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‘God is (un)dead: Religion and Identity in Post-9/11 Vampire Narratives’

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ABSTRACT

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GOD IS (UN)DEAD: RELIGION AND IDENTITY IN POST 9/11 VAMPIRE NARRATIVES

By Christina Wilkins

Cultural narratives have long played a valuable role in mediating difficult and politically sensitive topics. Investing metaphorical tropes with cultural significance offers audiences the opportunity to consider new perspectives and prompt important discussions. One of these tropes that has become ever more prominent in the last decade is that of the vampire. This thesis is concerned with the questions of how the figure of the vampire is used in modern narratives, and how it has changed from previous incarnations, particularly in American narratives. The rise of the modern vampire coincides with the aftermath of 9/11 and it is this link that is primarily explored here.

Through an examination of three texts, *Being Human, True Blood* and *The Strain,* these chapters construct an argument for the vampire as a key figure in post-9/11 narratives and imbued with a religious significance. *Being Human* establishes the difference between the UK and US interpretation of the figure through a direct comparison of an original series and its American remake. This highlights the religious aspect to the figure, along with reinforcing the Americanisation of the vampire, discussed in relation to the series. With this established, the argument moves on to *True Blood,* looking at patriotism, terrorism and the presentation of the 'other' onscreen in the series. Particularly, it posits the vampire in *True Blood* as being representative of the Muslim other, providing a unique method for discussing post-9/11 issues of religion and identity. The argument then moves on to looking at *The Strain,* which presents a more explicit link between vampires and 9/11, and argues for a need for narratives that do this. By looking at theoretical research on the issues raised in the texts, particularly those of trauma and faith, it highlights a change in perspectives. Ultimately, the exploration of these texts shows a valuable use of the vampire in working through the trauma of 9/11, a need for an American vampire and the importance of religion (in its many forms) in cultural narratives.

Contents

Academic Thesis: Declaration Of Authorship

I, CHRISTINA WILKINS

declare that this thesis and the work presented in it are my own and has been generated by me as the result of my own original research.

'God is (un)dead: Religion and Identity in Post-9/11 Vampire Narratives'

I confirm that:

1. This work was done wholly or mainly while in candidature for a research degree at this University;

2. Where any part of this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree or any other qualification at this University or any other institution, this has been clearly stated;

3. Where I have consulted the published work of others, this is always clearly attributed;

4. Where I have quoted from the work of others, the source is always given. With the exception of such quotations, this thesis is entirely my own work;

5. I have acknowledged all main sources of help;

6. Where the thesis is based on work done by myself jointly with others, I have made clear exactly what was done by others and what I have contributed myself;

7. Either none of this work has been published before submission, or parts of this work have been published as: [please list references below]:

Signed:……

Date: ……

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Introduction

The rise of the vampire reached its peak in the year 2009. Riding on the waves of a tumultuous decade, the figure was dominating screens big and small, along with bookshelves and magazines. The popularity of the figure presents an interesting puzzle: why the vampire, and why at that point? Arguably, its ability to embody evil and the idea of new beginnings, along with its defiance of death and the quasi-religious status vampires hold found a niche in a post-9/11 society. This is the underlying argument of this thesis – the vampire's popularity, particularly in the US, surged due to the ways in which it could be used to represent politically and culturally sensitive topics, and in turn, the consumption of vampire narratives in the US in the decade following 9/11 exhibits a need to confront issues of identity, belief and belonging. It is this year, 2009, in which the textual pillars of this argument - *True Blood, Being Human* and *The Strain* – began to establish themselves.[1]

Yet, this millennial conception of the vampire differs dramatically from its predecessors. Unlike the umbrous *Nosferatu* or the shapeshifting figure that is *Dracula,* the twenty-first century vampire seems to be remarkably human. The vampire has emerged from the shadows of the horror genre and has found a keen market across various genres and media. They are now linked to teenage romance novels (*Twilight*) and Southern Gothic tales (*True Blood*) amongst other things, fulfilling a role that is closer to angel than demon. Articles discussing the change in the figure, such as a 2009 piece by Joan Acocella in the *New Yorker* comparing the new recruits to Stoker's *Dracula,* merely illustrated the surface differences rather than probing deeper into why the vampire had changed.[2] Changes in culturally embedded figures happen due to societal need; in the case of the vampire, as Nina Auerbach argues 'every age embraces the vampire it needs.'[3] In the post-millennial age, we've created and embraced a vampire that embodies a religious impulse and questions how we construct our identity. The vampire has been firmly Americanised, as is discussed in Chapter 1, and thus the focus of culture and society across these chapters is primarily American. This thesis pieces together the social (the aftermath of trauma),

[1] *True Blood* began season 2, looked at here, in 2009. *Being Human* began in 2008, with the US version coming at a later date, but the UK version was available via BBC America. *The Strain* was released in 2009.
[2] Joan Acocella, 'In the Blood', *The New Yorker*, (16 March 2009) <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2009/03/16/in-the-blood> [accessed 5 January 2013]
[3] Nina Auerbach, *Our Vampires, Ourselves* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995) p.145

political (the George W. Bush administration) and spiritual (the state of religion in the US) factors that surround the conception of the modern vampire, showing how it arose due to a need for a metaphorical figure to mediate these struggles in that cultural moment. The positioning of the vampire in culture and its history are key to its importance; it is at once marked by its spiritual foundations and ability to recast itself in numerous roles. This comes perhaps from the nature of the figure itself, that of a perpetual remake; turning humans into something *more* and altering their very nature enables the cycle to continue. The vampire's lack of boundaries – when compared to the social, physical and metaphysical boundaries of the human - means endless possibilities for exploration of identities, meaning and experience. It is this absence of human limitations that facilitates the copious changes made over the years to the figure. The vampire is no longer merely 'other' – its history and current use have created a new figure that appears to be an amalgamation of aspects of previous incarnations, which exemplifies its flexibility. In a world where, as Shannon Winnubst asserts, an 'obsession with strictly defined and rigidly upheld boundaries haunts Western concepts of subjectivity,' then 'the figure who lives by crossing these boundaries tells us something about how they are made and how they might be dismantled.'[4] Through this defiance of boundaries, vampires give the opportunity to symbolically use death to an advantage and explore what it means to be human by watching a figure that is defined as 'inhuman' struggle to attain a sense of humanity. This sense of humanity, evident in the texts under discussion, includes religious belief; this has become increasingly prevalent in the figure within the last decade, indicating a cultural resurgence in the importance of religion. In particular, these narratives focusing on the vampire answer the need to represent religious minorities such as Muslims (as seen in Chapter 2), along with working through the traumas invested in the figure of the vampire that provoke a re-evaluation of faith (something discussed in Chapter 3).

The interventions that this research is making are useful in moving scholarship forward in several key areas: genre studies, 9/11 studies, critiques of Islamophobia and American studies. Firstly, the assessment of genre and its use both onscreen and in literature is discussed in depth throughout the following chapters. The discussions

[4] Shannon Winnubst, 'Vampires, Anxieties and Dreams: Race and Sex in the Contemporary United States', in *Hypatia, 18:3* (2003) 1-20 (pp.7)

of horror and supernatural fiction in conjunction with these texts posit a need for them, and a need to further exploring their offerings. Analysis of genre here builds upon theorists such as Heather Dubrow and Steve Neale who outline the use and construction of genre, and utilises this to critique the fixed perception of the vampire as belonging to the horror genre. 9/11 studies, which encompasses elements of genre within it (see the 9/11 novel discussed in Chapter 3) is furthered by this analysis of televisual and literary texts as engaging and debating key issues raised by the events of 9/11. Rather than examining explicit representations of the trauma (which is a large part of 9/11 studies, arguably), this research looks at the way in which a popular cultural trope offers symptom and solution to the events.

The discussion of 9/11 in this research necessarily involves critiques of Islamophobia, which are discussed throughout this thesis. By proposing the vampire as a representative of the Islamic other, as this research does, it exposes another approach to dealing with these anxieties and prejudices. Along with research on the treatment of Muslims in the US, and the explicit depiction onscreen, it makes an argument for using other methods to combat an intolerance of otherness. All of these elements of this research are key, and all combine to offer a step forward in the area of American studies. They offer nuanced perspectives of different anxieties, theoretical approaches and cultural events. In particular, this thesis explores the American use of cultural narratives and argues for their necessity.

Cultural narratives have long figured as a reflection of the anxieties and situations of the time, mediating scenarios and taboo topics in a memorable way through the guise of fiction. Vampires have a privileged position[5] in the realm of storytelling and cultural narratives, which gives them an importance that should be explored. The popularity or dominance of certain tropes in these narratives often reflects a cultural preoccupation with a particular topic or viewpoint. The vampire is one such popular figure, and it represents a variety of issues, some latent and others evident through the ways in which they are consumed. For the recent manifestations of the metaphor,

[5] As seen by the volume and success of these narratives across media and decades, particularly in comparison with other cultural figures, which, whilst successful, do not enjoy the same level of reverence.

much has been said about it representing gay rights, such as in *True Blood,*[6] or the dangers of adolescent sex, such as in *Twilight*.[7] Yet there is a more apparent meaning that has been barely unpacked in responses to these shows and books, either critical or academic. The very nature of the consumption of these narratives and the reverence awarded to the figure positions it as god-like, particularly in those texts which are televisual due to the nature of the medium and the presentation of the vampire within it, as this thesis will illustrate.

The boundaries of this thesis shape and define the study. It employs various theories – identity theory, remake theory, trauma theory, theoretical perspective on religion – and these offer a fixed perspective. Yet, this is crucial as it allows for clear parameters and thus a better understanding of the texts through the approaches used. Particularly with material on religion in the thesis, there are certain limitations; primarily they are the writing about the topic and its criticism from a Western perspective. Much of the criticism and discussion about both Christianity and Islam comes from a Christian-Judeo society and as such, it could suggest both a bias and a lack of understanding of non-Western religions such as Islam. However, I would argue that as it is primarily a Western response that is being examined that it is necessary to use criticism in this area, and to explore the response through this filter.

The other boundaries of the thesis are those of the methodologies used and the media consulted. There are few academic analyses of the texts under consideration, and as such, alternative sources have been used to glean opinion and reception. This is a somewhat more pertinent approach, as the cultural reception is the focus of the thesis and an examination of prominent popular sources such as newspaper and online journalistic reviews echoes the real-life resources consulted by fans and viewers of the texts here. The texts themselves are strong examples of the shift towards a discussion of religion, identity and belonging in popular culture, which is why they cross media. The two televisual texts, *Being Human* and *True Blood,* are important because of their impact; this impact is aided by their popularity. The use of literary examples comes in the form of *The Strain* which whilst a change in medium, offers a

[6] Such as in J. Bryan Lowder, '*True Blood's* Queer Legacy', *Slate,* (25/06/2014) <http://www.slate.com/blogs/outward/2014/06/25/true_blood_reviewed_why_hbo_s_vampire_show_is_a_queer_masterpiece.html > [accessed January 2016]
[7] As discussed by Melissa A. Click, *Bitten by Twilight,* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2010)

similarly strong example of the key themes of the thesis and one which has proved popular. Contemporary popular culture is important to study in order to analyse attitudes, and it would be remiss to only look at one aspect of it (i.e. only television, or only literature).

The current vampire, which will be shown to be (in part) symptomatic of religious impulses and sublimation, teases out the implications of the struggle with identity and religion in a world where communication and representation are increasingly mediated through screens. As the figure changes, so should approaches to it, incorporating a broader understanding of fandom and methods of textual dissemination. The result is that all three texts in this thesis are looked at with an awareness of current cultural consumption of narratives, along with an up-to-date perspective on the importance of metaphorical figures such as the vampire in contemporary texts. Many previous investigations into the vampire have been Freudian – the oozing blood from the lips, the phallic fangs penetrating and possessing. Yet this thesis is not primarily psychoanalytic – Freud is used briefly in later chapters, but in relation to trauma theory rather than to sexualize the figure. This is in part due to the idea that sex is no longer the taboo topic, but instead has been replaced by the issue of faith (which in this thesis is figured differently to religion, as explained in more detail in chapter 1).[8]

These narratives have been consumed at a growing pace since 2000, when arguably the vampire became an increasingly dominant presence in all forms of media – online, television, books, film and comics – and thus this period (2001- 2011) is the central focus for this study. Television is a staple medium of many households and provides content in a more 'accessible' form, so it was the televisual vampires that most clearly displayed a new form of the figure. To understand clearly the difference between the vampires discussed here from their predecessors, it is necessary to briefly outline the pre-millennial televisual vampires. *Dark Shadows,* a long running gothic soap opera, was the first show to instil the vampire regularly on the small screen, with a total of 1,225 episodes between 1966-1971. It told the story (amidst other storylines) of Barnabas Collins, an eighteenth century vampire who is revived in the 1960s and

[8] Which Freud also tackles, but again, the approach here looks at contemporary cultural theorists of religion instead.

introduces himself to the modern Collins family as a cousin from England. The characterization seems similar at first to that of *Dracula,* with the vampire Barnabas being a mysterious intruder, but over time, he becomes something of a protagonist through his selfless actions. The series was remade in 1991, initially successfully, but due to ratings was later cancelled. Other 90s televisual vampires include *Forever Knight,* the story of an 800-year-old vampire who becomes a police officer bringing criminals to justice after feeling remorse for his previous behaviour. The most notable of 90s vampire television is undoubtedly Joss Whedon's *Buffy the Vampire Slayer.* The series ran between 1997-2003, and has been discussed in academic writing by such scholars as Milly Williamson and Stacey Abbott whose exploration of the text attest to its cultural importance. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* focused on Buffy Summers, a pretty, blonde teenager in high school who discovers she is the 'chosen one' and must commit to a life of slaying vampires. It was notable for providing a strong female character who could physically assert herself, look good, and save the day. As Anne Billson notes, *Buffy* 'would simultaneously embrace and subvert the clichés of slasher movies in a post-modern approach.'[9] The vampires in the series were primarily evil targets but several managed to gain the position of more positive, recurring characters such as Angel, Buffy's most prominent love interest, and Spike, a British vampire who loses the ability to attack humans, thus rendering him trustworthy. Although some of the vampires in *Buffy* were 'not so much a villain as a romantic role model', [10] they were still clearly separated from humans aesthetically by their ridged foreheads and protruding fangs. Whedon's reasoning for this was because he 'didn't want to put a show on the air about a high-school student who was stabbing normal-looking people in the heart […] when they are clearly monsters it takes it to a level of fantasy that is safer.'[11] This perhaps exemplifies the biggest difference between 90s televisual vampires and more recent ones. Although texts such as *True Blood* and *Being Human* are rendered as fantasy worlds by the very nature of the vampire's existence, the portrayal of the vampire figure is closer to human. As will be explored in this thesis, these televisual vampires live amongst humans (knowingly, in the case of *True Blood*) and both look and act more like humans than their predecessors. This change moves away from the aesthetics of the monstrous and instead focuses on the moral implications of actions. Vampires exemplify the idea that

[9] Anne Billson, BFI Film Classics: Buffy the Vampire Slayer, (London: BFI, 2005) p.18
[10] Billson, p.20
[11] Quoted in Billson, p.40

anyone could be a monster and in particular it is the idea of the familiar being evil that has been embedded in these narratives. As Timothy Beal notes, 'monsters are paradoxical personifications of otherness within sameness.'[12] This element of similarity gives readers and audiences a way to empathise with the figure. Yet, at the same time, the uncanny nature of it makes us question even our firmest assumptions. This will be argued to reflect the attacks of 11 September, 2001,[13] which highlighted the fact that unknown and fatal actions could be carried out at any time. This positioning of the threatening amongst the familiar is far more powerful in a 'domestic' medium such as television. As the medium is consumed in a space that is familiar, the threat invades the everyday life of the viewer. As my readings will show, this arguably reflects a concern with the invasion of terror into the lives of U.S citizens post 9/11; the concept of terror and terrorism overshadowed the media and the cultural offerings of surrounding years. Underpinning this discussion of terror is organised religion, which served a number of purposes in a post-9/11 world, and features as a firm fixture of this thesis.

Attitudes towards identity, religion, authority and alterity have all undergone revision following 9/11, along with the figure of the vampire. The primary research questions of this thesis are as follows: firstly, how and why did the figure of the vampire change from previous incarnations? Secondly, if there is a link to 9/11, what has it changed about the figure and the culture it is representing? Thirdly, how is identity in American culture figured post 9/11 – what role does religion play in these representations under consideration here? And finally, are cultural narratives such as the vampire text effective at representing and 'working through' traumatic events such as 9/11? These questions intertwine within the chapters and at times are addressed individually, but some themes and sections more explicitly tie them together. The primary theme is that of change – change in the vampire, culture, religion and approaches to it, along with notions of trauma.

The changes in attitudes towards these topics appear to be more prevalent on TV screens than in cinemas, which is why several texts under examination here are of that medium. Notably, the third chapter, which deals with a literary text, presents a

[12] Timothy Beal, *Religion and Its Monsters,* (New York: Routledge, 2002) p.4
[13] Which will be referred to in this thesis as 9/11.

different representation of the vampire and a very different scenario. The literary text is no longer set in the 'normal' world, but in a post-apocalyptic scenario where vampires are still unknown and monstrous, rather than being closer to human as in our TV texts. Why television is the chosen medium for these approaches can perhaps be understood through the way it is consumed and the importance it has in culture. In *Screening the Sacred,* Conrad Oswalt and Joel Martin discuss the role of religion onscreen, arguing that it is embedded within many American narratives, despite claimed assumptions of it being a 'peripheral phenomenon'.[14] They argue 'religion is finding new life embedded more discreetly in cultural forms.'[15] This new life represents both a rejection of current forms through sublimation and a desire for a religious output. The vampire here serves as an emblem of religious preoccupation, and the cultural form of television is proving to be the most prominent showcase for this.

To understand television's mediation of these issues, it is necessary to discuss television theory's understanding of audience consumption.[16] As modes of production and consumption continue to change, so do critical responses and approaches to television. Perhaps the simplest and clearest critical approach is that of Andrew Crisell who defines television texts as signifiers in a chain of signifiers, being informed and informing other texts. Thus they become embedded in the wider cultural narrative, and 'acts as a kind of mirror on…events in the outside world.'[17] Due to the nature of these texts, they function as 'private and domestic',[18] allowing for a personal experience for the viewer. This itself is key to understanding texts that impart critical responses to cultural events, as television informs whilst providing a sense of belonging, a signification of being 'connected' to the outside world and its events. Due to the wide and varied choice of programming, viewing habits have come to represent and reflect identities as Dave Gauntlett and Annette Hill have pointed out:

[14] Joel Martin & Conrad Oswalt Jr., Screening the Sacred: Religion, Myth and Ideology in Popular American Film, (Colorado: Westview Press, 1995) p.1
[15] Martin & Oswalt, p.158
[16] Something discussed further in chapter 1 and chapter 3.
[17] Andrew Crisell, A Study of Modern Television: Thinking Inside the Box (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2006) p.3
[18] Crisell, p.2

> The search for reference points regarding identity issues within programmes sits alongside the way in which individuals express their identity and difference through their programme choices.[19]

As such a prominent part of cultural narratives, with 96.7% of Americans owning television sets,[20] and online streaming platforms becoming increasingly available, the impact viewers have on content and production has been 'greatly underestimated' according to John Fiske, who argues that 'traditional media analysis' needs to look at 'the power of audiences to shape meaning.'[21] This is crucial to this thesis, as a large part of it argues for the consumption of these narratives figuring as a reflection and acceptance of a wider variation of viewpoints and attitudes. This is due to the 'social formative function'[22] of narratives, in which the meaning is derived from 'an interaction between text and reader, as an effect to be experienced.' [23]

As a significant presence in everyday life, television has the power to inform, progress and change attitudes through programming. It is also able to 'domesticate communal experience', [24] mingling the public and the private, taking a shared experience (the viewing of a certain program) and allowing it to be made public. This is increasingly done through social media such as Twitter, where fans and viewers live-tweet their responses through episodes of series. Religion onscreen is discussed thoroughly in Diane Winston's *Small Screen, Big Picture* which argues that television exemplifies 'lived religion', noting that 'in each series [discussed in the book], lived religion – the everyday expression of ultimate commitments – is part of what compels viewers.'[25] The similarities to religious experience are easy to draw – the communal experience, a sense of involvement and belonging, and the reflection of beliefs and identity. These aspects of the medium indicate its suitability in presenting a figure imbued with a strong religious undertone, as it adds another dimension to the consumption of the text.

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[19] Dave Gauntlett, & Annette Hill, TV *Living* (Bodmin: Routledge, 1999) p.131
[20] With this being a drop from a previous 98.9%: Brian Stelter, 'Ownership of TV sets falls in U.S', *New York Times,* (2011) < http://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/03/business/media/03television.html > [accessed July 2015]
[21] Quoted in *Television Studies* ed. by Toby Miller, (London: BFI, 2002) p.26
[22] Robert C. Holub, *Reception Theory* (Oxon: Routledge, 2003) p.68
[23] Holub, p.83
[24] Crisell, p.135
[25] Diane Winston (ed.), *Small Screen, Big Picture: Television and Lived Religion,* (Texas: Baylor University Press, 2009) p.11

Although religion may permeate many televisual texts, its explicit presence and reference within vampire narratives is what is under examination here. The change in the last few decades to a more religiously-informed and penitent vampire raises questions about how we define good, evil, and what it means when our monsters are portrayed as the lesser evil. The figure became dominant in the 17th century across Europe with the outbreak of 'vampire crazes' where people claimed to have been bitten by vampires or terrorised by them. How one could become a vampire had a number of explanations, all of them rooted in various religious beliefs and superstitions.[26] These religious elements are still present today. However, vampires are no longer a product of religious transgression, but instead, are symbolic of redemption. Stoker's *Dracula* moved beyond the folklore and entrenched the figure as part of the cultural narrative, unquestionably the defining point of vampire history. So many interpretations of the vampire have been based on Stoker's character – notably *Nosferatu* and the *Hammer Horror Films* - that it is the one text that most frequently recurs in academic discussion and in popular culture. It has been seen in many ways: as invasion narrative[27], as racial criticism[28], and as fear of female sexuality[29], for example. What *Dracula* did do was move the vampire away from the idea of the aristocratic seducer to foreign villain; powerful enough to inspire a following and perform vampirism as a quasi-religious experience. It is the character of Renfield that displays an attitude akin to religious devotion, which Herbert discusses from the point of view of readers experiencing *Dracula* at the time of its release: 'According to what system of thinking could the loathsome vampire actually become an object of religious devotion?'[30] According to Herbert's discussion of the vampire as religious icon, Stoker had foreshadowed the future and current use of this figure. Post Stoker, the vampire moved away from the religious and instead, reflected the fears of its contemporaries. One big leap was Matheson's *I Am Legend* (1954), which offered a refreshing take on the vampire. Previous films and novels, such as *Nosferatu* (1922) and Tod Browning's *Dracula* (1931) had all conflated the metaphor with sexuality or fear of invasion. This time, the vampire was situated in a post-apocalyptic setting and

[26] Detailed in Wayne Bartlett and Flavia Idriceanu, *Legends of Blood,* (Connecticut: Praeger, 2006) and Margaret Carter, *Different Blood: The Vampire as Alien* (USA: Amber Quill Press LLC, 2004) among others.
[27] Most notably, Arata, Stephen, 'The Occidental Tourist: "Dracula" and the Anxiety of Reverse Colonization" in *Victorian Studies,* 33: 4 (1990) 621-645
[28] Jiang, Ying & Zhang, Xiao-Hong, 'An analysis on *Dracula* from Cultural Perspective' in *English Language and Literature Studies,* 2:4 (2012) 100-105
[29] Senf, Carol, 'Dracula: Stoker's Response to the New Woman', in *Victorian Studies,* 26: 1 (1982) 33-49
[30] Herbert, Christopher, 'Vampire Religion' in *Representations,* 79: 1 (2002) 100-121, (pp.107)

seen as caused by a disease (whereas previously it had been that the vampire was a different race, or the product of a religious transgression). The ensuing tale saw the white male protagonist struggle with the concept of facing the 'outsider' figures of the vampires, and coming to a realisation that *he* was the abnormal one. The novel forces the reader to occupy the position of 'other' rather than the vampire being its representative. This becomes particularly important in discussions of science and the vampire within chapter 3.

Another change in the figure came with Anne Rice's publication of the first of her *Vampire Chronicles* in 1976: *Interview with the Vampire.* It introduced the vampire Lestat, who has been signposted by many as the turning point for the sympathetic vampire, laying the groundwork for the millennial figures explored here. Prior to Rice, there had been a slew of Hammer Horror (1958-1974) films featuring Christopher Lee playing Dracula, along with the TV series *Dark Shadows* (1966-1971) which posited a more playful version of the figure. Rice's vampires were more concerned with God than their literary predecessors, becoming seemingly obsessed by theological questions. Other horror writers used the trope of the vampire to explore concepts of time and sexuality, such as Stephen King in *Salem's Lot* (1975) and later, Poppy Z. Brite's *Lost Souls* (1994) which very much placed the vampire in the role of 'other'. Kim Newman's *Anno Dracula* series explored the vampire as historical manipulator, an idea that reoccurs frequently due to the immortal nature of the figure. The vampire can be imbued with as much historical significance as required by the text and also figures as a method of exploring multi-directional memory (which will be explored in chapter 3 in relation to cultural trauma).

The 80s saw the proliferation of teen/coming of age films that featured vampires such as *Fright Night* (1985)*, Once Bitten* (1985)*, My Best Friend is a Vampire* (1987)*, Near Dark* (1987) and *Lost Boys* (1987)*.* These narratives focused on the corrupting nature of the figure, and positioned it as a metaphor for emergent sexuality and a fear of homosexuality. Religious elements were mostly absent; yet, these elements arguably returned in force within Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight Saga* (2005-2008 and 2008-2012, books and films respectively)*.* The series comprised of four books, and film versions followed shortly after. To date, the franchise has been the most financially successful of all vampire imprints, netting an estimated $500 million in

merchandising alone. In these texts the central vampire character, Edward Cullen, acting as a high-school student, is driven by his need to protect the 'soul' of the girl he loves. The series received backlash because Meyer's vampires were feminised ("vampires don't sparkle!") and made objects of romance. This was nothing new; the sympathetic vampire as potential suitor and desirable object had featured in Rice's *Interview with the Vampire* and the TV series *Buffy*. With *Twilight,* Meyer had gone further, with the danger of the vampire being stripped away. These vampires are 'vegetarian' (which meant feeding only on animals and not humans) and so pose no threat. The same formula – vampire living amongst humans and denying their 'natural' impulses to feed on them – is evident in other narratives from the same period such as *The Vampire Diaries, True Blood* and *Being Human.* The latter two also include religious elements, and are looked at in this thesis. Whilst the vampire's popularity extends beyond TV and *Twilight,* it must be noted that it is those series with religious elements that have proven most popular. The list of vampire texts and their religious elements listed above is not exhaustive; nevertheless, they are prominent examples of the vampire in culture and as such, serve as interesting markers for the progression of the figure and its religious ties.[31]

In those texts with religious elements, questions of identity also come hand-in-hand with religion. The implications of a 'spiritual' or religious vampire are evident to both the viewer and the fictional world they inhabit. By trying to 'pass' as human, which includes human struggles with faith and belief, vampires highlight the perception and boundaries of identities. Identity in this thesis is grounded in identity theory, primarily social identity theory, which pertains to the formation of a perceived 'American' identity (something problematic given the varied makeup and nature of the country itself). It is relevant here particularly due to the divisions of 'us' and 'them' that have been repeatedly referred to in the post 9/11 world. These divisions have sometimes focused on religious differences,[32] and as such, religious markers are often used to define identity. Religion as an identity marker is a topic discussed in chapter 2. Although the vampire challenges notions of identity through the modern subversion of the figure, how far can they be used to represent anxieties about faith? Often the vampire will try to use their concept of a 'soul' and belief to prove they are not

[31] A more detailed list of vampires on screen can be found in J. Gordon Melton's *Vampires on Video* (London: Cengage Gale, 1997). Melton has also compiled other 'encyclopaedias' of vampire history, literature and film.
[32] Here, between Muslim and Christian, a specific topic discussed throughout this thesis.

monstrous, and as shown in the texts under examination, they struggle to move away from the established tropes of their identity. This enforces the idea of belief as being a way to ground or mark an identity.

The increasing propensity to make the vampire religious also extends to the way in which they are portrayed and received by audiences. The links between the vampire and religion go far back, but the way in which viewers and readers respond to shows like *True Blood, The Vampire Diaries* and *Twilight* illuminate the possibility that the vampire is a god-like figure – more than human, immortal and in many cases, saviour-like. If the vampire is being used in this way, it could be argued that the figure is a sublimation of a religious impulse, which is dealt with throughout the thesis. Primarily, the idea of the religious impulse relates to the way religious feeling and inclinations are channelled – the various expressions of religion, faith and spirituality encompass this impulse and its pre-eminence in culture is made clear here through the way faith and religion are imbued in these narratives. It is not just vampires that seek a religious experience of their own, but the humans in post-9/11 narratives too. In a discussion about religion and myth, Martin and Oswalt state that 'gods include all superior beings that humans engage religiously.'[33] Vampires are treated akin to gods in recent narratives, with literal enactment or surrogacy of religion in these texts illustrating the idea that 'religion manifests itself through cross-cultural forms',[34] positioning the texts as a form of religion themselves for the audiences.

The discussion of religion in these texts is mostly defined within a Judeo-Christian framework, primarily because what is being examined here is the religious response of America, and an American identity which is tied to Christianity and Western concepts of religion.[35] Chapter 1 contrasts the religious elements, or lack thereof, of a UK vampire narrative in order to highlight the emphasis religion holds in US narratives. As such, there is little discussion of religion in the UK in the chapter as this isn't the central focus, nor does it appear much in the UK text. There is also a discussion of fundamentalist approaches to religion, across the thesis, which Elaine Showalter in *Fundamentalism in America* argued has 'become one of the lead

[33] Martin & Oswalt, p.6
[34] Ibid.
[35] This will be explored further in subsequent chapters.

agencies in the psychic propulsion of "millennial America" from neurosis to psychosis.'[36] The absence of discussions about fundamentalist Islam in her analysis, which would unquestionably be under investigation in discussions of fundamentalism post 9/11, is telling. There is a similar lack of discussion of fundamentalist Islam within this thesis, as these narratives primarily portray fundamentalist Christianity. A Western framework and perceptions of fundamentalism, along with a lack of knowledge about faiths such as Islam, necessarily complicate understanding of other religions. Perhaps the most important idea for this thesis concerning religion is one elucidated by Talal Asad, who argues that belief is 'not independent of worldly conditions'.[37] The way certain conditions, such as the powerful impact of 9/11, change belief is under scrutiny, and this change is illustrated through cultural narratives by the latent attitudes and portrayals displayed. These worldly conditions appear to serve as catalysts for a cycle of resurgence and decline in active participation in faith, as will be shown in the following chapters as we look at the most recent resurgence of faith and its ties to the events of 9/11. The form belief takes is explored in the cultural texts of the following chapters, providing material to analyse for both the impact of 9/11 and how that effects belief.

The texts in this work are informed by and respond to religion's role in society. Prior to the catalytic events of 9/11, the place of religion arguably became more of a divisive topic, something discussed by scholars such as Gilles Kepel, Clyde Wilcox and Philip Melling. The history of American religious belief and doubt is extensive; for the sake of brevity and relevance, key titles have been selected here that reflect pertinent questions and attitudes, alongside their informative and comprehensive outlines of the topic.

Gilles Kepel's *The Revenge of God* is a particularly apposite text for this thesis. He states that 'movements for the reaffirmation of religious identity have undergone a considerable change between 1975 and 1990.'[38] Through examining Christianity, Judaism and Islam in the latter half of the twentieth century, Kepel argues that there has been a resurgence of religion paralleled by all three denominations, primarily in response to modernity. Yet, important to note is his argument that these religions

[36] Quoted in Philip Melling, *Fundamentalism in America,* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998) p.viiii
[37] Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion* (Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993) p.46
[38] Gilles Kepel, *The Revenge of God,* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994) p.191

attempt to infuse modernity with their beliefs, rather than modernise their religion to maintain relevance. This raises questions about the function and relevance of religion if change is needed to make it compatible with modernity, an ideal springboard for the discussions here. In the following chapters, the vampire narratives are shown to deconstruct traditional notions of religion and play with their form by subverting expectations of belief and morality. Kepel situates the beginnings of the resurgence of religion in the decade of the 1970s and looks at the political conditions surrounding the worlds of Islam, Christianity and Judaism. Despite the examination of Islam, a non-Western religion, the book explores societies from a Western perspective, which gives it a somewhat limited approach.[39]

Clyde Wilcox's *Onward Christian Soliders?* focuses on the Christian Right, noting that the 'debate about the role of the Christian right in America is located in a larger debate about the role of religion in American politics.'[40] Wilcox identifies a divide in the movement between 'pragmatists' and 'ideologues', implying that to classify the Christian Right as one united movement would be to oversimplify the understanding of it. Despite this, his study does provide an interesting context for the Christian Right from the beginning of the twentieth century until the late 1980s whereupon Pat Robertson's 'populist crusade'[41] facilitated a decline in support for the movement. It offers little in the way of concluding opinion about the movement, or the future of it. It is useful in this thesis as it aids in an understanding of the ties between religion and politics within America, which is under consideration particularly in chapter 2.

Philip Melling drills into the understanding of fundamentalism in America, situating it in a post-Cold War moment, which he appears to imply is catalytic in terms of religious belief. At times Melling's argument in *Fundamentalism in America* is unclear due to its constant discussion of other scholarship, which often obscures his point. However, it does offer a broad overview of the state of, primarily, Christian fundamentalism in the US pre-2000. Interestingly, the most pertinent argument of the book is as follows:

[39] More is said about these limtations later with reference to Talal Asad.
[40] Clyde Wilcox, *Onward Christian Soliders?* (Colorado: Westview Press, 2000), p.12
[41] Wilcox, p.40

> Fundamentalists are not only members of a dynamic, interactive global culture, they also belong to a culture of piracy, in which ideas…are frequently borrowed and plagiarized.[42]

This is evident through the presentation and comparison of Christian fundamentalism with non-Western cultures, which Melling briefly does, and which occurs in this thesis within chapter 2. These similarities are also something Kepel identifies between the three religions of his book: 'these historical movements have a great deal in common beyond mere historical simultaneity.'[43] Melling looks at the 'contradictions of fundamentalism', one of which being the idea he cites various other scholars using that 'fundamentalists believe they can live apart from the world',[44] yet often their worldview centres around incorporating and changing aspects of the world to provide a future in line with their beliefs. One such example is the inclusion of Jews in the future narratives of evangelical Christianity in order to facilitate the second coming. Like Wilcox and Keppel, Melling's work offers a limited view of the state of pre-2000 religion in the US. What can be taken from these texts is a context for understanding the shift post 2001 in approaches to fundamentalism and the role of religion. Whilst each author has historicized and outlined the events that either furthered or hindered the various modes of fundamentalism and faith, they do not move beyond context into reflection, representation or understanding. Arguably the position of religion in cultural narratives offers a more nuanced understanding of the ways fundamentalism and religion is interpreted beyond the political.

Whilst these outlines of religion in America are astute, and provide a strong basis for comparison to post-millennial religion, the timings of their publication means that they do not engage with the trauma of the 9/11 attacks. The events are argued here to serve as the catalyst for changes in the role and mediation of religious belief, and subsequently, the need and use of the vampire. Thus, explorations of religion in this thesis are divided into *pre* and *post* 9/11, with *pre* often being used as a point of comparison and *post* as confirmation of the change. The attacks have been detailed in many scholarly texts, but here it is the trauma of the event (and the subsequent aftermath) that is under examination. It is the trauma that facilitated the change in

[42] Melling, p.47
[43] Kepel, p.192
[44] Melling, p. 16

attitudes towards religion and identity, and so throughout this thesis, there will be an ongoing discussion of trauma, as arguably the texts in question are products of it, and ways of working through it also.

Trauma here is discussed through the use of trauma theory informed by the discourses of Cathy Caruth and Ann Whitehead who focus on Freudian manifestations of trauma such as the repetition compulsion, memorialising, concepts of haunting and the need to 'work through'. In the case of the trauma of 9/11, it will be approached through an examination of its manifestation in cultural narratives and whether such narratives are able to 'work through' the issues that have arisen due to it. Certain aspects of trauma are arguably more pronounced due to the modern setting in which it happened – the video capture and constantly recycling of footage on news channels and in the media proliferated the impact. David Holloway argues a similar point:

> From the very beginning, '9/11' and the 'War on Terror' were so appropriated by storytelling and mythmaking that the events themselves became more or less indivisible from their representations, or simulations, in political rhetoric, mass media spectacle and the panoply of other representational forms that made the events feel pervasive at the time.[45]

This overwhelming representation of trauma ensured a wider audience could bear witness to the events, and understand their impact. Responses to 9/11 were varied, but there are those who believe it marked a change,[46] and those who believe that there is no change evident post-9/11.[47] What this thesis argues is that the fear and anxiety evoked by the trauma of the events is embedded in the texts that are being studied, and in particular, the figure of the vampire embodies many of these anxieties in a metaphorically acceptable way. The trauma also combines with the defensive response to 9/11, namely the need to reassert an American identity fuelled by and grounded in religion.

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[45] David Holloway, *9/11 and the War on Terror* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005) p.5
[46] Such as Georgiana Banita, *Plotting Justice: Narrative Ethics and Literary Culture after 9/11,* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2012)
[47] Dunmire, Patricia, '9/11 Changed Everything: on intertextual analysis of the Bush doctrine', in *Discourse and Society,* 20: 2 (2009) 195-222

The tackling of 9/11 explicitly did not happen for some time[48] in film and television in particular, but when it did, the portrayals were mere representations of the events rather than a delving into any discussions of the underlying issues. Prominent examples of this include Oliver Stone's *World Trade Centre* (2006), *United 93* (2006) and *Flight 93* (2006) – all offered a dramatic retelling of the events, which arguably served to cement the story-like status of the events into a consistent public narrative. The use of a metaphorical figure like the vampire allows for a more nuanced and sensitive discussion, which could be argued as a reason for the strong infusion of elements of the events into the narratives here. They combine the fluid nature of the vampire, along with its ability to represent and debate issues of religion and identity through its nature with the metaphorical setting needed to broadcast problematic discussions.

This thesis then, fills a gap in research and links together various issues, texts and theories to explain and understand how the vampire has changed, and the importance of its current cultural use. Each chapter deals with a different text, and therefore, different facets of the argument. Chapter 1 lays the foundations for the importance of the figure's Americanisation, exploring the difference between the UK version of *Being Human* and its American remake. *Being Human,* although a show about vampires, werewolves and ghosts, features a large proportion of vampiric narrative, and I will be looking at the presence of religion in the American version in order to understand the difference between the uses of the figure, and to establish the American cultural value of the vampire. This chapter also touches on the concept of the remake given the nature of the series in question, and looks at why vampire films and stories are so often reproduced. It also introduces the critical importance of television, laying the foundations for a deeper exploration of televisual texts in later chapters. It uses critical reception of the show in order to examine responses to it, along with ratings to surmise its popularity.

Chapter 2 focuses on the US TV series *True Blood,* a hugely popular show screened on HBO and based on the *Sookie Stackhouse Mysteries* written by Charlaine Harris. The series colours the vampire as a minority figure, with it being set in a world where

[48] *United 93,* one of the most well-known films about 9/11, released in 2006, was still described as 'too soon' by many critics.

vampires are 'out' and living amongst humans, unlike a vast majority of other literature where the status of the vampire is masked or secret. In particular it is season 2 that will be examined, as this makes overt reference to the attitudes post-9/11 and the treatment of Muslims, along with terror attacks. Patriotism is a key theme in the series and so is explored along with its links to faith and fundamentalism. This is done through an examination of religious beliefs and attitudes via polls, media responses and scholarship around the topics. *True Blood* has a large and devoted fan base, so chapter 2 will develop the discussions of chapter 1 about how these texts are being consumed and look at the role of fandom in the interpretation of meaning. This is looked at from a theoretical approach and through ratings, online responses and the role the series plays in culture.

Once the role of religion, identity, patriotism and 9/11 have been opened up, Chapter 3 takes this knowledge and uses it to critique a different approach to vampires and representations of 9/11. Guillermo Del Toro's *The Strain* trilogy makes explicit reference to the events of 9/11 and the aftermath. This chapter allows the exploration of a different medium in the vampire genre – the previous chapters have focused on television, whilst this looks at a series of books. Thus this chapter will also necessarily cover the recent representation of the vampire in literature and how this is received by readers, as well as the need for representation, or rather, recreation of the events of 9/11. It will explore the 9/11 novel, theories of apocalypse and religion, along with the importance of the text in mediating trauma with explicit representation and evocation of other traumatic events in a form of multi-directional memory.

Overall, this thesis seeks to argue that the current use of vampires is that of a sublimation of religious feeling and as a way of examining fears about identity post 9/11. The positioning of the figure has seen it become god-like, offering a way to express a culturally sublimated religious impulse. The reasons for the need for sublimation are explored in further detail later but this thesis argues that it is the change in attitude towards religion and the identities associated with it that make it problematic to freely express belief without consequence. The vampire, then, with its ever-useful metaphorical nature, is flexible enough to be used for this purpose – added to that, the nature of the vampire is now inflected with religious meaning. It embodies fears and solutions for death, a physical manifestation of the afterlife that

goes beyond 'human' and comes with expected behaviour and identity like many other religions. It is, in some ways, a depoliticized way to express religious thought and feeling, in a non-specific way (it can stand in for Islam or Christianity, for example). The need for this shows how important religious expression is and how complex the relations between identity and religion are. With 9/11 and the re-enforcing of ties between violence and faith, the vampire is deployed more than ever to explore these stereotypes and break down the boundaries between categorisations of identity. Bernard Beck takes a similar view of the use of the vampire, stating that:

> The plain message of today's vampire lore is that we are becoming less fearful and hostile, more curious and sympathetic to those we insist on defining as strangers. Whatever else the vampires may be, they are not *us,* and the challenge of the vampire story is whether we can live together with them.[49] (Italics my emphasis)

Whilst this is a simplistic view of the figure, it attempts to define the use of the metaphor, but fails to mention the fact that 'us' will predominantly mean Westerners, and for a large part, the vampire has been culturally appropriated to represent a safer version of the outsider. Our continued fascination with the figure seems to indicate we've not yet made peace with the strangers that we fear. Perhaps the vampire can help us begin to understand our complex relationship to the 'other' that lurks in the shadows, a figure that inverts and distorts our own conceived or perceived identities. If we look closer, it may be a distortion of our own reflection that we see. The following chapters further the understanding of the modern vampire, and highlight the idea of it as a figure simultaneously able to represent good and evil. It has become a figurehead for a movement away from organised religion, and represents a more individualized approach to faith and identity. In developing an understanding of the uses of the vampire in the modern age, it opens doors to new understandings of boundaries and definitions.

[49] Bernard Beck, 'Fearless Vampire Kissers: Bloodsuckers we love in *Twilight, True Blood* and others', *Multicultural Perspectives,* 13.2 (2011), 90-92 (pp.91)

Chapter 1

Comparing Influence: Religion and Authority across the Transatlantic

If demonising the monster keeps God on our side, then deifying it often puts us in a world of religious disorientation and horror.

- Timothy Beal, *Religion and its Monsters*[50]

In the past decade there has been a marked increase in the number of vampires on screen, in books and across the media. This influx of undead characters has proved almost inescapable, with more films, series and books set to emerge.[51] Television has been instrumental in furthering the vampire craze with an array of series that feature the figure. Although the pre-millennial offerings such as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer, Ultraviolet* and *Forever Knight* proved popular, there has been a cluster of series in the last decade all presenting a new approach to the vampire. These include *Being Human* and *True Blood,* which this thesis looks at, along with other series such as *The Vampire Diaries* and *The Originals.* The recent approach positions the vampire in the midst of society rather than on the fringes, and constructs a more human representation through the blurring of boundaries of identity. Interestingly, the majority of these series have been American and here it is pertinent to address the research questions I will be exploring in this chapter. Perhaps my most important question addresses how the US has staked a claim to this figure, looking precisely at what the 'Americanisation' of the vampire entails and whether there is a clear cultural difference between the American vampire and (in the case of *Being Human*) the British vampire. In this chapter I will argue that the cultural claim of the figure is due to a need borne out of the events of 9/11 and their effects on attitudes towards religion and identity.

In the frame of these questions, *Being Human* is an important series to examine. It began as a British series, and was remade in the US a mere two years after the original. It offers a chance to compare two interpretations of a vampire narrative, and

[50] Timothy Beal, *Religion and its Monsters* (New York: Routledge, 2002), p.6

[51] The seventh series of *The Vampire Diaries* premieres Autumn 2015, along with the third series of its spin-off, *The Originals.* The second series of *The Strain* and *From Dusk till Dawn* premiere in Summer 2015. Numerous films featuring vampires are being added to each year, including the upcoming *Underworld* sequel, due in 2016, along with *The Kitchen Sink* and *Atlanta Vampire Movie,* which are scheduled for release in Autumn 2015.

with it, an interesting foundation for comparison between UK and US[52] TV cultures. The aspect of the remake will also be taken into account and explored in order to fully examine the implications of reception. *Being Human* posits a storyline very common amongst modern vampire narratives – that is, the quest to be human and to assimilate with human society. Undoubtedly, an aspect of society that cannot be ignored is the structures used to understand and create the world and these include religion and authority. Thus, it is only logical that these series deal with these topics; how exactly they are portrayed is what offers us the chance to understand attitudes that influence cultural viewpoints. In particular, *Being Human* provides a comparison of the established structures of authority and attitudes towards religion on different sides of the Atlantic as this is a prominent element within the series. The comparison of approaches to storylines and presentation of characters through visual elements and dialogue should allow for a clear analysis of the differences. To understand the formation of the series, background is necessary, which is detailed below.

The story of how *Being Human*[53] began is an interesting one, not least from the point of view of critics. Its contentious instatement onto BBC3 was a product of audience response. Toby Whithouse's story of a group of three flatmates, who just happen to be a vampire, a werewolf and a ghost, aired its pilot in 2008. The initial viewing figures were not monstrous by any means at 430,000, yet a petition set up by a journalist for *The Reading Chronicle* soon became viral, gaining over 3000 signatures, and the series was given the green light to be produced. The series began properly in 2009, with a slightly different cast. The three flatmates are led by John Mitchell (Aidan Turner) a vampire who we learn was killed in the First World War; he apparently gave himself up for conversion in exchange for the lives of his men. Mitchell (as he is known in the series) struggles constantly with his bloodlust, but tries to repress any urges he has to feed, or 'fall off the wagon'. He yearns to be part of humanity, and tries to integrate himself as much as he can, including getting a job at the local hospital (which also conveniently offers him access to blood bank supplies).[54] Then there is the werewolf, George Sands (Russell Tovey), who is given 'the curse' by a scratch on a holiday in Scotland that left his friends dead. After the 'incident', he fled

[52] Although filmed in Canada, the writers are American, it is set in Boston and screened primarily on Syfy in the US. Thus, I am using it as an example of US TV culture.
[53] *Being Human,* BBC3 (2008-2013). Subsequent references to this series within the text are made with reference to the version (in this case, UK) and the episode title and number.
[54] Which means he can feed without killing anyone. The ethics, however, still remain dubious.

from his family and friends and began a new life in relative anonymity, working at the same hospital as Mitchell as a hospital porter. Once the two meet, it becomes apparent that they both share the same aspiration of trying to live a 'normal' life, which results in them agreeing to live together. Here they meet the third member of the cast – Annie Sawyer (Lenora Crichlow), a ghost trapped in the house they move into. She has memories of the aftermath of her death, and of discovering she is a ghost at the beginning of the series, but cannot remember how she died. It emerges in the first few episodes that her fiancé had been the one to kill her by pushing her down the stairs in a jealous rage. For Annie, her purpose is unclear – this is what she must figure out through the course of the series. She, like George and Mitchell, desires to be human. All three have at some point been human, which is perhaps a key difference from other monster stories. In contrast to tales such as *Frankenstein,* where the monster has known no other state than monstrosity, these characters have been deformed by their physical and metaphysical change; a change that strongly places them within the realm of death thereby allowing them to subvert the 'norms' and limits of humanity despite their desire to re-join it. Here, there is an attempt to normalize 'otherness' through its situation in the domestic scenario of a flat share. The series follows the three characters, and their problems (as is usual for sitcoms) with the added twist of the supernatural. *Being Human* offers a different portrayal of the vampire from its contemporaries in the teen narratives of *Twilight* and *The Vampire Diaries*, through its positioning of the male lead as pre-occupied with his own struggles rather than being primarily a love-interest for another character. It explores a wide range of issues, but the show's core is what generates its popularity: that of a group of twenty-somethings, fighting to be 'normal' in a world where adversity has to be constantly overcome. *Being Human* is particularly relevant to this thesis as a whole because of the way these questions about humanity and identity are framed. The US version of the series particularly focuses on the religious aspects of identity, and both debate the strength and nature of the structures of authority. What is especially important is the comparison between the two series as they highlight the cultural difference between religion and conceptions of cultural identity. The principal difference, as shown in this chapter, is the infusion of religious elements into the vampire in the US version. I posit that a major factor in this difference is due to the events of 9/11, which arguably colours both the writing and reception of the US series.

Overall, the UK's *Being Human* was received well, being touted as one of the biggest ratings pullers on BBC3: series one averaged 0.9 million viewers per episode, with the figure rising to 1.2 million viewers per episode for series two and three.[55] Whilst these figures may seem small in comparison to the big draws of prime time shows on BBC1 and BBC2, which pull in between five and eight million,[56] it has to be taken into account that BBC3 was a freeview channel, meaning that those who didn't have a Freeview box or Sky subscription in the UK wouldn't have had access to it.[57] Viewing figures are not always accurate in this age – file-sharing, online viewing (through iPlayer for example) and DVD sales have a real impact on statistical accuracy. Critics reviewed the series positively, with minor criticisms aimed at the pilot, and the subsequent series attracted a favourable reception. The response to Mitchell was particularly positive, because he did not follow the path of recent cinematic vampires who were overwrought with emotion and existed for the sole purpose of being an enigmatic heartthrob. This was a post-*Twilight* world, and those who loved vampires, but objected to the 'feminine' representations Stephenie Meyer had written, sought out something else. Mitchell offered this. On the surface, he was just an ordinary 'bloke' who struggled with his inner demons, except his inner demons were more literal, and resulted in fatal consequences. The glut of vampiric figures on screen did little to dampen the response to the latest televisual creation. For, as Ira Konigsberg writes: 'The popularity of this figure resides in the complexity of his representation, in the fact that he is always more than what he at first seems.'[58] The vampire is layered with cultural meaning and this is evident in the texts discussed here. Mitchell is able in the series to play at being human, but at points his struggle with his 'true' nature is what gives him depth, which makes him perhaps more human.

Our cultural narratives have long dealt with the ugly side of human existence, and the monstrous has been a way in which to explore this both figuratively and literally. The current thirst for vampires and their counterparts quenches the desire to see the most

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[55] *TV By the Numbers,* 'Being Human cancelled by the BBC', (Feburary 2013) < http://tvbythenumbers.zap2it.com/2013/02/07/being-human-uk-cancelled-by-bbc/ > [accessed January 2016]
[56] Soaps such as *Eastenders* drew in an average of 8-9 million during the period between Feb 23-26 2009, according to Leigh Holmwood, 'TV Ratings: First Eastenders to feature all-black cast pulls in the viewers', *The Guardian,* (Feb 2009) <http://www.theguardian.com/media/2009/feb/25/tv-ratings-eastenders-black-cast > [accessed 18 March 2012]
[57] It has subsequently been moved online as of February 2016 due to funding cuts at the BBC.
[58] Ira Konigsberg, 'How many Draculas does it take to change a lightbulb?' in *Play It Again Sam*, ed. by Andrew Horton and Stuart Y. McDougal (California: University of California Press,1998) pp.250-277 (p.261)

primitive of struggles acted out. But from the reviews of *Being Human*, it appeared that the critics were not watching it just for the monsters, but because of *what they were saying.* To them, these characters were resonating cultural fears and desires, as with many a monster narrative before. This time, the mythology was not getting in the way – the focus of the series, as the critics picked up on, was not the fact that these characters were not human, but that they were struggling with identity, and with knowing how to be in a world complete with so many restrictions. This was unlike the previous manifestations of the figure in which identity was not a choice, but a state of being denoted primarily by appearance and physical limits. The restrictions of the monstrous identity were formerly depicted as the Achilles heel of the monster, offering a neat narrative device for the destruction of the vampire. One example that has since been negated in some modern narratives is the vampire's inability to come out during the day. These restrictions also served to demarcate the monster from the human. Now, with these boundaries becoming frequently obscured, humanity is posited as an identity rather than a state of being. This is the case with *Being Human,* which presents a choice between two identities, something discussed in further detail later in the chapter.

How the UK series was received critically was evident from the journalistic reviews. In terms of reception, I have taken into account ratings, critical responses in national media and (brief) discussions in academic writing about the series. The reception of both this text and the US version gives us an indication of whether the message of *Being Human* resonated with the viewers and critics. The Guardian described it as 'Britain's best home-grown cult drama, and BBC3's biggest-ever hit.'[59] Other critics responded positively, remarking on its broader appeal for those 'not bitten by the vampire craze',[60] exemplifying its attraction beyond the fixture of vampires, which had become increasingly prominent on screen at the time of the release of series 1 of the UK *Being Human.*[61] The series itself comprised of more than another treatise on the moral complexities of the vampire; it was an exploration of existence in a broader sense, which the *Times* pointed out: 'Like all monster fantasies, it is basically about

[59] Daniel Martin, 'Being Human: five reasons why BBC3's drama is essential viewing', *The Guardian*, (2010) <http://www.guardian.co.uk/tv-and-radio/tvandradioblog/2010/jan/08/being-human> [accessed January 2012]
[60] Tom Sutcliffe, 'The Weekend's TV', *The Independent,* (2011) <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/tv/reviews/the-weekends-tv-being-human-sun-bbc3brnurse-jackie-sat-bbc2brthe-killing-sat-bbc4-2192382.html> [accessed January 2012]
[61] *True Blood, The Vampire Diaries* and *Twilight* had been released around this time.

people trying to conquer their demons.'[62] It is also important to consider that some viewers may just enjoy the subject matter for what it is, without reading anything into it; there's a tendency for narratives, particularly those that deal with the supernatural or Sci-Fi, to be picked apart by critics and fans alike for a commentary on the wider social and political state. Prominent examples include *Lost, Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Battlestar Galactica*. These series have prompted discussions around important cultural issues, arguably reflecting the events and cultural milieu of the time. In the case of *Buffy* we see issues of feminism being brought centre stage, offering a different portrayal of female protagonists.[63] *Lost* evokes discussions of spirituality, with it being set in purgatory and the multi-faith cast providing a number of different perspectives on belief.[64] *Battlestar Galactica* is of the Bush-era administration and makes comment on the Iraq invasion.[65] The use of these sci-fi and supernatural series in discussing political and cultural issues could be in part due to the seemingly apolitical world of metaphor these narratives inhabit, giving them a wider scope for criticism whilst keeping a narrative distance. This is arguably what the vampire is able to do through its status as cultural trope. The use of the supernatural highlights a need to imply our own understanding of the world through 'abnormal' characterisations and settings, as the otherworldly is available to represent a number of different topics from a distanced and different perspective. Whilst these types of series, films and books *do* interact with these topics[66] and explore them in such a way that may not have been possible were it more explicit, the primary motivation for making them is usually for entertainment and some of the audience will react in a way that belies this. However, it would also be short-sighted to think that the political, social or cultural norms of the audience are not reinforced or challenged in some form alongside the entertainment.

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[62] Hugo Rifkind, 'Tudors: so absurd it's almost worth watching', *The Times,* (2011) <http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/arts/tv-radio/article2891126.ece > [accessed January 2012]

[63] Explored in more depth by Lorna Jowett, *Sex and the Slayer: A Gender Studies Primer,* (Connecticut: Wesleyan Press, 2006)

[64] An interesting discussion is by Bradley B. Onishi, 'I Once Was Found and Now I am Lost: Reflections on the Religious and Spiritual Dimensions of Lost', *Huffington Post,* (2011) < http://www.huffingtonpost.com/bradley-b-onishi/i-once-was-found-and-now_b_586861.html > [accessed January 2016]

[65] Discussed in more depth by Brian L. Ott, '(Re)Framing Fear: Equipment for Living in a Post 9/11 World' in *Cylons in America,* ed. Tiffany Potter, C. W. Marshall, (New York: Continuum, 2008) pp.13-26

[66] Some useful examples being George A. Romero's *Land of the Dead* as political commentary, discussed in Terence McSweeney, '*The Land of the dead* and the home of the brave: Romero's vision of a post-9/11 America' in *Reframing 9/11:Film, Popular Culture and the War on Terror* ed. by Jeff Birkenstein, Anna Froula & Karen Randell (New York: Continuum, 2010)

The reviews continued to be positive throughout the series, with favourable responses from American critics. In a comparison with *True Blood,* the *New York Times* noted that the series was one that 'posits ghosts, werewolves and vampires roaming through the pubs and supermarkets of Bristol' and was 'more prosaic, but more compelling.'[67] In a similar vein, the *LA Times* writes of the attraction of the series over others: 'Even in a crowded field, "Being Human" stands out, mainly because it has what the others lack -- a sense of humor.'[68] The American response to the UK *Being Human* is important, mostly because it differs greatly in comparison to their response to the US version.

The US version of *Being Human* first aired in January 2011 on the SyFy channel. In terms of scheduling, it was quite different to many of the other mainstream US series, which begin in either June or September (such as *Grey's Anatomy, House, Dexter, True Blood*). The series revolves around the same concept as the UK version, placing three housemates, a ghost, a vampire and a werewolf, in the same situation. The first difference is the names of the characters. The vampire, Aidan[69] McCollin (Sam Witwer) comes from the same beginnings as Mitchell: converted during a war, to be more precise, the Revolutionary War, making him a good deal older. He is similarly tortured by his nature, abstaining from 'feeding' and attempting to live a normal life amongst humans. With him lives Josh Radcliff (Sam Huntington), a werewolf who fled from his family,[70] years of education, and left behind his human future. He repeatedly asserts that what he wants is to be 'normal'. The werewolf is the driving force for 'normality' in both series, whilst the vampire is the character that puts the whole guise under threat more often than others. They both live with the ghost, here known as Sally Malik (Meaghan Rath). The character of Sally is quite different from her original: at times she seems borderline hysterical and high pitched, whereas Annie veers between self-deprecation and wavering optimism about her flatmates' predicaments. The series concentrates far more on the vampiric aspect of the trio than the UK original. It also departs from the original storyline of series 1, bringing more vampire action to the mix, and exploring the character of Aidan more thoroughly by

[67] Alessandra Stanley, 'Friendship, thicker than blood', *New York Times,* (2009) <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/07/24/arts/television/24human.html > [accessed January 2012]
[68] Mary McNamara, "Being Human' on BBC America', *Los Angeles Times,* (2009) <http://articles.latimes.com/2009/jul/25/entertainment/et-beinghuman25 > [accessed January 2012]
[69] Named in homage to Aidan Turner.
[70] Whereas George in the BBC series left behind a girlfriend and family, Josh leaves behind his family and lesbian sister, which some critics have said has been added for "political correctness."

showing more of his past than we have seen of Mitchell's. This is undoubtedly a reflection of the prominent and lucrative nature of the vampire in US culture. *True Blood* (which began in 2008) and *The Vampire Diaries* (which began in 2009) were two commercially successful series featuring vampires as the prominent figures, although they too, like *Being Human*, feature other supernatural beings.

The US series of *Being Human* had a consistently similar number of viewers throughout its run, averaging at 1.49 million.[71] This isn't as high as other channels, such as ABC, which pulls between ten and eighteen million viewers for programs such as *Grey's Anatomy*.[72] The SyFy channel itself is smaller, and the type of programs it runs are very different to the more mainstream dramas like *Grey's*. It is also important to note that *Being Human* isn't one of its bigger attractions; other programs such as *Warehouse 13* pull in an average of 2.61 million per episode.[73] The uninspiring figures are reflected in the reviews. The *New York Times* compares the two series, stating that the UK version, 'looks like the work of Shakespeare — or, more to the point, Mike Leigh — when compared with the bland, airbrushed American version of "Being Human" that begins Monday night on Syfy.'[74] They then go on to dismiss the changes made, in particular, a perceived American tendency for obviousness: 'It's the first sign of rampant Americanization: the underlining of every theme and emotion, the explanation of every plot point.'[75] *SFX*, a popular magazine devoted to all things Sci-Fi and fantasy, dismissed the series as 'depressingly conservative and familiar.' It also reiterates the same point made in the *NY Times*, stating that the series' 'opening monologue rams home why the show is called Being Human with an Olympian lack of subtlety.'[76] Other reviews were just as scathing, again lamenting the failure of the series to live up to its original, stating that it was 'quickly proving to be a watered-down, superficial adaptation of the great storytelling

[71] Though it later dropped to around 1 million in later seasons before its cancellation.
[72] Robert Seidman, 'Thursday broadcast finals, plus quarter hour detail for Flashfoward', *TV By the Numbers,* (2009) <http://tvbythenumbers.zap2it.com/2009/09/25/thursday-broadcast-finals-plus-quarter-hour-detail-for-flashforward/28439/ > [accessed March 2012]
[73] The Cancel Bear, 'Syfy's Warehouse 13 rules Tuesday with series highs as top scripted drama', *TV By the Numbers,* (2009), <http://tvbythenumbers.zap2it.com/2009/07/29/syfys-warehouse-13-rules-tuesday-with-series-highs-as-top-scripted-drama/23839/> [accessed March 2012]
[74] Mike Hale, 'Relocated to America, Still Bloodthirsty', *New York Times,* (2011) <http://tv.nytimes.com/2011/01/17/arts/television/17human.html > [accessed January 2012]
[75] Ibid
[76] Dave Golder, 'Being Human's US makeover', *SFX,* (2009) <http://www.gamesradar.com/pure-golder-being-humane28099s-us-makeover/> [accessed January 2012]

being told over in the UK; the actors simply appear to be acting.'[77] Yet despite these critical responses, the series was commissioned for four seasons and the show maintained consistent ratings, suggesting it resonated with audiences. With 65% of television shows being cancelled in their first season, the lifespan of *Being Human* indicates success.[78]

The problem of the remake

The fact that *Being Human* is a remake brings up a number of issues pertaining to reception. As evidenced by the US critics' remarks, the series is (for the most part) being seen in relation to the original. Whether or not the majority of the US audience will have seen the UK version is a different matter. The issues surrounding remakes are interesting, and provide us with insight into the limitations of the series, and the varied reception it received.

Remake studies is a developing area in film scholarship, less so in the field of TV studies. Criticism amasses with time; as the number of remakes increase, it becomes more important to examine and understand the various structures of the remake, and more importantly, how to define it. Are remakes surplus to the original text, or do they add something new? Quoting Neale, Constantine Verevis argues that 'Whilst there is often sufficient semantic and syntactic evidence to suggest that remakes are particular textual structures, film remakes (like genres) "exist always *in excess* of a corpus of works (qtd in Neale, p51)."'[79] But to see the remake as excess is to deny the very definition of the term. It is *re-made,* and thus the structure and elements will be composed differently, changed by both time and the maker. Before we discuss remake theory any further, it should be made clear that the majority of literature relating to remakes largely ignores the TV remake. Books such as Robert Eberwein's *Play it Again, Sam* and Jennifer Forrest and Leonard Koos' *Dead Ringers* have tackled the subject, debating the problems arising from categorisation and theorisation. In recent years, in light of the developing methods of mediation and communication, research

[77] Lori May, 'Syfy's 'Being Human' premiere review: A shadow of the BBC version', *StarPulse,* (2011) <http://www.starpulse.com/news/Lori_May/2011/01/19/syfys_being_human_premiere_review_a_sh >[accessed January 2012]
[78] It is also important to note that critical responses do not always guarantee the success or failure of a series. A recent case in point is NBC's *Hannibal,* which was cancelled despite high critical regard.
[79] Constantine Verevis, *Film Remakes,* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005) p.2 quote from Steve Neale, 'Questions of Genre' in *Screen,* 31: 1 (1990) 45-66, p.51

has started to focus on forms of cultural media such as television in relation to its place within the network of cultural media en masse. Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, in *Remediation: Understanding New Media* begin to tackle the televisual use of existing information and its way of 'remaking' reality. Television 'has always borrowed freely and diversely from other media'[80] and as such, functions as a method of continually remaking well-known stories in an easily digestible form. Yet, it isn't quite the same as the remake we are addressing here which is far more explicit and as such, has a series of confines and rules to abide by – such as the premise, plot and characters that are required to be represented. The lack of discussion about TV remakes seems odd considering the number of TV series that are remade, especially those translated into US series from UK originals. Recent examples include *Life on Mars* (2006-08, UK, 2008-09, US)*, The Office* (2001-03, UK, 2005-13, US) and *Eleventh Hour* (2006, UK, 2008-09, US). We can speculate why the US has remade so many UK series, but realistically, the decision is probably financial. As Lesley Stern notes, 'Remakes reflect the conservative nature of the industry; they are motivated by an economic imperative…in order to maintain economic viability…remakes are also compelled to register variation and difference (from the originals) to incorporate generic developments.'[81]

The body of remake studies as a whole is particularly useful in the frameworks and theories it offers when comparing the relationship between UK TV texts and their US incarnations, because some of the same structures used to analyse and categorise the film remake apply here. Before we look at how the labelling of 'remake' may impact upon the reception of *Being Human,* the basic structures need to be understood and a model established to understand the remake in question. From this structure we can position both *Being Human* and its US remake, giving us a better perspective of the various reasons behind its remake, and why it is important. Critics such as Michael Druxman have attempted to categorise the different 'types' of remake, arguing that there are 3: the 'disguised remake', 'direct remake' and 'non-remake'.[82] *Being Human* arguably falls into the last category, as the plot diverges too much from the original for it to be direct, despite the acknowledgement of its source through maintaining the original series title. Whilst the US version is indeed based on Toby Whithouse's

[80] Jay David Bolter & Richard Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (London: MIT Press, 2000) p.184
[81] Stern, quoted in *Film Remakes,* p.4
[82] Michael Druxman, *Make it again, Sam: A Survey of Movie Remakes,* (Lancaster: Gazelle Books, 1976) p.173-174

original conception, the way it departs from the story lines in the UK version raises questions about how similar a remake should be. This divergence from story along with the strong differences in characterization seem to argue that the series appears to be an adaptation, rather than a remake, in the vein of *Battlestar Galactica*'s 're-imagining', title. Yet, it still has a place in the framework in which remakes can be understood, that is, within the various 'types' of remake.

These 'types' allow us categorise the remake, but do not tell us *why* they are made in those specific ways. Remakes are made for a variety of reasons; to understand how the US version of *Being Human* will impact upon audiences in comparison to its original and how it fares alone, the various reasons must be established which would help us find the possible intent of the writers and the likely, or desired, reception by an audience. I would posit that remakes are made for four key reasons – firstly, a remake of a foreign film is a way of modifying a story both linguistically and culturally so it is understandable by different audiences. Verevis asserts that 'foreign films are dispossessed of "local detail" and political content to exploit new (English language) markets.'[83] In the case of *Being Human,* despite both versions being English language, both the local detail and political content are perhaps too alien to be marketable to an American audience. The particular British idioms may also be lost in translation, and replaced with a more suitable language. Recent examples of US remakes of foreign films which have been critically acclaimed include *Let the Right One In* (2008) which was remade into *Let Me In* (2010), and *The Girl With the Dragon Tattoo* (2009, US remake 2011). Both were remade in a short space of time, were originally Swedish, and were very similar to their originals in terms of mise-en-scene. It should be made clear that with regards to their similarities they are exceptions to the rule; the remake is usually a contrasting depiction of a story, regardless of the difference in the original language. Both films are also based on books that have proved financially successful too.

This leads us to the second reason remakes are made – the previously stated financial incentive. Of course, this financial reason applies to all films – a studio would not make a film if it did not believe it would be successful. It must be noted that the US

[83] Verevis, p.3

has been the main country to produce remakes. American remakes 'are a way of investing in a concept that has already proved itself with an audience.'[84] In terms of *Being Human,* the UK series had already proved itself to be a hit in the UK, and on BBC America.[85] Thus to remake it for another network and another audience (as well as gaining existing fans of the UK series) was a feasibly sound financial decision. As noted above, the remake of *Being Human* was greeted in critical reviews with a lukewarm response, especially in comparison to its UK counterpart. Two different sides of the Atlantic will necessarily produce different versions of the same story, because they are riddled with cultural references and attitudes that remain specific to the country of origin. These references may seem 'alien' to viewers on the other side, and may distance the viewer from the meanings inherent in the text. What perhaps explains some of the disappointment with which a remake is sometimes received is as follows:

> The audience for a remake is responding to the paradoxical promise that the film will be just like the original, only better. The fundamental rhetorical problem of remakes is to mediate between two apparently irreconcilable claims: that the remake is just like its model, and that it's better.[86]

Whether or not it can be described as *better* is highly subjective; especially cross-culturally, the remake will appeal to specific markets, and be unavoidably imbued with 'the different historical, economic, social, political and aesthetic conditions that make them possible.'[87] Even if these conditions result in changes that are subtle, they will still be recognised by an audience directly comparing the original and the remake. This is made obvious in *Being Human*, with all of these factors altering the presentation of the characters, particularly the figure of the vampire. It is especially relevant for the contrast between these series as they were produced within a few years of one another. This allows us to see political, social and aesthetic differences in

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[84] Jennifer Forrest & Leonard Koos, *Dead Ringers*, (New York: State University of New York Press, 2001) p.6
[85] The UK series apparently garnered some of the 'largest audiences in the network's history' according to the Miami Herald: Glenn Garvin, ''Being Human' and 'Harry's Law': Disappointing', *Miami Herald,* (2011) <http://miamiherald.typepad.com/changing_channels/page/3/#ixzz1V3EzrJmG > [accessed March 2012]
[86] Dead Ringers, p.44
[87] Dead Ringers, p.4

this time period, which I believe is the product of a difference in the manifestation of religion, especially post 9/11 in the US version.

These differences become part of a further third reason for the remake: the cultural need. Once the financial viability has been ascertained, a remake may be made because a fundamental element of the story will be culturally relevant; it can be shown in a new light due to cultural developments or differences between one remake and the other – whether that is temporal or spatial is irrelevant. The remake itself encapsulates these differences, and uses the story to comment or critique current issues. It also offers a comparison between the cultural moment of the original and the remake. This insight into the current cultural moment, in the case of *Being Human,* is limited somewhat. Whether or not we can impart an objective viewpoint is unclear; we are in the midst of reception of the series. Like Robert Eberwein states: 'I doubt anyone writing about the new film will be able to position it fully in terms of its contemporary reception.'[88] What is different is the temporal distance between the series. Whilst some remakes and adaptations have been made in a different decade from its original,[89] therefore in a different social and cultural moment, both of these series exist within the same period. The major difference shown later in this chapter appears to be a consequence of the influences of the countries of origin. This is particularly important because it gives us a control – when comparing the two series, we cannot put one element down to a different time period. The biggest comparison will come from the attitudes evident in the series, which will in turn reflect the attitudes of the US and the UK. This will highlight their differences, much like Eberwein notes: 'assumptions about a shared cultural identity is pertinent to consideration of any cinema assumed to reflect the culture in which it is produced.'[90] This idea is also relevant for this thesis as a whole – these narratives may reflect yet these reflections may also indicate a broader spectrum of cultural identity than is portrayed onscreen. There may be US viewers who identify more with the UK series and vice versa. In the case of the US series though, it must be said that many viewers may not have encountered the original, and thus the differences evident will not be

[88] Robert Eberwein, 'Remakes and Cultural Studies' in *Play it again, Sam,* ed. by Andrew Horton and Stuart Y. McDougal (California: University of California Press, 1998) pp.15-34 (p16)
[89] For example, *Fright Night* (1985) was remade in 2011. *Dracula* has been remade throughout decades. *I Am Legend* has had several versions in 1964, 1971 and 2007.
[90] Ibid

apparent to them and as such, the appeal of the show will come from the content and themes.

Whilst every new film may be another interpretation of a story already known by thousands of readers, the film remake itself attempts to display its take on the story, which is the fourth reason for a remake. In particular, as Verevis argues, the remake can often be used to showcase the vision of the auteur. This may combine the other three reasons – financial viability, foreign language and cultural need, to create a remake that can be stylistically linked to the auteur. The phrases 're-imagining' 'revisited' and 're-envisioned' are used to imply the influence of the auteur.[91] These terms are also evocative of a difference in storyline; a recent television example of the 're-imagining' phrase is *Battlestar Galactica* (and mentioned above in relation to *Being Human).*[92] The style of the series became a signature repeated in later spin-off series such as *Caprica.* These 're-imaginings' are often linked to an original text, such as the many remakes of the story of *Dracula,* and this presents the 'remaker' with the option of inflicting their own vision as well as imbuing the text with cultural specificity. The same can be said in a more metaphorical sense with the figure of the vampire. It is the embodiment of the remake in both its actions and manifestation; it takes a human and 'remakes' it with added features and a subversion of the original rules of humanity. The original and the remake are still connected by appearance, yet the content (in this case, the psyche or personality) is often completely changed. Interestingly, this is a cycle that is continuous in vampire narratives, with vampires having the ability to 'turn' and 'create' new vampires. As for the manifestation of the vampire, it is a figure that has been continuously 'remade'. The various remakes of *Dracula,* which add to the mythology and representation, arguably create a 're-imagining' each time. When it comes to the vampires in *Being Human,* they have been remade from human to vampire, and are trying to 'reimagine' the state of vampirism by aligning it closer with humanity.

With relation to the comparison between the two versions *Being Human,* the primary element that links them is Toby Whithouse's original conception. The two series, in

[91] Verevis, p.10
[92] It is interesting to note that the re-imagining of the series of *Battlestar Galactica* also is infused with the themes of terrorism and faith, a dominant undercurrent in television series of this period.

their UK/US interpretations, are similar in terms of genre[93] and thematically, but they diverge on a number of other points. Thus, the exploration of the remake highlights how *Being Human* uses the core idea of the show and develops it in way more fitting for US viewers. *Being Human* presents, or offers, one version of an American take on the figure, and in doing so, strengthens the American cultural hold over the trope by incorporating the remake into its cultural library of vampire narratives.

The most prominent reason for the remake of *Being Human* is arguably the cultural need (which is one of the central arguments of this chapter), evidenced by the way it has been altered. This consideration of the various motives for the remake illuminates the factors involved, highlighting the reasoning behind the cultural makeover of the series and setting the groundwork for the discussion of the Americanisation of the vampire. As I discuss below, the vampire has become an Americanised figure, and the remaking of a successful series such as *Being Human* allows that to be reinforced. The Americanisation allows the concept and characters to be put in a familiar setting, along with a more American approach to the storyline – what exactly this entails is clarified below. The series itself was shown on BBC America, and garnered 'some of the largest audiences in the network's history',[94] yet it was given its own American makeover. The reasons for this become more apparent when there is a direct examination of the changes made between the original and the remake. It also becomes clear that the thirst for the American incarnation of the vampire remained unquenched, and this itself is telling. The popularity of the vampire expresses a need for a familiar outsider, an identity almost feared following the events of 9/11. If we look at how the series is translated transatlantically, there is less of a comedic element, and it is placed almost within a different genre. There are also the obvious minor changes to references (for example, political and pop culture ones) that were needed; yet this brings to mind the fact that American TV shows are rarely remade for British audiences.

Regardless, what is curious is the fact that many American reviewers disliked the US version, and actually preferred the UK one. So why was the series popular with viewers? Despite the critical reception, the remade US version acquired fanbases in

[93] In a broad sense, but certain genre-specific elements are highlighted in each of the two series, discussed later on.
[94] Glenn Garvin, ''Being Human' and 'Harry's Law': Disappointing'

both the US and outside it.[95] The US series offers viewers outside the US a chance to, as George Lipsitz suggests, 'acquire memories of a past to which they have no geographic or biological connection.'[96] Given the infusion of religious and traumatic elements that are discussed here, the American embodiment of the metaphor serves as a window into a representation of possible American attitudes – cultural narratives both form and reflect common opinions and issues, something that will be discussed further in chapter 3. Particularly with the change in the methods of textual dissemination, the Americanisation of our imagined vampires will become more prevalent. As Anat Zanger notes, 'The constant repetition of the same tale keeps it alive in social memory, continually transmitting its meaning and relevance.'[97] Thus the increasing repetition of the American vampire means that it is fast becoming *the* model to base subsequent interpretations on, despite the fact that there is an intertextuality to the figure due to the incorporation and evolution of elements dating centuries back. With these US remakes staking their claim to the figure, it appears that America needs the vampire.

The meaning of Americanisation is not singular. With regards to the vampire and this thesis, it encompasses both the idea of it being a dominantly American cultural trope in recent years, and the *way* in which the figure is presented, which is in a more positive, redemptive way, as discussed below. It becomes clear through the remake of *Being Human* that the metaphor of the vampire is culturally entrenched, for a number of reasons. In the past twenty years, the majority of TV series, books and films about the vampire have originated in the US, securing the figure's status as American property. The US influence is obvious: the vampire is no longer enigmatic, but filmed in a slick style that glosses over the flaws of the figure itself, holding up its hedonistic aspects as something to worship.[98] Despite this, the critics themselves have in the case of *Being Human* preferred its original, even citing the 'Americanisation' of the show to be one of the factors in its perceived failure in comparison to the original, as discussed above.[99] The American domination of modern narratives, particularly those featuring vampires, is a curious thing. On the one hand, it seems logical considering a vast majority of films and TV shows are funded by American production companies.

[95] Sites like http://www.fanpop.com/clubs/being-human-us being one example.
[96] Quoted in Play it again, Sam, p.28
[97] Anat Zanger, *Film Remakes as Ritual and Disguise,* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press: 2007) p.9
[98] Which Rob Latham in his book *Consuming Youth* argues is a reflection of capitalistic tendencies.
[99] See the reviews on p.36

Yet, the figure's literary and folkloric origins are resolutely un-American. It has been transformed from a terrifying otherworldly demon into another way to portray the emotional needs of a market saturated by romantic comedies and second-rate horror. This is a reversal from the late nineteenth and early twentieth century where European vampires were more prominent. Following the locus-shift of entertainment to America due to the higher production values and bigger industry, the USA, now more than ever, is laying claim to the figure. The contrast between the two countries provides an interesting opportunity to examine the various ways in which cultural responses to religion and traumatic events are portrayed. It also allows us to see the changes in the metaphorical figure of the vampire. Critics such as Jules Zanger have denounced the recent change (the humanization) as a 'defanging'[100] of the figure, and this is what will be looked at later in greater detail. Here in this chapter, in an American interpretation of an original British concept, we can see how the figure has lost the comic edge and has become far more self-concerned and egotistical, yet also more redemptive.

This redemptive aspect of the figure is defined by several things: firstly, the emphasis on the idea of the soul. In *Being Human,* neither Aidan or Mitchell mention the word 'soul' – which is something that arises in other vampire texts, especially in texts where there is a rejection of vampiric behaviour. The vampires who aspire to humanity either see the value of the human soul themselves or wish to try and absolve themselves enough to gain part, or all, of their soul back. This occurs in the case of Angel from *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* whose soul burdens him with a conscience that leads to a rejection of typical vampiric behaviour. A similar thing occurs in *Twilight* where Edward's primary objection to turning Bella into a vampire is the thought of her losing her soul.[101] Both *Buffy* and *Twilight* position the human and the soul as something to be revered. Yet *Being Human* strives to show a similar kind of compassion and valuing of the human, but with no overt mention of the soul itself. The vampire protagonists have not used overtly religious language in their descriptions of humanity and their struggle to assimilate. Rather, it is the 'makers' (those who turned them) of the vampire protagonists who do this: positioning vampirism as a religion itself, which I will go on to discuss in further detail later.

[100] Jules Zanger, 'Metaphor into Metonymy: The Vampire Next Door', in *Blood Read: An Introduction,* ed. by Joan Gordon & Veronica Hollinger, (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997) pp. 17-26 (p.21)
[101] Meyer explores the idea of a soul further in her later book, *The Host.*

This aspiration towards humanity and soul positions the figure as striving for redemption, something arguably imbued within the metaphor due to its Americanisation.[102] This is made possible in some respects by changing the nature of the figure, stripping it of more unsavoury aspects such as a need for blood. Whilst the vampires in *Being Human* may conform to some of the traditional vampire mythology, these portrayals omit the aversion to sunlight and the *necessity* of blood; in both cases, the thirst for blood is played like an addiction narrative – complete with scenes of a junkie couple a lá Sid and Nancy, holed up in a hotel, getting high on their drug of choice (blood). The function of the addiction narrative is manifold: whilst Mitchell and Aidan may *consciously* object to the 'true' vampiric nature, addiction takes away the idea of choice and culpability, as it is an unthinking impulse. The omissions of mythology strengthen the link between these onscreen monsters and their human counterparts.[103]

Here these vampires are victims of the latest change to mythology, the apparently arbitrary choice: to feed, or not to feed. Once it was literally a case of life or death, for victim or vampire. Now blood isn't just a staple part of the vampire existence – it is a fetishised substance that has intoxicating effects. Other recent texts such as *True Blood, Twilight* and even the not so recent *Lost Souls* by Poppy Z. Brite all feature a curious absence of feeding and draining humans. *Dracula* required blood: he was compared to a leech and when full, became similarly bloated and ruddy. But now, there is no *need* to feed: modern living has found solutions for the vampire. In *True Blood,* a synthetic blood substance has been invented. In *Being Human,* both vampires work in hospitals where they have the convenience of blood bags courtesy of selfless donors. These perks were not available during the development of the literary vampire, so the figure itself was necessarily more demonic – it was *life* these creatures fed on. They emerged as walking dead, requiring life to regenerate them; blood was the most efficient way of getting it – for 'the blood is the life'[104] Deuteronomy 12.23 as is stated in the Bible, and quoted in *Dracula.* The Dutch, the 'traditional'

[102] The shift towards a more 'positive' portrayal can be seen as part of the Americanisation, in the same way the 'Americanisation of the Holocaust' is seen – discussing the topic but ending discussions on a hopeful note. For more on this, see Hilene Flanzbaum's book *The Americanization of the Holocaust* (Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999)
[103] Whereas other series such as *The Vampire Diaries* or *True Blood* rely on mythology as a storyline, usually bringing in witchcraft as another tie, or 'enforcer' of mythology.
[104] Deuteronomy 12.23

(described as 'Orthodox') vampires in *Being Human* who run the vampires of the US, refuse to merely 'feed' on the blood of donors offered to them because they 'feed on life.' Now that the 'problem' of obtaining blood without death has been solved, this has changed the way the vampire itself is figured. Whilst it may seem as if what made the vampire monstrous has been taken away, in fact it enables a reduction of the figure to its simplest elements without the demonisation that arises from its once death-inducing acts. Perhaps this suggests a bigger change in societal attitudes than can be discussed here, or is a symptom of its Americanisation. The absence of this monstrous aspect allows for the figure to be viewed more positively and strive towards a positive – even addiction (the way blood is featured in these narratives) can be 'cured' and overcome. Given the numerous links between blood and religion,[105] the absence of a need for it could be argued as an indicator or symptom of a decreasing dependence on the ties of religion, specifically a religion strengthened by the power of fear. This link itself, that of religion and fear, will be discussed in greater detail later, and becomes a central focus in chapter 3. The absence of an absolute need for blood is symbolic of a rejection of structured, authoritarian faith,[106] and points towards the possibility of redemption for a once damned figure.

These changes to the vampire, arguably all part of its Americanisation, have occurred more frequently in the last decade and primarily within televisual narratives, as can be seen by the discussions within this thesis. Whether the changes to the mythology of the vampire and its increasing inclusion in television narratives are linked is unclear, but its position as the subject of domestic dramas (especially in *Being Human* where the figure strives to be obtain a more 'normalized', domestic life) and its exhibition on a domestic medium such as television have only strengthened its position as narrative staple. What is worth pointing out here is that the discussion of the figure of the vampire historically hasn't looked at televisual texts to a great extent, especially in comparison to its exploration in other mediums. Much of the academic focus in relation to vampires revolves around the films they appear in.[107] Critical work on vampires in TV has begun to increase since the cultural impact of *Buffy the Vampire*

[105] Especially in Christianity and Catholicism.
[106] The lack of a need for blood, but a desire to be a part of humanity has a somewhat spiritual significance in these narratives.
[107] For example *Dracula* has been a subject of academic criticism for a century, and filmic versions of the vampire – whether Rice's *Interview with the Vampire,* Bigelow's *Near Dark* or Schumacher's *The Lost Boys* have been discussed in essays, books and journals, with little or limited coverage of television vampires until the early 2000s.

Slayer, becoming more prevalent in journals and as subjects of books.[108] However, it still remains that the 'academic silence was perhaps instrumental in conveying the impression that this work was somehow not worthy of serious analysis.'[109] Yet, these modern and compelling vampiric metaphors are now increasingly taking place on our television screens, some of which in what Lucy Mazdon would describe as quality TV series,[110] and arguably present a complex portrayal that needs to be examined. There has been a focus of attention (at conferences and in journals/media)[111] on the vampires of *True Blood,* which has been defined as one such example of the contemporary vampire, but *Being Human* has been mostly neglected thus far, despite the opportunity it offers for an interesting cross-cultural study. Thus, the primary evaluation or criticism of the series is available through media criticism (which has been discussed earlier) and fan opinion (gleaned from the various fan sites, but which will not be discussed here).[112] The various metaphorical uses of the figure of the vampire have traversed the boundaries of film into television, and so the representations of the figure in television are arguably worthy of analysis. The incarnations that these figures take obviously vary to some degree, but this thesis seeks to outline a common theme in the recent interpretations. TV series have played a large part in the changing representations of the figure, due to their ability to challenge and defy norms – their position as a domestic staple has helped this. As Mazdon notes, 'Drama consistently played a vital role in pushing the boundaries of television as a medium'[113] and now certain networks, such as HBO with *True Blood*, seek to push these boundaries even further. Television is a further reaching medium than film, arguably considering the previously noted statistic of 96.7% of Americans owning a television set; given that we 'monitor the television in private spaces' and that it 'functions in a practical way within our domestic economy',[114] this privileged position as domestic staple means that television is the first port of call for our

[108] Such as The Lure of the Vampire by Milly Williamson (2006), Anne Billson's BFI Companion to Buffy the Vampire Slayer (2005)
[109] Michael Hammond & Lucy Mazdon, *Contemporary TV Series,* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005) p.7
[110] Hammond & Mazdon, p.7
[111] In UK conferences such as 'Open Graves, Open Minds' at Hertfordshire University in 2010, 'Vampires: Myths of the Past and Future' at IGRS, London, 2011 and 'Monsters: Subject, Object, Abject' at Manchester University 2012 all featured a number of papers on *True Blood,* and no mention of *Being Human. True Blood* has been featured in articles in journals such as *Film Quarterly,* whereas *Being Human* has only been covered in journalistic media in the form of episode reviews.
[112] Such as http://beinghuman.activeboard.com/. Fans can now congregate on Facebook, with most series having a page available to share news and links on. The *Being Human* page on Facebook has over ¾ million likes. There are also forums on http://www.reddit.com which enable fans to discuss plot points, post questions, pictures or discuss episodes.
[113] Hammond & Mazdon, p.7
[114] Bolter & Grusin, p.186

cultural narratives.[115] Along with the format, this gives writers and producers scope to sculpt long-running interpretations that unravel their complexities over time, making them far more nuanced and subtle.

The positioning of the vampire on television has an impact on the way it is consumed, but so too does the genre it resides in. We need to briefly consider the vampire's place, and the place of *Being Human,* within the genre of horror. The vampire is often placed within the horror genre because of its visceral nature. Horror, like sci-fi, explores the limits of the human mind, but focuses on the primitive urges of sex and violence, hence the obvious link between the figure and the horror genre. Stephen King discusses the nature of horror, claiming that its primary purpose is 'to reaffirm the virtues of the norm.'[116] This is clearly evident in *Being Human*: its entire premise revolves around it. Aidan and Mitchell are attempting to understand and assimilate 'the norm', and this is the driving force behind the show. How it has strayed from that path (specifically in the US series) is telling, especially considering that the US version contains more elements of horror than its UK counterpart – there is more gore, and a much stronger focus on the visceral, whereas the UK focuses on the dynamics and the drama of humanity. This could be seen as an attempt to avoid the classification of the vampire as 'feminised', which occurred with *Twilight* (which featured little to no visceral vampire action) or perhaps because recent US series that had focused on the grisly side of the vampire such as *True Blood* had been remarkably popular. Remakes of horror and sci-fi are becoming more common, perhaps to update them in terms of technology or the relevance for the modern day. The essential elements of these stories are timeless, and to remake them shows the need to repeat and master the demons they feature.

Same name, different aims

The interpretation of the vampire differs between the two versions of *Being Human.* As it is classed as a 'remake', viewers and critics will necessarily look for the *similarities* as well as differences between the two versions. Understanding these comparisons illuminates the Americanisation and what it entails, and also continues on from the discussions of the remake to the implications of it textually. As the

[115] I would argue that online television series are a part of this too through sites such as Netflix or networks offering catch-ups of recent episodes of series.
[116] Stephen King, *Danse Macabre,* (New York: Everest House, 1981) p.23

cultural need has been identified as the key reason for the remake here (that is, an identified need to confront a particular theme, topic or anxiety, here specifically the use and assimilation of the vampire in order to metaphorically assimilate the other, something discussed in depth throughout this thesis), the differences and similarities are read through this lens; they are factors that contribute to the creation of an American version of the vampire, the specifics of which illuminate prominent cultural anxieties. European vampires are fast becoming extinct, with the majority of newer characters being American, an unquestionable result of the cultural need for its particular version of the figure – a crux of the argument throughout this thesis.

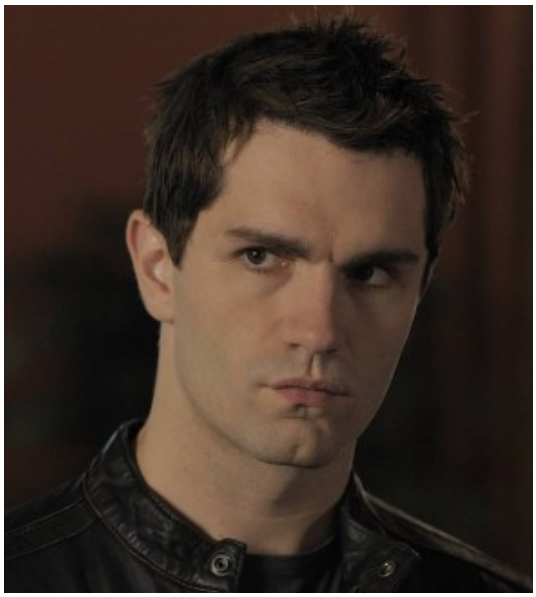

Figure 1: Aidan (Sam Witwer)

Figure 2: Mitchell (Aidan Turner)

The differences between the two series here may at first glance appear to be minimal; with so many vampire-related narratives, there needs to be something to differentiate between one and another, a unique selling point beyond the inclusion of a popular trope. The visual similarities between the US *Being Human* vampire protagonist and other popular male leads of vampire narratives are evident - Sam Witwer (Aidan, Fig. 1.1) is far more in keeping with the template of the brooding vampire. With strong cheekbones and Edward Cullen-esque hair,[117] his appearance is reminiscent of other pin-up vampires such as Angel from *Buffy the Vampire Slayer.* Aidan Turner (Mitchell, Fig.1.2) exudes more of a bohemian vibe, with mid-length hair, and scruffier attire. Mitchell is played as far less serious than the character of Aidan (except for one scene involving garlic which reinforces the vampiric stereotype).

[117] A similar appearance can be seen in series such as *The Vampire Diaries* and *True Blood.*

Whilst Mitchell subverts the expectations of the 'normal' vampire – we see him eating toast, making jokes and unaffected by garlic or crosses – Aidan confirms the stereotype of the now clichéd American vampire: tortured soul, brooding, aloof, and with a prominent jawline.

Moving to the specifics of the vampire portrayal in these series, the UK series shows Mitchell choose the side of humanity, and his attempts to assimilate. His 'arch-enemy' in the series is his maker, Herrick (Jason Watkins), who Mitchell has shunned. Far from being just a classic case of patriarchal rejection, Mitchell renounces everything that comes with being classified as a 'vampire', including structured authority, human sacrifice, and a lack of morals. Although he is staunchly against the practices of his kind, he suffers a moment of weakness in the first few episodes after a hostile reaction by his local human community due to miscommunication. He is accused of being a paedophile, and hunted down by the neighbours he had once wanted to integrate with. This is a far darker moment compared to most scenes, but is treated with the same humour typical of the series. George remarks on the odd practice of rotten tomatoes being thrown at their door in a humorous manner, along with a despondent reaction to the misspelling of the word 'paedo' graffitied across their door. Whilst Mitchell's reaction may be less light-hearted (he momentarily returns to the fold), it doesn't take long for him to realise that there are far worse monsters than an angry mob, and humanity, despite its flaws, has a stronger moral compass than his vampiric family.

The US version comes from a slightly different angle: Aidan also wants to choose the side of humanity, and like Mitchell, he has a lapse where he shuns humanity too. However, his lapses back into vampiric feeding are more frequent than Mitchell's and he is influenced by the authority of the 'Dutch'. These orthodox vampires present far more of a threat than the paternal authority that he (and Mitchell) fights. We have to bear in mind that both series will have some of the same themes, and some will differ completely. For the remake can be defined by the 'peculiar nature of the relationships they establish with their earlier models and with their audiences.'[118] Some of the audience of the UK version will seek out the US version, most likely to compare. US TV shows have a bigger budget; so there is usually a hope that special effects (the

[118] Dead Ringers, p.37

type that are needed in a show about supernatural beings) are of a better quality, and the production values are higher. But, the fan's ties to the original will alter the way they approach the series, particularly if they have been very approving of the series, which may result in a more critical judgment. The US series caused uproar among fans online because the original was seen as setting standards that the remake failed to achieve.[119] Thomas Leitch has argued that:

> remakes also seek to please both audiences who have seen films on which they are based and audiences who have not…but they are competing with them, and so cannot risk invoking memories of the earlier film too fervently.[120]

This could explain in part why the US series drifted away from the themes and storyline of the UK version. Though in the respect of the remake, it is more likely that the cultural need as such was different, not the invoking of memory. With the foundation of remake theory set up, what follows is an in-depth textual exploration that clarifies the connection between the US remake of *Being Human* and the cultural need for the vampire. This is done through exploring the similarities, differences, symbolism and themes in the series.

The Prodigal Son

One way in which the series *are* alike is how the two vampire protagonists, Mitchell and Aidan, represent an antithesis to the other vampires within the show, yet they are sought after by their kind. Both characters are indebted to their maker, Mitchell to Herrick and Aidan to Bishop. Their maker simultaneously plays the role of father and friend, teaching them everything they need to know about vampirism, and act as a partner-in-crime for their murderous ways. Yet both Mitchell and Aidan have rejected the lifestyle they were previously used to, choosing humanity. In rejecting the lifestyle, they also reject their maker, an unquestionable father figure. The makers respond in the expected paternalistic way: readily welcoming them back into the fold when they (briefly) return and trying to enforce their way of seeing the world onto

[119] Emily Asher-Perrin, 'SyFy's *Being Human* proves it: The remake is dead', *Tor.com,* (2011) <http://www.tor.com/blogs/2011/02/syfys-being-human-proves-it-the-remake-is-dead > [accessed March 2012]
[120] Thomas Leitch, 'Twice Told Tales: Disavowal and the rhetoric of the film remake' in *Dead Ringers,* pp.37-61 *(*p.41)

their protégés. Mitchell, when asked to choose between vampires and humanity by Herrick, simply states, 'I choose them' (UK, Episode 2, 'Tully'), indicating a clear divide between 'us' and 'them' that serves as a common theme throughout these narratives and within this thesis. Aidan, by contrast, appears to make a temporary choice, stating: 'I may be sentenced to a life in hell with you, but here and now I choose them.' (US, Episode 2, 'There Goes the Neighborhood Part 2') This temporary choice evokes the damned existence of the vampire among other things, positioning humanity as a form of temporary absolution. The differences between these two portrayals of the 'same' character indicate a divergent use of the metaphor. A closer look at the meanings behind the choices, characterization and symbolism of the two primary vampiric characters is necessary to understand how the figure is being used.

Aidan's temporary commitment to humanity suggests three things. Firstly, his view of humanity as currently desirable. Secondly, it positions vampirism, and vampiric behaviour as undesirable, in particular, the actions of his maker, Bishop, for it is him he is primarily rejecting. And thirdly, that both identities are mutually exclusive, which is important considering our tendency as a society to characterise evil as 'monstrous'. Here, the more literal sense of the word highlights the division between human and monsters and our belief that an individual can only be one or the other.[121] Mitchell's permanent assertion of allegiance to humanity creates the impression of humanity being difficult enough to master and emulate that it requires an eternal commitment. It is an absolute rejection of vampirism and all that it entails – suggesting that the problem cannot be fixed. On the other hand, Aidan's temporary foray into the world of humanity implies that the issue is able to be modified, and that for now, the framework of 'humanity', or what it represents, offers a chance for more time, and thus, more solutions to the problem his maker and the accepted lifestyle has imparted. The differences between the way in which our protagonists reject their old lifestyles and all that comes with them begins to illuminate the divergent nature of the identity of 'vampire'. Here, in their desire for and attempt at humanity, we can see the cultural difference in the definition of 'other'. Both protagonists reject the 'other' and this rejection is coloured by the cultural undercurrent of fear and anxiety that entrenches itself within the narrative. Aidan and Mitchell's rejection of their makers,

[121] This is further discussed and ultimately disproven in chapter 2.

the 'religion' of vampirism that they represent, and most importantly, in the US series, the instance of Aidan *killing* his maker (arguably the most symbolic difference between the series), can be seen as an attempt at the manifestation of Nietzche's claim that 'God is dead', [122] or perhaps, even more potently, as Freud sees it, 'God is Dad'. [123] As Mathias Nilges argues, following 9/11, the 'loss of paternalism' equates to 'the lack of stability and protection.'[124] Here, in *Being Human,* we can see that authority cannot control or protect against virulent identities that threaten our own opposing ones. Specifically, it is a traditional notion of 'human essence' that is being threatened, and the rejection of vampirism that reasserts the desire to assimilate with society.

Mitchell and Aidan object to the stringent rules their makers implicate, offering a symbolic absolution for these vampires, with their attitudes displaying a kind of rebellion against a forced identity. Regardless of whether it is for religious or political reasons, both the makers and their protégés see choosing the side of humanity as an identity choice. For example, when talking to Herrick's sidekick, Seth, about the plan for "recruiting" others, Mitchell sarcastically suggests 'mass conversion?' (UK, Episode 1, 'Flotsam and Jetsam') To Mitchell and Aidan, the vampiric structures are dogmatic and restrictive – part of their attempt to assimilate with humanity stems from the need for choice; along with the option to create their own identity, rather than being forced into a lifestyle that they do not agree with. As previously stated, there are cultural differences already evident in how these rebels view their allegiance with humanity and this itself affects how devoutly they see vampirism as an identity that cannot be altered. This arguably is the result of differing cultural conditions and perceptions of identity, or rather, the need for identity at that moment.

These cultural divisions are also evident in how each show illustrates the path to their chosen identity. The divisions in our protagonists' identity, primarily in the form of past and present, are represented through flashback sequences. The flashback sequences are multi-purpose: they show the extremes of vampiric behaviour, what

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[122] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science* (1882, 1887) (New York: Vintage, 1974), p.181
[123] Specifically, 'God is nothing more than an exalted father' in Sigmund Freud, *Totem and Taboo,* (London: Routledge, 2001) p.147
[124] Mathias Nilges, 'The Aesthetics of Destruction: Contemporary US Cinema and TV Culture' in *Reframing 9/11: Film, Popular Culture and the 'War on Terror',* ed. by Jeff Birkenstein, & Anna Froula, (New York: Continuum, 2010), pp.23-34 (p.31)

these vampires are rejecting and with it, the significance of the choice for these vampires in particular. These flashbacks feature both Mitchell and Aidan committing violent acts that are exemplary of vampiric behaviour, contrasting with the 'reformed' character shown in the present. In the first episode of the US series, we are shown images of Aidan slaying a wedding party, [125] establishing the degree of his reformation. It shows the audience the potential each of these characters have for evil and puts their struggle into perspective. Mitchell's lack of flashback scenes means that the audience is required to rely on the description of his acts from other characters. Mitchell is treated with far more reverence by the vampiric community – they place him as god-like in his vampiric form. In contrast, when it comes to Aidan, the Americanised need to 'make everything obvious' as some TV critics have put it,[126] is shown here by the visually detailed and defined backstory. Maximum exposition for the US audience means a visual definition, whereas the UK version relies on implication alone, which is arguably far more powerful.[127] With their influential position in the vampire community, the vampire protagonists have a greater opportunity to enforce a permanent change in the way humanity is approached. Their quest for assimilation is an attempt to make the difference between *them* and *us* negligible, despite the greater potential for destruction. This potential is what distances the vampire from the human; yet its similarities are what make it more dangerous than other monsters such as the werewolf or the ghost. The comparable appearance and mimicking of human behaviour is one way of 'passing' as human, and as such, confuses the boundaries and definitions of identity. The blurring of these boundaries is what gives the vampire such power and ability to depict cultural anxiety about identity, a particularly apt scenario for the US incarnation of the vampire, and a firm foundational idea of this thesis. *Being Human* shows three different tropes to be desirous of humanity – ghost, werewolf and vampire - but indicates that it is the vampire that has the biggest challenge in this quest. This complicates the use of the figure; the struggle indicates a suitability of the vampire as a metaphor for the confusion of identity.

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[126] Mike Hale, 'Relocated to America, Still Bloodthirsty', *New York Times,* (2011) <http://tv.nytimes.com/2011/01/17/arts/television/17human.html > [accessed January 2012]

[127] Interestingly, the US series becomes far more visual and gory, as are other portrayals of vampires in US TV, which, despite being a show aimed at teenage audiences, is gory and includes scenes of torture and dismemberment.

It is the supporting characters, werewolf and ghost, that point out the difficulty of the vampiric struggle to be human: in both series, they contrast their own monstrous nature with that of the vampire, noting 'the effort it must take him [Mitchell] every second of the day...' (UK, Episode 1) to deny his impulses. But it should be mentioned here that to take a simplistic view of identity as following impulses would be to deny the progress of humanity as a whole: these vampires make us feel uncomfortable because they remind us of our own struggle to deny these impulses we too have, to feed, to fornicate, and to fight. By contrast, the werewolf George (from the UK series) describes his monstrous side as a "condition" which is a "part-time thing" rather than a full-blown identity. Yet Mitchell or Aidan are neither vampire nor human. They are the catalyst for change, and a movement to a different perspective of the supposedly fixed categories of human and monster (as touted by Bishop and Herrick). The maker's refusal to subvert these categories is perhaps the main thrust of the show. The difference in what these categories embody illuminates key cultural characteristics.

The definitions of human and vampire have changed as they have been incorporated into different narratives, and here, with its incorporation into an American narrative, it is pertinent to outline the division, or perhaps confusion between the two. The vampire has come some way from being a slave to its impulses as it previously was – the discussion above of the Americanisation touched on the absence of feeding and blood, which unequivocally changes the moral and metaphysical boundaries of the figure. By contrast, the human appearance of the modern vampire offers a different form of evil to distinguish from, and thus the challenge becomes psychological rather than physiological. The vampires of *Being Human*, with their rejection of the cult they were inducted into and their severing of blood ties, present us with a figurehead for progression. Their struggle with their (literal) inner demons is shown as akin to human addiction, which is a widespread problem, and on a grander scale, illuminates our societal problems of consumption (oil, food, land etc.). When he originally devised the series, Whithouse was trying to write about a sex addict, an agoraphobic and an individual with anger management issues.[128] Having issues with the plot, he decided to cast them as representative characters – a vampire (alcoholic), a ghost

[128] Drew McWeeny, 'Toby Whithouse on vampires, werewolves, ghosts and 'Being Human', *Hitfix,* (2010) <http://www.hitfix.com/blogs/motion-captured/posts/the-m-c-interview-toby-whithouse-on-being-human > [accessed January 2012]

(agoraphobic) and a werewolf (anger issues). The inner demons have become both literal and figurative, and are played out in the human arena. What issues they represent almost becomes meaningless – in their persistent quest to emulate humanity, they reject the monstrous conventions once forced upon them. Here, it can be truly said that for these vampires, 'we still remember these figures more for the strength of their human passions than their inhuman powers.'[129]

Mitchell and Aidan's quest to forge a new identity leads them to defy structure and those they have abandoned deride this pursuit for a defined identity. Herrick tries to goad Mitchell into returning, sneering 'pretending to be human…it's a game.' (UK, Episode 1) Similarly in the US series, Bishop tells Aidan to 'get it out of your system' (US, Episode 3). Both seem to imply that the behaviour of their protégés is a form of adolescent rebellion. Indeed, this would fit in with an idea I have previously written about in another body of work;[130] that of adolescent identity and the vampire. Erik Eriksson's theory of identity posits that the adolescent searching for identity often includes something called a *psychosocial moratorium.* It comes in many forms, but essentially absolves the adolescent of the responsibility that comes with a particular identity, being an adult, and of the need to follow social conventions. This gives them time to work out their identity, and make a choice by suspending their identity momentarily, not committing their undefined self to the confines and the oppositions of culture and society. I argued that texts featuring vampires used the figure as the moratorium: in the *Lost Boys* this becomes most clear – with the defiance of social norms and feral lifestyle. By the time we get to *Twilight,* the same suspension of identity is still there: this time, vampirism is a clear identity choice rather than a suspension.[131] The vampires in recent texts, including *Being Human* with Aidan suspending his identity as dictated by Bishop, show the vampire dabbling in the world of humanity in order to find a niche rather than the other way round. This is obviously not the first text to show a vampire living amongst humans. The difference here is the need to *be* human. Anne Rice's *Interview with the Vampire* came the closest to exploring this need, but this was short-lived, as Louis, the central figure who was a 'sympathetic' vampire and railed against his status as 'monster', had accepted his

[129] Play it Again Sam, p.266
[130] Christina Wilkins, *Bound by Blood: The Search for Identity in the Family Structures of Modern Vampire Portrayals*, (2010), University of Southampton
[131] Something I argued may be due to religion, which led me to exploring these issues here.

nature by the end of the novel. Although Mitchell and Aidan may struggle with their 'monstrous' status, ultimately, they return to the fundamental need to be something other than vampiric.

In *Being Human,* the nature in which our protagonists alienate themselves from the vampiric identity does not deter their reputation amongst the herd – it is the authority that sees them as problematic, perhaps because of the respect they garner from those equal to them. Both vampires are spoken of with reverence by their peers. As Seth says, 'they're always talking about Mitchell. Like, "remember that time when Mitchell did those twins"' (UK, Episode 1) - the language of this talk is incredibly similar to the stereotypical male bragging about sexual conquests. But here, the conquests are kills – a similar display of power and penetrative potency, but defined by the vampiric nature instead of the male one. Whilst the conflation of sex and death is common, it is Mitchell and Aidan's rejection of both the badge of honour awarded to them and how their behaviour is idolised that is different. It at once denies their vampiric nature and the forceful prescriptions of masculinity.

For Mitchell, the series focuses around his indecision about which side he is truly on. We are first presented with the image of him before he was turned, fighting in a World War. Similarly, Aidan is shown in a human state as a soldier. These heroic origins set up the character for their 'fall'. He then follows a path from choosing the side of humanity, to swiftly shunning them: 'I've seen what humanity is really like, and this is where I belong.' (UK, Episode 3, 'Ghost Town') His return to the fold is spurred by a rejection from humanity, after he is accused of being a paedophile. Soon after though, this resolve falters after he discovers his maker's 'true' nature. Throughout the series, Herrick implores Mitchell to return to the side of the vampires, because they are soon going to be able to 'live amongst humanity'. His plan involves converting more humans into vampires in order to grow their numbers and be able to seize control. Mitchell finds a group of abused, frightened and malnourished humans in the basement of the vampire 'headquarters', kept to feed the appetites of the vampires. This strengthens his intention to remain human and exposes the tyrannical and selfish nature of authoritarian structures. Aidan, by comparison, continually shuns the vampires, only offering to go back in a self-sacrificial act in exchange for saving his friend, Josh, the werewolf. Mitchell similarly offers himself up in a showdown

with Herrick, so he can protect both his friends, George and Annie. But Aidan's shunning of the vampires seems more of a facade than a conscious choice. He may strive to 'be human', but his view of it as temporary solution combined with the more frequent lapses he suffers (in comparison to Mitchell) struggles to convince the viewer that his resolve is strong enough. Nevertheless, his attempt to protect his friends and alter the mode of vampirism is still a sacrifice, a key theme in recent vampire narratives and across these chapters.

Identity and sacrifice

Examining the definitions and complicated nature of identity is a key aim of this thesis. Given the changing nature of the vampire and the precarious definitions of 'American' identity that were impacted by 9/11, its necessary reflection in cultural narratives such as the ones in these chapters are crucial to examine. Establishing theories of identity is important here as it sets up discussions both within this chapter and in the thesis as a whole - the changing definitions of identity, along with the urgent need for its reinforcement in both vampire narratives and within post 9/11 society is the foundation of the arguments here. In particular it is the *categories* of identity that are crucial here, not identity as a singular. Identity sets apart 'us' and 'them', and seemingly offers a mode of stability in an ever-changing world.[132] The shift in the nature of the vampire adheres to the very notion of what the mode of vampirism encompasses, that of necessary change. Our metaphors, in this case the metaphor of the vampire, reflect cultural changes. The way identity, particularly group identity, is defined in the two series tells us something about the importance of defining identity as a whole in a cultural moment where it is used to alleviate or create fears. The various manifestations of the vampire simultaneously recreate and reflect conceptions of identity, in particular how identity changes with regard to social expectations and norms. The conception of the vampire as an identity can be used to reinforce or destroy cultural perceptions of the 'other', a group which the vampire has continually represented. To illuminate this idea further, it is perhaps time to explore the uses of identity theory.

[132] As does religion, which is tied to identity, which follows.

To clarify, I am using *social identity theory* here, for the following reason: identity theory relates to the individual's sense of identity – who they perceive themselves to be. *Social* identity theory relates to the relationships between groups, and how the individual fits into the society of which they are a part, along with how they choose to categorise themselves within a group.[133] What is being discussed here is how conceptions of what is means to be 'American' are being portrayed, along with ways in which the perceived identity of the terrorist upsets particular conceptions of the patriotic and Christian-American identity.[134] Conceptions of identity become evident in the response to cultural crises (here: 9/11), which necessitates a consolidated, 'united' response (a 'group' identity). This idea is challenged in chapter 2 by the presentation of multiple and divergent viewpoints from the 'mainstream', indicating that it is misplaced to assume that a perceived majority defines the group identity of the US as a whole.

Social identity is a person's knowledge that 'he or she belongs to a social category or group.'[135] It is through 'social comparison' that categorization is made, and this is an 'accentuation of the perceived similarities between the self and other in group members, and an accentuation of the perceived differences between the self and our group members.'[136] This social comparison is made easier after events like 9/11, where divisions are staunchly enforced, with Bush marking the boundaries by stating 'you're either with us or against us.'[137] Comparison was important to establish identity: good or evil, us or them, American or terrorist, Christian or Muslim. For as Arthur G. Neal argues, 'collective social identities emerge most prominently from moments of catastrophe.'[138] Thus there was an attempt to consolidate a cultural identity as a defence, and elements of a perceived 'typical' American identity were emphasized in the media, such as patriotism and religious belief (something discussed by Faludi, a recurring discourse of this thesis). Whilst none of these comparisons were explicitly mentioned, attitudes towards 'outsiders' are heavily defined by perceptions of their faith, as shown by narratives such as *Being Human.* The series shows the

[133] Jan E. Stets & Peter Burke, 'Identity theory and Social Identity Theory', in *Social Psychology Quarterly,* 63: 3 (2000) 224-237
[134] This can be argued as the idealized/dominant version of identity given the results of various research such as Pew Forum and Gallup polls, discussed in chapter 2.
[135] Jan E. Stets & Peter Burke, 'Identity theory and Social Identity Theory', in *Social Psychology Quarterly,* 63: 3 (2000) 224-237 (p.225)
[136] Ibid
[137] Andrew Bacevich, & Elizabeth Prodromou, 'God is not neutral,' in *Orbis* 48:1 (2004) 43-54, (p.48)
[138] Arthur Neal, *National Trauma and Collective Memory,* (New York: M.E.Sharpe, 1998) p.82

struggle for identity through singular examples (our vampire protagonists) recognising and making a choice between group identities. It also illuminates the conception and maintenance of group identities and their implications. Aidan and Mitchell are torn between their identification with the vampires and their desired identification with the humans. In denying their impulses and their very behaviours that categorize them as 'vampire', they are trying to assimilate the identity of 'human'. Their makers are both cognitively and behaviourally attuned to the identity of vampire, behaving 'so as to maintain consistency with the identity standard.'[139] This verifies their identity, whereas Aidan and Mitchell's rejection of this behaviour is a rejection of the identity with which they are being labelled. But to clarify – it is the US version which sees the identification as a *religious* identification. Aidan and his maker are defined by terms such as 'heretical' and the group is founded on the structures and strictures of a religious belief system. Religion as an identity is a key focus in the comparison between the two series, and ultimately highlights how and why the US has claimed the figure in the manner they have, the specifics of which are dealt with in more detail later on in the chapter. This differs in the UK series; Mitchell and Herrick use terms more akin to political language and the religious referencing doesn't pervade the dialogue in the same way. Both protagonists carry strong opinions about what defines 'good' and 'evil', which are traditionally religiously infused terms. The way they define themselves and those around them is key to understanding the series. In terms of social identity theory, 'definition of others and the self are largely "relational and comparative"'.[140] The comparisons have changed as we, en masse, try to discover the common link between 'us' and 'them' and how religion controls aspects of this. Religion and the authority that traditionally comes with it played a major role in identification (of the self and *with* others) yet religion is now a grounds for exclusion in the case of the terrorists – thus we are confused. Authority cannot protect us from the actions of others; it cannot sanction or decide the fundamentals of our identity.[141] It can only attempt to shape it – thus a rejection of authority and religion is a rejection of the belief that identity can be 'controlled'.

[139] Stets & Burke, p.232
[140] Blake Ashford & Fred Mael, 'Social Identity Theory and the Organisation' in *Academy of Management Review,* 14: 1 (1989) 20-39 (p.21)
[141] Despite what Foucault argues. These narratives, and indeed, the continuous change in attitudes towards various topics such as gay marriage, homosexuality, race and gender imply that there is continued progression that moves beyond sanctioned ideas and behaviours.

A rejection of authority and religion doesn't negate the religious elements of the vampire in *Being Human* or change their portrayal as something god-like. The sacrifices these vampires make, their struggle to contain their demons, their love of humanity and their immortality provide a strong resemblance to a Christ like figure. This is made explicit by a line in the US version of *Being Human.* Josh pleads with Aidan, saying 'God, Aidan, what are we supposed to believe in if we can't believe in you?' (US, Episode 10, 'Dog Eat Dog') The juxtaposition of *God* and *Aidan* highlights the similarity between religion and these vampires. Previously, the vampire has been positioned as an anti-Christ figure, for example in *Interview with the Vampire* and *Dracula.* In *Interview with the Vampire,* Louis questions the very existence of God, and tries to understand whether he is truly one of the Devil's creatures. Dracula is seen as a high priest of vampires, of which other models are just variations on a theme. In positing Dracula as anti-Christ, Konigsberg notes that he is 'a limited God, but God like nonetheless, he is more than human.'[142] The vampire is the ultimate anti-Christ; with the ability to both create and destroy, immortality, and origins of demonic possession, there is no other figure that would fit the role so well. The vampire has long been a creature of devilish proportions – even the idea that it is a creature of the night (and the most simplistic assumption that darkness equals evil and light equals goodness) imparts a sense of devilishness. Vampires have continually been able to be warded off with a crucifix, or holy water, implying they reject Christ or God. Yet vampires of late have undergone an evolution of their being. In various narratives across film, television and literature, there is an emergence of the vampiric soul, opening up an avenue of thought about the trope that previously did not exist. The vampire was vehemently portrayed as being *soulless* and it was because of this that their evil acts were deemed possible. *Being Human* illustrates that the vampire has transgressed the boundary back from evil to good, and is no longer a physical incarnation of the anti-Christ. This Messianic shift is also apparent in another recent American vampire in the series *True Blood* (chapter 2). This shift addresses the culture of myth and storytelling, exploring *what* makes somebody 'evil' and *who* can be denoted as the enemy. It isn't just the evil of the older vampiric generation that Aidan and Mitchell are fighting against, but their dogmatic authority, which is portrayed as quasi-religious. We have a tendency to link the idea of 'evil' with

[142] Konigsberg, p.266

monstrosity, particularly in religious terms. The word itself is particularly important in discourses since 9/11, as I will discuss below; these varied portrayals of a stereotypically 'evil' figure have begun to challenge the notion of stereotype itself. The identity of the monstrous and 'evil' has changed, but the religious connotations of both are still evident. This is due to religion's role as defining identity, and with it, a policing of the categories of 'good' and 'evil'. The religious ties to the vampire here are complicated – whereas once it was used to demonise, it is now being used to deify.

Religion and the undead

The portrayal of the vampire in these series illustrates its transformation to something god-like. This elevation of the figure is key, reflecting the cultural climate through the need to revere an effigy that imbues a moral struggle. In *Being Human,* the religious overtones in the US series modify the state of the vampire from the previous glamour of debauchery to a moral struggle between one identity and another. This moral struggle is undoubtedly figured as religious in the US series, especially in comparison to the somewhat secular UK series, reflecting the cultures in which they were made. To understand the importance of the figure and its return to religiosity, it is vital to look at the history of the vampire and religion and how it has been encoded. The vampire has been seen variously as anti-Christ and a redemptive figure across its history. The balance has shifted over time, with the vampire protagonists in modern texts often being presented primarily as redemptive, rather than the demonic figure once presented in *Dracula* and *The Vampyre.* Whereas texts like *Twilight* and *True Blood* present us with a vampiric hierarchy and strict authority, *Being Human* goes one step further. The authoritarian figures in *Being Human* (both series) impose restrictions on the protagonists with religious justifications used to underpin them. They are no longer the anti-Christ but a substitute for religious belief – complete with strict rules and belief systems. The religiosity of the vampire has transformed from the theological to the political, with an emphasis on the corruption of authoritarian religion. This is an apt metamorphosis given the exploitation of the vampire by authoritarian religion in its early years as folklore.

The folkloric origins have a basis in both religion and superstition. Vampires have been seen (separately) as heretics, and as the consequence of religious transgressions - therefore, placing them firmly in the realm of the anti-Christ. As the myth moved on, the religious traits became more firmly embedded. Aside from the aversion to the cross, there were the effects of holy water, and the inability to come out during the day, thus making them creatures of the night. In the age-old battle of good vs. evil, the sides of dark and light are self evident, and the vampires were reinforcing this. When Stoker wrote and released *Dracula*, the 'most religiously saturated popular novel of its time,'[143] the myth found a strong foothold, a figurehead that would be continually emulated. The language within the novel of Dracula enforces the religious themes: 'scriptural quotation is worked deeply into the stylistic texture of the novel.'[144] Yet the novel also encompasses themes of superstition: 'Harker's journey to Transylvania at the beginning of the story is accordingly not so much an eastward movement in space as it is a time-journey into a stratum of the European mind prior to the supposed conquering pagan magical thinking by Christianity.'[145] The positioning of the figure amidst the religious backdrop of Europe exemplifies its power as a corrupting influence, as Zanger notes: 'Dracula is the anti-Christ'.[146] For the modern vampire however, this has changed and 'his or her evil acts are expressions of individual personality and condition, not of any cosmic conflict between God and Satan.'[147] Thus the onus of sin or transgression lies with the individual vampire, because they are no longer deemed to be blindly dictated by the forces of evil. Instead, the figure has moved to a more secular interpretation, which emphasizes free will and the cult of personality.

The figure's historical Christianisation and subsequent destruction of religion creates a surrogate religion by 'remaking' concepts of faith. It takes aspects of Christianity and warps them, creating a sublimated form of traditional faith. This is interesting, especially considering the history of how the vampire came to be viewed as the anti-Christ. The history of the vampire has been detailed in the introduction, but perhaps it is useful to reiterate the key points of its religious history. The origins of the vampire are buried deep: 'historical records mentioning vampires date back to the beginnings

[143] Christopher Herbert, 'Vampire Religion', in *Representations,* 79: 1 (2002) 100-121, (pp.101)
[144] Herbert, p100
[145] Herbert, p.102
[146] Jules Zanger, p.17
[147] Jules Zanger, p.18

of recorded history.'[148] Over time, these mythologies became amalgamated and could be said to have been 'hijacked' by Christianity, as the vampire had evolved features and aspects that disagreed with Christian theology such as immortal life on earth, the celebration of death, and promiscuous behaviour. These are all elements that arguably be seen as a temptation or challenge to the tenets of Christianity, so to embrace it as a cautionary tale would have been pertinent. The fact that blood, which was such an important symbol of Christianity, became an integral part of the vampire myth only served to 'strengthen'[149] the ties between the fear of the vampire and the power the church could wield. Thus the use of the figure to now critique these methods of control, specifically in organised religion, seems somewhat ironic. Why the vampire is being utilised as an idolatry figure, with religious allusions being consistently made is an interesting question, and can perhaps illuminate both the evolution of the figure and the attitudes prevalent within society.

The use of the vampire to critique organized religion is related to the change in contemporary culture to a more secular approach, or so we would believe, given the responses of many Christian apologists or Republican commentators.[150] It can be linked to the increased vocalization of atheistic opinions, and the debate around the idea that religion is a pre-requisite for morality.[151] The ties between the morality of these vampires – using their actions as an example – and their religious belief questions the idea that religion and morality go hand in hand. The vampire, the metaphorical epitome of 'other', allows viewers to explore this link in an arguably depoliticised way. There will be those who view monsters as being 'other', particular 'other than' human, and this may arguably 'protect' them from guilt by association. Yet, it is undeniable that these monsters are frequently being represented as human; instead of focusing on the monstrosity, texts seem to explore the issues around humanity. The consensus from the variety of different series, books and films about monsters seems to be that humanity is flawed; more than that, it is a *struggle* to uphold the values and morals of the category which the figure of the monster strives

[148] Wayne Bartlett and Flavia Idriceanu, *Legends of Blood,* (Connecticut: Praeger, 2006) p.4
[149] Bartlett & Idriceanu, p.7
[150] The 'Four Horsemen' of New Atheism – Hitchens, Dawkins, Dennett and Harris – have all written and published successful books taking an atheistic standpoint on matters of religion, in many cases, attacking it, and feature prominently in the public eye as the 'opposition' to religious culture. Christian apologetics are less prominent, though debates are often showcased between apologetics and atheists, such as a recent one between Bill Nye and Ken Ham in February 2014. Political religious movements are dealt with in detail in Chapter 3.
[151] Both British TV in the form of BBC's Big Questions, which broadcast a show around the link between religion and morality in May 2012, and US programmes such as NPR's 'Religion and Morality in America' series.

towards, except it is expected that if or when the monster fails to live up to these ideals, they will not suffer for it. As Aidan notes in one of the opening monologues of the US series: 'One thing monsters and humans have in common is the fact that they're both capable of destruction. We all leave a ton of carnage in our wake. The difference is that a human feels bad about the pain that they cause.' (US, Episode 3) Although this is an inherently flawed statement, as many humans are capable of inflicting pain without guilt, the fundamental idea is used often in these series. It is a marker of the 'monstrous' figure, whether they be originally human or monstrous. Guilt and conscience, or absence of it, appears to be what defines someone as a monster. These definitions are important as they are tied in to conceptions of identity, a crucial part of these narratives and the specific post 9/11 cultural anxiety.

The definitions are further complicated by the use of religion in these more modern interpretations of the vampire as short hand for *amorality.* Across modern vampire texts, religious characters (whether vampire or human) are continually figured as corrupt and amoral. Yet it should be said that the way religion and amorality are tied together is through the idea of organized religion rather than faith. It should be stressed that there is a major difference between the idea of faith and religion. One is personal, whilst the other is cultural and highly structured – or, to put it another way, one relates to personal identity and one relates to social identity. Faith is also often used to mean all faiths – i.e. a more ecumenical interpretation, and in this thesis, we are looking at the specifics of different religions, primarily, Christianity, but also Islam. We see the vampires in *Being Human* rejecting religious tradition, yet the idea of purgatory is made physical and the afterlife is very much believed in. Perhaps it is because that at heart, these stories allude to the deeper fears of our collective cultural consciousness. Our identity, our 'essence', is so fleeting that the notion of the afterlife is compelling as it offers a possibility of immortality for the soul.

These definitions and identifications are important, especially in relation to faith or religion, as they are embedded in our culture. There is a prevalence of 'cultural religion', that is, religion that isn't 'practiced' but one that an individual cognitively attaches themselves to. For example, whilst a majority of Americans, and many UK citizens may define themselves as 'Christian', the number who *actively* practice their religion in the US is significantly less as shown by Gallup Polls and Pew Forum

surveys – only 40% report regularly attending church, and there are arguments for this figure being too high. This is an apparent return to the kinds of figures evident in the 1940s/50s.[152] In comparison, church attendance was said to have grown in the UK, which has been explored in documentaries such as *Does Christianity Have a Future?* presented by Ann Widdecombe.[153] The role of 'active' organised religion appears to be on the increase in the UK. Yet in the US, there has been a rise in those identifying as Atheists/Nones, despite the majority of the population (78.4% according to the Pew Forum survey)[154] continuing to classify themselves as Christians. The differences in religion between the US and the UK are discussed by Peter Berger and Grace Davie in *Religious America, Secular Europe?* In it, they note that there is a culture war in the US between 'a highly secularized cultural elite and a strongly religious populace.'[155] But, ultimately, they argue, 'the country…is much less divided culturally than its politics make it appear.'[156] The presentation of religion in narratives throughout these chapters indicate that there are varied views on the subject but its strong presence indicates that religion has a more pervasive role in culture.

The impact of this change in the use of religion now is reflected in the figures that were once defined by it. Zanger also noted that 'these shifts – from solitary to multiple and communal, from metaphoric anti-Christ to secular sinner, from magical to mundane – demythologize the vampire, transform it from Satan's agent on earth into someone who more nearly resembles a member of a secret society or a subversive political association.'[157] He recognizes the 'subversive' nature of the figure and the fact that the identity of it necessarily creates the need for a category of 'member'. Although they are usually portrayed as loners, the vampire collective has become more commonly represented in recent years, and many texts critique the structures evident within them that are undoubtedly comparable to the hierarchy and structures of human authority. But Zanger still maintains that these vampires are outsiders; 'only' outsiders, rather than mythical: 'the new vampire has become, in our

[152] Frank Newport, 'In US, Four in 10 Report Attending Church in the Last Week', *Gallup,* (2013) <http://www.gallup.com/poll/166613/four-report-attending-church-last-week.aspx > [accessed March 2013]
[153] Screened April 2011, BBC1
[154] 'America's Changing Religious Landscape', *Pew Research Centre* (2015) <http://religions.pewforum.org/reports > [accessed January 2015]
[155] Peter Berger & Grace Davie, *Religious America, Secular Europe?* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2008) p.124
[156] Berger & Davie, p.128
[157] Jules Zanger, p.19

concerned awareness for multi-culturalism, merely ethnic, a victim of heredity.'[158] He goes on to explore the reasons *why:*

> The transformation of the vampire I have described might be understood analogically as a shift from a monotheistic, moralistic structure to a pagan hegemony of power and pleasure.[159]

Yet whilst this may be true of vampires in the Anne Rice universe, Poppy Z. Brite's novel *Lost Souls* and other texts pre 2001, the modern vampire seems far more concerned with guilt – about their nature and their past. They cannot accept their physical identity and past behaviour, thus derive simultaneously pain *and* pleasure from the acts they carry out. For it is no longer a display of power, but a display of physical and mental weakness. It is true that these monsters operate in a Pagan-like structure. Vampires are idealized, worshipped, but in a polytheistic way. Each individual figure tells a story, offers a slightly different perspective, through either the period they were 'created' in, or the human identity they choose to emulate. What they have in common is the way they are encoded in religious terms, particularly in US representations.

Religion within the series

The vampire, as previously discussed, embodies elements of religion, authority, identity and is capable of exploring moral issues. These figures are the key players in our modern myths, in a variety of forms. They are positioned as a sort of 'human 2.0', surpassing our physical abilities and limitations whilst being burdened by their flaws, which oddly, give them the edge of humanity. Yet despite these flaws, they are still revered and worshipped as gods. In *Being Human*, these vampires both reject and accept this new state of being. Mitchell and Aidan, whilst both adopting the role of a Christ-like figure, as previously discussed, simultaneously reject the idea of being God-like. They both strive to be human, despite their ability to be more, as Herrick states 'Life doesn't have to be hard. Not for us.' (UK, Episode 1) Vampires have an

[158] Ibid
[159] Jules Zanger, p.21

evolutionary advantage, which here is used to justify a creation of a new society, and with it, a new kind of religion, one based on defying death. Herrick's continual conflation of religious and evolutionary language enforces this. By contrast, Bishop (whose name in itself has religious connotations) is not as forceful on the matter, because of the threat of the 'Dutch', who in their orthodoxy, reject changes in the balance between mortal and immortal. In the US version, it is the religious authority that assumes the role of Godhead. Omniscient and stubborn, they mete out punishment like the God of the Old Testament. Any heresy or transgression is punishable by death, and they think nothing of the slaughter of humankind. By contrast, Bishop, who has a more limited authority, represents the incarnation of the New Testament God, offering forgiveness to Aidan, finding humane solutions to the feeding on humans, and preaching to convert. The UK version sees less of a concentration on the power structures evident, and focuses more on Mitchell's personal struggle with his urge to be human and his true nature. For the vampires in the UK, the issues with authority are political rather than religious, which perhaps says more about its US counterpart. In order to understand the differences between the two series, and especially in order to understand why there is a marked difference in religious elements between them, a closer look at the language of the characters needs to be undertaken. It is important to note that *Being Human* only represents *one* religiously infused interpretation of the figure (others such as *True Blood* are discussed in chapter 2) and it is not assumed that it is representative of American belief en masse. Rather, the series illuminates a post-9/11-prompted quest for identity which here is defined by religious structures. With the link between religion and cultural identity discussed in chapter 2, it is fair to say that this form of identity definition/division is an understandable interpretation of the vampire. In *Being Human,* it is the confliction with authority and the methods of control (of controlling identity particularly) that distinguishes between one identity and another. Aidan and Mitchell's subversion of expected behaviours (for example, by refusing to drink blood or keeping company with humans) prompts a reaction as it undermines the identity the authority figures in these series are trying to enforce. This identity is tied with religion, which is explored in further detail shortly, as it has become a core aspect of these narratives.

Regardless of the political undertones and comparatively unreligious content in the UK series, the use of religious language when talking about control is still present. The definitions of identity here are firmly focused on 'us' and 'them', with Herrick using religious allusion to justify his plan to 'takeover' humanity. 'They had their chance…we left them to tend this paradise, this Eden, and look what they did…' (UK, Episode 1) The implication is that both vampires and humans were created by God, and humans were the ones to take control and, in the view of the vampires, cause destruction. Herrick remarks on this when confronting Mitchell's choice to 'be human': 'In fact, the only part of humanity they successfully adopt is their ability to deceive and destroy.' (UK, Episode 6, 'Bad Moon Rising') Despite the fact that the very nature of the vampire means it creates a cycle of destruction and infection (that will only end once there is no humanity), Herrick focuses the viewer's attention to the age-old problems of our existence as a species – the tendency to be self-destructive. For the vampires in *Being Human* who relish their identity, death is the beginning, and the severance from a human life is liberating. No wonder then that Herrick describes it as the following: 'Our very existence is a union of life and death…funeral parlours, cemeteries, hospitals…These are our churches.' (Episode 6) Yet, even though this language is religious, the overriding theme for the UK version seems to be the problems of authority, which dominate in a cult-like way. The dogmatism of this authority is oppressive for some, and this emerges in the dialogue between Mitchell and Herrick.

The authority of the vampires in the UK version seems to tiptoe between the lines of religion and politics, which is not surprising, considering they are two key proponents of institutional control. When one of Mitchell's friends learns about Herrick's plan, she exclaims 'The vampires are mobilizing. Oh, they're making it sound all New Labour, but this is an invasion! It's a coup!' (UK, Episode 3) The balance of power seems to rest between the borders of life and death. For the US version though, the authority seems far more overtly religious, and encompasses many versions of belief, apt for a nation that sees religion as a free market. The religious themes in the US series are complicated by the historical American ties between politics and religion, which are strengthened by institutions such as the Christian Right, and discussed further in chapter 3. One example of authoritarian belief in the US *Being Human* is

the over-zealous religious advocate. This is acted out by the Priest figure who appears in Episode 5 ('The End of the World As We Knew It').

Figure 3: The Priest (Eric Davis) talks to Aidan

Instead of administering last rites in hospitals, he 'converts' the patients into one of his own kind. He justifies it by his belief that he's 'still saving souls…but in a different way.' (US, Episode 5) This is the only time in the series that the idea of having a soul is mentioned. He later states 'God saved me.' It isn't particularly difficult to make a link between this attitude and the attitudes displayed by Christians who are militant in their belief and their quest to spread the word, and 'save souls'. The role of the Priest is further complicated when it emerges that Bishop turned him in order to help with his plan of converting others. Here, Bishop confirms all our worst fears: religion is a tool used to gain power. 'Nobody sells eternal life like a Priest,' he says, before justifying it with 'Holy men are always by the side of important men.' Aidan confronts the Priest, questioning his belief in God, and the reasons for his actions. The Priest says: 'If God made everything…then he made vampires too.' This is something that comes up in Rice's *Interview with the Vampire* but is used here not to question God, as Rice does, but to question the assertions authority figures make to justify their actions. Aidan's response is simple: 'I get it, you're completely unhinged.' To denounce religious faith as delusional isn't a new standpoint,[160] but it is fitting in a world where reason is increasingly contending with traditional forms of belief. Despite claims that the US is becoming increasingly secular (to the point of it being a majority), the figures prove the opposite – the US

[160] As per the themes of the 'Four Horsemen' of New Atheism who see religious faith as delusional. Their popularity has soared in the last few decades, with books by each of the four (Dennett, Harris, Dawkins and Hitchens) selling increasingly more copies.

still has a majority of Christian citizens. There may be a separation of Church and State in the US, but there has never been an atheist President, and the previous administration was headed by a man whose faith dictated (or was used to justify) his policies and attitudes.[161] The Priest is symbolically defanged by Aidan, rendering him unable to 'save' any more souls. One strand of religion here has been effectively neutered, and exposed for its forceful and almost violent approach to 'conversion'. Yet there remains the quasi-religious manner in which our vampire protagonists are treated.

In *Religion and its Monsters,* Timothy Beal claims that

> the monster is deified as a revelation of sacred otherness….the monster is an envoy of the divine or the sacred as radically other than "our" established order of things. If demonising the monster keeps God on our side, then deifying it often puts us in a world of religious disorientation and horror.[162]

The vampire as deified is made more explicit in the US series, which perhaps explains the genre difference and negative focus on structures of religion. It also illuminates the religious impulses that occur in narratives that question our nature or existence. A view of order and authority is subverted specifically in *Being Human*, with vampires in a position of religious and communal authority, loudly commenting on the corruptions in the hierarchies of society. As for deifying, Mitchell/Aidan are arguably portrayed as 'prodigal sons' (Aidan more so than Mitchell) and as the key to a change in world order, through vampires being able to come out and show their true natures. Aidan and Mitchell are fighting against this 'true nature', and the religious authority gives them something to contend with.

There are many other things to rail against in the current social climate, but religious authority acts as a dual metaphor. Firstly, the imposition of beliefs and condemnation of others is something still very much an issue for current religious frameworks. In

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[161] Including God talking to him, as is described in this article: Ewen MacAskill, 'George Bush: 'God Told me to end the tyranny in Iraq', *The Guardian,* (2005) <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2005/oct/07/iraq.usa > [accessed January 2015]

[162] Timothy Beal, *Religion and its Monsters,* (New York: Routledge, 2002) p.6

more Orthodox religions, there has previously been trouble with Popes over their assertions and condemnations, which control the lives of believers and stigmatise minorities such as homosexuals.[163] This authority comes from deep-rooted traditions – the Dutch being the most literal manifestation of this, with their afterlives being structured by tradition, ritual and thus, authority. The portrayal of the Dutch on the show, and the subsequent attack on them by Aidan and Bishop, enforces the idea that vampirism is to be seen as a religion. As John Micklethwait and Adrian Wooldridge argue in *God is Back,* 'the assault on tradition is often an assault on religion.'[164] Thus, the structures of vampirism upheld by the Dutch can be seen as religious. The breakdown of tradition and undermining of authority can be ascribed in some ways to the condition of modernity. These modern vampires can break free of the dogmatism of religion and do not need to be spoon-fed by their makers – they have other options to feed as evidenced by both *Being Human* and *True Blood.* Aidan and Mitchell choose not to feed on humans, instead opting for blood donations or going without. This goes against what is deemed to be traditional 'vampire' behaviour and arguably a religiously imbued ritual. The idea of 'heretical' behaviour is something raised in the US version: the Dutch are described as 'orthodox' and are shown to live like Amish peoples. They denounce Aidan as 'heretic' for mixing with both werewolves and humans. These attitudes are reminiscent of segregation, which is now far more outdated than it ever has been[165] and are painted as just as ridiculous. In trying to be human, Aidan is presented as a human figure in his own right, rejecting the confines of the vampiric lifestyle and denying his violent impulses. To strive to be *good* does not appear to be something that could be deemed 'heretic', and so the Dutch and their assertions are seen as dogmatic and outdated. Indeed, they are described as being thousands of years old, and when being taken on a tour, shown to be unused to the current customs of modern-day Boston. These old-fashioned attitudes coupled with their obdurate resistance to change are shown as fatal: in one scene, some of the members of the Dutch are killed after they drained the 'donors' because they are 'spiked' with juniper, which paralyses vampires.[166] Their refusal to follow current custom and leave the donors alive (Bishop reproachfully describes them as being

[163] However, not the current one, Pope Francis, who has been more accepting of homosexuality.
[164] John Micklethwaite & Adrian Wooldridge, *God is Back,* (London: Penguin, 2009) p.248
[165] Despite the recent racial tensions that led to riots in the USA in late 2014.
[166] In other series, herbs are used as a method of paralysis for vampires, such as 'vervain' in the *Vampire Diaries*

'greedy', which in itself is a potent comment) paralyses them, thus making it easier to kill them.

Here, the Dutch are the more extreme example of problematic religious authority. Aidan has to choose between obeying his maker or the authoritarian figure of Heggeman (Head of the Dutch), and chooses the latter. Each represents a form of control, but each have their differences. Bishop has *direct* control over Aidan's life, but Heggeman has *greater* control because of the position he holds. It comes down to a simple fact: if Heggeman is killed, he will be replaced by someone as similarly orthodox and traditional as he is. The traditions of the old vampires are unchanging. Bishop, by contrast, exists in the modern world, and can evolve: any replacement of his would be far more likely to approach Aidan's 'situation' without the need for strict rules and regulations. Aidan's saving of Heggeman puts him at an advantage, and gives him a chance to prove that understanding needs to be given to the traditional approach. To respond in the same manner, i.e. by destroying those with differing beliefs, would be a step backwards and is particular pertinent to note considering the US response to the attacks of 9/11. Despite the fact that retaliation will do little to further the cause, the US response was violent (i.e. The War on Terror), and continued over a long period (which many condemned). *Being Human* gives us an alternative approach to dealing with those who are oppressive and who differ in their beliefs, whilst simultaneously showing the problems and hypocrisy of authority. The religiosity of the authority is analogous to the structures of religiously-influenced political parties and the Bush-era government. As I will argue in chapter 2, this is something made explicit in *True Blood*.

It is *Being Human's* view of authority that provides us with an interpretation of the word 'monster'. For all the claims that Mitchell and Aidan make of monstrosity, this is most clearly displayed by the unflinching, uncompromising coldness of those in charge and thus, they are humanized in comparison (the 'good vampire'), offering the viewer a locus of identification. For Beal,

> the monster's warning is distressingly double. On the one hand, as a disciplinary figure, it warns against tampering with the order of things, urging us to pull back from the threshold of the known at which it

> appears, into the social and symbolic centre, examining ourselves for any traces of its touch, reinvigorating a vigilant reason, letting sleeping leviathans lie. On the other hand, as a sign of unaccountable and unimaginable excess, it warns against the limitedness of our well constructed cosmologies and against simplistic but widespread understandings of religion as morality or ideological system. [167]

Taking this quote in relation to *Being Human,* we can see how the monster enacts both warnings – the Dutch (the 'order of things') figure as the limitedness; yet by digressing from this order, Aidan cannot always control himself and inflicts damage on humans (either killing or traumatizing them). The vampires in *Being Human* and *True Blood* feature an aspect of this 'limitedness' that is railed against by the central characters and by chapter 3, which looks at *The Strain,* we see the fictional consequences of tampering with this order – the apocalypse. The trend of rejecting or rebelling against authority primarily appears to be rejection of the demands and confines of it and thus portrayals of it as corrupt (there are various examples in these texts) gives us a 'valid' reason to rail against it. The authority figures in these series give us yet another example of corrupt authority, a common trope evident in many films, series and novels. But here, it is specifically religious authority and the corruption of the 'other'. Despite this corruption and control on the part of religious figureheads, one of the main arguments that I have found in this show, and in other new American vampire fiction, is that spirituality and faith still remain strong. Religious authority on the other hand, is something here that is criticised and shown as outmoded. Yet religious authority is still shown to have some degree of control: Aidan is summoned at the end of series one to meet an unknown 'her',[168] and assume control of Boston despite his attempts to shun the vampire world. He may subvert the expectations of what it is to be a 'normal' vampire, but there are absolute rules that cannot be ignored. This acquiescence appears to indicate the inescapable power of authority, but Aidan and Mitchell's subversion of its many rules enforces the nature of their identity.

[167] Beal, p.196
[168] Who he is later exiled by.

Although Mitchell 'lapses' back into vampiric behaviour momentarily, he describes this as being "easier" than remembering the consequences of his actions, indicating a use of the strict confines of the vampire identity. The structure of the vampire world provides somewhere to hide because the identity it constructs is rigid and known; therefore it offers a possibility to absolve any behaviours or beliefs that may not be comfortable for the individual to accept. This in one sense is why these vampires who subvert the expectations of others and their nature are aspirational: they are not taking the easy route. This complex view of authority, combined with its dominant presentation as 'monstrous' (those in charge being a relic of the traditional monster figure) serves to highlight the simultaneous need for and rejection of religious authority. It provides a firm, stable, opposing identity. This provides one explanation of why religious authority still has a strong degree of power, despite our existence in an age where there is no *one* particular faith that everyone follows. Another key reason, and one that is pertinent to the discussions of post-9/11 US religion, is the idea of religion as an identity marker.

Religious identity and sublimation

Why the vampire is imbued with a religiosity is deserving of consideration, especially for a culture that debates the very notion of the existence of God so frequently.[169] It is important here to note that the discussion of religion as an identity marker and the resurgence of religion are specifically related to the US series: for it is the US series that is imbued with religiosity and the vampire is a figure that has become dominated by the US market. Thus, it is only logical that a key metaphorical figure should return to its quintessential nature – the struggle between good and evil, which religion is fixated upon. To use religion as an identity marker simultaneously shows the cultural need for it and how important defining identity currently is. Religion is often used as an identity marker because religions 'answer the individual's need for a sense of locatedness.'[170] They do this because the religious traditions and institutions 'resist

[169] The continuing love/hate affair with Christopher Hitchens and the other 'Four horsemen' is proof of this. *Time* magazine has continued to discuss the place of religion with its eye-catching covers, including 'God vs Science' (2006) and 'One Nation, Under God' (1991) and 'Is God Dead?' (1966). *Newsweek* emulated the design of the latter in 2009 with the headline 'The Decline and Fall of Christian American.' Especially for a country with such a devoutly religious right, to ignore these interpretations would be confusing.

[170] Jeffrey R. Seul, 'Ours is the way of God', in *Journal of Peace Research,* 36: 5 (1999) 553-569, (p.558)

constant change in the negotiation of social meaning, thus affording individuals and groups more secure anchors for self-reference.'[171] For the older vampires, the more traditional and conservative Dutch, immersing an identity in religious structures is the best way of maintaining order, and therefore, provides a stability in both the structures and the identity associated with it. The Dutch are the ruling hierarchy of the vampire world in *Being Human* and are a major difference between the US and UK series. There is a lack of orthodox, traditional authority in the UK series, which is apparent in the American presentation of the metaphor. They are the group that dictate the identity and accepted behaviours of vampires, controlling and maintaining order in a religious manner. Religion tends to 'promote the stabilization of individual and group identity by favouring the preservation of old content.'[172] A specifically interesting aspect of identity and religion is the need to reaffirm it through rituals. In the case of the vampire, the ritual in question is that of feeding on humans, and the consumption of blood, itself a religiously symbolic act. This preservation of ritual and reconfirmation becomes relevant for mythical beings like vampires whose history is based on 'old content', and gives them a way of situating themselves in the world, linking past and present. They provide evidence of the sublimation of religion as the vampires that are becoming popular are the ones like Aidan and Mitchell who reject the strict religious structures of identity. Whilst religion may be still a strong cultural force in the US, there has been a move towards less traditional forms of faith, which reject the firm structures associated with organised religion. Whilst many may still have faith, because religion modifies identity so that 'mundane existence' appears 'more orderly' 'more consistent' and 'more timeless',[173] there may be a rejection of elements of a particular religious identity, much like Aidan and Mitchell reject many aspects of vampirism. Our narratives involving monsters frequently feature religion so as to reinterpret our recurring dilemmas[174] in a stable and understandable way as they evoke complex reactions that may be incongruent with a particular identity. In *Between the Monster and the Saint,* Richard Holloway mentions the chaos of reconciling the many facets of identity, to which he asserts, 'Religious institutions evolved partly to control and partly to embody these cloudy anxieties.'[175] Identity can become 'fixed' with the aid of religion and it can also provide a 'reason' for polarising

[171] Ibid
[172] Ibid
[173] Seul, p.559
[174] Such as Pearl Harbor and 9/11 which highlight vulnerability and act as a reminder of death.
[175] Richard Holloway, *Between the Monster and the Saint,* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2009) p.54

views, thus is relevant in this thesis given the divisive nature of the events of 9/11 that challenged views of religiously based identities, something further discussed in chapter 2. As Robert Doran notes, 'the most virulent conflicts are those that involve relations of identity, not difference.'[176] Whilst religion has often been present in monster and vampire fiction, the extent has not been the same as now, nor has it been used in the same way. Here, in these texts (those in this chapter, and the thesis as a whole) religion is being used strongly as an identity marker, and divisive weapon. It is no longer about the physicality of one's identity, but its cognitive and behavioural expression. The expressed need to reassert an identity in the post 9/11 era is a consequence of this divide. It also exemplifies the pervasive nature of religion in society given its role as cornerstone of identity.

Yet, despite the prominent positioning of religion in culture, the way the vampires are characterized and the themes they encompass indicate a sublimation of religion. This is strongly tied to the shift in identities; both of the human and the vampire. Whereas in novels such as *Dracula* we had a central human protagonist, and the vampire played the part of the villain, 'the reader or viewer no longer have a human locus with which they can attach themselves…the contemporary audience must identify with the lesser of evils provided for it – the "good" vampire.'[177] This is most definitely the case with *Being Human:* the human figures are shown to be judgmental, and just as capable of monstrosity as the central characters. However, what defines the 'good' vampire has changed. Once, it was a conscience, and the narrative concluded with the denial of this conscience (Rice, Brite, etc.). Post 2001, the vampires are abstaining and instead the focus is on how they hide or suppress their original identity. The central question of 'who we are' has overtaken religious questions thematically, despite the obvious sublimation of religion encoded in these texts. Overt Christian religious references across vampire film, books and television have steadily decreased in the last decade. There are fleeting references to religion in films such as *Twilight* and the recent adaptation of *Fright Night*, but overall, these themes have been subverted, and converted, into another form. It could be argued that these vampires are our gods now. They are idolised, feared and have the power to create and destroy life. This is symptomatic of a societal sublimation of religion. The impulses are still

[176] Robert Doran, 'The Singularity of 9/11' in *SubStance,* Issue 115, 37:1 (2008) 3-19 (p.7)
[177] Jules Zanger, p.21

there; people cling to faith and require something that will anchor them by offering both belonging and meaning. It is not just the personal expression but the political expression of religion that has changed, which strengthens its ability to define identity. Toby Miller states that 'analysis demonstrates that the last three decades have seen activist Democrats become more secular and modern, and activist Republicans more religious and anti-modern.'[178] This divide between Republican/Democrat and anti-modern/modern is showcased in all these narratives, particularly *Being Human,* and the favouring of modernity alongside the search for an expression of the religious impulse indicates a need for something more. In particular, the link between religion, authority and identity is a useful commentary on the Bush administration and its attitudes to religion. How people express faith has changed, perhaps due to a move away from the structures in place to explore religion, leading to a repression of these impulses. Here we see the exploration of religion through another outlet, that is, through the fictional characters of monsters who have superhuman powers and act as a surrogate religion. The very essence of vampirism is religious: they congregate in buildings they describe as 'churches', can offer an afterlife, and adhere to strict traditions, denouncing anyone who strays from the expected group behaviours as a 'heretic'.

Although the 'human' vampire remains distanced from us by their supernatural elements, their everyday life is still afflicted by the same struggles and issues that we deal with. Their distance (physically/categorically) from humanity allows them to explore morally grey areas that if we saw in a human we would immediately denounce as monstrous. In the case of the vampire who is trying to give up blood, an occasional slip is not seen as disastrous, even though it may result in the loss of a human life. Most contemporary vampire texts focus on the rivalries and contentions between vampires – and those that are 'bad' either betray the vampire 'group' in some way, or kill their own kind. The division between human and vampire dehumanizes the human whilst humanizing the vampire. The centrality of the vampire in these texts position them as the figures we identify with, complicating the way we view their morally dubious actions. The breakdown of these boundaries (through identification with a 'monster') allows us to push the limits of morality, to examine the psyche of a

[178] Toby Miller, 'Creepy Christianity and September 11' in *SubStance,* Issue 115, 37: 1 (2008) 118-133, (p.119)

being that is capable of committing such acts, and thus begin to have an understanding of those of us who lean towards the more psychopathic end of the spectrum. As Ira Konigsberg points out, 'There have been numerous horror films dealing with our repulsion for the animal in us.'[179] The value of cultural narratives in expressing these anxieties is important to consider, and is dealt with in more depth in chapter 3.

Some of us may turn to the steady structures of religion to find reason. For Holloway, instead of religion being able to control the anxieties about identity, it was myth that functioned better for this purpose: 'myth is art, not the fixed historical truth of dogmatic religion; it tells us about *ourselves.*'[180] Yet it must also be remembered that just like religion, myth cannot account for the desires and attitudes of everyone; Holloway's generalisation highlights the issue at the core of myth – subjective interpretation. What is read into myth, or even in this case, mythological creatures such as vampires, will necessarily differ. What *can* be seen though, is the need to explore just what it is that constitutes identity, and how exactly religion affects it, as *Being Human's* US counterpart illustrates. Post-9/11, the search for identity, meaning, and faith has been embedded within a significant amount of dramas produced, such as *Battlestar Galactica, The West Wing,* and *True Blood* which have all been extremely successful and praised for their attitudes towards the complexities of dealing with these issues.[181] The themes are far more apparent in shows with monstrous characters. This is because, as previously stated, they are imbued with so many aspects of the 'other' than we can use them and our ideological distance from them to try and understand their motives, our responses, and how our identity relates in contrast to it. Myth and religion are curiously similar and different in a number of ways; Roland Barthes argues in *Mythologies* that myth is depoliticizing (and is thus political because of it). Religion has an important role in politics, particularly in the US, where presidential campaigns are wrought with religious language and allusion. Despite the first amendment, separating the two has become difficult. Yet myth, or at least, myth as we are discussing here, is also unavoidably political due to the way it has been

[179] Konigsberg in *Play it again, Sam*, p272
[180] Richard Holloway, p.56
[181] *Battlestar Galactica* is a strong take on these issues – the 'other' in this case are robots (or 'cylons') that look like humans, some of which still believe they are human, who have found their own brand of faith and are on a mission to create a new, idyllic civilization – the parallels with the vampire narratives discussed in this thesis are blatant and incredibly useful.

transposed from its original forms (word of mouth, writings) and into arguably political structures such as TV.[182] In the second section of *Mythologies,* Barthes' examination of myth builds upon Levi Strauss' conception of the structural study of myth and argues that the structures are similar but the details are different. This is evident in the pitting of two sides against another 'the good vampire' versus the 'bad vampire', or the 'bad human' versus the 'good monster.' Whilst the identities may have changed, the central storylines remain similar. The identities have shifted in order to reflect and question current assumptions of character. Vampires have evolved beyond their mythological origins, and it is evident in shows like *True Blood* and our current topic of discussion, *Being Human,* that political aspects are indeed embedded. These are primarily shown by the function and portrayal of the authority in the series, and the influence they have.

Regardless of the degree of power these authorities have over the monstrous protagonists, there are still key differences between the US and the UK series, and their focus on religious aspects of life and death. When discussing the difference between American and European approaches to film, Forrest and Koos assert that American films 'privilege clear-cut motivation, both of causality and character (good or evil), whereas the principle of the latter is ambiguity.'[183] Yet, this isn't quite the case here. The flashback sequences in the US series show us the apparently evil character of Bishop displaying the same behaviour and attitudes as Aidan does in the present day. It is unclear what Bishop's motivation is: it partly stems from his belief that vampires are elite and pressure from the authority of the Dutch (who threaten death for 'heretics'). It is unclear whether Bishop is good or evil. The UK version conversely seems less ambiguous with its authoritarian figures and their standing. Herrick does not give Mitchell the same kind of leniency that Bishop gives Aidan. He is unrepentant in his actions, and never strays away from the path of 'evil'. This difference is important as it suggests a duality, or hypocritical nature of religion in the US series. On the one hand, the religious structures of the vampire world are an attempt to 'keep the peace', and further down the ranks are characters like Bishop who uphold these values. Yet, they too have enacted the behaviours they condemn others for, and disregard the notion of 'forgiveness'.

[182] Necessarily made so by the need for funding through advertising etc.
[183] Forrest and Koos, *Dead Ringers,* p.8

Specifically, these differences around the perception of religion, and the prominence that religious figures are given, together with the morally ambiguous nature of many characters in the US version indicate a confusion of identity. Some have remarked upon the change in attitude to religion, faith, and identity post 9/11.[184] It seems the US remake (and the direct comparison to the UK version) has given us a chance to explore how these issues are being worked through in current dramatic mediums.

The possibility of monstrosity

9/11 has been written of time and time again. Over a decade later, issues that were raised by the event still continue to pervade contemporary culture. The central argument of this chapter rests on the idea that the religious elements of *Being Human* are far stronger in the US series because of the impact of 9/11. In the days and weeks following the terrorist attacks, the responses given were indicative of the foundations of a US identity *en masse*. President Bush responded by relying on his faith, infusing his speeches with religious language and imagery. 9/11 became the catalyst for the 'war on terror', which for him was a 'monumental struggle between good and evil'.[185] He defined America as 'good' and declared that 'rooting out evil was America's responsibility.'[186] Thus, he set the boundaries of the cultural identity *he believed* were apt at that point in time. It positioned Americans as separate from terrorists, and the separation was founded in religious belief. Much like the Dutch in the US series of *Being Human* denouncing those who were against the system of traditional vampirism as 'heretics', judgments about moral and spiritual positions of others were being inflicted upon those who did not comply. And whilst the events were horrific, the fallout reached far beyond those who were responsible. Bush urged the avoidance of 'ethnic profiling' in the wake of the event; in a comparable situation, Pearl Harbor, Japanese civilians who were living in the US had been targeted, despite their lack of responsibility for the attack. Bush evidently did not want history to repeat itself. Yet the words of one man cannot control the wider opinion, especially considering the actions of the government: the FBI targeted 5000 Arabian men who had recently

[184] John Blake, 'Four Ways 9/11 Changed America's Attitude Toward Religion', *CNN*, (2011) <http://religion.blogs.cnn.com/2011/09/03/four-ways-911-changed-americas-attitude-toward-religion/ > [accessed January 2012]
[185] Bacevich & Prodromou, *God is not neutral*, p.48
[186] Ibid

moved to the US, and student visas for foreign students from countries associated with terrorism were made harder to obtain. In terms of citizen response, one extreme case saw a Sikh gas attendant killed because the attacker thought he was Muslim. Aside from hostile responses, interest in Islam itself surged: 'the patriotic desire to protect the flag and "what it stands for" is now characterized by new understandings of "what it stands for."'[187] The attack had been carried out in the name of a particular faith, triggering a need to 'know your enemy' and cling to what it is that identifies you as 'other' in relation to the attackers.

How the 'other' is defined has changed. Whereas once visible disparity spoke of more fundamental difference – marked by monstrous or alien features or deformity – differences now are portrayed in popular culture as more than skin deep.[188] The change in attitudes towards 'evil', the theistic connotations of it and how it could be detected all changed. It could be argued that some of these attitudes are a reversion to previous times, following a cyclical pattern of loss and resurgence of belief. In 1946, Siegfried Kracauer, discussing the appearance of evil in Hollywood film, argued that 'evil no longer marks and defines a person's face or manner…any trusted neighbor may turn into a demon.'[189] This is evocative of current attitudes and fears about identity, and the positioning of evil as a neighbour places the discussion into a personal realm outside of the public influence of religion. However, even if a resurgence in belief (and the theistic notions associated with it, such as evil) is a cyclical event, there is still a catalyst needed for the return to previous opinions. This change is easily explained when put into context – to ask the question 'why is appearance no longer the defining identifier?' should give some indication as to the way we operate as a society. The 'other' is no longer physically different, but views the world from a different perspective. And why is this? The simple answer is this: *terrorism.*[190]

[187] Deborah Schildkraut, 'The More Things Change', in *Political Psychology,* 23 3 (2002) 511-535, (pp.253)
[188] I am aware that some people still judge by appearances, and that the superficiality of the visual world means we will continue to be shown stories with unfeasibly attractive people. It is the change in 'monstrous' that I am looking at here – the vampire was physically obvious in series such as *Buffy* and films like *The Lost Boys* where the face morphs in 'vamp' mode. But now, there is little to distinguish them from humans.
[189] Siegfried Kracauer, 'Hollywood's Terror Films: Do they Reflect an American State of Mind?' in *New German Critique* 89: (2003) pp.105-111 (Originally published in 1946)
[190] Sam Harris discusses this in his book *The End of Faith* where he explores the assumptions we make about others due to their faith and the ideas linked to it.

One of the major issues that emerged from 9/11 was that these terrorists had been living in America; to the outside world they were ordinary citizens, but only up until a certain point. They were in a sense, according to Jean Baudrillard, 'ready to activate […]as if [they] were a double agent.'[191] He goes further, pinpointing the painful aspects of the attack: they 'used the banality of American everyday as cover and camouflage.'[192] If terrorists can hide in plain sight, then identity is no longer as easily explained or identified. This is why the vampire as a metaphorical character is so useful in understanding the issues surrounding the event, because, like terrorists, they can assimilate in society. And 'if *they* could pass unnoticed, then each of us is a criminal unnoticed...'[193] Their identity is mutable: they *look* human, can *act* human, but behind closed doors, to understand their thoughts and intentions is near impossible. Thus, how to define or categorize is not easy when you can 'pass' or assimilate. The domestic upset of terrorists living as American citizens is reflected in these narratives which position the vampire within society. There are aspects of the vampire that enforce the association of it with the terrorist other, such as the fact that like terrorists, they turned 'their own deaths into an absolute weapon against a system that operates on the basis of the exclusion of death.'[194] For vampires are post-mortal, rather than *immortal,* as they are usually described. They have gone through death, and come out the other side. Their death (which is simultaneously the start of their life as a vampire) is used to cause further death and destruction. Yet, not all vampires use their death as a weapon – these narratives show a diverse range of portrayals of the figure, suggesting that stereotypes need to be re-examined, and the other considered as more than an outsider. The divisions of identity can be problematic, returning us to how we identify the difference between human/vampire (and in the post-9/11 sphere, American and terrorist). The only identity marker that could possibly be examined is *faith,* as this is what linked the terrorists. In chapter 2 the explicit link between vampires and Muslims will be explored through the series *True Blood.* The 9/11 perpetrators all acted in the name of Islam, and whilst they are regarded as fundamentalists, it still links them to the rest of the group who define themselves as Muslims. This is regardless of the fact that most practicing Muslims have strenuously made efforts to distance themselves from this extremist side of faith, much like many

[191] Jean Baudrillard, *The Spirit of Terrorism*, (New York: Verso, 2003) p.10
[192] Baudrillard, p17
[193] Baudrillard, p18
[194] Baudrillard, p17

Christians may distance themselves from the more conservative and unflinchingly devout few that persecute minorities and use their faith as justification. The only thing that links the vampires in *Being Human* together is their shared history, their *potential* to become, at any moment, a potent weapon against humanity. The difference between vampires like Aidan and Mitchell and the authoritarian group is that Aidan/Mitchell make a conscious choice to reject the values and beliefs of the group 'vampire'.

Thus, they have defined themselves as 'safe' despite existing as a figure historically linked with violence. This reforming of the figure of vampire could be seen as a way to conquer and metaphorically quell fears of the violent other that were arguably more present in the post 9/11 world. Although the vampire is an apt figure to represent the problems of terrorism and identity (a further thread picked up in chapter 2) they also frequently embody post 9/11 fears because of the way they figure as both symptom and solution to the trauma of the events (further discussed in chapter 3). Repetition is a key symptom of the Freudian understanding of trauma. The repetition in this case is the repeated summoning of the figure. Cathy Caruth is a key theorist of trauma, arguing that 'to be traumatised is precisely to be possessed by an image or event.'[195] This possession leads to a repetition of the event: 'In some cases, Freud points out, these repetitions are striking because they seem not to be initiated by the individual's own acts but rather appear as the possession of some people by a sort of fate, a series of painful events to which they are subjected, and which seem to be entirely outside their wish or control.'[196] Whilst those involved in producing and creating these texts have been careful to avoid directly invoking the exact details of the event itself,[197] the influences and the sublimated details of it are evident in the narratives, particularly the narratives of the vampire. The events of 9/11 can be looked at culturally with the Freudian notion of trauma. Because if trauma:

[195] Cathy Caruth, *Trauma: Explorations of Memory,* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1995) p.4
[196] Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History,* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996) p.1
[197] Until we get to chapter 3, which provides a more explicit look at the events

> is experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known and is therefore not available to consciousness until it imposes itself again, repeatedly, in the nightmares and repetitive actions of the survivor.[198]

What we are looking at here is how this trauma is mediated through the use of text, film and TV. 9/11 was unexpected, and thus the repetition compulsion, through texts like the vampire narratives which have been proliferated through media, offers a way to understand the meaning, to come to terms with the event in a way that the survivor (or witness – and we all vicariously witnessed through the countless hours of footage) can understand and manage. Because of the genre and the metaphorical nature of the characters, the viewer is not pressured into undergoing an identical flashback. Some of the narratives that provide a more overt comparison are still guarded by the idea of the vampire as non-human.

This guarding is an attempt to alleviate the haunting effects of the trauma, and also a way to try to *know* what the trauma means; as E. Ann Kaplan argues: 'What returns to haunt the victim…is not only the reality of the violent event but also the reality of the way that its violence has not yet been fully known.'[199] In this case though, who is the victim? Is it the culture as a whole? Kaplan discusses the distinction between direct and vicarious trauma, and notes that 'it is hard to separate individual and collective trauma.'[200] As she notes, the focus in the aftermath of 9/11 was the victims – among others, pages of the *New York Times* bore pictures and 'telling details' of the victims, in a somewhat emotionally manipulative way, in order to make the event more real. Kaplan suggests that 'it gradually became clear that national ideology was hard at work shaping how the traumatic event was to be perceived.'[201] This impact of direct and vicarious trauma on both individuals and the collective sent shockwaves out, which may still be felt currently in the form of changes to policy, attitudes represented in film and media and the understanding of a national identity, which had been shaken by a surprise attack.

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[198] Cathy Caruth, *Trauma: Explorations of Memory,* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1995) p.4
[199] E. Ann Kaplan, *Trauma Culture,* (New Jersey: Rutgers, 2005) p.6
[200] Kaplan, p1
[201] Kaplan, p13

Trauma as a narrative 'attests to its endless impact on a life';[202] those that were affected by it will never lose that part of themselves. Caruth asks 'is trauma the encounter with death, or the ongoing experience of having survived it?' […] and thus it could be seen as a "double telling", "a crisis of death and correlative crisis of life'[203] which is unashamedly apt considering the undead subject matter that so frequently deals with the themes tied to the event. Interestingly, the word trauma comes from the Greek *trauma,* or 'wound'. The idea of trauma victims being doomed to repeat the traumatic event becomes eerily relevant in these texts where wounds are frequently inflicted – upon other humans, upon each other, episode after episode, the wound is opened, and the act is repeated. This repetition of trauma, specifically, the repeated wounding in the form of fangs is what Kaplan calls the 'translation' of trauma. She suggests, 'If the wound of trauma remains open, its pain may be worked through in the process of its being "translated" via art.'[204] This wounding, this translation is presented in complex ways, despite the seemingly obvious manifestation with the literal wound the vampire inflicts. It is not so much the traditional *victim* that is affected by it any longer but the perpetrator themself, as the wounding becomes a symbol of *loss* of power, specifically loss of willpower. Both power and willpower are dominant themes in *Being Human:* Aidan/Mitchell's struggle with 'staying on the wagon', and the complex structures of the vampiric world which is based on political, or religious authority. In every episode we see these wounds being repeatedly inflicted; moving beyond the physical, the reminders of the limitations of an identity are painfully overt. These vampires are trying to be 'other', specifically 'human' and in a repetitive fashion. Their transgressions (which happen a few times in both series) give ammunition for those who would claim that their true identity cannot be masked. This issue of fixed identity (specifically group identity) triggers off many kinds of thoughts and fears, particularly in relation to assumptions about Islam and the nature of insurgent terrorism. Since the events of 9/11, there have been so many (American) explorations of the vampire, as if by trying to master *one* dominant cultural 'other', another (such as the incongruous 'terrorist') could be tamed and changed.

In discussing the number of *Dracula* remakes, Ira Konigsberg suggests that the 'repetition compulsion is evident in constant remakes…[because] we are trying to

[202] Caruth, p7
[203] Caruth, p.7
[204] Kaplan, p.19

understand [the story] and master it.'[205] The need to understand is evident from Baudrillard's approach to 9/11, in which he notes that we 'try retrospectively to impose some kind of meaning on it, to find some kind of interpretation. But there is none.'[206] However, the multitude of narratives attests to an alternative view. The repetition of the vampire in films 'envelope us in a world already dreamlike and unreal…with their intrusion of the dead into the world of the living.'[207] In the case of *Being Human,* this sense of unreality is used to question some of the cultural questions arising from 9/11 that have been largely skirted around. The unreality of the vampire is far from the stereotypical manifestation of the vampire in *Dracula,* yet the barrier of death is still upheld. The complexity of the vampire is comprised, among other things, of those elements of ourselves that we cannot understand or do not dare to explore. They prompt us to ask the question 'what is it that makes us human?' This is particularly relevant in this series, where the protagonists are struggling to *be human,* as the title suggests. They may emulate humanity in terms of appearance and employment, but the one major difference that they must reconcile their previous identities with is the cognitive dissonance between human and monster. Realistically, although much of entertainment is escapism, there is still a need for audiences to *identify* in some way with the characters, or a particular character they see on screen. Identification forms an anchor for the viewer, allowing a preliminary connection through which issues can be explored through the hours of narrative in these series. This anchor helps to provide a safe place from which to explore these questions, and the issues that the modern vampire evokes through these narratives. As well as prompting a look at humanity, the positioning of the vampire in society questions identity, faith and trauma. Thus, a locus of identification is needed to facilitate this.

So why are these important issues not being debated more publicly, rather than hidden in the text of popular narratives? Kaplan notes that the 'political public discussion of 9/11 has been, and still is inadequate because of the unfortunate limits being set on what can and cannot be debated.'[208] 9/11 brought up comparisons to other instances of cultural trauma, like the already-mentioned Pearl Harbor. The comparisons have changed as we, as a society (in this case, specifically Western), try to discover the

[205] Konigsberg, p.251
[206] Baudrillard, p.30
[207] Konigsberg, p.258
[208] Kaplan, p.9

common link between ‘us’ and ‘them’ and how faith controls aspects of this. Religion and the authority that traditionally comes with it played a major role in identification yet some forms of organised religion (in this case, Islam) result in social exclusion or prejudice – thus confusing the role religion has.

Being Human brings up a great many issues and highlights the cultural sensitivities we harbour about identity. What makes us 'human'? To identity theorists we are a collection of roles and group affiliations, but the overarching theme is that humans are fundamentally flawed, yet inherently 'good'. The vampire, like the terrorist, is positioned as something other than 'human' in order to explain the evil nature of their acts. Vampires that try and assimilate with humans are seen as heroic, and something to aspire to. It is these vampires that are capturing our attention, in more shows than just *Being Human.* Perhaps it is the modern fairy tale: an identity that is unique in its rejection of the expected behaviours and beliefs, and faith without the confines of religious authority. Making these vampires 'good' is a way of neutralising the threat of these 'others' who masquerade as human, who live amongst us. The US use of the figure exemplifies the need for a godhead, and this establishing of the Americanisation serves as a springboard for discussions of more overtly religious themes in vampire narratives in the form of *True Blood* in the next chapter. By instilling the hope that a group doesn't define the values and behaviours of *all* of its members, we attempt to temper stereotypical views of religious identities. By using the figure of the vampire though, we quell the fear of the unknown by creating new gods of our own.

Chapter 2

'Muslim Buffy with a dick': Post 9/11 interpretations of fundamentalism in *True Blood*

The TV vampire…is all the more monstrous and frightening because it is represented as both 'other' and just like us.

– Stacey Abbott, *TV Loves Fangs*[209]

The vampire has historically been used to explore politically and culturally sensitive topics, from the fears of female sexuality in Le Fanu's *Carmilla* to the fear of invasion so often cited within Stoker's seminal vampire text, *Dracula.* As societal issues have shifted and changed, so has the portrayal of the figure that is tied to anxiety and difference. The aspects of cultural attitudes have at times been nuanced, subtle, or hidden in the depths of mythology. This is not the case with HBO's *True Blood,* which offers a more explicit commentary on contemporary political and cultural fears, namely those associated with religion and the spectre of terrorism. The series is an all-American take on the vampire, embedding it in modern-day Louisiana, despite the European links many of the characters have in their histories (which arguably encompasses realistic aspects of modern American origins). It explores one portrayal of an American interpretation of the figure and the taboos it brings with it. This chapter takes the transatlantic difference in the portrayal of the vampire established in chapter 1 and examines these apparently American idiosyncrasies in more depth. With the religious elements being highlighted as the key difference in the stateside incarnation of the figure, chapter 2 looks at the specific case study of *True Blood* in order to examine the details of the religious attitudes and anxieties being dealt with in these narratives. This chapter will discuss the links between patriotism and religion, the representation of religion on screen, and the ways in which *True Blood* uses the vampire to encode fears of the Muslim 'other' and terrorism. By showing the complex portrayal of the vampire in the series, as well as the illumination of attitudes towards certain religious factions, it serves to expose a more nuanced approach to both the vampire and the issue of religion.

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[209] Stacey Abbott, 'TV Loves Fangs' in *True Blood: Investigating Vampires and Southern Gothic*, Ed. by Brigid Cherry (London: I.B. Tauris, 2012) pp.25-38 (p.37)

To outline briefly, the storyline of *True Blood* is slightly different to that of the average vampire tale. The series is set in the fictional town of Bon Temps, in Louisiana, USA. The central character is a waitress, Sookie Stackhouse, who embarks on a life entangled romantically and dramatically with vampires. In the world of *True Blood,* vampires have 'come out of the coffin' as they put it – owing to the Japanese creation of a synthetic blood substitute, allowing them to co-exist with humans without the need to kill or feed from them. Interestingly, whilst the vampires try to abstain from feeding on humans, the humans use vampire blood as a drug known as 'V'. This co-existence causes friction between the humans and vampires, and the series highlights the fight for rights that the vampires undertake, and the persecution they suffer on account of being different. Owing to this, the series has been touted as a metaphor for gay or race rights, particularly since it also features a high proportion of LGBT and black characters. The persecution shown in the series is often based on religious reasoning, as evidenced from several frames of the title sequence, including an illuminated Church billboard that reads 'God hates fangs', a perversion of a well-known slogan indicating homophobic attitudes.[210] Historically, the vampire has featured as a menacing figure that has been able to overpower humans primarily by way of their true identity being hidden. In this case, it is the vampires who are at the mercy of the humans. These attitudes are explored in detail across the series, particularly in season two, and serve as the analytical focus of this chapter. Season one introduces Sookie, the telepathic waitress at Merlotte's Bar and Grill. It is here that she encounters Bill Compton, a vampire who is historically linked to the town, and is related to some of its current inhabitants. Their relationship, and its consequences, is at first a primary focus for the series, before a grisly spate of murders disrupts the town. Women who sleep with vampires (known in the series as 'fang bangers') are being killed, and Sookie's brother Jason Stackhouse is the primary suspect. Sookie uses her telepathic powers to find out more information and discovers that the culprit is a psychopathic human named Renee who hates vampires and those that associate with them. The season contrasts the romantic idea of a relationship with a vampire with the consequences of it. This sets the scene for season two, which focuses on the organisational hatred of vampires with a religious rationale. It follows the group the Fellowship of the Sun, which is a fundamentalist Christian group whose

[210] Specifically, it references the Westboro Baptist Church who picket events and funerals with signs proclaiming 'God Hates Fags' and even their website bears this phrase as its URL.

central focus is the hatred and eradication of vampires. In this series, the vampire, and its rights, have become a political issue, and the way the figure is treated exposes many commonly held beliefs and responses to other outsider groups. Thus, it is a focus for this chapter, both raising and answering some central research questions of the thesis. In particular, this chapter begins to answer questions about how 9/11 has been portrayed televisually through the figure of the vampire. It also seeks to understand whether the metaphorical approach (positing the vampire as Muslim, as will be shown later) was necessary in order to broach some of these subjects given the politically sensitive nature of them. Although there were discussions of and allusions to 9/11 in series such as *24*[211] and *The West Wing*, these narratives firmly positioned the Muslim as enemy and did not explore the political or moral complexities highlighted by the event. The 'other' onscreen, especially in relation to the events of 9/11, was rarely given a voice. The difficulties in offering the 'other' side of the story or presenting a more detailed representation of figures linked to the national tragedy of 9/11 will be discussed throughout the chapter – primarily in relation to the patriotic response, religious identifications, and conceptions of terrorism. Ultimately, the response to the series and its characters will attempt to show the success of representing a marginalized minority in metaphorical terms.

Firstly, it would be wise to explore the creation of the series (and provide a more fleshed out storyline to set the scene) in order to understand the attitudes behind it, and how these have modified the use of the vampire. The original story behind *True Blood* comes from Charlaine Harris' *Southern Vampire Mysteries,* a long running literary series that began with *Dead Until Dark.* This was published in 2001, with a further thirteen books in the series, the last of which was released in May 2013. Harris originally signed a contract for ten books, but following the success of the television series and the books, this was extended in 2007 to thirteen books in total. The fandom of the book series, like *True Blood,* was, and remains, incredibly strong.[212] Commercially, the books have done well, selling over thirty million copies by 2012

[211] This did come after some time – the pilot episode of *24* was scheduled shortly after 9/11, and scenes that mirrored the events were edited out of it.
[212] This was evidenced by the response to the final book being published, which had Sookie end up (romantically) with what some believed to be the 'wrong' choice. Harris received hate mail and threats to the extent that she cancelled her tour for the book.

(more recent figures are not available).[213][214] A rebrand of the books followed *True Blood* being aired, allowing for a repackaging and the targeting of a different market (that is, viewers of the series) which undoubtedly aided the sales figures. References to the books may be made within the chapter, as it serves as a useful benchmark for any changes made to the storyline or script, and allows us to understand what issues the writers of *True Blood* felt needed to be explored. Interestingly, the books and the adaptation that is *True Blood* offers two different readings of the same concept which appeal to different audience demographics. The romantic nature of the books targets a distinctly female audience,[215] whereas the TV series incorporates violence, blasphemy, profanity and high levels of sexual content, which will appeal to a broader spectrum in terms of gender and age.[216] There are several key differences between the series and the books; the books have the same premise overall, that is, that vampires are out of the coffin and fighting to be accepted. Sookie's love life is the central plot concern in the books whilst the televisual adaptation provides all characters with airtime for their storylines to develop, alongside her romantic drama. The TV series follows the storyline of the books quite closely until the end of series one, but after that, it departs dramatically, with characters being killed off, kept in or emphasized according to the needs of the script. The more violent aspects of the vampires in the books (such as Bill raping Sookie or Godric's paedophilic past) are omitted in the series in order to maintain the sympathetic vampire angle that *True Blood* has adopted. What is particularly relevant to this chapter is looking at the differences in portrayal of the Fellowship of the Sun. On screen, they are part of season two's 'big bad' (a phrase derived from *Buffy* denoting the monster usually defeated in the season finale), which is arguably organised religion. However, in the books, they are an ongoing presence, and it is individual characters that pose a threat rather than an organization or mindset. Ultimately, the difference between the characterization of the vampires in the books and onscreen is this: vampires are coded in a number of ways

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[213] Alexandra Alter, 'How to kill a vampire (series)', *The Wall Street Journal,* (2013) <http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424127887324482504578453062428371352 > [accessed December 2013] In October 2008, Harris had 7 out of 8 of her *Southern Vampire Mysteries* simultaneously in the *Times* Bestseller List: Chris Yandek, 'Charlaine Harris: The New York Times Bestselling Author Talks About Deadlocked, the Latest Book in her Sookie Stackhouse series', *CY Interview,* (2012) <http://www.cyinterview.com/2012/05/charlaine-harris-the-new-york-times-bestselling-author-talks-about-deadlocked-the-latest-book-in-her-sookie-stackhouse-series-gives-us-insight-into-the-popularity-of-vampire-fiction-more/> [accessed December 2013]

[215] With women making up 84% of the romance market, according to the RWA: 'Romance Reader Statistics', *Romance Writers of America,* (2014) <http://www.rwa.org/p/cm/ld/fid=582 > [accessed September 2014]

[216] Wired.com noted that for the 4.6 million weekly average, 52% were female: Angela Watercutter, 'Yes, women really do like *Game of Thrones* (we have proof), *Wired*, (2013) <http://www.wired.com/2013/06/women-game-of-thrones > [accessed September 2014]

and certain aspects are exaggerated for the purposes of different storylines, with different characters representing different aspects of the vampire. Generally, in *True Blood,* the vampire is portrayed as a desirable, sympathetic minority struggling against persecution. In the books, the violent side of the vampires is highlighted more often and Sookie ultimately shuns them altogether.

One other major difference between the books and the series is that the books are narrated by Sookie, and therefore, are limited in terms of storyline, whereas the series weave together several storylines that omit her. In the books, Sookie describes herself as a Christian, and this attitude is carried over to the HBO series. Her faith is tested by the emergence of vampires, and her encounters with them stretch the limits of her moral boundaries and acceptance. Ultimately though, her religious belief is secondary to her belief in the cause of the vampires, and this gives the series a secular edge. This has been pointed out by a Christian critic of the series, Susanna Clements, who notes that 'While Sookie clearly considers herself a Christian, she consistently separates her faith from her understanding of and interaction with vampires. Thus the resulting portrait of the vampire in the books is a secular one.'[217] To viewers (and readers) without a strong religious affiliation, Sookie could appear to be grounded in her faith, and her acceptance of the vampires and their behaviour can be seen as a tolerant form of Christianity. It must be remembered that vampires are no longer portrayed as the satanic creatures they were originally seen as; the human origins of the figure are made clear, and human similarities strenuously pointed out in many series, including *True Blood.* With a central part of the series of *True Blood* focusing on the Vampire Rights Association (VRA) striving for an equality between humans and vampires, the parallels between minority groups and the vampire become ever more explicit.

The series was written and produced by Alan Ball, and shown on the channel HBO, coming to an end in July 2014 after seven seasons. Ball has a history of producing shows dealing with death; his previous award winning show, *Six Feet Under,* featuring Michael C. Hall as a gay undertaker, revolved around issues of human mortality, a theme continued (albeit to a less explicit extent) in *True Blood.* Known for his seemingly banal subject matters and dry style, Ball wanted *True Blood* to be

[217] Susanna Clements, *The Vampire Defanged,* (Michigan: Brazos Press. 2011) p.83

'as rooted in reality as a show about vampires could be.'[218] This echoes the ethos of Southern Gothic, which examines the morbidity of the mundane and places its (flawed) characters in derelict settings and situations arising from the problems of violence, racism, and alienation. The setting of *True Blood* facilitates the Southern Gothic elements, whilst incorporating elements of European Gothic[219] – the vampire being a well-known trope of the gothic subculture. The importance of Southern Gothic will be discussed in more detail later in the chapter, but the 'normalising' of the supernatural allows the series to encounter storylines that mix social issues with fantasy in a realistic way. Speaking of his decision to create *True Blood,* Ball recalled reading the books and said that 'no such boundaries existed' [220] in the reality of Sookie's world (unlike in *Six Feet Under* where there was only so much he could do with a storyline). This lack of boundaries and interest in 'reality' makes the show perfectly suited for HBO, a channel widely known for broadcasting series that push the boundaries (and are more graphic or explicit in nature), including previous shows such as *Sex and the City, Game of Thrones* and the recent favourite of critics, *Girls*. *True Blood* has also been criticised for being raunchy as the series features very full-on sex scenes (though this is secondary to the bloodshed and death evident in the show, and that is rarely discussed).

HBO is a channel known for its innovative approach to television, and is synonymous with controversy. The channel is a pay-cable one, and this means that it does not have to adhere to the usual FCC regulations that police the content on other networks, which according to Stacey Abbott, means that it 'does not need broad appeal but rather targets niche audiences interested in "quality television."'[221] The freedom from being reliant on advertising means that HBO can produce shows that may be deemed 'offensive' by advertisers or may not pull in the demographics advertisers are looking for. The offensive content of HBO series has been commented on by various critics, with Kim McCabe arguing that 'courting controversy has been institutionalised by HBO'.[222] This embracing of controversy has ensured success for the network, with it being the second largest premium channel in the US, with thirty million subscribers,

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[218] Quoted in Cherry, Brigid, *True Blood: Investigating Vampires and Southern Gothic,* (London: IB Tauris, 2012) p.9
[219] Which is arguably a part of Southern Gothic here given the French ties Louisiana has.
[220] Quoted in Leah Wilson, *A Taste of True Blood*, (Texas: Ben Bella, 2010) p.214
[221] Stacey Abbott & Lorna Jowett, TV *Horror: Investigating the Dark Side of the Small Screen,* (London: IB Tauris, 2011) p.11
[222] Janet McCabe & Kim Akass, Quality TV: Contemporary American Television and Beyond, (London: IB Tauris, 2007) p.63

and a further 114 million worldwide.[223] To David Chase, TV writer for HBO, an important part of the network is 'being able to tell the story in an unconventional way.'[224] This makes it the ideal network for a series like *True Blood,* and allows it to explore such controversial issues such as terrorism, fundamentalism and religion in a post 9/11 America. The fact that it is a pay-cable network also implies that those who choose to subscribe, knowing the reputation of the channel, are seeking something that doesn't gloss over culturally or politically sensitive issues for the sake of advertising. There are many vampire series that have been aired at the same time as *True Blood*, but its success shows that it is the subject matter and the particular portrayal of the figure that has produced such a strong fan base and positive response. The overall responses to the show have been favourable, with the ratings for the second season, with which this chapter is concerned, averaging at 4.28 million viewers per episode, with a weekly average of 11.5 million, including repeats. To add to these positive ratings, the second season premiere (shown in June 2009) was the most watched program on HBO since the series finale of *The Sopranos,* which is a mainstay of critics 'must-watch TV' lists.[225] The majority of reviews from critics were positive, with the site metacritic.com giving the season 74/100.[226] An article in the New York Times queried the show's appeal, with the following review:

> Still, the truth is that "True Blood" isn't going to attract viewers who are indifferent to vampire tales. The show relies too heavily on fascination with that world and a performance as good as Moyer's necessarily feels stylized - because he's playing a vampire.
>
> Furthermore, without a grounding in vampire lore, many viewers won't get a lot of the nuances, including the humor, in "True Blood." So as good

[223] Jonathan Sherman-Presser, 'Why doesn't HBO allow non-cable subscribers to subscribe to HBO Go a la Hulu?', *Forbes,* (2012) <http://www.forbes.com/sites/quora/2012/09/05/why-doesnt-hbo-allow-non-cable-subscribers-to-subscribe-to-hbo-go-a-la-hulu/ > [accessed January 2013]

[224] Quality TV, p64

[225] With the Writer's Guild of America labelling it the best written of all time: Michael Ausiello, 'Writers Guild names 101 best-written shows ever', *TV Line,* (2013) <http://tvline.com/2013/06/03/100-best-written-tv-shows-ever-the-sopranos/ > [accessed September 2014]

[226] 'True Blood: Season 2', *Metacritic,* (2008)< http://www.metacritic.com/tv/true-blood/season-2 > [accessed January 2013] Metacritic takes critical reviews and uses them to build a score out of 100, using a weighted average. More details can be found at http://www.metacritic.com/about-metascores but as an example, the TV series *Six Feet Under*, which was another Alan Ball/HBO collaboration, also received 74/100 and was nominated for a number of awards, including winning a Golden Globe for Best Drama Series in 2001.

> as Paquin and company play it, this is another quality pay-cable show that does have a secret handshake. Or bite.[227]

Despite this review, the ratings indicate that *True Blood* isn't quite as niche as this critic wants to believe, and other reviews describe it as 'telling terrific Southern gothic tales with a potent mixture of freaky scariness and great country music.'[228] It has a large fan base, with replica clubs based on those from the show being set up around the world and multiple conventions being held.[229] The way academic culture has also embraced the series is evident in its status as a staple of TV conferences, cultural references and books published on the show. The fan response and the wider textual influence *True Blood* has will be discussed later in the chapter, where the meanings and inferences of its popularity and message will be considered.

What should be noted is that many reviews of the series, regardless of season, have described it as being an allegory for gay rights. As David Bianculli notes, 'It's big on allegory, and the tension about accepting vampires into society is an obvious play on civil rights in general, and gay rights in particular.'[230] Charlaine Harris took this approach when writing the original books: 'When I began framing how I was going to represent the vampires, it suddenly occurred to me that it would be interesting if they were a minority that was trying to get equal rights. It just seemed to fit with what was happening in the world right then.'[231] However Alan Ball disagrees, saying 'to look at these vampires on the show as metaphors for gays and lesbians is so simple and so easy, that it's kind of lazy.'[232] Though some reviews pigeonholed *True Blood* as issuing commentary on gay rights, the implications of the series go beyond that issue; it just so happens that fundamentalist Christians are often associated with homophobia (the much referenced 'God hates fags' being one message they espouse). Yet it's not just homophobia when it comes to *True Blood.* The fundamentalists in the series see a war happening, and it isn't the sexuality of the vampires they despise, it's their absence of Christian belief, or lack of perceived American traits. The vampire is alien,

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[227] David Hinckley, 'Vampire fans rejoice: 'True Blood' back in circulation', *NY Daily News,* (2009) <http://articles.nydailynews.com/2009-06-12/entertainment/17926258_1_sookie-stackhouse-vampire-true-blood > [accessed January 2013]
[228] Ken Tucker, 'True Blood: B+', *Entertainment Weekly,* (2009) <http://www.ew.com/ew/article/0,,20284276,00.html > [accessed January 2013]
[229] 'Fangtasia' clubs have been set up in London and Australia.
[230] David Bianculli, '"True Blood,' tasty new TV from Alan Ball and HBO', *NPR,* (2008) <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=94320825 > [accessed January 2013]
[231] Maxine Shen, 'Flesh and 'Blood'', *New York Post,* (2009) <http://nypost.com/2009/06/23/flesh-blood/ > [accessed January 2013]
[232] Ibid

and threatening to the status quo; fighting back with religion and using belief as a barrier between vampires and humans is one way of enforcing a division. For many characters in *True Blood*, particularly the Fellowship of the Sun, the influx of vampires coming 'out' mirrors the invasion fear present in *Dracula*. This chapter focuses on a number of aspects evident in the second series of *True Blood* – patriotism, religion, terrorism and the widening textual narrative. As the chapter moves through each of these, it will illuminate how the show has dealt with these issues, and why it was so crucial to do so at this moment in US cultural history.

Post 9/11 Patriotism

Interestingly, it is not the vampires in this series but the reactions to them that most clearly display attitudes towards the outsider and the prominence of patriotism. The emergence of vampires can be seen as analogous to the events of 9/11. Both revealed a darker side to American society. In the case of 9/11, these attackers were living amongst those they sought to destroy, revealing themselves in a violent attack. In the world of *True Blood,* the vampires announced their existence in an event known as the 'revelation'. Due to their ability to subsist on a substitute rather than human blood, it allows them to come out without being threatening. Yet many humans still feel threatened because of stereotypes associated with the figure – similar to some reactions to Muslims (and even mistakenly, Sikhs) once Al-Qaeda claimed responsibility for the attacks. For the vampires, the revelation was peaceful and promised to be the beginning of an untroubled existence, the opposite to the violent reality of 9/11. Regardless of intentions, the reactions following both events brought the definitions of 'us' and 'them' into sharper focus and highlighted a vulnerability. Season two of the series shifts from looking at the small-town attitudes towards the minority group of vampires to examining a religious standpoint towards it. We are introduced to the religious group titled 'The Fellowship of the Sun' (hereafter referred to as FOS) that leads the charge against the vampires, recruiting good clean American boys in their war against a perceived evil. The church is headed by the Reverend Steve Newlin who courts the public via TV debates with the leaders of the American

Vampire League,[233] where he is used to provide a staunch anti-vampire standpoint. His church, the Light of Day Institute, recruits young men and women and takes them on boot-camp style events, immersing them in their ideology and beliefs. Within this season, we are also shown another facet of belief in the form of Maryann, a mythical 'maenad'[234] who takes control of the town of Bon Temps by using her magic to establish a cult.

Throughout season two, the FOS are increasingly revealed to be an extreme opponent of vampires, even planning horrific sacrificial rituals where vampires are burnt on the cross as they 'meet the sun' in a perverse reversal of the crucifixion. For in the world of *True Blood,* vampires are an affront to the American identity, and God is the poster-boy for patriotism. As Salman Rushdie points out: 'God is America's answer to its crisis of identity.'[235] This is evident both in *True Blood* and the public and media response to 9/11. The link between patriotism and religion was examined by Deborah Schildkraut, who found that 'Christianity has played a central role in defining American identity.'[236] Vampires and terrorists reject Christianity, and are thus deemed 'un-American'. Patriotism, particularly as it is represented in *True Blood,* appears to be inseparable from religion – combining a belief some hold about Christianity being an essential composite of the American identity.[237] Patriotism also offers its own sense of religion, specifically civil religion, which will be discussed in greater detail later. Both terrorists who have integrated in American society and vampires, who have done much the same following their European pasts, threaten an arguably right-wing conception of American identity[238]– they reveal deeper, darker links to the past, a common heritage that questions the differences between them and us. The FOS deny these links, shunning the vampires, shouting that 'they live forever, but we were here first.' (Episode 2, 'Keep This Party Going') This, for one, exposes their ignorance, and furthermore, highlights an aspect of patriotism that may seem

[233] A group headed by vampires advocating equal rights and treatment.
[234] This essentially is a Goddess who waits for her God, Bacchus to appear. She feeds off chaos and vice, and as such, instigates episodes of lascivious behaviour, drinking, fighting, and in some cases, murder.
[235] Salman Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands,* (London: Penguin, 1992) p.391
[236] Schildkraut, p.601
[237] As discussed in Barb Amandine, '*An atheistic American is a contradiction in terms*': Religion, Civic Belonging and Collective Identity in the United States', in *European journal of American studies* [Online], 6:1 (2011) < http://ejas.revues.org/8865 > [accessed February 2015]
[238] This is despite the creation and make-up of the US, which is culturally diverse. There is still a definite divide and sense of difference – recent riots linked to race in Ferguson show the pervasive racial tensions. This racial divide is clearer in the Republican Party, where 9 out of 10 voters for the Republican candidate Mitt Romney in 2012 were white. Source: Chris Cillizza, 'Republicans have a major demographic problem. And it's only going to get worse', *The Washington Post,* (2014) <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/the-fix/wp/2014/04/22/the-republican-demographic-problem-is-just-going-to-keep-getting-worse > [accessed January 2015]

unpalatable to some: territorialism. After all, patriotism can be defined as a pride in, or a devotion to, territory and the fierce protection of that area and its boundaries. Understandably, a threat to the perceived 'American way of life' is also a direct threat to what these boundaries allude to. The illumination of the vampire and terrorist presence is akin to an invasion, except in both cases, they have been there all along. What has changed is their position in society, which alters dynamics and hierarchies. The figure of the vampire has been claimed as an American myth, as discussed in chapter 1. Zanger concurs with this, asserting that the new vampire is 'resolutely American' [239] – playing American characters and becoming part of the community (as priests, bartenders, doctors) – yet their history as the 'other' and their separation from humanity still positions them as an outsider. As Terence McSweeney states 'Once again the boundaries between 'us and them' continue to be blurred; we see ourselves in the enemy.'[240] By fitting them into the structure of the community, they are assimilated and incorporated into an American societal structure. This explains in part why the vampires in *True Blood* are simultaneously used as outsiders, and the victims of terrorism (at the hands of the FOS, explored later), thereby enabling Americans to sympathise with their experience despite their alien status – their position in society speaks to different conceptions of American identity. These vampires disrupt the notion of identity for those who see American as equalling WASP, yet their inclusion in the societal structure as a minority gives something to sharpen perceived definitions of what an American is. It also speaks to another conception of American identity that is more of a composite – for example, Irish Americans, Polish Americans, Mexican Americans and African Americans. These dualities express the need to more accurately represent an identity, and in doing so, position themselves within a subset of 'American'. The American vampire, by being assimilated, has become another subset. Yet, for the vampires on *True Blood,* American identity is a struggle to obtain in certain parts of the USA, and they are denounced as the enemy by certain groups.

Despite this, who exactly the enemy is in *True Blood* isn't clear – there are so many subplots and differences in characterisation that it is too simple to say vampire equals

[239] Jules Zanger, p.19
[240] Terence McSweeney, '*The Land of the dead* and the home of the brave: Romero's vision of a post-9/11 America' in *Reframing 9/11:Film, Popular Culture and the War on Terror* ed. by Jeff Birkenstein, Anna Froula & Karen Randell (New York: Continuum, 2010) pp.107-116 (p115)

good and human equals bad or vice versa. This complex investigation into the identity of good and evil highlights that the over-simplification so frequently evident in other TV shows and films cannot be used when portraying attitudes to minorities or indeed, the structures of a culture constructed of differences, such as the US. Instead, *True Blood* allows for a broader view of a variety of perspectives and mind-sets evident in modern-day America. Some of this will undoubtedly be due to the form that *True Blood* takes - a television series. The multiple plots and threads, and indeed, perspectives, allow for dramatic conflict and resolution and provide the viewer with multiple characters to identify with. One enemy, however, is made clear – the FOS. In Season 2, their intolerance and use of fundamentalist religion is shown as dangerous and outdated mainly through the attitudes of the other characters who oppose them. The portrayal of the vampires is different also – they are not shown as compassionless, or simply equated visually with evil (for example, constantly filmed in shadows, particular angles, or juxtaposed with evil symbols and objects). Instead this season in particular shows them as the victims, the voice of reason and saviours – specifically in the case of Godric, who I will discuss in further detail later. The representation of extremes of religion and belief is compounded by the storyline involving Maryann. Her control increases throughout the series, until Jason and Sookie return just as she's about to perform a sacrificial ritual. Jason, at this point, having failed to be a 'good soldier for Christ' in the FOS camp, tries to change his powerless state and fight in the 'war he'd been training for.' The residents of Bon Temps are under the influence of Maryann's sorcery and commit acts even the vampires would consider inhumane, giving Jason an enemy to fight against. The status quo of his hometown has been disrupted, shown visually by derelict looking streets and most notably by graffiti he witnesses on returning to the town bearing the words 'FUCK AUTHORITY', leaving him wondering if the town has been attacked by terrorists. This is an interesting observation given that historically, terrorists have frequently fought for particular forms of authority. Jason's perspective reveals the links he makes between terrorism and a loss of structure, which to him is a disruption of stability.

The response to the feared threat is immediate and physical, with Jason wanting to act, regardless of collateral damage: 'the time for thinking is over. Time for action is

now.'[241] Jason's need for action, to feel *useful,* reflects the attitudes in a post-9/11 society, where the US was vulnerable, but there was little that could be done physically by the average citizen. These attitudes can be seen in the number of hate crimes perpetrated against Muslims in 2001 after the attacks, which increased by 1600%.[242] The attacks positioned the US as victim by highlighting vulnerability, conflicting with established identities based on power and strength. The logical response to a challenging or disruption of identity would be to address the imbalance: 'what is important is not that a person consciously finds an appropriate response to a given situation, but that any response allows a person to 'keep a particular narrative (of identity) going.'[243] For Jason, who as we will see is lacking in cognitive ability, action is the only option available in order for him to feel useful and to maintain his identity. The fact that he is desperate to act in the crisis involving Maryann rather than the original reason he had for 'preparing for war' – the vampires – is merely displacement. In reality, it stems from a storyline in the first season, where he witnessed his then-girlfriend stake a vampire he had become friends with. Emasculated by her action, the phallic penetration of the stake and his passive behaviour, he sought to prove his masculinity, a quest which became invested in patriotic behaviour. Jason's actions are concomitant with the disruption following 9/11 and the beginning of the War on Terror (WOT). 'The WOT is in part an existential struggle marked by the displacement of the fight against the things we reject about our own identity but would like to repress.'[244] It is exemplary of the need for action, response, and a challenge against the identity of victim inflicted by the events. The identity of victim is linked historically with an idea of the feminine, something discussed by Susan Faludi, an argument revisited later. Patriotism, especially as seen here, is a masculine response – privileging displays of strength and impenetrability. Jason's reaction to the vampires – somewhat hyper-patriotic – can be read as a parody on the writers' part of the reaction to 9/11.

Following the events of 9/11, there was an overtly patriotic media response, and any exploration of the attacks that was not an outright condemnation was torn apart by

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[241] *True Blood,* HBO, Episode 11,'Frenzy', first screened August 30 2009. References to subsequent episodes will be from this season and given in parentheses in the text.
[242] Conor Friedersdorf, 'Was there really a post-9/11 backlash against Muslims?', *The Atlantic,* (2012), <http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2012/05/was-there-really-a-post-911-backlash-against-muslims/256725 > [accessed January 2013]
[243] Jules Zanger, p.11
[244] Mathias Nilges, 'The Aesthetics of Destruction', p.28

other critics. The attitude was such that anyone espousing an opinion contrary to a patriotic reaction was vilified, becoming a scapegoat of sorts. This included people such as Susan Sontag, who questioned the motivation for the attacks; this was seen as analogous to condoning them. The extreme nature of the attacks roused extreme responses, and she was declared traitor and 'America hater'[245] for deviating from the patriotic narrative. The same is evident in the attitudes of both the small-minded inhabitants of Bon Temps and the FOS when it comes to associating with vampires. In doing so, these humans are denying the division between human and vampire and thus challenging the boundaries of identity that define human. The human's 'tolerant' attitude towards vampires in *True Blood* is seen as defection and those who choose to associate with vampires are deemed traitors. Gayatri Spivak notes the same effect when it comes to politics (which arguably represents two possibilities/versions of American identity): 'on Left and Right, you lose support when you stop us-and-them-ing.'[246] The division between the AVL and the FOS provides a potent example of vehement for and against attitudes. In the series, it is shown repeatedly through the responses of those who are anti-vampire towards tolerant humans. One of the best examples is the 'support group' at the FOS camp (which Steve Newlin's wife, Sarah, leads) where recruits detail their experiences with vampires and positive interpretations of them are re-described in a negative way (Episode 3, 'Scratches'). For example, Jason tells his story:

> **Jason:** I ain't a vampire victim….My girlfriend, she staked a vampire right in front of me. His name was Eddie, and he was… gay. [looks around nervously at the word gay] But he was a real nice person.
> **Sarah:** He wasn't a person, Jason.

This dehumanising of the enemy is common in many 'us' and 'them' situations where one side seeks to distance themselves and make the prospect of war easier to swallow. This is particularly pertinent to the South location of the series, which has historic ties to using religion to justify prejudice against the other, as Peter Kolchin discusses:

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[245] David Talbot, 'The "traitor" fights back', *Salon,* (2001) <http://www.salon.com/2001/10/16/susans/ > [accessed January 2013]
[246] Gayatri Spivak, 'Terror: A Speech after 9/11' in *boundary 2,* 31:2 (2004) 81-111 (pp.87)

> suggestions that blacks represented a distinct species of human beings violated the Christian sensibilities of most white Southerners, and the ridicule to which some 'scientific' racists subjected the biblical story of creation raised serious questions about their credentials.[247]

This prejudice against the other for religious reasons is strongly present in the values of the FOS. Sarah later goes on to remark to Jason that 'If his kind never existed, the people you love would still be alive.' The FOS see themselves as victims, and attempt to fight back with a brand of patriotism strongly informed by religion. This combination of patriotism and religion makes it necessary for these recruits to 'repent' for their previously positive views of vampires. The nature of the FOS is pro-American, with the violence towards vampires being spun as retaliation, or a necessary defence. Overall, the FOS are attempting to be seen as positive, which is displayed by the various ways they present themselves. Firstly, the colour scheme of the church is white and yellow – colours reminiscent of the sun, along with the scenes of the group playing team games together. The open, glass panelled church is light and welcoming and invites the viewer (and Jason) in. This is soon shown to be a front and the scenes with the FOS gradually focus on different settings, such as the basement where Sookie is being kept after she is discovered to be a spy looking for Godric, the missing vampire. We are given hints of this disparity from the beginning of the series – this difference between public and private, which is the fundamental issue – firstly in the presentation of the difference between Steve Newlin on and off screen. His TV debate with Nan Flanagan, head of the AVL (American Vampire

Figure 4: On screen with Nan Flanagan


Figure 5: Off screen with wife, Sarah

[247] Peter Kolchin, *American Slavery 1619-1877* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1993), p.193

League) shows him putting across his views with a smile on his face and attempting to display a positive public image (fig.4). Once the filming stops, his face falls and he walks off set looking angry (fig.5).

The same is true of Sarah Newlin, Steve's wife. At first we see her as devoted wife (as seen in the screenshot above), adoringly supporting her husband, her clothes carefully co-ordinated to match his. Once we learn of her aggressive opinions in the support group (detailed above), the façade starts to crumble. She is shown betraying her Christian values by committing adultery with Jason, and later, attempting to shoot Jason when she learns he is Sookie's brother.

In episode 8 ('Timebomb', shown in fig.6), Sarah is seen in a completely different light. She is still wearing the signature FOS colours, but surrounded by darkness and holding a gun.

Figure 6: Sarah Newlin in 'Timebomb'

Her smile has gone and instead her perfect makeup is smudged, showing the audience a different side to her. This exemplifies the duality between the public and private, particularly when it comes to patriotism, religion and politics. Patriotism aims to emphasise the positives of the individual's country and focuses on presenting a confident, self-assured exterior. It also means reducing and ignoring the negatives, thus causing a duality. This is displayed in *True Blood* through the attitudes of the FOS who see everything American as good and equated with 'light' and religion. Their personal demons are suppressed, only to emerge in moments of anger as described above. The public image of the FOS is synonymous with the presentation of patriotism, in particular of the post-9/11 variety. Patriotism was a public face to mask the vulnerabilities (both state-wide and individual) that the attack exposed.

This was a key argument of *The Terror Dream,* in which Susan Faludi describes the various outpourings of grief and the myriad ways it was expressed and displaced. She, too, concludes that patriotism and 'traditional values' were part of a standard response to the trauma. In particular, part of these traditional values were the stereotypical gender roles that were being enforced, with 'women figured largely as vulnerable maidens,'[248] and notably the striking placement of female victims in the coverage of the event, despite the majority of the victims being male. This traditional view of men as protector and woman as victim is evident in the resurgence of these vampiric narratives which feature a petite, defenceless female being protected by a strong, older, *male,* vampire. *True Blood* isn't the only example of this, but it does display a clear divide between portrayals of men and women, regardless of sexuality. Sookie is constantly being 'rescued' by the men within the series, whilst her brother Jason goes to the other extreme and espouses a hyper-patriotism that is clearly linked with violence. Faludi discusses the backlash towards feminism following 9/11, with commentators, including female ones, using the event as a reason to halt the progress of feminism, such as Ann Coulter: 'if you didn't already realise how absurd it is to defang men, a surprise attack on US soil is a good reminder.'[249] The expression 'defanging' seems to be used here to imply a lack of power, particularly traditional male power (penetrative). Zanger's discussion of 'defanging' the vampire noted in chapter 1 rests on the same idea; without the power of fangs, the vampire is

[248] Susan Faludi, *The Terror Dream,* (New York: Picador, 2007) p.5
[249] Ann Coulter, quoted in Faludi, *The Terror Dream,* p.26

ineffective. Yet the current vampire trend could be seen as an expression of this, despite Zanger's complaint.[250] *True Blood* most definitely has fangs, and features visceral vampiric scenes, and a focus on action rather than the 'brooding' evident in other shows where there is an attempt to deny their nature.[251] The active and passive again reflects the traditional roles assigned to masculinity and femininity, but more importantly, victim and predator. To remain passive is to be a victim, and overt and vocal patriotism is the only option the ordinary men and women of America had to divest themselves of the identity of victim.

These stereotypical gender roles are explicitly evident in the narrative of *True Blood,* particularly when dealing with the FOS. Sookie prepares to infiltrate the FOS to rescue a vampire, Godric, who they have captive, and she is paired up with a man, Hugo, as 'churches have a way of not trusting a woman who is absent a man.'(Episode 6, 'Hard-Hearted Hannah') Organised religions have a long history with viewing women as submissive, or lesser.[252] Or in the case of some, as necessarily imbued with evil. As Jason and Luke discuss: 'The first evil was Eve. That's why they call it Eve-il.' (Episode 3) Using religion to enforce these gender stereotypes provides a structured and 'traditional' basis for doing so. Yet gender division was merely one aspect of a response which sought to find ways to explain and *act* on the attacks that had rendered the US a victim rather than predator. The strength of the patriotic response was evident in media and reflected in cultural narratives, reinforcing its impact.

In *True Blood,* and in the response to the events of 9/11, religion and patriotism are conflated. The ardour with which the idea of 'America' (and all it stands for) is defended post 9/11 particularly, can be likened to a religious fervour. Indeed, the questioning of the attacks provoked claims of anti-Americanism, and the response was to protect the 'one nation under God' that America is often described as. Religion, as discussed in chapter 1, is an ideal identity marker, and to conflate the American ideal with Christianity set it apart from both Islam and the 9/11 attackers.

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[250] This seems to focus on the idea of the vampire as love-interest and lacking in explicit vampiric scenes, along with the turn towards redemption which changes how the vampire operates.

[251] The Vampire Diaries is a good example of this. But it should be noted that both *Twilight* and *The Vampire Diaries* are aimed at the teen market, whereas *True Blood,* by its rating, and its broadcast channel, is most definitely not.

[252] Arguably shown by women as being created from man in the Bible, and in the restriction of religious roles to primarily men. Issues with the treatment of women in religion have been recently raised by former US President Jimmy Carter in his new book: Jimmy Carter, *A Call to Action: Women, Religion, Violence and Power,* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2015)

The way 9/11 was dealt with, and the quashing of any 'un-patriotic' comments or discussion surrounding the event was a way of creating a 'patriotic public memory' in order to sustain or create a national identity, one defined in part by civil religion (something discussed further in chapter 3). As Letia Frandina notes, 'The creation of a public memory of 9/11 is directly linked to the stabilisation of a national identity.'[253] Part of this stabilisation involved the central placement and usage of religion, as evidenced by the religiously infused speeches Bush delivered. *True Blood,* particularly season two, focuses its narrative on the use of religion as a way of counteracting fears of identity disruption, vulnerability and the threat to the American ideal. Yet, its presentation of patriotism illuminates the holes in the seemingly united front and the multiple challenges to the idea of the 'American identity'. Religious identities that subvert the Judeo-Christian framework, such as Islam, are shown to be one of the biggest of these challenges, particularly post 9/11.

Who's your leader? Cults, Christianity and Fanaticism

Before we look at the portrayals of religion in *True Blood,* it is crucial to understand debates surrounding organised religion, particularly in America, and how religion is being defined in this chapter. In Chapter 1, we looked at religion as an identity marker and the religious nature of the vampire. In this chapter, religion is being examined from multiple angles, but primarily linked to the idea of traditional American identity equalling a fixed religious perspective, here equalling Christianity. Talal Asad argues that 'there cannot be a universal definition of religion…because it is itself the historical product of discursive processes.'[254] I am not attempting a universal definition, but an understanding of the American religious landscape, particularly the definitions and representations of organised religion, and how they incorporate minority religions such as Islam.[255] It should also be made clear that organised religion (such as the FOS) and *faith* are being treated here as separate entities. Like the presentation of the FOS, organised religion represents the public face of its private counterpart, belief. It provides a mechanism for outwardly and overtly expressing the faith of an individual through ritualistic behaviour.

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[253] Letia Frandina, 'A Patriotic Public Memory: The Shaping of a National Identity in 9/11' in *The Journal of Intergroup Relations,* 31, (2004) 21-39, (pp.22)
[254] Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion,* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993) p.29
[255] Minority in the US, not worldwide.

Because of the nature of the topic, there are two forms of religion being focused on in this thesis, including their various expressions. Chapter 1 primarily dealt with Christianity, but here we are also exploring the portrayal of Islam due to its inclusion in the narrative and metaphorical context of *True Blood.* In the series, the 'default' faith is Christianity, as shown by its expression in the central characters. They encounter problems with those who express other forms of religion, such as the fundamentalists of the FOS. Due to the positioning of the vampire in the narrative that centres around a 'war' strongly evocative of the War on Terror, the vampires here can be strongly argued to represent Islam in opposition to the FOS, an allusion made more explicit throughout this chapter's exploration of the language and positioning used in the series. Thus, there is a need to examine portrayals of Muslims and Islam, as it illuminates discussions on the metaphorical allusions to Islam here (and why it is needed). This will be done following an examination of the representation and manifestation of religion in *True Blood,* which sets up the Western religious framework in which conceptions of Islam and terrorism are understood.

A pre-occupation with religion is crucial to the series. The series creator, Alan Ball, in discussing season 5, and its similar pre-occupation with religion, indicated why he felt it was important to explore it:

> We wanted to play with the politics/religion angle, since that seems to be something that never stops. Some of the things being said by some people during the Republican primary were so horrifying to me that I thought, 'What if vampires wanted a theocracy? What would that look like?' Whenever anybody thinks they know what God wants and wants to apply that to government, whether Americans or the Taliban, it's kind of a terrifying thing.[256]

Ball clearly displays a distance from the Republican party, which in part explains the critical portrayals of Republican Christians such as the FOS, and is shown in later

[256] Greg Perreault, ''True Blood' draws new blood in vampire myth', *Huffington Post,* (2012) <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/greg-perreault/true-blood-draws-new-blood-in-vampire-myth_b_1829806.html > [accessed January 2013]

seasons by his explicit referencing of Republican senators.[257] Yet his thoughts also expose the diverse beliefs and attitudes of America – both political and religious – showing that despite the overwhelming religious majority, not everyone's beliefs are the same. The inclusion of the Taliban here also implies the cultural importance it has, and arguably links to the inclusion of terrorism in series two. As noted elsewhere in this chapter, the tie between religion and politics is strong and divisive – again this exploration of 'knowing what God wants' challenges the application of organised religion in society. Ultimately, it critiques the Republican positioning of religious viewpoints within policy. Despite this, the series does not advocate an absence of faith, but a more moderate approach that separates the religious from the political, evidenced by the central positioning of a Christian character.

Religious belief in series two of *True Blood* seems to be primarily identified through behaviours, notably the rituals enacted. This was briefly touched upon in chapter 1 in relation to strengthening conceptions of identity, thus a brief look at them here will highlight which religions are being portrayed. Along with traditional organised religions, it is useful to approach the series with the idea of vampirism as a religion in mind, as argued in chapter 1.[258] Although here vampirism in opposition to the FOS is used to represent Islam, across all series, it is broadly figured in a religious way, primarily through the rituals and behaviours it entails. Ritual is important in religion because as Asad notes, 'a crucial part of every religion, ritual is now regarded as a type of routine behaviour that symbolises or expresses something and, as such, relates differentially to individual consciousness and social organisation.'[259] The most obvious ritual is the vampiric feeding with fangs. Despite the evolution of the vampire figure to subsist without feeding on humans, the universally acknowledged symbol of the vampire is still the pair of fangs. The act of feeding on humans reinforces the identity of the vampire; to refuse to feed, as many of these modern vampires do (known in *True Blood* as 'mainstreamers') is seen as sacrilegious by older and more traditional vampires. The FOS follows some of the well-known rituals of Christianity,

[257] In season 7, on the hunt for Reverend Newlin's estranged wife, Sarah, they attend a Republican fundraiser for Ted Cruz, disguising themselves as 'republicunts'. Ted Cruz spun this mention into implications of Democrats being vampires: Coby Itkowitz, 'Ted Cruz bites back at 'True Blood'', *The Washington Post,* (2014) <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/in-the-loop/wp/2014/07/22/ted-cruz-bites-back-at-true-blood/ > [accessed January 2015]

[258] In later seasons of *True Blood,* voodoo plays a key role, which can arguably be seen as another form of religion or belief.

[259] Asad, Genealogies of Religion, p.57

such as group prayer, church attendance and bible studies. They also concoct their own ritual to kill the vampires, as previously noted. This reference to the crucifixion doesn't appear to faze the FOS, who see it as a way to sacralise the vampires. This ritual re-affirms their belief that vampires are abominations. When it comes to Maenads, we see that Maryann's whole plan is to conduct a ritual where she will be united with the 'God who comes'. This ritual is a key part of her faith, and the whole purpose of the town becomes invested in completing it. It is crucial to note that all of these rituals are public, and ignore the personal rituals that are a performative part of faith. The more a ritual is performed, the more power and symbolism it acquires. The power associated with these rituals also impacts on the identity of those enacting them. The lure of a strong identity has been discussed previously, but the power a religious identity offers is crucial.

The second series of *True Blood* provides more than one example of the power of religion. Firstly, the FOS, as I have already mentioned, rouses and recruits followers to be 'soldiers for Christ' in the war against vampires – inciting them to commit acts of hatred, even going as far as brutal murder. In the same way, Maryann Forester casts her spell (literally) over the town of Bon Temps as part of her master plan to summon 'The God who Comes.' Once under the influence of her magic, her followers indulge in every kind of vice (including orgies) and like the FOS, they commit murder, in a 'sacrifice' to God. Sacrifice plays a key role in this series (and indeed, the modern vampire narrative), with the FOS seeing their actions as a sacrifice, and Godric sacrificing himself in an effort to absolve vampiric behaviour. These storylines run parallel throughout the series, seemingly separate, until they come to a head in the last few episodes and Sookie and her brother Jason are shown to be involved and profoundly affected by both forms of extreme (and cultish) religion. Sookie, who is unquestionably the focus of both the series and the books, views these religious outpourings from her own proclaimed Christian perspective. She is involved from the beginning of the series in a search for Godric, an elder vampire who has gone missing. She is used by the vampires because of her 'talent' for telepathy, enabling her to read the minds of humans and thus possibly discern his whereabouts. This develops further when it emerges that the FOS have kidnapped him. Along the way, the viewer is exposed to their fundamentalist attitudes and these contrast strongly with the moderate attitudes of Sookie and the vampires. Thus, the

fundamentalists are portrayed as villains, and the vampires the victims. Sookie denounces their version of Christianity, questioning the way they define their identity as religious: 'You call yourselves Christians? Jesus would be ashamed of you. (Episode 7)

This repulsion towards the FOS is also evident when Jason first gets accepted into the FOS Leadership Conference. He appears afraid to tell his sister about where he is truly going, so lies instead. This is probably due to the predominant perception of the FOS as 'vampire haters' as he discusses with Hoyt in episode 1:

> **Jason:** Fellowship of the Sun, they came to visit me.
> **Hoyt:** The vampire haters?
> **Jason:** No, turns out they're about a lot more than vampires. What does our back-ass church give us?
> **Hoyt:** Well, they teach me to be a Christian for one, and not hate vampires.

Despite encountering these negative viewpoints, he is still enthused about joining them and gradually takes an increasingly central role in the organisation – the reasons for this are unclear in this season.[260] Jason's role in the series as a whole is also important – he displays how these seemingly insidious attitudes can seduce a person with little or no prior experience and knowledge of religion, such as Jason. His lack of knowledge becomes clear as he discusses biblical matters with Luke, another 'recruit' of the FOS in episode 2:

> **Luke:** You think you walk on water don't you?
> **Jason**: I'm pretty sure that was Moses.

Among other examples, it displays a lack of theological knowledge. His 'conversion' began at the end of the previous season when he was falsely imprisoned. At that point, he was vulnerable, emasculated and lacking purpose. Feeling a failure, the FOS gave him a chance at redemption – of both his spirituality and his masculinity, which is

[260] However, in Season 5, Reverend Newlin returns – as a vampire, and gay, and professing his love for Jason.

particularly interesting given Faludi's discussion of the resurgence of traditional gender roles as a response to 9/11. Interesting also to note is the absence of Jason's involvement with the FOS in the books, suggesting that the series offers a divergent perspective on the situation. Jason's attitudes can be seen as a parody of some responses post 9/11, and his exploration of groups such as the FOS allows for a more detailed critique of groups similar to them. Critics favoured the inclusion of the Jason/FOS storyline, noting that 'he really did seem to actually learn something about life and what is important to him, without losing the cluelessness and honesty that makes him such a fun character.'[261] This storyline gives a way to explore the reasons behind someone making a choice to become involved with a fundamentalist group such as the FOS, along with the power of religion to influence actions and identity, which is especially interesting given the link between fundamentalism and faith in contemporary society. Islamic fundamentalism is the configuration of the two usually shown onscreen. However, in *True Blood,* there is a divergent approach, with Christianity being the link between fundamentalism and faith.

One view of his involvement focuses on the aspect of feeling 'special': there is a 'desire for symbolic, rather than literal, immortality that motivates Jason's newfound religious zealotry, as he wants to feel that God has a purpose for his life, that he is special.'[262] In a wider sense, this could be because the 'human condition gives rise to a need for a sense of some kind of transcendent significance.'[263] This transcendent significance is often 'found' in religion, regardless of the extremity. Perhaps the key reason for the inclusion of specifically *Jason* as the focus of the FOS' efforts is because of his proximity to Sookie. Being her brother, and sharing the same Christian upbringing, the division that occurs between their views highlights the political nature of the religious. This is described by some critics (such as David Campbell and Robert Putnam) as the 'God gap.'[264] In *True Blood* we see the role religion has in informing different attitudes towards vampires – clearly exemplified by Jason and Sookie. As Campbell goes on to note, 'religion…informs and shapes people's deep-

[261] Michelle Zoromski, 'True Blood: Season 2 Review', *IGN,* (2009) <http://uk.ign.com/articles/2009/09/21/true-blood-season-2-review > [accessed January 2013]
[262] Jonathan Bassett, 'Ambivalence About Immortality: Vampires Reveal and Assuage Existential Anxiety' in *Fanpires,* ed. by Kirstine Moffat and Gareth Schott (Washington, DC: New Academia Publishing, 2011) pp.15-30 (p.24)
[263] Bassett, p.23
[264] David Campbell & Robert Putnam, *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us,* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2010) p.492

seated values, their worldviews.'[265] In real terms, the divisions in religion in the US inform and shape attitudes towards key political issues such as gay marriage, abortion and the educational syllabus in schools.[266] Right-wing politics in the US is tied to conservative forms of Christianity and this is clearly represented by Steve Newlin in *True Blood.* His debates with Nan Flanagan of the American Vampire League (AVL), shown in pictures above, show the two (public) sides of the argument when it comes to vampire rights. In terms of Jason and Sookie, we are shown two different *personal* approaches to the issue, in which religion is the divisive factor. In this case, it becomes clear that, indeed, the personal is the political. Although organised religion has been instrumental in solidifying Jason's opinion on the matter, their personal views still translate to political standpoints. The same is true of Newlin, who uses religion as a tool for authenticating his hatred of vampires due to his personal views. This allows him a place in the political arena. Yet, the main focus of the FOS is the hatred of vampires, forgoing any other real Christian values – shown by the almost liberal attitude to other aspects of Christianity, for example, Sarah's infidelity with Jason, and in later seasons, Steve's homosexuality. The actions of the FOS also show hypocrisy in the attitudes of these fundamentalists, which reflects real-life scenarios and critiques these standpoints.[267]

Both Sookie and Jason, being the central focus of the series, display the perceived 'correct' attitude towards the extremes of the religious cults. Sookie views both Maryann's Dionysian religious rituals and the FOS with scepticism whilst it takes Jason longer to see them with the same view. He's drawn in out of a desire to feel useful, despite knowing little about Christianity. This notion of being 'useful' reflects the need for the active in both Jason's story and post 9/11 society. Both underwent a traumatic event (in Jason's case, watching a vampire he considered a friend being staked in front of him) and this led to a desire for action to negate the condition of passive victim. However, Jason's lack of knowledge is irrelevant given that both the FOS and the Bacchanal cult of Maryann the maenad are built from half-truths and delusion. The FOS use scripture to spuriously justify their hatred, whereas Maryann is

[265] Campbell & Putnam, p493
[266] It is curious to note that the Republican conservatives condemn Islam, often arguing that it is primitive, yet some of their policies are equally as constrictive for certain groups of society and do not allow for progression. This is discussed explicitly in an article in *The Atlantic* amongst others*:* Peter Beinart, 'The GOP's Islamophobia Problem', *The Atlantic,* (2015) <*http://www.theatlantic.com/national/archive/2015/02/anti-islam/385463/* > [accessed March 2015]
[267] Such as Ted Haggard, an American Evangelical pastor, who preached against gay marriage and homosexuality but in 2006, was revealed to have paid a male escort for 3 years preceding, along with taking crystal meth.

acting on an unfounded belief that God, as she views him, will appear. Religion is used as an excuse here for action, and these attitudes are reliant on false perceptions and personal prejudice. The FOS is driven by vengeance – its leader Steve Newlin's parents were killed by vampires. He repeatedly describes them as 'baby-killers', 'children of Satan' and 'not people', thereby continuously demonising them.[268] This would seem normal perhaps in vampire narratives from decades previous, but in this context – with vampires fighting for equal rights and shown to be able to co-exist with humans peacefully - it is seen as discriminatory and misguided. This says several things: firstly, it shows us how much the vampire has changed since the days of *Dracula*, and the extent of its humanisation. These comments and attitudes are more appropriate for previous incarnations of the figure, which were literally baby killers, and encompassed other aspects described by Steve Newlin. Secondly, the reference to preceding vampire tropes shows both the evolution of the figure and Newlin's unwillingness to move past stereotypes. The vampire is no longer the antagonist, and their humanisation shows a maturation of our attitude to the monstrous other. In particular, *True Blood* figures the vampire as a political and religious minority who is viewed as monstrous by some because of their difference and they struggle for acceptance. The complete and overt rejection and persecution of vampires therefore appears backwards and heavily reliant on the premise of the categorical (vampire) stereotype rather than any real analysis or understanding of their identity.[269] The representation of this viewpoint in the series does highlight the idea that there is not just one religious response in the US to the attacks, nor is there a singular religious identity that demarcates American or terrorist.

The vampires in this series, for the most part, are portrayed as vehemently anti-Christian by the FOS. Interestingly, despite the clear message that the FOS's views are misguided, vampires are still portrayed for the most part as being secular.[270] This is evidenced explicitly when Queen Sophie-Anne is discussing the creation of Maenads and their insistence in waiting for the 'God who comes'. When asked if Gods ever do indeed show up, she responds: 'Don't be silly, they only exist in

[268] Interesting given the idea of Jews as baby killers – often referred to as blood libel. 'Blood Libel', *Jewish Virtual Library,* (2008), < http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/judaica/ejud_0002_0003_0_03147.html > [accessed September 2015]
[269] Arguably much like the Islamophobic viewpoints, which often rest on stereotypes.
[270] In Season 5, however, the vampires are overtaken by a religious cult, promising their fealty to 'Lilith', who is supposedly the original vampire.

human's minds, like money and morality.' (Episode 11) In this way, these vampires distance themselves from the religious dimensions of humanity, and its effects, which some critics have picked up on. When Brigid Cherry discusses what's 'missing' from the new slew of paranormal/vampire stories, her response is this: 'It's guilt. Sin.'[271] And furthermore, Clements notes that: 'While religion is still an issue in these stories, the vampire itself no longer has genuine theological significance'[272] - whether this is due to the way the vampire is depicted or societal attitudes towards 'evil' is arguable.

The vampire as a group identity is figured more like a religion, and the response to the figure posits their behaviours and beliefs as primary in their identification, much like religion. There are sublimated religious undertones in their identity as group, and individual examples of religious themes, such as Godric, the vampire Sookie et al are attempting to rescue, who 'becomes almost a Christ figure.'[273] We learn he has voluntarily sacrificed himself and believes the existence of vampires to be an 'abomination'. His sacrifice, along with his attitude – silently accepting the weight of the sins of those he has created, whilst remaining tolerant and forgiving - strengthens this perception, along with the intention to be sacrificed on a crucifix by his 'enemies'. Throughout the series, there are flashbacks to his earlier existence and his creation of new vampires, to which he tells them, he will be their 'father, brother, son', a triad verbally reminiscent of others – the Holy Trinity in particular.

[271] Cherry, A Taste of True Blood, p.232
[272] Clements, The Vampire Defanged, p.102
[273] Clements, p.101

Figure 7: Godric (Allan Hyde)

The visual presentation of Godric reflects this view of him as Christ-like. In the scene above, the low angle shot and uplighting serves to make him look commanding, as if he is looking down on the audience. It reinforces the idea of him as someone to look up to, and this is shown as the situation with the other vampires in this scene. He orders them to stop fighting, which they do, and be peaceful. His visual presentation throughout this episode focuses on him as something special, and when he later goes to meet the sun, he adopts a Christ-like pose (reminiscent of the crucifixion) as if he is absolving more than just himself of his sins. This is a big contrast between the representation of Godric in the books and onscreen. In the books, he is a paedophile, whereas onscreen he is Christ-like and seeking redemption. A similar change happened when converting *Let the Right One In* from book to screen – the 'carer' of the young vampire was a paedophile who maintained a sexual focus even when brutally injured. This too was cut from the film version, perhaps because of the taboo of paedophilia. Death, murder and blood-sucking are now acceptable storylines to be explored onscreen, but the corruption of childhood innocence is seen as far worse. However, the presentation of Godric as apologetic, protective and kind could be a way of explaining the attitudes of the FOS, in an attempt to balance out the prejudice against the fundamentalists. Although their attitudes are roundly condemned, the fact that one of the vampire kind is condemning his whole race by voluntarily handing himself over for sacrifice implies that there are those who are not fundamentalists

who see a problem with the existence of vampires – and thus fundamentalism isn't the only marker for certain viewpoints and attitudes.

Let us return to the idea of vampire as Muslim. To clarify, it is not the identity of the Muslim actual, but the perceived identity of the group that has been of increased interest since 9/11. Although it may seem contradictory to use the Americanised vampire as a metaphorical Muslim figure, it provides a way to assimilate the figure of the 'other' within a known, familiar trope. In another sense, the Americanisation of the vampire serves to neutralise the metaphorical use slightly; the assimilation being seen as less of a clash of civilisations. This aptly reflects the circumstances of 9/11, with American Muslims being part of the attacks. The positioning of the figure in opposition to the staunchly 'American' FOS as the 'other' side of the 'war' they're fighting, along with the linguistic terms used against them (as discussed in the next section, which demarcates them as terrorist) and the violent acts perpetrated against them (evocative of post-9/11 hate crimes against Muslims) lend weight to this argument. But why would there be a need for vampires to represent Muslims? Amir Hussain concludes that 'Muslims are not recognised in American television as ordinary citizens of this country but instead are portrayed as dangerous immigrants with a religion that is both alien and evil.'[274] Thus, it provides an alternative to the often-seen onscreen. Often, the religion of Islam is stereotyped, and 'it is important to consider what stereotypes are permissible and why'[275] – thus, making it crucial to examine portrayals of religious characters. Perhaps it is due to a lack of understanding of faith – in another Pew Forum poll, 70% described Islam as 'very different'[276] and this is reflected in the lack of complexity in Muslim characters. It also must be understood that looking at Islam through a primarily Christian-Judeo[277] filter can be problematic, as noted by Talal Asad in his book *Genealogies of Religion.* He argues that 'while religion is integral to modern Western history, there are dangers in employing it as a normalizing concept when translating Islamic traditions.'[278] Although Asad is discussing the history and origins of religion, it is applicable here for our current understanding and investigation into religion. The drive to understand

[274] Amir Hussain, 'The Fire Next Time' in *Small Screen Big Picture,* ed. by Diane Winston (Texas: Baylor University, 2009) pp.153-171 (p.154)
[275] Hussain, p.157
[276] 'How Americans Feel about Religious Groups', *Pew Research Centre,* (2014) <http://www.pewforum.org/2014/07/16/how-americans-feel-about-religious-groups/ > [accessed September 2014]
[277] As is done in *True Blood* and series that explicitly portray Islam such as *Homeland, The West Wing* and *24.*
[278] Asad, Genealogies, p.1

and represent Islam that followed 9/11 is done through a Western lens, and as such is moderated by Western conceptions of religion. This comes across in the way Islam is treated onscreen; for many shows, such as *24, The West Wing* and even the recent *Homeland,* Islam is primarily pigeonholed as, and remains, shorthand for 'enemy'.[279] Although *True Blood* explores the idea of the Muslim as victim rather than attacker, we have to be careful not to view it as just another minority identifier. As has been noted – *True Blood* has been read as a multitude of allegories for minority rights, and arguing for a religious minority (in this case, Islam) as one of them would be to 'normalise' it by defining it as such. Whilst vampires represent Muslims in *True Blood*, they are not defined as a singular identity and instead are shown to be diverse in their behaviours, beliefs and characteristics. Conceptions of other forms of religion, here Islam, and alterity are being explored in *True Blood* in comparison to American concepts of religion, which whilst according to Asad, would be problematic, also encompasses a greater deal of variety and complexity than is often portrayed onscreen.[280]

By contrast, there are various forms of Christianity represented. Granted, these are not all positive, but beliefs that go against the majority are treated in such as a way to make sure they are not condoned, just discussed.[281] For religious organisations 'supply…the public narratives of religion', and 'the individual sees themselves as the authority over what is to be considered religious or spiritual.'[282] Along with this, in many shows, 'audiences may clearly see a larger message: that faith is good, but when perverted by fanaticism or hypocrisy, it should be condemned.'[283] This is unquestionably the case with *True Blood.* The show is predominantly narrated from a Christian standpoint, and the portrayal of the fundamentalists strives to show them as bigoted and in many cases, stupid. It is not just Jason's lack of theological knowledge that is played for laughs, but the leader, Steve Newlin's outbursts too:

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[279] With Muslim characters being used primarily to represent terrorists rather than playing any other role. This was discussed in the following article: Laila Al-Arian, 'TV's most Islamophobic Show', *Salon*, (2012) <http://www.salon.com/2012/12/15/tvs_most_islamophobic_show/ > [accessed January 2013]

[280] That is, a broader spectrum of belief.

[281] One example is the treatment of atheists onscreen, which has been discussed by Bird. She notes that they are continually shown to have a flawed nature, which viewers can pinpoint to be the reasoning behind an absence of belief/faith.

[282] Richard J. Bernstein, *The Abuse of Evil,* (New Jersey: Wiley, 2006) p.12

[283] S. Elizabeth Bird, 'True Believers and Atheists Need Not Apply: Faith and Mainstream Television Drama' in *Small Screen, Big Picture,* ed. by Diane Winston, (Texas: Baylor University Press, 2009) pp.17-41 (p.37)

> **Steve:** Just as Jesus was betrayed for thirty pieces of silver, just a few ounces of silver will betray a child of Satan to the world.
> **Sookie:** That doesn't make any sense, how can you people listen to him?

Again, Sookie, the 'balancing' religious viewpoint, shoots down the inconsistencies in fundamentalist logic, and this stupidity casts doubt on their other beliefs. Though Erikson argues that 'instead of presenting religious themes through the church or Christian belief, *True Blood* offers acts of sacramentalism, of ritual and of transcendence through sex, violence, desire and drugs.'[284] This shows the varying ways in which religion can be presented, and the way in which the impulse can be sublimated even if it is not explicitly tied to a particular faith. Erikson's view also omits the perspective of the inhabitants of Bon Temps, who attend church and profess a belief in God, as well as the main character, Sookie, who follows these views too. It is also questionable whether Maryann's beliefs can be called a 'religion', despite her frequent allusions to 'God', for religion implies organisation. The difference between faith and organised religion was discussed in more detail above, but it should be noted that Maryann's form of faith reflects the move away from organised religion. The issues with organised religion and attitudes towards it are made clear predominantly through the portrayal of the FOS.[285] This isn't just the views of a critical team of television writers, but reflects a growing trend in US society: 'Gallup Polls showed a nationwide growth in the view that organised religion should have less influence from 22 percent in 2001 to 34 percent in 2008.'[286] This looks at the *influence* of organised religion, not faith, which is still sought after and valued. As Putnam and Campbell noted, 'Americans overwhelmingly…identify with a religion.'[287] The fact that this religious belief is less frequently associated with organised religion says more about the methods of societal control. It does not necessarily indicate a decline in religious belief. The popularity of narratives such as *True Blood,* which have a sublimated religious context, implies a need to express attitudes often associated with religion.

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[284] Gregory Erickson, 'Drink in remembrance of me: Blood, bodies and divine absence in True Blood', in *True Blood: Investigating Vampires and the Southern Gothic,* ed. by Brigid Cherry (New York: IB Tauris, 2012) pp.74-88 (p.75)
[285] It was also shown by the fight against the strict orthodox framework in *Being Human,* which was discussed in Chapter 1.
[286] Campbell & Putnam, *American Grace* p.121
[287] Campbell & Putnam, p.8

The so-called '3 B's of religion – belonging, believing, behaving'[288] are values reflected onscreen. On the other hand, whilst Maryann's system of belief may in part display these characteristics, its focus is so small that it becomes idiosyncratic to Bon Temps. The town in effect serves as a microcosm to examine for the effects of extreme belief systems.

Despite this variety of responses to religion and belief, Bruce and Karen Bethke have described the series as 'secular', saying 'In the world of *True Blood* there may be supernatural creatures galore, but there is a notable absence of actual divinity.'[289]Along with this, an explicitly Christian perspective on it notes that 'the television series questions the fundamental nature of religion and belief…and so the show is more purely secular than the book series.'[290] This implies that religion and belief is a fixed concept to be questioned, yet as Gregory Erickson (just one of the many critics to express this view) notes, 'the different presentations and definitions of 'religion' as they appear in *True Blood* open up into a larger discussion of what religion is, where it comes from and how it changes.'[291] That is just the issue in question – religion and attitudes towards it change constantly, and have clearly done so post 9/11.

The inclusion of storylines dominated by religious elements indicate a wider cultural preoccupation with religion. That they are positioned in response to 9/11 highlights the resurgence of interest in religion following the events, which as previously stated includes an interest in Islam. In the world of *True Blood*, there are no explicitly Muslim characters but the positioning of the vampires indicates that they are representative of post 9/11 Muslims, and often viewed by certain groups like the FOS as a 'terrorist', a stereotype which will now be explored.

He that is without sin: The Terrorism Reversal

Throughout this thesis so far, there have been two key connections established. The first, and perhaps the most important, is the Americanisation of the vampire. This

[288] Ibid
[289] Bruce & Karen Bethke, 'From castle Dracula to Merlotte's bar and grill', in *A Taste of True Blood,* ed. by Leah Wilson, (Texas: Ben Bella, 2010) pp.223-240 (p.232)
[290] Clements, The Vampire Defanged, p.97
[291] Erickson, in True Blood: Investigating the Southern Gothic, p.76

develops and subverts its European and religiously-fueled folkloric origins. The Americanisation allows the vampire to better embody a broader spectrum of national anxieties by offering a figure to simultaneously identify with and act as a representative of various subsets of American society. Conversely, it can be argued that the vampire has also been used in recent narratives, particularly *True Blood*, to explore the identity of the Muslim. In setting the stigmatised vampires in a Southern-American setting, *True Blood* contrasts the assimilated Americans (the vampires) with the epitome of conservative Christian America. What this serves to do is paint the minority as less radical than their fellow citizens, and give viewers a chance to critically assess the viewpoint of the outsider. Importantly though, when discussing the terrorist acts within the series, it is the humans of the FOS who commit a suicide bombing, and thus the fundamentalist attitude of the Christians which is brought to the forefront, offering a reversal of the usual formula onscreen of Muslim equals terrorist.

This fundamentalist attitude is not just a work of fiction – here it is a case of art imitating life, and doing so in a relevant and intriguing way. Fundamentalism, after all, was what was behind the 9/11 attacks; yet it is not the FOS who are treated with prejudice – they treat the vampires as if they are the terrorists, despite their own actions (again recalling the actions and ethos of the Westboro Baptist Church). This is where the tie between the response to 9/11 and *True Blood* becomes most obvious. The FOS are, like some Americans in the aftermath of 9/11, reacting to an event which opened up a vulnerability. In this case it is both personal *and* social – stemming from the death of Reverend Newlin's family and the 'coming out' of the vampires which threatened the perception of American identity. For even though these vampires had indeed fought in the Civil War and protected the USA long before most members of the FOS were born, they do not adhere to society's idea of 'normal' (creatures of the night, a diet of blood, immortality) and they have the eternal life that many religions promise, without any need for worship.[292] As Travis Sutton and Harry Benshoff note 'religion institutionalises strategies that individuals use to obscure the reality of death.'[293] The figure of the vampire subverts this through their defeat of

[292] However, this is arguably at a different cost than worship, mainly the price of immortality and loss of 'human' identity which these vampires are so pre-occupied by.
[293] Travis Sutton & Harry M. Benshoff, '"Forever Family" values: *Twilight* and the modern Mormon vampire' in *Horror after 9/11,* ed. by Aviva Briefel and Sam J. Miller, (Texas: University of Texas Press, 2011) pp.200-218 (p201)

death, and thus are shunned by religious organisations such as the FOS in *True Blood*. In short, they are alien, and force those who are non-vampire to confront their mortality, especially when theoretically, they are all potentially the prey of those who strive to be seen as 'equals' by them.

The nature of the vampire is in some ways transcendent, particularly when viewed with the limitations of humanity in mind. Thus, religion, particularly fundamentalism, is used as a defence against the new possibilities the existence of vampires has opened up. In many ways it can be seen as a reaction to change, or the disruption of traditional value systems, as Geiko Muller-Fahrenholtz argues: 'Fundamentalism is a reaction to the violent underside of modernity,' and people 'reduce this confusion by settling for a few safe and irrefutable beliefs.'[294] Both the emergence of vampires in *True Blood* and the events of 9/11 reminded many of the tumultuous and dangerous side of humanity, and may have upset those whose beliefs or values were undermined. Particularly with 9/11, events that had no interpretation according to Baudrillard, fundamentalist religious attitudes and their growth can be viewed as 'symptoms of the legitimate quest for meaning.'[295] For, as other critics have noted, there is now a 'simultaneous attraction and repulsion of religion after 9/11' which Sutton and Benshoff believe has 'contributed to the continued growth of Christian fundamentalism in the US'[296] – in part, the idea behind this growth is that it was a false or 'wrong' religion that developed fundamentalist attitudes, therefore Christians are justified in 'fighting back' with their own brand.

However, it is also clear from the responses of the central characters Sookie, and eventually Jason, among others, that this fundamentalist response is not the only one relevant to both the existence of vampires and the transgressions members of the vampire 'race' commit. A Christian critic of the series, Susannah Clements, noted that 'Harris makes it clear that the Fellowship is not representative of all Christians or all religious characters. They are portrayed negatively because they are extremists and hypocrites who use religion to pursue their own intolerant agenda.'[297] Yet *True Blood*

[294] Geiko Muller-Fahrenholtz, *America's Battle for God*, (Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 2007) p.122
[295] Muller-Fahrenholtz, *America's Battle for God*, p.121
[296] Sutton & Benshoff, *Horror after 9/11*, p.201
[297] Clements, The Vampire Defanged, p.83

does explore the issue of religiously-based terrorism, showing one strain that diverges from the usual portrayals onscreen.

Representing terrorism in a post-9/11 era is something of a precarious balancing act. Terrorism stems from extremist beliefs; there may be aspects of extremism that originate from a moderate religious source – such as Christianity, Islam or any other belief system. Because of these ties to a shared belief, terrorism may have a negative impact on the identity group (or religious group) as a whole. In the case of Islam, the governmental policies responding to the event and the mission of the FBI to eliminate terrorism created a 'hostile social climate for Muslims and Arabs,'[298] according to Robyn Rodriguez. In her paper exploring the social conditions for Muslims post 9/11, she describes FBI agents forcing their way into an apartment building, 'arresting Muslim immigrant men living there.'[299] She notes that this was problematic as 'although the government admits that the post-9/11 anti-terror sweeps…did not have links to terrorist groups, the detention and deportation of immigrants has persisted.'[300] Along with the state response is the rise in 'bias and hate crimes since 9/11'.[301] This fear of (Islamic) terrorism fuelled a form of 'securitization', prompting attacks and sweeps that were seen as mostly pre-emptive and again, a way to actively respond to the catastrophe. The desire to protect and defend explains in part Islamophobic attitudes post 9/11: the surge of interest in Islam and the call for Islamic scholars was part of an attempt to understand the 'enemy'. But this in itself is missing an essential point – terrorism, our particular current understanding of it, is now 'a perspective, an orientation,'[302] rather than an action borne out of fundamentalist beliefs. This approach to it offers a reductionist view – a singular motivation for the actions that leave the victims blameless and view it as inevitable, rather than a series of actions and reactions. Michael Moore touches upon this in his 2004 film, *Fahrenheit 9/11,* where he explores the relationship between the USA and the Bin Laden family, and military actions that preceded the attacks. Whilst Moore's film may not be entirely accurate, the reaction to it was far more interesting. Branded unpatriotic, Moore was attacked by a wide variety of critics for daring to portray the USA as something other

[298] Robyn Rodriguez, '(Dis)unity and Diversity in Post 9/11 America' in *Sociological Forum,* 3: 2 (2008) 379-389 (pp.382)
[299] Rodriguez, p.383
[300] Ibid.
[301] Ibid.
[302] Jeff Birkenstein & Anna Froula, *Reframing 9/11: Film, Popular Culture and the War on Terror* (London: Continuum, 2010) p.15

than blameless.[303] These included Christopher Hitchens, who denounced it as 'propaganda',[304] along with the critic Shalaigh Murray in the Wall Street Journal calling it 'harshly satirical'.[305]

The representation of terrorist action in *True Blood* is similarly interesting. The parallels between attitudes towards Muslims are evident, yet they shy away from stereotyping the identity of Muslim, helping avoid claims of Islamophobia that have plagued more explicit responses. This is odd in a sense, considering it is the human groups such as the FOS that are perpetrating the acts in this series, yet it is still the vampires who are treated as 'other'. This stems from the separation between *war* and *terrorism*. The two have different meanings and connotations, particularly moral connotations, despite there being an overlap on the behaviours and acts committed within those frameworks. It is the context that legitimatises or condemns certain acts to either of the categories. Talal Asad commented on the notion of the War on Terror, noting that 'many commentators asked why the deployment of organised violence against terrorism was being described as a war.'[306] He argues that within war, people are seen as 'legitimately killable' as it is part of a different framework. So then, terrorism is an 'out of context' act, which is arguably why the fear of it is so powerful.[307] It does not adhere to any rules and hence is difficult to pre-empt or categorise – much like the vampires who emerged and did not easily fit into any category. This is reflected by the way Steve Newlin describes the FOS and their attitudes towards vampires. Having dinner with Jason, he asserts that 'What's going on out there is a war' and that they've 'got to choose sides…[between the] side of dark and the side of light.' (Episode 4, 'Shake and Fingerpop') This call to action leads Jason to parrot the same line to his fellow comrades the next morning when they joke around about vampires. Newlin describes the 'recruits' as a 'spiritual army called Soldiers of the Sun'. This is reinforced by the boot-camp style exercises we are shown

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[303] However, it is interesting to note that some received it positively, welcoming its attempt at debating the facts surrounding the event. In particular, Denis Hamill describes it as a "corrective to the daily drumbeat of right-wing talk radio." Denis Hamill, 'Moore's Message Delivered, Big-Time', *NY Daily News,* (2004) <http://www.nydailynews.com/archives/boroughs/moore-message-delivered-big-time-article-1.607013 >[accessed January 2013]

[304] Christopher Hitchens, 'Unfairenheit 9/11' *Slate,* (2004) <http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/fighting_words/2004/06/unfairenheit_911.single.html > [accessed January 2013]

[305] Shailagh Murray, ''Fahrenheit 9/11' has recruited an unlikely audience: U.S Soldiers', *Wall Street Journal,* (2004) <http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB108958506463960810 > [accessed January 2013]

[306] Talal Asad, *On Suicide Bombing* (Columbia: Columbia University Press, 2007) p.8

[307] And thus, why that fear is harnessed and used to pass stricter security rules, including recently, the NSA, who claimed their phone-tapping was necessary in a post-9/11 world.

in between lines of Newlin's diatribe against vampires. We are not shown any vampires committing terrorist acts, but simply the (Christian) response of the FOS. The existence of the 'soldiers for Christ', as Newlin names them in episode 4, highlights the hypocrisy of negative perceptions of Islamic terrorists attacking in the name of their God, but an acceptance of fighting to reinforce Christian values. It raises questions of acceptability and the response to the War on Terror which saw a high death toll to Iraqis and Afghanis which far exceeded any US toll. This is not to imply that human life is quantifiable in any way, but to question the disproportionate response and coverage of deaths in the US media.

Although Bush made an attempt to distinguish between terrorists and Muslims by saying that 'the terrorists are traitors to their own faith,'[308] it was clear that others did not see it that way and that in particular, 'the media tended to see the post-9/11 world divided into the west and Islam.'[309] This attitude is clearly displayed by the FOS. The vampires, regardless of whether they are 'good' or not, are seen as evil by the FOS and a vast number of Americans within the show, highlighted by the precedence the AVL and FOS debates take onscreen. This is justified by religion to suit the agenda of those who have been wronged by them at some point, and indeed, was founded for this very reason by Reverend Steve Newlin. To justify this persecution and these attitudes, meaning had to be ascribed to the attacks and in the case of *True Blood,* the existence of vampires. Discussing the meaning of the 9/11 attacks, one teacher of Islamic studies noted 'some students clearly saw it as an attack on Christianity.'[310] Steve Newlin and the FOS preach this perspective in *True Blood* in relation to the emergence of vampires*,* ignoring wider causes and facts. But as previously noted, fighting back with a different 'brand' was seen as one way of trying to correct the balance. American identity had been threatened by unpalatable events; figuratively in *True Blood* with the shadowy nocturnal vampires, and literally in the wake of September 11, with the gaping holes where the Twin Towers had once stood.[311]

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[308] George W. Bush, Washington D.C., 20th September 2001, from 'Transcript of President Bush's address', *CNN,* (2001) <http://edition.cnn.com/2001/US/09/20/gen.bush.transcript/ > [accessed January 2013]
[309] Christopher Vecsey, *Following 9/11: Religious coverage in the New York Times*, (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2011) p.273
[310] Matthew J. Morgan, *The Impact of 9/11 on Religion and Philosophy* (New York: Macmillan Palgrave, 2009) p.21
[311] The Twin Towers' meaning and importance rests on their position in the heart of the financial district in New York – they offer a symbol of the fiscal power of the US. In episodes of the television series *Fringe,* different timelines are denoted by the presence or absence of the towers – showing the pervasive significance they hold.

With any attack – physical or on the values and fabric of society – retaliation in some form is always seen as a necessary option, and this was reflected in the way Bush spoke and attempted to mediate the crisis of identity that had been instigated by attacks from the inside. The similarities between the language Bush used and that of Steve Newlin and the 'recruits' of the FOS are undeniable. The most obvious reference being Newlin, aping a speech by Bush, asserts that 'You're either with us, or against us'. (Episode 11) When the situation comes to a head, and there is a potential war, Godric attempts to negotiate with him, to which Newlin retorts 'I will not negotiate with sub-humans.' (Episode 11) This itself is an obvious play on the much used phrase 'We do not negotiate with terrorists', spoken by Bush many a time. The characterization of Steve Newlin, and his desire to be a governor of Texas is also telling – as this was Bush's former position before he became President. This is reflected in the look of the character, and the way he is shot onscreen. His suit includes the FOS pin in exactly the same spot, and he is frequently shot with shadow lighting, giving his face a gleaming edge (which also implies a duality within the character – in this case, we know the public and private versions of Steve Newlin are very different). In an interview with Michael McMillian, the actor who plays Steve Newlin, he described his interpretation of the role as having 'a bit of George Bush in the character.'[312] The links to Bush were further emphasized in another interview where he describes the character of Steve Newlin as 'a living ideology. It's like trying to figure out who Bush was.'[313]

Figure 8: Steve Newlin as visually reminiscent of Bush

The allusions to Bush and the 'war' against vampires make it clear that *True Blood* is dealing with issues that arose post 9/11, and this itself was tricky, demanding the

[312] Michael McMillian, interviewed by Shadaliza, *The Vault,* 23rd July 2009, <http://www.trueblood-online.com/the-vault-exclusive-michael-mcmillian/ > [accessed January 2015]
[313] Michael McMillian, interviewed by Meredith Woerner, *io9,* 16th July 2009, <http://io9.com/5316389/true-bloods-christian-conservative-vampire-hater-speaks-out > [accessed January 2015]

mask of metaphor. Transposing these difficulties and questioning the response and attitude of the government would have been a difficult task and indeed,

> In the highly charged atmosphere right after Sept 11, there were very few venues outside of the classroom in this country where we could have had such a passionate yet civil conversation about religion, politics and violence. [314]

The figure of the vampire is portrayed variously as sympathetic (with characters such as Bill, who is 'mainstreaming' and trying to help his community and those he cares about) and as a more traditional form of evil (such as Eric, who holds a human, Lafayette, prisoner in a dungeon and tortures him in scenes reminiscent of torture-porn films like *Saw*). The bleak lighting and halo effect around Eric in fig. 7 (the 'evil' vampire) echoes the effects used in horror films. The ominous nature is somewhat lightened by Eric's foil highlights in his hair. Given the more diverse and arguably realistic portrayal of an identity group, that is, one that allows for individual difference and free-will, the vampire is approached in a different light.

Figure 9: Eric and his dungeon.

[314] Asma Afsaruddin, 'An Altered Terrain' in *The Impact of 9/11 on Religion and Philosophy,* ed. by Matthew J. Morgan (New York: Macmillan Palgrave, 2009) pp.19-29 (p.22)

Stereotypical divisions of morality applied to stock-horror creatures (the zombie being one such example) are common; the monster is an embodiment of evil or 'enemy' in most cases. The monster also represents the 'other' and with a broader spectrum of identity, it provides opportunities for attitudes towards the 'other' as a whole to be critiqued and re-assessed.

Avoiding stereotypical vampire characterisation or portrayal of the 'other' is crucial as stereotypes are markers of identity and 'serve as information shortcuts.'[315] This is incredibly reductive, and often dangerous, as has been seen from the responses to certain ethnicities post 9/11. As Asad describes:

> For many Muslims living in the United States, September 11 was the beginning of a long period of anxiety, during which they found themselves associated, occasionally explicitly, but more often implicitly, with terrorism.[316]

Forms of stereotyping often occur due to visual markers such as appearance – this is the case with Muslims and the vampires in *True Blood.* The series' portrayal of vampires offers a broader, more dynamic view of a stereotypical figure (as seen above with Eric, for example) whilst examining the attitudes and responses based on the 'perception' of the figure.

Although critics have seen vampires as an allegory for gay rights and race rights, the linguistic arguments used against them in this series points directly to vampires representing the 'them' that threatens 'us' in the WOT. It must be noted that it is the stereotype of the vampire (or Muslim, as is being metaphorically hinted at) that is held up as the threat. Or rather, it is the perception of Muslims as a threat (politically, physically or morally) that is perhaps the driving factor behind the intolerance, as 'increased threat perception has a considerable influence leading to decreased political tolerance.'[317] As we can see from the various characters, there are some

[315] Deborah Schildkraut, Americanism *in the Twenty-First Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010) p.38
[316] Talal Asad, On Suicide Bombing, p.3
[317] Marie Eisenstein, Religion and the Politics of Tolerance: How Christianity Builds Democracy (Texas: Baylor University Press, 2008) p.54

vampires who are conscientious, and some that reject humanity – that all should be tarred with the same brush reflects the need for us to question the motives and attitudes towards those who are seen as 'other' and do not follow a faith that is comprehensible to the American majority.[318]

The incomprehensibility stems from a number of issues, but the simplest explanation is that Islam encompasses a variety of attitudes, and some that are in firm opposition to those held in the West, particularly the US. Speaking of why Islam is often used to represent the 'Other', John B. Cobb notes that 'One reason that the Muslim world can represent the Other that threatens us is that Islam, rather than nationalism, largely constitutes the operative 'faith' of most of its people.'[319] This is in stark contrast to the formation of group identity with the US. For 'In general in the US, the nationalistic 'faith' has a deeper hold, even among member of religious institutions, that the traditional 'faith' to which those institutions officially subscribe. In many Christian congregations, going against the nationalist 'faith' antagonises more members than critiquing inherited forms of the Christian 'faith'.'[320] This is often described as 'civil religion' (discussed further in chapter 3) and evidenced in a number of ways in *True Blood,* from the treatment of vampires as un-American to the castigation of vampire sympathisers. One interesting example is when Jason is at the FOS conference, and is taking part in a role-play dealing with vampire sympathisers. Ultimately the role-play ends with the sympathiser being an actual vampire,[321] and Jason, in a moment of panic, grabs a nearby American flag and snaps it in half, and wards off the 'vampire' with the stake-like flagpole. This is interpreted as unpatriotic, and another recruit confronts him, asking

> What was with you snapping the American flag in half like you some **Muslim** Buffy with a dick?

[318] Evidenced in part by a previously referenced Pew Forum survey describing the feelings of American citizens towards different religious groups.
[319] Kevin Barrett, John Cobb & Sandra Lubarsky, *9/11 and American Empire, Vol.2: Christians, Jews and Muslims Speak Out,* (Northampton, MA: Interlink, 2008) p.155
[320] 9/11 and American Empire, p.160
[321] Interesting to note the conflation of actual identity with sympathetic views. Whilst the two are distinctly different, both are seen as culpable, much like the view of Fundamentalist Muslims and traditional Muslims. Both were targeted for hate attacks, and even going as far as other forms of the 'other' – a notable case being recently a woman who admitted to hating all Muslims and Hindus since 9/11, and was found guilty of pushing a Muslim onto subway tracks. The target shows ignorance and highlights the need for a scapegoat, rather than 'legitimate' revenge.

The immediate response to this supposedly unpatriotic act is to divide and place the offender as 'other'. Despite the fact that Jason's actions, by FOS standards, would have been the 'right' thing to do (killing the vampire with an American symbol – thus defeating an 'outsider' with an American weapon), the fact that he damaged an American symbol in the process is seen as in itself, a symbolic act, and taken as a renouncement of the faith in America, and ergo Christianity. This patriotism and stigmatizing of the 'other' became even more complex in the years post 9/11. For, if terrorists could assimilate within society, how could they be identified? Identification is predominantly based on perception, and individuals will choose to reject or approve aspects of another based on the perception of themselves. Post 9/11 approaches involve 'mirror imaging' with the unfamiliar – people presume that those they seek to understand are 'fundamentally 'like' or 'unlike' themselves.'[322] Thus Muslims are predominantly portrayed as something unlike the American ideal, despite there being a constantly changing face of the nation (if census details are anything to go by). There is a clear parallel with the portrayal of the vampires in *True Blood,* who are shown to be outsiders despite their increasing similarities with humans, from the aesthetic to the moral. It is their differences to humans (sleeping during the day, pale skin, diet) that are focused on rather than their similarities, and this is given as reason enough for prejudice against them. It should be made clear that vampires have a long history in representing outsiders; as one critic notes on a discussion of the vampires in *Twilight*:

> Since vampires have been used in recent decades to dramatise outsider status…the good vampires in *Twilight* seem to situate fundamentalist identity in the role of the sympathetic outsider.[323]

The same is true of the vampires in *True Blood,* who are shown as the opposition to the FOS – the embodiment of patriotism and fundamentalist Christianity - and they are treated with derision by a majority of the town of Bon Temps. Yet this pre-occupation with the place of the vampire in the community is part of the horror genre itself as Linda Holland-Toll notes, 'The genre's concern is "the presentation" of the

[322] Liora Danan & Alice Hunt, 'How did the U.S. government look at Islam after 9/11?' in *The Impact of 9/11 on Religion and Philosophy,* ed. by Matthew J. Morgan (New York: Macmillan Palgrave, 2009) pp.51-64 (p.54)
[323] Sutton & Benshoff, *Horror After 9/11,* p.202

community and its accepted values.'[324] Bon Temps can be seen either as one particular part of the US, or as a microcosm of American society as a whole.[325] The stories, struggles and issues dealt with are applicable to the state of the nation, and as noted before, the genre of horror is a useful one to work through some of these issues. Stephen King describes the need for horror as such: 'We make up horrors to help us cope with the real ones.'[326]

One of the real horrors came in the form of the impact of 9/11 which has been discussed frequently. The impact was widespread, with one of the most horrific aspects being the intolerant attitudes towards Muslims, which are still evident in their portrayal in mass media entertainment. Amir Hussain discusses the depictions of Muslims post 9/11, describing the pervasiveness of the 'stock Arab Muslim terrorist.'[327] These stereotypes are explicit in some shows such as *24, Sleeper Cell,* and most recently, *Homeland,* where Muslims are predominantly featured as terrorist characters. They were denounced as Islamophobic by various writers,[328] despite the producers (who also worked on *24*) claiming that the response to their previous show, *24,* had 'inspired them to do something different' with *Homeland.* They describe *24* as the 'lens through which a lot of the country looked at 9/11.'[329]

Yet, despite *True Blood* being a subtler tackling of the issue of attitudes towards Muslims, the actions perpetrated against the vampires and the attitudes towards them make it clear who it is they're representing. Whether the vampire is a better way of exploring facets of human difference is debatable, but it allows for a level of detachment, and therefore a safer way of questioning responses to the situations occurring, such as differences of faith, morality and lifestyle. The vampire as ostracized and religious isn't new – we've seen the vampire as Jewish in a number of narratives, from *Dracula* to *Fearless Vampire Killers.* Positing the vampire as a religious identity appears to be a way of challenging or encoding problematic

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[324] Martin Amis, *The Second Plane,* (London: Vintage, 2009) p.162
[325] Although Louisiana is a Republican state, and the political/religious divide is marked.
[326] Stephen King, *Danse Macabre,* (New York: Everest House, 1981) p.27
[327] Hussain, p.168
[328] The previously mentioned *Salon* article, along with Laura Durkay, ''Homeland' is the most bigoted show on television', *Wall Street Journal,* (2014) <https://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2014/10/02/homeland-is-the-most-bigoted-show-on-television/ > [accessed September 2014]
[329] ''Homeland' producers on how '24' "Islamophobia" concerns inspired the show', *Hollywood Reporter,* (2014) <http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/live-feed/homeland-producers-how-24-islamophobia-726987 > [accessed September 2014]

attitudes towards that particular identity. To posit the vampire as Muslim highlights the need for a different approach to the identity that goes beyond stereotypes. The 'default' perception of vampire/Muslim as terrorist is questioned by *True Blood*, and unlike the other series mentioned, it is the stupidity of the FOS that is highlighted, rather than the stereotypical portrayal that is Muslim equals terrorist which is both problematic and lazy. The situating of Islam versus Christianity ignores the political aspects behind the War on Terror, and the 9/11 attacks. The attacks were against *America,* not Christianity, despite some conceptions of American identity being tied strongly to Christianity. The bombers themselves were fundamentalists, and shunned by the Muslim community. Terrorism is primarily a political act; and as Spivak ascertains, 'politics is misrepresented as religion by war-makers when the occasion suits.'[330] Yet, these stereotypical perceptions of equating Islam to terrorism are only beginning to be questioned on screen, and it is important to understand the ways that perception has changed.

Liora Danan and Alice Hunt assert that 'US Govt conceptualisation of Islam is not only a product of recent years.'[331] They argue that it goes back to the Nineteenth century, where the 'speculations about the similarities and differences between Christianity and Islam allowed them to construct and understand how religion fit into their own identity.'[332] As discussed in chapter 1, definition of identity comes in part from setting oneself against another group, which reinforces ones differences. This is evident in *True Blood* through the constant reinforcement of difference (in chanted songs, 'survivors groups' and even board games), the seeking out of differences between Islam and Christianity, and the need to understand just what these differences entailed. With the War on Terror, sides were firmly established, and perceived terrorists were deemed those who shared similar aesthetics or values to the 9/11 terrorists, which for many mistakenly meant a large number of Muslims. After 9/11, the perception of Muslim as terrorist was evident from the fact that violence against Muslims and even Hindus rose, and from the continued portrayal of them on screen as terrorists. This is the same as tarring all the vampires with the same brush in *True Blood,* despite there being as much individual difference between them as there is between humans. What's interesting is that it is the FOS who carries out these acts of

[330] Spivak, 'Terror: A Speech After 9/11', p.103
[331] Danan & Hunt, p.52
[332] Danan & Hunt, p.53

terrorism, and preaches hatred, like Al-Qaeda, but instead they come from a Christian standpoint. The message of *True Blood* seems to be questioning assumptions about Islam, the nature of fundamentalism and the precarious nature of identity, and the very fact of the inclusion of this storyline challenges the assumption that everyone reacts in the same way to minority groups. With so many types of viewpoint on morality, identity and faith, to assert that shared aesthetic characteristics automatically mean shared viewpoints has been rightly shown to be ignorant and anachronistic. This in part is displayed by the continued use by the FOS of the word 'evil' (and too, by Bush) and the demonization of the vampires. As Bernstein notes 'The concern with evil is as old as civilisation itself. It is fundamental for all the major religions.'[333] This is what the FOS fixates on, and it is another division with which to use as an identifier.

To return to the attitudes towards Muslims post-9/11, despite the firm lines drawn by the War on Terror, the 'US continued its efforts to identify with Muslims worldwide and reject the notion that it was at war with Islam.'[334] Yet, this was not enforced by the media or even the government itself, which was struggling to outline its target in the war, especially when the terrorists had used the name of Islam as a cause they were fighting for. In the aftermath of such an event which left a nation and a government feeling vulnerable, where to place blame became confusing. Islam was identified as the religion of terror, and the traditional Muslim appearance was earmarked as something suspicious. The government's response, it's 'inclusion to draw sharp distinctions between 'authentic' and 'inauthentic' Islamic expressions and to focus on the pro and anti-Western aspects of these expressions limited the US government to a simplistic understanding of Islam.'[335] The concern is understandably about the aspects that affect the government itself, but the simplistic understanding fails to tackle any of the issues of identity and faith in Muslims. The same is evident in *True Blood,* where vampires are divided into 'good' and 'bad', or 'authentic' and 'inauthentic', dependent on their similarities to the townspeople of Bon Temps. Those that are different are deemed bad, or immoral. Yet, for the most part, there is a lack of understanding – of both the complexities of the nature of the vampire and the difference between religion and fundamentalist religion. This itself is exacerbated by

[333] Bernstein, The Abuse of Evil, p2
[334] Danan & Hunt, p.56
[335] Danan & Hunt, p.57

fear; a fear of the unknown, that encourages the seeking of difference and separation as a form of protection. This could be argued as a reason for a resurgence of professing of Christian faith post 9/11, and for groups such as the fictional FOS to be able to thrive. Although the world of *True Blood* remains fictional, it is evident that it is intended to reflect and critique real life, with groups not unlike the FOS existing, and indeed, thriving since 9/11. For those such as Jason, it offers the opportunity to feel as if he is fighting for something in the wake of events that left many feeling powerless.

What the violent, and perhaps even hypocritical response reminds us is that evil is relative, and even retribution is no excuse, for 'we must never underestimate the evil deeds that human beings are capable of committing…we should welcome and encourage serious debate about these vitally important issues.'[336] These issues are discussed in the series through the questioning of the very nature of the vampires themselves and the responses of the humans. It's a way of critiquing and understanding actions such as 9/11 which are indecipherable to many, and the resulting prejudice and violence against Muslims. The medium of television, and the transposition of terrorist into vampire is a way to confront and cathartically deal with fear and anger. As Lynn Schofield Clark contends, 'Films…and other forms of fictional entertainment offer satisfaction because they symbolically resolve conflicts that are deeply troubling to our society.'[337] That these conflicts are troubling to the central character of the series, Sookie, is representative somewhat of the temperate form of Christianity engrained in US culture. One Christian perspective of Sookie's conflicts of religion, identity and morality is less forgiving, though:

> While Sookie wants to hold onto her religious and moral understandings, they just cannot be consistently sustained in a world so large. While she has not yet figured out a worldview that will encompass them, the best answer seems to be understanding and flexibility – social virtues – rather than spiritual virtues like faith and morality.[338]

[336] Bernstein, The Abuse of Evil, p.107
[337] Jules Zanger, p.13
[338] Susannah Clements, The Vampire Defanged, p.96

This perspective ignores her response to the reprehensible actions of the humans within the series and still maintains the perception of vampire as a figure of evil. From this view of the show, the author came to the conclusion that it gave a message something like this: 'It is *not in religion* but in human society, human feeling, that we can reach something that feels like God.'[339] (emphasis mine) Although the series explores and perhaps focuses on issues relating to faith and religion, what does emerge is the different ways humans (and vampires) channel a religious impulse. That they are imbued with a religious aspect, and the modes of consumption offer a widening of the textual narrative is both testament to the need for the story and the interaction with the issues at the centre of it.

TV, religion, and the widening textual narrative

As we have looked at previously in Chapter 1, the vampire is a useful figure to explore religious impulses. Whilst *True Blood* incorporates elements of organised religion in the form of the FOS, it is the vampires themselves that portray a raw form of faith. Despite their status as ostracized terrorist/political pariahs, they are still feared, and it is this fear that allows them to have an element of god-like control in other parts of the fictional *True Blood* universe. Though the series primarily focuses on the Fellowship's persecution of vampires, it also touches upon the worship of these figures. Their distance from humanity (due to the physical limitations of vampirism, such as only being around after dark) gives them an air of mystery, along with their powers (mind control, speed, flying, immortality), which create a god-like aura. Humans flock to Fangtasia, the vampire bar, where Eric (the sheriff of the area) sits on a throne to be admired by the visitors. But even though they are revered (and feared), the image of the vampire is an act. In Fangtasia, where humans can interact with vampires, the vampires are merely offering a performance to humans to 'give them what they want', (as Eric states in season 1, episode 4) exposing again another duality between public and private identity within the series. The trope of the vampire is appealing, so it is continually performed, literally in *True Blood,* and in our culture, where *Dracula* films (the ultimate archetype of the figure) are remade. Despite the fact that in a sense, this attitude towards vampires mimics the real-life fandom of

[339] The Vampire Defanged, p.101

vampire series such as *True Blood,* the focus of this discussion is the portrayal of the vampire as religious icon, along with the ways in which this is aptly communicated by the medium of television.

The vampire differs in film and TV, arguably due to the restraints of the format. In film, vampires are often used as a metaphor for *one* issue or anxiety; it functions as part of the plot/narrative, fixed within the filmic moment. The serial nature of television shows means a developed storyline, and thus the figure's meaning may fluctuate as the narratives change. The overarching meaning may stay the same, for example, the positioning of the vampire as a minority, but the specifics may alter as different parallels become apparent in reference to different narrative contexts. With *True Blood,* this is unquestionably the case – although as it has been stated, the vampire in the series is seen as an allegory for a number of minorities, which one they represent changes between seasons, depending on the main storyline. In the season we are looking at, the focus is religion, and in particular, the sensitive issues in American culture at that moment pertained to the clash between Islam, fundamentalist Christian responses and post-9/11 identity. This is why the vampire is figured as it is within this particular series. The same happens with other television series, for example, Showtime's *Dexter,* with each series dealing with a particular 'issue' embodied by the 'big bad' of the series - *Dexter* chose to look at religion in the 5th series.[340] Films about vampires may or may not include religion – for example, *Daybreakers* happened to be a commentary on the issues of global warming and scarcity of oil. There was little to no mention of religion, because it was not the central focus of the film. However, with television, religion often will emerge at points, because it is a pivotal issue in society and TV is part of everyday life and thus reflects lived religion. When looking at the impact and representation of religion on television, specifically TV drama, it is important to look at the use of religion as a whole within the area, rather than just a specific series in order to understand how this particular interpretation compares. In discussing the representation of faith on TV, the critic S. Elizabeth Bird notes that the 'the default position for TV drama is an assumption of faith, although leaving vague the question of exactly in what.'[341] In a sense, due to its

[340] As previously noted, *True Blood* makes a return to religion in season 5 (2012) also. This isn't discussed here as the texts in the thesis are of the same time period – circa 2009 – and season 2 more overtly alludes to the WOT which is the issue here.
[341] S. Elizabeth Bird, Small Screen, Big Picture, p.25

popularity, it becomes part of a public narrative of religion, and may either reflect or influence how people view it. Bird argues that there is a case for 'television drama as one way through which people construct their worlds.'[342] If television contributes to and helps construct the religious worlds of its viewers (and television as a religious experience in itself is set out in the introduction), then how religion is portrayed is instrumental in shaping attitudes towards certain facets of religion in the real world. There is a reason faith of some description is seen as 'safe' onscreen – atheists are viewed negatively according to various Pew Forum polls (the same polls that showed the negative responses to Islam noted above).[343] Thus, both Muslims and atheists are treated negatively on screen.

The way religion is portrayed on TV also includes the accepted position towards 'any religious practice that is perceived as extreme, fanatical or hypocritical'[344] which has been noted before, but is important to reiterate as it would explain the attitudes in *True Blood* towards the FOS. As noted before, Bird argues that a lack of faith is treated in a "hostile" manner. TV drama channels the religious impulse, but the specifics are not detailed, and it is up to the viewer to find their outlet within the framework of the series they watch. In the case of these vampire television dramas, the vampire is figured as the religious outlet. Why it is the case with television and not with film comes down to the nature of television. The specific formatting differences between them alter the way they are consumed and treated. Film is a singular instance, whereas television is a repeated event, advancing the narrative in increments, developing plot and characterisation over a longer period of time, gradually becoming more embedded in the viewer's life and schedule. According to Diane Winston, the idea of there being a 'religious dimension to the experience of electronic entertainment has not received adequate attention from media scholars.'[345]

In particular, it is the way television is consumed that lends weight to it being a communal/religious experience. Shows are broadcast at certain times, with viewers following along on forums (such as Reddit), social media outlets (Facebook and Twitter), sharing their views and opinions of the events onscreen. Fan culture

[342] Bird, p.19
[343] 'How Americans Feel about Religious Groups', *Pew Research Centre,* (2014) <http://www.pewforum.org/2014/07/16/how-americans-feel-about-religious-groups/ > [accessed September 2014]
[344] Bird, Small Screen Big Picture, p.18
[345] Winston, Small Screen Big Picture, p.428

surrounding TV series is often stronger, as there are likely to be more hours of screen time, a number of storylines that can speak to different aspects of different people, and the promise of a shared experience. This is unlike film, which is shown at cinemas with different film times, and can only cover a certain amount of material in what would amount to the same time as two episodes of a cable TV show, such as *True Blood*, where each episode runs for around forty-five minutes. The ability to share the experience traverses various media, as Stacey Abbott notes:

> Television has never been restricted to one medium, but instead offers fans multiple avenues to engage with their favourite programmes or TV monsters.[346]

This has become increasingly relevant with the advent of social media, enabling more ways of instant communication and discussion of programmes in real time. Shows like *True Blood* widen the engagement with a televisual text by investing in the idea of the *True Blood* universe. When establishing the series, the production company set up an online game, called Blood Copy, along with a prequel comic and documentaries on vampires. Alongside this, the production company set up sites for the Fellowship of the Sun and the American Vampire League,[347] extending the fictional world onscreen to online representation, enabling viewers to explore the world in further depth. Those details are the kind that enhance and create fandoms; exploiting and developing interest in the *True Blood* 'brand', and allowing for a deeper immersion in the fictional world the fan has invested in. Websites for television 'succeed in keeping viewer-users engaged long after a series episode has aired, and this requires greatly expanding the notion of what a TV text is.'[348]

Fans who share an interest with a series can discuss, explore and commune online – replicating the three b's of religion – belief, belonging and behaviour. The actions of fans are similar to the expression of belief, unsurprising if we consider the idea that Asad argues of belief not being independent of 'worldly conditions' and that

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[346] Stacey Abbott, *TV Horror*, p.203
[347] Which have been taken down following the conclusion of the show in 2014.
[348] John Caldwell, 'Convergence Television' in *Television After TV: Essays on a medium in transition,* ed. by Lynn Spiegel & Jan Olsson, (North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2004) pp.41-73 (p.51)

historical changes alter the nature and 'objects of belief'.[349] In this case, objects of belief have for some, become televisual tropes, particularly vampires, expressed through a channel unlike traditional religious belief usually is. Fan culture has sublimated the religious impulse, and the vampire, and horror in general, have become a way to represent different cultural needs akin to religious belief. Why exactly it needs to be sublimated is another question. To answer it, looking at the forms of religious activity in *True Blood,* which has a strong fan culture, and engaging wider textual narrative, can indicate the reasons behind the need.

Bassett notes that 'some scholars have suggested that the corpse has become an increasingly prevalent image in popular media because, in the twenty-first century, death has replaced sex as the repressed taboo topic in Western culture that needs some outlet for expression.'[350] Death is a central focus of religious belief, with most denominations offering a panacea for the fear of death in the form of an afterlife or reincarnation. Thus, for a figure that literally embodies death, to position it as a figure of worship (from the viewer's perspective) is another way of subverting this fear, by temporarily suspending belief and thus momentarily alleviating the possibility of death. For the inhabitants of Bon Temps, this is quite literal – they are faced with an 'afterlife' every time they encounter a vampire. The mixture of attitudes towards them within the series can be explained by their status as objects of religious worship. This is illustrated in several different ways in the series: firstly, they are treated with awe by some because they are seen as embodying aspects of religion. Secondly, they are an affront to some religions as they display what other religions can only promise and not deliver or prove – life after death. And thirdly, they are actively sought out by those who want god-like power. Vampire religion as an affront to other religions, particularly Christianity, lends more weight to the positioning of vampire as Muslim.

Monsters have had 'a long history in human religious experience.'[351] Yet they have often acted as warnings against 'prohibited' religious behaviour and have attempted to subvert the religious or social order. A change happened recently, as Victoria Nelson notes: 'the worship of the fictional monster gods cum teachers, the quest for the divine via the transformed demonic, is part of a deep shift in sensibility that started in

[349] Asad, Genealogies of Religion, p.3
[350] Bassett, *Fanpires*, p.16
[351] Victoria Nelson, *Gothicka,* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012) p.20

the late twentieth century.'[352] Monstrous behaviour has been channelled into human characters, and the monster is now redemptive. Or, as Erikson notes, 'the vampire, like Jesus, represents a monstrous and not-quite human figure that alters how humans see themselves.'[353] In the case of *True Blood,* the Jesus figure is explicitly embodied in the character of Godric (his name *God*ric relating to the messiah element also). Yet, on the whole, the 'coming out' of the vampires forces the humans in the series (whether they acknowledge it or not) to confront their mortality, and thus their faith, which offers a (supposed) chance at immortality unlike the one they are faced with in the vampire.

In some ways, the vampire can be seen as a metaphor for the human need for a physical embodiment of life after death, hence its strong link to what Nelson would describe as a 'religious impulse'. In Chapter 1, I discussed the idea of vampirism as a religion of its own, and the consumption of these narratives as an expression of sublimated religion. Further to this, Nelson discusses what she calls the 'religion making impulse':

> The religion making impulse, which remains a deep part of American culture no matter how denigrated it continues to be by the intellectual elite, is just as strong among those who grew up outside organised religion or are alientated from it as it is for the orthodox faithful. These seekers grasp eagerly at any scraps of the gothic supernatural, however spiritually meagre they may be, and in attempting to build a temple on them return the word fan to its original meaning.[354]

Whether the figure of the vampire creates or imbues a form of religion separate from our current models is debatable – though some contend that 'the vampire creates its own system of morality – distinct from human and particularly Christian morality.'[355] But it is undeniable that the vampire is a figure formed with religious meaning and indeed to some, 'One of the things that has made the vampire such a powerful metaphor is the spiritual and theological potential it holds,' but that is 'being lost' and

[352] Gothicka, p263
[353] Erickson, in True Blood: Investigating the Southern Gothic, p.81
[354] Nelson, *Gothicka*, p.56
[355] The Vampire Defanged, p.135

'Christians have let this happen.'[356] Though to limit the vampire, or the monster in general as a mere metaphor is dangerous, as Aviva Briefel and Sam J. Miller argue: 'Treating the monster as a sign that transparently gives way to an ulterior meaning is to overlook the monster's material presence.'[357] Vampires are still vampires, despite their current form – to see them just as a collection of metaphors strips them of the very metaphorical power we've imbued them with – they have fundamentally unchangeable features that will continue to be inhuman. How these are perceived is what changes. It is *our response* that is telling. The spectrum of the vampire from hate figure (to some, such as the FOS) to god-like creature (to fans, and the patrons of Fangtasia) shows the conflicts and differences when it comes to religious feeling and its expressions.

The various complexities displayed within the figure differ between film and TV, and the mode of consumption differs between the two, impacting on its ability to fulfil the religious impulse. How viewers encounter these shows has changed radically, and this change allows for a different way of experiencing televisual tales. Fan sites are set up for most shows onscreen today, where fans will come together to discuss plotlines and issues raised. Metaphorical strands can be drawn out and interpreted in a number of different ways by viewers from all cultures, which Henry Jenkins describes as "convergence culture":

> The same media content may be read in radically different ways in different regional or national contexts, with consumers reading it against the backdrop of more familiar genres and through the grid of familiar values.[358]

These 'familiar values' are what we are looking at here – in particular, how they've changed, why they're so important and what they say about the viewers and the culture it reflects. What is interesting and important is why people have chosen to become fans of this particular series. Fan 'behaviour' is similar (creating fan fiction, self-designed merchandise, discussions, trivia) but the reasons and ideology behind individual shows are what should be examined. Fan culture provides a group or

[356] The Vampire Defanged, p.162
[357] Briefel & Miller, *Horror After 9/11*, p.5
[358] Henry Jenkins, *Fans, Bloggers, Gamers,* (New York: New York University Press, 2006) p.157

identity to belong or to assimilate with and arguably fans in the group see something within the show that speaks to their ideals. Jenkins also discusses the idea that Internet downloading arguably facilitates a reading against different backdrops, as it allows different cultures to participate in the experience of a programme. With legal (and illegal) downloading or streaming (through iTunes or Netflix for example), viewers can store and view a programme as many times as they like, rather than being confined to the schedule of a network. Although this disrupts the idea of convergence and communal experience, the fan communities set up around these shows indicate different ways of sharing experience (for example, fans often tweet along with a programme in real time to share their reactions or contribute to real-time forums on Reddit). This expansion of the boundaries of the television narrative brings with it inclusivity, as it allows a wider range of people from various cultures to participate in watching, contributing and understanding the multiple approaches to a televisual text (primarily) through social media. This increased availability of television is something Pierre Levy denotes as a 'transitional moment.'[359] Fans watch, speculate and share in more efficient and textually rich ways than they had done previously. They create a 'new knowledge culture' that is 'enlivened by multiple ways of knowing.'[360] Jenkins discusses this further, arguing that 'fans are motivated by epistemophilia – not simply a pleasure in knowing but a pleasure in exchanging knowledge.'[361] This results in a collective consciousness, or a 'collective intelligence' as Levy terms it.[362] This expands the potential meanings that could be read into a show, and also offers reinforcing views to layer interpretations – given the multinational nature of fanbases, meanings will be varied. Meaning is conveyed through sharing, as Jenkins notes:

> The new information space involves multiple and unstable forms of recontextualisation…Meaning is a shared and constantly renewable resource and its circulation can create and revitalize social ties.[363]

Because of the cross-cultural appeal of many shows, in order to attract viewers they will have to 'provoke and reward collective meaning production through

[359] Levy, quoted in Jenkins, *Fans, Bloggers, Gamers,* p.136
[360] Jenkins, p.140
[361] Jenkins, p.139
[362] Pierre Levy, *Collective Intelligence,* (Cambridge, MA: Perseus, 1997)
[363] Jenkins, p.140

elaborate backstories, unresolved enigmas, excess information and extratextual expansions of the program universe.'[364] This is essentially what many modern fans do today – create and add to the story's universe, through mediums such as fan fiction. These backstories and excess information lead its viewers to seek answers often in a community, which could hasten the formation and growth of fan forums. The presence of these fan cultures and behaviours is debatably due to the nature the narratives are taking – television is more of a communal, quasi-religious experience that draws people together, gives a locus of identification and a fandom to associate, along with characters to idolise. Combined with the religious significance of the vampire, it is logical to posit shows such as *True Blood* and *Being Human* as fulfilling a religious need.

In *True Blood,* fans are actively shown the positives of the vampires; merchandise includes 'Team Eric' and 'Team Bill' t-shirts, mimicking the Team Edward/Jacob love triangle in other teen vampire film, *Twilight.* There is even a club-night that runs in London, *Fangtasia,* set up exactly like the *True Blood* bar, which includes all the elements of the show and allows fans a space to further their engagement with the world of Bon Temps. The extra-textual world of *True Blood* places the vampires as figures of obsession and worship, and thus the idea of the vampire as religious object is continued.

The placement of vampires in the position of minority despite their god-like status indicates the need to reassess the status of minority religious position; here we see it as the Muslim. Following 9/11, religion became an urgent question that provided answers and raised further issues pertaining to identity – both national and individual. References in the media (TV, film and fiction) were inescapably linked to 9/11, though the representation of the event was unthinkable. This particularly became apparent in the multiple films, series and other forms of entertainment media that had to be changed, delayed or cancelled following the attacks for fear of triggering memories or negative responses. How to accurately and sensitively portray 9/11 became difficult.

[364] Jenkins, p.145

David Steritt discusses the debate surrounding the 'propriety of representing 9/11 in popular terms,' in particular the difficulty with 'trying to calculate when the public would be ready to relive it.'[365] This issue of reliving is problematic because 9/11 was in itself a cinematic event – an event that had been imagined hundreds of times before onscreen, except this time, it was real. 9/11 is not an event in the sense of a defined moment of atrocity but includes the aftermath also (the phrase 'since 9/11' or 'post-9/11' being a popular one – indicating an after-effect). Yet the effects of the events – the distrust, the doubt, the identity crisis, which has been discussed to some extent here – show that it is not a need to 'relive' the event that is most important, but a public need to find a way to reconcile their pre-9/11 identity with a post-9/11 one. It is an identity which will undoubtedly be more polarised in some ways than it was before. It makes navigating any texts that include terrorism, religious fundamentalism, corrupt authority and identity masking difficult, as most offer some kind of comment or comparison following 9/11. Even more than ten years on, 9/11 comparisons are still being made in *Homeland,* because of the subject matter – terrorism and Islam.

Thus the second series of *True Blood,* which first aired in 2009, still made comparisons to issues surrounding the events – illustrating that it is something that still requires discussion in popular media. Mikita Brottman, conversely, argues that 'any discussion of the events of September 11 on American TV is still characterised by highly overcharged rhetoric, including the widespread use of the word horror.'[366] The fact that it is being mediated through the horror genre says a lot about the uses of the genre and the nature of the event itself. At first glance, horror including vampires may seem an odd choice, but the parallels become clear with a more extensive look. Vampires, and particularly those on *True Blood,* are visceral, body-horror tropes. They strike the human body in its most vulnerable places and drain it of life, changing its nature. The similarities between the dual pronged attack of fangs and the two planes taking down the Twin Towers and changing the nature of America are evident. Aside from the gore and the sex in the series, *True Blood* looks at the way society responds to its nature being threatened and changed, the hierarchy and order altered

[365] David Steritt, 'Representing Atrocity: From the Holocaust to September 11' in *Film and Television After 9/11,* ed. by Wheeler W. Dixon, (Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 2004) pp.63-77 (p.65)
[366] Mikita Brottman, 'The Fascination of the Abomination: The Censored Images of 9/11' in *Film and Television After 9/11,* ed. by Wheeler W. Dixon, (Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 2004), pp.163-176 (p.164)

by the emergence of vampires. Various critics have seen horror as either 'progressive or reactionary'. Matt Hills explains further:

> such pleasures can be deemed progressive where the audience revels in the monster's threat to dominant social/cultural norms and reactionary where audiences take pleasure in the monster's narrative destruction, and hence the restoration of social/cultural order.[367]

In the case of *True Blood,* the horror is both progressive and reactionary. The vampire has inarguably destroyed the social norms, yet they strive to live like humans, and to 'mainstream'. The audience may revel in a different perspective of what social norms should be, which the vampire offers. It is also interesting to question who exactly the monster is in this scenario – the humans are portrayed as just as grotesque, if not more, than the vampires (particularly the FOS). Yet, the vampires are the focus, because they alter the order of things – they have changed the social fabric and notions of identity.

This calls into question those who argue *against* any real change post-9/11. Laura Frost argues that:

> the fear of lack of control and stability represented in contemporary cultural production is not new and cannot simply be explained in reference to the "war on terror". Instead, the cultural narratives indicate a more complex problem, namely the way in which the 'war on terror' is linked to a psychological struggle created by a radical socioeconomic shift that predates 9/11.[368]

Yet the rise in references to Islam, religion and patriotism can be inarguably linked to 9/11. The explication of *True Blood* shows explicit reference to the War on Terror, and the influx of vampire narratives evokes a lack of control. Whilst, as previously noted, religious belief has cycles of popularity and decline, there is usually a trigger for this – and in this case, 9/11 can be linked to it by surveys of attitudes pre and post

[367] Matt Hills, *The Pleasures of Horror*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2005) p.50
[368] Laura Frost, 'Black Screens, Lost Bodies: The Cinematic Apparatus of 9/11 Horror' in *Horror after 9/11,* ed. by Aviva Briefel and Sam J. Miller, (Texas: University of Texas Press, 2011) pp.13-38 (p.27)

the events. What *True Blood* and the American vampire does show us, however, is that it is a particular need that is fulfilled, specific to the American population. This is further explored by contrast in the next chapter, which highlights a more explicit and contrasting approach to the events through literary texts.

Chapter 3

Fear, infection and the aftermath: Del Toro's 'The Strain' and its violent vampires

> *Post-apocalyptic representations are simultaneously symptoms of historical traumas and attempts to work through them.*
>
> **– James Berger, *After the End*[369]**

Whilst much of this thesis has focused on allusions to and metaphors for 9/11 and the War on Terror in popular culture, this chapter changes approach and looks instead at explicit references to the events and its aftermath in popular culture. The focus will be Guillermo Del Toro and Chuck Hogan's series of vampire novels entitled *The Strain Trilogy*. Del Toro is primarily known for his work as a director, and this is his first foray into novel-writing. The plot will be explained further on in the chapter, but it makes explicit reference to 9/11, and uses Ground Zero as a location where the 'nest' of vampires is based. The vampires of *The Strain Trilogy* (hereafter referred to as *TST)* are unlike the vampires we have encountered in previous chapters. They are ugly, mindless, and zombielike, carrying out the bidding of their master and thinking only of their next meal. This shift to a more feral, violent vampire is more reflective of Del Toro's style and storytelling rather than a sudden shift in post 9/11 attitudes. *TST* evokes the fear of invasion that has pervaded vampire novels for centuries, particularly echoing the fears of Stoker's *Dracula*, along with allusions to Matheson's scientific view of the vampire in *I am Legend.* What is different about this narrative is the manner in which vampires have invaded, together with the impact of the invasion and its aftermath. This chapter will explore the way this series of novels portrays the vampire, its comparisons to post-9/11 novels, how it interprets and represents cultural trauma and ultimately, a perspective on the political and psychological situation of the 9/11 aftermath. Given that it was del Toro who wrote the outline of the story, for the sake of the chapter and the evidence presented in the novel, the focus will be on his perspectives, influences and filmic catalogue. Hogan himself noted in an interview that the monstrous aspects were dealt with by del Toro: 'GDT has a lock on his monsters; I am all audience in that respect [...] He leads, I follow'.[370] In the progression of the thesis as a whole, this chapter should serve to illuminate that, despite the monstrous

[369] James Berger, *After the End: Representations of Post-apocalypse,* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1999), p.19
[370] Chuck Hogan, interviewed by Elaine Lamkin, *Dread Central,* 4 June 2009, < http://www.dreadcentral.com/news/31993/co-author-chuck-hogan-talks-the-strain#axzz32L6yZFfF > [accessed March 2014]

nature of the vampires which is unlike that of the other Americanised vampires, *TST* develops the perception of humans as monstrous and highlights the downfalls of cultural categorization. It offers instead, as the other vampire narratives discussed do, the idea of individual responsibility and moral standing as a solution for societal ills. Whereas in previous chapters the discussion of vampires atoning for their sins has been central – a desire to mimic some religious aspects of humanity – this chapter instead examines the human need to rebuild, rewrite and redeem, turning away from organized religion for redemption and instead towards a path of spirituality.

Firstly, the series itself should be introduced. *The Strain Trilogy* was written by Guillermo del Toro and Chuck Hogan, with the first installment, *The Strain,*[371] being published in 2009. It entered the *New York Times* bestseller list at number 9 following its initial publication in hardback. It was followed by two sequels, *The Fall*[372] (published 2010) and *The Night Eternal*[373] (published 2011). The storyline was originally devised by Del Toro, who envisioned it as a television series but couldn't find a buyer. The twelve-page outline was then passed around for a suitable publisher and writer to work with. Chuck Hogan was given the outline and immediately agreed to work with Del Toro. Hogan was established as a crime fiction/thriller writer, his novel *Prince of Thieves* (2006) having won the Hammett Award and used as the basis for Ben Affleck's film *The Town* in 2010. The two wrote the story by emailing chunks back and forth and editing for almost a year, 'feeding off' each other's vision.[374]

TST offers a different look at the vampire, bucking the trend of the romantic or sympathetic lead and instead, reinstating them as plague-like and invading society as we know it. We are led through the series following two main characters – Dr Ephraim Goodweather, a specialist at the CDC, divorced father of one, and Abraham Setrakian, a Holocaust survivor[375] who has known of vampires for decades. The novel opens with the landing of a Boeing 747 in September at JFK, New York. It lies still and quiet on the runway, communications down, which raises concerns from the air-control tower.

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[371] Guillermo Del Toro & Chuck Hogan, *The Strain,* (New York: Harper, 2009) – subsequent references to this book will be made in parentheses with the page number and the abbreviation TS

[372] Guillermo Del Toro & Chuck Hogan, *The Fall,* (New York: Harper, 2010) – subsequent references to this book will be made in parentheses with the page number and the abbreviation TF

[373] Guillermo Del Toro & Chuck Hogan, *The Night Eternal,* (New York: Harper, 2011) – subsequent references to this book will be made in parentheses with the page number and the abbreviation TNE

[374] Chuck Hogan, interviewed by Elaine Lamkin, *Dread Central,* 4 June 2009, < http://www.dreadcentral.com/news/31993/co-author-chuck-hogan-talks-the-strain#axzz32L6yZFfF > [accessed March 2014]

[375] An Armenian Jew, linking him to both the Holocaust and the Armenian genocide.

A team is sent in to investigate, and they find a plane full of corpses with no apparent cause of death. The story then follows the first and second nights as these corpses reanimate and spread their vampiric disease across New York. Dr Goodweather is alerted by Abraham Setrakian, an antiques dealer, that it is vampires infesting the city – he is doubtful at first, but presented with evidence, he becomes convinced. However, the government will not listen to him, framing him for murder, which results in him going on the run, along with his partner Nora. Together with Setrakian, they begin to hunt for the source of the infection, a rogue vampire named 'the Master', who we find out has been aided by a corrupt and aged billionaire, Eldritch Palmer. Along the way the story looks at the impact of broken families, the destruction of society and corruption within government.

These are themes echoed in del Toro's body of filmic work – particularly the political corruption and authoritarian governments. *TST* has been adapted into a series of graphic novels and most recently, has been taken up by the FX network for a TV series which began in Summer 2014 and has just been renewed for a third season. The elements of del Toro that are evident in the series have drawn attention to it, infusing his love of monsters with Chuck Hogan's history of writing crime and procedural-type novels. Hogan's other novels include *Killing Moon* (2007), which focuses on a manhunt and small-town politics. One of his first novels, *The Blood Artists* (1998) is the closest to *TST* in terms of content: it evokes an apocalyptic scenario due to a plague (much like *TST*) that 'devastates the flesh and soul'[376] and can only be cured by one young woman's blood. We see here the themes that will be later repeated in *TST* and that are paralleled in other apocalyptic narratives (to be looked at later in this chapter in more detail) – the need for sacrifice and the importance of a singular person saving a whole (a Messianic echo), particularly through a blood sacrifice, paying homage to early religious rituals. These are themes that occur primarily in del Toro narratives, whilst Hogan dealt with the aspects of the procedural, such as the CDC, which he says he had experience with through his novel *The Blood Artists.* As this thesis is primarily looking at the role of the vampire in American society, a self-confessed 'vampire enthusiast',[377] del Toro's vision of the supernatural[378] will be the focus of the chapter.

[376] From the blurb on Chuck Hogan, *The Blood Artists,* on amazon.com < http://www.amazon.com/The-Blood-Artists-A-Novel/dp/0380731460 > [accessed April 2014]
[377] Angela Watercutter, 'GDT talks vampires, giant monsters and the 'arrogance of science' in *Wired*, (2011) <http://www.wired.com/2011/11/interview-guillermo-del-toro/ >[accessed April 2014]

A Brief History of Del Toro

Guillermo del Toro has been a growing influence in the film industry, moving from independent Mexican cinema to Hollywood blockbusters such as *Hellboy* (2004) or *Pacific Rim* (2013). One of his first feature films, *Cronos* (1992), was primarily self-financed, putting him into vast amounts of debt, but garnering the attention of film critics – winning the Critics Prize at Cannes. It was at the time the 'most expensive Mexican film ever made.'[379] *Cronos* centered around a vampire and made allusions to the tensions between Mexico and America through the characterization of the central Spanish-speaking figure and the American influence attempting to change him. It has been described as a 'pagan reinterpretation of the biblical story'[380] with the central characters being named Jesus and Angel. Links between vampirism and Christianity are 'played with and subverted in *Cronos'*.[381] *Cronos* appears to be a sort of trial run for the themes and ideas that would emerge in the narrative of *TST*. As with *The Strain,* 'infiltration and infection is nonetheless at the heart of *Cronos'*.[382] The film begins with Jesus Gris, an antiques dealer, who finds a golden mechanical device in the base of the statue. This is where the parallels with *TST* begin – the fable/folkloric angles emerge from those who collect artifacts from the past, like Jesus and Setrakian. Like *TST*, *Cronos* shows the perils of immortality and those who seek it. There is an Eldritch Palmer-like figure in *Cronos,* in the form of Dieter de la Guardia, who is elderly, sick and rich. He uses his money and influence to seek out the device, which runs on an insect inside. This is revisited by the parasitic nature of the vampire in *TST* as the source of immortality, the mechanism which makes Eldritch's plan for control and eternal life work. Yet, ultimately, Jesus sacrifices himself by destroying the device, meaning it will not affect or infect anyone else. This martyring is repeated in *TST* when Eph detonates a nuclear device that will destroy the vampires on the island of Manhattan at the cost to his own life. Death is seen not as an end, but a solution in both cases, as Deborah Shaw notes in her examination of *Cronos*: 'the writer-director applies his thesis on the importance of death to the horror genre, and examines how

[378] He also takes a directorial role alongside writing and producing the series, which Hogan does not.
[379] Deborah Shaw, *The Three Amigos,* (Manchester: Manchester University, 2013) p.19
[380] Shaw, p.30
[381] Ibid.
[382] Ibid.

this subverts an understanding of death as the dark element to be feared.'[383] The importance of blood, sacrifice and maintaining a sense of morality are in line with religious beliefs and behaviours, particularly Catholicism.

These religious themes appear briefly in his other work, but do not make as much of an appearance until he deals with vampires again in *TST*. Del Toro's personal religious beliefs are reflected in his work. Raised Catholic, his upbringing in Mexico changed his perception and he became an atheist, claiming that 'humans could not possibly have souls; even the most blameless lives ended as rotting garbage.'[384] The combination of his religious knowledge and rejection of its themes emerges in his body of work as spiritual elements included to highlight the monstrosity of mankind. This monstrosity is particularly evident in his critically-acclaimed film, *Pan's Labryinth* (2006). The use of stunning visual effects combined with a comment on the Spanish Civil War and fascism was applauded by many. It was also argued to be a work that reflected fears further abroad, as Caryn James in the *New York Times* argued: 'Current fears about the loss of freedom and civil liberties, the fallout of the war on terror, echo through *Pan's Labyrinth.*'[385]

His body of film work regarded as a whole highlights certain key themes that arise repeatedly, with particular metaphors. One of these is monsters, which Del Toro is admittedly obsessed with. In an interview with Mark Kermode, he confessed that 'I've had a relationship with monsters in my bedroom since I was a kid.'[386] He is known to carry around a notebook at all times to draw and sketch out ideas for future monsters to be incorporated in his stories.[387] The monsters in his films may be fantastical (particularly in the case of *Pan's Labryinth* or *Hellboy*), and at times, gruesome looking, but their characterization places them often as victims or aides rather than enemies. As is the case with many other monstrous narratives, they serve to highlight the monstrosity of the humans within the story by contrasting notions of humanity against the gruesome aesthetics of the monster. Daniel Zalewski, in his examination of

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[383] Shaw, p.20
[384] Daniel Zalewski, 'Show the Monster', *New Yorker,* (2011) <http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2011/02/07/110207fa_fact_zalewski?currentPage=all >[accessed April 2014]
[385] Quoted in Francis Pheasant-Kelly, *Fantasy Film Post 9/11*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013) p.100
[386] Guillermo del Toro, interviewed by Mark Kermode, *The Guardian,* 21 November 2006, <http://www.theguardian.com/film/2006/nov/21/guardianinterviewsatbfisouthbank > [accessed April 2014]
[387] These notebooks and sketches were collated and published in 2013 in a book titled *Cabinet of Curiosities: My Notebooks, Collections and Other Obsessions* (London: Titan Books, 2013)

del Toro's monsters in the *New Yorker* posited that 'As is often the case in del Toro's work, the worst monsters are human beings.' They are, he notes, 'a way of understanding our own bodies'.[388] This in turn redeems the monster and allows us critically to evaluate our own monstrosity. Whilst many of the human figures in his films are flawed, there is an ongoing theme of self-sacrifice as a redemptive act – Ofelia dies trying to help her mother in *Pan's Labyrinth* for instance. Redemption is a key theme of the modern vampire narrative as has been discussed in previous chapters, and the manner of its inclusion here subverts the usual storylines which will be discussed later in the chapter.

Pan's Labryinth won three Academy Awards, three BAFTAs, and a number of other awards including Ariel Awards, Saturn Awards and Goya awards, cementing del Toro's name in the industry. Whilst *Cronos* piqued critical interest, and *The Devil's Backbone* (2001) achieved acclaim, it was not until del Toro ventured into American films such as *Blade 2* and *Hellboy* that he would have a significant box-office impact. *Hellboy* grossed $100 million worldwide. But *Pan's Labyrinth* illustrated his talents as a Spanish language/arthouse director and showed his artistic abilities alongside his already proven box-office successes. The publication and writing of *The Strain* began after this.

But why would a well-known film-maker turn to books? In an interview in 2009, he explained it was because books gave a 'freedom to experiment and place to explore vampire anatomy and biology.'[389] His encounter with Fox network executives explains in part why television did not offer the same opportunities at the time of his conception of the story[390] (in 2006, when the *Twilight* saga had just begun to ride the first waves of its popularity). Yet, the popularity of the books has meant the series was picked up by FX (an extension of Fox), which appears to show that prior success was needed before the series could be transformed into a televisual narrative, or that the ideas behind the books were not suitable for that moment. This could be for a number of reasons, but the strong allusions to 9/11 in the books may have been seen as too explicit, or 'too soon', given other responses to narratives dealing with the topic, as already discussed.

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[388] Daniel Zalewski, *Show the Monster*

[389] Guillermo del Toro, interviewed by Ray Carsillo, 12 June 2009, < http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7slEkBjMU64> [accessed April 2014]

[390] He disclosed in one interview that he had been to discuss it with the network executives at Fox, and they asked for it to be turned into a comedy and he declined. From: Scott Brown, 'Toro! Toro! Toro!' in *Wired,* 11:6 (2009) 84-91, (pp.84)

The timing of the TV series release (2014) places it amongst other dark/gothic narratives which emphasize the monstrosity of humanity, such as *Bates Motel* and *Hannibal,* both of which have gained critical acclaim, strong fan bases, and ratings to prove their popularity.

Del Toro's focus on monsters and the monstrous, combined with his non-American perspective, gives him a unique outlook when it comes to the post-9/11 monster terrain due to the previously discussed Americanisation of monstrous figures such as the vampire. The need for a non-American perspective is highlighted in responses to the event such as the film *11'09"01*, which David Holloway argues 'implied that 9/11 and the war on terror would only become knowable events if knowledge about them was de-Americanised, or at least stripped of its American-centrism.'[391] His narratives embody the 'Mexican familiarity with death'[392] and his knowledge and obsession with monsters allows for a knowledgeable approach to the metaphor, seeing it not just as a metaphor for sexuality but a catalyst for the exploration of a number of issues and themes. Del Toro has lived in Mexico and now resides in LA, but grew up on a diet of American and Mexican horror. His take on vampires in *TST* portrays his usual elements of folklore and fable through a realist filter. As Hogan states: 'We wanted to start with a real world scenario and grow it out until the only rationale left for the characters was the supernatural'.[393] There are elements of both *Pan's Labryinth* and *Cronos* that are reflected in *TST.* Shaw discusses these similarities, noting that: 'Three characteristics that inter-relate in Del Toro's filmmaking and which first appeared in *Cronos* are the crossing of genre boundaries, the co-existence of the magical/fantastical and the realist within a single text, and a concern to make a political statement.'[394] These all occur in *TST,* showing that it is not just in the medium of film that Del Toro's trademarks can be seen. Firstly, the genre of *TST* is questionable – the pace, writing style and marketing place it in the realm of the thriller. However, the inclusion of the disturbing vampire characters and the core themes – destruction of family, society etc – place it within the genre of horror also. Secondly, the fantastical – in this case, the vampires – are being used to highlight a real tragedy that occurred and explore it in a different way. The fallout from 9/11 and

[391] David Holloway, *9/11 and the War on Terror* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008) p.155
[392] Deborah Shaw, p.31
[393] Chuck Hogan, interviewed by Elaine Lamkin, *Dread Central,* 4 June 2009
[394] Shaw, p.38

the fallout from 'the event' in the books both included questioning identity, authority and the political use of fear.[395] Setrakian's experiences in the camps during the Holocaust also add an authenticity to the trauma by referencing a real-life traumatic event alongside the imagined one of the vampire attack (or infestation). Domestic issues such as a divorce and parenthood are also covered in the novel, making them as much of a concern as the fantastical elements of the story.[396] This occurs also in *Pan's Labyrinth* where Ofelia's magical world collides with her ordinary world – she believes her actions in the magical world will save her dying mother. Thirdly, the concern with making a political statement can be seen in all of Del Toro's work, including *TST. Cronos,* as previously mentioned, explores the American influence on Mexico. *Pan's Labyrinth* sets the magical realm Ofelia encounters against the backdrop of a fascist regime in 1944 Spain, and includes scenes of torture to highlight the brutality of it. Del Toro noted that 9/11 had an effect on his filmmaking and perspectives: 'September 11 happened. That was when I realised that (a) I don't know shit, and (b) whatever I had to say about brutality and innocence had just changed.'[397]

When it comes to *TST,* the political statement is encoded into the situation of 9/11 and its imitation event, in the form of the infestation of vampires, which creates a similar culture of fear. The work of this chapter is to identify where and how this takes place, though it must be maintained that Chuck Hogan co-wrote the series, so elements of Del Toro may be mitigated by a more traditional American perspective. As mentioned before, Hogan writes crime and thrillers with a procedural feel. The police procedural is a genre dominated in literature and on-screen by the American presence, with prominent examples being *Dragnet, Columbo, Kojak, Cagney and Lacey* and *Law and Order*. In *TST*, the elements of the police procedural are tied clearly to the location of America, particularly New York, the setting for many other series including those just listed. On the other hand, the elements of the fantastic and fable are linked to the European, through traditions of the European gothic and European folklore, so there is an interesting mix of cultural influence.

The focus of *TST* is the aftermath of the event, rather than the event itself, as is the case with many police procedurals that offer the solution to the problem and then explore

[395] As explained in previous chapters.
[396] The divorce could perhaps be symbolic of a divide/struggle between dominant authorities.
[397] Guillermo del Toro, interviewed by Mark Kermode, *The Guardian,* 21 November 2006

the journeys of the protagonists in reaching it. Yet simply finding out who inflicted the plague of vampires offers no cure in *TST*. Instead, finding the culprit acts as the catalyst to the breakdown of humanity and its social structures, and if we are to see it as an examination of 9/11, we must also look at how it compares to post 9/11 attitudes and changes. The cultural climate in both fictional and real cases is dominated by change and destruction. *Pan's Labyrinth* was seen as a commentary on 9/11 fears by some, as noted above. Yet it is the storyline, setting and themes running through *TST* that better encompass a commentary on 9/11, and even make explicit reference to it. In many ways, *TST* could be categorized as a post-9/11 novel despite its fantastical nature being somewhat uncommon in the recent genre.

The Post 9/11 Novel and Trauma

There are a number of books that have dealt with 9/11, so much so that there is a genre labeled the 'post-9/11 novel'. Among these are DeLillo's *Falling Man* and Jay McInerney's *The Good Life.* These were released 2007 and 2006 respectively, putting some distance between the event and its artistic interpretation. Other notable 9/11 novels include Philip Roth's *The Plot Against America,* Cormac McCarthy's *The Road,* Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close.* David Holloway states that 9/11 novelists 'questioned the capacity of language',[398] much like those writing about traumatic events such as the Holocaust. Despite this, Ann Keniston argues that '9/11 literature works as prosthesis, an awkward substitute for and attempt to compensate for the unrepresentable absence effected by 9/11 itself.'[399] Yet this perspective is interesting given the fact that these novels focus on the aftermath, the absence itself, rather than trying to reform or recreate the events. Another critic, Bimbisar Irom, states that these are attempts at a 'rewrite' rather than a *re*creation: 'the 9/11 novel's predilection for the concept-metaphor of the domestic, with all the attendant subthemes of…female victimhood, and regenerated masculinity, is prima facie evidence of its participation in what Faludi calls a recursive process of 'rewrite'.'[400] In this way, the 9/11 novel becomes a traumatic working through of the events, changing the focus and filling the void of the

[398] David Holloway, p.107
[399] Ann Keniston & Jeanne Follansbee-Quinn, *Literature After 9/11,* (London: Routledge, 2010) p.14
[400] Bimbisar Irom, 'Alterities in a Time of Terror: Notes on the Subgenre of the American 9/11 Novel' in *Contemporary Literature*, 53: 3, (2012) 517-547, (p.518)

towers with family values, reformed society and conflict outside of the events. The number of the narratives and their popularity[401] illustrate the need for audiences to immerse themselves in a form of representation of the event, and an inability to let go of its significance and trauma. Thus the proliferation of these narratives can be seen as both symptom and solution to the trauma of 9/11. Holloway also argues that in the genre of the 9/11 novel, there is a 'tendency to sublimate contemporary anxieties about state activity, and about the state's jeopardizing of the safety of its citizens, in stories about the failures of family members to protect one another – particularly the failure of parents to protect children.'[402] This speaks to the feeling of the populous being 'let down' by the government, the sense of vulnerability that the attacks evoked and the defensive reaction they provoked. This emerges particularly in *The Road, Extremely Loud,* and *Falling Man.* The same occurs in *TST*, where one of the central plotlines is the protection of Eph's son, Zack, who is eventually taken by the Master.

Given the link between trauma and the vampire (discussed briefly in chapter 1) it only seems apt that a 9/11 novel uses vampires as part of the narrative in order to repeat, rework and reimagine the scenario and its aftermath. Whilst trauma theory has been touched upon in this thesis prior to this chapter, it becomes a bigger focus in relation to the narrative we are currently dealing with (*TST*) and indeed, as a whole in terms of the elements of the genres that are being looked at that feature symptoms of trauma (vampire narratives, apocalyptic fiction, war). This chapter also focuses on a different medium. Trauma in fiction, not television, is being discussed here – previous explorations looked at trauma studies as a field. Thus a deeper exploration of the field is needed, along with a look at wider perspectives on trauma and narrative.

Anne Whitehead, in her book *Trauma Fiction,* assesses a number of positions of trauma, particularly the fixation in the field on representation. Trauma theory emerged in the US in the early 1990s out of responses to the Holocaust. The field took Freud's notion of trauma as being 'an extensive breach in the defensive wall surrounding the psyche'[403] and looked at symptomatic elements in narratives, particularly the repetition compulsion of trauma that Freud also details. Representation becomes a

[401] *The Road* was awarded the Pulitzer prize in 2007, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* reached number 4 on the NYT Bestseller list and *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* was also a NYT Bestseller.
[402] Holloway, p.108
[403] Anne Whitehead, *Trauma Fiction,* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004) p.119

crucial aspect of trauma theory, particularly in narrative forms such as writing and film. Whilst for some, including Whitehead, trauma is in its nature that which 'resists language or representation',[404] others, such as Geoffrey Hartman, argue that there are two aspects of trauma – the event (content) and the response (form) that operate in literary terms, making literature a medium effective at 'working through'.[405] Another theorist in the field, Dominick LaCapra, agrees that: 'writing necessarily implies some distance from trauma and is an inherently narrative process.'[406] Thus, placing a traumatic event in the details of *TST* arguably offers a way of working through whilst simultaneously representing the trauma itself. The differences between symptom, representation and working through will be made clear through a discussion of the various critical perspectives on trauma. E. Ann Kaplan in her book *Trauma and Cinema* argues that there is a focus on 'the traumatic event…and the symptoms of the victim' which 'ignores the larger issues of systemic proportions.' [407] This is crucial – post 9/11 novels have a tendency to look at the effects of trauma on the victim, pathologising it whilst ignoring the wider cultural implications. *TST,* being fantastical in nature, makes the trauma visceral and embodies both victim and perpetrator within the figure of the vampire. This pushes the boundaries of the 9/11 novel, and indeed, representations of trauma. Whilst Hartman and LaCapra see representation of trauma in narrative form as curative, Kaplan views them with suspicion:

> Narratives and images designed to represent traumas are viewed with suspicion, for they seem to have the seductive power to gloss over the horrendous fact and distort the literal truth of trauma.[408]

Yet, if trauma cannot be represented, or resists representation, where is the truth? If Holocaust scholars, including Shoshana Felman, argue that trauma is defined by bearing witness and there is a radical crisis of 'an event eliminating its own witness',[409] then how can trauma be truly represented? Trauma comes from the word 'wound', so how can something that is written on the body translate to the written word? Cathy Caruth argues that the text is 'performative', rather than merely

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[404] Whitehead, p.3
[405] Discussed in Whitehead, p.162
[406] Quoted in Whitehead, p.87
[407] E. Ann Kaplan & Ben Wang, *Trauma and Cinema,* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2004) p.4
[408] Kaplan & Wang, p.8
[409] Shoshana Felman, & Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History,* (New York: Routledge, 1992) p.200

representative: 'the text becomes imbricated in our attempts to perceive and understand the world around us.'[410] However, we must be careful not to assume that all events can be understood, or indeed that they can be adequately represented. As Kaplan warns, there is the possibility that the 'aestheticisation' of trauma 'flattens difference, history, memory, and the body into an abstract, pleasing mold.'[411] Whilst we may consume texts that are in categories such as horror, like *TST*, which may evoke images of trauma, they are *still consumable.* They are in forms we deem as acceptable and accessible. Perhaps this is the only way of representing and critiquing the effects of trauma without becoming traumatised ourselves, but there is a danger in the creation and consumption of these narratives. As LaCapra argues: 'trauma theory can seem to imply that everyone is a victim, that all history is trauma and that we share a pathological "wound culture"'.[412] The post 9/11 novel and the status of it as category could be argued as reinforcing this, yet to simply state that it exacerbates victimhood is to renounce its ability to work through these events.

The readiness to which we consume other's accounts of trauma and seek to empathise could be symptomatic of a need to keep the ultimate spectre of death at bay by focusing on the near-misses or losses of other's lives. This vicarious traumatization, which we are privy to through media, which in the case of 9/11, 'fabricated the trauma it purported to be reporting',[413] is an after-effect, a secondary symptom of original trauma. With the advent of globalization, the impact of events became wider, particularly due to modern media, which allows an event and its impact to be transmitted globally, widening the range of aftershocks and the impact of vicarious trauma. The viewer becomes the victim. Kaplan argues for the 'experience of modernity as living with shocks and suffering'.[414] This is certainly the case for many people who can access stories – but why do some traumas have bigger impacts than others? Specifically, with 9/11 as the topic of the chapter, or indeed, thesis, it is crucial to understand how the impact and representation of 9/11 is illuminated by trauma theory in order to better examine the ways these texts exemplify and offer a solution to the trauma itself.

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[410] Quoted in Whitehead, p.13
[411] Kaplan & Wang, p.11
[412] Quoted in Whitehead, p.14
[413] Anna Hartnell, 'Violence and the Faithful in Post-9/11 America: Updike's Terrorist, Islam, and the Specter of Exceptionalism' in *Modern Fiction Studies,* 57: 3 (2011) 477-502, (p.480)
[414] Kaplan & Wang, p.17

There are several aspects specific to trauma theory evident in the mediation of the 9/11 attacks in post 9/11 culture. Firstly, the presentation of the US as wounded: Fritz Breithaupt 'convincingly argues that in the wake of 9/11, the US media represented itself as a vessel of national healing'.[415] This was shown literally in the form of Ground Zero, which left holes filled with spectral light, emphasizing the absence with an almost spiritual significance. David Holloway also argues for the media presentation of the events as traumatic, implying 'a breakdown in embedded models of communal identity'.[416] If we return to the previous definition of trauma by Freud, the attacks enacted a literal and figurative breach of America. Secondly, the Freudian repetition compulsion is evident in responses to the attacks, which as Whitehead notes, added a symbolic aspect to it: 'through repetition or correspondence, the simplest event can be invested with a symbolic aura.'[417] This is so strong with 9/11, visually and linguistically, as Marc Redfield notes: 'the fact that the terrorist attacks of September 11 left a mark on ordinary language offers a hint of their historical force.'[418] The phrase '9/11' has come to represent the events and its aftermath, encompassing the trauma in a simple word-image.

Thus, other strategies for understanding and representing trauma appear to be needed – the legacy of 9/11 is so pervasive that narratives without an explicit reference to the event can be seen as symptomatic or a product of them. This occurred in the first two narratives considered earlier in this thesis. In terms of *TST*, the narrative is simultaneously *about* and *not about* 9/11. It can move beyond the realms of the real, incorporate elements of realism and the fantastic and elevate the concerns evoked to such a level that they are clearer and not mired in the mess of representation that occurs with trauma. Richard Gray argues that post 9/11 novels "fail to move beyond the preliminary stages of trauma by doing nothing more than 'registering that something traumatic…has happened.'"[419] *TST* works against this by beginning with the traumatic and processing the aftermath through the narrative. It shows the power of information, and the way media and the government utilises it, whilst avoiding

[415] Quoted in Hartnell, p.479
[416] Holloway, p.61
[417] Whitehead, p.86
[418] Marc Redfield, 'Virtual Trauma: The Idiom of 9/11' in *Diacritics,* 37: 1 (2007) 54-80, (p.55)
[419] Quoted in Michael Rothberg, 'A Failure of Imagination: Diagnosing the Post 9/11 Novel: A Response to Richard Gray' in *American Literary History,* 21:1(Spring 2009) 152-158, p.152

portraying a 'wound culture'. Despite this, *TST* manages to communicate an interpretation of the global effects of trauma.

TST centres around the 'world' of 9/11 – an airplane in New York; the 'nest' of the vampires within the ruins of Ground Zero; the aftermath destroying the fabric of the city; fear used as a weapon of control. Hogan defends the use of Ground Zero, saying 'Horror has to go to horrible places' and that 'We don't exploit the tragedy at all, but only address its role in the world today'.[420] This role is fundamental to the storyline - references to the events of 9/11 are made, like in other 9/11 novels, yet the tangential storyline further develops the notions of fear, destruction and change that seemed possible in the climate following the attacks. *TST* does something similar to other 9/11 novels which 'assimilate the unfamiliar into familiar structures. The crisis is, in every sense of the word, domesticated.'[421] Whilst it may seem odd to compare novels of family life and relationships to one including vampires and a plague spreading through New York, this idea needs to be unpacked. Firstly, the events were repeatedly described as 'like a movie'.[422] *TST* takes these events and reimagines them, putting them in a movie-like setting and making it the core of the story; details are changed, but it maintains the key elements of fear, destruction and questioning of identity. To put a horrific movie-like event in a horror novel normalizes it within the genre itself. In *TST,* 9/11 is referenced as a point of comparison for the event in the narrative. Secondly, the trilogy's protagonist is a family man who is dealing with a divorce and custody of a child. Within the story, the mother is 'turned' and he has to deal with the very real loss of his ex-wife and the mother of his child, taking the notion of separation to another level. We are given a number of parallel narratives that focus on families and 'survivors' of the crash who have been turned into vampires. The narrative in the opening chapters of the first novel of *TST* looks at the family reaction and response to this change, their willingness to accept it, and how it impacts upon the family unit. One family's solution is to treat the turned father as another of their pet dogs and tie him up in the kennels outside. In this way, he is still maintained within the family, but his nature has changed. It is a form of denial, a stage of grief.

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[420] Chuck Hogan, interviewed by Elaine Lamkin, *Dread Central,* 4 June 2009
[421] Irom, p.519
[422] 'September 11: A Warning from Hollywood', *BBC News* (2001)
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/programmes/panorama/1875186.stm > [accessed September 2014]

In many senses, the stages of grief are evident in the response to 9/11 in media. Perhaps this could explain why there is an attempt at a 're-write' as critics have described it – it is a form of denial, a bargaining. Writers, media, and the public seek ways to represent and view 9/11 as outside of the events themselves – to externalize them, and thus, make them tangible, something that can be impacted, altered. The very fact of the nomenclature of the events being part of everyday language is testament to the attempts to ascribe and describe the meaning of them. The word-image '9/11' encompasses the impact, the aftermath and everything in-between. Just like any other signifier, it is in a sense both universal and unique. What it conjures and evokes in others is dependent upon their experience and knowledge, but it is a global shorthand for the historical moment the US were attacked at their cultural core. New York is the go-to location for films, television shows, and novels. Of course, there is far more to the US than New York, but we have explored its landscape and skyline multiple times cinematically and televisually and it has become synonymous with 'America'. Even in *TST,* where the main character works for the CDC, which is based in Atlanta, he has convinced his superiors to let him work in New York (for family reasons) – giving us the cinematic backdrop to events that belong in the realm of fantasy. This transposing of action to this location links it to 9/11 explicitly and offers the reader the opportunity to re-imagine the events in a metaphorical context. To use New York post 9/11 often requires a recognition of the events, and it is a key part of the 9/11 genre.[423] Other fantasy narratives, such as *The Dark Knight* illuminate the strengthening of the genre:

> the film's imagery…may still operate within a continuum of memory that concerns 9/11…thereby explaining in part the success of the fantasy film since 2001. For others, viewing images that simulate those of 9/11 ironically reflects Baudrillard's claim of the West's fascination with its own destruction.[424]

Thus, the destruction we have "already imagined" according to Baudrillard becomes alien and uncanny. Re-imagining it through the eyes of a cinematic director in the

[423] Marvel's *The Avengers* (2013) ends with a destruction scene set in New York. It is referred to in other Marvel universe narratives such as *Daredevil* (2015) as 'the event'.
[424] Francis Pheasant-Kelly, *Fantasy Film Post 9/11,* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013) p.142

medium of a novel (and arguably one that treads the borders of the fantasy genre) transposes and thus (re)creates the event.

Returning to the idea of the significance of the event, Redfield's argument about 9/11's effect on language along with Kaplan's idea of repetition as imbuing a symbolic aura combine to show the weight the phrase carries. Its frequent repetition has given it a gravitas that evokes, yet distorts. As for many who were not direct witnesses, the media presentation is the image evoked from the name. Yet it is still important to remember that it does not necessarily need to be directly referenced in order for comparisons or links within popular culture (such as *Pans Labyrinth*) to be constructed.

So how does that effect novels such as *TST* who directly reference *and* borrow from the storyline of the events? I would argue that those who indirectly reference 9/11 often evoke a sense of déjà vu – the viewer/reader applies their experiences of the events to similar ones they are encountering in a fictional realm and thus re-experience their emotions. Frances Pheasant-Kelly describes it as a form of multi-directional memory – exploring one event through another which evokes it. For those who directly reference 9/11, a representation forces the viewer to confront the event head-on and draws comparisons with their interpretation of the event, often creating a narrower window of experience as the portrayal will necessarily only capture one perspective of events.

Arguably, *TST* begins with 9/11 as a point of comparison and diverges from the storyline, using metaphor and another form of multi-directional memory (in the form of the flashback to the Holocaust and concentration camps) to explore the feelings of trauma evoked. The novel opens with Flight 753 landing in September 2010 (a big reference to the events if it needed to be made more obvious) and evoking memories in those working on the case. The mystery of the 'dead' airplane has a traumatic impact: 'The spectre of 9/11 still hung over many of these Port Authority officers, and the current bewildering mass-casualty situation had brought it crashing down again.' (TS, p47) The mention of 9/11 acknowledges the similarities and impact of the events, and arguably uses the reference as an anchor-point from which to diverge and debate cultural trauma and its aftermath.

It is cultural trauma that is the common thread between these narratives – either through the visual or the literary. By putting trauma into a popular medium, it allows for both an individual and a universal approach to the issue – as it has to appeal to a broad audience (in commercial terms, in order for it to be published) and to the individual reader. This could suggest that the narrative is more ambiguous in order for it to be seen as relevant to a wider number of readers who can project their interpretations onto it. As Redfield notes, 'if we try to conceive of trauma on a cultural level things become more ambiguous, above all in the case of the 9/11 attacks…it is of course as symbolic acts of violence that they claim culturally traumatic status.'[425] *The Strain* echoes this by offering culturally (fictional and) symbolic trauma in the form of an airplane-based origin of impact. The narrative is filled with these symbols of reference to the events. Yet the divergence of the storyline takes the reader on a journey away from the direct occurrence of the events and engages in a wider discussion about the handling and aftermath of a traumatic impact. The vampires are the ideal symbolic pairing with the events of 9/11 because they transform and mutate, puncturing and draining – leaving holes in the body and using fear as a motivator, turning the body's systems against itself until it becomes hostile. The vampire becomes a multitude of things – the scapegoat, the victim, the aggressor, the vessel for change, but mostly, it becomes the catalyst for these events.

The vampire, in the case of *TST,* moves away from the personal; there are no elements of personality to fixate upon, just the idea of evil and the threat of death – they affect the population rather than the individual for the most part. The story focuses on the efforts of individuals trying to stop the spread of vampires. This is the opposite to *True Blood* and *Being Human* where the character focus is on the singular vampire and his struggles, a struggle that is caused *by* the fact that he is a vampire and fighting against his nature, and the relationships they have with individual humans (for the most part). In *TST* we see the vampire as a *species* rather than a personality type as a metaphor for the spread of fear and change across American culture. Whilst this echoes the fear of invasion present in *Dracula,* it takes the notion of the hostile vampire and pluralises it. The civilized vampire, also finding its roots in *Dracula* (and *Varney the Vampire)* is

[425] Redfield, p.56

present in *Being Human* and *True Blood.* For the most part, the post 9/11 vampire is based upon the idea of the civilized vampire with a hostile past, or fighting against preconceptions of their hostile nature. In *TST*, the narrative takes the preconceptions of the civilized vampire as the antonym to what a vampire should be. There is a lack of humane behaviour throughout the series; instead it primarily focuses on survival and the animalistic nature of humans and other species that threaten them.

The human focus in this story jumps between perspectives, again unlike the texts dealt with in the first two chapters. This offers a broader view of the political and cultural response. E. Ann Kaplan raises the point that in trauma studies, there is primarily a focus on 'the traumatic event, its impact and the horrifying symptoms of the victim.' This, she argues, is 'the fixation on trauma as the ultimate limit of representation.'[426] To assess the event as singular is to miss its place in history and perhaps mistakenly give it more influence than it truly has. Yet, I would argue, this fixation on the event and its impact is a form of processing, of grieving, and the pre-occupation with the minutiae of an event, efforts at representation or discussions of impact are an attempt to record and reform. It must also be noted that the proliferation of these representations of trauma are both symptomatic and restorative. They move the boundaries of trauma from the personal to the public and allow for a shared mourning and public catharsis in the form of symbolic working through. Trauma often takes on a symbolic form in its manifestation – investing unrelated events, objects and language with a quasi-spiritual significance in the process of dealing with it. These objects, words and echoes of the original trauma are present in the many narratives that emerge from the time surrounding the traumatic event. In the case of 9/11, language changed, stories of paternal failing and masked identity evoked the themes present in the events of 9/11. Stories and narratives were invested with the power to 'work through' the emotions and symptoms – yet the very fact of their existence as traumatic narratives is a symptom of the trauma itself. Many narratives around the time repeated the same themes and stories – and explicit references merely repeated the events rather than analyzing them. Thus, scholarly interest in the impact of trauma will always necessarily focus on the event that caused it and the impact because they are bound together – following a traumatic event, there will be a flooding of related media,

[426] Kaplan & Wang, p.4

whether visual, verbal or literary.[427] This process spreads the cultural impact of the trauma, makes it shared, and gives some sense of kinship and support in dealing with the grief that follows. It is also, in a sense, a form of display that attempts to showcase the importance of the victim.

Who the victim is can be hard to discern, as has been discussed in previous chapters. With cultural trauma there is no singular victim, rather, there are sides – victim(s) and perpetrator. In the case of *TST,* it is difficult to ascertain who exactly is on which side, for it is a state in flux – the conditions change as the virus spreads. At the start of the novel, the sides appear clearly defined: the humans on the plane who have been killed are the victims, and the perpetrator came from a coffin full of earth transported on the plane. Immediately the reader is exposed to the idea of the vampire as the primary evil in the novel – especially given the opening of Setrakian's tale of Sardu who devours groups of men in the forest, and also exhibits vampiric characteristics. But as the story progresses, those who we see as 'victims' begin to attack others and create a chain of victims. Their families accept them into their homes because they see the external representation of their beloved and want to believe they are not dead – a stage of denial in the process of grief. Yet, their husbands, daughters, wives, etc. have unmistakably changed and enforce this on the family they return to. So the story continues until the trail of victim and perpetrator leads to Eldritch Palmer, a shadowy figure living on dialysis in a mansion, hidden away. The vampire who we had initially thought to be the perpetrator has been aided by a human and is a 'rogue' vampire – enacting behaviour not condoned by other vampire groups. Palmer, it is revealed, is a capitalist fat-cat who is living a quasi-vampiric existence of his own through medical means and seeks to become vampire proper. Thus, we cannot simply say it is the vampires or humans that are either victim or perpetrator.

This is something that becomes key through the other vampiric narratives we have seen. In both *Being Human* and *True Blood,* it couldn't be said that *all* the vampires were evil or *all* the humans were good, or vice versa. Rather, there were factions within each 'species' and ultimately it came down to the set of beliefs a group subscribed to rather than what their DNA meant. This happens in *TST* – and again, like

[427] The Holocaust being the most obvious example, which is referenced in *TST.*

in other novels, it is the dogmatic authority that is in control, with its stringent structures and capitalistic characteristics. Palmer embodies greed; he is the ultimate consumer – living off the machines that provide him with life and sacrificing humanity so that he can gain immortality. Conservative or fascist authority is an ongoing theme in Del Toro's work – both *Cronos* and *Pan's Labyrinth* present fascist or conservative characters or regimes as morally dubious and playing the role of antagonists.

Taking this information and applying it to the subject matter at hand, that is, the 9/11 novel, it is evident that *TST*, along with other 9/11 novels, subverts the story, or rather, representation of the events. With many 9/11 novels, the aggressor/victim roles have already been defined, thus the focus of the novel is the impact of the events – they become a processing of grief and an outward display of the effects for those who did not witness to see, feel and understand. But they do not *question.* Rather, these novels often accept and are internally focused on the grief, the trauma, and the shock. What makes a series like *TST* different is that it actively reimagines – focusing instead on the political – and (perhaps due to the genre it comes under) takes the reader on a search for the root of the trauma, which is why it does not simply divide into good/bad. As has been a recurring point through this thesis, it is perhaps because of this genre and the use of the vampire that such probing questions are seen as less of an affront.

In previous chapters, I have argued that the vampire makes the treatment of 9/11 in some sense apolitical. But, as discussed above, Del Toro is known for using his work to make a political comment. Does the same apply here? The monster as metaphor for the (sometimes) intangible or complex fears of a culture or society has a long history, but how far does it act as a buffer between the realistic politics of a situation in question? If the audience can read the interpretation, and it is clear, then it is nothing more than a re-enactment of a situation in a somewhat poorly veiled disguise. With *TST,* the issue in question has been so thoroughly publicised, dissected and discussed that the readership will be aware of the intricacies of the case and thus will be able to spot the similarities between real-life and the fiction they hold in their hands.

Making memories: official versus cultural narratives

Throughout this thesis there has been a discussion of the varied interpretations of primarily televisual vampire texts, a look at their reception critically and the meaning of their popularity. But even if, as above, the similarities between texts like *TST* and the real-life events leading to the War on Terror can be seen, why is it relevant? Storytelling in its various forms is usually careful to place itself in the world of fiction – the legal necessity of the disclaimer at the end of productions also reminds us that we have been watching a dramatization. Even if stories and inspiration are taken from real life, they alter and present it in an entertaining and easily-consumable way. As we consume stories, they become part of our ongoing narrative about the world and are informed by our experience. This is exemplified in the novel when Setrakian recalls being told about Sardu – he 'gulped down the end of the story with the remains of his soup.' (TS, p13) The popularity of films, books and television is important because it may impact the modes of thinking audiences have and may help foster attitudes and opinions on topics they were previously unaware or unsure of. Fiction and reality have a symbiotic relationship – each affecting the other. We tell stories to make meaning, to transmit key ideas, and our cultural narratives fulfil a function, much like official narratives do. These two forms of knowing – fiction and reality – are juxtaposed here with the events of 9/11 and its inclusion and allusions in the novel. Due to the prominent role both cultural and official narratives have in our structures of meaning in the world, the portrayal of people and events is crucial, as it impacts and forms viewpoints that may be dangerous or misguided. This happens in cultural narratives with the presence of characters deemed 'other'. A prominent example is the continuous positioning of the Muslim or Arab as 'other' and therefore, 'dangerous', and often linked with terrorism. This results in a reinforcement of a negative and inaccurate perception of the identity group as a whole,[428] as discussed explicitly in chapter 2.

This is something that has been studied at other levels outside of fiction; interestingly, an examination of reporting of the 9/11 events in American textbooks by Mohammed Saleem and Michael Thomas showed the proliferation of polarized attitudes and

[428] As displayed by various Pew Forum surveys on perceptions of Muslims in America referenced in previous chapters.

confusing categorisations. One of these is the concept of "terrorism" which they found is primarily attributed to Muslim perpetrators rather than other groups. They state:

> The politics of official knowledge are the politics of tacit agreement or compromise where the compromises that are formed favour dominant religious groups.[429]

The same goes for other officially (government) sanctioned areas such as advertising. Elizabeth Alsultany found that media representation 'confirmed the binary framework of good and evil, Americans and Arabs/Muslims.'[430] Further, she posits that the government and the media 'relied on old Orientalist tropes that positioned American national identity as democratic, modern and free and the Middle East as primitive, barbaric, and oppressive.'[431] Thus the dominant American Christian-identified religious groups (as discussed in Chapter 2) are defined as positive in contrast to the negative portrayals of Islam. Despite Bush claiming that 'the enemy of America is not our many Muslim friends',[432] there is still an obvious linguistic divide between 'American' and 'Muslim', even in his statement. Cultural narratives, then, offer an alternative to tackling these issues literally. In *The Strain,* del Toro and Hogan take the notion of 'other' and shift it from the usual presentation of vampire as persecuted outsider to focusing on the handling of a crisis and the government cover-up. The vampires feature as catalyst of the crisis rather than the focus of the story, and this relegation of the figure to somewhat mute allows the reader to further explore the divisions, processes and attitudes that arise during and following a traumatic event. The first novel of the trilogy shows the government struggling to cover up the truth and discrediting the protagonist, Eph, by trying to frame him as a killer.

This exploration of stereotype versus reality is made evident through the perception of vampires by many characters in the book, which is repeatedly shown as the assumptions are discredited and the truth is revealed. Nora, Eph's partner, exclaims 'I thought vampires drank virgin blood…' to which Setrakian, the figure who was raised

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[429] Mohammed Saleem, & Michael Thomas, 'The Reporting of the Sept 11 Terrorist Attacks in American Social Studies Textbooks: A Muslim Perspective' in *The High School Journal,* 95: 1 (2011), 15-33, (p.15)
[430] Elizabeth Alsultany, 'Selling American diversity and Muslim American Identity Through nonprofit advertising' in *American Quarterly,* 59: 3 (2007) 593-622, (p.594)
[431] Ibid
[432] Quoted in Alsultany, p.594

on folklore and has been following them for decades, responds, 'They are much romanticized. But the truth is more…banal.' (TS, p.285) Vampires are more than the string of preconceptions – in the narrative, they have a unique function that allows them to effectively mediate and critique the situations they find themselves in – that is, they move beyond the present and represent the past, particularly in the case of the Master. Their function as representative of the 'other' is just one aspect that makes them apt for cultural narratives. They are described by Ann Davies as heterotopic: 'vampires, in living as they do, become repositories of information about other times and places, the embodiment of the sort of information contained in libraries and museums…allowing for both a heterotopic and heterochronic approach to reality.' [433]This is particularly pertinent in *The Strain,* where the contrast between the Holocaust and 9/11 is made through the figure of the central vampire, the Master. He moves in the narrative from Setrakian's memories of the concentration camps to enacting a similar kind of inhumanity upon modern-day society. This heterotopic and heterochronic approach allows for the traumas and events to be seen alongside one another rather than as distinct. One trauma evokes the other, is mediated and recalled through images and events that evoke inhumanity and suffering, with death as the central emblem of these traumas – perhaps because it is the fear of death that allows these traumas to wield such power.

The knowledge and approach to these events are shown as folklore and fable; without official documentation, experiences are lost in translation, modified and altered, but nonetheless, the central meaning may still exist. The vampire, as a feature and emblem of folklore, offers a cultural narrative rather than an official one, and as such, those who attempt to pass it on are discredited (such as Eph and Setrakian). *TST* thus illuminates the battle between cultural narratives and official ones. To clarify, in the context of this chapter, the differences between cultural narratives and official narratives should be explained: cultural narratives are comprised of information and stories passed between people and in cultural artefacts (through films, plays, books, television and other cultural forms). Official narratives are often government-sanctioned, and suit a particular agenda. Official narratives often involve vicarious witnessing – a passing on of testimony that has been phrased or written in a specific

[433] Ann Davies, 'Guillermo del Toro's Cronos: the vampire as embodied heterotopia' in *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 25, (2008) 395-403 (pp.397)

way. This vicarious witnessing is central to the novel (as most people see the rolling footage of the plane landing and the start of the infection) and echoes the experience of 9/11 for those outside New York. Redfield states that 'most people who experienced Sept 11 did so not as survivors or eyewitnesses, but as TV watchers.'[434] The way this experience was presented is key, as Hartnell argues: 'the media itself played a large role in fabricating the trauma it purported to be reporting.'[435] The media, with its official narratives, serves as the messenger for the aftershocks of the event. The impact the event has is determined by the (re)presentation of it. Kaplan argues that 'cultural memory is being subjected to relentless erasure by the transnational media driven by the logic of commodity and consumption' which in turn is 'rendering past traumas into spectacles.'[436] It is undeniable that 9/11 has been turned into a spectacle or that cultural memory is replaced by official narratives. But this need to consume and commodify information, even trauma, is part of the need for knowledge, and the safety and power that comes with it.

Perhaps a very telling attitude is the response Setrakian gives to Eph when he discovers the truth: 'you simplify because you cannot believe…and because this is America - where everything is known and understood, and god is a benevolent dictator, and the future must always be bright.' (TS, p.267) The need to *know* and to *simplify* echoes the blunt categorisations of good and evil in the War on Terror. Vampires are so easily discredited because they are not an accepted part of the societal narrative. Reality is what is known and what has been seen – the rest is fable and folklore. This is why the text shows that it is easy to control the population and to assure them it is a virus. Viruses are known, and can be controlled. The supernatural on the other hand is a different matter. This works to the advantage of both the government and the rogue vampire and his human ally, Eldritch Palmer, as they take control of the human race.

Eph is discredited as if he were a conspiracy theorist as he presents a challenge to the official narrative. Indeed, for the most part, *The Strain* shows these challenging figures as rogue outsiders who fight for the truth. In relation to 9/11, the questioning of the government and authority showed itself through the multitude of conspiracy

[434] Redfield, p.68
[435] Hartnell, p.480
[436] Kaplan, p.11

theories surrounding 9/11. There were a number of theories globally, addressing different aspects of the events. The magnitude was such that Bush had to address the issue in a speech at the UN[437] and the government added a page to its site in 2006 debunking many of the most common theories.[438] Despite their lack of truth, the number of them shows a doubt in the authority of the government. In *The Strain* (and indeed, as we saw in Chapter 1 in the US *Being Human*) authority is treated as corrupt, and the protagonists have a more liberal, tolerant view of society and the situation. Thus readers can vicariously question authority in the 'safe' space of fiction. These fears of corrupt authority are present, argues Stacy Takacs, in sci-fi post 9/11 which featured 'invasive alien forces, *shadowy government conspiracies*, and generalized mood of paranoia and dread.'(itals mine)[439] All of these elements are present in *The Strain,* and highlight the complexities of boundaries between humans and monsters.

The varied portrayal of the outsider and the vampire across these texts, particularly in *The Strain,* also subverts the official definitions of 'us' and 'them' that have been shown in textbooks, governmental advertising and the media. Rather than strict boundaries, 'good' and 'evil' are conflated in a number of characters and groups. What is 'human' is loosely defined to show the broad range of definitions and the ethical problems with simplifying and reducing a figure to an 'outsider' or 'evil'. The use of mythical figures also places the narrative into something similar to fable or myth. Del Toro purposely wrote elements of fable into the story, and he has stated before that 'Fables and fairy tales have a very primal, raw power. Realism has become an overwhelming force in human narrative. The fable should have as important a place.'[440] In the case of representing the traumatic events of both the holocaust and 9/11, as *The Strain* does, it arguably twists realism into its own fable, and focuses on the myths constructed around moments of terror.

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[437] George W. Bush, United Nations, New York, 10 November 2001, in 'CNN', <http://edition.cnn.com/2001/US/11/10/ret.bush.un.transcript/index.html > [accessed March 2014]
[438] Which had previously been located at http://iipdigital.usembassy.gov/st/pubs-english/2006/September/20060828133846esnamfuaK0.2676355.html but has since been removed. [accessed January 2012]
[439] Stacy Takacs, 'Monsters, Monsters Everywhere: Spooky TV and the Politics of Fear in Post 9/11 America' in *Science Fiction Studies,* 36:107 (2009) 1-20, (p.1)
[440] Guillermo del Toro, interviewed by Gilbert Cruz, *TIME,* 4 June 2009 <http://content.time.com/time/arts/article/0,8599,1902395,00.html > [accessed February 2014]

Since 9/11, there has been an obvious increase in the use of the word/concept 'terror'. The War on Terror, terrorism and terrorists are all part of our everyday cultural vocabulary – used often in our cultural narratives as shorthand for those who want to destroy society and the structures in rests upon. But how do we define terror? It has moved beyond a simple description of fear and the threat of violence to something performative and political. The word has been hijacked so that it is almost synonymous with 9/11 and its perpetrators. It is not an act but an *impact* – the terror comes from the imagining or threat of these events. It is the *possibility* of violence that embodies terror. It is simultaneously a presence and an absence – a fear defined by the ever-possible presence of violence, which is all the more terrifying in its absence. Thus the realization can dispel an element of terror as it allows us to examine and interpret rather than ruminate and imagine the worst as is so often present in apocalyptic narratives. This happens in *The Strain* with the description and presentation of the 9/11 scenario (albeit with a monstrous and metaphorical twist), subduing somewhat the moments of terror by their realization through their fictional presentation. George W. Bush in a post-9/11 address described the impact the events had and how they played out 'terror': 'it is natural to wonder if America's future is one of fear. Some speak of an age of terror.'[441] This divide between pre- and post-9/11 safety illustrates the effect of terror, particularly the idea that terrorists claimed America's 'freedom from fear'.[442]

The political meaning of the word also needs to be assessed. It may differ amongst the populace, as Geoffrey Harpham argues: 'who knows, these days, what terror is?'[443] It has been used as the central word in the retaliation to al-Qaeda attacks and becomes a mantra, a word that summons and evokes a response which has become ingrained by its repeated association with the 'enemy'. The War on Terror was fought against the *concept* of terror, which is difficult to pin down and eliminate as it is beyond the realm of the real. As Charles Tilly notes, 'some vivid terms serve political and normative ends admirably despite hindering description and explanation of the social phenomena at which they point.'[444] It does not move beyond the political use for the word, but serves as a function, denoting the enemy only. This is somewhat

[441] George W. Bush, Washington D.C., 20th September 2001, from 'Transcript of President Bush's address', *CNN,* (2001) <http://edition.cnn.com/2001/US/09/20/gen.bush.transcript/ > [accessed January 2013]
[442] Peter Stearns, American Fear: The Causes and Consequences of High Anxiety, (New York: Routledge, 2006) p.34
[443] Geoffrey Harpham, 'Symbolic Terror' in *Critical Inquiry,* 28:2 (2002) 573-579, (pp.573)
[444] Charles Tilly, 'Terror, Terrorism, Terrorists' in *Sociological Theory* 22:1 (2004) 5-13, (pp.5)

contradictory when 'properly understood, terror is a strategy, not a creed.'[445] Terrorists are only the means by which terror is enacted – the perpetrators are flexible, ever-changing, yet the War on Terror focused solely on al-Qaeda and the 'Axis of Evil', using the word 'terror' to give a name to the enemy. Terror*ism* is described by WJT Mitchell as 'a war of words and images carried by the mass media.'[446] Terrorism works as long as its primary objective has a means of spreading, like a disease. Its ultimate aim is the *threat* of violence, the spread of fear. It works well in America because of its media and the politicians that speculate about safety and freedom. It is 'being propagated by the very means that are supposed to destroy it.'[447]

This terror serves a purpose – it is a motivator behind the War, a cause the populace can understand in their fear. Terror is 'unspeakable and unimaginable'[448] and the actions of the government may be a way to imagine and give a voice to those affected by it. In the narrative of *TST*, terror for the reader is subdued by the very fact of it being placed within fiction – it is put in the realm of the unreal. Yet, the characters within these narratives are controlled by fear; rather, the government uses fear as a method of control and oppression, particularly to silence those who go against them, like Eph.

The politics of fear

The use of fear as a form of political control is particularly pertinent in relation to the events of 9/11. Because the attacks were unforeseen and unknown, they opened up a vulnerability – and became ammunition in the American politics of fear. Stacy Takacs, discussing the influx of monster narratives onscreen post 9/11, argues that these monsters 'were all clearly enabled by and responsive to the heightened sense of anxiety associated with life in the post-9/11 United States. They both contributed to and critiqued the 'politics of fear' (re)structuring US social relations at that time.'[449] Anxieties and fears produced by predominant representations of terrorism post-9/11

[445] Tilly, p.11
[446] WJT Mitchell, 'The Unspeakable and the Unimaginable: Word and Image in a Time of Terror' in *ELH,* 72:2 (2005) 291-308, (pp.298)
[447] Mitchell, p.300
[448] Mitchell, p.298
[449] Takacs, p.1

are projected onto 'racial others'[450] in such a way that the effect of those dominant discourses of terrorism – the racial stereotype – is mistaken for the cause. Concerns have been shown through the divisions between racial groups and the reinforcing of the American identity through media and cultural representation – seen before with the divisions in advertising and official narratives. These racial divisions are first touched upon in *TST* in a more realistic sense through the character of Gus Elizade, a Hispanic youth. In a fight with a vampire, the police arrived too late and assumed he was the perp as there were no witnesses to state the contrary: 'the tourists were gone.' (TS, p195) His simple statement of 'this was America for you' (TS, p195) is a short but powerful point about racial assumptions and prejudice. *The Strain* also plays on this culture of fear by showing its use as manipulation in order for the central, capitalist, human figure to get what he wants. This is in line with del Toro's political views, and his other narratives, but it also allows a criticism of the politics of fear, as Takacs described being evident in the television shows. The elements of vampirism and a non-American perspective in the approach to 9/11 are interesting as they use an arguably Americanised popular figure, modified to resemble its monstrous origins and thus refigured as un-American outsiders.

The Americanisation of the vampire is apt given the figure's link to fear through its previous incarnations as a symbol of fear, and the American 'fear culture'. This fear culture has been perpetuated by politicians, the media and spread like a disease. By contrast, the disease in *TST* is spread through a denial of the truth on the part of the government. Once the truth emerges, fear is used to set up a new world order. The set-up of the country as 'fortified' with bunkers, armed guards and guns may remind the populace 'to be ever more afraid.'[451] They serve as visual markers for the *need* for protection. This increased post-9/11, particularly in airports, with tighter security measures which simultaneously offered reassurance and served as a reminder of the possibility of a repeat of the events. In *TST* this is shown by the presence of men in 'combat gear with armored vests and assault weapons', who we learn are 'concerned citizens'. (TF, p19) This response indicates the militaristic reaction and mindset associated with 'fear culture'. The results of surveys showed an increase in fear: 'polling data soon after the September 11 attacks demonstrated that a near-majority of

[450] Ibid
[451] Stearns, p.23

Americans had experienced active fear.'[452] It was this fear that drove the subsequent response in the form of the War on Terror. An attempt to reclaim freedom from fear would paradoxically put America at risk of further retaliation. This is highlighted by the terror warnings (the colour code system) which rose to its highest and 'would not drop below fearsome levels in the foreseeable future'[453] after 9/11.[454]

What is it about this fear-soaked response that is resolutely American? Contrasting responses to other terrorist attacks, particularly the 7/7 bombings in London showed an absence of fear or panic, according to Peter Stearns. Bush even remarked that the bombings were 'meant to scare Americans.'[455] This is excessive fear that seeks out attack, even if it is against someone else. The focus is internal, and acts, as Derrida argues, like an autoimmune disorder: 'terror works on the collective imagination to clone images of horror'.[456] Thus fear and terror is being used *against* Americans, and is spread like a disease. What this does is instill a sense of vulnerability and a need for guidance, leadership and a solution, as Stearns notes: 'American fear culture opens many people to excessive manipulability.'[457] This manipulability is a political asset, allowing for governmental control in a time of confusion and fear. The spread of fear, like a disease, weakened and confused people, and the government presented a cure in the form of the War on Terror. Stearns continues, arguing that, 'it is no accident that the most fear-soaked television channel after September 11, Fox News, was also closest to the Bush administration.'[458] The media again were being used to prey on the fear evoked by the events and to spread it further by the repetition of images that kick-started it. If terror is unspeakable and unimaginable, then it resides in the realm of the unknown, and fear is its symptom. Thus, to quell the symptoms of fear and terror, people may look to 'official' sources for guidance and knowledge such as the media and government. Contrastingly, in *The Strain,* the official sources for guidance can offer no help, in part due to their corruption by the elderly billionaire, Palmer. Together with the government, he hides the nature of the vampire which is confusing due to its difference from stereotypes and common conceptions of the figure. The fear

[452] Stearns, p.25
[453] Stearns, p.44
[454] The colour-coded system has been subsequently replaced by the National Terrorism Advisory System (NTAS) which currently has no threats listed as of July 2015.
[455] Stearns, p.24
[456] Quoted in Mitchell, p.301
[457] Stearns, p.217
[458] Stearns, p.210

originally in *TST* comes from an absence of knowledge, which is used to the advantage of Palmer. He had a 'vested interest in misleading the American public and the world at large, [he was] influencing the media and controlling the CDC.' (TF, p38) This leads people to react to the 'public perception of the virus', giving Palmer the responses he orchestrates and desires. His control is such that it can elicit evil acts from others, who then in excuses reminiscent of Nazi war criminals, claim that they 'are just following orders.' (TF, p213)

Part of the fear in *The Strain* comes from a change in the presentation of the vampire to a monster, rather than something human, and because it is unknown. Whilst other narratives have shown the vampire as having redeeming or relatable qualities, *The Strain* positions the figure as insect-like, with extending tongues and white blood, clearly marking it as something inhuman and indecipherable. In the novel, the biology of the vampires is explained to the main characters, whilst the population are kept out of the loop and thus, still able to be manipulated by a fear of an unknown. The unknown and the consequences of secrets are key to the post 9/11 moment, as Michael Barkun asserts: 'during periods of social or political tension, religious secrets, real or imagined, take on a broader and more sinister importance, for they may be seen as evidence that a religious community has unsavoury beliefs or behaviours that it must hide.'[459] This in particular is relevant to the fear and mistrust of Islam as 'some manifestations of Islam have come to be regarded as potential threats to public security, not because of anything that can be clearly seen, but because of what some believe may be hidden from view.'[460] The presentation of the vampire and its explanations of its biology lay bare the inner working of the figure and cause the reader to focus on what is not being seen or explained – primarily, the human elements of control and manipulation behind them.

Science, vampires, and the monstrous human

Del Toro, known for using mythical creatures and their accompanying spirituality, focused on the biology in *TST* to 'find the spiritual in the biology and find the biology

[459] Michael Barkun, 'Religion and Secrecy after September 11' in *Journal of the American Academy of Religion,* 24: 2 (2006) 275-301, (pp.298)
[460] Barkun, p.288

in the myth.'[461] The vampires are investigated by the scientist protagonist, Eph, and it is this knowledge of the biology that allows him to accept their existence. Del Toro stated that he was 'fabricating this biology as a way to allow people to believe in them.'[462] This again returns to the idea of knowledge being the antidote to fear – by explaining, it can be rationalized and thus, the fear is subdued. Hogan notes that they used an epidemiologist's view of vampirism as it 'contributed to the novel's realism', as 'disease control is a constant battle.'[463] A scientific approach to vampirism takes something that emerged from folkloric origins and attempts to give it credibility by examining and explaining it, which serves to highlight the almost fictional-seeming echoes of 9/11. The biology of these vampires shows them to be almost a cross between Ridley Scott's *Alien* and traditional vampires: 'out wriggled something pink and fleshy that was not his tongue….as though he had swallowed a live squid, and one of its tentacles was still thrashing about desperately inside his mouth.' (TS, p.218) They are later described as vampiric, but in a less traditional sense of the parasite: 'bloated with blood, like ticks, lying about and digesting' (TS, p.466). The focus on the physical shifts the examination of the moral or mental state of the vampire, common in contemporary narratives, to the human, as will shortly be discussed. The scientific element of the vampire that is built upon in TST is arguably an element of a genre the vampire inhabits, and as such, is referred to throughout this section as 'the scientific vampire'. It denotes the biological focus on the figure and positions it as something less than human.

The scientific explanation for the vampire strips away the mystique and posits it not as supernatural, but a genetic mutation. Previous vampire descriptions are denounced as 'Products of their time. Products of one Victorian author's fevered Irish imagination, and the religious climate of the day.' (TS, p.266) Thus the religious is apparently separated from the biological in preliminary introductions to the figure. Yet, del Toro's view that 'science and religion are like a Mobius strip'[464] is confronted later in the novel, after the initial positioning of the vampire in the realm of science. The various elements of romance and kitsch of the figure are removed, as Setrakian describes: 'Think more along the lines of a man with a black cape. Fangs. Funny accent…Take

[461] Angela Watercutter, 'GDT talks vampires, giant monsters and the 'arrogance of science'
[462] Guillermo del Toro, interviewed by Gilbert Cruz, *TIME,* 4 June 2009
[463] Chuck Hogan, interviewed by Rob Beschizza, *Boingboing,* 4 November 2011, <http://boingboing.net/2011/11/04/a-quick-qa-with-chuck-hogan-co-author-of-the-night-eternal.html> [accessed April 2014]
[464] Angela Watercutter, 'GDT talks vampires, giant monsters and the 'arrogance of science'

away anything funny about it.' (TS, p.242) The novels also move away from the sexualized perception of the vampire in recent narratives such as *True Blood* and *Twilight* by removing the genitalia – Gabriel Bolivar, a once promiscuous rockstar, is left with a 'limp penis, blackened and shrivelled, ready to drop from his groin like a diseased fig from a dying tree.' (TS, p.252) The horror of the physical emphasizes the difference between monster and human.

The history of science and the vampire arguably began with Matheson's *I am Legend.* Matheson's vampires are more like zombies, devoid of personality and seemingly sentient thought. They are driven by a desire to feed. It is a story in which, Erik Smetana argues, 'science has run amok.'[465] The vampires are the result of a pandemic, caused by war, and the story is told by the last remaining human who treats the vampires with contempt, which he comes to realise, is how they view him. He is treated as monstrous, though from the reader's point of view, the monsters are on the outside. It serves to reinforce the idea that monstrousness can be a point of view, and that 'human' is not the opposite of 'monster'.

Other narratives posit the vampire as scientifically-based, and explain the mystique of the supernatural, allowing a 'cure' to be found. These include films such as *Blade* and *Daybreakers,* which also serve as a commentary on issues such as race and global warming respectively. Their primary theme though is the strength and position of science and its ills. Vampirism is a virus, a contaminant, yet it allows there to be a search for a cure, unlike narratives where there is no underlying scientific cause. This is a direct echo of the portrayal of the vampires in *TST,* where 'vampires are viruses incarnate.' (TS, p.342) In these films, the cure is fixated upon, rather than containment (as happens in *TST).* The way this cure is used for control and manipulation often echoes the comment on authority many other vampire narratives contain. The novel *The Passage* by Justin Cronin explores this; the vampire 'virus' is developed and used to further political interests, portraying a cynical view of government. Smetana comments on the novel, arguing that it 'tries to find its footing as a rebirth of the

[465] Erik Smetana, 'Books with Bite' in *The Missouri Review,* 34:1, (2011) 173-180, (pp.174)

vampire-as-monster, examining the societal striations of today while looking ahead at those of tomorrow.'[466]

This examination and prediction (or projection) is a key element of *The Strain.* The government are shown to alter the truth depending on financial incentive, and the outcome of society is similarly controlled. Further on in the trilogy, once the virus of vampirism has spread, a police state is set up to control the newly turned vampires, and humans are hunted out. Yet, the vampire-as-monster is questionable, as I would argue that the scientific vampire is not the monster in these narratives. Because they have been 'infected', they are victims, and primarily, they are following their instincts, rather than any sort of consciousness. Giving a scientific basis for the condition of vampire allows the fault to lie with those who *let* it spread for whatever reason.

We see this in *The Strain* with the treatment of Kelly, Eph's ex and his son's (Zack) mother. She is turned, and there is grief. Although she is a 'monster', Zack is still desperate to see her and sees the humanity in her. There is more anger at the vampire that began this spread: the Master/Sardu. Yet he cannot be held responsible for the spread as he was aided and sought out by a human. This human is Eldritch Palmer, an influential figure, millionaire, and suffering from illness. Head of the Stoneheart Group (an apt name given his ties with vampirism), he is the human embodiment of a vampire. He is being kept alive by medical science – reflecting the positioning of the scientific vampires who are mutated and spread with the help of the CDC who turn a blind eye to it. Palmer is described as having a 'perpetually gaunt' appearance and has hemodialysis frequently, giving him a continuous influx of fresh blood, as vampires need. He has enlisted the help of the Master, as he was 'quite simply…not planning to die.' (TS, p.33) The echoes of vampirism continue past the appearance, as he uses humans to get what he needs and wants and then disposes of them – his predatory nature appearing more horrific because there is no biological cause to exonerate him. He provides a human comparison to the vampire and is the epitome of the 'monstrous human' in the narrative.

[466] Smetana, p.176

Eldritch Palmer[467] is a standard character of del Toro's work; as such, I am looking at Palmer as an archetype rather than an individual character. Del Toro's body of work features capitalistic, dogmatic and controlling men in positions of power who attempt to exert their influence to suit their own ends. As Deborah Shaw notes in her examination of del Toro, 'all his villains thrive and grow strong from the destruction of others, and in this they have their roots in the figure of Dracula.'[468] Palmer illuminates the vampiric characteristics of humans whilst highlighting the method of their monstrosity.

Despite the vampires in *The Strain* being predatory, hideous and lacking redeeming qualities, they are still exempt from blame somewhat due to the viral nature of the condition, and their lack of human cognition. They are not portrayed as sentient or malicious, rather following an urge. By contrast, the humans in the novel, particularly Palmer, despite their state of humanity, act inhumanely. This contrast is echoed further with the description of the Holocaust by Setrakian. His family 'would be driven from their woodwork shop and their village, though not by Sardu,' (TS, p.13) emphasising the role of human nature in his suffering. It was in the concentration camps that he first met Sardu/the Master, yet it was humanity that caused him to lose faith in God:

> The thing was an expert in horror, but this human horror indeed exceeded any other possible fate. Not only because it was without mercy, but because it was acted upon rationally and without compulsion. It was a choice. The killing was unrelated to the larger war, and served no purpose other than evil. Men chose to do this to other men and invented reasons and places and myths in order to satisfy their desire in a logical and methodical way. (TS, p.225)

Along with a comment on the atrocities of the Holocaust, this can be seen as a broader condemnation of human behaviour. This is nothing new; yet it remains entirely relevant for the topic at hand and other associated traumas. Although *TST* may appear to take a very different approach to other vampire narratives with similar aims (to

[467] An homage to Philip K. Dick's character Palmer Eldritch in *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch*. In it, Eldritch discovers a substance that will make him a fortune, control colonies and he ends up becoming a god-like figure, much like this Eldritch does in *The Strain.*
[468] Deborah Shaw, *The Three Amigos*, p.37

highlight the monstrosity of the humans), in some ways the monstrosity of the vampires highlights the evils of humanity even more. Even though these creatures, which solely exist to kill, are out there, there is a human, or there are *some* humans who are worse by virtue of their soul, conscience or humanity. This arose in Matheson's *I am Legend* and it appears again here. As the Master notes: 'your kind is the epidemic – not mine.' (TS, p.380)

What is the place of this response in a narrative about cultural trauma and 9/11? In trauma studies and in times of cultural trauma, there is a tendency to focus on the victims as they best embody the effects of such trauma and offer a way to analyse its impact. Thus, the victim is explained or explored in such a way that often negates any blame on their part, focusing on positive attributes about the victim.[469] But what if the victim was not completely blameless? There were few post 9/11 who dared suggest the attacks occurred as part of a chain of events, in particular Michael Moore, in *Fahrenheit 9/11,* which discussed the Bush family's relationship with the Bin Ladens and US funds being used to arm the Taliban. Thus, narratives where the blame shifts back to the supposed victims offers a way to internally criticize and evaluate the actions that led to the catastrophe. These narratives all display elements of corruption, alienation and double standards. A.V. Rajwade, writing about the fall-out of September 11, argues that 'The key is avoiding situations where a section of the people gets so alienated that it starts believing that terror and violence are the only means to get 'justice' – or at least attention.'[470] These narratives offer a journey through the minefield of difference and a commentary on inclusivity and fighting against prejudiced attitudes. They also include the use of religion as a redemptive force for these flaws of humanity.

Return to the religious primitive

With trauma comes a proximity to death, and with death comes a search for significance. As a reminder of mortality, trauma offers a glimpse at the end point, and the void between that is yet to be filled. It could be argued that trauma is akin to a religious experience which imbues life with a deeper meaning by virtue of its contrast

[469] This occurs in 9/11 with the *New York Times* testimonials about the victims, focusing on their family life and achievements.
[470] AV Rajwade, 'Fall-out of September 11' in *Economic and Political Weekly,* 36:42 (2001) 3983-3984 (pp.3984)

with death. Beth McDonald, in her discussion of vampire as numinous experience, argues that humans seek significance in the face of reminders of mortality:

> Having survived into the new millennium, we humans also have been transformed, renewed and resurrected; in answer to our resurrection we must find a new spirituality to serve as a guide for the new century.[471]

This resurrection occurs literally in narratives such as *True Blood* and *Being Human* where new vampires seek a form of spirituality and faith. Yet I would also argue that this same response is evident in times of cultural trauma, specifically 9/11. The religious resurgence has already been touched on in previous chapters, yet in *TST*, there is an emergent spirituality, or need for spirituality, which comes from the reconstruction of society and which will be developed further here.

It must be noted that throughout this thesis there has been a clear divide between *religion* and *faith,* and this is particularly crucial here. To reiterate, religion has been used to denote a structured, public-based belief system, whereas faith is personal and unbound by as many rules as religion. The divide between the two has arisen repeatedly in these texts and seems to be the main point of contention between protagonists and their enemies. Whilst religion offers a public structure, which can offer a sense of belonging and identity, it is arguably faith that provides the meaning and substance for someone. For instance, as mentioned in chapter 2, onscreen portrayal of religion is varied, but there is a need for an assumption of faith of some sort. Atheists are still portrayed as morally flawed if they have a professed absence of faith, and protagonists usually have a faith.[472] The fact that those *without* any kind of faith are portrayed this way indicates the belief that faith in whatever form offers a moral compass and meaning to that individual's life. Faith without religion is defined at times as 'spirituality', which is the subject of Lawrence Buell's book, *Religion on the American Mind.* He describes it thus:

> spirituality has taken root as a semi-antonym to institutional religion, whether as a term of honor with which to reproach religious formalism or

[471] Beth McDonald, *The Vampire as Numinous Experience* (North Carolina: McFarland & Company, 2004), p. 180
[472] Gregory House, from *House* is one such exemplary character. *Dexter* is a self-described atheist, and he is a serial killer.

> as a denigrating byword for the inchoate shallowness of the religiously unmoored.[473]

This positioning of spirituality as the alternative choice to politically-right religion is seemingly positive yet the further definitions of the term elicit questions about the independence and freedom of it as a choice. Leigh Eric Schmidt argues that the 'spiritual left' is a space in which the 'primacy of individual experience is joined to a whole web of spiritual practices and social commitments…it has been thriving in the US for at least two centuries.' Yet, he also notes that it 'has been socially directed, not just me-centered.'[474]

As the religious market in the US became bigger and more varied, with different denominations of Christianity and other faiths being founded, opportunities to find a faith that fits opened up. Spirituality offers such a fit for those who find themselves disagreeing with the dogma of Christianity or other such structured religions. It's been a trend that has been increasingly evident in the last few decades, where the focus is on having a belief, rather than a specific religious denomination. Its focus lies in the importance of that individual and their relationship to the universe, rather than the assertion of being a 'subject' worshipping a deity. It melds with American individualism, which has risen steadily along with capitalism, though this isn't the angle we're looking at it from. Here, the idea of spirituality as an option allowing an individual to profess a belief in something bigger than themselves whilst avoiding the constraints of religion is positioned as a response to the use of religion in society, particularly in the response to traumatic events such as 9/11. *TST* combines this turning away from authoritarian religion with the religious elements of apocalypse and the need for a 'rewrite' following a traumatic event – ultimately this combination of themes echoes the fears and anxieties of a post-9/11 America. In *TST*, the split between two different types of faith ('religion' and 'spirituality') are made clear from the very beginning. Setrakian, the Holocaust survivor, loses faith in God, or rather, notes the *absence* of God that has been replaced by man. In *TST*, there is a clear divide between 'God' (religion) and 'man' (spirituality). The vampires are associated with God and religion due to their origins and subsequent descriptions.

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[473] Lawrence Buell, 'Religion on the American Mind' in *American Literary History,* 19:1 (2007) 32-55, (pp.38)
[474] Quoted in Buell, p.38

Whilst the novels start off by positing the vampires in the domain of science, by the time we get to the third of the trilogy (*The Night Eternal),* there is an established link to religion. We are told the origin of the Master and the 'Ancients' (other vampires). They are remnants of the torn-apart angel Ozryel who was cast out by God for his bloodlust. The pieces of Ozryel's body are scattered and find new host bodies to continue on in. The Master is formed from Ozryel's throat, thus the links between him being the 'voice' of the blood-driven Ozryel are clear. With their ancient religious origins, the vampires are positioned as relics of old-world religion, and the dogmatic elements of traditional religious structures are evident in the way they are regarded by others and the order/obedience they seek. 'It was Ozryel who held the voice of God within himself.' (TNE, p.78) This link to God is expanded further, and the Master becomes a Godhead himself. In the first novel, he is introduced to those who haven't seen him before as: 'The hideous transcendent. Behold the Master.' (TS, p.384) His very name suggests he has power, along with his ability to give eternal life and control vast swathes of followers. The idea of vampires being linked with older forms of religion is reinforced by the way his followers act around him, 'they gathered before him like primitives at a temple.' (TS, p.383) He is omniscient, and sees through the eyes of his 'children' who he has given eternal life to, allowing him to be omnipresent. His lack of mercy and the violence used to control the population and his followers are explicitly linked with the Old Testament in the series. The origin story is likened to Sodom and Gomorrah; 'Each of the holy books, the Torah, the Bible, and the Koran, tells the tale of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.' (TNE, p.181) The Occido Lumen, which is positioned as a 'bible' of the vampires, tells the story of destruction caused by Ozryel and his subsequent dismemberment. It is thus fitting that the destruction (a nuclear explosion destroying the birthplace of the Master) of the Master occurs in what Nora refers to as 'a true Old Testament moment.' (TNE, p.465)

By contrast, man is presented as the alternative choice to the vampiric religion the Ancients offer.[475] In the first of the series, man is positioned as the bigger evil, perpetrating the events of the Holocaust and causing a loss of faith in God because of human evil. When describing the Holocaust, Setrakian claims that 'in the absence of

[475] Similar to the themes discussed in Chapter 1 around *Being Human.*

God, he had found Man.' (TS, p.226) 'Man' is thus positioned as the antithesis to God, and originally is shown as a negative. However, the narrative of *TST* takes us through a journey of redemption for man. The destruction of Old-World religion is positioned as a redeeming act, and Eph is written as a Messianic figure. The following passage illuminates the doubt created by a loss of faith and subsequent fears for morality/the state of society and the positioning of Eph as the saviour:

> A group of protesters heckled them from across the street, holding signs about God's wrath, proclaiming that because America had lost faith in Him, He was now abandoning it. A preacher in a shabby suit stood atop a short stepladder, reading verses out of Revelation. Those surrounding him stood with their open palms facing the OEM in a gesture of blessing, praying over the city agency. One placard featured a hand-drawn icon of a downcast Jesus Christ bleeding from a crown of thorns, sporting vampire fangs and glaring red eyes.
> "Who will deliver us now?" the shabby monk cried.
> Sweat ran down Eph's chest, past the silver-loaded pistol stuck in his belt.
> (TNE, p224)

Eph is judged as an outcast by the public, and eventually, his family and friends. In order to 'save' humanity, he has to sacrifice himself and his only son, much like God. The various descriptions in this passage also reveal attitudes evident in the varied sea of religion in modern-day America. The blaming of events on a loss of faith has been consistent by some religious factions in the last few decades[476], and the need for a savior reflects the religious impulse. Here, the original Messianic figure, Jesus Christ, has been made monstrous, and thus is posited as the opposition the human Eph, who will eventually be the modern savior. This returns us to a Christian-like religion, but without the control that underpins its previous use. His status as an outcast and divergent from the original plan is cast as his leadership qualities. He is described as 'like Jacob…It is not faith that distinguishes our real leaders. It is doubt. Their ability to overcome it.' (TNE, p.371) On the other side, Palmer, motivated by greed and

[476] Such as John McTernan from the Defend and Proclaim the faith ministries. He blamed Hurricane Sandy on the state of America: "God is systematically destroying America", whilst the Westboro Baptist Church praised the Hurricane and saw it as retribution for gay marriage. 'It's all our fault! 10 disasters the gays supposedly caused', *Advocate,* (2012) <http://www.advocate.com/politics/2012/10/31/10-disasters-gays-were-blamed-causing?page=full > [accessed January 2014]

capitalism, view the Master as the Messiah: 'I have delivered to you a new messiah, and the reckoning is at hand. The mythmakers were right…God promises eternal life. The Master delivers it.' (TF, p.280) Palmer views eternal life as redemptive, yet Eph sees morality and quality of life as superseding immortality. The need for redemption in *TST* is echoed across the texts looked at in this thesis, and in a wider sense, in narratives centered around 9/11. It could be argued that this fixation on redemption comes from an uncertainty about the events and the causes that led to them (as touched upon in Moore's *Fahrenheit 9/11).* This line of thinking is mentioned in *TST* too, and the echoes with post 9/11 actions and thinking are evident:

> revenge murders were widely suspected, but, in the end, more tolerant voices rose to answer to the question of who did this to us. We all did. (TNE, p.471)

Interestingly, it is America that 'redeems' the rest of the world in *TST*. Despite the fact that we are told planes touch down in other cities and spread the 'plague' across the world, the story focuses on the site of origin, New York, and it is the American hero/Messiah, Eph, who saves the world. This echoes the Bush administration's view of America as a redeemer nation, as Michael Northcott notes: Bush gave a 'near-Messianic account of the American story…and of America as the liberator of humanity'.[477] He continues, 'for Bush America is the author of her own story, and God's agent in redeeming human history.'[478] The response to the events of 9/11 and the actions in Iraq and the War on Terror place America in the position of fighting 'evil' and 'saving' nations from un-Western regimes.[479] Part of the redemptive power of America comes from the religious aspects it so strongly identifies with.

The country itself is made up of a Christian majority. As previously discussed in Chapter 2, Christianity thus can be seen as part of one version of American identity, thus, there is a religious basis for the idea of redemption in the real world (which is echoed in *TST*). This desire to 'redeem' or 'remake' through religious conversion appears to be more like the authoritarian vampire religion in *Being Human* and *TST*.

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[477] Michael Northcott, *An angel directs the storm,* (New York: IB Tauris, 2004) p.3
[478] Northcott, p.8
[479] Whilst this is a massive simplification, intervention in Iraq and Iran focused on the overthrowing of Saddam Hussein and instating an American way of life.

The use of faith to dominate, control and structure society is in keeping with Republican views of American society. A majority of their political policies are informed by their religion (such as abortion and homosexuality, and in particular, gay marriage)[480] and there seems to be a condemnation of those whose views fall outside their own (and a subsequent attempt to correct them).[481] Northcott argues that this staunchly faith-based position echoes that of Islamism: '[Islamism] shares with America more than just a financial sponsor. In the same way as the secular and religious right in America, Islamists see themselves as engaged in an apocalyptic struggle over the outcome of modern history.'[482] In a similar way, Rajwade notes the commonalities between the two: 'The Christian right obviously has a lot in common with the Muslim fundamentalists who throw acid on women not wearing burkhas.'[483] But why is this relevant here? If, as I have been previously arguing, there is a move away in these narratives from 'religion' to 'faith', why discuss right-wing Christianity? The Christian right in the US is often held up as a deterrent for fundamentalist faith in cultural narratives. Onscreen they are treated with contempt (along with their metaphorical mouthpieces, authoritarian vampires) and in books such as *TST* they are similarly regarded. What does this mean though? It is an ongoing theme throughout these narratives. The negative portayals of the Christian right, and the subsequent consumption of narratives that figure them as such indicates an agreement and desire for other forms or approaches to faith. The polling data in the US shows a rise in the 'nones'[484] – those who do not define themselves as having a particular religion, as well as a rise in atheists. These are two separate points and will be dealt with as such.

Firstly, the move to 'none' doesn't account for those who are 'spiritual but not religious', and thus this is a factor that requires more research. It could be assumed that 'none' includes elements of spirituality present in these narratives, with their consumption reflecting a rising trend. Secondly, the rise in atheism, along with the rise

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[480] As is currently being discussed ahead of the 2016 Presidential Elections. Members of the GOP are staunchly against abortion and gay marriage: Laura Chapin, 'Politicians make lousy doctors', *US News* (2015) <http://www.usnews.com/opinion/blogs/laura-chapin/2015/08/10/gop-2016-candidates-selling-lies-on-abortion > [accessed January 2015]

[481] There is also a strong correlation between those affiliated with Christian denominations and support for the Republican party as discussed in the Pew Forum: 'Trends in party identification of religious groups' *Pew Forum,* 2 February 2012, <http://www.pewforum.org/2012/02/02/trends-in-party-identification-of-religious-groups-affiliation/ > [accessed September 2014]

[482] Northcott, p.35

[483] Rajwade, p.3984

[484] Pew Forum, '"Nones" on the rise', <http://www.pewforum.org/Unaffiliated/nones-on-the-rise.aspx >[accessed Jan 2012]

in ‘nones’ points to a combined move *away* from authoritarian religion. Whilst this thesis has focused on religion throughout, one of the biggest findings made clear through this research has been the growing discontent with traditional and authoritarian types of religion. Whilst the number is currently relatively small and nowhere near a majority, it still remains an upward trend and something evidently worth including in popular narratives as we have seen.

Nevertheless, there is still a need for some kind of belief which is expressed in the constant religious undertones of these narratives, along with the idea of a ‘spiritual’ or faith-based act or standpoint as redemptive. This has markedly risen, particularly in vampire narratives, where the monstrous protagonists were primarily godless creatures. Thus it could be surmised that faith is equal to redemption and in searching for an answer as to why those events happened, an outward display of faith and religion became increasingly prevalent. The enthusiasm for religion, tied to American identity, became louder as Bush included religious references in his speeches about the War on Terror. Stearns notes that the religious enthusiasm post 9/11 ‘left more people open to older traditions of apocalyptic thinking.’[485] It is this apocalyptic thinking that is echoed in *TST*.

Post apocalyptica

With fear and terror having a dominant presence in our everyday media, vocabulary and lives, it is unsurprising that our dominant narratives continue to imagine its impact to an apparently logical conclusion. Post-apocalyptic narratives take some of the core themes of the apocalypse – fear, change and terror – and speculate upon the state of society after our fears have been realised. It must be noted that the meaning of ‘apocalypse’ is varied, but for most, it signifies the end of the world. These narratives, by virtue of their existence, signify a belief in something *after* the ending (therefore ‘the world’ is a concept), thus the apocalypse is only the end of the world *as we know it.* What is more frightening seems to be unclear from the tone of the narratives on the subject. It is best to briefly clarify the meaning of ‘apocalypse’ before looking at the

[485] Stearns, p.211

portrayal of 9/11 and its aftermath as 'the end times' and how this is reflected in novels such as *TST*.

Apocalypse is a religious concept, and derives from the Greek word *apocalypto*, which translates to 'without veil'. For Christians, the apocalypse relates to the second coming of Christ to once again redeem humanity and begin again.[486] Thus, Christ is simultaneously being unveiled and unveiling a new form of existence. The underlying principle is the redemption and 'saving' from corruption. When there is talk of the 'end times', this is complete with descriptions of a plethora of immoral behaviour along with violent events. If it were purely seen as redemptive, perhaps it would be welcomed. Yet to redeem in this case means to change and destroy, and create something new from that destruction. It is the fear of destruction and change that acts as the driving force behind fear-ridden narratives. As Rosen argues, these narratives resist the crisis of change by inculcating change into its very vocabulary.[487]

Whilst 9/11 was not the end of the world, too often the reporting and response to it placed it as a marker of further events to come, a 'sign of the end times'. According to opinion polls, 'a quarter of all Americans believe that they are living in the end times.'[488] A ten year reflection on the events was entitled 'Witness to Apocalypse.'[489] A *Daily Mail* headline a day after the event featured a picture of the towers being hit by the planes with the word 'APOCALYPSE'.[490] Responses by witnesses thought it was a film event, something seen in numerous apocalyptic films for decades prior. The discussion and treatment of it by official sources, in particular, the American government, placed the events as the beginning of the apocalypse. According to Northcott, who examined the apocalyptic response to 9/11 in his book *An Angel Directs the Storm,* Bush uses 'this same apocalyptic language to advance an imperial vision of American power and in doing so he taps into a core feature of American evangelicalism.'[491] Despite its political uses, governmental use of the apocalypse is quite clearly tied to religion.

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[486] Interesting given that all the narratives in this thesis feature Messianic figures.
[487] Elizabeth Rosen, *Apocalyptic Transformation* (Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2008)
[488] Northcott, p.9
[489] 'Witness to Apocalypse', *New York Times* (2011) <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/09/08/us/sept-11-reckoning/escape.html > [accessed February 2015]
[490] Given the mail's status as the most popular English-language news-site in the world, it is feasible to assume that US readers would have seen this also.
[491] Ibid

Northcott touched upon this political use, stating that 'Norman Cohn traces modern Western apocalyptic politics back through history to medieval millenarians who […] promised to redeem the world from corruption and evil through violent revolt against the established order.'[492] This need for redemption is obvious through the Bush administration's frequent use of the word 'freedom' and their promises to give it to nations under dictatorial regimes, such as Iraq and Iran. Yet, this is exactly the reasoning behind some Islamist viewpoints – a railing against an established order, with America/the west being *the* established order – in many cases, terrorist acts are touted as the solution – a 'jihad'.[493] Both want to convert, or rather, save, an established order by putting their own in place. In both cases, what is redemption? It appears that differs according to religious beliefs that define the desired morals of a utopian society. This is a particularly strong element of apocalyptic fiction – societies are ridded of their current order, and a new system is often put in place. Yet, both these groups of society are acting on the belief that they are the *redeemers* and able to offer redemption. The post-apocalyptic narratives consumed often place redemption at the hands of some other-wordly or alien force, and redemption comes from a 'rewrite'.

According to Rosen, apocalypse is 'an organising structure that can create a moral and physical order while also holding out the possibility of social criticism that might lead to a reorientation in the midst of a bewildering historical moment.'[494] This need for order contrasts with the chaos of destruction, and imposes a structure on the confusion of society post-traumatic event. It allows for an exploration of the needs of society and the possibilities of change. This in turn is particularly useful for moments where change has occurred, such as the era post 9/11. Although the towers can be rebuilt, and the levels of terror may subside, the events served to highlight and further racial and religious divisions, along with the need for a religious anchor (in its many guises). This change is emphasized in post-apocalyptic narratives to make the differences explicit. Peter Paik explores this, arguing that "the never-ending fascination with the disintegration of human society appears nevertheless entwined

[492] Northcott, p.42
[493] A term misused by the Taliban, which is in fact, less violent than the common conception often repeated by the media. It is defined as a "struggle" to maintain the religion. Its use to mean 'war' is seen as controversial by some.
[494] Rosen, *Apocalyptic Transformation,* p.xiii

with an inability to imagine change on the more modest scale of history."[495] Thus, these narratives that imagine an apocalyptic change draw from smaller changes and emphasise the elements of difference to magnify and examine the impact.

Post-apocalyptic narratives vary in their form and function, but primarily focus on the destruction of the known society. There is a divide between a focus on religiously-inflicted apocalypse (the traditional Christian apocalypse) or a man-made apocalypse which focuses on the 'catastrophic and devastating'.[496] A Christian example of apocalyptic narratives is the popular *Left Behind* series. The series, which was released between 1995-2007, found increasing popularity post 9/11, with books reaching number 1 in the bestseller lists. It focuses on a world post-rapture, where 'true believers' have been raptured to heaven and the remainder of humanity are left on earth to face God's judgment. By contrast, post-apocalyptic narratives such as *The Road* feature an unspecific apocalypse and focus on the destruction of society. According to Holloway, its 'grounding in apocalyptic trauma, in the ruins of an American civilization buried in ash, made the novel's many poetic resonances with 9/11 and the war on terror explicit and unavoidable.'[497] By contrast, when it comes to *TST*, the post-apocalyptic combined with the 9/11 novel provide a double attempt at tackling the trauma of the events. The use of the vampire, an increasingly Americanised figure, serves to place the events within a metaphorically understandable and politically-accessible realm. The premise of *TST* as a post-apocalyptic narrative is made explicit in the beginning of the second installment, *The Fall,* with Eph telling us that 'It took the world just sixty days to end.' (TF, p1)

The vampire and the post-apocalyptic have been dealt with previously in Matheson's *I Am Legend.* The same themes of science, the struggle of humanity and fear in the face of change are evident in *TST*. In the series, the vampire acts as both catalyst and victim of the apocalypse as they literally embody their victims, forcing them into irreversible change. A crucial difference between *I Am Legend* and *TST* is the origins of the apocalypse. The vampires of *I am Legend* are firmly cast as scientific,[498] whereas in *TST*, we are introduced to the idea of fables by Setrakian in the

[495] Peter Paik, *From Utopia to Apocalypse: Science Fiction and the Politics of Catastrophe*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), p.124
[496] Rosen, p.xiv
[497] Holloway, p.110
[498] Explained in the novel as a disease.

introduction, and this idea of the magical/otherworldly is continued. The science and biology behind the vampire is explained but ultimately, we discover they have a heavenly origin – they are part of Ozryel (another name for Azrael, the archangel of death), an archangel who was punished for his bloodlust by being cut into seven pieces and scattered. The seven pieces are the seven vampires, with the Master as the one part that 'went rogue'. The religious nature of the apocalyptic scenario is reinforced by Setrakian, who when he hears of the emergence of vampires 'saw the future. He saw families torn apart, annihilation, an apocalypse of agonies. Darkness reigning over light. Hell on earth.' (TS, p.231)

A core theme at the heart of post-apocalyptic narratives is the need for redemption, particularly if there is a strongly religious reason for the apocalypse. Mankind need to 'prove' themselves worthy, and they have been cast as the monsters. This is often done by means of a sacrifice. Whether it is a father saving his child, or a superhero saving a city (in the case of Christopher Nolan's apocalyptic *Batman: The Dark Knight Rises);* the messianic echoes are still there. This, in supernatural narratives, almost converts the monstrous to the human once more. The same theme occurs in del Toro's other films, especially *Pan's Labyrinth,* which according to Deborah Shaw, 'builds on the concept of the monstrous human…and the idea of sacrifice is once again central to the plot and to the idea of redemption.'[499]

This quest for redemption may lead to the sanctification of previously mundane or secular places as a focal point for religious or spiritual feeling. Specifically in *TST*, Ground Zero functions as such. In the series, it simultaneously functions as a reminder of the events and consecrated ground – Vasiliy Fet, the exterminator, says that 'the site existed like a gouge in the city...' he 'remembered that apocalyptic September of 2001.' (TS, p280) Later on he describes the pit where the towers had fallen as a 'holy place' (TS, p347). This is echoed in the treatment of Ground Zero in real life, which became a tourist site, attracting swathes of people to witness the site and sight of terror. Marita Sturken describes it as 'a highly overdetermined space…where practices of memory and mourning have been in active tension with representational practices and debates over aesthetics.'[500] The rebuilding of the site

[499] Shaw, p.67
[500] Quoted in Bimbisar Irom, 'Alterities in a Time of Terror: Notes on the Subgenre of the American 9/11 Novel', p.529

has seen it used for a memorial, and it could be argued to have a spiritual significance for America, with it being revered like a sacred monument. In *TST*, the site of destruction before it was rebuilt was described as a 'terrible black bruise' (TS, p347) and the wounded language continues, as there is a question of why the vampires are using it as a base. Ground Zero drew the Master because 'Gangrene forms in a wound. He is rooted in tragedy and pain.' (TS, p455) The physical trauma is invested with a spiritual nature.

With 'healing' comes a rebuilding, which involves discovering and in some cases, *re*discovering elements of society that had been cast aside, such as faith. In *The Fall*[501], Eph describes the blame for the apocalypse being on 'All of us', that 'we allowed it to happen because we never believed it to happen.' (TF, p2) This can be seen as a criticism of a lack of faith and a reliance on civil religion, which places the authority of America as infallible. In post-apocalyptic scenarios, due to the nature of the world 'ending', the slate is almost wiped clean, and humans are often stripped of their developments. This leads to a primitive civilization where there is a need to fight for survival again. Rather than enforcing divisions between 'us' and 'them'[502], series such as *TST* illuminate the complex issues in rebuilding a society in the wake of trauma and trying to re-impose a structure (or authority) that's been shown to be vulnerable or fallible.[503] God, religion, or spirituality offers an infallible option to cling to and base a new society around. In *TST*, the vampires offer a repressive, controlling presence. They cause a nuclear winter and set up a police state, controlling humans and vampires alike, with the 'Master', their God, at the helm. It is only when their God is destroyed that humanity can begin to rebuild and move towards a spirituality that isn't defined by dogma. Thus, we see a return to the themes of chapter 1 in which the older, historical vampires offer an authoritative, controlling religion and the newer generations offer a fight against it, and a need for a spirituality/faith not so controlled and dogmatic.

[501] Arguably religiously-titled. The Fall refers to the fall of humanity, Adam and Eve, and thus offers the chance for redemption as later occurs by Jesus Christ, or in this case, Eph acting in a Messianic way.
[502] As is the case with many of these narratives in which humanity has to fight to survive, such as *War of the Worlds, Pacific Rim, Independence Day, The Road* and *I am Legend*.
[503] Other recent examples include Battlestar Galactica, Lost, and The Walking Dead.

What's at stake? The role of the vampire

This chapter has asserted a need for spirituality and a move away from authoritarian types of religion. But why is the vampire the figurehead for this? To effectively summarise, it is best to look at an overview of the series and the impact the various aspects have. Firstly, vampires, figures known for being tied to religion (but demonic rather than holy) are presented in the series through science, and as an 'epidemic'. The scientific treatment of the vampire is rounded out through detailed descriptions of their biology and the physical effects. As we move through the series, the vampires 'spread' much like the fear that comes with it, reflecting the climate of fear post 9/11. The fear focuses on 'others' who are physically removed from the accepted 'human' appearance, and the 'others' are immediately dehumanized. This categorization and identification based on aesthetics is similar to post 9/11 targeting of Arabs by civilians, otherwise known as 'hate crimes'. We also discover that the vampires have been assisted in their takeover by a wealthy capitalist who seeks to gain his own advantages, but is ultimately disadvantaged by it – this could be said to be reflect the state of the US which invested in the Middle East and whose funds were used to train the Taliban, only to suffer at the hands of them years later. Moving on, the control gained by the effective use of fear and violence asserts an authoritarian state in which the humans live, echoing fears of a right-wing or Islamist state. Ultimately, to destroy this authority, mankind must accept blame and redeem itself by sacrifice and belief in their own power, whilst the vampires are revealed to have religious origins. Whilst the world does not return to how it once was, society begins again, and 'Old faiths had been shattered; others had been reaffirmed.' (TNE, p.469)

The vampire is a figure here that combines fear, religion, biology and disease to discuss the various issues surrounding cultural trauma. Its history allows it to mire itself in old-world regimes and beliefs and attempt to fit them into modern society (which simultaneously illuminates the issues with using various tenets of religion and using them to inform social policy today). Their continued appeal also makes the topic of political and societal takeover more appealing and accessible, allowing audiences to revel in the monstrous and find a positive in humanity. Del Toro's involvement and his body of filmography contribute to the appeal of the story, and explain in part the medium of communication for the message. His films have frequently featured

monsters as monstrous, rather than positing them as redemptive figures. Here, whilst he initially follows his trend of showing humans as 'more' monstrous than the monsters themselves, ultimately humanity redeems itself and the ending takes a more positive turn. Primarily though, the series fuses a political message with the spectacle of the monstrous, and that is the condemnation of authoritarian control, which encompasses capitalism and dogmatic religion.

For readers encountering the series, it will undoubtedly evoke memories and references to 9/11, both explicit and suggestive. Unlike other 9/11 novels, the focus isn't on things closer to home (despite the divorce plot being central in the first novel) but on the wider impact of the spread of fear and change. It preaches a message of tolerance and understanding, of searching for the origins of the trauma rather than blaming convenient figureheads, and a need to focus on the spiritual. This series, like many of Del Toro's other works, fuses together various genres, and in this case, it embodies the post 9/11 novel, post apocalyptica, sci-fi, the procedural, and monster fiction. The resulting effect assesses the issues at hand in a unique way that perhaps may offer new ways of thinking about the subject.

This series shirks away from the current (post 9/11) representation of vampires and it may offer those who prefer their monsters to be monstrous a way to remain captivated by the figure. Rather than demonizing any particular figure and laying blame, *TST* posits a shared responsibility for trauma, deconstructing the ideas of collective blame based on a cultural identity and looking instead at the contributions specific actions make to society. This paves the way for a more nuanced discussion where difference is tolerated and one specific identity isn't preferenced over another, unlike other vampiric narratives. Whilst these vampires may have immortality, they are shown to be almost zombie-like, and devoid of individual will, instead answering to the despotic command of the Master. Straying away from the sexualized and exciting portrayals of other recent vampires, this position shows death as a solution, and one that is preferable to immortality, which can cathartically aid readers in coming to terms with the boundaries of death rather than wishing for more. Overall, *TST* shows that faith is still needed, that evil isn't restricted to a specific identity and fear is an infectious disease that can alter, damage and restrict. The vampire, even here with its religious origins, is once again

reinstated as the enemy, allowing us ultimately to focus on the positives of humanity instead.

Conclusion

In exploring the nature of the modern vampire, a striking feature emerges: regardless of all the apparent variations and sheer saturation of popular media with the figure, there is one element that recurs – the religious aspect. Despite an arguable 'secularisation' of culture, these narratives and their resounding popularity illustrate the need for a figure of worship and identification. The vampire is multi-faceted in its spiritual importance. As the numbers dwindle when it comes to active religious behaviour, the ideology behind it is explored through our fictional characters instead, allowing for a separation between the state of 'human' and 'god-like', which is arguably how the vampire is portrayed. Vampires, like the pantheistic gods of previous eras, provide us with stories investigating moral questions, probing the meaning of existence and identification. There is no one vampire god – instead, the continually growing cannon of narratives add to and strengthen the figures' importance.

Perhaps this is why it continues to be a useful cultural narrative. Regardless of arguments for the figure being stripped of its theological significance, its use has crossed a number of boundaries and issues, exploring all aspects of the 'other'. With the form and function of religious belief being so firmly established in places like America where a majority are Christian and subscribe to an identity that encompasses this fact, the vampire in its role as ambassador for the 'other' can explore unrepresented areas such as alternatives to organised religion including spirituality and alternatives to Christianity. In his book *The American Religion,* Harold Bloom argues that there is an 'American religion' that is essentially Gnostic and encompasses elements of individualism. This is why, he states, there is an 'American Jesus'[504] which is 'personal.'[505] The need for the personal is reflected in all these narratives, and continues a trend Bloom identified in his book – that is, primarily, a use and subversion of traditional Christian ideas for personal relevance. We see these vampires looking for souls, sacrificing themselves and offering redemption in their various ways, embodying elements of Christianity whilst forging their own spiritual path.

[504] Harold Bloom, *The American Religion* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992) p.32
[505] Ibid

Throughout this thesis, the role that the vampire has played has been on the surface of it, varied. In Chapter 1, we saw the move away from the authoritarian nature of the vampire with *Being Human* – rather than an impulse to maintain and cultivate the vampiric identity, these vampires shun controlled forms of faith and identity and instead move towards a sense of self defined by their conscience rather than rules. The difference between the UK and the US versions of the figure is crucial as it allows the illumination of the religious element in the US representation. This establishes the religious element of the modern vampire, with the comparison showing the striking difference between the two cultures, thus strengthening the understanding of the figure's importance in the US. The figure again was varied in Chapter 2, but it firmly functions as the 'other', and specifically in season 2, which this chapter looked at, as a religious minority. By chapter 3, the role of the vampire returns to something akin to its folkloric origins and functions as a metaphor for the plague of fear. But, perhaps more importantly, the religious element to the figure is still evident – these vampires are formed from a religious being and bring about the apocalypse. They return also to the authoritarian state the vampires of *Being Human* rebelled from – humanity shied away from this control and in doing so, redeemed themselves. This is surprising given the role of the modern vampire as a redemptive figure and the positioning in the narratives of humanity as redemptive.

If taken as linear, these texts show a progression through the figure that mirrors the cultural response to the traumatic events of 9/11. Throughout all of these texts, there have been elements of the repetition compulsion, a well-known response to trauma. This is perhaps most prominent in the physical act of biting, a symbolic and literal wounding that renders the victim powerless – similar to the mass response to the two holes left by the twin towers. This traumatic response is subtler in *Being Human,* and the fixation of the series was on breaking away from the authority that had failed due to its reluctance to modernise. When we get to *True Blood,* the links to the events start becoming clearer with references to terrorism and the arguable portrayal of the vampires as Muslims – a complex analysis of the role of both victim and perpetrator (i.e. jihadists and Muslims who had distanced themselves from the mindset of the fundamentalist perpetrators). Yet, despite the links, the situation did not echo the events and could only mimic some of the issues that had arisen following 9/11. By the

time we get to chapter 3, there is an almost literal analogy of the events – the plane lands in New York, the 'other' that is the vampire begins to spread the plague of fear and society is irreversibly changed. There are even more obvious parallels in the form of the vampiric base being Ground Zero. As we move through the chapters, there is a different approach to both the figure of the vampire and human. In many narratives post 9/11, the vampire serves as a redemptive figure – aspirational and envied. It is the human that is reviled, being castigated for their monstrosity which is denoted by their actions. Yet, as we progress through the chapters, we see a move towards the redemption of the human and a navigating of moral questions and the nature of what it is to be human. In many ways, it is as if we needed to explore the otherness and monstrosity of the vampire in order to redeem and reassert our identity. With *The Strain* (including its televisual debut) comes a new era for the vampire, and indeed, the human. It provides an example of a narrative that questions our behaviour and takes responsibility for the negative actions rather than merely ascribing blame to the monstrous.

This leads to the contribution of the research itself. Whilst there has been some study on the figure of the vampire, the role it has played in mediating the cultural trauma of 9/11 has not been broached, nor has the discussion of identity and faith's interaction. Thus, this thesis has explored a number of topics crucial to the last decade of popular culture and acts as another contribution towards the academic study of cultural narratives and their importance. Religion's role in popular culture has been varied throughout the years, and exploring its place in the vampire narrative views it from a unique angle. For a figure that arguably questions the very nature of belief by its existence, the vampire manages to successfully mediate and explore topics of faith through its similarities and differences with humanity.

Returning to my research questions I stated at the beginning of this thesis, a brief review of them shall follow. Firstly, how and why did the figure of the vampire change? The modulation between the demonic figure through the redemptive and returning to the catalyst for change (*The Strain*) has been discussed thoroughly. As to the reason why – the role that 9/11 has played has been firmly established by this thesis and the place of the vampire as mediator of trauma and identity frequently stated. This itself answers the second question, which looked at whether there was a

link to the events of 9/11. This link can be argued by the explicit references to the events and the time period in which the figure changed (and accordingly, the characterisation of the figure pre-9/11). Thirdly was the question of how American identity was figured and the role of religion. By examining these texts it has become apparent that religion does indeed play a key role in establishing an identity and the vampires in these narratives also interrogated the idea of the 'other'. Lastly, are cultural narratives effective at representing and working through traumatic events such as 9/11? It appears from these examples here that these narratives do both of these things, offering an unofficial space for the response to and creation of the memory of their impact. Whilst the governmental response may be documented in history, the cultural narratives that have been unquestionably impacted by it will subsequently influence future narratives, in a cycle of remediation that places the trauma within the tapestry of culture. The response to and consumption of these narratives illustrates their importance and shapes the impact of the events.

Overall, this research gives rise to more questions, as research should. Possibilities for further research around the topic include the importance of television in cultivating and promoting identity, both religious and otherwise, the progression from folklore to cultural narrative, and the modern relevance of trauma theory within cultural narratives. The impact of these questions and their importance within American culture is evident. To continue to probe ever-emerging narratives and examine our metaphors in a way that reflects their enormous cultural impact is something that needs to be addressed in order to fully understand, reflect and progress.

These texts together represent a cultural moment that encompassed the aftermath of 9/11. They metaphorically embodied the trauma and issues evoked by the events. But these embodiments are just that – a moment in the cultural narrative. The media has moved on, but the impact of 9/11 is still there. However, discussions of the events now are framed as an historical event rather than as an ongoing trauma, such as in televisual narratives. One example is a 2012 episode of the television show, *Bones.*[506] The storyline revolves around the discovery of remains of a veteran involved in the 9/11 attacks, prompting discussions of memories of the day:

[506] *Bones,* Season 8, Episode 6, 'The Patriot in Purgatory' (Broadcast on Fox, 12 November 2012)

Colin Fisher: 9/11 was a trauma to us all - not like this guy or the people who died that day. But it still changed us, right? A-and we act like it doesn't matter. Clearly Wendell is freaking out. And you [to Arastoo]

Colin Fisher: You went nuts earlier. The first rule at the loony bin is to get it all out in the open. So that's what we're going to do, all right? I'll go... I was in High School. It was my Senior Year. I was breaking into my history teacher's desk to steal a test I hadn't studied for, and he walked in. He was crying. He couldn't care less what I was doing. That's when I found out. So I... I talked to him. I had stolen test in my hand, and we both sat... and we cried... Next?... Oh, come on!

Dr. Clark Edison: ...I was working. It was uh, before school - coffee shop. Everyone was just staring at the TV. No one said a word. The cook came out to watch with the rest of us. I still remember the smell of food burning on that grill.

Finn Abernathy: I was 9. I got in the way of my stepfather hitting my mama. He stuck me with some scissors. My mama wanted to take me to the hospital. But my hurt didn't seem like nothin' when we heard what happened.

Arastoo Vaziri: I was at morning prayers... I didn't believe that day. I didn't believe in anything.

Colin Fisher: ...Wendell?

Wendell Bray: ...I was uh, with my aunt... from that morning for the next few days... My uncle was a firefighter at New York... He never came home.

The frank discussions of whereabouts exemplify the ability to talk about the events whilst still maintaining a sense of their cultural importance. Combined with the move away in vampire narratives from the interpretations of the figure we see here (examples being NBC'S *Dracula* and FX's *The Strain* – which removes the majority of allusions to 9/11), it becomes evident that these texts (and the figure) had a purpose. Yet, some of the central issues – those of identity and religion, are still

highly pertinent today, especially given recent events in France and the prominence of ISIS in cultural discussions.

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Bram Stoker's Dracula, dir. by Francis Ford Coppola, (Columbia Pictures, 1992)

Buffy the Vampire Slayer, The WB/UPN, 1997-2003

Cagney & Lacey, CBS, 1982-1988

Columbo, NBC, ABC, 1968-2003

Cronos, dir. by Guillermo del Toro, (October Films, 1994)

Dark Shadows, ABC, 1966-1971

The Dark Knight Rises, dir. by Christopher Nolan, (Warner Bros., 2012)

Daybreakers, dir. by Michael & Peter Sperig, (Lionsgate, 2009)

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Fright Night, dir. by Tom Holland, (Columbia Pictures, 1985)

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From Dusk Til Dawn, Netflix, 2014 – Present

Forever Knight, CBS, 1992-1996

The Girl With the Dragon Tattoo, dir. by David Fincher, (Columbia Pictures, 2011)

Grey's Anatomy, ABC, 2005 – Present

Hannibal, NBC, 2013-2015

Hellboy, dir. by Guillermo del Toro, (Columbia Pictures, 2004)

Homeland, NBC, 2012 – Present

Kojak, CBS, 1973-1978

Law and Order, NBC, 1990-2010

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