Review Essay: The Proliferating Undead

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Abbott, Stacey. *Celluloid Vampires: Life After Death in the Modern World.* Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007. 266 pp. Soft cover. ISBN 9780292716964. $24.95.

Bak, John S., ed. *Post/Modern Dracula: From Victorian Themes to Postmodern Praxis.* Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2007. 162 pp. Hardcover. ISBN 9781847182005. $49.99.

Keyworth, David. *Troublesome Corpses: Vampires & Revenants from Antiquity to the Present.* Essex: Desert Island Books Limited, 2007. 320 pp. ISBN 9781905328307. £30.

McClelland, Bruce A. *Slayers and Their Vampires: A Cultural History of Killing the Dead.* Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006. 260 pp. Soft cover. ISBN 9780472069231. $19.95.

As Stephen D. Arata observes in his seminal essay on *Dracula*, "The Occidental Tourist: *Dracula* and the Anxiety of Reverse Colonization," what marks the vampire in Stoker's vampire ur-text is his monstrous *fecundity*. What Dracula does and aspires to do (much to the dismay of Stoker's "Crew of Light," to borrow from Christopher Craft) is to procreate, to create more vampires—a premise that has been elaborated upon to the point of absurdity in twentieth- and twenty-first century vampire fiction and film (if everyone is a vampire, what's left to eat?). A hallmark of the vampire tradition in fiction and cinema is thus the anxiety of the living over the potential proliferation of the undead.

But vampires seem to breed more vampires wherever they go. The viral potency of the undead is also evident, albeit in a (marginally) less threatening

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form, in the constantly expanding corpus of secondary literature on vampires in fact and fancy. It appears that once academics get bit, they can't stop talking about vampires and, in the same way that vampires breed more vampires, books on vampires seem to breed more books on vampires! Four of the most recent entries in the category of undead scholarship, David Keyworth's *Troublesome Corpses: Vampires & Revenants from Antiquity to the Present*, Bruce A. McClelland's *Slayers and Their Vampires: A Cultural History of Killing the Dead*, John S. Bak's *Post/Modern Dracula: From Victorian Themes to Postmodern Praxis*, and Stacey Abbott's *Celluloid Vampires: Life After Death in the Modern World*, demonstrate the scope and breadth of the vampire's icy grasp. From ancient Greece to our modern moment and from medieval European folklore to contemporary cinema, these four books, taken together, offer a fascinating—if at times frustrating—overview of both the vampire's metamorphic abilities and its persistently hypnotic gaze. At the same time, this quartet of bitey books tells us quite a bit about our preoccupations and desires in the early years of the twenty-first century.

David Keyworth's *Troublesome Corpses* is itself, I'm afraid, a troublesome book. As Keyworth makes clear in the introduction, his intention is to present "a historical survey, descriptive analysis and phenomenological study of vampires and undead-corpses in Western Europe from antiquity to the twenty-first century" (6). In the service of this objective, Keyworth offers seventeen chapters ranging in length from 5 pages to 24 (with the average length somewhere in between) that begin by considering undead revenants in works of antiquity and make their way forward to the twentieth century (but not, one must point out, to the present), stopping periodically to consider witches, werewolves, demons, and other pesky quasi-undead creatures.

Keyworth's methodology is primarily comparative, and he prefers to let his source texts speak for themselves through extensive quotation. What this leads to are chapters that are constructed entirely around the sequential juxtaposition of quotations from and accounts of vampires and revenants from different regions and cultures during roughly the same time frame. So, for example, *Troublesome Corpses*' second chapter, "Undead Corpses in the Medieval Period," begins by considering accounts of revenants in twelfth-century England, shifts abruptly to twelfth-century Scandinavia, jumps back in time to accounts from tenth-century Iceland, and then moves forward to thirteenth-century Scotland and Germany. There is no attempt to look at any of the representations of revenants in context, which allows Keyworth, for instance, to consider in chapter 5, "A Comparative Typology of Vampires & Other Undead Corpses," Swahili folktales and tales of Serbian gypsies about "belligerent pumpkins" (70) in the same breath, and then to move on in the next two paragraphs to consider sixteenth-century French accounts of "the evil propensity of certain fruits" (70, no mention of the kiwi, alas) and

accounts of revenants that take on animal form, respectively. Furthermore, translation is never raised as an issue, despite the fact that Keyworth introduces an astonishing array of tales and reports from many different centuries and cultures.

Keyworth for better or worse (mostly worse) is saved from the accusation that he mistakes analogy for homology by an overall absence of analysis and reflection. The book offers a comparative typology of revenants as introduced in folklore from various times and places without any larger argument or purpose. He does not attempt to explain the cultural or contemporary significance of any of the accounts detailed or to argue that there are any necessary connections between, for example, the various accounts of "astral vampires" that he surveys in chapter 17. Rather, he just strings together summations of and quotations from various accounts of vampires that feature, say, a putrid scent or which engage in sexual congress with the living. The comparisons can't be considered flawed because nothing is being compared beyond surface similarity. For example, Greek and Russian vampires in medieval folklore both feature evil stares, reports Keyworth. What this means or why it is significant or whether a wink from a Greek vampire is the same as a blink from a Russian one (not a scenario Clifford Geertz has considered, to the best of my knowledge) is anyone's guess. It's a bit like saying that both Finland and sharks have fins. It's undeniable, but the fins, of course, are completely different.

What also distinguishes Keyworth's book is a dizzying overreliance on adverbs as transitions between paragraphs, which is an unfortunate outgrowth of the study's comparative methodology and only serves to accentuate the ahistorical approach of the book. The reader is overwhelmed with paragraphs that begin with "similarly" (a real favorite of Keyworth), "interestingly," "likewise," "nonetheless," and "furthermore"—indeed, adverbial transitions appear in such profusion that there will sometimes be five on the same page rendering the text (at least for this reader) an extremely annoying read. If there ever was a book that needed a strong editor to take the author in hand and introduce him to methods to vary transitions and sentence structure, it is this one. It is, alas, quite simply a poorly written book.

Troublesome Corpses, announces Keyworth on the first page, is a study intended as an academic textbook for university students in courses on folklore, cultural history, and religious studies. I can't possibly see assigning this book for a course on any level because it sets the poorest possible example for research methodology as well as for prose. However, what this book does accomplish—its true value—is the presentation of new documentary material. Keyworth introduces folkloric accounts of vampires and revenants that have never before been cited or quoted, and thus this book directs scholars to a wealth of sources ripe for the analysis Keyworth never provides. The kindest way to consider Keyworth is as a sort of archeologist who has dug up a variety

of interesting artifacts and has left them to other scholars to interpret and explain. The sheer profusion of accounts that Keyworth provides is impressive and easily convinces the reader that vampire-like creatures lurk in folklore throughout the Western world.

A much better book for students—one that is vastly more sensitive to historical context and the nuances of translation (and which, unlike *Troublesome Corpses* comes close to the present in actuality rather than just in subtitle)—is Bruce A. McClelland's *Slayers and Their Vampires: A Cultural History of Killing the Dead*. Indeed, despite the fact that McClelland's and Keyworth's studies were both published in the same year, the former can almost be seen as a rebuke to the methodology of the latter. McClelland is interested in how understandings of the idea of the vampire have developed over time and the extent to which contemporary representations both preserve and diverge from their folkloric roots. He notes in his introduction concerning the Slavic word *vampir* that its significance has changed greatly over the last thousand years or so, but that "most writers on the subject [e.g., Keyworth] have ignored both the cultural context in which the term arose and the possible changes in the nature of the thing designated by the word across time" (3). McClelland thus undertakes the task of unearthing the "deep history" of the vampire with particular attention not only to the vampire himself but to the vampire's adversary, the slayer. The folkloric vampire cannot exist without a formula or method to dispatch him, asserts McClelland; however, the folkloric slayer was, like the vampire, marked in some way by a connection with the world of the dead. He was a magician, healer, or shaman—"a holy person from a pre-Christian religion with a much different idea about the afterlife" (9)—and he met his demise ironically not at the hands of the vampire (among the many interesting details that McClelland includes are that the now iconic fangs are a relatively recent invention), but at the hands of proselytizing Christian polemicists. It was only once the role of the slayer was diminished that the vampire could become a protagonist in Romantic fiction. McClelland returns to the folklore in effect to "restore the balance […] between the vampire and his heroic adversary" (6).

What follows McClelland's introduction are ten chapters organized more or less chronologically that explore the folkloric representation of the vampire as a type of scapegoat (chapter 2), examine the development of the term "vampire" itself (chapters 3–5), scrutinize the mythology of the vampire slayer (chapters 6 and 7), consider the significance of Dutch physician and historian Gerard van Swieten on transforming understandings of the vampire (chapter 8), and then consider both the buried folkloric roots and divergences of vampire and slayer representation in Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (chapter 9) and in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (chapter 10).

Reading McClelland's study against Keyworth's is an interesting experi-

ence because many of McClelland's arguments call into question Keyworth's all-to-facile amalgamation of representations of various supernatural and natural creatures and practices in different cultures under the rubric "vampire." McClelland begins, in contrast, by noting that, while the origin of the word *vampir* cannot be pinpointed exactly, the evidence suggests that it was a Slavic word used between eight hundred and a thousand years ago to label an individual who either belonged to a particular group or practiced specific beliefs or rituals—which is to say that the original vampires were not supernatural beings, but cultural outsiders (32–33). The earliest use of the term, continues McClelland, has been linked with a heretical Bulgarian Gnostic sect known as the Bogomils, "whose dualistic beliefs challenged Orthodox Christianity from the tenth through the fourteenth centuries" (42–43). From there, McClelland traces the ways in which ideas about heretics referred to as vampires fused with beliefs about pagans as blood drinkers and Jews as enemies of Christ into an image of heretical Christ-hating blood drinkers.

After excavating these origins in the first several chapters, McClelland turns his attention in chapter 4 to the vampire as a communal scapegoat—an unclean, transgressive entity that needs to be expelled in order to restore social cohesion and order. And in order for this restoration of order to occur, the vampire needs to be detected, confronted, and destroyed—enter the slayer. Slayers, asserts McClelland, are in the folklore themselves quasi-supernatural beings and come in different forms. *Vampirdžii*, for example, are offspring of a vampire and his former mate and are endowed with some supernatural features, including the abilities to detect and destroy vampires. The *sâbotnik*, someone born on a Saturday—and thus symbolically tied to Judaism through the connection with the Jewish Sabbath—shares some supernatural abilities with the vampire but is not himself the offspring of a vampire. Marked as outsiders, slayers share features with the vampire but act on behalf of the community to expel evil forces.

Notable about McClelland's study is the way in which he intertwines discussion of the evolution of the idea of the vampire with analysis of the significance of the countervailing force, the slayer. Chapters 6 and 7 continue and expand the discussion of folkloric beliefs surrounding slayers with attention to regional variations. Of particular interest here is McClelland's observation that missing from the folklore is any sense of violent contestation between the vampire and the slayer. Quite to the contrary, asserts McClelland, "there is a feeling of ritualized finality, in which the vampire slayer never encounters real resistance, never had to track down his elusive prey, but instead must simply identify his enemy among the recently deceased [...] and perform the necessary and proper gestures to destroy him once and for all" (113). In this way, concludes McClelland, the relationship between vampire and slayer is analogous to that between sacrificial victim or scapegoat and sacrificer.

Chapter 8 of *Slayers and Their Vampires* considers the translation of the vampire from the Eastern into the Western European worldview, what was lost and gained, and what explains the transformation. Lost was the Slavic/Orthodox conception of the underworld and path of the soul after death (127). Gained was a powerful link between the vampire and the idea of epidemic disease—something not present in Slavic and Balkan folklore. (Also a relatively recent invention, reports McClelland, is the idea that a person bitten by a vampire becomes one.) And the person most immediately responsible for this transformation of the vampire—making it available as an object of fascination for artists and writers—was Dutch physician Gerard van Swieten. Dispatched by Empress Maria Theresa of Austria in 1755 to Moravia to investigate reported outbreaks of vampirism, the Enlightenment-influenced van Swieten proposed materialist explanations for allegedly supernatural events, and, McClelland contends, with van Swieten's report, "any remaining folkloric or mythological function of belief in the animated dead crumbled immediately to dust" (135). This "death of the demonic" in Western Europe transformed witches and vampires into symbols available to be appropriated by the Romantics, and in *Slayers and Their Vampires'* last two chapters, McClelland considers two such appropriations.

Chapter 9 takes up Stoker's *Dracula* and considers the transformation of the vampire from agrarian peasant into aristocratic parasite in Romantic literature. And not only does the vampire change, but so does the relationship between vampire and slayer. In Stoker's *Dracula*—and most modern vampire stories and movies—the emphasis is not on identifying the vampire but on the contest between the vampire and slayer. Van Helsing, according to McClelland, is the first professional vampire slayer in English literature. And yet, asserts McClelland, he is incomplete on his own—he is lacking the essential attribute of the vampire slayer: mystical insight. He has not entered the world of the dead and is not marked in any special way as other (161). (McClelland does note Van Helsing's foreignness, but this is not quite the same thing as shamanistic mystical insight.) The folkloric roots of the vampire story then reassert themselves through the necessity of Mina as seer. McClelland argues that the combination of Van Helsing and Mina results in one complete vampire slayer, "a union of rational intellect and spiritual power derived from 'feminine intuition'" (164).

In chapter 10, McClelland, naturally in this study of vampires and their slayers, turns to *Buffy*, "perhaps the first time in the history of the modern vampire slayer [that] the slayer's calling is explicit and formal rather than merely circumstantial" (179). (While McClelland does mention Roman Polanski's *Fearless Vampire Killers* [1967] in this context, he perhaps can be excused for overlooking the extremely mediocre Hammer Studios film *Captain Kronos—Vampire Hunter* [1974].) *Buffy* restores, asserts McClelland, the

understanding of the slayer as someone specially marked for the task. Chapter 10 then concludes with a brief summation that emphasizes the book's larger points: that the essential functions of both the vampire and the slayer remain invariant and that vampire and slayer are cut from the same cloth. Following chapter 10 is a brief appendix that examines in detail the origins of the word vampir in Old Russian and Old Slavic.

McClelland's *Slayers and Their Vampires* does what Keyworth's study makes no attempt to do: it analyzes the development of vampire folklore and its shift into literature and popular culture with attention to context, nuance, and language. It is fully annotated, nicely written, and convincing and presents a useful model for undergraduates and graduate students for historical research. And, significantly, there is an argument here that organizes the discussion—that the history of the conjoined pair vampire / slayer reveals a "well-developed and extremely subtle mechanism for heroizing that which helps a community bury the traces of injustice committed in the name of preserving things as they are" (185). What McClelland's text develops is the social utility of vampires in folklore and, to a somewhat lesser extent in contemporary popular culture, the role they—as abject creatures functioning as scapegoats to be expunged—played and perhaps continue to play in maintaining social stability. Keyworth's text effectively illustrates the ubiquity of supernatural blood drinkers in world literature; McClelland's text helps us to understand why they appear with such regularity. For all their transgressiveness, vampires are thus ironically revealed to be ideologically conservative—they are there to be killed in the name of preserving "things as they are."

But is this always and inevitably the case? And to what extent can this analysis be applied to the proliferating undead of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries? In contrast to Keyworth's *Troublesome Corpses* and McClelland's *Slayers and Their Vampires*, John S. Bak's edited collection, *Post/Modern Dracula: From Victorian Themes to Postmodern Praxis*, and Stacey Abbot's *Celluloid Vampires: Life After Death in the Modern World*, focus not on the folkloric roots of the vampire but on modern literary and cinematic representations of the vampire and their significances for understanding modern culture. The Bak collection consists of a brief preface and then nine essays based on papers given at the international conference "Victorian Themes / Postmodern Praxes: *Dracula* from Stoker to Coppola," held at Nancy-Université in France in 2006. The essays themselves are grouped into three sections composed of three essays each: "(Post)Modernism in *Dracula*," "Post/Modernism in Stoker's *Dracula*," and "Postmodernism in Coppola's *Bram Stoker's Dracula*." According to the preface, essays in section 1 establish "the link between Victorian themes and postmodern praxes," while essays in section 2 look "at post/modernist concerns in Stoker's Dracula, that is, at those issues obviously influenced by modernism but also, with the help of the novel's plasticity vis-

à-vis the media over the last century, by postmodernism" (xviii). In practice, the distinction between section 1 and section 2 seems tenuous and unnecessary. The contributors to the volume are almost all French, with the notable exceptions of well-established scholars of the Gothic William Hughes and David Punter and one Bulgarian author, and none of the essays tops 20 pages in length including endnotes (most are shorter), which leads one to wonder if these are the actual conference papers themselves, rather than revisions or elaborations.

Collections such as this one drawn from conferences often consist of extremely specialized essays with selective appeal and with substantial variation in terms of quality, and such is the case with this volume which targets an academic readership from the get-go. Bak's brief preface argues that what links the contemporary imagination with Stoker's fin-de-siècle moment are concerns over contamination of blood. This argument, presented in five pages, while provocative, isn't fully developed and has little to do with the essays included in the collection. After providing the obligatory overview of the volume's inclusions, the preface concludes with a bulleted list of "basic principles of postmodern theory" (xxi). It's a fairly odd introduction, and one wonders why Bak didn't just develop his assertions about blood in Victorian culture and contemporary culture as a separate essay. It would make much more sense to start by offering an overview of postmodernism and then summarizing the structure and contents of the volume without this half-hearted attempt to establish the relevancy of the book's focus to contemporary issues or to defend the bifurcated gaze of the collection.

Section 1, "(Post)Modernism in *Dracula*," consists of three essays (or chapters as the book puts it): William Hughes's "On the Sanguine Nature of Life: Blood, Identity, and the Vampire," Ludmilla Kostova's "Straining the Limits of Interpretation: Bram Stoker's *Dracula* and Its Eastern European Contexts," and David Punter's "Bram Stoker's *Dracula*: Tradition, Technology, Modernity." To a certain extent, Hughes's brief contribution (ten pages, including notes) actually runs contrary to Bak's assertions in the introduction concerning the centrality of blood to the novel by arguing that this is a modern imposition by literary critics. Hughes bases this argument on the interesting observation that blood, "other than in its status as a gruesome detail rather than a symbolic substance, remains strikingly absent from the reviews of 1897" (4). Hughes's provocative conclusion is that what modern critics have identified as the novel's "quintessentially fin-de-siècle themes of race, disease, and gender"—and blood—can arguably be construed as "a projection of postmodern praxis" given that Stoker's contemporaries didn't find these same themes as central (3). The point here is that it is impossible to read Stoker—or the work of any other author for that matter—without recourse to modern (or postmodern) interpretive frameworks. This is obviously not an original

argument—Raymond Williams says essentially the same thing when he develops his idea of a "structure of feeling" inaccessible to those who live outside of a particular time and place and of the "selective tradition" established by contemporary scholars of earlier works—but Hughes's specific analysis of blood as a cultural signifier is interesting.

The next two essays in this section have little connection to Hughes's essay—or to each other for that matter. Kostova's "Straining the Limits of Interpretation: Bram Stoker's *Dracula* and Its Eastern European Contexts" reads Stoker's *Dracula* against other "terrorist" novels of the late Victorian period, including Joseph Hatton's *By Order of the Czar* (1890), Richard Henry Savage's *My Official Wife* (1891), and L. T. Meade's *The Siren* (1898). She sees in these novels the recurring theme of transgressive Eastern European antiheroines who successfully "infiltrat[e] key areas of western life" (20). While Dracula of course is no *femme fatale*, he is comparable to these women in representing a grave danger to "western society's political and moral foundations" (26). Punter's contribution, "Bram Stoker's *Dracula*: Tradition, Technology, Modernity," seeks to understand Stoker's text not as Gothic, but as modern—or rather as a novel that stages a contest between the forces of modernity and the forces of archaism. To put it extremely reductively, technology in the book stands for modernity while vampirism represents the hold of the past. Modernity in *Dracula*, according to Punter, "is always and everywhere under siege, but [wins] out in the end" (39). Ultimately, for Punter *Dracula* is a "fundamentally political text in the sense that it is haunted in its potentially progressive ideas by that which drags those ideas back towards a deeper past" (41). One can't help but wonder to what extent this assertion is true of almost every text.

The three essays included in the second section, "Post/Modernism in Stoker's *Dracula*," are somewhat more connected than the essays in the first section. Nathalie Saudo's "'Every speck of dust […] a devouring monster in embryo': The Vampire's Effluvia in *Dracula* by Bram Stoker" examines the novel in terms of the themes of smell, hypnosis, influence, and fascination and relates these themes to the "terrifying permeability of 'bodies'" (55). Understanding *Dracula*'s "effluvia," concludes Saudo, "helps reveal the many social fears and scientific questionings of the end of the nineteenth century" (56) and, in particular, connects with the nineteenth-century fascination with supernatural forms of communication such as magnetic phenomena and mesmerism. Françoise Dupeyron-Lafay's "Fragmented, Invisible, and Grotesque Bodies in *Dracula*" characterizes *Dracula* as "a novel of grotesque bodily metamorphoses and anamorphoses" that "expresses a sense of insecurity, disorientation, and alienation that heralds postmodernism" (xix). Noting that the novel affords only the vaguest of descriptions of most of the characters (Van Helsing and *Dracula* himself excepted), Dupeyron-Lafay concludes that, reflecting the fragmented structure of the narrative itself, fragmented bodies in

Dracula become loaded signifiers that speak beyond language to communicate a "sense of the fin-de-siècle tragic" (70). Rounding out the middle section is Monica Girard's "Teaching and Selling Dracula in Twenty-First-Century Romania"—an essay that has absolutely nothing to do with the two that precede it or anything else in the book. This essay investigates the Romanian "moral dilemma" (75) of how to be true to history while capitalizing on interest in Vlad the Impaler. Of note here is Girard's consideration of how Vlad is represented in Romanian scholastic history books.

Part 3 of *Post/Modern Dracula*, "Postmodernism in Coppola's *Bram Stoker's Dracula*," shifts attention away from Stoker's text and focuses it instead on Coppola's 1992 adaptation. Jean Marigny's contribution, "Dracula: Tradition and Postmodernism in Stoker's Novel and Coppola's Film," fails to rise above the banal. The premise being argued in the essay is that both novel and film are built around "paradoxes" which render each postmodern in its own way. Stoker's novel subverts Victorian moral and aesthetic codes for literature, allows the reader unusual interpretive freedoms, and offers complex characters (100); hence, it is postmodern. Coppola's adaptation both is and is not faithful to the original and this "paradox" renders it postmodern. Rather than focusing on plot, Jean-Marie Lecomte argues in "Postmodern Verbal Discourse in Coppola's *Bram Stoker's Dracula*," that voice-over narration, off-screen voices, and invisible narrators in the film "partake of the aesthetics and poetics of postmodernism" (107). Lecomte's essay is more compelling than Marigny's because beyond the self-fulfilling prophecy of proving something postmodern, Lecomte offers an interesting analysis of the ways in which Coppola constructs an "intimate, subjective soundscape" (109). Rounding out the collection is Jacques Coulardeau's "The Vision of Religion in Francis Ford Coppola's *Bram Stoker's Dracula*," which argues that the film is "religious from beginning to end" (123). Coulardeau focuses on religious iconography in the film, leading to his conclusion that Coppola inverts Stoker's horror story and "turns it into a love story in order to establish his central theme that universal love, not hate, is what will ultimately save humanity from evil" (xx). Following this essay is a "select bibliography" of sources on Stoker, Coppola, and vampires, and then a very "select filmography" of vampire and other films mentioned in the essays.

This collection of essays is deficient in several respects: composed of only nine essays, it is skimpy; the essays vary greatly in quality, and internal cohesiveness is lacking; and perhaps most significantly, far too many of the essays seem intent on proving that Stoker's novel or Coppola's film (or both) are postmodern. This obviously begs the question of "so what?" and it's this question that the collection as a whole never really addresses. So we accept the premise that a Victorian novel has elements of what has come to be known as literary postmodernism. Where does this get us? If a Victorian novel and a

contemporary film can both be postmodern, what does this mean for the rubric "postmodernism"? If one sees postmodernism wherever one looks, what value is left in the term? It's these sorts of questions the volume should be raising somewhere, but it never does. So I suppose I'm convinced that Stoker's novel has elements of postmodernism. I just don't know why I should care.

Indeed, in keeping with Hughes's contention in his contribution to the collection, this volume as a whole seems to say much more about contemporary academia's schizophrenic attitude toward periodization than it does about vampires. That is, the book commits itself to the model of intellectual history in which modernity is followed by postmodernity, even as the individual essays constantly worry this division by isolating elements of postmodernity in a modernist text. The book as a whole thus reifies what the essays challenge, resulting in an odd and I'm sure unintended parallel with Stoker's text and stories of beasties more generally—the transgressive monster who challenges society's conventions is expunged at the end, shoring up the status quo.

I should also add here that, in keeping with other books I've received from Cambridge Scholars Press (not to be confused with Cambridge University Press), the book itself is cheaply put together. The paper and dust jacket are thin, the binding unstable, and the cover consists merely of the title on a white band across a blue background. Five figures are included in the volume (3 in the preface and 2 in Girard's essay on marketing Vlad), and the quality of each—especially those in the preface—is poor. This is a book that will only be of interest to specialists looking to be comprehensive in their research, and even then I would leave it to Interlibrary Loan rather than investing in a personal copy.

In contrast to *Post/Modern Dracula*, one recent publication that I can recommend both to specialists and vampire fans of the "educated layman" variety is Stacey Abbott's *Celluloid Vampires: Life After Death in the Modern World*. While the book is far from comprehensive in its treatment of its subject (which would be an absolutely Herculean task given the hundreds of vampire films in existence) and restricts its attention almost exclusively to British and American releases, it is the most thorough academic treatment of the subject yet and has some very smart and original things to say about its topic. Interestingly though, Abbott feels the same need to ground his discussion of vampires both in Stoker's text and—as with Bak's collection—in a fuzzy notion of historical modernity.

The book consists of an introduction and twelve chapters divided up into four sections: "Bram Stoker's *Dracula* from Novel to Film," "The Birth of the Modern American Vampire," "Reconfiguring the Urban Vampire," and "Redefining Boundaries." Organizing the study is Abbott's perhaps counterintuitive claim that the vampire, rather than being an anachronism in the modern world, is in fact an embodiment of modernity itself: "The vampire is

in a constant state of disintegration and renewal, and it is through this process that it is intrinsically related to the modern world, which is also perpetually in the throes of massive change" (5). Contra Punter's assertions in the Bak collection, rather than being in opposition to modernity, the vampire, Abbott claims, in fact embodies our experience of it. This thesis actually is my largest quibble with the study—part of what defines the vampire is his amorphous nature and what the proliferation of scholarly literature on the vampire makes readily apparent is that it is far too facile and reductive to say the vampire is this or the vampire is that. Abbott does an excellent job showing the vampire's relation to technology, special effects, and the urban experience, but I think one could just as easily argue the opposite (as McClelland does to a certain extent in *Vampires and Their Slayers* and as Punter does in his contribution to *Post/Modern Dracula*)—that the vampire represents the irruption of the mythic/folkloric past into the present. In addition, I'm not sure if it's Abbott's hesitancy about this thesis or simply the result of the process of converting an academic dissertation into a 200-page book (my money's on the latter), but noticeably missing—absent a few passing references to Baudelaire and Georg Simmel—is any real theorization of the experience of modernity, which honestly is needed to bolster Abbott's overarching thesis. Thankfully, however, the larger thesis tends to take a back seat to compelling close readings of films as the book progresses, and the book can stand on its own two feet without the reader necessarily accepting that the vampire embodies the experience of modernity pure and simple.

That said, Abbott does a fine job in part 1, "Bram Stoker's *Dracula* from Novel to Film," connecting the vampire to modern existence. The three chapters included in this section, "*Dracula*: A Wonder of the Modern World," "The Cinematic Spectacle of Vampirism: *Nosferatu* in the Light of New Technology," and "From Hollywood Gothic to Hammer Horror: The Modern Evolution of *Dracula*," move the reader with increasing rapidity to where Abbott really wants to go: the present. Chapter 1 treats Stoker's novel and makes a compelling case for the novel as an "exploration of the complexities of modernity" (16). Abbott focuses on the novel's urban setting, its emphases on "modern systems of bureaucracy and professionalism" which aid the vampire hunters' investigation (16–17), and the complex representation of the Count himself who in many ways personifies the "hypermodern world of electricity, hypnosis, telepathy, telecommunications, and the disintegration of time and space" (17). Chapter 2, on F. W. Murnau's *Nosferatu* (1922), explores the "technological necromancy" of film (44) and the ways in which Count Orlock is "an embodiment of technology, his vampirism emerging through the filmic process itself" (45). Abbott's discussion of the vampiric nature of the cinematic apparatus here is compelling, but, especially given the inclusion of a still from Merhige's *Shadow of the Vampire* (2000), one wonders where the discus-

sion of this film went! Chapter 3 is a rather unsatisfactory "hinge" chapter that moves the reader forward in time by rapidly considering a handful of films from the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s in terms of their reflections of contemporary themes. Much more could have been done here—especially with the Hammer vampire films which are barely touched upon.

Although Abbott's discussions in chapter 1 and 2 are engaging, the book clearly is impatient to get to the heart of the matter—Abbott's analyses of contemporary vampire films starting in the 1970s, and that is where part 2, "The Birth of the American Vampire," picks up. The four chapters included here, "The Seventies: The Vampire Decade," "George Romero's *Martin*: An American Vampire," "Walking Corpses and Independent Filmmaking Techniques," and "Special Makeup Effects and Exploding Vampires," offer a nifty analysis of the relationship between cinematic vampires and cultural context, with a special emphasis in chapters 6 and 7 on industrial practices. Chapter 4, "The Seventies: The Vampire Decade," is a short chapter that showcases the ways in which vampire films—and TV programs such as *Dark Shadows* and *The Night Stalker*—of the 1970s reflect America's shift into postindustrialism, and chapter 5 on Romero's *Martin* (1977) develops this thesis in greater depth. *Martin*, for Abbott, "embodies the paralysis and identity crisis that characterized America in the 1970s" (98).

Chapters 6 and 7, "Walking Corpses and Independent Filmmaking Techniques" and "Special Makeup Effects and Exploding Vampires" respectively, relate shifts in representations of vampires on film in the 1970s and early 1980s to industrial practices. In chapter 6, Abbott places special emphasis on the role of Romero's 1968 *Night of the Living Dead* (*NOLD*) in altering cinematic expectations; what Romero did, argues Abbott, is to transform the "object of horror from a conceptual terror to a very real confrontation with the abject body" (112). After *NOLD*, "drinking blood could no longer be presented purely as an act of sexual desire" (116), and many subsequent films, contends Abbott, treat blood drinking mainly as feeding, largely as a result of Romero. What also shifted on-screen representations of vampires was the professionalizing of special effects and makeup in the late 1970s and early 1980s. According to Abbott, the physicality of the 1980s vampire "became the site upon which our concerns and anxieties about the body in the 1980s were projected" (124). Among the many films discussed here are *Fright Night* (1985), *The Hunger* (1983), and *Lifeforce* (1985).

Part 3, "Reconfiguring the Urban Vampire," is in its originality and compelling analysis the strongest section of the study. The three chapters that compose this section, "New York and the Vampire Flâneuse," "Vampire Road Movies: From Modernity to Postmodernity," and "Los Angeles: Fangs, Gangs, and Vampireland," consider three vampire subgenres and move from New York to LA by way of the vampire "road movie." Chapter 8, "New York and

the Vampire Flâneuse," explores how "the perception and discourses around modernity are reinterpreted by the female vampire's command of the urban landscape and her appropriation of the traditionally male role of urban flâneur" (143). In art house films such as *Nadja* (1994), *The Addiction* (1995), and *Habit* (1997), female vampires literally "take back the night," and vampirism in these films allows women to "claim their place within the urban space" (147). Chapter 9 on "vampire road movies" demonstrates how the vampire genre reinvented itself in the 1980s by fusing with elements of the western and the road movie. In films such as *Near Dark* (1987), *From Dusk Till Dawn* (1996), *John Carpenter's Vampires* (1998), and *The Forsaken* (2001), the Gothic is redefined and the vampire film follows the path from modern to postmodern (172). And the natural destination on this lost highway is, of course, Los Angeles. In chapter 10, Abbott considers vampire movies set in LA, including *Fright Night*, *The Lost Boys* (1987), and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1992). "The movement from the New York vampire to the Lost Angeles vampire along the highway of the vampire road movie," argues Abbott, "charts a shift from the specificity and locality embodied by New York to the absence of locale, the fragmentation of space and identity, and the prevalence of postmodern alienation that defines Los Angeles" (178). Abbott's observations here are particularly astute—he observes that while New York vampires are grounded in a form of realistic representation absent of supernatural accoutrements, the LA vampire film is dominated by special effects and allegorize "the superficiality of the postmodern city" (185).

The final section of *Celluloid Vampires*, "Redefining Boundaries," consists of two chapters, "Vampire Cyborgs" and "Vampires in a Borderless World." Although Abbott doesn't make enough of this, chapter 11 on "vampire cyborgs" loops the book back around to chapter 2 on *Nosferatu* through its emphasis on the relationship between representations of vampires on screen and technological change. Abbott observes in this chapter that in contemporary films including the Blade series, the Underworld films, and *Van Helsing* (2004), generic conventions have shifted to an emphasis on science as a means not only for tracking of the vampire but for hunting and destroying him as well. As vampire hunters are surrounded by scientists and technological support teams, vampirism is analyzed in terms of genetics, and vampires making use of computers pursue technological dominance, both the hunter and vampire morphing into vampire cyborgs. Chapter 12, "Vampires in a Borderless World," is really more of a coda to the book than an actual chapter and briefly considers the globalization of the vampire in light of postindustrial capitalism. One wishes that this chapter had either been developed at more length or omitted. Chapter 12 is then followed by notes, a selected bibliography of secondary sources, a filmography, and an index.

In my opinion, *Celluloid Vampires* is more successful in relating particular

films to the eras of their production and grouping those films into subgenres than in supporting the under-theorized and problematic initial thesis that the vampire embodies the experience of modernity. As I indicated in my comments about *Post/Modern Dracula* above, I'm just not convinced of the value in attempting to pigeonhole a specific book—much less a supernatural creature (the vampire) or an entire cinematic genre—as modern or postmodern or some other rubric. If anything, these attempts only succeed in calling into question the utility of these categorizations. And strangely absent from Abbott's discussion—particularly of 1970s vampire movies—is any discussion of sexuality, which seems a serious omission. However, I do think the book succeeds thoroughly in demonstrating the relationship of vampire films to their social context. Particularly impressive are Abbott's insights concerning *Nosferatu*, *Martin*, and the indie vampire films of the 1990s. Both undergraduates and graduate students could find much of value in *Celluloid Vampires*.

So where do these books get us, and what do they tell us about the future of vampire studies? Keyworth's and McClellend's studies demonstrate the extent to which the power of blood and the desire to subvert death have captivated the human imagination literally for thousands of years. The vampire emerges in these studies as both a desiring body and a body of desire, of human desires to persist after death and to control the environment and other people. Bak's collection and Abbott's study examine the representations of vampires in literature and film as products of particular sets of historical forces. What all four studies taken together, however, suggest is the need for considerations of the vampire that extend past North American and European fiction and film and that, rather than attempting to make grand pronouncements about the meaning of "the vampire" (the vampire as atavistic emergence of premodern [or pre-Oedipal] impulses, the vampire as representation modernity, the vampire as representation of postmodernity, the vampire as representation of the viral spread of global capitalism, etc.) consider social origins and functions of vampires in particular social contexts—considerations attentive to the fact that, like figures in dreams (which is essentially what they are), vampires are always overdetermined, always the product of complicated mixes of history, politics, and both personal and collective desire.

The growing body of work on vampire myths and cultural representations represented by Keyworth, McClelland, Bak, and Abbott suggests the ironic vitality of the vampire as an overdetermined cultural signifier and the need for the development of something along the lines of comparative vampire studies. One hopes to see more studies like those by McClelland and Abbott that excavate the deep histories of the vampire in particular contexts and explore and then compare the significances of representations of the vampire within specific cultural contexts. In as much as human beings ultimately give birth to and

shape vampires, studying vampires tells us a lot about human beings—both about what connects us across time and place and what differentiates us from each other.

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