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TV Fangdom: Horror Studies special edition

Introduction Bloodlines: Hunting the Vampire through TV History

Stacey Abbott, Lorna Jowett and Michael Starr

On the 18th April 1967, in the daytime soap opera *Dark Shadows* (1966-71), the corrupt and thieving con artist Willie Loomis (John Karlen) entered a hidden crypt within the Collins family mausoleum, hoping to uncover the family jewels. Instead he unleashed a monster onto the unsuspecting town of Collinsport, Maine—the vampire Barnabas Collins (Jonathan Frid) who had been trapped in his coffin for a hundred and seventy years. Barnabas was not the first vampire to appear on television, but his popularity with audiences signalled a synergy between the vampire and television that has flourished ever since. While initially associated with literary gothic adaptations or allusions, the vampire haunts multiple genres and modes of television, from children’s programming to comedy, from teen romance to graphic horror, from melodrama to the post-apocalypse, from episodic to long running serial narratives, and from low budget to prestige productions. The vampire is undeniably ubiquitous in the contemporary television landscape. Following the success of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003) and its spin-off *Angel* (1999-2004), and shortly after the literary and cinematic phenomenon that was *Twilight*, vampire romances have multiplied, with *True Blood* (2008-2014), *The Vampire Diaries* (2009-17) and its spin-off *The Originals* (2013-) all demonstrating the immortal appeal of this seductive undead icon—as well as spawning the acronym VILF. These series necessarily reflect on and refine the sympathetic and/or reluctant vampire tropes that emerge so influentially in *Dark Shadows* (as discussed by Spooner in this issue). Other, more recent series, react to the paranormal romance boom by offering a different, graphically horrific or apocalyptic view of the vampire, resituating the genre within the growing landscape of horror on television—*The Strain* (2014-17), *From Dusk Till Dawn* (2014-), *Van Helsing* (2014-). Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* has once again risen from the grave, fusing the romance, horror and apocalyptic genres into enthralling hybrids serving vastly different audiences (*Dracula* [2013-14], *Penny Dreadful* [2014-16], *Young Dracula* [2006-]). Recent vampire fictions continue to provide a fertile source of material for new series, including adaptations of Justin Cronin’s apocalyptic vampire narrative *The Passage*, currently in development, and John Lindquist’s acclaimed Swedish novel, *Let the Right One In*, a text that has previously been adapted as Swedish and American films as well as a Scottish stage play. Even Anne Rice has been drawn to television as she begins the process of

developing a TV series based upon her *Vampire Chronicles*. News of another Dracula series, from UK *Sherlock* (2010-17) creators Steven Moffat and Mark Gatiss and thus probably a prestige BBC series of feature-length episodes in a miniseries format, is stirring up vampire fans across the world. Lady Gaga's Countess in anthology series *American Horror Story*'s fifth season, *AHS: Hotel* (2015-16) stirred things up in another sense, demonstrating further possibilities for celebrity casting. *Hotel* delivers a lavish, spectacular mash-up of Kubrick's *The Shining* (1980) and Tony Scott's *The Hunger* (1983) but it is dripping with delirious televisuality and, like other popular FX series, pushes the boundaries of television.

Meanwhile, streaming and Video-on-Demand (VoD) services continue to capitalise on vampires, with Netflix following the success of its first original drama series, *House of Cards* (2013-), with a vampire series, *Hemlock Grove* (2013-2015). *Hemlock Grove* may not have been as critically acclaimed and long-running as *House of Cards*, but its twisted reimagining of vampires, werewolves, witches, mad scientists and other horror monsters cast a lurid lens on the genre that appealed to its niche audience. Netflix, then, recognises the lure of the vampire, and has since acquired *Van Helsing*, as well as launching another of its own original programmes, *Castlevania* (2017-), an animated series based on the Japanese video games from the 1980s. Amazon UK distributes AMC's *Preacher* (2016-), which features a vampire as one of three main characters, and Amazon Japan has streamed seven-episodes of an original series, *Tokyo Vampire Hotel* (2017-) directed by provocateur Sion Sono. Meanwhile online TV formats encourage independent filmmakers to create series like *So Dark* (2016-) and the Canadian reimagining of LeFanu's novella *Carmilla* (2014-), where the limitations of the single-frame vlog format inspire leaps of imagination and ingenuity.

Likewise, the vampire has spawned contemporary transmedia franchises. *The Vampire Diaries* has two separate novel series, two TV shows, podcasts, fan websites, and a large music community. The multi-platform video games *Buffy The Vampire Slayer* and its sequel *Buffy The Vampire Slayer: Chaos Bleeds* (2003), with corresponding comic book prequels and novelisations were early transmedia hits. However, whilst vampires have invaded the mass media, this has yet to manifest its full potential in the medium of video game. The successful *Castlevania* and *Bloodrayne* (2002-2011) series feature vampires heavily, yet vampires appear here as generic enemies rather than playable protagonists, a trait typical of the video game vampire, in direct contrast to the fascination with reluctant or sympathetic vampires in other media. One notable exception is the board-game adaptation *Vampire: The Masquerade – Bloodlines* (Activision 2004), a videogame that grew out of the tabletop role playing game, *Vampire: The Masquerade* (1991) and which has been critically

(if not commercially) successful due to writing and characterization that do some justice to the nuances of the vampire in the 21st century. So though the videogame vampire has yet to reach the ubiquity of televisual representations, with franchise *Vampire: The Masquerade* inspiring the TV series *Kindred: The Embraced* (1996), *Bloodrayne* spawning its own film series, and the *Underworld* films clearly heavily indebted to video game aesthetics, such transmedia expansions and experiences serve to further the spread of the vampire into popular culture and entertainment. In fact, with *Castlevania* the TV series being hailed as ‘the future of videogame adaptation’ (Muncie 2017) it seems likely that more of the undead will be moving from games to television screens.

Despite a rich legacy of the vampire on television, as well as its continued popularity within a changing television landscape, published scholarship on this subject has remained focused on a selection of series, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Angel* and *True Blood* in particular (see Wilcox 2005; Jowett 2005; Abbott 2009; Cherry 2012). While *Dracula* remains a focal point within any discussion of the vampire across media, its televisual presence is only occasionally discussed and even then is usually detached from its production and broadcast context, or, as Stacey Abbott argues in this issue, used to signal the decline of Stoker’s master vampire in the light of changes to the horror genre. To counter this gap in scholarship, the two conferences we organised that inspired the articles in this special edition (TV Fangdom at the University of Northampton and Daughter of Fangdom at the University of Roehampton), yielded a rich body of work on the vampire throughout television history, addressing issues of aesthetics, industry, gender, reception, audience and national culture. While series such as *Buffy*, *Angel* and *True Blood* figured prominently, highlighting their impact upon the genre, they were accompanied by an international range of shows, both contemporary and historical.

As 2017 marked the twentieth anniversary of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, the fiftieth anniversary of the first appearance of sympathetic vampire Barnabas Collins and the conclusion to the long-running *The Vampire Diaries*, it seems an ideal opportunity to reflect on the histories and meanings of the vampire on television. The articles included here showcase the range and variety of vampire TV, in some cases pointing to their contribution to the evolution of horror on television, only now receiving critical attention; in others mining the rich bloodlines of the vampire throughout popular narratives.

Where else would an exploration of the vampire begin but with the most famous vampire? Stacey Abbott’s “‘Look Who’s Got a Case of Dark Prince Envy’: *Dracula*, Televisuality and the Golden Age(s) of TV Horror’ sketches out a history of *Dracula* on television, from the 1950s to contemporary horror series. By analysing key examples situated

within particularly fruitful periods for television and television horror, and comparing their Draculas with popular cinematic versions of the Count, Abbott sheds light on historical and industrial contexts, aesthetics and the ‘provocative’ nature of Dracula on television, demonstrating that every age has the Dracula it needs.

In ‘Last night I dreamt I went to Collinwood Again: Vampire Adaptation and Reincarnation Romance in *Dark Shadows*’ Catherine Spooner uses the release and fan reception of Tim Burton’s adaptation/remake of the television series *Dark Shadows* as a spring board to a re-examination of this highly influential, if often overlooked, daytime supernatural soap opera. Exploring the series’ use of gothic conventions surrounding doubling and repetition, Spooner considers how the show ‘destabilises the notion of an “original” text’, while also examining how the reincarnation romance that underpins much of the series serves as a useful prism through which fans’ emotional response to the series can be understood.

The contribution to and influence of Stephen King upon the horror genre of course cannot be overstated; correspondingly his works have been subject to televisual and cinematic adaptation more than any other contemporary author, albeit to wildly varying levels of critical and commercial success. In ‘Stephen King’s Vampire Kingdom. Supernatural EVIL and Human evil in TV Adaptations of *Salem’s Lot*,’ Simon Brown analyses two such King adaptations, made a quarter of a century apart. In terms of their thematic and formal elements, Hooper and Salomon’s treatments of *Salem’s Lot* adopt very different approaches to King’s original story, and via a detailed examination of both texts, the issues of adapting King’s original work for television are discussed and placed within the larger context of the ebb and flow of the TV horror genre.

While discussions of the vampire in film and television have largely focused upon work emerging from the US and the UK, the ubiquity of the vampire within popular culture is a global phenomenon. Xavier Aldana Reyes’ ‘The Curious Case of the Spanish Televisual Vampire’ begins to redress this balance through an examination of the pioneering work of Narciso Ibáñez Serrador in Spain’s first horror television series *Historias para no dormir / Stories to Keep You Awake* (1966–82). Exploring the representation of the vampire within this nascent horror series, Aldana Reyes uses the vampire and its relationship to canonical literary sources to examine the country’s approach to, and perception of, TV horror.

Even if not granted a starring role, the vampire still has an uncanny habit of televisual infiltration. In ‘A Very Special Vampire Episode: Vampires, Archetypes, and Postmodern Turns in Late-1980s and ‘90s Cult TV Shows,’ Sorcha Ní Fhlainn examines *Friday the 13th*:

The Series (1987-1990) and *The X-Files* (1993-2002); in these series specific instances of TV vampire ‘guest-appearances’ are evident, yet such marginal figures are often overlooked in vampire studies. As both shows span an important period in the history of horror cinema and television, their examination provides insight into the state of the contemporary undead outside of vampire-centric films, novels and television series.

Following this analysis of ‘reimagining’ the vampire on TV, Bethan Jones interrogates another kind of intertextuality in ‘“When there's blood involved, a line has been crossed”: Spike/Eric Slash and the Fascinations of the Crossover Text’, looking at the ways crossover fan fiction mashes up vampire TV, bringing characters from different story worlds together in the same narrative. Focusing on two popular ‘blond bad boy’ vampire characters, Eric (Alexander Skarsgård) from *True Blood* and Spike (James Marsters) from *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Angel*, Jones details how crossover slash fanfics use these characters to explore twenty-first century vampire representation, particularly the trope of the hedonistic vampire who embraces vampirism and thus contrasts the reluctant vampire. The way the two, apparently similar, vampires are presented in crossover slash sheds light on constructions of vampire ‘masculinity’ and also, Jones argues, the ways fans use fanfic to negotiate both fascination and frustration.

Tackling one of the longest-running vampire series of recent years, Rebecca Lush unpicks the complexities of geographical and historical setting in ‘Original Sin: Frontier Horror, Gothic Anxiety, and Colonial Monsters in *The Vampire Diaries*.’ She demonstrates how *The Vampire Diaries*’ continually unfolding and revisited vampire mythology draws on and rewrites mythologies of the colonial US and of Native Americans, while perpetuating many stereotypes of both. The Mikaelsons, introduced as the ‘original’ vampires, are, as Lush explains, presented as ‘surrogate Indians’ and their story serves to ‘replace, displace and erase’ Native American history in Virginia, where the series is set.

Continuing the historical focus, Lorna Jowett points out that vampires are essentially immortal with long lives that stretch back into history, making them, in many ways, ideal source material for long-running television serial drama. In ‘Horrible Histories? Vampire Television, Period Drama and Spectacle’ Jowett examines the relationship between vampire TV and period drama and considers how these series use the familiar trope of the flashback to maximise and dramatize the spectacle of history through costume and setting, while also subverting the convention in the service of story, character and theme. These vampire histories celebrate the excesses of the past while subsuming the past in the service of the present.

The essays in this special issue highlight the richness of the vampire bloodline on television, comprised of a long, diverse, and complicated history of production, while also signalling an overwhelming synergy between the vampire and TV. TV audiences love vampires — young or old, seductive or monstrous, sympathetic, evil or amoral. Vampire mythology rules that in order to take hold of us, the vampire must be invited in: it is through television — that most domestic of media — that we have invited them in, repeatedly and enthusiastically. Our aim for this issue is that it starts to unpack the meanings and implications of that invitation by exploring what television brings to the horror genre, and more specifically to horror concerning one of the genre's most enduring icons, the vampire. The articles included here, and the papers presented at the conferences we organised, have only begun to sink their teeth into an ever-growing body of work that pulses with life and vitality. It is our intention that this issue should inspire further discussion of the televisual within vampire and horror scholarship, and we invite readers to enter into the debate. This is but the beginning. The invitation is given, in the immortal words of Dracula:

‘Come freely. Go safely. And leave something of the happiness you bring’
(Stoker 2011: 18).

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