

**Laidlaw Scholars Undergraduate Leadership and Research
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Research Report**

**Queer Vampires and Tabloid Monsters: the Literary Influence on
Politicized Representation in Reactionary British Media**

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In 2023, the right-wing British tabloid the *Daily Mail* published an article entitled “Being trans or non-binary is a new sub-culture... but we risk raising a nation of chemically castrated children” (Matthews). The headline quotes a controversial British psychiatrist, reported by a former patient for attempting conversion therapy (Strudwick), warning that “gender ideology” is a threat to “vulnerable” families (Matthews). Throughout the piece, transgender identity is alternately referred to as a “myth,” a “cult,” and it ultimately concludes that affirmation is a form of “grooming” (Matthew). By depicting gender affirmation as a predatory “ideology,” the article situates the transgender community as a sinister ‘other’ to the reader, and purports a national crisis of British youth indoctrination. Despite research consistently underscoring the harms of denying gender-affirming care (Boerner), the anti-LGBTQ+ rhetoric platformed by the Daily Mail is paradigmatic of a renewed moral panic across reactionary British media outlets of queer boogeyman draining British ideals and institutions (Lovelock 2).

The tabloid representation of queer people as parasitic and corruptive forces in society is not a new convention, but a reconstitution of homophobic and transphobic narratives of monstrosity that scholars observe throughout literary history. Scholars in English and Gender studies provide the framework of Monster Theory to examine how socio-cultural prejudices and anxieties manifest in the creation of the monster, figures constructed to reflect and reinforce societal concepts of normality and its transgressors. Monster Theory identifies Gothic fiction as a representational space that, through the narrative technology of monsterization, cultivated the vampire as an embodiment of cultural disdain toward non-normative sexuality and gender identity. Correspondingly, scholars argue that stigmatizing queerness has been a core strategy of the UK press throughout modern history to position itself as the voice of “ordinary” British citizens (Lovelock 4). The confluence of Gothic literature with the operation of British tabloids,

in defining normality against a vilified figure of vampiric queerness, evidences the need to investigate a shared narrative technology of queer monstrosity and its inheritance from fiction to journalism.

To determine the extent to which fictional strategies of queer monstrosity play a role in reactionary media, this paper will analyze six novels spanning the nineteenth, twentieth and twenty-first century, *Carmilla*, *Dracula*, *Rebecca*, *Silence of the Lambs*, *Troubled Blood* and *If We Were Villains* to identify the evolution of the queer vampire from its Gothic iterations to contemporary literature. The language and tropes employed in these books vilify queer desire and transgender identity through their investment in the dominant themes of draining and contagion. They establish the vampire as a figure whose threat lies in its ability to drain vitality and reproduce through infection, symbolizing the perceived danger of queerness as a pathology that siphons the life force of society. By comparing this literary tradition of queer monstrosity to contemporary articles from the five most popular reactionary British outlets, the *Sun*, the *Express*, the *Daily Mail*, the *Telegraph* and the *Times*, this paper will investigate the influence of fictional queer vampires in current political media content. The denigratory representation of queer people in reactionary British media, by employing the narrative technology of queer monstrosity, adopts literary tropes of queer vampirism into journalistic vocabulary. Ultimately, in appealing to the demonization of queer identity embedded into public consciousness by literature, reactionary outlets reinvigorate fictional visions of queerness as destructive, fabricating moral crises.

Several prominent scholars in literary and gender studies have developed Monster Theory as a method to critically examine cultures through the monsters that they generate. In his coalescent framework of Monster Theory, Cohen argues that the monster's body functions as an

embodiment of socio-cultural alterity, evincing political, racial, economic, and sexual differences that signify the uncertainty and fantasies of its creators (Cohen 7). Constructed through a rhetoric of deviance, the monster's body is the site where difference becomes moralized into aberration as a cultural 'Other' that must be destroyed (Cohen 7). Cohen produces Vincent of Beauvais' medieval account of the monstrous cynocephalus (half-man, half-dog) from *Speculum Naturale* to argue that "[d]eviant sexual identity is...susceptible to monsterization":

This strange creature, a composite of the supposedly discrete categories "male" and "female"...is a living excoriation of gender ambiguity and sexual abnormality, as Vincent's cultural moment defines them: heteronormalization incarnate. (Cohen 9)

Cohen identifies the 'otherness' of the creature in its refutation of binary structuration that comprises "normality"; the monster induces, and emerges during, crisis because it fundamentally violates the categorization deemed 'natural' in a particular cultural moment. Its aggregation of "discrete" distinctions is realized in an external incoherence that Cohen understands as "excoriation," a materialized warning for the public against disrupting norms of gender and sexuality. Cohen is deliberate to assert the ontological liminality of the monster: its body is "pure culture" that "exists only to be read" (Cohen 4). Thus, while it reflects a particularly cultural moment, the monster's threat is ultimately to endlessly reappear and shift over time.

Jack Halberstam elaborates on Cohen's shifting signification of the monster, defining its body as a permeable and "infinitely interpretable" (Halberstam 21) machine which can represent any abrogate traits the audience may project into a narrative:

Monsters are meaning machines. They can represent gender, race, nationality, class, and sexuality in one body. And even within these divisions of identity, the monster can still be broken down. (Halberstam 21-22).

Halberstam presents monsters as deliberate narrative technologies that function through the signification of *excess* meaning- incorporating as many fear-inducing characteristics into a single body as possible. In consolidating signifiers of difference, the inhuman monster operates as a negative figure to define identity against (Halberstam 17), consequently entrenching a hegemonic conception of ‘the human’ as “white, male, middle class and heterosexual” (Halberstam 22). Halberstam traces the overrepresentation of sexuality as a feature of otherness to Gothic literature’s role defining sexuality in the nineteenth century, where markers of difference such as “class, race, and nation [were] subsumed...within the monstrous sexual body” (Halberstam 7). She argues that the collaborative relationship between the author and reader produces features of monstrosity: the Gothic cultivates an audience who consumes monstrosity then surveys its own members for markers of monstrous deviance (Halberstam 12).

Benshoff affirms the “considerable overlap” (Benshoff 233) between constructions of the Gothic monster and the invention of “homosexual” as a “distinct type of person” (Benshoff 233) during the late nineteenth century. In disrupting hegemonic norms, the monster is to “normality” as homosexuality is to heterosexuality. Historically, the semantic overlap between queerness and monstrosity has manifested in anxieties concerning sex and death in media, particularly in horror films (Benshoff 117). Benshoff observes the slippage of fictional patterns of monstrous representation from horror narratives into the realm of ‘real-world’ politics (Benshoff 117), elucidating that the language employed to represent the LGBTQ+ community mediates understandings of it (Benshoff 136). Thus, the monster does not just escape through recurring cultural evolutions, as Cohen notes, but becomes a stand-in for the figure of ‘the homosexual’ in media.

To determine the extent of slippage from fiction to reactionary media, it is necessary to trace the origins and evolution of queer monstrosity in literature. From these interventions, Gothic horror emerges as a representational space where the figure of the monster became inextricable from cultural censure of queerness. Within the Gothic, two of the most culturally influential depictions of queer monsters, *Carmilla* and *Dracula*, popularized the vampire and its queer signification in the public imagination. Reading monsters as pure culture, the practical aspects that constitute the monstrosity of vampirism -draining lifeblood and infecting others- become signification for the perceived threat of queerness to society, both in draining its vitality and as a contagion endangering its cultural fabric. Per the monster's nature to endlessly regenerate in cultural discourse, the figure of the vampire does not dissipate from the representation of queer monstrosity, but reappears and evolves over time.

In Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla*, a Gothic novella published in 1872, the mechanism of *draining* originates as a narrative strategy for embodying anxieties around queerness through the titular vampire Carmilla's portrayal as a queer, parasitic predator. Le Fanu offers a prototypical depiction of the lesbian vampire, depicting Carmilla's relationship with the young Laura contrary to benefits of reciprocity and vitality traditionally associated with love. He articulates lesbianism through Laura's symptoms of clinical illness and parasitism:

a languor weighed upon me all day. I felt myself a changed girl. Carmilla became more devoted to me than ever, and her strange paroxysms of languid adoration more frequent. She used to gloat on me with increasing ardor the more my strength and spirits waned (Le Fanu 51).

Through the repetition of "languor" in Laura's descriptions of her illness and Carmilla's "languid" affections, Le Fanu symbolically equates the parasitic nature of vampirism with queer

intimacy. Depicting Laura's deteriorating health as bolstering Carmilla's "languid adoration," Le Fanu invokes the simultaneous connotation of "paroxysm" as a violent emotion and sudden attack of disease. In doing so, he equates Carmilla's queer desire and vampirism as parasitic energy transfers that derive sadistic pleasure from draining Laura's vitality. This pathologization invokes the popular 19th century belief that 'non-procreative' sexuality was an unnatural waste of life energy (Hobson 12), manifesting in physical decay. Thus, by correlating Laura's declining health with Carmilla's increasing devotion, Le Fanu pathologizes queer desire as a draining and potentially epidemic contagion that culminates in sickness, and ultimately, death.

Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, published 1896, fortifies *draining* as a signification of queerness' threat to heteronormative Victorian society, while also reflecting fears of disrupting binary gender norms. The Count's possessive ownership over his captive Jonathon Harker, declaring that "This man belongs to me," (Stoker 52) evokes horror through Stoker's representation of vampiric draining as an eroticized ambition, implying that the Count intends to seduce and feed on Harker in the sexualized manner that the Brides' attempt to do (Craft 110). As such, draining becomes monstrous through the sexualized connotation of Dracula penetrating Harker, another male, via his bite. Fangs thus operate as tools of feminization in threatening to penetrate Harker and transform him into a Bride, unnaturally displacing him from the phallic sexual role expected of men in Victorian society (Craft 110). The disparity between the eroticized language that describes Harker's ecstatic anticipation of the vampiric Brides versus the horror vocabulary characterizing the Count indicates that 'deviant' sexuality, not supernatural action, is the true monstrous aspect of vampiric draining.

While *Carmilla* and *Dracula* construct the vampire as a literal monster of exsanguination and disruption, Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca* (1938) rearticulates *draining* in a non-supernatural

context. Although Rebecca is not a literal vampire, she embodies the vampire in her corruptive sexual transgression, depicting queerness as a force *draining* societal institutions and morality. Though her sexuality is never specified, Rebecca's widower Maxim alludes to her 'unnatural' identity in lamenting that "she was not even normal" (Du Maurier 334). His vagueness further implies queerness as the locus of her corruption; non-normative sexuality, more so than Rebecca's infidelity, remained unutterable in the 1930's (Berenstein 246). Rebecca's sexual immorality finds symbolic representation in her physically diseased and "deformed uterus," that produces, not a child as Maxim anticipated, but a tumorous growth, indicative of her perversion of the maternal role expected in marriage. Her malformed reproductive system materializes anxieties of lesbianism in the 19th century as "ungenerative," (Berenstein 255) embodying fears of 'unnatural' sexuality *draining* the health of not just the individual body and morality, but the familial institution; the 'social' body.

Thomas Harris' *Silence of the Lambs*, published in 1988, expands the figurative conception of *draining* present in *Rebecca* to emphasize non-normative gender, specifically transgender identity, as a pathology *draining* women's bodies and violently destabilizing the societal order. Buffalo Bill's operation as the vampire manifests in his desire to become a woman through constructing a 'girl suit' from the bodies of victims, constituting a literal act of *draining* their life force as well as symbolically *draining* their 'female essence.' This Gothicized allusion to transition, as a process foregrounded by stealing fragmented female parts (Halberstam 169), demonizes transgender identity as a violent appropriation of womanhood, reflecting an essentialist rhetoric of heterosexism. The text frequently undermines Buffalo Bill's presentation with descriptions of his traditionally masculine features, reaffirming non-normative gender expression as an 'unnatural' deviation from binary gender norms. Despite the novel's adamant

that Buffalo Bill does not ‘medically qualify’ as “transsexual,” the act of *draining*, symbolically amalgamating murder and feeding, implicitly pathologizes non-normative gender as a parasitic desire to consume an ‘unnatural’ identity. Buffalo Bill exemplifies the ‘threatening hybridity’ of the monster and embodies the Gothic association of vampirism with moral and physical decay

The murderous villain Creed from *Troubled Blood* by J.K.Rowling (published in 2020 under the pseudonym Robert Galbraith) echoes Buffalo Bill as an iteration of the vampire wherein non-normative gender expressions function as desires to *drain* womens’ ‘essence.’ Rowling depicts his cross-dressing as an extension of his voyeuristic desire to steal women’s underwear-”I felt I stole something of their essence from them, taking that which they thought private and hidden”(Galbraith 80)- symbolically resonating non-normative gender expression and male predation. By emphasizing Creed’s desire to *drain* womens’ essence, the text reinforces a heterosexist view of gender as inherent and immutable, coinciding with *The Silence of the Lambs* in reducing transness to a violent, fetishistic appropriation of womanhood. Rowling’s portrayal refutes the authenticity of non-normative gender expression as a guise through which to perversely consume -vampirically drain- women’s bodies for sexual gratification. In aligning cross-dressing with voyeurism and predatory behavior, Rowling evokes contemporary transphobic rhetoric informing discriminatory “bathroom bills,” pathologizing it as symptomatic of deviant, criminal ambitions *draining* womens’ quality of life.

M.L.Rio’s *If We Were Villains* (published in 2017) offers a contemporary vision of the vampire as a queer predator in the character of Alexander, reinforcing the Gothic signification of queerness *draining* vulnerable targets through sexual deviance. Though he is not a literal vampire, Alexander’s appearance is explicitly described as vampiric, particularly in emphasizing his “sharp canine teeth,” and status as the villain of his university’s acting group. These symbolic

evocations of the Gothic foreground his narrative development as a figure of moral ambiguity and sexual promiscuity. His bisexuality (as the only openly queer character) manifests narratively through an aggregation of these tendencies in “prowling for first-years who don’t know they’re gay yet,” (Rio 131) dehumanizing his queerness to animalistic instinct reminiscent of *Dracula’s* predatory bloodlust. The connotations of grooming in hunting specifically for “first years” explicitly harkens to the vampire’s urge of *draining* and transforming innocent victims. In this sense, his queerness resonates as a symptom of both sexual and moral corruption, one which emboldens him to drain normality from and infect the vulnerable with deviant behavior.

Moreover, the secondary function of the vampire’s bite, to infect its victims and create monstrous offspring, appears throughout the novels as a signification of queer contagion that threatens to spread non-normative sexuality and gender identity, undermining the ‘natural’ reproductive order of society.

Carmilla explicitly evokes fears of vampiric contagion by linking pollution of the blood to the transmission of lesbianism, portraying queerness as an ‘unnatural’ condition that contaminates the physical self and social body. *Le Fanu* appeals to reproductive fears of queerness through the connotations of mother-daughter incest in Carmilla and Laura’s relationship. In her infantile memory of Carmilla, Laura initially recalls her motherly gestures as she is “caressed,” “smiled,” at and “soothed,” by the “very pretty,” woman, until Carmilla’s fangs like “two needles ran into [her] breast very deep” (*Le Fanu* 7). This scene of feeding perverts the maternal act of breastfeeding into one of queer *contagion* wherein the vampiric mother, corrupted by the penetrative fangs, infects the offspring with her monstrous condition and unnatural desires. Through the perverse maternal role of Carmilla, in seducing her direct descendant, *Le Fanu* makes incest and lesbianism metaphorically resonate as unnaturally “lusting

for one's own kind" (Leal 39). In doing so, he appeals to fears of queerness as a *contagion* that undermines the 'natural' reproductive and familial order, propagating a monstrous lineage of queer desire.

Stoker further articulates the vampire as a signifier of queer *contagion* through the Count's unnatural reproductive role, demarcating him as the infective source of gender transgressions. The association of vampirism with a perversion of breastfeeding resonates between both *Dracula* and its predecessor *Carmilla*; in both texts, references to the vampire's "bosom" or victim's "breast" (Stoker 284) renders unnatural mother-child feeding as imagery of queer *contagion*. Stoker's Count is inherently monstrous for his defiance of gender categorization: as the maker of vampires, he occupies a feminized motherly role but does so through the phallic penetration of the vampiric fangs and his domination of women. In this sense, the vampiric male "bosom," emerges as the locus of deviant gender and sexual desire, nonconsensually infecting victims with unnatural fluid to transform them against their will and compel them to enact sexual transgression on others.

The infectious tendency of Rebecca's deviance evokes the *contagious* threat of the Gothic vampire; as a spectral figure, her queerness haunts the novel in diseasing the mind of her husband Maxim, but also in the transmission of homoerotic desire to the narrator and Mrs Danvers. This *contagion* manifests most explicitly in Mrs. Danvers as an embodiment of the perverse vampiric mother: her recollection of Rebecca's drowning, having been her motherly caregiver since birth, assumes incestuous deviance as she verbally materializes fantasies of Rebecca's body being stripped of clothing- both in "tak[ing] it off," and having garments "torn from her body," (Du Maurier 210) by rocks. In this moment, Rebecca's death mediates Danvers' perverse fantasies, wherein her eroticized and violently maligned body becomes a site of

corruptive sexuality. The passive phrasing of “torn” facilitates a textual fluidity between homoerotic desire and Rebecca’s destructive cessation, symbolically figuring the waves as a watery dissolution of boundaries between sex, death and motherhood. As such, Rebecca’s body, even in her death, operates as the locus of unnatural desire in the novel, framing her queerness as a *contagion* that spreads sexual corruption to the minds of others.

Thomas Harris’ *Silence of the Lambs* continues the vampiric tradition of evoking ‘unnatural’ reproduction to pathologize queerness. Gumb’s obsessive desire with his own late mother consolidates his fetishization of women’s flesh as a non-normative intent to assume a female reproductive role. His fixation on moths, placing one in the mouth of each victim, elucidates his desire to ‘moult’ into a female form. This desire finds representation in the metaphor of chrysalis: his construction of the skin suit manipulates women’s bodies into a cocoon, an unnatural womb, for Gumb to re-emerge from as a perverse dissolution between mother and child. This unnatural reproductive imagery implicitly pathologizes queerness as a *contagion*; Gumb’s queer identity is not limited to an individual disease of his manhood, constituting a symbolic castration, but infects the bodies of others by transforming them into vessels for his deviant desires.

Likewise, the character of Creed from *Troubled Blood* does not contain non-normative sexual desires and gendered expression to his individual, rather he externalizes queerness onto society, specifically women, through predation. By intertwining Creed’s penchant for cross-dressing with his murderous intent, describing his “sexually ambiguous” (Galbraith 375) persona as a tactic, Rowling reinforces Harris’ evocation of ‘inauthentic’ performances of femininity- constituting a violent *contagion* that preys upon and destabilizes the social body. Thus, by framing the non-normative identities of Gumb and Creed as a reconfiguration of the

reproductive and gendered order, Harris and Rowling reaffirm the monstrosity of queerness in perverting fundamental “naturalness” in society, sustaining itself through violent destabilization.

Alexander, from *If We Were Villains*, parallels the character of Creed whereby their destructive tendencies emerge as symptoms of childhood instability and parental neglect. Though Alexander’s non-normative desires depart from the explicit violence of Creed, the novel nevertheless invokes fear of ‘unnatural’ reproduction in deriving his instability from the emotional absence of his mother and the physical absence of his father: a reimagining of the ‘unnatural’ parent. By situating Alexander’s sexuality alongside other afflictions derived from familial dissolution, such as addiction and emotional instability, the novel mobilizes queerness, not as an individualized identity, but as a larger signification of his overarching dysfunctionality. In the Gothic tradition, Alexander’s corruptive tendencies- providing drugs to classmates and endorsing a friend’s death- symbolize an ‘unnatural’ reproduction of his neglectful inheritance, externalizing his mental and moral contamination to the wider plot. These behaviors, in tandem with his predatory desires, comprise a re-invocation of queerness’ *contagious* threat to, not only corrupt the individual, but sustain a monstrous legacy of societal disruption, pathologizing queerness as a signifier of deeper, systematic disorder in society.

The representation of queer identity in literature has thus maintained a consistent emphasis on the vampire as a figure symbolizing anxieties of queerness as a threat to society. The following section analyzes articles from the past five years published by the five most prominent British reactionary outlets concerning LGBTQ+ representation. From examination of their media output, three major areas of interest and negative representation concerning LGBTQ+ identity have emerged: healthcare, democracy and the family. Through analyzing these

themes, their discursive strategies of queer monsterization function as a rearticulation of the literary vampire through two key practices: draining and contagion.

The first area in which British reactionary media monsterizes queerness is healthcare, specifically in disparaging the High Court's ruling that the NHS is responsible for providing PrEP, a medication preventing the transmission of HIV. Articles from the *Daily Mail* and the *Sun*, in pathologizing recipients as queer men engaged in sexually 'deviant' behavior, vilify the queer community as a burden on national resources. The *Daily Mail's* headline, "NHS told to give out £5,000-a-year lifestyle drug to prevent HIV—as vital cataract surgery is rationed. What a skewed sense of values," (Boreland et al.) in framing PrEP as a "lifestyle" drug, dismisses its medical necessity, implying that it results from, and enables, the irresponsible behavior of queer men. This minimization is echoed in descriptions of PrEP in both the *Daily Mail* and the *Sun* as a "promiscuity pill," (Boreland et al. 1) which moralizes recipients as less worthy of care than "vital" surgeries due to the assumed logic of queerness as not only a deliberate "lifestyle" choice, but fundamentally hypersexual and risky. The *Sun* bolsters the *Daily Mail's* claims that this constitutes a "skewed sense of values," in reporting that "CHILDREN with cystic fibrosis and cancer patients," (Frisk 1) are jeopardized by the drug decision, reaffirming a hierarchical dismissal of queer health as a less deserving of treatment. The frequent invocation of "children," particularly prominent for its capitalization and syntactical dominance in the *Sun's* article, renders a dichotomy of queerness as a parasitic 'other' that siphons care from vulnerable populations. This elucidates the fundamental strategy of both articles in appealing to the readers "values": ostracizing sexual practices outside of the heteronormative as morally incompatible with the interests of the British public. In this construction of queer men as both an economic and moral deficit, the overarching narrative between the articles suggests that HIV treatment is

ultimately a consequence of queerness deliberately disavowing ‘natural’ heteronormative priorities of marriage, monogamy and children (Lovelock 231).

These evocations of queer threat in healthcare reporting, by depicting queer men as a parasitic drain on society’s resources and a locus of disease, function as a rearticulation of the vampire’s core significations: *draining* and *contagion*. The threat of the Gothic vampire lies in its bite as an action that both *drains* its victim of vitality and morals through corrupting them with non-normative sexuality. The tabloids’ implicit representation of queer men as burdening the NHS directly inherits the trope of queerness as a parasitic energy transfer; where the vampiric iteration of *Carmilla* manifests in symptoms of clinical illness as it depletes the victim’s health, queer men as they are mediated through these tabloid constructions circumvent the necessity of vampiric impalation, depleting the nation’s health by irresponsibly draining resources. Similarly, the tabloids’ moralized dismissal of HIV as a condition derived from queer men’s “promiscuous” lifestyles reconstitutes the Gothic foundations of the vampire as an embodiment of sexual transgression. The assumed synonymousness within these articles of ‘queer men’ and ‘people who have HIV’ relies on a logic of blaming “risky” sexual practices (Lavigne 2) integral to the Gothic conceptualization of disease as the outcome of ‘unnatural’ sexual and gender expressions. To this extent, the vampires’ blood becomes equated with queer blood as an infectious localization of fear, evoking horror through the threat of moral and physical decay associated with the sexualized act of *draining*. Further, the recurring invocation of “children” as the predominant targets of queer threat in healthcare employs the fundamental fear of the vampire as a *contagion* reliant on unnatural reproduction. In presenting a moralized vision of the NHS’s limited resources, the articles fabricate a mutually exclusive choice between the well-being of queer people and that of children, situating queerness as an oppositional force to the nation’s

future. This appeal to ‘futuraity’ (Lovelock 231) harkens back to the vampire’s Gothic origins as a perverse embodiment of anxieties that ‘ungenerative’ sexualities disrupt the ‘natural’ gender roles within the reproductive cycle. Thus, the tabloid representations of queer people reiterate the vampire in public consciousness as an existential threat to both the health and future persistence of the nation.

As indicated in healthcare discourse, monsterization of queerness as *draining* institutions is a consistent strategy of representation. However, another arena in which reactionary media coalesces in monsterizing the LGBTQ+ community is democracy, wherein the ‘otherization’ of transgender identity manifests in its presentation as an oppressive burden eroding political freedoms, particularly for women. This is exemplified in articles from the *Telegraph* and the *Express*, who coincide through evoking “freedom of speech” (Montiel-McCann 2970) anxieties in reporting on Stephanie Hayden, a trans woman, losing her discrimination case for Twitter harassment by Kate Scottow, a cis woman (Tominey 1) and the potential that future Labour governments could make misgendering a crime (Spyro 1). The *Telegraph’s* headline “People must have the 'right to offend' without facing a police investigation,” (Tominey 1) entirely excludes Hayden as a victim of a discrimination case, instead reframing Scottow as the victim of wrongful state infringement on her ‘rights.’ The *Express’* critique of hate crime protections suppressing “analytical criticism” mirrors the *Telegraph’s* reduction of Hayden’s harassment to “opinions,” (Tominey 1) trivializing discourses of transgender rights to subjective disagreements rather than matters of systematic oppression. The frequent reference to an unspecified gender “ideology” in the *Express’* claim that “ideologues” (Spyro 4) seek to shut down free speech, underscores the operation of these articles in reworking transness from an identity to a threatening political agenda. In referring to transgender activists lobbying for hate speech

protections as “bigots” eroding protections for women and “even our understandings of reality,” (Spyro 4) the *Express* highlights the strategy undergirding the *Telegraph*’s defense of Scottow: framing the transgender community as authoritarian oppressors, rather than targets of discrimination. This rhetorical appeal to category crisis, by portraying transgender rights as a metaphysical threat to the boundaries and norms that uphold democracy, casts transness as an destabilizing front against British values and legal freedoms.

These representations of transgender identity, as a threat to the democratic ideals of British society, reconfigure the vampire as a parasitic figure *draining* women’s freedom and infecting political institutions with *contagious* rhetoric. Throughout the iterations of the queer vampire, its parasitism and predation are frequently interlinked; Creed, from *Troubled Blood*, exemplifies the proclivity of the vampire to embody concerns of non-normative gender identity as a symptom of pathological desires for power. Though the vampire in these articles does not embody the explicit perversions of Creed, they distinctly reconstruct the rhetoric that transgender desires, in this case for greater protections, derive from an ambition to subordinate women. *The Express* is most explicit in depicting transness dogmatically, as an insidious group of bigots that *drain* the vitality of women to progress their ideological agenda. This representation finds precedent in the 20th century imagination of the vampire (*Silence of the Lambs*) as a figure whose urges to *drain* victims manifest in a violent appropriation of “unnatural” gendered attributes. Moreover, the threat of the Gothic vampire appears in its predisposition to destabilize societal norms; as a monster, the vampire functions as a “harbinger of category crisis” (Cohen 40). These articles explicitly appeal to category dissolution as an imminent threat of accepting transgender identity- simultaneously conjuring an ideologically-charged vision of transgender activists infiltrating political institutions. The fear of contagion inherent to the Gothic vampire

articulates queerness as a force that *drains* and infects deviant behavior to the population at large: it contaminates both the individual society and the wider moral value of society through its existence. The tabloids' construction of transness, analogous to this Gothic vampire, reimagines the open wound of the victim in the figurative bleeding of the body politic, pathologizing transness as an infection that must be contained to preserve Britain's moral and legal integrity.

The third area in which reactionary media monsterizes LGBTQ+ identity is the family, disparaging Drag performances in schools and criticizing clinics for 'indoctrinating' children into queer identities. The *Times* and the *Daily Mail*, in reporting that queer people are perversely intruding into children's spaces, demonize queerness as a predatory threat to the familial institution. The headline from the *Times*' article, reporting that "Drag is the new front of culture wars," (Ellery & Beal 1) frames drag universally as a threat to societal values, despite the contents of the article reporting on one specific performance. The *Daily Mail* adopts a similarly alarmist tone, uncritically reporting a mother's declaration that gender-affirming clinics are "mutilating" and "indoctrinating" (Matthews 27) children based on her disapproval towards her daughter pursuing hormone therapy. Both articles predominantly report from the perspective of offended parents, largely ostracizing queer perspectives; the *Telegraph* cites parents' alarm to the rise in drag performances within institutions traditionally associated with morality and education- schools, libraries, and churches. This authorial position alienates the reader from queerness, reinforcing its position as a hostile 'other' that seeks to intrude and prey upon the familial sphere. The threat of this disruption remains consistent between the articles' emphasis on children. The *Telegraph* narrates the offending drag performance alongside separate incidents of children being exposed to sexualized materials in schools and, correspondingly, the *Express* appeals directly to mothers in describing transness as a "cult" that disrupted the source's

connection to her child. In drawing narrative parallels between queer identity and the perceived exposure of children to inappropriate materials, the articles render transness and drag as significations of aggregated predatory concerns. As such, they devise queerness as an overarching ideological threat to children, insinuating non-normative sexual and gender expression as a corruptive force that undermines British cultural institutions, morals, and families.

In this representation of queerness as a predatory threat to the family, the tabloid narrative reinvigorates the Gothic vampire's symbolic role as a corruptive and intrusive force, indicating queerness as a force *draining* vulnerable children and as a *contagion* indoctrinating unsuspecting victims. The Gothic vampire often assumes the role of a perverse parental figure, where its unnatural reproduction—draining and converting victims—serves as a predatory allegory for queer transgression of traditional gender roles. *Carmilla* exemplifies the threat of the Gothicized maternal predator: by exploiting her proximity to Laura as an infant, she *drains* her vitality and reconstitutes her being with vampiric influence. Le Fanu positions *Carmilla*'s transgressive body as a signification of cultural anxieties regarding queerness- that it subverts the patriarchal order of the British household. This concern of parental authority becomes manifest in the media's emphasis on the danger posed to children by queer identity, reimagining drag queens and clinicians in the vampiric role of *draining* the morality of children by exposing them to sexualized content. Through the “unnatural” connotations of “mutilation,” the *Express* invokes a vision of bodily fragmentation and horror that aligns transness with the murderous pathology of Buffalo Bill, demonizing gender affirming clinics as sites *draining* the vitality of children and perpetuating destructive ideologies. The articles' evaluation of queerness as a united ideological “front” reiterates the vampire's existential threat of *contagion*- their urgent appeals to parents position

queer performance and gender affirming healthcare as corruptive forces that cannot be passively tolerated. In this configuration, the vampire is not staked, but rather eradicated through a suppressive erosion of public visibility, safety and acceptance.

Overall, reactionary media operates within the continuity of the queer vampire inherited throughout literary history, reaffirming the Gothic conceptualization of queerness as a force *draining* the health and vitality of society and a *contagion* destabilizing its morals, norms and values. In tracing the history of queer monstrosity from its Gothic origin to its contemporary manifestation in British media, the narrative technology of the vampire elucidates the consistent strategy of framing queerness as a repository for society ills, cultural fears and underlying biases. The complicity of reactionary media with this monsterization has the additional threat of purporting fictional tropes as journalistic fact, exploiting the susceptibility of its audience to narratives of queerness as a cultural monster that have been deeply embedded into public consciousness. This research underscores the significance of analyzing representational strategies to understand the deliberate ways in which marginalized groups are vilified in both fiction and the media. Particularly for a community that has been aligned with inhuman monstrosity for centuries, the implications of reactionary media's reliance on fictional narrative technology underscores the role that political institutions play in fabricating "common sense" narratives around queerness and normative values. In using and accepting the vampire as the dominant figure of queer representation, reactionary media in Britain continues to embed antiquated conceptions of queerness, as a threat that must be eliminated, into the contemporary perception of the LGBTQ+ community.

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