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Dark Ecology and Queer, Amphibious Vampires

NAOMI BOOTH

“Queer reworlding,” Donna Haraway has recently argued, “depends on reorienting the human” (*Companion Species* xxiv). In Haraway’s account, “[q]ueering has the job of undoing ‘normal’ categories, and none is more critical than the human/non-human” (xxiv). Haraway is one of a number of critics who have recently highlighted the ways in which the disruptive energies of queer theory might intersect with an ecological disruption of species categorization.¹ Queering, then, is seen in this article as necessarily extending in ecological directions, challenging the conceptual integrity of the ‘natural’ and the ‘human,’ alongside the heteronormative and anthronormative² apparatus these categories have often supported (Mortimer-Sandilands and Erickson 22). Haraway famously gave us the species-disruptive hybrid figure of the cyborg as a “political myth” that might help us with the task of “reinventing” Nature (“A Cyborg Manifesto” 149). I propose in this article that other ambiguous, “more-than-human” creatures (Mortimer-Sandilands and Erickson 23) presented in the literature of previous centuries might be read as the imaginative forerunners of such a reinvention. Specifically, I will suggest that the unruly figure of the vampire in late nineteenth-century

literature can be read as an early imagining of species-challenging hybridity, a hybridity that is also inherent in the terms ‘queer’ and ‘amphibious.’ I propose that ‘queer,’ ‘amphibious,’ and ‘vampire’ might be viewed as contiguous concepts, animating an ecological aesthetic that “ruthlessly denature[s] and de-essentialize[s]” the concept of nature in vampire texts (Morton, “Ecology as Text” 1).

Recent queer and ecologically-informed criticism has focused on the vampire as “a kind of queer nature that refuses the binary opposition between the natural and the unnatural, especially in terms of the sexual” (Azzarello 139). In this paper, I build on previous descriptions of the vampire as “eco-de-

constructive,” reading Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* (1897) alongside Sheridan Le Fanu’s *Carmilla* (1872), a text in which a queer female vampire is explicitly described as “amphibious.” The amphibian has been given an important place in the critic Timothy Morton’s recent attempts to theorize “dark ecology” (*Ecology Without Nature* 185). Morton calls for a re-estimation of “Nature,” demonstrating that “[l]ife-forms are constantly coming and going, mutating and becoming extinct” (21). Rather than venerating Nature as a single, identifiable fetish object, Morton encourages us to see the world as ecology in motion, as a multiplying series of interconnected life forms (*and* texts). The Latin *ambo*, “in both sides,” infuses Morton’s account

of how species-relation and aesthetics might be simultaneously rethought along ecological, interconnected lines. There is an ethical imperative, Morton argues, to value and protect the marginal, the ambivalent, and in particular the *amphibious*:

[I]f current industrial policies remain unchecked . . . spaces, such as coral reefs, and liminal spaces (Latin, *limen*, boundary) such as *amphibians*, will be increasingly at risk of being wiped out . . . I mean here to support these margins. As a matter of urgency, we just cannot go on thinking of them as in “between.” We must choose to include them on this side of human social practices, to factor them into our political and ethical decisions. (51)

The amphibian must, for Morton, be brought into our view of what it means to be a social human, and might be used to challenge our distinction between Nature and ourselves, between subject and object. The amphibious, then, is a liminal category that might be used to problematize the conceptual coherence of “species,” and to produce an inclusive and ecological version of the human. For Morton, the ecologically re-

conceived subject is necessarily a queer project:

To contemplate ecology's unfathomable intimacies is to imagine pleasures that are not heteronormative, not genital, not geared to ideologies about where the body stops and starts . . . It's not that ecological thinking would benefit from an injection of queer theory from the outside. It's that, fully and properly, ecology is queer theory and queer theory is ecology: queer ecology. ("Queer Ecology" 280–1)

In this paper, I argue that early vampire narratives might be reread as queer ecological fictions, re-imagining the human as a liminal, amphibious entity, reconstituted as a hybrid through the dark ecology of new blood relations. The assemblages, erotic species confusions, and queer desires that emerge in relation to the vampire establish an ecology that is far darker in tone than some contemporary, commodified versions of pristine Nature.³ Morton tells us that the ecological thought, as "the thinking of interconnectedness," has a lingering darkness that has nothing to do with "a hippy aesthetic of life over death, or a sadistic-sentimental Bambi-fication of sentient beings" (*Ecology Without Nature* 185). It has more in common with the "goth assertion of the contingent and necessarily queer idea that we want to *stay* in a dying world: dark ecology" (185). Morton's "dark ecology" describes human entanglement in the world at the moment of the apprehension of ecological catastrophe. Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands, editing a recent collection on *Queer Ecologies* (2010), makes similar claims for the importance of the apprehension of loss in nascent queer ecological work. The final part of this paper considers the importance of melancholic haunting for current theorizations of queer ecology, positing vampire literature as an example of the "non-normalizing relationship to the past" (Mortimer-Sandilands 341) that might be constitutive of queer,

dark ecologies.

Queer Dreams and *Dracula*

Fictional vampires have, since their inception, threatened to reconstitute traditional human families along the lines of newly forged blood relations. They act to impair individual agency and to transmute desire and connection along decidedly queer lines. When the first narrator of *Dracula*, Jonathon Harker, is making his journey east to visit the Count, he tells us that he does not "sleep well, though [his] bed was comfortable enough, for [he] had all sorts of queer dreams" (Stoker 8). Harker initially blames the paprika in the local food, but these "queer dreams" are a foreshadowing of the dreamy state in which he will soon exist, imprisoned in Count Dracula's castle. A sort of prolonged nightmare is to follow, for Harker and for us as readers. And this nightmare is pleasurable and terrifying by turns, as agency and mobility begin to seem impossible in the "paralysis of fear" produced by the vampire (19). In

en appear before Harker, with "brilliant white teeth, that shone like pearls against the ruby of their voluptuous lips" (45). Harker feels towards them an uneasy "longing" that is "at the same time some deadly fear." And he confesses to feeling in his heart "a wicked, burning desire that they would kiss me with those red lips" (45). The "wickedness" he self-diagnoses here is not just the desire for women other than his betrothed, the virtuous Mina; it seems also to be a more profoundly interdicted desire for *passivity*, to be sexually predated by three "voluptuous" women. Harker describes "looking out under my eyelashes in an agony of delightful anticipation" as the three advance upon him. As the fairest of them approaches, he can smell on her "sweet breath" an "offensiveness, as one smells in blood"; he can then feel the "supersensitive skin of my throat, and the hard dents of two sharp teeth, just touching and pausing there. I closed my eyes in a languorous ecstasy and waited—waited with beating heart" (46).

Early vampire narratives might be reread as queer ecological fictions, re-imagining the human as a liminal, amphibious entity, reconstituted as a hybrid through the dark ecology of new blood relations.

the opening stages of the novel, Harker describes himself in thrall to the Count, existing in a strange sleep-deprived state, in which he often wonders if he is dreaming. He falls asleep in a room in the castle he has been warned away from, and what follows is an exquisite description of the erotic pleasures of immobility, the paralysis of the dreamer sliding into a fantasized sexual immobility.

Three finely-dressed young wom-

The count intervenes at this point, claiming Harker for himself and depriving him and the female vampire of their consummation. Harker is overwhelmed by what he has experienced: "the horror overcame me, and I sank down unconscious," leaving the Count to carry him to bed (47). The sinking man seems here to be subject to a queer fall; his sinking represents the male desire to be erotically overwhelmed, made passive, by the vital, predatory vampire. When

Van Helsing, a model of vigorous masculine endeavor, storms Dracula's pile and encounters these same sleeping female vampires, he records the same languorous effects of their "voluptuous beauty." In his idiomatic English, he describes them producing the desire for immobility in a man, a desire for

delay, til the mere beauty and fascination of the wanton Un-Dead have hypnotize [*sic*] him . . . and the voluptuous mouth present to a kiss—and man is weak . . . I was moved to a yearning for delay which seemed to paralyse my faculties and to clog my very soul. (393)

At this point Van Helsing describes a "strange oppression" beginning to "overcome" him: "Certain it was that I was lapsing into sleep, the open-eyed sleep of one who yields to a sweet fascination" (393). The waking dream/nightmare of fascinated immobility at the advance of the beautiful vampire threatens to overwhelm Van Helsing, the upright scientist, too. The figure of the vampire renders the male characters of the novel prone to all sorts of queer sinkings; to faints, coyly termed "falls"; to hysterics;⁴ and, most profoundly, to the desire for a yielding, erotic immobility. Vampirism makes *men* subject to the kind of languorous immobility that had become symbolically associated with *feminine* forms of pathology by the end of the 18th century.⁵ We might read *Dracula*, then, as a kind of erotophobia. It suggests the dangers of the vampiric overwhelming of its male subjects, while revelling in describing the temptation towards "delay." Morton describes erotophobia as "the fear of and fascination with a feminized state" (*Ecology Without Nature* 137). The possibility of passive (feminized) masculine states here is a source of terror, which nevertheless betrays erotic fascination. Dracula threatens *all* of his victims with the desire to be immobile, to be subject to "a languorous ecstasy" which might seem dangerously close to desiring a "feminized state"; the queerest of dreams.

Animals Off Display

MARIANNA SZCZYGIELSKA

This series of photographs is an attempt to explore the impossible spaces of the contemporary zoological garden from a queer ecological perspective. I intentionally focus on the artificiality and finitude of the zoo landscape rather than on nonhuman animal bodies that are already overrepresented in the zoological reimagination of natural habitats. The zoo with its taxidermic taxonomy captures nonhuman animals within the species boundaries, turning them into things on display. Wary of the limits of representation I focus on what usually remains in the background, or functions as an obstacle for "wildlife photography," on the very edges of the voyeuristic imagemaking practice so present in the zoo nowadays. In this sense I see the zoo as a paradigmatic example of a Foucauldian heterotopia—a real place that stands outside of its space, and creates an illusion of a world in miniature captured in a timeless void.¹ There is no fire in a two-dimensional forest; there is no key to the door in the painted jungle. The photographs were taken in various zoological gardens around the world (Hungary, Poland, Singapore, Malaysia, Canada) as part of a large project, "Queer(ing) Naturecultures: The Study of Zoo Animals."

1. Foucault, Michel. "Of Other Spaces," *Diacritics* 16 (Spring 1986), 22-27.

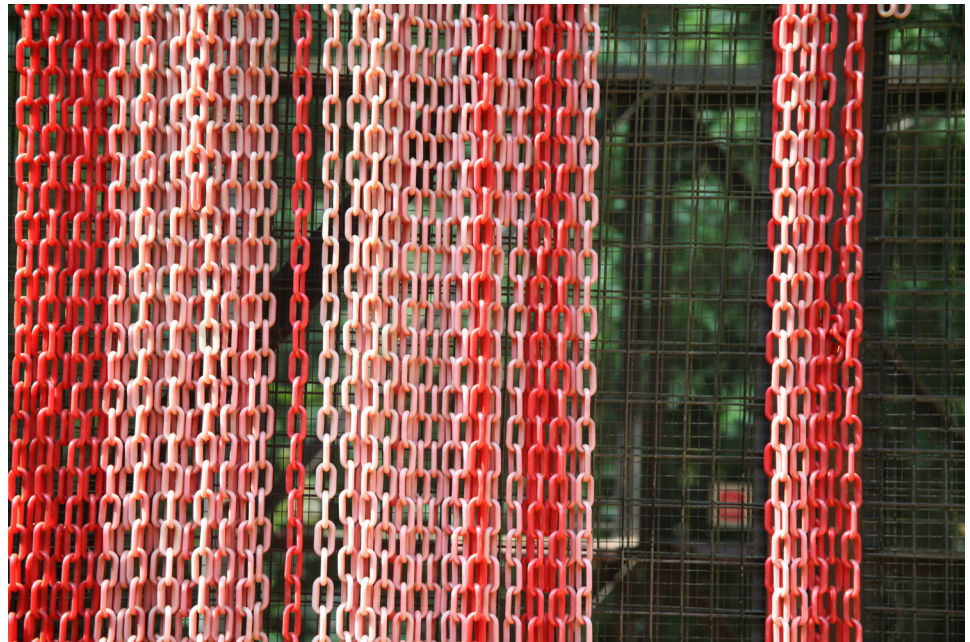


THE TORONTO ZOO. Marianna Szczygielska.

One of the key threats and *pleasures* of vampire narratives, then, is the imagined effect of the vampire on the agency and desires of his victim. None in a vampire narrative is safely allowed to remain themselves. This is most dramatically manifested as the telepathic influence the vampire is able to exert on his victims through the drinking of blood. But, in *Dracula*, there is also a parallel mesh of influence and interrelation between the ostensibly non-vam-

piric characters. I use the term "mesh" here to posit a parallel to Morton's idea of life-forms constituting an ecological "mesh":

a nontotalizable, open-ended concatenation of interrelations that blur and confound boundaries at practically any level: between species, between the living and the nonliving, between organism and environ-



ZOO IN BUDAPEST, HUNGARY/FŐVÁROSI ÁLLAT- ÉS NÖVÉNYKERT (L) AND MALACCA ZOO, MALAYSIA/ZOO MELACA (R).
Marianna Szczypińska.

ment. Visualizing the mesh is difficult: it defies our imaginative capacities and transcends iconography. (“Queer Ecology” 275–6)

Vampire fiction might be read as one (alarmist and eroticizing) attempt to iconize ecological mesh, a proleptic literature of ecological awareness. The vampire and his victims in *Dracula* form a new and bloody mesh. Blood transfusions between other characters in the novel provide a parallel circulation of blood-exchange, which similarly reconstitutes all the narrative’s main characters as enmeshed entities. Lucy Westerna, a beautiful young woman who is nightly drained of her blood by Dracula, is given transfusions in an attempt to save her from anemia. Arthur, Lucy’s betrothed, has donated his blood for this purpose, and feels that, even though her premature death prevents an actual marriage ceremony, the mingling of blood has made Lucy “his wife in the sight of god” (Stoker 185). At this suggestion, Van Helsing’s face grows “white and purple by turns” (185). The Professor’s intermittent floridity and blanching here reveals his dis-ease at this blood-tie version of marriage. All the strong young men in the nov-

el (who have also mostly been in love with Lucy) have donated their blood to her, unbeknown to Arthur. This blood promiscuity means that all the men are now married to the polyandrous Lucy, and also, by blood-mingling extension, to each other, to the Count, to Mina, and to Jonathon Harker.

The bloodletting that has made even the most virile among them feel “faint” has also bound them all together in an erotic mass-transfusion. This is the kind of pan-erotic connection that the vampire critic Christopher Frayling refers to as “haemosexuality” (xx), working from Maurice Richardson’s earlier influential psychoanalytic description of the cast of *Dracula* constituting one big incestuous family: a “kind of . . . necrophilius, oral-anal-sadistic all-in wrestling match” (387). In Richardson’s account, the “morbid dread” of the vampire stands in, following Freud’s dictum, “for repressed sexual desire” and the desire suggested here is for a multilateral, immobile sexual overwhelming in undifferentiated haemosexuality. A queer new version of the incestuous human family is produced here: a mesh of conjoined characters, living and undead.

Blood Relations and Erotic Contagion

The dis-ease with which Van Helsing, the medical professional, encounters this erotic mingling of blood is partly a realization of proliferating sexual connections, but it is also intimately connected with the vampire’s connection to disease. There have long been anthropological accounts of vampires that link their supposed appearances to altered physical states and to contagion. Christopher Frayling tells us that when vampire epidemics were reported across eastern and central Europe between 1672 and 1772, the Age of Reason and Enlightenment thinking adduced medical explanations that might correspond with contemporaneous scientific thinking. Some suggested food poisonings might be responsible for the belief in vampires, or that communities were embroiled in collective nightmares following opium use. It has also been suggested that plague was being re-imagined as vampirism:

The symptoms of the victim—pallor, listlessness, fever, nightmare—were thought to be those of the plague. The transmission of the ‘vampire’s curse’ from predator to victim, who then became predator in

turn, was a graphic way of explaining the rapid spread of plague germs. (Frayling 25)

The possibility of vampirism as an account of rabies has also been considered, and Frayling suggests that most recent folklorist analyses of the vampire outbreaks of 1731–2 have concluded that the “manifestations” represent, at least in part, “attempts by preliterate communities to make sense of what we would today call ‘contagion’” (26).⁶ Ernest Jones, in *On the Nightmare*, makes the same point about the close correlation between the visitation of the Black Death and reports of vampirism in the Middle Ages, telling us that “even as late as 1855 the terrible cholera epidemic in the Dantsic revived such a widespread belief in the dead returning as vampires to claim the living that, according to medical opinion, the fears of the people greatly increased the mortality from the disease” (413). It is interesting that Jones mentions cholera here, given the accounts of the horrific epidemics in Ireland that Bram Stoker’s mother, Charlotte, wrote for him. In these she describes to Stoker the disease’s “bitter strange kiss” and the fact that many were buried alive, “stultified from opium” (Stoker 412). The double meaning of pathology can be felt to resonate here, as both the apprehension of disease and *the pleasurable feeling* of succumbing that might bleed out from its strange, bitter kiss.⁷

To further explore the ramifications of erotic contagion in the context of dark ecology, I turn now to a slightly earlier queer vampire tale. It is perhaps no coincidence that this tale was also written by an Irish writer, one who had lived through the cholera outbreaks as well as the horrific starvation and cannibalism of the Great Famine (1845–1852). Sheridan Le Fanu’s *Carmilla* was originally published in 1872 as part of his popular *In a Glass Darkly* collection, which ostensibly presented the posthumous papers of an occult detective. This particular case is narrated by its central character, Laura, who recounts the visit she and her father received in their “lonely” forest mansion in Styria⁸



MALACCA ZOO, MALAYSIA/ZOO MELACA. Marianna Szczygielska.

from a beautiful, refined young woman who is unexpectedly placed in their care. The two young women, Laura and Carmilla, seem to remember one another instantly. Carmilla claims to share a traumatic “dream” that Laura also had as a young child, in which a beautiful woman caressed her: she “lay down beside me on the bed, and drew me towards her, smiling; I felt immediately delightfully soothed, and fell asleep again. I was wakened by a sensation as if two needles ran into my breast very deep at the same moment, and I cried loudly” (90).

The two girls begin to share a reciprocal trance-like attraction: “I wonder whether you feel as strangely drawn towards me as I do to you?” Carmilla asks Laura. “Now the truth is, I felt rather unaccountably towards the beautiful stranger,” Laura tells us. “I did feel, as she said, ‘drawn towards her,’ but there was also something of repulsion. In this ambiguous feeling, however, the sense of attraction immensely prevailed. She interested me and won me, she was so beautiful and indescribably *engaging*” (101, emphasis in original). Laura exhibits the mesmerized fascination common to the vampire experience, and this sense of captivated immobility is deepened and inflected through the repeated use of the term “languor.”

Carmilla’s “bodily langour” is often remarked upon, and becomes part of her attractiveness to Laura: “Her beauty was, I think, enhanced by that graceful langour that was peculiar to her” (123). Carmilla exhibits the nineteenth-century vogue for looking consumptive, as described by Susan Sontag. “Romantic agony,” Sontag tells us, is trammelled during this period into a glamorization of debilitation, whereby specific kinds of morbidity are transformed into the desirable state of langour (30).

When Carmilla’s attentions to Laura become particularly ardent, she briefly wonders, in a Shakespearean turn of mind, if Carmilla might be a man dressed as a woman, come to woo her. But, she decides, this is implausible: “I could boast of no little attentions such as masculine gallantry delights to offer . . . there was always a langour about her, quite incompatible with a masculine system in a state of health” (105). Carmilla’s attractiveness is bound up with her langour and the exquisite feminine illness it connotes. The possibility of this langour being infectious is the basis for reciprocal erotic attraction here. Laura describes Carmilla’s embraces becoming “foolish,” that is over-intimate, and wishes to extricate herself from them: “but my energies seemed to fail me. Her murmured words sounded



OLD ZOO IN POZNAŃ, POLAND/STARE ZOO W POZNANIU. Marianna Szczygielska.

like a lullaby in my ear, and soothed my resistance into a trance” (104).

The dangerousness of this seductive langour is made manifest as young girls in the surrounding area begin to die. The young women report seeing a ghost, or a figure that seizes them by the throat, and then the process of their decline is described as “sinking” (106, 109). Laura’s father thinks they are in the midst of an epidemic fever, and both girls wear charms as an “antidote against the malaria” (118). However, it becomes clear that Laura has now contracted this “illness.” Every morning she feels an increased “lassitude and languor”; she believes that she is darkly transforming: “I feel myself a changed girl.” Her apprehension of this sickness is also an apprehension of her failure of volition:

[A]n idea that I was slowly sinking took gentle, and, somehow, not unwelcome possession of me . . . Without knowing it, I was now in a pretty advanced state of the *strangest illness* under which mortal ever suffered. There was an unaccountable fascination in its earlier symptoms that more than reconciled me to the incapacitating effect of that stage of the malady. (118)

The erotic immobility of the vampire/contagion victim is further attested to in Laura’s nightly dreams, where strange sensations visit her, in particular the “peculiar cold thrill which we feel in bathing, when we move against the current of a river” succeeded by the feeling that “warm lips kissed me, and longer and more lovingly as they reached my neck and throat . . . a sense of strangulation, supervened, and turned into a dreadful convulsion, in which my sense left me, and I became unconscious” (118, 119). Sexual ecstasy and horror in the midst of disease/predation climax here into a swoon. But, Laura refuses medical help for her dreadful/ecstatic complaint, she tells us, because of the “narcotic” influence that is acting upon her (119).

Carmilla is the contagion. She admits that she has herself “suffered from this very illness” (109). Discussing the spread of the “fever” with Laura’s father, she tells him that the “disease that invades the country is *natural*. *Nature*. All things spring from Nature—don’t they? All things in the heaven, in the earth, and under the earth, act and live as Nature ordains? I think so” (109). Vampirism, contagion, and the spread of queer desires *are* Nature in Carmilla’s account. Further, she pursues an erotic intimacy with Laura which seems to share much in common with Morton’s conception of

ecological intimacy: “a polymorphously perverse belonging (and longing) that doesn’t fit in a straight box—an intimacy well described by queer theory when it argues that sexuality is never a case of a norm versus its pathological variants” (“Queer Ecology” 278).

Carmilla’s philosophy of the natural involves a version of the erotic that is at once a disintegrative and deadly fusion of the lovers *and* their transformation into other organic forms: “[Y]ou shall die,” she murmurs to Laura, who is immobilized in her embrace, “die, sweetly die—into [my life] . . . you, in your turn, will draw near to others, and learn the rapture of that cruelty, which yet is love” (103). Then she kisses her. This recalls Ernest Jones’s account of vampirism as the continued relation between the living and the dead, a reunion which might transform individuals into conjoined organisms. For Jones, vampiric conjoining is the correspondent of the desire for lovers to die together expressed in Wagner’s *Liebestod* in *Tristan and Isolde*: “our being we might blend/ in love without an end” (qtd. in Jones 405). The transformative connections stressed in *Carmilla* also remind me of the many other ways in which shared blood is imagined to mesh individuals into strange new amalgams: the childhood rituals of cutting fingers and rubbing blood on blood to produce playground “blood brothers”; folk-magical beliefs that secreting menstrual blood in a man’s food might bind the beloved to the bleeding woman; or the continued belief in menstrual synchronicity.⁹

Later, Carmilla extols to Laura the virtues of the opportunity “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 larva, don’t you see—each with their peculiar propensities, necessities, and structure” (110). This vision of the erotic as the propensity towards merger and organic metamorphosis is followed by a description of the vampire as an “amphibious existence” (147). The vampire is both at once: it is symbiotically doubled rather than single; it is an ev-

er-changing “existence” rather than a solitary life form. In Le Fanu’s imagining of the vampire as queer amphibian, as the contagious metamorphosis that is nature, we can discern the beginnings of the dark understanding that has been recently expounded by Morton as dark ecology. In Morton’s deconstructive re-estimation of nature, those “unnatural” terms against which it might seem to stand, for instance “queer” or “disease,”¹⁰ might instead be drawn into its purview. We might, then, hear the vampire Carmilla’s plaintive question echo through Morton’s work: “disease . . . is *natural*. *Nature*. All things spring from Nature—don’t they?” (109)

The ideas of “hosting” and “hospitality” might be helpful here as ways to further explore the notion of queer vampiric/ecological/deconstructive symbiosis. The risk of contagion in *Carmilla* is simultaneously achieved through the idea of the body as the host of disease (of fever, of “malaria,” of “the strangest illness”), and of the home as hosting the self-replicating vampire. Hosting and hospitality have long played an important part in vampire mythology,¹¹ with vampires often needing to be *invited* across the threshold into a victim’s home. In the case of *Carmilla*, the vampire is handed over into the care of various aristocratic homes and she thanks each host heartily for their “hospitality,” later being described by them as a “perfidious and beautiful guest” (114, 145). The uneasy proximity between hospitality and predation has been explored in J. Hillis Miller’s incendiary deconstruction of the terms “parasite” and “host.” Hillis Miller (1977) tells us that “parasite” originally had a positive meaning, referring to “a fellow guest, someone sharing the food with you, there with you beside [*para*] the grain” (442). As the meaning of the term “parasite” modulates towards predation, “The host and the somewhat sinister or subversive parasite are fellow guests beside the food, sharing it. On the other hand, the host is himself the food, his substance consumed without recompense, as when one says, ‘He is eating me out of house and home’” (Hillis Miller 442). This sense also echoes

through the use of “host” to refer to the Eucharist bread: the host as sacrifice, or symbolic victim. But if the host is both the eater and the eaten, he also contains in himself “the double antithetical relation of host and guest, guest in the bifold sense of friendly presence and alien invader,” because host and ghost share the same etymological root:

ghos-ti, stranger, guest, host, properly; someone with whom one has reciprocal duties of hospitality . . . A host is a guest, and a guest is a host. A host is a host. The relation of . . . host and parasite in the original sense of “fellow guest,” is inclosed [*sic*] within the word “host” itself. A host in the sense of a guest, moreover, is both a friendly visitor in the house and at the same time an alien presence. (442–3)

Working through these terms as an example of deconstruction, Hillis Miller suggests that there is always already an alien guest in the home of the *text*: each reading of a poem contains “its enemy within itself, is itself both host and parasite” (447). Deconstruction is, then, bound up with the strange logic of the welcomed parasite; “Deconstruction,”

Derrida famously remarked, “is just visiting” (“Time is Out of Joint” 29). The idea of deconstruction as the welcome alien is perhaps even more pronounced in Derrida’s idea of “autoimmunity” (*Rogues* 45). The term “autoimmunity” is best known to us through autoimmune diseases such as Multiple Sclerosis and AIDS, wherein the body treats its own material as alien, producing an immune response against its own cells and tissues. As Michael Naas explains, in Derrida’s thinking, the autoimmune “entails an attack not simply on the self through some kind of self-destructive behaviour, but an attack on those things that protect and defend the self, leaving it open, vulnerable, hospitable to outside forces” (162). This is at once “a threat and an opportunity”:

The threat or danger is that in compromising the self . . . [it] may allow within it something that will eventually destroy it, a virus, a would-be assassin, a terrorist cell. But the opportunity consists in the fact that by compromising the *autos* in this way, by opening the self to what is other than and outside it, beyond its borders, it has the chance of welcoming something that may help it go



THE SINGAPORE ZOO/TAMAN HAIWAN SINGAPURA. Marianna Szczygielska.

beyond itself. (Naas 165)

The questioning of the integrity of the self that is inherent in the concept of autoimmunity therefore leads Naas to think of deconstruction “as autoimmunity” (166).

The concept of autoimmunity might then be the continuation of Hillis Miller’s earlier account of deconstruction and the welcome parasite. In the account Hillis Miller provides, deconstruction is an investigation of the *inherence* of “figure, narrative and concept in one another” (443), so we get a sense of the way in which we might think deconstruction as a discipline of ecological symbiosis, a study of interrelations and symbiotic interdependences, and a critique of the coherence of individual selves. This idea is emphasized by Morton when he argues that life forms cannot be said to differ in a “rigorous” way from texts: both exist as series of non-unitary interrelations, as ecology and deconstruction might demonstrate to us. To develop an ecological culture, Morton suggests, we would benefit from “concepts that ruthlessly denature and de-essentialize: they are called deconstruction” (“Ecology as Text” 1).

Queer, Dark Ecologies

Deconstructing the notion of Nature out of its naturalness, Morton’s dark ecology performs the same kind of queer and contingent reimagining of nature-as-ecology (*Ecology Without Nature* 143) that is exemplified in Carmilla’s notion of the natural vampire. Here, dying is imaginatively posited as the high point of collapse and interconnection in both of these ecological accounts. For Morton, “dying is becoming the environment” (71); for Carmilla, dying is entering into new vampiric life, the girlish larvae metamorphosed into the undead butterfly. Vampire narratives have long made dying mesmerizingly beautiful. Dracula’s first victim, Lucy Westerna, “is a very beautiful corpse ... God! How beautiful she was” (Stoker 174, 180). “Lingering” with death as a beautiful possibility is at the heart of dark ecology. Thinking about the vampire might also, then, be

thinking about *staying with* the process of dying, in life. “Lingering” with death, with something “painful, disgusting, grief-striking” is, Morton argues, “exactly what we need right now, ecologically speaking” (*Ecology Without Nature* 197). This is because, Morton argues, the looming ecological catastrophe has *already* happened: we have already entered the sixth mass extinction event and must imaginatively accept, whilst staying in the world, that we are in some sense already dead (*Hyperobjects* 7). We should, then, “be finding ways to stick around with the sticky mess that we’re in and that we are, making thinking

which resistance might be found, Mortimer-Sandilands focuses on particular writers in the late-twentieth century for whom the “commingling of queer and ecological” sensibilities opens onto “an engagement with environmental loss and environmental responsibility” (Mortimer-Sandilands 332). Mortimer-Sandilands strikingly describes this engagement as, “a condition of *melancholia*, a state of suspended mourning in which the object of loss is very real but psychically ‘ungrievable’ within the confines of a society that cannot acknowledge nonhuman beings, natural environments, and ecological process-

Queer ecological resistance must insist on a “non-normalizing relationship to the past.”

dirtier, identifying with ugliness, practicing ‘hauntology’ (Derrida’s phrase)” (*Ecology Without Nature* 188). Dark ecology in this sense has more in “common with the undead than with life” (201). In his most explicitly vampiric formulation, Morton tells us that “The task is not to bury the dead but to join them, to be bitten by the undead and become them” (201). Our current moment of ecological catastrophe has rendered vampire fiction prophetic: *we are already* the amphibious undead stalking the diluvian world, and vampire literature has already described this strange predicament in its lingering, languorous descriptions of dark new ecologies.¹²

Vampire literature, I have argued, has a renewed relevance for theorizations of queer ecology now. In a recent publication, Mortimer-Sandilands and Erickson propose that queer ecology can be seen as part of a “tradition of resistance” (21), focused on the eco-sexual transformation of heteronormativity and nature. For Mortimer-Sandilands, this resistance must involve a melancholic dwelling on “what has been lost” to our culture’s destructive homophobic and anthropocentric violence (39). While literature is not the only space in

es as appropriate objects for genuine grief” (333). Resonating with Morton’s “grief-striking” sense of dark ecology, Mortimer-Sandilands’ melancholia “suggests a present that is not only haunted but constituted by the past: literally built of ruins and rejections” (340). If our current culture produces conditions in which “the everyday relations we have with the more-than-human world are unmarked, unnamed, and ungrievable,” making it “almost impossible to recognize the value of what has been lost,” then queer ecological resistance must insist on a “non-normalizing relationship to the past,” on the perpetual return of the things that contemporary consumer culture has diminished, denied, destroyed and commodified (333–341). The haunted and haunting tales of gothic literature, patterned on the return of the dead, might help us in this task, and the nineteenth-century vampire, as a figure of queer, dark ecology, might have a curious relevance for attempts to re-imagine our inhabitation of the material world at the start of the twenty-first century.

Notes

1. See, for instance, the recent collection *Queering the Non/Human* (2008), edited by Giffney and

Hird.

2. This is Alice Kuzniar's term (qtd. in Giffney and Hird 3).

3. See Mortimer-Sandilands (337) on commodified versions of "pristine" nature currently peddled by ecotourism.

4. Van Helsing is described as giving way to "a regular fit of hysterics . . . just as a woman does" (Stoker 180) under the pressure of dealing with the vampire Lucy.

5. Elaine Showalter suggests that hysteria had been the quintessential female malady for centuries, but that during the "golden age" of hysteria it assumed an especially central role in definitions of femininity and female sexuality, such that by the end of the 19th century, "hysterical" had become almost interchangeable with "feminine." Even where doctors, such as Charcot, treated male hysterics, "hysteria remained symbolically, if not medically, a female malady" (Showalter 129, 148). The critic Gretchen Mieszkowski has suggested that other forms of prostrate indisposition, in particular fainting, had become symbolically feminine by

the end of the 18th century. My current research focuses on this process of feminisation in relation to swooning.

6. Frayling also advises us to consider "the initial reactions of *post-literate* societies to the AIDS epidemic. The resemblances [to folklore vampire accounts] are startling to say the least" (27). Frayling suggests particular similarities in the emphasis on an accusatory "who did it" rather than an exploratory attempt to understand the viral mechanisms of contagion.

7. The OED gives as the first meaning of pathology, now rare: "I. Senses to do with feelings."

8. Now part of Austria.

9. For a review of recent research on this phenomenon see Gosline. The review suggests that this phenomenon is an enduring myth rather than a scientifically verifiable phenomenon.

10. The "nature" writer Kathleen Jamie has recently questioned these distinctions, too, describing her visit to the pathology department of a hospital in order to challenge what she calls "fore-shortened" definitions of nature, which institute

"otters and primroses" over "our own intimate, inner natural world, the body's weird shapes and forms [which] sometimes go awry . . . the bacteria that can pull the rug from under us," the "rubbery brownish-pink" of a segment of colon and the "hard whitish deposit" of a tumor (24, 26–27).

11. Frayling notes that one of the earliest vampire accounts, contained in the Istrian *Ehre dess Herzogtum Krains* (1672), describes a male vampire who likes to be invited across the threshold, after knocking. This is repeated in many later accounts, where the vampire must be invited into a victim's house (Frayling 42).

12. Morton expresses the power of literature as vampiric contagion in his suggestion that the gothic tackiness of Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" is aesthetics as ecology in the sense that its point, rather than providing a "moral" ("don't shoot albatrosses!"), is to "infect others," to perpetuate violent interrelation through literature as contagion (*Ecology Without Nature* 159).

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