they will stay together.

Throughout the novel Gilda struggles with desiring a more constant companion than her surrogate mother/lover, Bird, is willing to be, and in her quest for kinship she forges bonds with humans and vampires alike. As the world changes and the years pass by it is not only the eternal, immortal family that Gilda relies upon, but also the memory of all the humans she loved in the past. Family comes to mean more than race, more than gender, more than time. It raises complex questions of the relationship between family, race and queerness. Gomez cited one of her influences as Octavia Butler: "Rereading Octavia Butler's work convinced me that there was a place for women of colour in speculative fiction."[6]

Fourteen years later Butler published her own vampire novel, *Fledgling* (2005). *Fledgling*, like *The Gilda Stories*, interrogates concepts of race, family and queerness. However, with a significantly stronger science-fiction focus, Butler approaches vampirism

[6] Gomez, *The Gilda Stories*, p. xii.

from a different angle: vampires in this text are an all-white race called Ina, an entirely separate species to humans. Due to genetic modification, the main character, Shori, is one of the only Black vampires. Shori has amnesia that causes her to forget both her biological, vampiric family, and her chosen human family, so she seeks solace in the new close bonds she develops with humans, her symbionts, the blood of whom she requires to survive. The novel follows Shori as she attempts to recover knowledge about her biological family, but also as she creates her own kind of family through the humans she comes to rely on for both sustenance and a sense of belonging. Her created family is diverse in every sense of the word: male, female; old, young; black, white; deliberately chosen, picked by chance, or added due to a sense of duty. Each member inhabits a unique role within Shori's created family that could not be replicated by another and, ultimately, comes to be more significant than any biological ties. Shori's family was murdered by other Ina who despised the genetic experimentations that resulted in her being Black, and so she seeks to navigate the kinship she feels with other Black people, but also to reconnect with her Ina heritage.

Queerness

As Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle state, "queer's a queer word."[7] Its first recorded meaning, emerging in the early sixteenth century, meant unusual—or, more specifically, as the Oxford English Dictionary defines it: "Strange, odd, peculiar, eccentric, in appearance or character. Also, of questionable character, suspicious, dubious. *Queer fellow*, an eccentric person."[8] It is not known exactly where the term originated from, but it had noted usage early on in Ireland and Scotland. Queer connoted strangeness for a few hundred years until the definition began to shift around the late nineteenth century. Perhaps the most infamous instances of its new use, and likely what propelled the popularity of the secondary definition, was the use of "queer" in the trials of Oscar Wilde. In these trials the Marquess of Queensberry (who had two sons; one of whom had a homosexual relationship with a political figure and the other who had been engaging in a homosexual relationship with Wilde for years) had his letters read aloud.[9] One letter contains references to homosexuals, particularly

[7] Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle, 'Queer', in *Introduction to Literature, Criticism and Theory*, (5th Ed) (London: Routledge, 2016) pp. 260-269, p. 260.
[8] *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023) <https://www.oed.com/oed2/00194686;jsessionid=29800D0408C3B2E9D6BF3ACB049B00E7> [accessed 6 June 2023] s.v. queer.
[9] Mollie Clarke, "'Queer' history: A history of Queer', *The National Archives* (2021) <https://blog.nationalarchives.gov.uk/queer-history-a-history-of-queer/> [accessed 6 June 2023].

those in a higher social class such as Wilde, as "the Snob Queers."[10] The use of queer in specific reference to sexual orientation was similarly used in scientific and medical communities to describe men who were "'queer' in sexual tendency."[11] This evolution of the term still somewhat aligned with its original meaning, as queer sexuality was strange sexuality, sexuality that was abnormal, non-heterosexual and non-conforming. The negative associations of this usage almost immediately turned queer into a pejorative, an inherently derogative term. Queer came to mean homosexual, but in a way that was loaded with disgust and stigma. It connoted a sense of wrongness and othered the people who were labelled as such.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, "queer" underwent another change. Bennett and Royle explain how, "partly in response to the spread of AIDS among gay men, the word took a queer turn: homosexuals themselves began to 'reclaim' the word […] 'Queer' becomes a term of pride and celebratory self-assertion, of difference affirmed and affirmative difference."[12] The term gained an aspect of positivity as, rather than conveying simply exclusion from the heterosexual world, queer grew to be a word of inclusivity, of community and acceptance with people that, like you, are Other. It has come to be a label of pride and celebration, even as people continue to be prosecuted for their queerness. It is a staunch refusal of the shame and the implication of defectiveness that came with queer's place as a slur, and instead expresses the beauty of our difference. Yes, we are strange, and peculiar, and non-heterosexual—and isn't it wonderful?

In queer theory, the definition of queer is open-ended and inclusive of many concepts or ideas. Chris Berry and Annamarie Jagose describe queer as "an ongoing and necessarily unfixed site of engagement and contestation."[13] David Halperin's explanation is that "queer is by definition whatever is at odds with the normal."[14] For Lisa Duggan queerness is "dissent from the hegemonic, structured relations and meanings of sexuality and gender."[15] All are attempting to describe the indescribable, with a notable focus on the shifting, changeable and, most importantly, strange nature of the word. Influenced by definitions such as these, Will Stockton states that, "queer theory asks us to consider that heterosexuality is neither a natural nor a universal form of sexuality; that sexual identity is a social construct rather than an

[10] Richard Ellmann, *Oscar Wilde* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1988), p. 426.
[11] Oxford English Dictionary Online, s.v. queer.
[12] Bennett and Royle, 'Queer', p. 261.
[13] Chris Berry and Annamarie Jagose, 'Australia queer', *Meanjin*, 55.1 (1996) 5-15, p. 11.
[14] David M. Halperin, *St. Foucault: Towards a Gay Hagiography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995) p. 62.
[15] Lisa Duggan, 'Making it Perfectly Queer,' *Socialist Review*, 22.1 (1992), 11-31, p. 24.

essential feature of the self; and that gender is performative rather than simply biological."[16] Queer, in this context, refers both to queer people, and other things that may be, societally, considered "queer": examples given in Sullivan's *A Critical Introduction to Queer Theory* include married couples without children, fetishists, protesters against what is deemed as "normal" behaviour.[17] Unusual examples to have together, certainly, but that perfectly illustrates the point: that queer can be a multitude of things, all at once.

Colloquially, queer has a more specific definition as "an umbrella term describing anyone who identifies as something other than heterosexual and/or cisgender."[18] While queer theory is undeniably an integral aspect of this thesis, there remains some merit to the common understanding of a word as that is how it is engaged with in society. So, in reference to the colloquial definition, in this thesis queer is first used to refer to relationships or actions that are "gay," that is, non-heterosexual. It includes gay men, lesbians, bisexual, asexual, pansexual people—and potentially many more. The term "queer" groups all "sexual deviants" together on the merit of their difference and celebrates the power of such variations. Then, beyond sexuality, queer is used in reference to gender-diverse people who do not fit neatly within the framework of male/female or masculine/feminine. This may be people who are transgender or gender non-conforming, among other identities. As such, in this reclamation of the word, queer refers to anyone not neatly heterosexual or someone that does not reside firmly within their assigned gender roles. There is some criticism of the use of queer as an umbrella term, as Gloria Anzaldúa warns,

> Queer is used as a false unifying umbrella which all "queers" of all races, ethnicities and classes are shoved under. At times we need this umbrella to solidify our ranks against outsiders. But even when we seek shelter under it we must not forget that it homogenizes, erases our differences.[19]

This is an inarguably justifiable concern. Painting all queer experiences as the same simply because of the common umbrella they rest under would be dangerous and ignorant, as this tends to make the most dominant voice, that of the white gay male, the only one that is heard—but this should not diminish the significance of queer and its history. Queer's value,

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[16] Will Stockton, *An Introduction to Queer Literary Studies: Reading Queerly* (London: Routledge, 2022) Taylor & Francis Group <https://doi-org.ezproxy.waikato.ac.nz/10.4324/9781003132936> [accessed 20 June 2023] p. 3.

[17] Nikki Sullivan, *A Critical Introduction to Queer Theory* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2003) ProQuest Ebook Central <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.ezproxy.waikato.ac.nz/lib/waikato/detail.action?docID=6141853> [accessed 26 July 2023] p. 50.

[18] Chloe O. Davis, The Queens' English: The LGBTQIA+ Dictionary of Lingo and Colloquial Expressions (Random House, 2021)

[19] Gloria Anzaldúa, 'To(o) Queer the Writer: Loca, escrita y chicana', in *InVersions: Writing by Dykes, Queers and Lesbians*, ed. by Betsy Warland (Vancouver: Press Gang Publishers, 1991), pp. 249-263 (p. 250).

when used with care, lies in the sense of community it connotes as it celebrates the differences that unite us while acknowledging the other kinds of difference that alter each individual's queer experiences. Queer may indeed be explained in a rather broad sense, but this is due to the (somewhat contentious) refusal of the word to be strictly defined—as confining queerness to simply one thing is antithetical to the very essence of it.

Related to queerness, in this thesis the word "sapphic" will be used frequently. This word, derived from the name of the poet Sappho, is used similarly to queer as an umbrella term. It was originally used to denote relationships or attraction to women—if a woman loved another woman, she was a "sapphist." In *Sapphic Modernities: Sexuality, Women and National Culture*, Laura Doan and Jane Garrity explain the fluidity and inclusivity of "sapphic", stating that '"sapphism" is a useful term in that it distances us from the more rigid contemporary categories of identity, such as "butch" or "femme," and reminds us that the claiming of a sexual identity—indeed, the exclusive connection of Sappho with same-sex desire—is relatively recent."[20] Doan and Garrity state that the value of sapphic lies within its fluidity, similar to queer. It is not confined by descriptions of gender performance such as butch or femme, nor is it concerned with labels of lesbian or bisexual. This is due to the fact that sexuality was not always something that was claimed as an identity, as we now view it, but instead sexuality was an act that is performed. A woman did sapphic things, rather than being sapphic. As the reclamation of an older term, it is not associated specifically with a lesbian *identity*, but instead it focuses solely on *desire*, on the longing of a woman for another woman—regardless of how they might otherwise identify. A common misconception is that sapphism, sapphist, or sapphic referred only to lesbians because sapphic/lesbian were often used interchangeably, as "bisexual" was not a commonly used term until the 1950s. Due to the lack of recognition of bisexuality, sapphic refers more broadly to a woman that feels desire for another woman and/or engages in sexual relations with another woman, but not necessarily exclusively so.[21] The defining of sapphic as an identity, related solely with lesbianism and monosexuality, is, in comparison, a recent development.

In considering the labels I will use in this thesis, I could simply designate the characters I will discuss with a sexual orientation: lesbian if they only express desire for women, bisexual if they express desire for men also. Although I may, at times, refer to the

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[20] Laura Doan and Jane Garrity, 'Introduction', in *Sapphic Modernities: Sexuality, Women and National Culture* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 1-16, p. 3, ProQuest Ebook Central <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/waikato/detail.action?docID=308119> [accessed 6 June 2023]

[21] Chandra, 'Why "Sapphic" is Back in Style', *Autostraddle* (2021) <https://www.autostraddle.com/why-sapphic-is-back-in-style-definition-meaning-trend/> [accessed 16 March 2024].

relationship and desire in *Carmilla* as lesbian due to the absence of attraction to men—and although I could describe *Fledgling*'s Shori as bisexual—whilst sexualities can be a useful tool to define attraction by modern understanding, they have potential limitations. For one, there may be inaccuracies in my interpretations: to designate a character as "lesbian" simply because of her attraction to women could be potentially dismissive of the full scope of her attraction. If she also desires men, that attraction is not of less value to her, and to ignore it would be erasing that aspect of her sexuality. It is also an act of imposition as I would be designating them a likely anachronistic identity. There are, of course, exceptions, such as Gilda of *The Gilda Stories*, who is undoubtedly a lesbian, as Gomez refers to her novel as "a black lesbian vampire story,"[22] but the majority of the vampires I will examine lack any such clarified sexuality. Sapphic includes a variety of identities and hence does not exclude women who identify as bisexual, pansexual, or queer.[23] Sapphic refuses strict categorisation and does not necessarily force an identity upon someone, as it reflects the nature of desire—it could indeed be an identity, but it can also simply be the name of the attraction that one woman feels for another. Using the word "sapphic" allows me to focus on the similarities of desire, the romantic or sexual attraction of women to other women, while not dismissing other attraction that they may feel. This is convenient in cases such as in *The Blood of the Vampire*, where Harriet, although undoubtedly romantically and sexually interested in men, also expresses desire for a woman (Margaret)—desire of a notably ambiguous kind. Therefore, despite the fact that sapphic and lesbian can often be used interchangeably, it is preferable, at times, to use this term rather than referring to attraction between women as lesbian. This is relevant particularly with sapphic vampires, as the nature of the desire itself is ambiguous; it may be sexual desire, romantic desire, a desire for blood, or all of these kinds of desire at once.

My engagement with queerness in this thesis is both with its original meaning, strange or peculiar, and its modern meaning of non-heterosexuality. This is because I believe they are inherently related, particularly when it comes to the figure of the vampire. Freud's concept of the uncanny is, as Nicholas Royle states in his book *The Uncanny*, "a peculiar commingling of the familiar and unfamiliar."[24] The uncanny contains the liminal, the uncertain, things that are known and unknown, things that are not quite as they should be. The vampire is a clear

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[22] Gomez, *The Gilda Stories*, p. xii.
[23] Julia Sotska, 'Sapphic - What is it? What does it mean?', *Taimi* (2022) <https://taimi.com/wiki/sapphic-what-is-it-what-does-it-mean> [accessed 6 June 2023]
[24] Nicholas Royle, *The Uncanny* (New York: Routledge, 2003) p. 1.

example of this as the vampire may seem human but is not quite; may seem alive but is not quite. In their chapter on the uncanny, Bennett and Royle lay out thirteen forms that the uncanny may take. The one of relevance here is a "sense of radical uncertainty about sexual identity."[25] The uncanny is strange, the uncanny is sexually ambiguous, the uncanny is queer. Queerness has historically been singled out for its strangeness in relation to heterosexuality, so homosexuality has always been characterised by and inextricably linked with the abnormal and atypical. Therefore, the relationships and created family units I will be examining are queer on both levels: they are unusual and strange, the familiar made strange to the point of being horrific—and they are also gay. The link between these meanings is not without significance, and as such I will be using queer as a multi-layered word.

(Un)living in the Margins

It is imperative that, beyond queer identity, I comment on race. Whilst not the primary focus of this thesis, it is undeniably relevant to the characterisation of the vampires I am examining, as none of them are explicitly or exclusively white. Carmilla is the most white-passing, but she is still positioned as an ethnic Other and has a connection with "a hideous black woman."[26] Harriet's mother was mixed-race. Gilda is a Black woman that escaped slavery, and Shori, although an Ina which is an all-white vampire race, has DNA from a Black human woman that makes her Black.

It is not insignificant that all of these women are women of colour. The literary vampire has a history of being Other, a threat that invades a country, or home, or woman. This begins with Carmilla, as Ardel Haefele-Thomas writes: "the vampire Carmilla who embodies queer sexuality and maternal evil invades both the schloss and Laura, foreshadowing the fear of reverse-colonization yet to come in later vampire texts."[27] Carmilla is a threat to the British home that Laura's father creates in Styria, and she is therefore a threat to the young British (white) woman. This kind of racial threat is amplified in *The Blood of the Vampire*, as Haefele-Thomas continues: "Marryat plunges us into a tale fraught with anxieties and ambiguities about 'the Other.'"[28] Both embody fears of the time about racial purity and invasion, positioning the Other as monstrous and hazardous to the very

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[25] Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle, 'The Uncanny', in *Introduction to Literature, Criticism and Theory*, (5th Ed) (London: Routledge, 2016) pp. 35-43, p. 38.
[26] Le Fanu, p. 16.
[27] Ardel Haefele-Thomas, *Queer Others in Victorian Gothic: Transgressing Monstrosity* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2012) p. 101, JSTOR <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt9qhdw4> [accessed 20 February 2024].
[28] Haefele-Thomas, p. 108.

fabric of society itself. This equating of race with vampirism is another layer of liminality, one of living on the border racially and geographically. Therefore, although the race of these characters is not a focal point of this thesis, it is undeniably a contributing factor to their Otherness and to the threat they pose to whiteness.

There is also nuance to the intersection of queerness and Blackness, as *The Gilda Stories* and *Fledgling* demonstrate: this intersection places the characters in a doubly marginalised position. These vampires are, in some sense, a reclamation of the tropes of the lesbian and Black vampire—the author of *The Gilda Stories*, Jewelle Gomez, is a Black lesbian—and Octavia Butler's *Fledgling* envisions a queer, polyamorous, Black vampiric future. Sexuality, race, and gender are intrinsically linked in these texts, as in life itself, and as Gomez wrote about the genre of speculative fiction (which *The Gilda Stories* and *Fledgling* both fall under) and its link to wish fulfilment,

> [f]or Black lesbians the wishes are a lot larger and richer than most people have been able to imagine. In our speculations about the future the vision of the struggle is often quite brutal, but the vision of the triumph is equally fantastic.[29]

Racism is not shied away from in either text: Gilda escapes from slavery in 1850, is told that she needs to be taught "a lesson" by two white men in 1921 who attempt to whip her; Shori is targeted and her family murdered because she is Black and is told that allowing her to reproduce would dirty the Ina bloodline. But ultimately, as Gomez says, although they struggle, they triumph. They celebrate Blackness. Race occupies a vastly different position from that of the older texts—the Black vampire is still the Other, but this marginalisation is depicted as antagonistic and ultimately futile as Gilda and Shori are now an Other in a way that takes negative tropes and upturns them. Gilda and Shori's tales both end with a sense of kinship and hope for the future. The sapphic Black vampire lives (or unlives) in the margins between identities, and flourishes both because of and despite it.

The History of the Vampire

In order to understand the texts and the different myths their stories are derived from, the evolution of the vampire must first be explored. The vampire, as we now know it, was first birthed from superstition, folklore used to explain the unexplainable—hair and nails on a

[29] Jewelle Gomez, 'Speculative Fiction and Black Lesbians', *Signs*, 18.4 (1993) 948-955 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3174916> [accessed 2 March 2024] p. 955.

corpse that seems to have grown, a lack of decomposition, or noises in graves.[30] Such occurrences are now easily explainable: nails and hair may seem to grow as the skin shrinks back, bodies can be well-preserved depending on the burial conditions and noises may be caused by something as simple as a wooden coffin settling in the dirt. Despite the now-possible rationalisation of such events, it is things such as these that led to tales of the vampire, in the place where superstition and reality meet. The case of Peter Plogojowitz is a perfect example of many of the tropes that have endured throughout the years. Plogojowitz was a Serbian peasant who was labelled as a vampire as he allegedly returned from the grave, killed nine people in eight days, and drank the blood of his victims. His case contained many supposed signs of the vampire, as Nick Groom observes:

> Plogojowitz had reappeared three days after his death, upon which villagers recounted that they had dreamt he was sucking their blood from their throats; they subsequently fell ill and died. There were further tantalizing details: Plogojowitz's coffin had filled with blood when he was staked, and other corpses in the graveyard had then been protected with garlic and whitethorn—details that would be enthusiastically taken up by later writers.[31]

The vampire, at this point in European history, was merely a man returned from the dead, killing the living, resisting true death himself.

An exception to this was the Romanian folktale 'The Vampire Princess,' included in Raymond McNally's collection of vampire folktales, *A Clutch of Vampires* (1974). I was unable to find any specific date for the origin of this folktale, but 'The Vampire Princess' depicts the daughter of an emperor who falls in love with a soldier. The soldier is fired by the emperor, who is furious upon discovering their relationship, and their separation causes the princess to become sad, sick, and then die. The emperor orders that she be entombed in a coffin inside a church and guarded, but she is undead—she awakens each night and eats the soldiers guarding her until she has eaten ninety-nine of them. The soldiers, unsurprisingly, grow fearful and refuse to take the post, so the emperor must turn to the soldier the princess loved for help. With advice from a beggar woman, the soldier evades the princess for two nights as she attempts to hunt him down to feed off him. On the third night he hides in her coffin, and upon seeing him in there she is so surprised that she becomes "a real girl again."[32]

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[30] Nick Groom, *The Vampire: A New History* (Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2018), p. 25, JSTOR <https://doi-org.ezproxy.waikato.ac.nz/10.2307/j.ctv6gqxp2> [accessed 6 June 2023].

[31] Groom, p. 49.

[32] Raymond McNally, A Clutch of Vampires: These Being Among the Best From History and Literature

As Heide Crawford explains, this romanticisation of a female vampire “immediately eroticizes the folkloric vampire, who until now had been nothing more than a reanimated corpse.”[33] The body of the female vampire introduces sexuality to a previously grotesque monster—she breathes new life into the “reanimated corpse” and makes it an object of desire.

The folklore that travelled throughout the Balkans led to a deep interest in the vampiric, initially predominantly in German poetry such as ‘Der Vampir’ by Heinrich August Ossenfelder in 1748.[34] The interest in the vampire was scientific, philosophical, and literary all at once: subject to scientific investigation, such as journal articles and examinations of corpses, philosophical debate about the state of undeath and a popular figure of horror in literature.[35] The most notable of early vampiric works in English is Polidori’s *The Vampyre* (1819). A work chiefly created to scorn Byron, Polidori’s tale was influential as it “literally romanticizes the vampire into an enthralling outrage of sexual bloodlust.”[36] It took fragments from different tales of the supernatural and morphed the vampire into what it remained for quite some time—a bloodthirsty monster who wears the mask of an aristocrat in order to prey upon the wealthy. The next prominent work was the ‘penny dreadful’ series of *Varney the Vampyre* (1845). These stories contained graphic violence, explicit feeding and a strong emphasis on the beauty of female prey.

Whilst most of these stories were about men, the Romanian ‘Vampire Princess’ had her lasting impact, both through the eroticism of the vampire and the fact that, as Nick Groom states, “it was the she-vampire that was the queen of the nineteenth century.”[37] *Carmilla* (1872) exhibits the clear seductive power of the female vampire: desirable to the point where victims do not realise that they are just that. *Carmilla* exhibits what would become typical features of the vampire: blood drinking, shapeshifting, agelessness, and she is killed through the standard procedure of staking, decapitation and cremation. Another notable female vampire is Harriet Brandt in *The Blood of the Vampire* (1897), although she is rather non-traditional: cursed by the ‘bad blood’ of her mother and father, Harriet, at first unbeknownst to her, drains the vitality of those closest to her until they die. Race and genetics play a large

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(Connecticut: New York Graphic Society, 1974), p. 194, Internet Archive Open Library <https://openlibrary.org/books/OL5440438M/A_clutch_of_vampires> [accessed 12 May 2023].

[33] Heide Crawford, *The Origins of the Literary Vampire* (Washington: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2016), p. 8, ProQuest Ebook Central <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.ezproxy.waikato.ac.nz/lib/waikato/detail.action?docID=4648481> [accessed 11 April 2023].

[34] Crawford, p. xii.

[35] Crawford, p. 2.

[36] Groom, p. 110.

[37] Groom, p. 139.

part in the transmission of vampirism here, accompanied by the notion that evilness is a biological inheritance.

Published the same year as *The Blood of the Vampire*, and perhaps the most well-known piece of vampire literature, Bram Stoker's *Dracula* compiles many traits of the typical vampire, just as *Carmilla* does. Most frightening is Dracula's proven ability to turn his victims into vampires themselves—vampirism is a contagion, a disease. *Dracula* was not the first text to contain a kind of vampiric transmission, as transmission is suggested in *Carmilla*, and there are hints to it in earlier stories such as Aleksey Tolstoy's *The Family of the Vourdalak*, written in 1839, in which the vourdalaks "prefer to suck the blood of their closest relatives and dearest friends who, once dead, become vampires in turn."[38] This is particularly fascinating in the context of this thesis, as familial ties become a hindrance and a hazard. The bonds of family are exploited as the now-deceased relative feeds upon and then turns their loved ones. This places interpersonal connection, essential as it is, as something to be feared, because being family of the dead puts individuals at risk of becoming the undead themselves. The network of human relationships then becomes infected: as more people turn into the vourdalaks, the more people are now in immediate peril of becoming one that spreads death. The vampiric urge that compels the vourdalaks to turn their relations then ensures that the familial unit remains unbroken, restoring the family to a state of unified sameness as they are all given the same fate of hunger, of undeath, of hunting down and consuming the humans they used to love. But at least they are in it together. In this thesis I will further explore the construct of vampiric kinship and why, just as with the vourdalaks, so many of them are compelled to collect (or reclaim) a family.

In spite of this intriguing example, none of the representations of vampirism as a contagion were quite as explicit in the manner of transmitting the vampiric curse as *Dracula* was, nor as deeply disturbing to the reader. Through this transmission of vampirism Dracula creates his own family (his three wives) and attempts to steal more women (Lucy and Mina). He drinks blood, he shapeshifts, he has telepathic communication with those he turns. Elements of transgression play a pivotal role in this novel, particularly noticeable in the depiction of desire: Lucy, Mina's friend, is proposed to by three men and laments, "Why can't they let a girl marry three men, or as many as want her… But this is heresy, and I must

[38] Alexsey Tolstoy, *The Family of the Vourdalak* (1884), American Literature <https://americanliterature.com/author/alexei-tolstoy/short-story/the-family-of-the-vourdalak> [accessed 28 May 2023].

not say it."[39] This polygamous view is inherently transgressive as she desires multiple men in a society that barely accepts female desire at all, and those men then kill her once she becomes a vampire. It is not merely non-monogamous desire being condemned, but queer desire also. Dracula's wives are, just like anyone he turns, agents of Dracula's own wants: "my creatures, to do my bidding."[40] And yet they want Jonathan, and Jonathan wants them, writing that "I felt in my heart a wicked, burning desire that they would kiss me with those red lips."[41] The brides want Jonathan precisely because Dracula does. With his brides as a conduit, Dracula's desire for Jonathan is expressed, conveyed through the female vampires.

Vampire novels following *Dracula* struggled to achieve the same levels of success; instead, it was the world of film in which the vampire retained its fame. *Nosferatu* (1922) is a perfect example: a German silent film that was an unauthorized adaptation of *Dracula*, and as such was ordered to be destroyed. It fortunately lives on regardless, and remains a cultural staple that is looked to as a massive influence on vampire film. Many other film adaptations of *Dracula* followed, including the 1936 sequel *Dracula's Daughter*, a film following Count Dracula's daughter, Marya Zaleska.[42] The film follows the Countess as she struggles with, and then succumbs to, her thirst for blood. The most notable victim is a woman named Lili: the film was criticized and yet later lauded for its somewhat obvious lesbian themes. While claiming to be based on Stoker's short story 'Dracula's Guest,' there was speculation that the film was inspired by *Carmilla* (particularly due to its threatening sapphic vampire), which in turn had many of its own adaptations, such as the movies *Terror in the Crypt* (1963) and *The Vampire Lovers* (1970), or the *Carmilla* web series (2015) that later had a movie sequel (2017). It is clear that both *Carmilla* and *Dracula* continued to have enduring impacts on vampire lore. Many of these films featured increasing violence and sexual themes, and overtime the vampire began to stray from horror to the genres of science-fiction and fantasy.

Whilst other vampire novels were written after *Dracula*, not many had significant cultural impact. Some honourable mentions would be novels such as Richard Matheson's *I Am Legend* (1954) and *Salem's Lot* (1975) by Stephen King. While they are, in their own way, staples of vampire fiction, they could not compare to what came next: *Interview with the Vampire* (1976) by Anne Rice. In *From Demons to Dracula: The Creation of the Modern Vampire Myth,* Matthew Beresford explains that the image of the vampire was "re-inventing

[39] Bram Stoker, *Dracula* (New York: Tom Doherty Associates, Inc., 1988), p. 57.
[40] Stoker, p. 295.
[41] Stoker, p. 36.
[42] *Dracula's Daughter,* dir. by Lambert Hillyer (Universal Pictures, 1936).

itself in the literature of pioneering authors such as Anne Rice and Stephen King."[43] The novel *Interview with the Vampire*, later to become a series and then adapted into a number of films, combined several alluring traits of vampire fiction. Beresford states that in this novel Rice "bridged the gap between the early-modern vampire and the present form."[44] The narrative follows the main character, Louis, as he is dealing with the grief of losing his brother when he meets the vampire, Lestat. Lestat turns him into a vampire because he wants Louis to be his companion, but as they live together they struggle to reconcile their morals due to Louis' views of the feeding on humans as reprehensible, and so he chooses to feed off animals instead. While Louis eventually caves and begins drinking the blood of humans, he continues to regard Lestat's lack of compassion for humans as increasingly troublesome. In an attempt to repair their growing divide, Lestat turns a five-year-old girl, Claudia, into a vampire to become their daughter. Plots of murder, jealousy, love and loss follow. With queer undertones, questioning of morals and, significantly, a precariously constructed family, it both exhibited the traits of vampires of the past (such as the vampiric transmission seen in *Dracula*) and paved the way for the romantic, yet deadly, vampires of the future (such as the enduring elements of love and/or lust seen in subsequent vampire fiction). It plunged the vampire back into popular fiction, and the public devoured it.

Fifteen years later came Gomez's *The Gilda Stories* (1991), and later still was Butler's *Fledgling* (2005), but neither of these novels have had significant cultural impact. In the history of the vampire something that cannot pass without mention is Stephanie Meyer's *Twilight* saga and its movie adaptations. The first novel was published the same year as *Fledgling*, and was immeasurably more popular. The *Twilight* saga retains many desirable aspects of the vampire: strong, immortal, romantic, obsessive. Yet it also attempts to discard many of the less appealing aspects (or at least, those less convenient for the plot): the vampires in this text do not combust in sunlight, they can cross over water, and, most importantly, they can choose to be 'good' and abstain from drinking blood from humans. Although an overwhelmingly heterosexual series, it too exhibits that concept of found family that this thesis interrogates. The Cullen family, the vampires that the saga centres, is run by Carlisle, who acts as a surrogate father and who turned Esme (who acts as the mother), Edward, and Rosalie. All three were turned either for companionship or out of pity, which is the same reason that Emmett, Rosalie's mate, was turned by her. Alice and Jasper joined

[43] Matthew Beresford, *From Demons to Dracula: The Creation of the Modern Vampire Myth* (London: Reakiton Books Ltd, 2008), p. 150.
[44] Beresford, p. 150.

later, as Alice's future-predicting ability let her know that they would find family in the Cullens. They are, at their core, a collection of people who simply do not wish to be alone, and so choose, actively, to be together.

And thus the genre of vampire romance gained more popularity in the twenty-first century, as the concept of an eternal lover who has to fight their innate urges to devour you apparently appealed to many. The battle of the 'good' vampire versus the 'bad' vampire, as seen particularly in *Interview with the Vampire*, played a pivotal role. The developed eroticism of the vampiric figure truly shone in romance, as well as themes of transgression and taboo. The erotic, romantic vampire amounted to novels aimed predominantly at women and teens, as the figure of the mysterious man who was immensely dangerous (but who also deeply desired you) was enticing to women of all ages. The vampire became almost synonymous with romance, as evidenced by a study of sixty-six young adult vampire novels from 1990 to 2010. Fifty-nine out of the sixty-six novels had a plot that revolved around a romance between a main character and a vampire.[45] In romantic plots that also had an element of turning a human into a vampire, 63 percent of these novels had a female victim and a male vampire. He echoes the allure of the original erotic vampires, the female vampires: he pulls the reader into his world, changes them, and as such they may live this dangerous, sexy life potentially indefinitely—evidently the idea of bliss for many, although it may seem like a state of purgatory to those who do not understand the appeal.

The most recent highly acclaimed vampire fiction was Taika Waititi and Jemaine Clement's *What we do in the Shadows* (2014), and the spin-off television series of the same name (2019-). Characterized by households of mismatched immortal roommates, both the movie and the series interrogate concepts of chosen family and uncanny kinship. The vampires are queer, they bicker, they argue about whose turn it is to do the dishes or battle nearly to 'true' death—but ultimately, they choose to be with each other.

Dracula and his wives, Louis and Claudia, Gilda and Bird, vampires flatting together—it is clear that while vampires, particularly queer vampires, may be creatures connected to and driven by desire, they are also connected to kinship, retaining an urge for some semblance of family throughout time. What is it about the vampire that allows for exploration of such unconventional family units? Is it the inherent uncanniness, the stronger-than-life love? Or is it something else entirely? In this thesis I will analyse this kind of chosen

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[45] Sarah Mayfield, Leigh Lunsford and Rhonda Brock-Servais, 'Romancing the Bite: Statistical Analysis of Young Adult Vampire Novels', *Incite*, 4 (2011), <https://blogs.longwood.edu/incite/2012/01/30/romancing-the-bite-statistical-analysis-of-young-adult-vampire-novels/> [accessed 1 May 2023].

family that is present throughout vampire literature, but particularly in *Carmilla, The Blood of the Vampire, The Gilda Stories,* and *Fledgling*, and I will explore exactly how these queer vampires challenge heteronormative constructs of family.

Vampires and Queering the Death Drive

The form of the queer vampire raises many questions to do with life, reproduction, and living through the future, eternally. Lee Edelman's *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* is a valuable tool in the context of these ideas, as he examines the concept of the queer figure as other particularly through their lack of participation in ensuring futurity through reproduction. Edelman explains that, as the Child is often a symbol of the future, non-reproductive sex is sex that is anti-future. Queerness thus both refuses to attribute meaning to sex and comes to pose an active threat to the endurance of modern society—at least in the mind of a heterosexual, queer-fearing social majority.

The Child as a symbol is assigned meaning beyond simple futurity. It enforces a purpose upon heterosexual sex, effectively "impregnating heterosexuality,"[46] as Edelman states, making it representative of concepts beyond the literal child: it comes to stand for the future, for renewal, for life itself. This meaning given to heterosexual sex implies a significance that, in contrast, makes sex without procreation seem empty and meaningless. Non-reproductive sex, particularly of the homosexual kind, is then villainised as anti-child. The Child stands for innocence, purity—and the Child must be heterosexual, as Edelman notes that queerness "is understood as bringing children and childhood to an end."[47] The Child represents a fixation on heteronormativity and on sameness, and on ensuring a future that is still the same.

Therefore, Edelman argues that homosexuals should refuse this Child, reject the notion of reproductive futurism as applicable to us. If we are representative of negativity, then we should embrace that negative force. It is in this way that homosexuality thus embraces the death drive; perhaps the only way to embrace queerness without attempting to fit within the heteronormative guidelines that society continues to depend on is to refuse participation entirely. Deny the belief in a final meaning, refuse to contribute to the idea of the future, insist instead that there is no true future. There is little point in contributing to the

[46] Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (London: Duke University Press, 2004), p. 13.
[47] Edelman, p. 19.

continuation of a society that alienates us, Edelman writes, as "the future is mere repetition [of heteronormative ideas] and just as lethal as the past."[48]

Freud's theory of the death drive, first introduced in 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle,' is the drive towards death or destruction, often characterised by aggressiveness or repetition. Prior to Freud's conception of the death drive he had stated that every action humans took, both in their dreams and in their lives, was in the pursuit of pleasure or in the avoidance of unpleasure.[49] However, there remained situations that defied this principle: particularly the fixation of shell-shocked soldiers on their traumatic experiences, especially in their dreams, and the games that Freud's grandson played which entailed him reconstructing upsetting events. The latter could potentially be explained as a reworking of a frightening experience that allows for agency or control, but the former was not explainable in any such terms. This self-destructive compulsion to repeat the painful shaped what Freud initially labelled as a "death instinct."[50] It complicated his original theory of the pursuit of pleasure, as previously he had stated that dreams were the place for wish-fulfilment, for ultimate pleasure—and yet, here were men whose dreams were utterly consumed by trauma. Freud described the death instinct as "the restoration of an earlier state of things,"[51] that is, a push back towards the inanimate state, towards death. As stated previously, this instinct or drive is characterised by repetition and aggression. The aggressiveness can be directed outwardly, towards others, or internally, to one's own ego. There exists, for Freud, a constant conflict in all things living between the death drive, Thanatos, and the life drive, Eros. As Judith Butler says, "As much as there is something in humans that seeks to fulfil wishes and to preserve its own organic life, there is also something that operates to the side of wish-fulfilment, seeking to negate the organic conditions of life, whether that life belongs to another or to oneself."[52] Even as one seeks to obtain pleasure and continue life, there is also an impulse to repeat the unpleasant, to create suffering, to end in death.

[48] Edelman, p. 31.
[49] Sigmund Freud, 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle' in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud Volume XVIII* (London: Vintage, 2001), pp. 7-64 (p. 7).
[50] Freud, 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle', p. 44.
[51] Freud, 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle', p. 37.
[52] Judith Butler, 'Political Philosophy in Freud: The death drive and the critical faculty,' in *On Psychoanalysis and Violence: Contemporary Lacanian Perspectives*, ed. by Vanessa Sinclair and Manya Steinkoler (New York: Routledge, 2018), pp. 21-31, Taylor & Francis Group <https://www.taylorfrancis.com/chapters/edit/10.4324/9780429437342-3/political-philosophy-freud-judith-butler> [accessed 12 May 2024] p. 22.

The repetition aspect of the death drive, which Freud describes as the "perpetual recurrence of the same thing,"[53] is performed in the way we go back to traumatic events or keep attempting the same action. This could even be as simple as people "all of whose human relationships have the same outcome."[54] It is the continual return to the same scenarios with the same outcome. The death drive is inherently rooted in repetition, as it is the instinctual longing to return to the prior state of inexistence. The circle of life is, as the name suggests, intrinsically repetitive through the transition from birth to reproduction to death. The vampire defies this structure: as an 'undead' being, and one that does not reproduce in the traditional manner, the vampiric life is an extension rather than a repeated cycle. However, as Colin Davis says of the death drive, "it shatters coherence and unity, sets in motion an endless sequence of senseless repetitions, and resists attempts at rationalisation."[55] Just like the death drive, there is no end to the vampiric life. The vampire then endures the "endless sequence of senseless repetitions," constantly experiencing situations that have been seen before. The vampire may target similar victims, long for similar companions, all the while recalling their entire unlife's worth of memories of the people they loved or victimised before. Just as Carmilla hunts girls with striking similarities, just as she seems compelled to anagrammatically reproduce her name rather than adopt a new one, just as she returns to the land she originated from, Carmilla is stuck in numerous loops of time, stagnating, unchanging. Even the process of turning another into a vampire, as seen in *The Gilda Stories*—whilst it is not repetition in the biological sense, it is a conversion of the other, a human victim, into the same: the vampiric entity. Vampirism itself is then repeated, the rebirth and reintroduction to the world is experienced anew. This is how the death drive ties into Edelman's arguments about rejecting the future, as the repetition of death and the continuation of unlife, as seen in the figure of the vampire, is a stubborn refusal to engage in standard modes of existence.

This aspect of repetition, and thus sameness, that the figure of the vampire exhibits has further intriguing implications when applying it to a queer interpretation. Often there is a kind of mirror imagery placed onto queer couples as the lovers are the same sex, duplicates of each other. The queer attraction and relationships are characterised by a perceived sameness rather than the differences between individuals seen in heterosexual attraction.[56] In relation to

[53] Freud, 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle', p. 22.
[54] Freud, 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle', p. 22.
[55] Colin Davis, Haunted Subjects: Deconstruction, Psychoanalysis and the Return of the Dead (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 26.
[56] Weston, p. 144.

heterosexuality, homosexuality embodies an Other kind of sameness—a sameness that is viewed as unnatural, but, to those experiencing it, feels entirely natural. This desire for doubling means that in homosexual relationships the queer body is repeated, reflected from one lover to another. The taking of a new lover is even more repetitive than Freud suggested in his statement about people whose human relations have the same outcome, as not only is it the same situation, but the lover is even more the same. *The Gilda Stories* provides a prime example of this, as the first Gilda passes her name down to the Girl she and her partner, Bird, change into a vampire. The new Gilda is intended to replace the old one as Bird's life-long companion, as child, as friend, as lover. Therefore, queer relations could arguably be defined by a kind of repetition. This repetition of the death drive conveyed through the queer body is particularly apt when considering vampiric homosexuality. When discussing the murderous women in *Basic Instinct*, Teresa de Lauretis notes that, "female homosexuality—represented as narcissistic identification with a female ego-ideal— […] constitute them as doubles of each other and make them effectively partners in crime."[57] This doubling of the queer figure, when clearly villainous attributes are incorporated, is troubling for the negative implications it may have, and yet, the reflection of one woman in the other, the intense desire of the self as seen in another, leads to a love that endures nearly every trial: the women are automatically complicit in the "transgressive" acts of the other. Whilst this analysis was related solely to the film, what de Lauretis says about the doubling, the transgressiveness and villainous depictions is certainly applicable to the sapphic vampires that will be seen throughout this thesis. Whether it may be sapphic desire or murder, the women enact every deed together, and are almost inextricably linked.

Additionally, the aggression aspect of the death drive is one that is heavily applicable to both the sapphic woman and the vampire. The aggression is not necessarily a tendency for violence, as it may be easily understood, but rather a desire for a return to the inanimate state before life. The death drive, as de Lauretis explains, "is not to be equated with aggression as the will to overcome or destroy others but, in the first place, with the unconscious drive towards one's own death."[58] That is not to say that it is not also a drive towards the death of others, but this drive is not quite the brutal, murderous drive that it may seem. The death drive is, predominantly, towards the self—the instinct may simply reveal itself in acts towards others. This is significant when considering the vampire as to sustain their unlife the

[57] Teresa de Lauretis, *Freud's Drive: Psychoanalysis, Literature and Film* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), p. 32.
[58] de Lauretis, p. 96.

vampire must take the lives of, or at least feed on, humans. It is often depicted as a violent act. In a sense the vampire itself embodies the external death drive: they are an unliving being taking the lives of others, pushing humanity to destruction. This concept of the eradication of humanity is where the death drive largely comes to play in Edelman's writing, as the refusal to participate in the reproductive cycle of society could be perceived as both self-destructive and destroying outward; the discontinuation of one's genetic line is the death, so to speak, of one's self, as there will be no beings carrying an aspect of that person, and the refusal to reproduce is destructive of society as eventually there would be no one left to carry on civilisation itself. This is particularly relevant to the figure of the vampire as a transgressive, hyper-sexual or queer character. In a discussion of films from the 1990s, de Lauretis states that they "explicitly thematize the relation of sexuality to the aggressive and self-destructive drives, articulating it to issues of gender and sexual deviance."[59] Whilst not directly in reference to vampires, it holds relevance due to the dual nature of queerness and vampires as both alluring and dangerous. It demonises the deviant sexualities or gender expressions portrayed by literally villainising these queer, vampiric figures (although the danger is, to a modern audience, part of the allure). This indicates that the queer figure, through their refusal to ensure the future of humanity and their "dangerous" sexuality, can be clearly linked to the death-driven vampire as both engage with their lives in unconventional, repetitive ways that ultimately lead to death.

Edelman's work helps to examine the concept of futurity, particularly as it relates to methods of vampiric reproduction. His utilisation of Freud's theory of the death drive enables me to interrogate the relationship between queerness, repetition and aggression—particularly in reference to vampires. I will apply Edelman's argument that queers should disengage from the promise of reproductive futurity to the queer family, particularly the queer child, and argue that it is possible to conceptualise a form of futurity that lies outside of heteronormative society. As Edelman says, "the 'death drive' designates the dimension of what horror fiction calls the 'undead,' a strange, immortal, indestructible life that persists beyond death."[60] In Chapter Two I will examine if this kind of un-death, of turning others into immortal vampires, is a form of reproduction or merely a continuation. I will also analyse vampires that sexually reproduce and explore if this ability to procreate (heterosexually) gives or takes meaning from any queer chosen kin they gain. Furthermore, beyond reproduction or lack

[59] de Lauretis, pp. 24-25.
[60] Edelman, p. 48.

thereof, Edelman's arguments will also be useful to examine the alternative ways in which the queer vampire disrupts futurity.

Queer/Vampiric Chosen Families

The concept of chosen family is best understood through Kath Weston's *Families We Choose: Lesbians, Gays, Kinship*. Weston uses anecdotes from eighty people,[61] as well as her own personal experiences, to examine the concept of kinship in the queer community. Similarly to Edelman, Weston states that the emphasis on heterosexual reproduction can limit ideas of family and damage relationships with queer people: "if heterosexual intercourse can bring people into enduring association via the creation of kinship ties, lesbian and gay sexuality […] isolates individuals from one another rather than weaving them into a social fabric."[62] Weston argues that this emphasis on a heterosexual structure both excludes and villainises queer people, placing them in the solitary state of "other."

With a focus on reproduction as the creation of family, a queer identity can effectively be viewed as "killing off" the family they hypothetically could have produced. In a heterosexually driven society biological ties are valued above all else, which negatively frames the queer individual as a danger to family units. The fear then, from both society as a whole and individual heterosexual family members, is the way in which queer people may create their own family units. Weston states that:

> 'recruitment' joins 'reproduction' in allusions to homosexuality. Alleging that gay men and lesbians must seduce young people in order to perpetuate (or expand) the gay population because they cannot have children of their own, heterosexist critics have conjured up visions of an end to society, the inevitable fate of a society that fails to 'reproduce'.[63]

This is representative of an issue with the concept of queer families: the inability (or lack of desire) to biologically reproduce is seen as destructive to the antiquated, heterosexual concept of family, but creating a queer chosen family is problematised by fears of 'turning' someone gay. Instead of a traditional parents-and-children family, the queer family is populated with people that are equals, immediately upsetting the structured roles of a family unit. Either way, as both Weston and Edelman note, the blame of the destruction of the future is placed with homosexuals. It is not that there is a lack of significance to biological families—as many of the anecdotes in Weston's *Families We Choose* expressed a kind of irreplaceable quality to

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[61] Weston, p. 10.
[62] Weston, p. 22.
[63] Weston, p. 24.

blood ties—but that heteronormative notions of family are incredibly limiting in a queer context.

With the discussion of the biological family, Weston examined the concept of 'coming out' to biological family, and the way in which love previously described as unconditional can become conditional. The idea of disclosing one's sexual identity is a relatively recent concept, as to do so previously would guarantee a lack of employment, imprisonment, institutionalisation or even death. It puts a person in an incredibly vulnerable position, and yet this disclosure to biological family is seen as a necessity to many.

For many, particularly when this book was written, coming out would often lead to rejection from biological family. Or, if one chose to keep their identity private, they would feel as though they were constantly concealing a part of themselves. This is what necessitated the 'chosen' family—a group of people who have developed deep ties of kinship to you, not despite of who you are, but because of it.

However, considering *Families We Choose* was published in 1991, developments in gay rights, legal opportunities, and the technology available to create a queer family have come quite a long way over the course of the last thirty-three years. Same-sex marriage is now legal, not only in the United States of America, but in thirty-four countries around the world. Joint adoption by same-sex couples is legal in thirty-five countries. Moreover, in Weston's book artificial insemination was the predominant method of creating a biological link in queer families; now, not only is artificial insemination an option, but through a combination of IVF and egg donation it is now possible in lesbian couples for one woman to carry the baby that is biologically her partner's, establishing links between the child and both parents. Many fertility clinics actively advertise towards LGBTQ+ couples. With an increasing number of options for creating a biological or legal queer family, it is possible that the chosen family loses some of its significance, particularly as less queer-identifying people completely lose touch with their biological family after coming out.

Despite the outdated aspects of *Families We Choose*, I believe it is still a valuable framework with which to examine the concept of sapphic chosen families. In part because it is still relevant for some of the texts (*The Gilda Stories* also being published in 1991), but also because the core concept of chosen families retains immense value within the queer community, although slightly altered. Rather than the chosen family acting as a substitute for the biological or legal family, the chosen family is instead interwoven with the pre-existing family. Both fulfil different roles in an individual's life, and both are irreplaceable. Weston's concept of the chosen family enables me to examine the way chosen families mimic

biological families in a way that both parallels and disrupts heteronormative constructs of kinship. I will further use Weston's work to explore the dynamic and appeal of the chosen family and use her definition of chosen family as a frame with which to analyse the bonds of kinship in the texts I am examining.

Villains and Victims

As I have mentioned previously, there are many aspects of vampires that are inherently liminal. They are not quite dead, but not quite alive; they are not quite human, but not inhuman; we want them, and yet fear them. However, the vampires analysed within this thesis contain even more unstable traits. For instance, *Carmilla* and *The Blood of the Vampire* each position their vampires as a destructive force yet refrain from painting them as wholly villainous. Take the female vampires of *Dracula*: Jonathan experiences the same mix of desire and disgust towards Dracula's wives that, as I will examine in Chapter One, is present in *Carmilla* and *The Blood of the Vampire*. He explains that "There was something about them that made me uneasy, some longing and at the same time some deadly fear," and that they were "both thrilling and repulsive."[64] Laura experiences "adoration, and also abhorrence,"[65] towards Carmilla, and Margaret feels that Harriet "seemed to hypnotise her as the snake is said to hypnotise the bird"[66]: all relationships are confused by contradictory emotions. The contrast is that Dracula's wives, once Jonathan sheds his longing for them, are solely a threat, as he declares that "nothing can be more dreadful than those awful women, who were—who *are*—waiting to suck my blood."[67] Dracula's wives are nothing more than a sexy danger.

Conversely, Carmilla and Harriet, although sexy dangers themselves, are not *only* these caricatures of the sensual and frightening female vampire. Both are characterised as victims of their situations before perpetrators, Carmilla having been haunted by a vampire and subsequently turned into one, and Harriet an unwilling vampire as a result of her parents' own sins. This demonstrates an authorial compassion for their characters and adds another layer of ambiguity to them—they are dually the villain and victim in their own stories, inhabiting positions equally evoking compassion and fear. The female vampire is furthermore liminal in the nature of her relationships as she occupies roles of mother, daughter, and lover

[64] Stoker, p. 36.
[65] Le Fanu, p. 23.
[66] Marryat, p. 29.
[67] Stoker, p. 39.

alternately and simultaneously, shifting between positions of kinship. Moreover, her concepts of family are centred around biology *and* choice, new family created through the sharing of blood, or genetic connection, or she may have a desire to possess both kinds of family. I will come back to this liminality throughout the course of this thesis to explain how it is a crucial aspect of the female vampire and of the queer community she creates. The sapphic vampire makes for an alluring lover, as she is every kind of person you could need—and yet, she is none of them at all.

Chapter One will examine the confusion of familial roles, particularly as they pertain to feeding. Many vampire texts evoke breastfeeding imagery in the vampire bite, resulting in a maternal vampire which is complicated by sexual desire that the vampire and victim may have for each other. I will utilise Freudian concepts and contemporary analyses of maternal sexuality to examine why maternal and sexual affections frequently coalesce in sapphic desire. I begin with exploring the figure of the child and its depiction while feeding or being fed on, arguing that the asexuality of most of the textual children is a subversion of the heteronormative construct of the sapphic/vampire as predatory in every sense of the word. Conversely, Shori's eroticism while feeding challenges notions of agency due to the power of her venom and her appearance as a child. The next section will examine the sexualisation of breastfeeding imagery and the relationship between sexual desire and vampiric hunger. Finally, I will address the attitudes of the texts towards post-menopausal women, analysing why in *The Blood of the Vampire* the post-menopausal woman is not viewed as food, and why in *Fledgling* she is. In examining the confusion of roles, the equating of desire with hunger, and sexualisation of the maternal, I will analyse why this ambiguity is necessary and valuable for sapphic representation.

In Chapter Two I will discuss the reproductive methods of different vampires and the subsequent "queer" families that they create, examining *why* the chosen families are unusual, and comparing the Victorian texts to their contemporary counterparts to interrogate heteronormative constructs of kinship. First, I discuss the transmission of vampirism in *Carmilla*, and how its depiction as a contagion reflects negatively on lesbianism and the chosen family. I argue that Carmilla is threatening not only for her potential to spread sapphism, but also because she embodies the social death drive in numerous ways that affect both her and Laura. I then compare this depiction to *The Gilda Stories,* in which vampirism is also transmitted but framed as a gift rather than an illness. Although Gomez's vampires still embody the death drive, the portrayal of the queer vampiric family is innately positive, and I analyse the significance of this in relation to the ambiguous familial roles the vampires

inhabit. I will also examine genetic vampirism, arguing first that *The Blood of the Vampire*'s conflation of vampirism and race, expressing anxieties about racial purity, is done in a way that makes it unclear if Harriet is truly vampiric. In order to do this, I will challenge the claims of Doctor Phillips and examine Harriet's hereditary curse through the lens of Victorian medical thinking. I will then compare Harriet to Shori, as in *Fledgling* Butler similarly examines anxieties about racial purity but makes it clear that the racist position is unequivocally antagonistic. Butler constructs the both the biological family and the chosen (human) family as necessary, and I will argue that her characterisation of chosen kinship frames it as the superior form of family, even as biology continues to play an essential role. Throughout this chapter I will utilise Edelman's polemic that queers should disengage with the heterosexual reproductive cycle in order to ascertain if different methods of vampiric/queer family building align with his argument. Furthermore, I will use Weston's explanation of the chosen family to analyse the different kinds of kinship and determine the function of fluid familial roles.

Chapter One: Vampiric Breastfeeding and Sexual Hunger

In *Fledgling* Octavia Butler writes that the “hunger was a massive twisting hurt inside me.”[1] Butler establishes vampiric hunger as all-consuming and animalistic, only satiated by the lives of others, where starvation is agony and feeding is the principal pleasure. When it comes to the figure of the vampire, its most discernible trait is this very hunger. The main purpose of their existence is to satiate that seemingly limitless appetite, and whilst the way they derive their nourishment varies between different tales, the economy of blood always ends in one of the following ways: they take, and they give—or, sometimes, both. The manner in which a vampire feeds is a notoriously violent act. The vampire inserts their teeth into throat, into neck, into breast, blood dripping from the wound that they created.

Take, for instance, the exemplary depiction of this in *Nosferatu* (1922): the “sinless maiden”[2] has her heart, through her breast, grasped by the shadow of a vampiric hand. In the next scene, Nosferatu is seen feeding from her neck while she lays there, supposedly powerless. Her lack of resistance is not a sign of weakness, as Nosferatu feeds on her until the sun rises and he crumbles to ashes. She sacrifices her life in order to end his and to prevent any further losses. In this we see a few of the tropes related to vampiric feeding that I will examine, such as the significance of the breast and the suckling, the draining of life. In evoking breastfeeding, the vampire is positioned as a child. Yet, as they feed on the blood and the life-force of their often unwilling victims, they are also a parasite, drinking until the provider is nothing but a withered husk. It is in this sense that the vampire is depicted as a parasitic child; just as the common cuckoo replaces the eggs in a robin’s nest with its own to deplete the resources meant for other chicks, the vampire drains the woman of her life—life that could have nourished her own progeny or sustained her own life further.

As what is likely the most well-known piece of vampire literature, Stoker’s *Dracula* is considered the staple of vampiric lore, and *Dracula*’s manner of vampiric feeding is no exception. In the novel Dracula forces Mina Harker, upon whom he has been feeding, to drink from him: “his right hand gripped her by the back of the neck, forcing her face down on his bosom. Her white nightdress was smeared with blood, and a thin stream trickled down the man’s bare breast which was shown by his torn-open dress.”[3] Again we have the breast as a point of significance, but where in *Nosferatu* the vampire is a leech of life, here the

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[1] Octavia Butler, *Fledgling* (London: Headline Publishing Group, 2022) p. 307.
[2] *Nosferatu,* dir. by F. W. Murnau (Prana Film, 1922) YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dCT1YUtNOA8&ab_channel=BestClassics> [accessed 12 May 2024]
[3] Stoker, p. 271.

breastfeeding imagery is perversely subverted as the Count shares his unlife through his own blood, with a young woman's mouth at his dead, nonnutritive breast. The figure of the mother has been distorted and is neither safe nor nurturing. In *Carmilla*, *The Blood of the Vampire*, *The Gilda Stories*, and *Fledgling* feeding may be maternal or predatory, the mother figure sensual or sexless. Their stories and their vampires are drenched in this imagery, of the breast both giving life and taking it away. There are aspects of the sapphic vampire that these texts are consumed with anxiety about: the drying up of the breast, the misuse of maternal affections, the removal of a potential mother from the cycle of reproduction. In this chapter I will examine these anxieties and interrogate the sexualisation of the breast, arguing for feeding as both nourishment and as a conduit for sapphic desire.

Although the erotic tension that typically exists between vampire and victim may make breastfeeding an unusual image to focus on, I will argue in this chapter that the relationship between breastfeeding and sexuality is a crucial aspect of the representation of sapphic desire. The maternal act and sexual attraction are not mutually exclusive; rather, they are quite closely linked. In this chapter I will utilise and expand upon existing arguments regarding the relationship between sexuality and breastfeeding, such as Freud's theory of the phases of development of the sexual organization. Freud's theory posits breastfeeding as the first stage of sexual development; human sexuality begins with the oral phase. At this stage the infant is not able to recognize the breast as their mother, or even to separate it from themselves; the breast is merely an extension of the self, an object belonging to them that brings them pleasure. The oral phase is where "sexual activity has not yet been separated from the ingestion of food."[4] Thus, for the child, the act of feeding is inextricably linked to feelings of pleasure, and pleasure evolves into the sexual. This pleasure from feeding is a sensation that the literary vampire has been depicted to experience just as the infant does, like Nosferatu suckling at the maiden's breast. It is not always *breast*feeding specifically, but can be any method of feeding: Joan Copjec states that vampiric means of consumption are "a matter of an *oral relation*, of a *jouissance* attained through sucking."[5] The suckling vampire is a parasitic double of the infant, but the pleasure is not only in the biological sexual sense as it is with the child, but it is erotic, motivated by attraction to the victim/mother, sexual desire as well as literal hunger.

[4] Sigmund Freud, On Sexuality: Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality and Other Works (London: Penguin Books, 1991), pp. 116-117.
[5] Joan Copjec, 'Vampires, Breastfeeding, and Anxiety,' *October*, 58 (1991), 24-43 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/778796> [accessed 13 October 2023] p. 33.

This sexualisation of breastfeeding is not, however, simply an outdated Freudian concept, nor is it merely sexual for the infant. Just as Dracula enjoys Mina at his breast, the breastfeeding mother may enjoy being fed on. More contemporary academics than Freud have produced studies that discuss and examine the relationship between nursing and pleasure. In her article on lactation as a form of maternal sexuality, Alison Bartlett argues that while sexuality is predominantly socially constructed and as such bare breasts are not *inherently* sexual, there remains a connection between sexuality and maternity that can potentially make breastfeeding an erotic experience. Bartlett states that there is a "difference a maternal gaze might make to our construction of sexuality"[6] and that there are "often silent sexual/sensual pleasures women experience with their breasts and infants."[7] When the arousal of men is prioritised, the desire of a mother is often transgressive, if even acknowledged, particularly as maternity is sanitised into an entirely asexual experience despite the necessity of a sexual act to make a woman into a mother. Notwithstanding the taboo nature of sexualised breastfeeding, the mother may still satiate both her infant and herself, as the word "satiate" can "simultaneously encompass the sexual, emotional, nutritional and psychological dimensions of breastfeeding."[8] Meaning, as the mother feeds her child, she also satisfies herself. A more recent examination of breastfeeding than Bartlett's work is Sara Cohen Shabot's 2018 article on the ambiguity of breastfeeding both as an act dehumanising the lactating mother and assigning her a kind of power. Cohen Shabot agrees that sharing accounts that are "straightforwardly and clearly emphasising the carnality of motherhood could provide an ethical, affirming alternative to the constructs in which motherhood is a trap."[9] Where the mother's body is a source of nourishment, it is also a vessel for her own desire that may be fulfilled by nursing a child.

The role of the infant is also ambiguous and, in this context, inherently queer. In *On Narcissism: An Introduction*, Freud discusses the child as an object of narcissism. It begins with simply wanting better for your child than yourself, wherein "the child shall have a better time than his parents."[10] While an ostensibly admirable intention, Freud goes on to explain that the child becomes almost idolised—which Edelman expands on in his image of the Child

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[6] Alison Bartlett, 'Maternal Sexuality and Breastfeeding', *Sex Education*, 5.1 (2005), 67-77 <https://doi.org/10.1080/1468181420003018944> p. 70.
[7] Bartlett, p. 70.
[8] Bartlett, p. 71.
[9] Sara Cohen Shabot, 'Edible Mothers, Edible Others: On Breastfeeding as Ambiguity', in *Rethinking Feminist Phenomenology: Practical and Theoretical Perspectives* ed. by Sara Cohen Shabot and Christinia Landry (Rowman & Littlefield International, 2018), pp. 155-170 (p. 159).
[10] Sigmund Freud, 'On Narcissism: An Introduction', in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud Volume XIV* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1986), pp. 73-102 (p. 91).

in *No Future*—as "the laws of nature and of society shall be abrogated in his favour; he shall once more really be the centre and core of creation—'His Majesty the Baby', as we once fancied ourselves."[11] However, not only is the child above the law and revered like royalty, but they also exist as a conduit through which the parent may live vicariously:

> The child shall fulfil those wishful dreams of the parents which they never carried out—the boy shall become a great man and a hero in his father's place, and the girl shall marry a prince as a tardy compensation for her mother.[12]

The child is thus used as a reflection, as a double, of the parent. The doubling is both uncanny and queer, as "parental love, which is so moving and at bottom so childish, is nothing but the parents' narcissism born again, which, transformed into object-love, unmistakably reveals its former nature."[13] With a focus on the self, reflected through the child, the act of reproduction is inherently narcissistic as, at its crux, it seeks only to replicate for selfish purposes. A parent wants to see themselves in their child. It is precisely this narcissism that makes the role of the child a queer one—the queer lover is a double, narcissism personified, as Freud states, homosexuals are "seeking *themselves* as a love-object, and are exhibiting a type of object-choice which must be termed 'narcissistic'."[14] The queer lover, positioned just as the double of the child is, is narcissistic. At the heart of the roles of the child and of the sapphic lover is a desire for sameness and a reflection of oneself.

As an essential component in the production of the child, motherhood holds much significance in relation to vampires, breastfeeding, and eroticism—especially the construct of the sapphic and monstrous mother. For the sapphic mother or the sapphic daughter, an aspect of the attraction they feel towards each other is the doubling they see of the other and the self. Moreover, in considering the social anxieties towards female, queer sexuality that the novels I examine convey, the eroticism of breastfeeding "threatens the satisfaction of men and masculinity,"[15] as Bartlett states, as women may then find men sexually dispensable. Cohen Shabot expresses a similar sentiment, stating that, "in an economy of desire in which mother and child constitute the self-sufficient erotic unit, men are displaced."[16] In a cycle of desire characterised by breastfeeding, doubles, and maternal figures, men are rendered useless. As such, there will be little mention of them in this chapter—but that is perhaps replicating exactly what it is that these texts tell us that men fear. The fusion of these aspects is, like all

[11] Freud, 'On Narcissism: An Introduction', p. 91.
[12] Freud, 'On Narcissism: An Introduction', p. 91.
[13] Freud, 'On Narcissism: An Introduction', p. 91.
[14] Freud, 'On Narcissism: An Introduction', p. 88.
[15] Bartlett, p. 74.
[16] Cohen Shabot, p. 159.

vampiric texts, concerned with desire and with anxiety. There remains some ambiguity, some potential for an exchange of roles with the feeder, the vampire, when she is a woman too. She is a predator, yet one that is sometimes desired by her prey. Thus, the sapphic vampire is a kind of predatory mother, masquerading as something that she both is and is not. The fluidity of these roles shows the "danger" of the queer woman—parasitic, camouflaged, transgressive. But does this effectively condemn her?

Vampiric Thirst for the Child

Not only is the sapphic vampire a predatory mother, but she is able to adopt the role of a parasitic child. The ambiguity of the sapphic vampire's hunger, as I will demonstrate, exhibits the sapphic's ability to transform herself for the object of her desire. Each text I am analysing has at least one instance of vampiric feeding that involves a child, who may be the vampire or the victim, but the point of interest is that in these instances the sapphic vampires tend to engage with young victims in a pseudo-maternal role rather than in actions fuelled by queer desire. In Le Fanu's novella, although Laura misremembers the encounter as a dream, she and Carmilla first meet when Laura is a child, six years old by her own estimate:

> I saw a solemn, but very pretty face looking at me from the side of the bed. It was that of a young lady who was kneeling, with her hands under the coverlet. I looked at her with a kind of pleased wonder, and ceased whimpering. She caressed me with her hands, and lay down beside me on the bed, and drew me towards her, smiling; I felt immediately delightfully soothed, and fell asleep again.[17]

In this scene Laura is a literal child, not simply inhabiting the role of one, and Carmilla's actions and demeanour are strikingly maternal—the placement of her hands under the coverlet conveys a kind of intimacy, and the touching of the bedsheets seems as if Carmilla is tucking Laura in. Laura is soothed like an upset infant, and Carmilla then strokes her, hugs her. Laura gains comfort from the interaction, "delightfully soothed" like a baby in the arms of her mother. The setting of the bedroom, often interpreted as sexual, in this case seems more to be a place of nurturing. Carmilla's placement near and on the bed evoke images of a mother comforting her child after they awaken from a nightmare. Which, at first, is what Laura assumes Carmilla is doing.

Laura's assumption is quickly proved incorrect. Carmilla's intentions are not that of consoling the child, but rather she seeks to feed upon her, exposing her status as a predator. Laura reawakens from her sleep due to the pain of being bitten:

[17] Le Fanu, p. 4.

> I was wakened by a sensation as if two needles ran into my breast very deep at the same moment, and I cried loudly. The lady started back, with her eyes fixed on me, and then slipped down upon the floor, and, as I thought, hid herself under the bed.[18]

Carmilla's prior depiction as a nurturing, maternal figure is upended when she begins to feed on Laura, in part because she is causing harm to her (a rather un-motherly act) but more so due to the nature of the feeding. The image of Carmilla at young Laura's breast, suckling the blood from her body in a disconcerting mimicking of the baby at its mother's breast, immediately subverts the roles that Carmilla and Laura were initially assigned. Angelica Michelis describes Carmilla in this moment as "the persecutory mother who retaliates by imitating the feeding situation of the infant."[19] The roles of mother and daughter are inverted, which warps the purpose of such roles. Where breastfeeding is the nourishment of life from one being to another, here Carmilla drains Laura's life to fuel her un-life, merely sustaining her stagnant existence. Carmilla's actions then place her as a child that has been unkind and, dreading the repercussions, attempts to escape; she hides under the bed. This choice of hiding place is notably infantile, making Carmilla the trembling child, tucked under the bed so that the monsters cannot find her—and yet, concurrently, Carmilla is embodying the very figure of the monster under the bed that the child would fear.

Carmilla's retelling of this encounter differs to that of Laura's. Carmilla re-shapes the interaction to present it as an uncanny experience that Laura and Carmilla shared as children. This makes their current meeting seem like fate, which in turn encourages a reciprocated attraction as it seems, to Laura, as though it is fated. Carmilla's version of the event entails no mother and daughter roles, instead positioning both girls as equals who experienced a shared "queer" dream. Carmilla first remarks that this occurred "when of course we were both mere children."[20] She then reinforces the falsity of a shared youth when she begins the retelling of the dream with "I was a child, about six years old,"[21] the same age that Laura estimated herself to be when she first "dreamed" of Carmilla. Carmilla's language is emotive to align her experience with Laura's: she states that she was "confused," "troubled," and "frightened."[22] Even her description of the embrace they share in the bed conveys a more child-like form, as she tells Laura that she "climbed on the bed and put my arms about

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[18] Le Fanu, pp. 4-5.

[19] Angelica Michelis, 'Dirty Mamma: Horror, Vampires and the Maternal in Late Nineteenth-Century Gothic Fiction', *Critical Survey*, 15.3 (2003), 5-22, p. 18.

[20] Le Fanu, p. 18.

[21] Le Fanu, p. 19.

[22] Le Fanu, p. 19.

you."[23] That she climbed upon the bed rather than simply lay down, as in Laura's memory, depicts Carmilla as noticeably small and, as she intends, in an identical position to Laura. Notably, despite the instability of the roles of mother and daughter in Laura's recollection of this encounter, there are no erotic insinuations to the feeding. There are no heaving breaths, no orgasmic descriptions, no emphasis on the way Carmilla's lips touch Laura's skin. These appear later in the narrative, once Laura is an adult. Whilst Laura gains comfort from the physical touch of a mother-aligned Carmilla, and Carmilla gains the pleasure of the satiated infant as she feeds, the pleasure gained is not erotic.

Harriet's manner of feeding in *The Blood of the Vampire* is similarly non-sexual when it involves children. Harriet's victims all mention an overwhelming sense of attraction to her, one that is typically physical or romantic—but not in the cases where she feeds upon children. Like Carmilla, although Harriet continues to be a predator as she drains the life of children, it is a literal hunger, a biological need for sustenance that drives her, not any overt form of sexual or romantic desire. Harriet, too, assumes a falsely maternal role in one instance of her feeding.

Upon first seeing Margaret Pullen's baby girl, Ethel, Harriet remarks at how beautiful and pale she is and expresses an intense demand for interaction with her: "O! Let me hold her! let me carry her! I *must!*"[24] Harriet's desire to hold Ethel is so immense that it is not something she wants to do, but something that she *must*. Once refused, she again pleads to be allowed to hold her, reassuring Margaret that "I will nurse her so gently that she will fall to sleep again in my arms. Come! my little love, come!"[25] The word choice of "nurse" here is significant. Merriam-Webster defines "nurse," when used as a verb, as "to nourish at the breast; to take nourishment from the breast of; to care for and wait on."[26] "Nurse" here is working on many layers, using three meanings of the word simultaneously. On one hand, it connotes the deep level of maternal affection Harriet has instantaneously developed for the baby, as she wants to care for her, and so the imagery of her nursing the child in this manner, in addition to her referring to Ethel as her "little love," asserts Harriet as a mother figure—at least, the mother figure she aspires to be.

On the other hand, this use of "nurse" refers more specifically to the act of nursing, or breastfeeding, an infant. Harriet's infatuation with the child is her desire to inhabit a maternal

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[23] Le Fanu, p. 19.
[24] Marryat, p. 14.
[25] Marryat, p. 14.
[26] *Merriam-Webster*, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/nurse> [accessed 14 October 2023] s.v. nurse.

role, or rather, *any* role in a familial unit. Her assertion that Ethel will "fall to sleep" in her arms does foreshadow the way that Harriet will later exhaust the child by draining her life force—and so the third meaning of "nurse" is utilised, as Harriet is "taking nourishment" from Ethel—but Harriet appears only aware of her maternal affection. This reference to breastfeeding reveals Harriet's intentions with Ethel. She views herself as a "giver," the feeder, the one providing for both the child and the other people she interacts with. Unbeknownst to herself, however, she is the taker.

Later, Harriet again attempts to place herself in a maternal role by buying baby Ethel an abundance of trinkets and toys despite her being too young for them, showering her with excessive love and affection and then, as she says, not wanting to part with her. This is another example of her attempted giving, similar to the time she offers to buy food and drinks for Margaret, striving to be the provider, when they stop at a café. Harriet's immense affection that she displays by purchasing gifts, which Margaret perceives as generosity (but is, in fact, a form of Harriet's own wish-fulfilment), is rewarded by Margaret validating Harriet's maternal instincts through a comment on how good she is with the baby, stating that, "I never knew her so quiet with anybody but her nurse or me before."[27] Harriet is then considered an equal to the actual mother figures of baby Ethel. Her actions are unintentionally sinister, though, cultivating a sense of dread as Ethel's quietness with Harriet is not obedience or contentment, but rather immense fatigue as Harriet's affections sap the infant's vitality. The child is seemingly content in Harriet's arms as she may, like many adults, gain pleasure from Harriet's uncanny aura of magnetism (yet may simply be exhausted), but in turn Harriet is ecstatic as she interacts with Ethel. Harriet becomes the child that is unable to distinguish the difference between the pleasure of feeding and other kinds of pleasure, unable to extricate the object of sustenance from herself. She feeds unknowingly, and as she is satiated she mistakes the pleasure for love.

In Carl Jung's archetype of the mother he discusses the various types of mother-daughter relations, the third of which being "identity with the mother."[28] This daughter will have no "feminine initiative," looking to her mother for everything as she views her mother as superior. In this case, "the daughter leads a shadow-existence, often visibly sucked dry by her mother, and she prolongs her mother's life by a sort of continuous blood transfusion."[29]

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[27] Marryat, p. 29.
[28] Carl Jung, *Four Archetypes: Mother, Rebirth, Spirit, Trickster*, trans. by R. F. C. Hull (Abingdon: Routledge, 2001), p. 24.
[29] Jung, p. 25.

The relevance of this particular quote is almost uncanny—the mother is vampiric, draining the daughter emotionally and literally to the benefit of the mother's own life; and yet, it is something that the daughter almost consents to. Even as the vampire attempts to take on the role of mother, she is this terrible, vampiric mother that Jung posits, heralding illness and death under her motherly ministrations as she takes life from the child rather than gives. Harriet's mother exemplified this deadly nature, literally bloodthirsty, as she would taste blood "on the tip of her finger when it came in her way."[30] Fortunately, her deathly vices were directed to the servants rather than Harriet, but this violent maternal figure would have undoubtedly affected young Harriet's mind.

Unwitting yet instinctual feeding began in Harriet's childhood. Her first two victims were in her infancy, as she recounts that she "was given to a black wet nurse and after a little while she was taken so ill they had to send her away and get me another, and the next one—*died!*"[31] These women that, ironically, Harriet depended on for sustenance, and thus cared for in the undeveloped, infantile way, were drained. Maternal acts prove deadly yet again, even when Harriet is on the receiving end of motherly feelings. The next instance was Harriet's friend little Caroline, whom Harriet loved so much that she "used to creep into her nursery door and lie down in the cot beside her,"[32] desiring her to the extent that she could not bear being apart form for even a moment—and this resulted in Caroline's death. A desire for intimacy was present in this case, but it seems to be one of sisterhood, of companionship. The use of "creep" creates the vampiric sense of transgression in this scene; Harriet is doing something she should not, invading in the space of another as she drowns Caroline in a demanding love that inevitably drains her life. Then, Harriet recalls a Sister Theodosia who, once Harriet was left at the convent,

> was very good to me when I first went there […] and she used to sit with me upon her lap for hours together because I was sad. But she grew ill and they had to send her away up to the hill where they had their sanatorium.[33]

Again, a woman who provided Harriet with a necessary comfort was sapped of her health and left immensely ill. She seats her upon her lap, also a maternal gesture, and is sickened by it. Physical contact seems to be most potent method of draining for Harriet; "nursing" baby Ethel, feeding on both the milk and the life of the two wet nurses, and her immense desire to sleep alongside Caroline. Her touch, the skin on skin of a child at a breast, transfers energy at

[30] Marryat, p. 68.
[31] Marryat, pp. 164-165.
[32] Marryat, p. 165.
[33] Marryat, p. 165.

an expedited rate. Harriet drinks until the metaphorical breast, the person she is feeding on, is withered and dried up. Harriet believed she loved all these people, and they believed they loved her, but they are overwhelmed by her, exhausted, as the love she so desperately tries to give them comes at a deadly cost. It may not even be love at all. They are simply experiencing the pleasure of feeding Harriet, and Harriet is experiencing the pleasure of being fed.

In *The Gilda Stories* the first instance of feeding is when the Girl has only just recently come of age and is turned into a vampire. When the process of turning her is begun by the first Gilda, the Girl "closed her eyes, her muscles softened under the touch of Gilda's hand on her arm. She curled her long body in Gilda's lap like a child safe in her mother's arms."[34] The first Gilda is positioned as a mother and the Girl as her child, receiving security and comfort from familial intimacy with her. Like Carmilla and Harriet, a large part of the connection is forged through physical contact. Then, while the Girl remains in the first Gilda's lap, the first Gilda "held the Girl's head to her breast and in a quick gesture opened the skin of her chest. She pressed the Girl's mouth to the red life that seeped from her."[35] The position that the two are in, the feeding from the breast, the description of the blood as life: all culminate to evoke strong imagery of a mother nursing her child. Whilst Carmilla and Harriet are positioned as mother figures yet feed as infants, in this instance the first Gilda is purely maternal. She does feed on the Girl first, but that is in order to bestow the gift of their extended life onto her. The nudity in this scene is necessary, the breast as an exclusively functional object—a body part being used to provide life (or, in this case, unlife) to one's progeny. The way the breast is being used is a direct parallel to its literal, biological purpose, as in this scene it clearly mimics literal breastfeeding. The first Gilda cements this familial connection when she tells the Girl to ask Bird "to complete the circle. It is she who will make you our daughter."[36] Motherly relations are thus forged through the act of breastfeeding. Bird then feeds the Girl in a manner similar to the first Gilda's, as she "bared her breasts. She made a small incision beneath the right one and pressed the Girl's mouth to it. The throbbing in her chest became synchronous with the Girl's breathing."[37] Bird guides the Girl's mouth to her breast, a mother latching her newborn onto her nipple, and then effectively becomes one with her. The Girl is a kind of newborn here as she is newly inducted into the ranks of

[34] Gomez, The Gilda Stories, p. 46.
[35] Gomez, *The Gilda Stories*, p. 46.
[36] Gomez, *The Gilda Stories*, p. 47.
[37] Gomez, *The Gilda Stories*, p. 48.

vampire. The synchronicity of Bird's pain with the Girl's breaths indicates the connection that has now been birthed between the two of them and is representative of the life flowing from Bird into the Girl. They stay like that, synchronised, for more than an hour.

Despite the second Gilda's claim that she is not a child, Bird cannot help but perceive her as such. She notes that "here in the place of the woman to whom she'd given her life sat a child."[38] In comparison to the first Gilda, to her age and her knowledge, the Girl is youthful and inexperienced. Even the Girl's adoption of the first Gilda's name does not make her an equal—instead it conveys a sense of inheritance, just as family names do. And yet, regardless of Bird's perception of the Girl, as Bird looks at her, she notes that "the childlike roundness of her had melted away."[39] This act of breastfeeding, whilst cementing Gilda as the infant, is also what confirms her transition from childhood into adulthood.

These sapphic vampires refuse to engage with eroticism involving a child, subverting the presentation of the sapphic/vampire as an indiscriminately bloodthirsty, and sexually predatory, monster (particularly in the case of *Carmilla* and *The Blood of the Vampire*). Some homophobic representations may see the sapphic as a predatory vampire, such as the novel *Regiment of Women* (1917), in which the predatory, older lesbian is compared to a vampire: "I tell you, it's vampirism. And now you are to take Alwynne. And when she is squeezed dry and flung aside, who will the next victim be?"[40] There is a long-standing trope of the queer figure in literature as a monstrous one, as well as literal monsters expressing queer desire. Paulina Palmer says of the lesbian vampire that she represents "an even greater threat to marriage and the fabric of society," that she is associated with "evil and sexual depravity."[41] Yet, while these vampires are undoubtedly predatory, their sexual transgressions are not applicable to children. This firmly rejects homophobic concepts of queerness equating with paedophilia. There is the implication that degeneracy can only go so far—that although the queer woman may be a threat, that the sapphic vampire, though perhaps a monster in some ways, still has a line she will not cross. She is, instead, an ambiguous figure that will not secure herself as mother or child. Desire is still what these events centre on, however. The desire in these instances is not just about sex, but instead it focuses on other things the women hunger for. The most prominent of these wants is the desire for a mother. Laura, Harriet, and Gilda are all motherless; Laura's mother died during childbirth, Harriet's mother

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[38] Gomez, *The Gilda Stories*, p. 49.
[39] Gomez, *The Gilda Stories*, p. 50.
[40] Clemence Dane, *Regiment of Women* (1917), Project Gutenberg <https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/40264/pg40264-images.html> n.p.
[41] Paulina Palmer, *Lesbian Gothic: Transgressive Fictions* (London: Cassell, 1999), p. 100.

was absent and then too died young, and Gilda's mother is gone due to Gilda's escape from slavery. They all want a mother, and it is through the act of feeding that they gain one—but all achieve it through vastly different means. Laura temporarily acquires a mother figure in exchange for her blood. Harriet drains potential mother figures of their life force in a desperate parallel to the literal child. Gilda feeds on and is fed on by the first Gilda and Bird to combine their blood, effectively making them "blood" family. The lack of sexuality does not imply a lack of hunger within the children, but merely that they seek a different form of pleasure.

These texts situate feeding on (or as) a child as a non-sexual form of pleasure, but Butler's vampiric race of *Fledgling*, the Ina, view feeding as intrinsically sexual due to the pleasurable feelings that both participants experience. This is not an inherently negative thing, but it is problematized by Shori appearing to be a prepubescent girl, regardless of her mental maturity. Wright, the first person that Shori meets after awakening, says that she looks "so innocent and young,"[42] and estimates her age to be "ten or eleven."[43] It is later confirmed by Shori's father that "Shori is a child. She has at least one more important growth stage to go through before she's old enough to bear children […] In all, she should live around five hundred years. Right now she's fifty-three."[44] It is a complex situation as she looks to be a child and is one by Ina standards, but is also of an age and maturity, in both Ina and human societies, where she is more than capable of consenting to sex. By her own admission, Shori is "old enough to have sex with you if you want to."[45] However, even before Wright knows what her age actually is, he expresses sexual attraction towards Shori. He states that Shori is "way too young […] Jailbait. Super jailbait,"[46] the term "jailbait" implying that he desires her but would face convictions if caught, and when dressing her once they return to his home, he comments that she has no breasts and then says "Pity. I guess you really are a kid."[47]

However, Wright may not be to blame for this sexualisation of a child, as these comments were only made after Shori first feeds from him. When this first happens, he asks "How did you do that? And why the hell did it feel so fantastic?"[48] Where previously he had been resisting and uncomfortable with Shori's actions, he now was compliant and pleasured. This sentiment of immense pleasure, even as it should be a deeply unsettling act, is

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[42] Butler, p. 17.
[43] Butler, p. 64.
[44] Butler, p. 64.
[45] Butler, p. 21.
[46] Butler, p. 12.
[47] Butler, p. 18.
[48] Butler, p. 12.

something echoed by almost everyone that Shori feeds on. For example, a man that Shori bites in order to compel him to give her information begs "Do it some more. Jesus, that's the best feeling I've ever had in my life."[49] Theodora expresses a similar sentiment to Wright's, asking "How could it feel so good when it should be disgusting and painful?"[50] Joel, a man who grew up around Ina as his father is a symbiont, explains that "I didn't want to join with a man. There's too much sexual feeling involved when you guys feed."[51] Joel's rigid heterosexuality therefore confirms the inherent eroticism of the Ina feeding method. This has to do in part with a biological component engaged during blood drinking: "We addict them to a substance in our saliva—in our venom—that floods our mouths when we feed. I've heard it called a powerful hypnotic drug. It makes them highly suggestible and deeply attached to the source of the substance."[52] The bite of the vampire therefore delivers a kind of high, a sexual ecstasy, that binds the human to the vampire.

The control that venom allows over the human situates feeding as a vehicle for Shori's agency, while potentially removing it from those being fed on. Gerry Canavan states that "her bite overwrites her victims' desires altogether and makes them adjunct to her own whims and commands."[53] As Elizabeth Lundberg notes, when Shori bites Wright the second time, "Wright allows himself to be bitten only after he has already been bitten against his wishes."[54] Already under the influence of the bite, he is unable to properly consent. Although he expresses desire for Shori, he is not the one making the decisions in this situation. Shori's hunger allows Wright too to feel as though he has some control, feel as though he desires her, when in fact Shori is a predator that is pacifying her prey. Wright expresses displeasure at Shori's need to have other symbionts but is placated by yet another bite. It is out of necessity; Lundberg specifies that "Shori, like other Ina, cannot meet all her nutritional needs using only one human symbiont."[55] Wright's possessiveness is incompatible with the Ina mode of existence and so must be corrected. While Shori does care for her people, at its base form this affection is for her food source. The people are food. Therefore, a mutual sense of pleasure occurs while Shori is feeding; both the "mother" and the "infant" enjoy the exchange. But, as Lundberg notes, it is not only hunger and love that contribute to this bond:

[49] Butler, p. 52.
[50] Butler, p. 91.
[51] Butler, p. 159.
[52] Butler, p. 73.
[53] Gerry Canavan, *Octavia E. Butler* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2016), p. 163.
[54] Elizabeth Lundberg, '"Let Me Bite You Again": Vampiric Agency in Octavia Butler's *Fledgling*', *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 21.4 (2015) 561-584, p. 569.
[55] Lundberg, p. 573.

> The act of feeding concretizes and biologizes the circuits of sexuality, belonging, and pain within which Fledgling's characters relate to each other. The mingling of blood and venom during vampire feeding is a physical manifestation of the mingling of identities in a community or family.[56]

By consuming the blood of multiple people, Shori effectively "shares" their blood, solidifying their familial status in a semi-biological sense and literalising the connection between them. As Shori feeds on them, sinking her fangs into their bodies, she asserts ownership of her symbionts. However, as a result of the venom, it is a mutual dependency—as much as her symbionts are addicted to Shori, they are also necessary for her beyond mere sustenance. As Brook, a symbiont with years of experience, tells Shori, "You need to touch us […] And we need to be touched. It pleases us just as it pleases you. We protect and feed you, and you protect and feed us."[57] Being touched by Brook alleviates Shori's depressive state as well as her physical injuries and reinforces the biological and emotional bond between them. At this point Brook is fully Shori's symbiont, and she explains that these effects occur only because she and Shori are already so bound together. People Shori feeds from temporarily or who aren't "[hers] yet" would not be able to help her the way Brook can.[58] Butler's text makes it easier to recognize the simultaneously emotional and physical aspects of touch by heightening their importance to the Ina's survival and by making them inseparable from one another, as Elizabth Lunderg notes: "touch is a biological necessity, but part of what is biologically required is the fulfilment of an emotional need."[59] The connection between Ina and symbiont is not solely a chemical dependence, but also an emotional and physical need for survival.

As well as being sexually pleasurable, feeding in *Fledgling* is a mutually beneficial connection. This is why the humans are "symbionts," as the nature of their relationship is described as mutualistic symbiosis. The Ina feed on the blood of the humans, sustaining their life, and in turn their humans gain enhanced health and an extended lifespan (typically living to between one hundred and seventy and two hundred years old). This is labelled as mutualistic symbiosis, as "We do keep those who join us healthier, stronger and harder to kill than they would be without us. In that way, we lengthen their lives by several decades."[60] However, the concept of mutual benefit is complicated in cases where, like Wright, they were never able to consent to becoming a symbiont. Lundberg agrees with this, writing that "Once

[56] Lundberg, p. 577.
[57] Butler, p. 177.
[58] Butler, p. 177.
[59] Lundberg, p. 579.
[60] Butler, p. 63.

Wright and other humans become Shori's symbionts, it is possible that they will not consent to everything Shori does with them, but, goes Ina logic, they did agree to that very nonconsensual relationship in their early negotiations."[61] While Shori believes that she gave Wright the opportunity to leave before he became truly addicted to her, as he was already under the influence of her venom it is unclear whether he was "sober" enough to truly consent. In this regard, the choices that symbionts make then come into question over *actually* being their choices, but, regardless, it is clear that they gain literal benefits and a sense of pleasure from being a symbiont.

It is not merely an intrinsic sense of pleasure derived from the act of feeding itself that lends to the eroticism of it, but also the frequent engagement in sexual acts concurrent with blood drinking. As Shori first states to Wright, he is free to have sex with her if he likes *because* she fed from him. "I bit him again just beneath his left nipple and took a little more blood. He shouted and squeezed the breath from me. Then he collapsed on me, empty, spent."[62] The bite below the breast mimics the imagery of the infant breastfeeding, reinforced by Shori's childlike appearance, but is immediately complicated by the fact that Wright is currently having sex with her. As she penetrates him, the reverse also occurs. Wright then becomes "empty" in two ways: he has climaxed and has no more left to give, and Shori cannot safely take any more blood from him. She is an active participant in the combination of feeding and sex—as Shori admits, "I liked to take my time when I truly fed from him, tear sounds from him, exhaust him with pleasure, enjoy his body as well as his blood."[63] Feeding simultaneously satiates hunger and desire and Shori likes to indulge in both. This erotic aspect of feeding is not limited to men. Shori goes to Celia, a symbiont of hers who Shori is able to smell has just had sex with another symbiont. Shori then decides to mimic what the man had done to Celia: "He had kissed her between her breasts and taken her nipples into his mouth…I tried that, and she giggled. I'd never heard her giggle before. Then her scent changed, and she made a different sort of noise in her throat."[64]Again, the fascination with the breast coupled with the intentional sexuality of their actions problematises the roles here, as Shori is placed as a child but intentionally seeks to pleasure Celia. The comments on scent and how Shori is able to smell Celia's arousal adds a primal element to the eroticism of this

[61] Lundberg, p. 571.
[62] Butler, p. 22.
[63] Butler, p. 93.
[64] Butler, p. 247.

feeding, reducing it to base desires. Feeding is a primal instinct, as is the desire for sex; which, in turn, serves to naturalise the queer attraction that they are experiencing.

Adulthood and Bloody Sex

The vampires of *Fledgling* are not the only ones to experience an intersection between sexual pleasure and the pleasure of feeding. In fact, this depiction of queer vampiric feeding as a liminal act of nourishment and sex is present in *Carmilla*, *The Blood of the Vampire*, and *The Gilda Stories* also. Once they are adults, the victims to our vampires begin to view the feeding as a sexual act. However, it is not necessarily immediately so. The first instance of Carmilla feeding upon an adult Laura is an uncanny and disturbing one. Although their shared dream framed Laura as a maternal figure, their roles are not fixed and later interactions blur the boundaries of who is mother and who is daughter in their relationship.

Another instance of Laura being fed on by Carmilla has Carmilla seemingly take on the form of a grotesque and monstrous approximation of a cat. This animalistic form indicates the primal and instinctual nature of the feeding, likening Carmilla to a predatory carnivorous species simply hunting for her prey. Laura recounts that "I felt it spring lightly on the bed. The two broad eyes approached my face, and suddenly I felt a stinging pain as if two large needles darted, an inch or two apart, deep into my breast."[65] Here the imagery of breastfeeding is repeated, yet there is neither maternal nor sexual motive driving it – this act of feeding is parasitic in the revolting and violating sense. The language used almost perfectly mirrors that of Laura's first experience as Carmilla's prey; the two needles, into the breast, deep. The child-like fear is replicated, and while Laura sits in the role of breastfeeding mother, she is an unwilling participant in this mimicry of mother and infant. This purely negative response does not remain, though, as Laura's terror "awakens" her from her presumed nightmare, and she then sees "a female figure standing at the foot of the bed, a little at the right side. It was in a dark loose dress, and its hair was down and covered its shoulders."[66] This figure is in a state of vulnerability, as is Laura, in a state of undress. The private space of the bedroom has been invaded, but instead of reacting with more fear, Laura is relieved as her first thought is that "Carmilla had been playing me a trick."[67] This is a notably childish action, yet one that is plausible enough for Carmilla's character to be easily attributed to her. Yet, despite her assumption that it is Carmilla in the room, Laura chooses to

[65] Le Fanu, p. 38.
[66] Le Fanu, p. 38.
[67] Le Fanu, p. 38.

refer to this figure as "it" rather than "she." Her subconscious alignment of Carmilla with the beast, of something other than human, perhaps indicates an awareness of Carmilla's true nature. Frightening and beautiful. If the act of feeding was merely depicted as an unsettling event, as this one was, then it would be quite simple to say that Carmilla fits into the role of predator, of invader, and nothing more, as she would be solely a point of fear and disgust.

This element of feeding becomes a gateway to other kinds of desire. Carmilla cannot be "nothing more," as there is a *more*: sexuality invades the moments of feeding. The blood-drinking already exists as a transgression through the invasion of the private bedroom space and the penetration of fangs into flesh, the convergence of an individual's body with an unfamiliar one. Consequently, it is not hard for one transgression to morph into another that also involves bedrooms and bodies. A subsequent one of Laura's "dreams" challenges her perception of the feeding events as disturbing or immature jest. The fear and pain are met with currents of sexuality and physical intimacy. The following is one of two passages often quoted when discussing the erotic sapphic undertones of *Carmilla*:

> Sometimes there came a sensation as if a hand was being drawn softly along my cheek and neck. Sometimes it was as if warm lips kissed me, and longer and longer and more lovingly as they reached my throat, but there the caress fixed itself. My heart beat faster, my breathing rose and fell rapidly and full drawn; a sobbing, that rose into a sense of strangulation, supervened, and turned into a dreadful convulsion, in which my senses left me and I became unconscious.[68]

The sensuality of this passage is apparent. The warm lips that kiss her do so "lovingly," not focused singularly on hunger or sexual desire, but love. Similarly, the hand is drawn "softly," the kisses turn into a "caress." This language indicates a certain level of care being taken in the handling of Laura, of a gentleness beyond feeding or sex. Then, interestingly, the kiss fixes itself at Laura's throat, yet there is no mention of the pain she describes in every other instance of Carmilla feeding on her. The kiss merely stays at her throat, her heart rate increases, she pants, sobs, and then her feelings "rose" into a climax.

The sexual overtones of this extract then lend to other interpretations; arguably the most significant detail is not in this passage, but the dream that follows it, in which Laura states that she "saw Carmilla, standing, near the foot of my bed, in her white nightdress, bathed, from her chin to her feet, in one great stain of blood."[69] The night dress is an article of clothing that conveys a sense of vulnerability, as that is when one is the most stripped back, unguarded. The white dress, often a symbol of innocence or purity, is tainted—by Laura's

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[68] Le Fanu, p. 43.
[69] Le Fanu, p. 44.

blood. After the overtly sexual passage that precedes this one, this dress is an "innocence" tainted by the feeding, by the new addition of pleasurable sexuality that accompanies the feeding. The blood, here representing Laura's new maturity, is a symbolic breaking of the hymen. Teeth break her skin, she bleeds, she is penetrated. The blood beginning at Carmilla's chin, in this particular interpretation, is then suggestive of the aftermath of oral sex, particularly as Carmilla is at the foot of the bed rather than at the head, as one would expect if she had been feeding from Laura's neck. Hence these passages demonstrate the newly complicated relationship between feeding and desire, as Laura craves one and is horrified by the other.

Marryat's Harriet Brandt, much like Carmilla and Laura, seeks a deep intimacy that bleeds romantic or sexual undertones into her relationship via feeding. Harriet is predominantly motivated by hunger, depicted as animalistic and unladylike. Maria Parrino observes this also, stating that

> one of the most striking features of her unusual manners is her voracity—horrifying eating habits, which the holidaymakers in the dining room cannot help noticing: Harriet's animal-like hunger displays a scandalous image of a woman expected to behave with Victorian middle-class female moderation and decorum.[70]

Harriet's problem is immediately the Otherness that she unknowingly displays while feeding, acting in a manner deemed inappropriate and judged as so, despite the fact that she has no real frame of reference as to the socially acceptable way to act. Then, juxtaposing this "incorrect" display of both hunger and femininity, is the young mother, Margaret. Where Harriet is improper and brash, Margaret is polite and gentle. Harriet is immediately drawn to her, and believes that Margaret's politeness was an invitation of friendship:

> 'But you are so different,' said the girl as she crept still closer. 'I could see it when you smiled at me at dinner. I knew I should like you at once. And I want you to like me too—so much! It has been the dream of my life to have some friends.'[71]

It is not the simple act of a smile that Harriet takes as an invitation; when they meet on the balcony after the first dinner, Margaret draws her into their company with a courteous, "Good evening!" Then, when discussing her history in the Convent, the mere mention of it left the other women deeply uncomfortable, but "Margaret Pullen was interested and encouraged the girl to proceed."[72] Three separate times Margaret stretches out a welcoming, friendly hand—

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[70] Maria Parrino, 'Crossing Borders: Hospitality in Bram Stoker's Dracula and Florence Marryat's The Blood of the Vampire', in *Hospitality, Rape and Consent in Vampire Popular Culture,* ed. by D. Baker (Palgrave Gothic, 2017) pp. 19-35 <doi:10.1007/978-3-319-62782-3_2> (p. 28).
[71] Marryat, p. 16.
[72] Marryat, p. 10.

and Harriet, the lonely, innocent girl recently equipped with near unimaginable freedom, develops an instantaneous and inevitable admiration for her.

Harriet is attracted to Margaret before she is attracted to anyone else in the text. She already demonstrates a childlike obsession with Margaret, infatuated in the manner of a child with someone they admire: all-consuming, intense, single-minded. On the evening of their first meeting, while seated at a café, Harriet

> had crept closer and closer to Mrs. Pullen as she spoke, and now encircled her waist with her arm and leaned her head upon her shoulder. It was not a position that Margaret liked, nor one she would expect from a woman on so short an acquaintance, but she did not wish to appear unkind by telling Miss Brandt to move further away.[73]

This is not to say that Margaret invites what will happen to her, but to a girl who is, as Margaret highlights, an unsophisticated and inexperienced young woman, Margaret's politeness is easily misconstrued as a direct invitation and a clear want. There is a propensity for permission to be ambiguous; as Parrino agrees, there is "a typical topos of vampires stories, a perverted suggestion that victims consent to and are responsible for their own abuse."[74] This invasion into Margaret's personal space becomes nearly unbearable:

> She had become fainter and fainter as the girl leaned against her with her head upon her breast. Some sensation which she could not define, nor account for—some feeling which she had never experienced before—had come over her and made her head reel. She felt as if something or someone were drawing all her life away. She tried to disengage herself from the girl's clasp but Harriet Brandt seemed to come after her, like a coiling snake, till she could stand it no longer.[75]

This scene echoes similar sentiments, though perhaps less intense, to that of Laura's feelings regarding Carmilla, of "adoration, and also abhorrence,"[76] the revulsion, yet tolerance, that later will turn into desire. Kimberly Cox explains that "the vampire's touch rather than her fangs reveals the tension between desire and repulsion."[77] Where typically the vampire "penetrates" her victim for the duality of disgust and desire, here it is initiated by a different kind of intimacy; physical touch enables Harriet to feed with more intensity to the point of overwhelming Margaret. The language used to describe Margaret's feelings while she is in Harriet's grasp is predominantly negative; with Harriet's head "upon her breast," she feels a sensation that she "could not define, nor account for." Harriet is the parasitic child at

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[73] Marryat, p. 17.
[74] Parrino, p. 30.
[75] Marryat, p. 18.
[76] Le Fanu, p. 23.
[77] Kimberly Cox, 'The Vampire's Touch in "Olalla" and The Blood of the Vampire', in The Vampire in Nineteenth-Century Literature: A Feast of Blood, ed. by Brooke Cameron and Lara Karpenko (New York: Routledge, 2022), pp. 110-124 (p. 114).

Margaret's breast, sucking life away from her. She is compared to a snake, aligning her with a predator just as Carmilla's cat-form does. Cox expresses a similar idea, arguing that "as the Biblical imagery of a "coiling snake" indicates, Margaret perceives Harriet's touch as immoral and a distinct threat to her very being."[78]

Harriet, for her part, is entirely unaware of the detrimental effect she is having, and so laments the loss of her new companion: "She felt lonely and disappointed. She knew there was no one to speak to and there was a cold empty feeling in her breast as though, in losing her hold on Margaret Pullen, she had lost something on which she had depended."[79] The dependence she feels is dually the hunger she is unaware of and the instant attachment she has formed.

The figure of the feeding infant is easily warped, as Copjec notes: "very soon does it become perverse, and eager to be gratified in everything."[80] Harriet's desire is, like the feeding infant, demanding. Already she views Margaret as a familial substitute and mourns her distance as severely as she would a death, pained by the "cold empty feeling in her breast." Where, on Margaret Harriet had rested, Harriet now feels a loss in an uncanny parallel to what Margaret may be experiencing—she has been drained. Margaret then becomes aware, the next morning, of the immediate attraction that Harriet has developed for her, as she glances at her and is immediately

> struck by the look with which Harriet Brandt was regarding her—it was so full of yearning affection—almost of longing to approach her nearer, to hear her speak, to touch her hand! It amused her to observe it! She had heard of cases in which young unsophisticated girls had taken unaccountable affections for members of their own sex and trusted she was not going to form the subject for some such experience on Miss Brandt's part. [81]

"Yearning affection" quite aptly summarises Harriet's feelings towards Margaret; she wants to be close to her, to listen to her, to touch her – to have Margaret in any way she can. Margaret acknowledges this and, in a pleasant surprise, does not feel any revulsion at the desire that Harriet is demonstrating. Rather, she finds it amusing, endearing almost, and resolves that she will not do anything to contribute to Harriet's so-called unaccountable affections for her. Regardless of Margaret's resolution to not become a point of sapphic interest for Harriet, after mentioning Harriet's mother Margaret is then struck, unexpectedly, by her own desire:

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[78] Cox, p. 119.
[79] Marryat, p. 19.
[80] Copjec, p. 33.
[81] Marryat, p. 23.

> The incident made her examine Harriet's eyes more closely than she had done before. They were beautiful in shape and colour, but they did not look like the eyes of a young girl. They were deeply, impenetrably black—with large pellucid pupils, but there was no sparkle nor brightness in them, though they were underlaid by smouldering fires which might burst forth into flame at any moment, and which seemed to stir and then go out again when she spoke of anything that interested her. There was an attraction about the girl which Mrs. Pullen acknowledged without wishing to give in to. She could not keep her eyes off her! She seemed to hypnotise her as the snake is said to hypnotise the bird, but it was an unpleasant feeling, as if the next moment the smouldering fire would burst forth into flame and overwhelm her.[82]

There is a clear sense of physical attraction here; Harriet's eyes are "beautiful," the fires in them are "smouldering," Margaret physically cannot keep her eyes off Harriet. It is, as she says, as if she is hypnotised. But Margaret also observes that she is overwhelmed by these feelings of desire—her fear of being overpowered is more so her fear of succumbing to them. Harriet's admiration of Margaret may be unwittingly driven by hunger, but it is evident that Margaret also reciprocates some sort of sapphic desire—likely a physical attraction to Harriet. Margaret's desire is not the only force behind this attraction, though, and the predator imagery she assigns to Harriet, that of the snake again, is quite apt as this sense of magnetism is largely due to Harriet's "vampirism." Margaret is, on some level, aware that Harriet is a predator and that she is prey and yet she retains a modicum of affection towards Harriet. The sapphic is therefore depicted as inherently predatory, both for her desire to feed and her ability to cause others to desire her, despite the danger it may put them in. This complex attraction that the two share is the sense of queer attraction, but also the desire of a predator for its prey. Margaret, whilst recognising the danger of the snake, cannot help but marvel at the shine of its scales even as its fangs sink into her.

Despite their fangs and consumption of blood, Gomez's vampires of *The Gilda Stories* take a significantly less predatory stance towards the act of feeding than Harriet. Harriet is intended to arouse fear in a Victorian society whereas Gilda's purpose is to celebrate a queer mode of existence, and so whilst Harriet's feeding is predatory, Gilda's is alluring. Gomez's vampires share a significant trait to that of Butler's: drinking blood is pleasurable for both the victim and vampire. When Gilda is turned into a vampire Bird tells her that

> 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. Let their joy fill you. It is the only way to share and not to rob.[83]

[82] Marryat, p. 29.
[83] Gomez, *The Gilda Stories*, p. 50.

The image of the parasitic vampire is subverted here, as the intention is to benefit the lives of those whose blood is drunk. Rather than Harriet's unknowing feeding or Carmilla's dangerous feeding, the experience of drinking blood is reframed to focus on the victim instead of the vampire. Gilda does not blindly take; as Bird says, feeding becomes a matter of sharing, not robbing. However, unlike in *Fledgling*, the kind of pleasure that both parties gain is not inherently sexual. Its focus is instead on wish-fulfilment. For instance, Gilda feeds upon a man who wishes for his boss to leave the gambling rooms early so he can return home to be with his family. Gilda then "made the exchange, reinforcing the man's simple pleasure and using another mind to reach out to his master."[84] She amplifies his own joy and influences the man's master to leave early to bring this man joy. It is, as intended, a form of sharing rather than a taking. This is particularly prominent when Gilda hears a woman crying and, upon finding her, discovers that the young woman has lost the will to live. She does not dream and has no aspirations, so Gilda feeds on her. "Her insistent suckling created a new pulse and filled her with new life. In return she offered dreams. She held the girl's body and mind tightly, letting the desire for future life flow through them both."[85] Rather than draining life, these vampiric abilities allow her to nurture it in a human, allow it to flourish where it had withered. They become connected, two beings with a desire for the future. This mutual beneficiary aspect of feeding is not automatic, though. Within Gomez's works it is a conscious choice that some vampires choose not to make.

Although this manner of feeding lacks an inherent sexuality, that is not to say that it cannot become sexual—but the instances of sexualised blood-sharing seem to occur predominantly when both parties are already vampires. This is first seen when Gilda is kissed by Eleanor, a fellow vampire who somewhat lacks the respect for life that Gilda has been taught to possess. Despite this, Gilda is enamoured with her, and their kiss feeds "a need inside her like no other she had experienced before."[86] The need in question is sexual desire, Gilda not yet having been intimate with anyone. The kiss deepens and "Gilda felt the sharpness of Eleanor's teeth as she bit her lip and continued to press her mouth onto Gilda's, taking in her blood […] her desire was a tide she feared she could not resist."[87] Gilda does not want to share blood, as that would create a link between the two of them, but Gilda's sexual desire outweighs the hesitance at drinking Eleanor's blood. This interaction is focused

[84] Gomez, *The Gilda Stories*, p. 68.
[85] Gomez, *The Gilda Stories*, p. 123.
[86] Gomez, *The Gilda Stories*, p. 97.
[87] Gomez, *The Gilda Stories*, p. 97.

entirely on sex, not family-building, as Jacia Carlile notes: “Gilda drinking blood—a metaphor for having sex through penetrating others—without turning the person she drinks from is the equivalent of having queer sex, where creating life is not the central point.”[88] While I will leave the discussion of reproduction (or the lack thereof) to Chapter Two, this quote encapsulates the relationship between hunger for blood and sexual hunger. Sexual desire leads to feeding, the only issue is that, in this context, it would have the unfortunate effect of making Eleanor and Gilda connected in a way that signifies kinship.

However, Gilda later has the change to explore the blending of sex and blood with someone where the sharing of blood is not a concern, as their blood already flows through the other. When Gilda and Bird first see each other after their extended separation, they are almost immediately consumed with longing. Bird then drinks Gilda’s blood from just below her breast:

> This was a desire not unlike their need for the blood, but she had already had her share. It was not unlike lust but less single-minded. She felt the love almost as motherly affection, yet there was more. As the blood flowed from Gilda’s body into Bird’s they both understood the need—it was for completion. They had come together but never taken each other in as fully as they could, cementing their family bond.[89]

Bird, the woman who had previously been characterised as Gilda’s mother, morphs into an object of lust, love, hunger, and familial connection all at once. It is almost “motherly affection,” and it is layered with sexual desire. The sharing of blood here is from the child to the mother, but it is a willing sacrifice. As they “come together,” take each other in, this refers to both the biological joining through blood and a sexual joining, becoming one literally and metaphorically. Gilda is drained almost completely of life and surrenders to it, and Bird then shares the blood back to her.

> She pressed Gilda’s mouth to the red slash, letting the blood wash across Gilda’s face. Soon Gilda drank eagerly, filling herself, and as she did her hand massaged Bird’s breast, first touching the nipple gently with curiosity, then roughly. She wanted to know this body that gave her life. Her heart swelled with their blood, a tide between two shores. To an outsider the sight may have been one of horror: their faces red and shining, their eyes unfocused and black, the sound of their bodies slick with wetness, tight with life. Yet it was a birth. The mother finally able to bring her child into the world, to look at her. It was not death that claimed Gilda. It was Bird. She wiped

[88] Jacia Carlile, ‘Lesbians are the Real Blood Suckers: Exploring Homosexuality and Vampirism through the Gilda Stories’, *Ellipsis*, 46 (2021) article 21 <https://scholarworks.uno.edu/ellipsis/vol46/iss1/21?utm_source=scholarworks.uno.edu%2Fellipsis%2Fvol46%2Fiss1%2F21&utm_medium=PDF&utm_campaign=PDFCoverPages> [accessed 12 May 2024] p. 2.
[89] Gomez, *The Gilda Stories*, p. 139.

> Gilda's body with a sponge, washing away the blood and sweat. She lingered over her as she would a child. She whispered sweet words to her as she might a lover.[90]

Gilda's fascination with Bird's breast in this scene mimics an infant yet again. As she feeds, suckling at the breast of her mother, she is innocently exploring the unknown that is another body. It is simultaneously part of herself and something other. Bird is situated frequently as a mother figure in this scene—her body gave Gilda life; this exchange is a birth and Bird is "the mother finally able to bring her child into the world." Bird drank from Gilda first to draw her to the brink of death in order to restore life back to her. Bird claims Gilda as her child, and also as her life partner. The final two sentences of this passage perfectly summarise the convergence of roles in this act of feeding; Bird is her mother, and Bird is her lover. There is no mutual exclusivity, and the role of lover seems to exist only because the role of mother did first.

The Post-Menopausal Woman: Dried Up or Desirable?

Despite (or perhaps due to) the constant confusion of hunger and desire, the sapphic vampire does not feed on any woman indiscriminately. She does, apparently, have standards. In this section I will argue that the way the sapphic vampire chooses her victims is reflective of societal beauty standards, and as such conveys how women are perceived. This is most evident in *The Blood of the Vampire*, where Harriet does not feed on Madame Gobelli despite her extended exposure and close proximity—which may be because she does not possess the sense of attraction and gentle maternity that Margaret has. The Baroness Gobelli, otherwise referred to as Madame Gobelli or, most commonly, the Baroness, is a mother with a son, Bobby Bates, who is close in age to Harriet. She has a vested interest in people who are worth cultural capital to her, people who may increase her social status, which leads her to take Harriet under her wing. She impresses her with tales of the people who visit her home, heavily embellished as they are, and flatters Harriet with compliments on her looks and potential marriage prospects. The Baroness's attempt at recruiting Harriet as a surrogate daughter is first seen even before they depart the hotel, with Harriet noticing that the Baroness "told everyone at the Hotel that the Baron and she had known her from infancy—that she was their ward—and that they regarded her as the daughter of the house, with various other falsehoods that made Harriet open her dark eyes with amazement."[91] She thrusts a familial construct upon Harriet, one that Harriet hesitates to refute as it would undoubtedly

[90] Gomez, *The Gilda Stories*, p. 140.
[91] Marryat, p. 82.

ruin the mutually beneficial relationship they have forged. The claim that Harriet is their ward asserts a level of responsibility and charity behind their conduct that is non-existent. It is not merely that Harriet has been pushed into this role, but the issue more so lies within the Baroness's compulsion to make her relationship with Harriet a public display to garner admiration, or interest, or the like. Towards the conclusion of their stay in Brussels the Baroness proclaims, "Gustave and I look upon you as our daughter, and you're welcome to share everything that is ours. You can come and live altogether at the Red 'Ouse, if you like!"[92] To Harriet, who has neither home nor family, this *should* be the ideal opportunity. The Baroness is exceedingly eager to have her as a daughter figure, evidenced by the fact she refers to her as such at least three more times, and explicitly offers her home to Harriet as if it were Harriet's own. Under the guise of hospitality Harriet is now entirely the victim, caught by a toxic mother figure that too-closely resembles Harriet's actual mother.

However, despite the fact that the Baroness did her utmost to assimilate Harriet into her family, the Baroness is not depicted as a maternal figure in the slightest. Indeed, Harriet seems to have no affection for her whatsoever—and this can be gauged in part *because* Harriet does not feed from her. The first sign of Harriet's separation from the Baroness is when, upon entering their house for the first time, Harriet remarks that "there was an unhomelike feeling in the Red House,"[93] exposing an element of discord from the very commencement of their fabricated family. This is further complicated when, despite the Baroness's various attentions towards Harriet, Harriet instead feeds off Bobby. So why is it that the Baroness—despite her vitality, her exuberance—is not affected by Harriet's subconscious act of consuming? Examining Harriet's prior and subsequent victims reveals the very simple trait that the Baroness is lacking: Baby Ethel and little Caroline are both children, their lives barely started. Margaret Pullen is a mother and the wet nurses likely were also. Olga Brimont, Harriet's travel companion upon leaving the convent and therefore her *only* companion, fell sick due to her inescapable close proximity to Harriet. Then, of course, there are the males that find themselves entranced by an adult Harriet's charm: Ralph Pullen, who was saved only as the death of his niece forced him to leave Harriet's company; Bobby Bates, who seems to be killed by the romantic loss of Harriet more than anything else; and, finally, Harriet's husband, Anthony Pennell, who passes after a mere six weeks of marriage to Harriet. Then, what *is* it that they have, that the Baroness does not? The answer is life, or,

[92] Marryat, p. 85.
[93] Marryat, p. 96.

rather, the potential of it. The wet nurses, as breastfeeding women, were an emblem of fertility and thus of life, as the ability to create more life indicates an abundance of it within them. Caroline, as a child, too contained an excess of life, the same as baby Ethel, having so many possible years ahead of them. Olga Brimont is a young woman herself, aged only seventeen, meaning she has fertile potentiality like that of the wet nurses and Margaret. Ralph Pullen, Bobby Bates and Anthony Pennell are all men within the biological prime of their lives, able and (very) willing to sexually engage with Harriet.

There is only one person that Harriet has cared deeply about in the entirety of her life that was not affected by her unstoppable, unconscious hunger, and that was the overseer, old Pete, as Harriet realises: "but old Pete loved me and took me with him everywhere, and he didn't get sick."[94] Not only did he love her and not part with her, but for a large portion of Harriet's childhood he was the only person who loved her and was loved by her. All of the life-sapping tendencies she possessed should, in theory, have been directed toward him. The word of significance here is "old" Pete, as his advanced age indicates a reduced amount of energy left to absorb. In regards to the Baroness, the reason that she is not fed on and the reason she does not inhabit a maternal role is very much in the same vein as that of old Pete's: she is no longer appealing, her capacity for life is diminished. The Baroness cannot continue inhabiting the role of mother—her son is grown, aged nineteen, and she is likely, if not post-menopausal, then perimenopausal and losing the ability to carry children, if it is not already lost. She is, effectively, *sucked dry*. Harriet's distance from the vitality of the Baroness is because the Baroness would be unable to sustain the energy draw. Put simply, she is not worth the effort. There is then a sort of menopausal judgement underlying Harriet's hunger, as her distaste reinforces the notion that women only retain value for as long as they are capable of producing children. Margaret contrasts this as the youthful mother, still in the prime of fertility and actively able to produce more children. I will not linger too long on this idea of reproduction, however, as I will later focus on it in closer detail.

Harriet's lack of hunger (for both energy and maternal affections) could also, in the case of the Baroness, be related to the quality of the energy Harriet would consume. When Harriet is faced with a slightly unappealing meal her response is that "she was greedy by nature, but it was the love of good feeding rather than a superfluity of food that induced her to be so."[95] The food needs to look good and taste good in order for Harriet to devour it.

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[94] Marryat, p. 166.
[95] Marryat, p. 98.

Typically I would argue that it is reductive to compare people to food, but the analogy serves its purpose well here, because to Harriet they are, literally, food, even if not recognised as such. Harriet's victims, as far as we are told detail-wise, all have looks that range from average to attractive. Moreover, they are of good character; well-bred like Ralph, maternal like Margaret, kind like Bobby, loving like Anthony. The Baroness is, contrary to these descriptions, harsh, vulgar, and often cruel. She is an "unnatural" mother, consistently belittling, berating and even beating Bobby. As Margaret summarises in perhaps the politest terms possible, "she used to make him so unhappy and humiliate him before strangers!"[96] The Baroness is described as "an enormous woman of the elephant build with a large, flat face and clumsy hands and feet. Her skin was coarse, so was her hair, so were her features."[97] A starkly unflattering description as opposed to that which the other characters receive.

Carroll Smith-Rosenberg explains that in Victorian times male physicians "displayed a revealing disquietude and even hostility when discussing their menopausal patients. In the medical literature, the menopausal woman often appeared as ludicrous or physically repulsive"[98] The Baroness is unequivocally depicted as physically repulsive by the text, and the resulting message is that the only attractive maternal figure is one who is appealing in all possible ways; aesthetically attractive, kind, able to reproduce. The only time that the Baroness is close to being described as beautiful is when she is viewing her china collection, as it states, "the woman became almost womanly as her eyes rested lovingly on her art treasures."[99] Femininity is only restored to the Baroness through her appreciation for the material objects she has hoarded—even then, it is not quite achieved, as she only becomes *almost* womanly. She cares for her possessions in a pitiful mimicry of how she should care for her son, and it is this misplaced maternal drive that places her adjacent to femininity while ultimately cementing it as unattainable.

Maria Parrino states that Harriet's killing of Bobby destroys "the role of the Baroness, an unmotherly mother left without any child to ill-treat."[100] Unfit for the role of mother, Harriet, albeit unknowingly, revokes the Baroness's status as a mother, deeming her unworthy. The text depicts the post-menopausal woman as unappealing, as the implication here is that the only desirable mother replacement is, in Harriet's view, the young, beautiful

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[96] Marryat, p. 170.
[97] Marryat, p. 5.
[98] Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, 'Puberty to Menopause: The Cycle of Femininity in Nineteenth-Century America', *Feminist Studies*, 1.3/4 (1973), 58-72 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1566480> [accessed 11 May 2024] p. 66.
[99] Marryat, pp. 132-133.
[100] Parrino, p. 31.

Margaret that Harriet longs for in more ways than one—and, as such, the only desirable woman for consuming is either the mother figure, Margaret, or the child that Harriet can mother, Ethel.

Butler uses the significance of the sapphic vampire's desire to rebel against this judgement of the post-menopausal woman as worthless, drained, or asexual through Shori's symbiont Theodora. Her initial introduction is not particularly promising, as Shori explains that "This woman didn't smell as enticing as Wright had. She was older, no longer to have children, but not yet truly old."[101] Theodora's age immediately makes her less attractive than Wright, who is twenty-three, and it is specified that, just as one may assume of the Baroness, Theodora is no longer able to have children. Shori makes it clear that she "didn't like her age,"[102] reinforcing the notion that age is an unappealing trait in a woman. This is further reinforced when Shori states,

> her aloneness was good, somehow. There were other people in the house, but none of them had been in her room for a long time. She didn't smell of other people. Perhaps it was only because she had bathed, but I got the impression that no one had touched her in a long while.[103]

Not only is Theodora unappealing to Shori, but she is sexually unappealing to other humans, abstinent and lonely. While Theodora does possess some traits that draw Shori to her, it is only "her height and her good health."[104] The nature of her solitude is multifaceted; her physical space has not had anyone else within it, although she lives with her daughter; she has not had contact with anyone else, as she does not smell of other people. She is literally touch-starved, and it is this that leaves her so susceptible to Shori's influence. Theodora feels purposeless and unloved—and in the absence of intimacy comes Shori, filling the gap and pleasuring Theodora with the venom she secretes in her bites. It is as if Theodora had no other options because she was "Not pretty. Not young either. But I like her."[105] It is not merely her age that is an issue; Theodora is not described as particularly physically pleasing. Like the Baroness, she is depicted as overweight and somewhat past her prime:

> She had waist-length, dark-brown hair with many strands of gray. Her eyes were the same dark-brown as her hair, and the flesh at the corner of the, was indented with arrays of fine lines—the only lines on her face. She was a little heavier than was good

[101] Butler, p. 24.
[102] Butler, p. 24.
[103] Butler, p. 24.
[104] Butler, p. 24.
[105] Butler, p. 87.

> for her. Plump might have been the best word to describe her. It made her face full and round.[106]

However, this description is not even remotely comparable to the consistently derogatory depictions of the Baroness, and Theodora's description is prefaced with "I turned her to face me and just enjoyed looking at her," displaying the pleasure Shori derives from Theodora's appearance despite her age and lack of conventional attractiveness. The correlation between age and appeal is, rather than inherently negative, a complex, perpetual shift between attractive and unattractive. The fluidity of this is complicated by Shori's admission that she is not sure exactly what she is attracted to about Theodora "I don't know why I like her so much, but I do."[107] She continues to admit her attraction alongside the aspects that complicate them. The inexplicability of her desire that she often references is consistent with the derogatory portrayal of the mature women that was seen through the figure of the Baroness in *The Blood of the Vampire*. While undeniably an improvement on attitudes towards post-menopausal women, it continues to echo those sentiments of a woman's depreciating value with age. It seems an unthinkable concept that the post-menopausal woman is still desired, absurd that she may still be sexually active and wanted—particularly by those younger than her.

Despite the confusion that Theodora's age causes, Shori is undeniably attracted to her as both a food source and an object of her sexual desire. Shori "stayed longer with her because something in her comforts and pleases me."[108] Where previously the post-menopausal woman is neither able to sustain life nor capable of being sexually desired, here the comfort that Shori seeks is directly linked to Theodora's age and the interactions they then have. It becomes a relationship of (somewhat) equals. When Theodora expresses that she wants to be with Shori, Shori "liked that more than I could have said."[109] Theodora is capable of agency over her own desire, and is desired even more for it. Shori actively craves physical touch with Theodora, as she "enjoyed every bit of the flesh-to-flesh contact when she bent and kissed me."[110] Shori also notes that "She was like Wright. She had some hold on me beyond the blood." This comparison to Wright serves to illustrate Shori's desire for Theodora; Wright, who Shori has sex with and is immensely attracted to, is just like Theodora. She is put in the same category as the twenty-three year old man; they both taste

[106] Butler, p. 90.
[107] Butler, p. 85.
[108] Butler, p. 85.
[109] Butler, p. 92.
[110] Butler, p. 93.

very good. Moreover, Shori is not the only one that desires Theodora—a man states that "I would have taken her to bed if I could have."[111] The vampire inhabits a liminal space between life and death, and Theodora inhabits a liminal space between young and old as Shori "made me feel more than I have since I was a girl."[112] While Theodora has not been literally turned by Shori's hunger, Shori's vampiric influence has breathed life into the dead. When investigating Theodora's murder, Shori is told that "She was very much in love with you, said she thought her life was pretty much over until you."[113] While Theodora *is* killed off, she died being more alive than she had in a long time.

In this chapter, I have demonstrated that feeding serves a multitude of purposes within the literature of the sapphic vampire. She simultaneously hungers for the body, the blood, and the love of another woman, unable to extricate one lust from another. The conflation of breastfeeding with predating and sexuality complicates both Victorian and contemporary images of motherhood. The vampiric mother may care for her child or drain her; the vampiric child may long for a mother or lust after her. The breast is positioned as an ambiguous body part: it is an extension of the self, yet its purpose is to nourish another, its use is maternal, yet it is often viewed as sexual—the sapphic vampire is able to view the breast as all at once, despite its somewhat contradictory nature. Moreover, the development of the attitude towards the post-menopausal woman in *The Blood of the Vampire* as opposed to *Fledgling* reframes societal standards of attractiveness—where previously she was dismissed, devalued, and unpalatable, now she is actively an object of another woman's attraction, alluring and sexual. Both being fed on and feeding another is pleasurable, and feeding may represent sex or happen *with* sex; the melding of hunger and lust effectively naturalises sapphic desire. The want for another woman is as innate to the sapphic vampire as her need to eat.

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[111] Butler, p. 259.
[112] Butler, p. 92.
[113] Butler, p. 258.

Chapter Two: Vampiric (Non)reproduction

The role the sapphic vampire takes, be it that of mother, daughter, or lover, is an inherently fluid one. She refuses to conform to expected behaviours or lifestyle choices—this applies to the way in which she chooses to create her family, and the positions she inhabits within it. This chapter considers queer notions of kinship, found family, and reproduction comparatively between Victorian and contemporary writing of vampiric fiction. Across the wide range of literature in which the vampire features, the nature of vampiric reproduction is ambiguous and ever-changing. In popular culture, the most common method of creating new vampires is through biting: in Stephanie Meyer's *Twilight Saga* the vampires are venomous, and a victim may become a vampire after a single bite. In *Dracula* Lucy becomes a vampire after being fed on again and again, dying, and then transforming in her grave. Mina is fed on repeatedly as well, but she is also made to drink the blood from Dracula's breast. Richelle Mead's *Vampire Academy* series takes both the typical approach and a somewhat unique one, as there are multiple kinds of vampire: amongst them are the Strigoi, which are vampires who have been bitten by another Strigoi and then forced to drink their blood, and the Moroi, who are vampires that reproduce like humans. As such, while there is a continuity across representation, the details of the methods of vampiric reproduction may vary: drink blood, have your blood drunk, receive a venomous bite, or simply be born. The texts I am analysing have significant overlap in the lore of their vampirism, and as a result the manner in which one becomes a vampire seems to be one of two ways: in *Carmilla* and *The Gilda Stories* vampirism is transmitted, but in *Camilla* it is depicted as an inherently negative illness that forever changes you, whilst in *The Gilda Stories* vampirism is considered a gift. In *The Blood of the Vampire* and *Fledgling* one is born as a vampire, but in *The Blood of the Vampire* this heredity is perceived as a curse, where in *Fledgling* it is a matter of intentionally manipulated genetics that provides an evolutionary advantage. The way authors approach these methods has evolved over time: from novels portraying a bleak picture of vampiric desire for family and love ending in death, to novels that centre love as the focal point and vampirism as a means by which bonds are strengthened: the newer texts, *The Gilda Stories* and *Fledgling*, take what their predecessors created and turned it into narratives that unambiguously celebrate queer love and chosen families.

In this chapter I will compare *Carmilla* to *The Gilda Stories* and *The Blood of the Vampire* to *Fledgling* in order to analyse their representations of vampiric reproduction and queer family building. Furthermore, I will examine the inherent liminality of these vampiric

families—dead/undead, related/not related, love/not love, family/not family—and explain why this liminality was, in the past, a necessary tactic in representing sapphic desire, and how, in the present, the liminal characters and relationships exist to confront preconceived notions of what constitutes a family and how it is configured. I will also analyse how the queerness that many believe is, according to Weston, "an end to society,"[1] or as Edelman elaborates, is viewed as "responsible for the undoing of social organization, collective reality, and, inevitably, life itself,"[2] does not represent the end of society, or disrupt notions of futurity—rather, queer chosen families *are* the future. In some literary contexts such as *Carmilla* or *The Gilda Stories*, as I will examine, the vampiric methods of reproduction align with Edelman's argument that queers should remove themselves from the societal imperative of reproductive futurity and instead embrace the death drive, celebrating bonds and relationships that are not viewed as reproductively viable. Conversely, the vampiric family may be read as bioessentialist procreation, regardless of its subversive appearance. However, the overarching approach of these texts is one that combines the two, existing apart from society and placing the hopes of futurity on a queer Child, while also stressing the irreplaceable significance of the chosen family.

Liminality is also an integral aspect of the chosen family. Lisa Knutson explains that authors have their characters exist marginally because "they seek liminal spaces and places that generate a sense of liberty and creativity and that offer the potential for social and political change and renewal."[3] The vampiric families that I will analyse all inhabit liminal spaces in varying ways: Laura is Carmilla's meal, her lover, her descendant; Harriet's love is both overwhelming and impossible; Gilda's chosen kin are reminiscent of her biological family, yet vastly different from them; Shori is human and not human, the matriarch of her chosen family and yet still a child. They challenge societal constructs of what counts as family, prioritising relationships that are chosen as opposed to biological or legal ties. All are characterised by contradictory emotions, conflicting motivations, and ambiguous roles within the families that they create. They all, in some manner, feel an urge to create a family of their own. Reproduction is an intrinsic aspect of the sapphic vampire—as Anthony says to Gilda, "You are part of our family and you will create others to be a part of it."[4]

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[1] Weston, p. 24.
[2] Edelman, p. 13.
[3] Lin Knutson, 'Monster Studies: Liminality, Home Spaces, and Ina Vampires in Octavia E. Butler's *Fledgling*', *University of Toronto Quarterly*, 87.1 (2018), 214-233 <doi: 10.3138/utq.87.1.214> (p. 214).
[4] Gomez, p. 177.

Vampirism: Contagion, Lesbianism

Carmilla's method of vampiric reproduction is so briefly mentioned in the novella that it is easily missed:

> A person, more or less wicked, puts an end to himself. A suicide, under certain circumstances, becomes a vampire. That specter visits living people in their slumbers; they die, and almost invariably, in the grave, develop into vampires. This happened in the case of the beautiful Mircalla, who was haunted by one of those demons.[5]

Crucially, Carmilla "was haunted by one of those demons," haunted by a person who transformed into a vampire due to their own suicide. The origin of vampirism is an existence born of brutality and despair, self-inflicted violence enacted by someone who is "more or less wicked," who then continues the cycle of violence by directing it toward others. Carmilla was, as she says, "'all but assassinated in my bed, wounded here,' she touched her breast, 'and never was the same since.'"[6] She was murdered in her sleep and in her grave morphed into the vampire we meet in Laura's account.

However brief the explanation of vampiric methods of reproduction may be, this understanding of it as a change, a turning that Carmilla endured rather than chose, paints her in a more sympathetic light. She began as a victim. Carmilla's existence is consequently liminal both regarding her status as dead/undead and for her role as victim/villain, which alters the way in which her desire for Laura, and her attempt at changing her, can be interpreted. Nonetheless, the change Carmilla experiences is something she could thus inflict upon Laura, which provides context for some of Carmilla's more obscure comments. For one, her obsession with Laura remains the inextricable desire of hunger and lust as examined in Chapter One, but it is also the manifestation of an additional vampiric instinct, adding another layer of motivation to Carmilla's already ambiguous actions. Following Carmilla's execution, Baron Vordenburg stays with Laura and her father for a few weeks and in that time educates them on the vampiric behavioural patterns he has learned: one being that, at times, "The vampire is prone to be fascinated with an engrossing vehemence, resembling the passion of love, by particular persons."[7] Here he is suggesting that Carmilla's love for his niece, Bertha, and now for Laura, is not love at all— merely obsession. However, rather than just a predator's obsession or hunger, Carmilla is also driven by sapphic desire, a desire that his

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[5] Le Fanu, p. 85.
[6] Le Fanu, p. 37.
[7] Le Fanu, p. 84.

heteronormative mindset misinterprets or refuses to acknowledge entirely. Regardless, he continues to explain that a vampire

> will, in these cases, husband and protract its murderous enjoyment with the refinement of an epicure, and heighten it by the gradual approaches of an artful courtship. In these cases it seems to yearn for something like sympathy and consent. In ordinary ones it goes direct to its object, overpowers with violence, and strangles and exhausts often at a single feast.[8]

This separates Bertha and Laura from the village girls that Carmilla drains. Classist undertones pervade this fact, as the text implies that the village girls are not worthy of courtship and therefore already occupy an undesirable status. Nina Auerbach also notices this, explaining that Carmilla is “distinguishing among her prey only on the sterling British basis of class. She preys on peasant girls but falls in love with Laura, a protected lady like herself.”[9] The village girls are merely a meal, whereas Bertha and Laura, two upper-class young ladies, are more than food, as for Carmilla part of the enjoyment of her conquest is the courtship, the romantic advances tied up within her hunger. The feeding is not the main event, but rather a kind of foreplay, an action preceding Carmilla’s eventual draining of Bertha and Laura to death. This passage signifies that when a vampire develops this dual desire, as Vordenburg specifies, she yearns for something akin to consent. Although the text does not explicitly state it, this desire for consent is the desire for love, because she wants to be permitted to love the girls, and she wants the girls to want her back; she wants her love reciprocated. This, of course, results in young Bertha’s death—but, unlike with Laura, there is no mention of the possibility of a vampiric afterlife for Betha. She simply dies. However, it is not inconsequential that this framing of it as a base, animalistic instinct is delivered by a man with a personal vendetta against Carmilla. He dehumanises her because of his preconceptions of her, preconceptions formed by his research on vampires and reading the journal of a man who loved Mircalla.

Unlike the village girls who were only a meal for Carmilla, or Bertha, who was temporarily a meal *and* a lover, Carmilla seems to have a more permanent goal with Laura. Although Laura survives her direct entanglement with Carmilla, it is clear that Carmilla not only intends to kill her, but to continue to be with her beyond her death. Of course, Carmilla intends it not as literal death—by turning her into a vampire, which, in the context of the novella, is synonymous with turning her into a lesbian, Laura becomes “dead” to the heteronormative society within which she was raised. Carmilla says to Laura, “Dearest, your

[8] Le Fanu, p. 84.
[9] Nina Auerbach, *Our Vampires, Ourselves* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), p. 41.

little heart is wounded; think me not cruel because I obey the irresistible law of my strength and weakness; if your dear heart is wounded, my wild heart bleeds with yours."[10] The mention of the "irresistible law," with the additional context of the vampiric obsession, refers to Carmilla's inability to control her multifaceted emotions toward Laura. She describes Laura's heart as "little" and "dear" where her own is "wild," indicating both Laura's innocence and Carmilla's non-human, somewhat sinister nature. She then continues to say that

> In the rapture of my enormous humiliation I live in your warm life, and you shall die—die, sweetly die—into mine. I cannot help it; as I draw near to you, you, in your turn, will draw near to others, and learn the rapture of that cruelty, which yet is love; so, for a while, seek to know no more of me and mine, but trust me with all your loving spirit.[11]

The most significant line is undeniably "I live in your warm life, and you shall die—die, sweetly die—into mine." Amanda Paxton, when analysing Carmilla and her actions in terms of a species of parasitic wasps, says of this moment that "Carmilla describes living inside Laura, recalling the ichneumon's position within the host body of the caterpillar."[12] There is indeed a strong parallel: Carmilla living in Laura's warm life refers to Carmilla's un-life being sustained by Laura's blood. She literally lives because of the "warm life" that she is taking from Laura. Carmilla's assertion that Laura will "sweetly die" into Carmilla's life indicates intent behind her actions. Just as it is Laura's life sustaining Carmilla, dying into Carmilla's life suggests that Laura's death will lead to an existence that is like Carmilla's. Carmilla intends for Laura's death to make them one and the same. She then makes brief reference to the parasitic nature of her kind, a kind that Laura will become: Carmilla draws near to Laura, Laura will draw near to others (in order to feed), and will "learn the rapture of that cruelty, which yet is love." To love is to suffer; as vampires love their victims, they kill them. Yet, due to Carmilla's desire for Laura being reciprocated, it is difficult to situate Laura entirely in the role of victim. It is, in part, that her victimisation is due to the perception of others, as here Carmilla stresses that although this may not look like love to outsiders, it remains as such.

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[10] Le Fanu, pp. 22-23.
[11] Le Fanu, p. 23.
[12] Amanda Paxton, 'Mothering by Other Means: Parasitism and J. Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla*', *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*, 28.1 (2021), 166-185 <doi:10.1093/isle/isz119> (p. 174).

The sentiment of lesbian love not being recognisable as such to outsiders (meaning, heterosexuals), is continued in the following exchange when Carmilla and Laura discuss death:

> "You are afraid to die?"
> "Yes, everyone is."
> "But to die as lovers may—to die together, so that they may live together. Girls are caterpillars while they live in the world, to be finally butterflies when the summer comes; but in the meantime there are grubs and larvae, don't you see—each with their peculiar propensities, necessities and structure. So says Monsieur Buffon, in his big book, in the next room."[13]

Carmilla refers to death, and therefore vampirism, as something Laura *must* undergo for them to live together as lovers. It very heavily echoes the sentiments of sweetly dying. The comparison that Carmilla makes between girls and caterpillars is, however, of significantly more interest. Paxton explains that in the book Carmilla refers to, "when Buffon makes mention of caterpillars, he discusses them in relation to their reproductive systems. He attributes the transmutation of caterpillars into butterflies to the fact that caterpillars have no reproductive organs."[14] Therefore, in Carmilla's comparison, she very well may be referring to the ability to vampirically reproduce. As a human, or more importantly, a lesbian, she will not or cannot reproduce sexually, but with vampirism comes the ability to make others into vampires. This metaphor of caterpillars and butterflies draws a clear parallel to the states of being human or vampire. They are changing forms; as the caterpillar becomes a butterfly, so does the human become a vampire. In this nature, Carmilla then asserts vampirism as the superior, more pleasing form. This comparison also refers to a circle-of-life thinking, naturalising instinct and the necessity of feeding on others; the other people—the grubs and larvae—are inferior as they will not become butterflies. The grubs and larvae are the inconsequential humans, such as the village girls or the other inhabitants of Laura's home. They are nothing more than a meal, and inferior to Laura and Carmilla, even before Laura enters the chrysalis that is her grave.

The chrysalis is a crucial concept in this passage. The conjunction of this metaphor with Carmilla's comments on death make it clear that she views death as not only necessary, but as a kind of transitional stage. Carmilla evidently believes that death is developmental, an evolution from a less evolved form (human/caterpillar) to a more evolved and graceful one (vampire/butterfly). She is draining Laura's blood because she loves her and feels it

[13] Le Fanu, p. 30.
[14] Paxton, p. 173.

necessary, feels that she is bettering Laura's life. However, Paxton argues that in her ichneumon comparison, Carmilla is not the butterfly that she envisions herself, as "If Laura is like a caterpillar, Carmilla herself resembles the ichneumon grubs and larvae,"[15] as she feeds on Laura's caterpillar body until she is nothing but a husk and Carmilla emerges, stronger for it. However, if Laura becomes a vampire as Carmilla intends, this metaphor would perhaps look like Carmilla draining Laura until she is *nearly* empty, and then a now-parasite emerges from the shell of who Laura used to be. As Carmilla says, it is "a cruel love—strange love, that would have taken my life. Love will have its sacrifices. No sacrifice without blood."[16] This again reflects on the way that society does not view the queer/vampiric love as love.

In this sense Carmilla's form of reproduction is consistent with the approach that Edelman suggests, as her "turning" of Laura, whilst indeed a form of procreation, ignores the potential "child" that Laura could have created in a heterosexual/human union. Futurity both is and is not a prominent factor in the life/unlife Carmilla wants them to have together: they have the future in the sense that they could experience the passing of time together, the years stretching out before them—but they also do not, as futurity is conceived in heterosexual society as *reproductive* futurity, secured through the figure of the child. Their future would hence be viewed by the society from which they originate as a stagnant future, one that is non-productive in the sense that it foregoes biological reproduction; rather than a future shaped by progression or development, their future remains in stasis.

Due to the transformation-focused language that Carmilla uses, it becomes clear that vampirism in *Carmilla* is portrayed as simultaneously an ending of life and a potential future. Regardless of the positive spin that Carmilla attempts to put on vampirism, her variation of vampirism is a literal illness, and a terminal one: all the women she infects inevitably end up dead (although, with Laura as a potential exception). Bertha suffers from an illness and dies "without suspicion of the cause of the sufferings,"[17] a village girl "fancied she saw a ghost," and "has been dying ever since,"[18] multiple deaths caused by Carmilla are attributed to "plague or fever,"[19] and Laura, even though we do not know the specific cause of her death, too ended up "dead," as the reader is informed in the prologue to the novella; in the years between Laura writing her recollection of the events in the text and the fictional publisher

[15] Paxton, p. 174.
[16] Le Fanu, p. 37
[17] Le Fanu, p. 8.
[18] Le Fanu, p. 26.
[19] Le Fanu, p. 26.

receiving her tale, "she had died in the interval."[20] Baron Vordenburg states of the vampire's grasp that "it leaves a numbness in the limb it seizes, which is slowly, if ever, recovered from."[21] Carmilla touches Laura frequently, all over her body; Laura does not recover from Carmilla's loaded touch and likely becomes "like" Carmilla post-mortem—therefore not quite dying. However, for every other woman, Carmilla's influence is painted as a kind of contagion. As I am examining vampirism as a metaphor for queerness, this association of Carmilla with contagion divulges how, in Le Fanu's time, sapphic relationships would have been perceived—if sapphists were recognised as existing at all. The Victorian thinking regarding sapphic sex was that "such behaviour was impossible was between women,"[22] to the extent that no language existed to describe it. The association that Le Fanu creates between lesbianism and contagion implies that lesbianism can be caught, it is a sickness, and lesbians are an active threat to young women. While examining transgressive desire in *Carmilla*, Elizabeth Signorotti discusses the way in which female vampirism was often intended to be read "in a more figurative sense. In addition to the idea of the literal contagion of the blood, vampirism came to be associatively linked with the notion of moral contagion and especially with the 'contamination' of lesbianism."[23] The equating of vampirism/lesbianism to a moral negativity is undeniably evident in *Carmilla*. The symptoms the women of *Carmilla* experience makes clear the text's intention to villainise Carmilla and the affect she has. Her hunger makes them sick, her affection makes them sick; sapphic desire makes them sick, often unto death. Carmilla, depicted as the embodiment of sapphic desire, is frequently mentioned to be poorly; her mother says that she is of "delicate health,"[24] and she often suffers from "languor and exhaustion."[25] Although this may merely be a reflection of the fashionable "look" of illness with the time, such as was influenced by tuberculosis, this nevertheless creates a direct parallel between sickness and queerness; Carmilla is both the carrier of and suffering from the disease. Susan Sontag writes that "TB was imagined to be an aphrodisiac, and to confer extraordinary powers of seduction."[26] Carmilla's threat, her hunger and her lust, are entwined with her state of illness. Even eradicating the scourge that is

[20] Le Fanu, p. 1.
[21] Le Fanu, p. 86.
[22] Anna Clark, 'Anne Lister's Construction of Lesbian Identity', *Journey of the History of Sexuality*, 7.1 (1996) 23-50 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3840441> [accessed 14 March 2024] p. 24.
[23] Elizabeth Signorotti, 'Repossessing the Body: Transgressive Desire in "Carmilla" and "Dracula"', *Criticism,* 38.4 (1996), 607-632 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23118160> [accessed 23 January 2024] (p. 610).
[24] Le Fanu, p. 16.
[25] Le Fanu, p. 20.
[26] Susan Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor and AIDS and Its Metaphors* (New York: Doubleday, 1990), p. 13.

Carmilla does not cure Laura of it; she has been infected, and the damage has been irreparably done.

Beyond vampiric reproduction, Carmilla's presence is also significant for her ability to *remove* Laura from the typical human reproductive cycle. Their queer desire—that ends in death—is characteristic of Edelman's argument in *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*. Edelman argues that "the death drive names what the queer, in the order of the social, is called forth to figure: the negativity opposed to every form of social viability."[27] Here he suggests that queerness should embrace the antagonistic role that heterosexual society fears, that which disinvests from the promise of futurity secured in the figure of the child. Carmilla and Laura embody this antagonism, removing themselves from reproductive society first through their desire, and later through Carmilla's death ensuring she no longer "spreads" this antagonistic queer force. Signorotti agrees that Carmilla and Laura's desire is destructive, stating that "Their transgressive relationship disrupts the laws of procreation necessary to maintain social order."[28] As I outlined in the introduction to this thesis, Carmilla is the personification of Freud's concept of the death drive. She is prone to fits of rage, she returns to her homeland, hunts village girls with similar characteristics, and upper-class girls that have commonalities as well, is compelled to reproduce her name anagrammatically, and the last girl she hunts, Laura, is genetically related to her, indicating that this is a repeat of prior kinship. She is stuck in numerous loops of time, stagnating, unchanging. Carmilla furthermore fits within the removal from reproductive futurity that Edelman posits: she is driven by a desire for a sort of suspended future, one that involves no change and no children, and she attempts to induct Laura into this queer life through death. Although, it is not quite death—it is a living death, a manner of living that is viewed as death by society, just as their love for each other is not viewed as love by the very same.

This is precisely what Edelman is addressing, as, in relation to *Carmilla*, Rae Yan states of Edelman's theory that he "links together capitalistic narratives of re/productivity centred around the futurity of the Child as a normative figure pitted against the radical alterity of the unproductive queer, like Laura, who embodies no future, no possible productive path."[29] The vampiric/queer mode of existence is viewed as invalid, as lesser, predominantly due to its non-reproductive state. Edelman asserts that by manifesting society's death drive he

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[27] Edelman, p. 9.
[28] Signorotti, p. 618.
[29] Rae X. Yan, '"Artful Courtship," "Cruel Love," and the Language of Consent in *Carmilla*, *Nineteenth Century Gender Studies*, 16.3 (2020), <https://www.ncgsjournal.com/issue163/yan.html> [accessed 29 January 2024] (para. 20).

does not "intend to propose some "good" that will thereby be assured."[30] Rather, there is no good that can be assured, and Laura and Carmilla are no exception: there is no good in their ending. Although Laura may have turned into a vampire, Carmilla is dead—their eternal future together has been cut short before it has even begun. While Carmilla insisted that the sapphic relationship *is* a productive path, the actions of older, heterosexual men prevented Laura and Carmilla from going any further. This death drive goes beyond Laura's ability to reproduce, however, and affects her father also. Paxton suggests that "with the death of his only child, presumably a result of Carmilla's infection, Laura's father has lost all chances that his name might be carried forth in subsequent generations. (Indeed, the text works toward this erasure insofar as the reader never even learns his name)."[31] This is a fascinating point to consider, as, by recalling Freud's death drive for a moment, Carmilla's reproduction of her name anagrammatically is then read as indicative of her vampiric reproductive ability, and, contrarily, Laura's father does not have a name at all, so he is represented as completely sterile. Ultimately, the patriarchal and heteronormative mode of existence has been successfully thwarted as Laura does not marry because Carmilla was an effective embodiment of the destruction of heterosexual society.

Yet, even as Carmilla is depicted as an illness and a threat to the reproductive future of society, Le Fanu hesitates to designate her and her love for Laura as inherently harmful. Carmilla gives Laura a "possible productive path," it is simply not what a heterosexual society would view as productive. Signorotti expresses a similar sentiment, stating that "Le Fanu, however, refrains from making them culpable for their procreative transgression and from condemning his vampiric representation of lesbian desire."[32] His placement of Carmilla as a victim before she is a predator is noteworthy. Through this, he makes her more sympathetic to the reader. Furthermore, Laura is not depicted as an entirely unwilling participant in their relationship, either. For one, as I have established, Carmilla's plans for Laura do not end with her death as her death is the catalyst that begins their life together. Because of the biological relation that Laura has to Carmilla, the narrative of Carmilla making Laura into a vampire becomes, rather than Carmilla's turning or Gilda's rebirth, a reclamation. Rather than, as Paxton argues, Carmilla being symbolic of the parasite, Carmilla is simply taking back what she always viewed as hers, that is, as part of her family. Laura's

[30] Edelman, p. 4.
[31] Paxton, p. 179.
[32] Signorotti, p. 618.

father states that her mother "was maternally descended from the Karnsteins,"[33] meaning that, as Carmilla is a Karnstein also, Laura's connection with Carmilla has been inherited from her mother. This relation has been carried matrilineally, effectively rendering the patriarchal influence redundant once Carmilla reconnects with Laura.

When taking their genetic relation into consideration, the illness-like symptoms that Laura experiences take on new meaning, as do some of Carmilla's comments. For instance, "I live in your warm life," now refers not only to Carmilla sustaining herself on Laura's blood, but also the fact that their genetic connection means that Carmilla's genes, those of her lineage, literally live on in Laura. If Carmilla is an illness/vampire/lesbian then Laura, sharing her DNA, may carry a trait dormant in her genes, an innate and inherited attribute. She is, within the logic of the narrative, predisposed to sapphic desire just like a congenital disease. This is, however, reliant on whether this queerness is a result of vampirism, or if it were always present. Kate Mishler states that this is "Carmilla's re-possession of the female body, reclaiming Laura and any monstrous offspring for the maternal rather than the paternal bloodline through vampiric reproduction."[34] By making Laura into a vampire she would be no longer human, no longer her father's child, but instead she would be more like Carmilla. Mishler continues to say that "Carmilla's insistence on the need to fulfill her predetermined ownership of Laura suggests that this is an act of (re)possession."[35] Carmilla is taking back what she rightly believes is hers, both romantically and literally. It is multi-layered; Laura is Carmilla's source of nourishment, the object of her desire, and her biological descendant.

However, not only does Laura belong to Carmilla, but through her "illness" and its "symptoms" she begins to belong to herself. Laura says, "I found myself a changed girl," and that "an idea that I was slowly sinking took gentle, and, somehow, not unwelcome, possession of me."[36] She observes changes within herself, and a loss of control, yet enjoys this relinquishing of her past state of being. Mishler notes that "Laura recounts her strange malaise as an eroticized transformation of self, a consensual repossession of her body outside of male desire."[37] Laura states that this change is not entirely unwanted. "Consensual" is the key word in Mishler's statement. Despite the negative affects of the illness she is experiencing, Laura perceives the changes as gentle and loving, and it is this change that

[33] Le Fanu, p. 58.
[34] Kate Mishler, 'Reclaiming the Matrilineal: Marital Disinheritance and the Irish Female Gothic in Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu's "Carmilla" and James Joyce's "The Dead"', *New Hibernia Review*, 24.2 (2020), 71-87 <https://doi.org/10.1353/nhr.2020.0019> (p. 78).
[35] Mishler, p. 79.
[36] Le Fanu, p. 42.
[37] Mishler, p. 79.

leads to Laura's erotic "dreams" that frighten her, yet she revels in. Carmilla, affecting this change and being the source of eroticism in Laura's account, is taking back what was hers all along, a "repossession." Laura enjoys this repossession and actively wants it. She is not an unwilling participant, but as Yan observes, "Laura is an equal partner in this queer relationship and evinces in plain terms and actions her erotic desires for Carmilla. She hungrily pursues Carmilla."[38]

Opposing Mishler's view of Laura as enthusiastically consenting, due to the discomfort that Laura expresses at some of Carmilla's affections and statements, Yan also believes that it "is not her desire for Carmilla that lies at the surface of their relationship, but the suppression of a painful experience with a lover whose sedating influence disallows her the means to consent fully to these "ordeals."'[39] However, this theory fails to consider the cultural context of the time. Le Fanu could hardly have written a vampire story in which the main characters embrace their sapphism and live happily ever after, as vampirism—and therefore lesbianism—will have been viewed negatively by almost all readers. Although Le Fanu is sympathetic, this is a Victorian story about a predator, and therefore to have Laura explicitly reciprocate Carmilla's transgressive desire would be to make a monster of her as well. She is indeed uncomfortable at Carmilla's affections, but discomfort does not necessarily equate a lack of reciprocation. Laura's desire is intentionally obscure because she is victim and transgressor simultaneously, just as Carmilla is. Furthermore, to claim that Carmilla's influence rendered Laura unable to consent fully nullifies Laura's agency throughout the text. It is not *only* because of Carmilla's "sedating influence" that Laura feels this way, as the equivocal emotions that she experiences are persistent and her affections for Carmilla, although confused, are enduring, as the text ends, over ten years later, with Laura's desire to see Carmilla once more:

> It was long before the terror of recent events subsided; and to this hour the image of Carmilla returns to memory with ambiguous alternations—sometimes the playful, languid, beautiful girl; sometimes the writhing fiend I saw in the ruined church; and often from a reverie I have started, fancying I heard the light step of Carmilla at the drawing room door. [40]

She remains unable to express solely clear disgust or longing for Carmilla, but it is her admission regarding Carmilla's presence that betrays her true feelings. Signorotti's interpretation of this scene is that

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[38] Yan, para. 8.
[39] Yan, para. 11.
[40] Le Fanu, p. 86.

> Laura ends her account fancying that Carmilla is poised to enter the drawing room. This image suggests her longing for Carmilla to re-enter her, to penetrate her once more. By this point, Laura has changed as a result of her vampiric love. No longer a mere 'sign,' she has become a fleshed-out, desiring woman. Far from restoring Laura to her father's system of exchange, the conclusion of her narrative confirms the reader's suspicions that everything Carmilla represents, if not Carmilla herself, remains loose and desirable in Styria.[41]

Their relationship is characterised by ambiguity that Le Fanu utilises to dance between sympathy for his characters and passing judgement on lesbian desire, to be unclear on whether Carmilla and Laura qualify as family or not, and to never specify if Laura ends up as a vampire. Whether she has been contaminated by Carmilla's illness or has simply been reclaimed by it, and if it is the case that she does not become vampiric post-mortem, she is permanently altered by her connection to Carmilla; as we are not told otherwise, it is possible that her death enabled exactly what Carmilla wanted. Laura may yet exist, spreading death and queerness, carrying the torch that Carmilla can no longer, continuing her predatory (yet perhaps desired) transgressions.

Creating a Family of Vampires

In contrast to *Carmilla*, I will show that mutual love is the foundation of the vampiric family in *The Gilda Stories.* Likewise, Gomez's vampires demonstrate how the ambiguous roles and necessary reciprocation of the queer chosen family position it as a more evolved kind of kinship. In contrast to the unclear boundaries of *Carmilla* where Carmilla seeks something *like* consent and Laura never explicitly decides if she is attracted to or repulsed by Carmilla, *The Gilda Stories* positions mutual affection as a requirement for induction into the vampiric lifestyle. The inclusion into the family must be wanted by both parties. This desire is demonstrated in the first chapter of the novel; when the first Gilda changes the Girl into a vampire and thus into Gilda she makes it clear that this is something the Girl must independently decide, as she says, "You must choose your path again," and then asks, "Do you trust me?"[42] The relationship between the first Gilda and her successor is inherently characterised by mutual respect, reciprocated desire, and trust—and these attributes are a non-negotiable component of their bond. Gilda's process of turning others then models the importance of reciprocity that the first Gilda demonstrated: when Gilda is drinking Julius' blood as she turns him, she "waited for him to make a sign of protest. If he did she would

[41] Signorotti, p. 619.
[42] Gomez, The Gilda Stories, p. 45.

leave him to his life and wipe these moments from his mind. But he only opened wider for her."[43] Whilst the consent is non-verbal, Gilda explicitly seeks some form of confirmation while staying vigilant for rejection. Tolerance would not be enough; pulling Gilda closer is a physical cue that he not only assents to becoming part of her family, but actively desires it.

Yet, the other instance of Gilda turning someone is done without their express permission. Gilda comes across Ermis in an abandoned building, unresponsive due to a sedative she had ingested in order to die, and therefore Gilda is unable to tell if Ermis would want to be part of her family. This is a different take on suicide as a means to becoming a vampire; where it is the violence of the act that turns a person into a vampire in *Carmilla*, it is being saved from the brink of death that turns Ermis, making the transformation rooted in life rather than death. Gilda admits that this changing is in part due to selfish reasons, but also that, upon touching Ermis' mind, she feels immediate kinship with her and senses a small desire to live. Although this changing was non-consensual, Gilda later says: "Don't feel obligated to take this journey if that's not what you want. You can still end your life if you wish, or go on alone."[44] She attempts to restore Ermis' agency, expressing encouragement for any choice she would make, inclusive of maintaining her choice to die.

However, although the desire for kinship must be reciprocated, there are times when Gilda revokes the ability of others to choose. The act of vampiric family building is ostensibly a selfless one—or rather, one born of mutual need—but Gilda occasionally refuses to prioritise the desire others have for kinship with her. She is hesitant to be the one to birth a new vampire into the vampiric family. Sorel has to urge her on, stating that Bird "can be mother, father, sister, lover—but she cannot create the family for you. You are part of our family and you will create others to be a part of it. This is no one's mission but your own."[45] This demonstrates the fluidity of familial roles that the sapphic lover, in this case Bird, can inhabit. Where in *Carmilla* the ambiguously maternal affections complicate the sexual desire, here it adds a depth to their relationship: one person is capable of providing maternal, sisterly, romantic, and sexual love all at once. Yet, regardless of Bird's multiplicity, she is unable to inhabit the role of child—the onus is put on Gilda to create a child of her own, but when given the opportunity, she hesitates.

The first human that Gilda deeply connects with is Aurelia, who she meets in 1921 after purchasing a farm neighbouring Aurelia's. Aurelia was newly widowed and the two of

[43] Gomez, *The Gilda Stories*, p. 192.
[44] Gomez, *The Gilda Stories*, p. 246.
[45] Gomez, *The Gilda Stories*, p. 177.

them grew close as Gilda helped her find purpose in her life through companionship and activism, close enough that Gilda considers the possibility of making Aurelia part of her vampiric family:

> how easily she could make her one of them. The knowledge landed heavily on Gilda's chest, almost cutting her breath from her. Aurelia would be acquiescent, eager, letting Gilda draw the blood and return it in the ritual of sharing that would bind them together forever. The pulsing of Aurelia's blood at her temple mesmerized Gilda. Here could begin a new family, she thought. Hunger and desire almost pulled Gilda across the parlor.[46]

Hunger, lust, and the desire to vampirically procreate intermingle for Gilda, and the power and responsibility of turning Aurelia into a vampire is overwhelming. The knowledge is "heavy" on her chest, "cutting her breath from her," and she is "mesmerized"—hyper focused on a small sensory detail. These almost replicate symptoms of an anxiety attack, highlighting how distressing the thought of creating a new family member is for Gilda—yet Gilda believes that Aurelia would let herself be turned, would reciprocate this desire to make their bond permanent—but Gilda does not offer her the option. Instead, she justifies her hesitance by arguing:

> Aurelia's life was now full of many new plans and people. She had begun to make a real place for herself among people she cared for. To claim this life now would be thievery. To pull Aurelia away from the ties she'd made, the commitment she felt, and to ask her to live apart from these things would be cheating her.[47]

Gilda embeds Aurelia in the present, implying that the inevitable distance to humanity that comes with vampirism would be detrimental to every aspect of Aurelia's life. Gilda specifies that "to ask her to live apart from those things would be cheating her," and yet, by not asking Aurelia, Gilda is cheating her of the life they might have had together. Gilda goes on to think, "As much as she longed to end the loneliness, to find a partner as Sorel had done, this was not the time, nor was it best for Aurelia."[48] Gilda rationalises her fears by framing it as "what is best for Aurelia" whilst, once more, never giving Aurelia the chance to make an informed decision on the future she might have had. If, as in *Carmilla*, we consider Gomez's use of vampirism as a metaphor for queerness, Gilda's hesitation is based in the potentially negative effects of removing Aurelia from normative human life and recruiting her among the ranks of their queer family. Gilda's fears are the manifestation of heterosexual society's perception of the queer lifestyle: she frames vampirism as incompatible with life. Forgoing straight society

[46] Gomez, *The Gilda Stories*, p. 120.
[47] Gomez, *The Gilda Stories*, p. 121.
[48] Gomez, *The Gilda Stories*, p. 126.

and “becoming” a lesbian would, Gilda worries, remove Aurelia from the ties she had made and the people she cared for because queerness would ostracise her. Gilda is afraid to claim Aurelia’s “life,” because Gilda does not view vampiric existence—queer existence—as truly living, echoing sentiments read above in relation to *Carmilla*.

Gilda’s interactions with Julius almost end similarly. He evidently desires Gilda; initially as a potential partner, but he is happy to be with her in *any* way. Gilda (telepathically) tells Julius, “*The life I offer is not for you. I feel for you as I would if I had a brother I loved.*[49] As with Aurelia, Gilda assumes that her life—her queer, not-quite-life—would be incompatible with the modern human life that Julius leads, that vampiric life is “not for him.” When Gilda, at Julius’ insistence, relents and offers to let him join their family, she states:

> I need an ally, a brother. If you want it, life can be yours, and we will be sister and brother throughout time. Our love will outlast the tears, the plays, the lights, these old buildings. What you must sacrifice may be too much, but once done it is final.[50]

Gilda’s statement that the sacrifice may be too much divulges the part of her that still attempts to steer Julius away from choosing the vampiric life; but it is that very word, “life,” that is what Julius wants. At the prospect of having a brother, Gilda’s perception of vampiric life begins to shift—its enduring nature, the infinite possibility of this queer life, promises endless love and kinship. Having lost his parents, Julius wants this enduring love, and choosing this form of family gives him exactly that.

The desire for family being reciprocated is imperative because, where Le Fanu hides the reality of reciprocated sapphic desire between Laura and Carmilla under a predatory mask of dubious consent (as it is therefore easy to deny that it is *not* queer love), Gomez makes it obvious that her characters are aware of and actively want the queer life and family that they will be inducted into. Carmilla is turned against her will, and Laura never can make up her mind, rendering her consent intermediary; she neither wants nor does not want Carmilla’s affections. Conversely, the vampires of *The Gilda Stories* are clear that they want, value, and celebrate the life they have together. This contrast makes Gomez’s celebration of the chosen family unmistakable.

During Gilda’s process of transforming Julius, the figure of the mother is recurringly mentioned. When Gilda begins the process of blood exchange, “She opened her eyes and her

[49] Gomez, *The Gilda Stories*, p. 184.
[50] Gomez, *The Gilda Stories*, p. 191.

arms; Julius lay in them like a child."[51] She begins to occupy a maternal role, just as, as discussed in Chapter One, the first Gilda and Bird did for her. In order to share the blood to complete the ritual Gilda then kisses Julius, and it was "a kiss both passionate and chaste, leaving Julius feeling like a child in her arms, yet still a man."[52] The physical affection is ambiguous, sexual and familial, demonstrating the liminal nature of the roles that the members of Gilda's family inhabit. Gilda continues the ritual and, as Julius drinks from her breast, further positioning Gilda as a mother figure, she urges him to give something back, to exchange rather than take. Gilda is

> immediately flooded with the sense of well-being only a child can feel when lying in the arms of its parent. She opened her eyes and looked up at the snapshot of Julius' mother, feeling the complete joy he had felt as a child. He left this most exquisite feeling with her, his gift as he pulled back from Gilda's breast.[53]

Julius melds biological and chosen family as he turns, Gilda assumes a maternal position, just as the first Gilda and Bird had for her, and he reciprocates with the affection he had for his mother. Mothers are solidified as an essential role, just as in *Carmilla*. Ellen Brinks and Lee Talley also notice this theme of maternity in relation to turning, as they state that in "a sexually and subjectively transformative act with connotations of maternal nurturing, Gilda creates a mutuality based on difference, not the one-way, deadly exchange imagined in traditional vampire lore."[54] Julius is able to contribute the memory of a mother from his different lived experience to Gilda's; it is both the mother and the difference that makes it so valuable.

Julius' biological family being a crucial component of his transition into vampirism reflects how the first Gilda and her successor both rely on past ties to influence their present. The first Gilda does not initially plan to make the Girl-that-becomes-Gilda into a vampire; it is upon having bathed the Girl and fed her, having looked into her eyes and seeing a "clear purpose" in them, that a memory is triggered within the first Gilda. It is this memory that creates her desire for the Girl to join their family:

> Gilda also saw a need for family that matched her own. She closed her eyes, and in her mind the musky smell of her mother's garments rose. She almost reached out to

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[51] Gomez, *The Gilda Stories*, p. 191.
[52] Gomez, *The Gilda Stories*, p. 192.
[53] Gomez, *The Gilda Stories*, p. 192.
[54] Ellen Brinks and Lee Talley, 'Unfamiliar Ties: Lesbian Constructions of Home and Family in Jeanette Winterson's *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* and Jewelle Gomez's *The Gilda Stories*', in *Homemaking: Women Writers and the Politics and Poetics of Home*, ed. by Fiona R. Barnes and Catherine Wiley (New York: Routledge, 2021), pp. 145-174 <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003249481> (p. 158).

> the phantom of her past there in the lamplit room but caught her breath and shook her head slightly. Gilda knew then that she wanted the Girl to stay.[55]

A parallel between the Girl and Gilda is drawn, a connection that spans race and age—the musky smell of the first Gilda's mother's garments echoes the Girls' treasured memories of her mother. Both are influenced by such memories, as it is a memory of the Girl's mother that guides her to feeling comfortable at Woodard's: despite the racial differences, the Girl observes that the first Gilda's face "was not unlike her mother's,"[56] and Bird's smell "reminded the Girl of her mother."[57] There is a focus on sensory recollections that equates the new, physically present relationships to people from one's past through tangible commonalities. Brinks and Talley observe that the Girl "clings to an idea of home as the memory of lived experiences, the richly inviting, sensual ones tied to her mother's presence."[58] Comparisons to Gilda's mother reframe her concept of home, of kinship, adapting to her altered situation. By focusing on what is the same rather than what is different, the Girl can nevertheless draw comfort from an entirely unfamiliar community.

Mother and daughter are not the only familial roles that Gomez utilises to explain the significance of the bonds that Gilda and her family form with one another. Sibling relationships are frequently mentioned: Gilda twice refers to Julius as a brother, Anthony "seemed to be brother and sister to her at the same time,"[59] and Bird is referred to as Gilda's sister. When Gilda meets Effie, a vampire hundreds of years older than herself, she thinks that just as "Julius had become her brother, Effie would be her sister."[60] These sibling relationships are not singular: Anthony exhibits a gender-fluidity within his role as both brother and sister, Julius is her brother and her child, Bird is her sister, mother, and lover, and Effie is a sister, a lover, and possesses an air of maturity that too places her in a maternal position for Gilda. Why is it that these characters inhabit fluid familial relationships? Weston states that "sibling ties and friendship have offered some of the few cultural categories available for making sense of powerful feelings toward a person of the same sex."[61] By equating these relationships with that of siblings, Gomez illustrates the depth of the characters' relationships, providing a frame of reference for a heteronormative mindset that privileges biological connections; it conveys their dynamic and the depth of their

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[55] Gomez, *The Gilda Stories*, p. 16.
[56] Gomez, *The Gilda Stories*, p. 16.
[57] Gomez, *The Gilda Stories*, p. 20.
[58] Brinks and Talley, p. 159.
[59] Gomez, *The Gilda Stories*, p. 71.
[60] Gomez, The Gilda Stories, p. 217.
[61] Weston, p. 119.

relationship. Kinship is therefore framed as a mindset rather than a chance of birth, as Jerry Rafiki Jenkins argues, stating that as "suggested by Gilda's transition from vampiric daughter to vampiric parent and sister, the creation and reproduction of the vampiric family is an ideological, not a biological process."[62]

This is not to say that biology is rendered insignificant: Gilda's genetic family consistently influences the chosen family that she surrounds herself with throughout the novel. Memories of her mother, father, or sisters are frequent. Christopher Lewis argues that "Deliberately maintaining a connection to the familial groupings of one's past is […] as important as consciously choosing family in the present."[63] By associating the past with the present, Gilda can create new family *and* retain a hold on her past, acknowledging the interconnectedness of it all. Brinks and Talley similarly state that "Gilda's concept and experience of family responds to the past as the common ground for a possible future."[64] The idea of this as a "response" is crucial; just as Lewis specifies that the connections Gilda makes need to be deliberate, conceptualising this connection as a response means it is not an inevitable result of her lived experiences, but a choice that is capable of change. Based on her choices, Gilda's definition of family constantly evolves, yet invariably circles back to her biological family—but always as a f reference rather than a model that must be exactly replicated. Brinks and Talley argue that family should be

> more than blood ties or a similar historical experience […] to define family solely along these lines would situate it in an unalterable relation to the past. Gilda's concept and experience of family responds to the past as the common ground for a possible future.[65]

Again, it is a response; those she feels kinship have relations to her past but are not bound by it. Moreover, the past is not in a static state; new experiences reframe the way she perceives her past, and as those she loved become part of her past, such as the first Gilda, they come to influence who she loves just as much as her mother did.

Whilst biological family is undeniably an influence on the kinship one may create in the present, *The Gilda Stories* frames the past, and genetic family, as a communication between the present and future. This depiction of communication is a notable development

[62] Jerry Rafiki Jenkins, 'Race Freedom, and the Black Vampire in Jewelle Gomez's "The Gilda Stories", *African American Review*, 43.2/3 (2013), 313-328 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23784061> [accessed 19 January 2024] (p. 318).
[63] Christopher S. Lewis, 'Queering Personhood in the Neo-Slave Narrative: Jewelle Gomez's The Gilda Stories', *African American Review*, 47.4 (2014), 447-459 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24589833> [accessed 18 January 2024] (p. 455).
[64] Brinks and Talley, p. 162.
[65] Brinks and Talley, p. 162.

from the way Le Fanu frames the past and biological relations in *Carmilla*. In *Carmilla* Laura and Carmilla are related through Laura's maternal line, the Karnsteins, and this biological tie is narratively necessary to legitimise the connection between them. By having his characters literally related, Le Fanu possesses room to explore their intense erotic relationship without moral outrage from a society that believed, as I noted earlier, that sex acts were impossible between women, as any questioning about sapphic undertones could be explained away as an overwhelming reclaimed bond of sister/motherhood. The genetic link between lovers is an example of living in an "unalterable relation" to the past that defines family within heterosexual definitions of biological relations. Where Gomez's vampiric family respects the past, Carmilla and Laura are bound by it. The difference lies in the fact that Gomez is not equating the characters to biological kin to *hide* the queer desire, but rather to explore the multifaceted roles that queers may inhabit to best support their chosen family. "Blood" relation in *The Gilda Stories* cements vampiric familial connections and asserts them as equivalent to biological ties, playing with idea of "blood family." Familial links are not singularly associated with vampiric creation, either, as shown when Gilda, while being bitten by Eleanor, thinks, "She did not want to be bound to this woman by blood."[66] Family is then fluid, able to gain more members regardless of said member's past. Gomez's vampires are resolutely unbound to the past; their fluid definition of kinship is indicative of the relationship between biological and chosen families that Weston discusses, wherein

> many lesbians and gay men began to portray themselves as people who seek not only to maintain ties with blood or adoptive relations, but also to establish families of their own. This vision resists more conventional views of family that locate gay people outside kinship's door.[67]

In 1991, when both Weston and Gomez's texts were published, legal or biological family was near-impossible for homosexuals to attain, so instead they conceptualised family outside of heterosexual societal standards (a man and a woman married with two children: the ideal nuclear family). Family grew to encompass more than the biological or legal—it denotes a closeness, an ability to rely upon each other, an enduring love. Gomez actively challenged the idea that kinship was beyond gay people, instead presenting a family that celebrates love above all else.

As I established, Gilda's initial fear of turning Aurelia and Julius is a reflection of heteronormative perceptions of the queer lifestyle: it is non-productive, a stasis, just as

[66] Gomez, *The Gilda Stories*, p. 97.
[67] Weston, p. 17.

Carmilla and Laura's life would have been perceived. Her development, upon changing Julius, is to view their life for what it really is. The text frames this evolution of her mindset as an acceptance of the value of the queer family, amplified by the way the vampiric transformation is framed: there is recurring imagery of "birthing" or "rebirthing" when a human is changed into a vampire. This is begun when Gilda refers to Bird as the "body that gave her life."[68] When Gilda turns Julius, she says that "If you want it, life can be yours."[69] The depiction of their vampiric existence as "life" implies that during their human pasts they were not truly living, situating queerness/vampirism as an evolved form of living. The text then posits this reciprocal, queer-focused life as the superior one. As the first Gilda says, Sorel "had pointed her and all of his children toward an enduring power that did not feed on death. Gilda was sustained by sharing the blood and by maintaining the vital connections to life."[70] Moreover, the birthing imagery further cements the chosen kin as legitimate; their secondary birth, into vampirism, mimics the birthing mother and her infant. This method of breeding highlights the family, but not centred around a child—at some point in time every vampire was the child, just as they become the mother to those they turn. Auerbach criticises the modern vampires of Lestat and Gilda, arguing that they "live and love in enclaves of their own, scarcely bothering to infiltrate mortal drawing-rooms or bedrooms or boardrooms […] they are so clannish and self-enclosed that they present no threat."[71] However, it *is* this very self-enclosed love that poses a threat: reproduction of this queer nature becomes threatening to heterosexual society for its ability to exist apart from bioessentialist constructions of belonging, as this form of procreation does not require a mother and a father to birth new life. Rather, it could be two men, or two women, and it is not limited to two parents and a child; this form of reproduction involves one parent and one child, and it is the two of them that exchange bodily fluids in order to birth this queer life.

Conceptualising vampirism, and thus queerness, as a rebirth is a markedly different approach to that of Le Fanu's. Weston's statement that heterosexual society conceives homosexual "reproduction" as only possible through a form of "recruitment," [72] the misconception that one can be turned gay, is demonstrative of exactly why the queer figure is perceived as the potential end of society. Edelman expands on this concept, clarifying that if "there is *no baby* and, in consequence, *no future*, then the blame must fall on the fatal lure of

[68] Gomez, *The Gilda Stories*, p. 140.
[69] Gomez, *The Gilda Stories*, p. 191.
[70] Gomez, *The Gilda Stories*, p. 31.
[71] Auerbach, p. 186.
[72] Weston, p. 24.

sterile, narcissistic enjoyments."[73] Queer sex, being non-procreative, may therefore figure the end of civilisation. *Carmilla* is exemplary of this, due to her embodiment of the societal death drive that Edelman posits, hindering heterosexual reproduction. Where Carmilla's vampirism begins with death, Gomez's vampires originate in birth and in life. If—to call back to Signorotti's argument regarding the relationship between vampirism, contagion, and lesbianism—one compares the illness imagery of Carmilla's vampirism to the life-based language of *The Gilda Stories,* this illustrates how much has changed for queer existence in the one hundred and nineteen years between texts. To "come out" is to be reborn, almost utopian as the queer lifestyle is affirmed as the superior mode of living. The turning of others into vampires *could* be indicative of "turning" someone gay—because, in a sense, it is. Rather than being turned queer, however, Gomez's vampires are given a family that loves them for who they are. Their identities, unable to fit neatly in a white and heteronormative society, emerge in the presence of these vampires who truly love them for who they are. The vampiric family is potentially endless, with no lack of love to share. As they may turn more people, they would love more also. Vampires are capable of granting a form of wish-fulfilment for those they feed off, and the majority of the vampiric population live by an ethical code of prioritising life, as they must "Feel what they are needing, not what you are hungering for. You leave them with something new and fresh, something wanted. Let their joy fill you."[74] The entire vampiric/queer moral code is bound in the preservation and celebration of life.

The last chapter demonstrates that humanity/heterosexual society are the ones taking life for granted, not the queer vampires. This chapter is set in 2050; environmental degradation has progressed to the point where humanity believes Earth to be unsalvageable, and as a result everyone that can afford it plans to board ships to move to the moon. This is not the only dystopian aspect of this semi-apocalyptic world: humans have discovered vampires, who are then hunted and commodified, as "the full transfusion of their blood gave eternal life to the hungry rich."[75] This process is explicitly antithetical to what it means to be a vampire within *The Gilda Stories*. It not only shows a disregard for life and takes excessively without giving, thievery as opposed to an exchange, but the way the affluent enact this procedure as they drain the vampire of their blood is in violation of a sacred rule: "Once transformed, however, the wealthy broke the one commandment held by her kind:

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[73] Edelman, p. 13.
[74] Gomez, *The Gilda Stories*, p. 50.
[75] Gomez, *The Gilda Stories*, p. 235.

never kill one's creator."[76] Queer blood, previously inundated with stigma of dirtiness and disease, is now actively desired by the wealthy seeking to exploit the queer body. Vampirism is a predominantly queer and morally good mode of being that the greed of (heterosexual) humanity taints, not the reverse. Weston, when discussing the perception of queer people as villainous, explains that a newly-out queer person may emphasise how they are still the same person their biological family has always known. Weston states that this is because "portraying continuity of self served to counter the implication that being gay transforms a person into something alien, deviant, or monstrous."[77] Once a queer person has come out, it does not change them. If they are monsters it is because they always were, hence how "portraying continuity of self" disproves this villainous notion—which the humans at the end of the novel prove. They were always selfish. On the other hand, it is their desperation for futurity that drives them, but it is a futurity based on the self rather than the Child, and, as a result, this warped futurity heralds society's end. Gomez eliminates the basis for human/heterosexual reproductive futurism, particularly on Earth, as the near-extinction of the human population engenders a world in which there *is* no future to value over the present. There are no potential children to strive for or prioritise, and instead the future is a form of suspension, in which our focal family is created through an imitation of reproduction, one that makes them "blood" family.

The novel ends with Gilda and the newest member of their family, Ermis, travelling to meet with Julius and Effie, and eventually Sorel, Anthony, and Bird. Gomez does, like Le Fanu, use vampirism as a metaphor, but it is one full of love and a hopeful future. Lewis says that "What queers the Girl/Gilda and her vampire family in 2050 is the pronounced element of choice in their intersubjective and interpenetrative conception of family."[78] The novel ends with a reunion of the family that they chose. Although humans have destroyed, and are now fleeing, planet Earth, the vampires—our queer, indigenous, Black vampires—are reclaiming the land that once was theirs, and they will make it their own again. Even if they live in a post-apocalyptic landscape, this opens the way for a utopian future, as they will be free to exist outside of the heteronormative and racist societal structure that they have experienced. Consent, diversity, and queer family building figures them as the end of society—and I do not think that is a bad way for humanity to end, after all. They do this knowing that they chose this life, and that they will have each other, now and forever. The family that, as Lewis aptly

[76] Gomez, *The Gilda Stories*, p. 235.
[77] Weston, p. 79.
[78] Lewis, p. 454.

designates them, is made up of "social monsters,"[79] is fluid—they are not biologically related yet "blood" related, they are all mother and daughter and brother and sister; and this liminality is precisely what makes their choice to be together so beautiful. Anthony has perhaps one of the most profound lines about this: "One takes on others as family and continually reshapes that meaning—family—but you do not break blood ties. We may not wish to live together at all times, but we will always be with each other."[80]

The Curse of Heredity

The Blood of the Vampire medicalises hereditary vampirism to display the lasting impacts of trauma and the necessity of kinship. Vampirism diverges from its most common representation as that of a transmittable condition, as seen in *Carmilla* and *The Gilda Stories*: in Marryat's work vampirism is a genetic trait that Harriet inherits. Although she is unaware of this condition and believes that she simply desires kinship with other people, her propensity to drain the energy of others, potentially to the point of death, prohibits her from gaining the only thing she wants: love. Doctor Phillips, a family friend of Margaret's who examines Margaret's baby—and had met Harriet and her family when Harriet was young—asserts, first to Margaret and later to others, that Harriet is energy-draining and consequently vampiric due to a human-animal cross-species interaction: when her grandmother was "pregnant with [Harriet's mother] she was bitten by a vampire bat, which are formidable creatures in the West Indies."[81] This bite that occurred while Harriet's mother was still in utero is attributed to causing Harriet's mother's love for violence, the bite making the foetus hunger for blood, as Doctor Phillips describes Harriet's mother as "a sensual, self-loving, crafty and bloodthirsty half-caste."[82] This genetic predisposition is then passed onto Harriet, and manifests in her as a subconscious act of draining the life-force of others. It is not only her trait of draining energy that poses Harriet as a threat, but additionally the fact that "she comes of a terrible parentage. No good can ever ensue of association with her."[83] He attributes her nature not only to what is essentially a gene mutation, but also her parents' personalities. As Helena Ifill explains,

> Proponents of theories of hereditary degeneration used language which asserted that heredity was inescapable, and that the "destiny of an individual is innate in him" (Maudsley 1863: 490). Significantly, Phillips tells Margaret to stay away from

[79] Lewis, p. 455.
[80] Gomez, *The Gilda Stories*, p. 69.
[81] Marryat, p. 69.
[82] Marryat, p. 69.
[83] Marryat, p. 67.

> Harriet, not because of anything that she has done, but what he feels she is sure to do.[84]

Despite the authority the doctor speaks with, the information he provides is not reliable. A lot of the "evidence" is anecdotal and based on second or third-hand accounts. For example, in the tales he tells Margaret about Harriet's family history, many statements are as follows: "they declared," "are said to," "her fellows prophesised," "everyone said," and "her servants had some story amongst themselves to account for this lust."[85] The language is circumstantial, uncertain, or, as with the prophecy, based entirely on superstition. In contrast, "that which is bred in her *will* come out," and "there *is* a curse."[86] The language is certain and authoritative. This disparity in the definitive versus inconsistent language that Doctor Phillips uses throws into doubt the validity of his claims regarding Harriet's vampiric status—he seems unquestionably sure of Harriet's disposition, even as his main evidence for this "diagnosis" is based on a story told by servants that hate their masters. There is an implicit bias and lack of objective examination of Harriet. As Ifill notes, Harriet is being condemned not for something she has done, but something she *might* do.

Despite the anecdotal nature of Doctor Phillips' diagnosis of Harriet, his word is taken as law. This is indicative of his authority as a white, male doctor, operating on multiple levels of power within Victorian society, even though much of what he states as fact is entirely unsubstantiated. Haefele-Thomas notes this also, as she writes that "Dr Phillips utilizes his Western medical authority to claim an understanding of the classification of Harriet's 'disease'; however, his nosology is not scientific, but predicated upon Jamaican folklore promulgated by Harriet's mother's servants in Jamaica." Haefele-Thomas observes that

> a weird miscegenation of authority has gone on here. Dr Phillips embodies white, male British medical authority, yet he relies on his information from Jamaican villagers who we have already been told believe in obeah and other religious practices that the British viewed with a jaundiced eye. Dr Phillips has the official credentials to give this folk wisdom a Western imprimatur, yet at the same time, his reliance on suspect, indigenous tradition threatens to undermine his authority.[87]

Not only is Phillips' information based on hearsay and gossip, but he acquires such information from those he views as inferior. Despite perceiving himself as a man of science, he submits to the superstition-based tales with no hesitation.

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[84] Helena Ifill, 'Florence Marryat's *The Blood of the Vampire* (1897): Negotiating Anxieties of genre and Gender at the *Fin de Siecle*', *Victorian Popular Fictions*, 1.1 (2019), 80-99, p. 83.
[85] Marryat, p. 68.
[86] [emphasis on all mine]
[87] Ardel Haefele-Thomas, *Queer Others in Victorian Gothic: Transgressing Monstrosity* (Wales: University of Wales Press, 2012), p. 114, JSTOR <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt9qhdw4.8> [accessed 27 February 2024].

Victorian medical thinking of the time would have had a few different theories about Harriet's condition, such that their understanding of pregnancy included the concept that a mother's actions or cravings during her pregnancy could result in deformities of the child. In her article on the hybridity, Brenda Mann Hammack explains that

> Although experts on the human gestational process usually did not claim that animal-human hybrids resulted from bestiality, some insisted that maternal fantasies or fears that involved animals could produce gestational mutation. Disfigurations were also said to reflect the mother's unfulfilled or even violent desires, experienced either during pregnancy or during conception.[88]

Following this line of thinking, Harriet's life-draining properties may be due to her mother's lust for blood as the hunger has been transferred. Hammack then continues,

> If a woman's craving for strawberries was not sated, she might, for example, give birth to a child whose birthmarks resembled that fruit. If she had entertained lustful thoughts involving an animal, her secret would be outed when the infant left the womb.[89]

Harriet's grandmother's encounter with the vampire bat could, then, have resulted in Harriet's mother's lust for blood, and subsequently Harriet's own hunger. On the other hand, it is not only animalistic desires that could lead to maternal impressions, but any "excessive emotion."[90] Rather than the animalistic tendencies being transmitted to Harriet's mother from the vampire bat, the abnormalities could be as a result of the fear she experienced. But if fright is enough, then what about the lives that Harriet's maternal family lived? Their situations and circumstances of their pregnancies become crucial. Harriet's grandmother was a slave. As Harriet's mother was half-Black, it is, unfortunately, incredibly likely that Harriet's grandmother was raped by the white man that "owned" her. The fangs of the vampire bat penetrating her skin therefore parallel the unwanted sexual penetration by a man. She would have felt violated and powerless. Melissa Edmundson argues a similar point, stating that the "unwelcome violence of the animal's attack that penetrates the woman's body is symbolic of the equally violent sexual predation that she experienced as a young girl, a literal slave to the whims of a powerful white English judge."[91] Giselle Liza Anatol concurs, writing that "the lack of free will and the power discrepancy between master and slave

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[88] Brenda Mann Hammack, 'Florence Marryat's Female Vampire and the Scientizing of Hybridity', *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 48.4 (2008), 885-896 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40071373> [accessed 27 February 2024] (p. 888)
[89] Hammack, p. 888.
[90] Giselle Liza Anatol, 'Black Female Vampires in Nineteenth-Century Writing and Folklore', in *The Vampire in Nineteenth-Century Literature*, ed. by Brooke Cameron and Lara Karpenko (New York: Routledge, 2022) pp. 11-26 (p. 19) <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003173083>.
[91] Melissa Edmundson, *Women's Colonial Gothic Writing* (Palgrave Gothic, 2018), p. 78 <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-76917-2_4>.

implies a vampiric violation."[92] It is not the vampire bat that is to blame for the curse of vampirism, but it is instead the predatory actions of the white man, draining this woman of choice and, as she dies in childbirth, of life. Layers of trauma also apply to Harriet's mother. Although she is described by Doctor Phillips as "the most awful woman I have ever seen," and a "revolting spectacle," Phillips also notes that "Brandt took her as his mistress before she was fourteen."[93] Harriet's mother was barely more than a young girl, and as the half-Black illegitimate child of a slave woman, she will have had no agency in what happened to her. Anatol comments on the vampiric nature of Henry Brandt's actions, stating that Harriet's mother's age

> insinuates Henry Brandt's sexual exploitation of a minor. His physical penetration of the young woman and the sapping of her youthful innocence as well as the predatory choice of someone of the biracial "mulatto" caste, who is ultimately powerless and voiceless because of inferior social standing, all suggest vampiric acts.[94]

Trauma is the inheritance that Harriet receives, as well as a lack of choice. Her "vampiric" sapping of the lives around her is then a reflection not of her maternal line, as is first suggested, but her paternal line. Their vampiric actions generate the horror, the "excessive emotion," that leads to maternal impressions that render the infant vampiric. However, to consider it from another perspective, Harriet's vampirism may be an innate form of self-defence. When the men that grew close to her maternal line were predatory and sapped a form of life from them, Harriet's vampirism consequently drains others before she is drained. This theory is immensely tragic, as Harriet, who wants only love, is biologically structured in such a way that her "vampirism" views love as danger.

This can be compared to a survivor of sexual abuse, to whom "intimacy feels so very frightening," due to "profound betrayals of trust."[95] When romance, sexual desire, or even the power of an authority figure has been exploited, it becomes safer to avoid being in positions of vulnerability, as the victim may not trust themselves to distinguish predatory attraction from respectful and reciprocated attraction. Although the trauma that resulted in this defence system was not experienced by Harriet, the effects of the trauma have been passed down genetically, from both Harriet's grandmother and mother. The need to protect herself, to prevent the powerlessness her family experienced, is written into her very DNA. Harriet, just

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[92] Anatol, p. 19.
[93] Marryat, p. 76.
[94] Anatol, p. 20.
[95] Barry A. Farber, Rachel Khurgin-Bott and Sarah Feldman, 'THE BENEFITS AND RISKS OF PATIENT SELF-DISCLOSURE IN THE PSYCHOTHERAPY OF WOMEN WITH A HISTORY OF CHILDHOOD SEXUAL ABUSE', *Psychotherapy Theory, Research, Practice, Training*, 46.1 (2009) 52-76 <DOI:10.1037/a0015136> p. 56.

like Carmilla, is a victim before a villain; Harriet is a victim of her circumstances from the moment of her conception.

Harriet then, regardless of which theory is followed, is genetically doomed if trauma is inheritable, if the bite of a vampire is inheritable, or if the personality of her sadistic father is inheritable. Ifill explains this as Marryat being "influenced by fin-de-siècle ideas of degeneration and eugenics. "Degeneration" was a blanket term that referred to the common belief that undesirable elements (physical, mental or moral) were hereditarily transmitted, with increasing virulence, from generation to generation."[96] Harriet's heredity is depicted as unavoidable, to the point where Doctor Phillips implies that her beautiful exterior—her appearance and her voice—is intentionally hiding a sinister and violent interior.

Marryat makes this implication explicit by attempting to align Harriet with her horrific parentage through three main events. The first is when she was "a little thing of four years old,"[97] old Pete let her whip the young slaves that had misbehaved, and she would "laugh to see them wriggle their legs under the whip and cry!"[98] As a child she enjoys the suffering of others in a scene that quite vividly reflects a burst of anger Carmilla experiences when a mountebank, a travelling man selling charms, entertainment, and herbal medicine, offers to file her fangs—a violent anger that appears contrary to their typical behaviour—as Carmilla exclaims that her father "would have had the wretch tied up to the pump, and flogged with a cart whip, and burnt to the bones with the cattle brand!"[99] As Carmilla calls back to her father, the only time he is ever mentioned in the novella, Harriet experiences a flash of fury that compares her to her mother, "All the Creole in her came to the surface—like her cruel mother she would have given over Ralph Pullen to the vivisecting laboratory if she could."[100] Her anger is attributed to both her Black blood and her mother's cruelty, depicting her as barbaric, notwithstanding the fact her anger was justified, as this occurs after Harriet discovers Ralph is courting her whilst betrothed.

It is not only Harriet's anger that the text uses as proof of her monstrous nature, but even also the paintings that she appreciated while at a museum:

> the representation of Napoleon in Hell being fed with the blood and bones of his victims—of the mother in a time of famine devouring her child—and of the Suicide between his good and evil angels, appeared to absorb all her senses.[101]

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[96] Ifill, p. 82.
[97] Marryat, p. 17.
[98] Marryat, p. 17.
[99] Le Fanu, p. 28.
[100] Marryat, p. 111.
[101] Marryat, p. 84.

This passage is thick with imagery; the feeding on blood represents both her vampiric nature and her mother's lust for blood; the mother devouring her child echoes her draining of baby Ethel; the suicide between good and evil foreshadows her own suicide whilst accentuating her liminal nature as simultaneously good and evil. Morbid fascination is used as evidence as "they interest me! They are so life-like!"[102] It does not matter that as exhibits in a museum there are doubtless others who are enthralled by the gory nature of these paintings, because the preconceived notions the other characters, and even the reader, as led by the text, have about Harriet means that this is taken as damning evidence. It is confirmation bias.

Regardless of Doctor Phillips' credibility and the true nature of Harriet's condition, Harriet is further victimised by the way that Phillips talks to her. While speaking to Harriet when she comes to him with questions about her vampirism, he retracts some of the things he has said to others and does not want to tell her about what is going on with her own body. He speaks to unrelated people about her "medical" history, but not the actual patient. To begin with, he gives her a diagnosis without ever having spoken to her as an adult, as the only time he had previously met her was when "this girl was a child of six years old, running half naked about her father's plantation, uncared for by either parent and associating solely with the negro servants."[103] Having never spoken to her or experiencing her draining effect, his diagnosis is based on assumptions he has drawn. His treatment of Harriet deteriorates further when she comes to him for answers, as he is uncomfortable with having to speak directly to Harriet about the things he has very willingly said to others. The text, however, is very quick to clarify that "Doctor Phillips was innocent of having misjudged, or slandered anyone."[104] At first he refuses to explicitly inform Harriet of his medical opinion, stating only that "The purity and charity of your own life can do much to wipe out the stain upon theirs."[105] He puts the onus on Harriet to make reparations for the acts of her parents, making her take responsibility for all the deaths that *they* caused. As this does not answer her question, she persists, asking "Have I inherited the vampire's blood? Who bequeathed to me that fatal heritage?"[106] Despite the fact that this is nearly identical to the language Doctor Phillips had previously used to describe Harriet's disorder, he exclaims that she must not talk of such things, as "You are alluding only to a superstition!"[107] It is ironic that he refers to the

[102] Marryat, p. 85.
[103] Marryat, p. 76.
[104] Marryat, p. 160.
[105] Marryat, p. 161.
[106] Marryat, p. 161.
[107] Marryat, p. 161.

vampirism as "superstition" due to the basis of his diagnosis for Harriet originating in myth and gossip. He is contradicting himself, making it unclear what is to be believed. This does not stop Harriet, as she persists

> Had I anything to do with the baby's death, or with that of Bobby Bates? I loved them both! Was it my love that killed them? Shall I always kill everybody I love? I *must* know—I *will!*[108]

The issue that lies within Doctor Phillips' actions is that his diagnosis is a literal life-or-death matter, both in regards to Harriet and the people she loves. Withholding such valuable medical "knowledge" is malpractice as, if it is to be believed, he denies Harriet information about her ailment that might have altered her fate; judging by her horror upon discovering her vampiric attributes, Harriet would have done all she could have to prevent deaths beyond Ethel's. The man that Harriet wishes to marry, Anthony, questions the doctor's authority, denoting the diagnosis as "absurd and untenable theories," and then proclaiming that "if it were the truth, I for one could not wish for a sweeter death! Come along, Hally, and try your venom upon me! I am quite ready to run the risk!"[109]

Anthony's willingness to "run the risk," as he says, is all that Harriet really desires. Above all else, Harriet's overwhelming desire is for a family, for companionship, and for love. This begins even before leaving Jamaica, as it is her chosen family that Harriet feels most connected to. Old Pete, despite his status as a Black servant, is the closest thing that Harriet had to a father figure, and she is obsessed with young Caroline to the point of her death. Harriet attempted to collect a family: a father, a sister, but was unsuccessful, and then was forced to live in the Convent where she was denied emotional connection with anyone. This is likely the cause of her over-enthusiastic nature upon meeting Margaret, as she later tells her, "I want friends—real friends!"[110] In the absence of any sort of biological family, and further lacking a chosen family, she has no support network and no kinship. This is likely why she latched onto Ralph Pullen as soon as he shows her affection; by getting married, and by having children, she would ensure a "permanent" family. The family she desires would undoubtedly include a child, as she laments, "What I would not give to have a baby of my very own to do what I liked with?"[111]

It is this desire for kinship, and particularly that of motherhood, that makes Harriet so very threatening. Kimberly Cox disagrees, stating that the "danger her caress poses is not the

[108] Marryat, p. 161.
[109] Marryat, p. 166.
[110] Marryat, p. 16.
[111] Marryat, p. 29.

risk of interracial reproduction—the text does not offer her that choice."[112] However, just because Harriet does not have the chance over the course of the text to reproduce does not mean she would be unable to do so, and it is the *possibility* of reproduction, which she is biologically capable of, that poses a threat. To a heterosexual and white society, the frightening thing about Harriet is simultaneously this reproductive potential and her ability to eliminate the reproductive potential of others. Harriet's desire for a child is problematised by the fact that she is a "quadroon," as Ralph Pullen callously observes, "she has black blood in her, her mother was a half-caste […] One might get a piebald son and heir!"[113] Merriam-Webster defines "piebald" as "of different colours; *especially* : spotted or blotched with black and white."[114] The comment Ralph makes here is used derogatorily to suggest a child with both black and white skin; the possibility of her passing on a racially impure child is revolting to him, despite the attraction he once felt to her. Octavia Davis notes that "*The Blood of the Vampire* refers to the breeding of the vampire Harriet Brandt, to the terrifying legacy and potentiality of her *blood*, rather than to her name."[115] It is her reproductive potential that makes her a threat to society as she could produce a child that, although they would look white, would be a covert carrier of Black genetics. However, Cox opposes this point, stating that it is not Harriet's reproductive potential that renders her a threat "but rather the prevention of reproductive futurism."[116] In killing Ethel, Harriet removes what would eventually become a white, well-bred woman from the possible mothers of the future. Not only this, but she expels Margaret from the role of mother and renders her procreation useless by killing her infant. Bobby's death and Anthony's death, as I mentioned in Chapter One, removes young men plentiful with reproductive potential from society. In this sense Harriet embodies the aggressive death drive of society; but also her internal death drive, as all of this, once she is entirely convinced of her parasitic nature, culminates in her taking her life.

Harriet appears to have an abundance of choice. She has immense wealth: she can travel anywhere or buy anything, but she is unable to obtain what she truly wants—a family. All she ever wanted was love, "to come out into the world and find someone to be a friend

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[112] Kimberly Cox, 'The Vampire's Touch in "Olalla" and *The Blood of the Vampire*', in *The Vampire in Nineteenth-Century Literature: A Feast of Blood*, ed. by Brooke Cameron and Lara Karpenko (New York: Routledge, 2022), pp. 110-124 (p. 118).
[113] Marryat, p. 143.
[114] *Merriam-Webster* <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/piebald> [accessed 7 March 2024] s.v. piebald.
[115] Octavia Davis, 'Morbid Mothers: Gothic Hereditary in Florence Marryat's The Blood of the Vampire', in *Horrifying Sex: Essays on Sexual Difference in Gothic Literature*, ed. by Ruth Bienstock Anolik (North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2007), pp. 40-54 (p. 40).
[116] Cox, p. 118.

and to love me, only me, and all for myself!"[117] When Anthony dies, Harriet realises that she is unable to have the one thing she wants and curses her parents for it. She is unwillingly vampiric; Milly Williamson's description of the vampire unwillingly turned tragically reflects Harriet's circumstances, as the reluctant vampire "embodies this melodramatic impulse as fully as any fictional figure. Its unwanted vampirism is the violation it has suffered, it is expelled from humanity, is misrecognised as evil by a world to which it does not belong."[118] This is certainly applicable to Harriet; though the world may have viewed her as evil, not once did she consciously harm. She bought trinkets for Ethel, nursed Olga Brimont when she was sick, gave Bobby a companion when he felt alone. She was not aware that these acts of kindness would result in anguish. When she first discovers that she may hurt others, she tells Anthony that "my love has opened my eyes! Sooner than injure you, whom I would die to save from harm, I will separate myself from you!"[119] Harriet would willingly deprive herself of the one thing she desires most—love—to save the objects of her affection. Unfortunately, Anthony persists until she wavers and consents to marry him, which ends with him dying in their marital bed. Once Harriet realises (or believes) that she is indeed the cause of the deaths around her, she asks God "why did He not let her perish with them—so that the awful power with which they had imbued her might have been prevented from harming others?"[120] She retroactively wishes to have never lived in order for others to endure.

Although there is nothing to be done for the people already deceased, Harriet chooses to take her life to avoid hurting others. Her choice to die is an act of strength, but this is also the only chance that Marryat provides Harriet with to gain redemption for her actions. In her letter to Margaret she writes for her to "not think more unkindly of me than you can help. My parents have made me unfit to live. Let me go to a world where the curse of heredity which they laid upon me may be mercifully wiped out."[121] Rather than continue the cycle of trauma and violence that her slave-owner grandfather started and her sadistic father perpetuated, she refuses to allow any possibility of its continuance. Ryan Fong agrees that Harriet's suicide ends the cycle of trauma, writing that "Harriet's choice to die not only displays her refusal to

[117] Marryat, p. 34.
[118] Williamson, pp. 43-44.
[119] Marryat, pp. 166-167.
[120] Marryat, p. 176.
[121] Marryat, p. 187.

remain complicit in patterns of structural violence recorded by the novel, but also marks her death and the deaths she causes as the collateral damage."[122]

Framing Harriet's death as collateral damage is an unfortunate truth—the truth being that, unequivocally, Harriet is also a victim. Before taking her life she wonders "wherein had *she* sinned, that she should have been cursed with such progenitors? How had they *dared* to bring her into the world, an innocent yet hapless child of sin—the inheritor of their evil propensities."[123] Harriet did nothing to deserve the parasitic traits she possessed. She was, at birth and throughout her life, an innocent child merely born into tragic circumstances. The family, biological or chosen, was never attainable for her. Marryat does not depict this ending as a triumph, as Harriet is not some evil to be vanquished. Harriet's death is a tragedy.

Despite Marryat's attempt to depict Harriet as animalistic and grotesque, she also has a clear compassion for her character as she paints Harriet in a resolutely sympathetic light. The constant uncertainty of the doctor's diagnosis puts doubt into the mind of the reader—is Harriet actually this terrible monster, or is Phillips merely believing the things that others have said, unverified? Harriet's vampiric state itself is liminal. She is Schrodinger's Vampire: she both is and is not a vampire, simultaneously. If Doctor Phillips' diagnosis is taken at his word, then Harriet is indeed draining the life of those around her—yet, with the unreliability of his information, it is just as likely that Harriet is simply a woman born of unfortunate circumstances. Even if she is not a vampire, she likely would not have flourished in Victorian society, as she is overly affectionate, naive, and knows nothing of social etiquette. In a sense, the novel almost tells us that it is society's inability to adapt to the diverse that is the real tragedy. As a queer and biracial vampire, the cards were stacked against her from the very beginning. Haefele-Thomas asserts that "Like 'vampire', 'queer' and 'half-breed' connote a liminal existence."[124] Liminality is apparent within Harriet's final choice; it is inevitable, and yet the only choice she's ever truly made. There is, however, the chance of a post-mortem happy ending for Harriet: when Anthony first proposes to her, he states, "when our bodies are withered by age our spirits shall still go loving on."[125] Although not withered by age, their bodies have perished—but, hopefully, in death Harriet is free for their spirits to go loving on, and Harriet finally has the family that she deserves.

[122] Ryan D. Fong, 'A Feminist Bloodletting: Reading Suicide in Florence Marryat and Angela Carter', in *Gender in the Vampire Narrative*, ed. By Amanda Hobson and U. Melissa Anyiwo (Rotterdam: Sense Publishers, 2016) pp. 109-123 (p. 117).
[123] Marryat, p. 151.
[124] Haefele-Thomas, p. 100.
[125] Marryat, p. 151.

Diversity as the Future

Fledgling similarly examines concepts of inheritance and racial superiority through the metaphor of vampirism, problematising biological kinship and necessitating the chosen family. Vampirism is more than a genetic trait in this text, as vampires, the Ina, are an entirely different species to humans. The Ina are a race of entirely white vampires that, much like the stereotypical vampire, enter a coma-like state during the daytime and are susceptible to sunlight, burning into ashes upon contact with it. Upon meeting one of her brothers, Stefan, who is Black but light skinned, Shori is told that her mothers were three sisters,

> and one human woman who donated DNA. Also, there were two eldermothers—our mothers' surviving mothers. The two eldermothers were the ones who made it possible for us—you in particular—to be born with better-than-usual protection from the sun and more daytime alertness.[126]

Just as in *Carmilla* and *The Gilda Stories*, the maternal influence is one that holds the most power. Shori's eldermothers are the ones who studied genetic engineering to integrate Black human DNA into that of an Ina child. As Gomez did, Butler has her family deliberately created, as Shori's eldermothers intentionally made her the way she is. Shori was not alone either, as Stefan, although less affected by the genetic modification, is Black also due to their shared human mother—but Shori then loses that connection when the paternal side of her family is murdered just as her maternal side was. Shori's "inheritance" is more than her vampirism—it is her human genetics, her Blackness, and her lost memories of her family that sets her apart from other Ina.

To begin with, Ina do reproduce sexually, but their mating rituals differ vastly to that of humans. For one, as the above quote suggests, they mate in groups of brothers from one family with sisters of another. The children belong to all siblings; the brothers are all fathers of any offspring, the sisters all mothers. Males are addicted to the venom in the females so they are only able to mate with them—they become infertile to any other females. Ina are, as Iosif says, "sexually territorial,"[127] that is, they have a heightened sense of smell that attracts male Ina to female Ina. It is also female Ina that possess the power in mating as, when a female Ina has particularly strong venom, "Ina children, male and female, wind up with more potent venom, but the female's is still more potent than the male's. In that sense, the Ina are kind of a matriarchy."[128] Therefore in Ina society mothers inhabit a dominant role, situating

[126] Butler, p. 77.
[127] Butler, p. 79.
[128] Butler, p. 109.

the matrilineal line as superior as in *Carmilla*. This is placed in direct opposition to the human patriarchal society, as Celia informs Shori:

> It's like the way males have competed among humans. There was a time when a big, strong man might push other men aside and marry a lot of wives, pass on his genes to a lot of children. His size and strength might be passed to his daughters as well as his sons, but his daughters were still likely to be smaller and weaker than his sons.[129]

As a result of the dominant nature of female Ina, as Iosif says, "We don't live males and females together as humans do."[130] He further highlights the difference between Ina and humans, illustrating a clear variation both in biology and cultural conventions. The divide between species is deepened as he continues, "We live alongside, yet apart from, human beings, except for those humans who become our symbionts."[131] Here physical space is what separates them, but symbionts are positioned as an intermediary species; more than human, but not quite Ina. It is made very clear, however, that symbionts still inhabit a position of inferiority and incompatibility as "We can't magically convert humans into our kind,"[132] and neither can they procreate together. It is unclear exactly why this is, as we are given no insight as to the nature of their reproductive organs. It can be assumed, from Wright's comment upon first seeing Shori naked—"Well, you're a girl, all right"[133]—that Shori appears to have a vulva, yet humans and Ina cannot mate. Some internal or otherwise unspecified factor prevents it. By making them reproductively incompatible Butler creates a clear divide between the species. The symbionts are then objects of sexual desire and physical nourishment rather than having any reproductive potential, framing them as a secondary family in their Ina's life—necessary, yet inferior to Ina. Lundberg says of the distinction between reproductive needs and sexual needs that

> Fledgling's vampires challenge heteronormative family structures by completely naturalizing same-sex familial and sexual relationships and by making those relationships necessary to the survival and perpetuation of the Ina species. Ina familial networks deconstruct the heteronormative family by decoupling sex from reproduction and reproduction from living arrangements.[134]

Through the mating rituals of the Ina, Butler effectively challenges societal concepts of family and reproduction: the process of mating in groups of siblings blurs familial and sexual boundaries in a way that is inherently taboo in human society, compounded by the queerness

[129] Butler, p. 109.
[130] Butler, p. 62.
[131] Butler, p. 63.
[132] Butler, p. 63.
[133] Butler, p. 20.
[134] Lundberg, p. 573.

that comes with mating with your sisters and then raising your daughters together, or with your brothers and raising your sons together. The Ina familial unit, outside of reproduction and the occasional visit from family of the opposite sex, is single-gendered. Both mother and father are not required to raise a child, just a loving group of sisters, mothers and eldermothers; or brothers, fathers and elderfathers. In heteronormative society sex and reproduction are often conflated, but in Ina society, where Ina are encouraged to have sexual relations with their symbionts despite the fact that there is no reproductive possibility there, the two are distinctly separate acts, just as humans and Ina are distinctly separate species.

Despite the separation between Ina and humans, symbionts are made clearly essential to the health of their Ina. Not only are symbionts necessary for the blood they provide, but physical contact and emotional connection are necessary for the mental well-being of symbiont and Ina alike. Butler recognizes the significance of emotional and physical aspects of touch by heightening their importance to the Ina's survival and by making them inseparable from one another; even though they are not biologically related—or even the same species—their presence is essential. Moreover, Celia explains that "Ina men are sort of like us, like symbionts,"[135] in the sense that humans are addicted to their Ina, unable to be fed on by other Ina, just as Ina males are addicted to their females. By drawing this parallel Butler immediately makes the reader question the societal construct she created of the divide between Ina and humans. As a result of the sharing of venom, a permanent bond is forged between the Ina and their symbionts. Like the exchange of blood in *The Gilda Stories* that makes their familial bond permanent, this sharing of venomous bodily fluids delineates these humans as vampiric family—another way of legitimising the bond with those not biological family. Shori's venom makes her human family permanently hers, not only through this addiction her venom creates, but also a scent that "won't wash away or wear away. It's part of them,"[136] clearly identifying to all Ina that a symbiont is already bonded to someone. Lundberg explores similar ideas, stating that "By depicting relationships that nourish and sustain themselves through the physical exchange of bodily fluids, *Fledgling* literalizes the metaphor of the vampire while biologizing the social, recasting relational belonging as symbiosis or physical addiction."[137] This use of addiction as a representation of the bond between chosen family members helps to create a "biological" tie that makes them as

[135] Butler, p. 109.
[136] Butler, p. 73.
[137] Lundberg, p. 564.

irreversibly connected as genetics, or blood, would. The significance of the biological family does not detract from the necessity of the Ina's chosen family.

Shori and the Ina closest to her highly value their symbionts and view their chosen family as a privilege. Iosif says to Wright, "You are her first symbiont, the first member of her new family."[138] Iosif is Shori's biological father yet acknowledges the value of Wright to Shori and his position as part of her new family. This human family is essential for Shori, or any Ina, as although she could, hypothetically, sustain herself on the blood of various humans, such interactions be unsustainable as if they were not "[hers] yet" they would not be able to provide mental, chemical, and physical support.[139] However, not all Ina value their essential symbiotic relationship. To them, the symbiosis is revolting. The differences, in their eyes, are too vast and they resent their reliance. Milo Silk, a member of the family that murdered Shori's family because they viewed the intermingling of Ina and Black human DNA as disgraceful, "resents his need of them, sees it as a weakness, and yet he loves them."[140] Some Ina view themselves as the more evolved species, and humans as an atavistic, primitive race. As Esther Jones emphasises, "The two parts of her family—human and Ina—separate the functions of sexual, psychological, and emotional pleasure and support from reproductive functions. Ina who lack this web of relations will die."[141] As much as Milo Silk resents his reliance on humans, to deny it would mean his death. Milo is not the only Silk to devalue humans; Russel Silk declares that Ina are not humans, "Nor should we try to be them. Ever. Not for any reason. Not even to gain the day; the cost is too great."[142]

It is this resentment that some Ina transfer onto Shori. Her human genetics place her as inferior to them, which is only compounded by her Blackness. Shori's eldermothers deliberately altered her DNA to give her melanin, but, as Katharine Dahlman believed, "because of their great error, you are not Ina!"[143] Katharine is unnerved by Shori's obvious differences—beyond simply the colour of her skin, Katharine asserts that, "you are neither Ina nor human. Your scent, your reactions, your facial expressions, your body language—none of it is right."[144] To be not white and conduct herself as such Others Shori, making her

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[138] Butler, p. 70.
[139] Fledgling, p. 177.
[140] Butler, p. 270.
[141] Esther L. Jones, 'Untangling Pathology: Sex, Social Responsibility, and the Black Female Youth in Octavia Butler's Fledgling', in *Black Female Sexualities* ed. by Trimiko Melancon and Joanne M. Braxton (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2015) pp. 57-69, JSTOR <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt13x1g4v.8> [accessed 12 March 2024] (p. 64).
[142] Butler, p. 292.
[143] Butler, p. 271.
[144] Butler, p. 272.

uncanny to Katharine; Shori does not look like an Ina, but does not act quite like a human. Despite the Ina reliance on humans, Shori's mixed human and Ina genetics make many Ina view Shori as a mongrel. It goes without saying that Shori's skin colour contributes to the Othering she experiences. Katharine Dahlman says to Preston,

> You want your sons to mate with this person. You want them to get black, human children from her. Here in the United States, even most humans will look down on them. When I came to this country, such people were kept as property, as slaves.[145]

Katharine's position is clear. In comparing Shori to property and mentioning slavery, Katharine places Shori as inherently inferior—as nothing more than an object. Of these comments, Knutson states that

> Butler explicitly evokes the violence of slave relations by targeting Shori's blackness as tainting future Ina vampires with a colour associated with slaves. The irony of this comment is manifest since Dahlman herself is a vampire, a monstrous being, yet she views black skin colour as the mark of a monster.[146]

Katharine's villainization of Shori is, as Knutson notes, ironic given the monstrous nature of all Ina, and given the fact that Katharine had just ordered one of her symbionts to kill Theodora, whom Shori desperately loved, in an attempt to make Shori so emotionally unstable that she would be rendered unable to continue rationally with the trial. Shori is not merely depersonalised, but also made animalistic in racist comparisons. The first comes from Milo Silk, who declares that Shori is not Ina and has "no more business at this Council than would a clever dog!"[147] Russel Silk takes it further, asking "What will she give us all? Fur? Tails?"[148] The fear of the Silks is, just as Harriet could possibly deliver a "piebald son," that Shori's potential offspring would be too Black or too human—tainted, and illegitimately Ina. In this sense they are very much stuck in the past, mimicking rhetoric that would have been seen in Marryat's time, as Williamson explains that "Victorian writings about Africa and Victorian vampire tales served similar functions; they create a mythos of race, otherness and sexuality based on assumptions of superiority and inferiority."[149] Jones aptly summarises the disregard for life under the guise of concern for Ina futurity:

> the murder of twelve Ina and nearly 100 human symbionts is justified in the name of protecting the state against the potential reproductive dangers of an adolescent black girl. It is not sexual activity that presents a problem to the state; it is the reproduction of more "mongrel cubs" like her.[150]

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[145] Butler, p. 272.
[146] Knutson, p. 230.
[147] Butler, p. 238.
[148] Butler, p. 300.
[149] Williamson, p. 21.
[150] Jones, p. 67.

Although the Silks and Katharine are ostensibly concerned with the state of future Ina, they disregard the value of Ina life, even as the majority of those are "pure," white Ina. There mere association with the creation of Black Ina is damning enough to warrant their deaths. They view humanity as dirtying the Ina gene pool, as weakness, but it is, in actuality, a biological advantage.

Butler unquestionably depicts the Silks and their racist ideologies as the antagonistic force of the novel. Shori's biological family, and even part of her chosen family, is killed due to the fear other Ina have of her reproductive ability. However, where in *The Blood of the Vampire* Marryat situates Harriet's Black genetics as a contributing factor to her monstrousness, Shori's Black (human) genetics make her stronger. Preston observes that "she carries the potentially life-saving human DNA that has darkened her skin and given her something we've sought for generations: the ability to walk, in sunlight, to stay awake and alert during the day."[151] The sun, whilst able to burn her, does not immediately kill her, and she is not debilitated during the day. This is proven as an asset during Shori's time with the Gordons, as the Silks send enthralled humans during the day to burn down the houses that the Gordon family slept within, striving to catch them unawares, and Shori's actions in conjunction with Gordon symbionts are the only reason the Gordons all survived. Therefore, even though she now lacks sisters to mate with, the Gordon brothers, especially Daniel, still want to mate with her. Her genetic traits are viewed as highly beneficial and desirable. This match, although unusual due to her lack of sisters (before their deaths she had three sisters to mate with the four Gordon brothers), is still endorsed by Daniel's elderfathers, Preston and Hayde, as Shori is "an intelligent, healthy, likable young female. When she's older, she'll bear strong children, and some of them will walk in sunlight."[152] Hayden is hesitant, but it is only due to Shori's lack of sisters, not her Black and human DNA. Shori is a threat—and the future of the Ina race—for her reproductive potential. Her very existence "queers" the vampire, as she embodies the Other, but the desirable other.

This stance diverges from Edelman's thinking, as Butler imagines a futurity that *does* rely on the image of the Child; a queer, Black, polyamorous Child, still commencing the collapse of normative Ina society. Edelman states that "the cult of the Child permits no shrines to the queerness of boys and girls, since queerness [...] is understood as bringing children and childhood to an end."[153] Yet what if the Child in question is *inherently* queer?

[151] Butler, p. 272.
[152] Butler, p. 275.
[153] Edelman, p. 19.

Shori is, as I mentioned in the prior chapter, by Ina standards still a child as she is not yet capable of reproducing. But she is encouraged to "sexually play" with her symbionts, a mix of males and females. She is sexually mature in this sense, but sexual maturity does not necessarily equate reproductive maturity. The Child Butler offers us is not the sanitised, strictly heterosexual child that Edelman configures in his polemic, but one constructed entirely of queer and boundary breaking potential. Beyond analysing Shori as the Child, *Fledgling* frames the potential child as what *everyone* is fighting for—the Silks want Shori and her family dead because they believe that the human and the Black DNA would weaken the Ina bloodline and make them inferior; as Russel Silk believes, the cost would be too high. Other Ina, particularly the Gordon family, view the children that Shori could produce as a better future for their kind—able to be awake during the day, not killed by the sun, and possessing particularly potent venom. Both sides of the argument value reproductive futurism highly. The Silks and Katharine clearly value futurity and racial purity more than their current life, as they have no qualms about the death of multiple Ina and their symbionts in their quest to eliminate Black human DNA from the genetic pool. The white, entirely Ina Child, is the most important thing to them. But Shori's future Children—Black, polyamorous and pansexual too, like presumably all Ina—signify an inherently queer reproductive future.

Regardless of the potential threat or hope of Shori's reproductive ability, as we have seen, she is not yet able to bear children. Any opposition or enthusiasm in regards to her future children is therefore a moot point. In terms of her biological family (or family-to-be), she is unable to stay with the Gordons long-term, as her pheromones will eventually be overpowering for the unmated brothers; and she considers staying with the Braithwaites, but this would only be temporarily. Her past family, of whom she retains no original memories, "was destroyed, and I couldn't even grieve for them properly because I remembered so little."[154] She has her biological family taken from her and is not even given the chance to mourn them. Her memories and thus her emotions are stolen. Thankfully, Shori quickly forms her chosen family—as Shori has lost her biological family, and her original symbionts, her current chosen family must act as a substitute for both. Shori's future in terms of biological kinship is hopeful, however; during the trial Vladimir Leontyev, one of Shori's elderfathers (one of her mothers' fathers), "looked angrier than the rest of them. It had taken me a moment and a look from him to realize that he was angry on my behalf. Something more had been

[154] Butler, p. 100.

done to me, and he was furious about it."[155] Although she retains no memory of him, he still remembers her. Her memory loss does not impede upon his love for her as he is willing to fight for her, and eager to reforge their relationship. The same goes for Joan and Margaret Braithwaite, whom Shori considers staying with for a year or two in order to re-educate herself on what it means to be Ina. She says of Joan, "I did not like Joan Braithwaite. But I thought I might eventually love her."[156] The future offers Shori a chance to learn about her Ina identity, and to learn to love those that still love her—although her immediate family is lost to her, there are still possibilities for her to experience genetic kinship. Weston argues that "if laying claim to a gay family in no way depends upon a break with one's family of origin, the theory of chosen family as a surrogate for kinship lost dissolves."[157] However, I counter that the chosen family *can* be a surrogate, in cases where one's family has exiled them or, like Shori, they have lost their family for other reasons, but I also believe that the chosen family can act as a supplement to the biological. Shori's desire to develop genetic kinship in no way impedes upon her love for her symbionts. Shori's chosen family *is* her family. As Celia says "it is the closest thing to a workable group marriage that I've ever seen."[158] The commitment that comes with marriage is applicable to each of them. Shori looks to the future, thinking about how "I'll have to decide what to do, how best to build a home for us all."[159]

In Ina society biological kinship intermingles with choice as Shori's chosen family very may well form genetic connections of their own; just as Shori will eventually take on the Gordon brothers as mates, symbionts are encouraged to start their own families if they feel so inclined, typically with other symbionts due to the atypical lifestyle and extended lifespan. Lundberg writes on the benefits of the atypical family building of *Fledgling*, writing that

> Family in *Fledgling* is by turns liberating, comforting, and political, unpredictable in the forms it takes yet inevitable because of the necessity and pleasures of attachment. Shori becomes herself by belonging with and to her evolving family—and since both Shori and her family are queer, queerness is repurposed in Fledgling. It is neither a dangerous outside threat that could destroy familial bonds nor a tool for parodic subversion of conservative family values. Rather, it is a part of individual and group identity, and it is woven through sexual behaviors, intimate relationships, and familial bonds.[160]

[155] Butler, p. 273.
[156] Butler, p. 276.
[157] Weston, p. 117.
[158] Butler, p. 127.
[159] Butler, p. 205.
[160] Lundberg, p. 576.

Shori's family includes her symbionts, her elderfathers, potential children and mates, those that support her, those she will learn to care for again. Family in *Fledgling* means a multitude of things, and this instability is beautiful for the vast kinds of love it can encompass. Butler, through Shori, envisions a Black, queer, and polyamorous future. Although Lundberg describes the vampire as "a fundamentally liminal, transgressive, or pangendered creature, but also as a way to articulate the unspeakable and as a vehicle for social commentary surrounding normative sexuality, the nuclear family, and social institutions,"[161] Shori is, above all others, the optimal vampire to do so. She is inherently liminal in her race, her species, her age, her sexuality, and her concepts of family. The nuclear family, homophobia and racial (species) superiority are all challenged by Butler. Like in Gomez's work, the potential future is characterised by queer love. Kinship may be romantic, familial, platonic, or even all of the above, and it is this fluidity of roles that makes the chosen family so beautiful. When a community is predicated upon respect and consent, the result is a family that will grow together and love deeper, as they actively chose each other. They want each other *because* of who they are, not despite it. Shori prevails: she is learning more about Ina, growing her family, deepening bonds with her symbionts, and one day in the not too far future she will mate with the Gordon brothers and initiate a new generation of stronger (and hopefully more tolerant) Ina. Shori talks to Celia about the fact that she did not initially choose to have her and Brooke as her symbionts in the following exchange:

> "I inherited you, both of you, from my father's family. You're mine."
> "You want us?"
> I smiled up at her. "Oh, yes."[162]

Through Celia and Brooke Shori can retain a connection to her father and to one of her brothers. But, more than that, her love is able to evolve, to encompass more, to actively choose. And, for the rest of her life, that is what she intends to do.

By comparing the Victorian texts to their contemporary counterparts, it is evident that much has changed in regard to representation, and societal perception, of the queer identity. The transmission of queer vampirism becomes a gift rather than an illness; the inheritance of Black, queer vampirism becomes hope for the future rather than the bringer of death. The chosen family has shifted from a poor substitute to a manifestation of their love that they chose. The liminality of the sapphic vampire made her an alluring lover in Chapter One, and in this chapter her liminality is a part of what makes her family building so effective. Weston

[161] Lundberg, p. 563.
[162] Butler, p. 124.

wrote that “The categories of gay kinship might better be labeled families we struggle to create, struggle to choose, struggle to legitimate, and—in the case of blood or adoptive family—struggle to keep.”[163] But this struggle strengthens the bonds forged. When a family is chosen—or created—outside of the heterosexual and monogamous structure that society dictates as the standard, the love felt may endure even longer. It was not without effort that these bonds of kinship were formed; but, as the saying goes, what’s easily won is easily lost. Given the difficulty of carving a space to inhabit out of a society that does not accept them, it is evident that these families will not lose each other any time soon.

[163] Weston, p. 212

Conclusion

I have argued that the sapphic vampire's atypical family building challenges heteronormative structures of kinship and reconfigures the family as something characterised by mutual love, respect, and choice. Weston states that the queer family "quite consciously incorporated symbolic demonstrations of love, shared history, material or emotional assistance, and other signs of enduring solidarity. Although many gay families included friends, not just any friend would do."[1] The families I have analysed throughout this thesis all exhibit some form of this enduring solidarity: Carmilla and Laura share history both genetically and through their shared dream, Harriet bequeaths her inheritance to Margaret, Gilda's family explicitly love each other and offer emotional support through their fluid familial roles, and Shori and her symbionts share resources, blood, and physical and mental support. Moreover, the chosen families of the vampires I examined are all rather exclusive. Carmilla wants only Laura eternally, in part because of her class status, and in part because of their biological relation; every other woman is only a meal or intended to be a temporary lover. Harriet, although seemingly not fussy in her desperation for kinship, still only drains selective people: sweet baby Ethel, kind Margaret, affectionate Ralph, smitten Bobby, adoring Anthony—she hungers for compassion and connection. As Weston said, not any friend will do. By highlighting the deep and selective nature of the chosen family, and the manner in which they attempt to make these connections permanent through blood or venom or vampirism, I have presented the concept of the chosen family as holding significance equal to, if not more than, that of the biological family.

Each one of these vampires, regardless of the time in which they were written, embody desire between women and the strength of the bonds that they create above all else. Despite the struggles they may endure, the love that they experienced is privileged as the ultimate motivation. Both Carmilla and Harriet meet tragic ends, but tragic ends that are too woven with love. *Carmilla* closes with, as I discussed in Chapter Two, Laura's inability to picture Carmilla solely as a beautiful girl or a hideous monster. The ambiguity, despite the internal conflict it creates within Laura, has no consequential effect, as in the last sentence Laura admits that "often from a reverie I have started, fancying I heard the light step of Carmilla at the drawing room door."[2] Carmilla is dead and Laura is forever haunted by her memory, both loving and fearing her until her own death. The transgressive sapphic desire

[1] Weston, p. 109.
[2] Le Fanu, p. 86.

must be eradicated to return heteronormative society to its "correct" state, which is ineffective—Laura still loves Carmilla, but they will never be together. *The Blood of the Vampire* ends with the lines, "my parents have made me unfit to live. Let me go to a world where the curse of heredity which they laid upon me may be mercifully wiped out."[3] Harriet shoulders the consequences of her parents' actions and views her own death as the only corrective measure that can be taken. She is a victim of her parents, of Doctor Phillips, of Ralph Pullen, of Victorian society—she takes her own life as self-claimed mercy.

Gomez and Butler took what Carmilla and Harriet's endings could have been and shaped them into more. *The Gilda Stories* ends with the following line: "Gilda was no longer fleeing for her life."[4] The queer, persecuted, vampiric family will meet, every member together for the first time, and face their future side by side. The planet may be dying, but their kinship is reason enough to remain. Gomez positions the queer chosen family as triumphant, as the future, and as the inevitable expression of the love they share. Similarly, one of the last few things Shori thinks in *Fledgling* is "I would restore what could be restored."[5] She is aware that her original chosen family of symbionts *and* her immediate biological family is irretrievably lost to her. Instead, she chooses to focus on the attainable: she will build up her chosen family, learn how best to support them, and she will, eventually, become the mother of a biological family of her own. Butler positions queerness, choice, and diversity as the future—a future ideally characterised by love and acceptance. Where Le Fanu and Marryat could not imagine a queer happy ending, Gomez and Butler envision a queer ending to a narrative as inherently joyful.

Biologically, family is an extension of the self, of genetics passed down to new humans. But it is more than DNA that delineates the family: rather, it is teachings, a way of being, the type of person that the parent wants the child to be that is inherited. The chosen families are about beginnings—Gilda and Shori are examples of families that take their status of Other and use it to form their own space in the world. They pass on a way of being to their equals, to their children, to their parents. Through this evolution of the sapphic vampire, it is evident that attitudes towards queerness have developed positively. That is not to say that it is accepted as easily as heterosexuality, but these contemporary texts represent the hope that a queer chosen family may have for the future. Gomez and Butler project hope that families of the future that the sapphic woman creates, inclusive of both biological and chosen kin, will be

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[3] Marryat, p. 187.
[4] Gomez, *The Gilda Stories*, p. 252.
[5] Butler, p. 310.

built on love, respect, acceptance, and choice. In a life that may be lived forever, it is ideally best spent with those that cherish you and in turn will be cherished, eternally.

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