

Université de Montréal

Neither Here nor There: The Figure of the Vampire as a Locus of Neutrality

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Neither Here nor There: The Figure of the Vampire as a Locus of Neutrality

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Résumé

Cette thèse suggère que la figure du vampire est une représentation de la neutralité, et ce, à travers diverses perspectives telles que la neutralité du genre, la neutralité temporelle et la neutralité corporelle. Le vampire a d'abord été considéré comme une créature malsaine avant de devenir plus humanisée au fil du temps. Cependant, je maintiens que le vampire contemporain n'est ni « négatif » ou « positif », mais plutôt neutre, ce que mettent en lumière les concepts de performativité et de corporalité élaborés par Judith Butler. Le vampire, étant à la fois arrêté dans le temps et existant pour toujours, manifeste non seulement la neutralité sexuelle et celle du genre, mais la créature vampirique illustre également l'importance du neutre tant au niveau corporel (tel qu'élaboré par Judith Butler) qu'au niveau temporel (tel que défini par Frank Kermode). Le neutre sera défini à partir des théories de Claude Stéphane Perrin, Maurice Blanchot et Roland Barthes. Étant à la fois présent/absent et à l'intérieur/à l'extérieur de l'expérience humaine, le vampire n'est pas seulement neutre, mais il permet d'étudier les différents aspects inhérents à la neutralité, soient-ils liés à la performativité du genre et de la sexualité, à la corporalité ou à la temporalité. Les aspects théoriques développés dans cette thèse sont analysés à travers les romans vampiriques contemporains suivants : *Let the Right One in* de John Ajvide Lindqvist (2004), *The Vampire Chronicles* de Anne Rice, plus précisément *The Vampire Lestat* (1987) et *Queen of the Damned* (1989), et *The Passage* (2010) de Justin Cronin. Le texte de Lindqvist redéfinit, entre autres, la neutralité du phallus à travers la castration, faisant du personnage d'Eli un vampire neutre et *genderqueer*. De plus, les crocs des vampires permettront une redéfinition neutre du phallus. La prépuberté vampirique dans les romans de Cronin et de Lindqvist sera également pertinente puisqu'un corps arrêté dans le temps et qui demeurera toujours prépubère solidifie le statut neutre du vampire. Les romans de Rice

permettront de redéfinir le tabou de l'inceste et, donc, de consolider la neutralité du vampire. Les espaces vampiriques neutres dans les romans de Rice et de Cronin seront également mis de l'avant, et ce, à travers une conceptualisation de la temporalité comme étant neutre. Concrètement, la figure littéraire du vampire tente de déconstruire les normes sociétales du genre, de la sexualité, de la corporalité et de la temporalité en faveur d'une ontologie fluide et libre qui mène au neutre.

Mots-clés : vampire, théorie de genre, neutralité, performativité, sexualité, corporalité, abjection, temporalité.

Abstract

The figure of the vampire is a representation of the concept of neutrality, shown through different perspectives ranging from gender neutrality, corporeal neutrality, and temporal neutrality. The vampire has been shown to go from a “negative” representation to a “positive” one over the centuries. My claim is that the contemporary vampire is neither “negative” nor “positive” but neutral. This neutrality will be analyzed through the lens of Judith Butler’s conceptualizations of gender performativity and of corporeality. The vampire, being both time-stopped and existing forever, not only manifests gender and sexual neutrality, but also neutral corporeality (as elaborated by Judith Butler) and neutral temporality (as defined by Frank Kermode). The concept of the neutral will be approached based on the works of Claude Stéphane Perrin, Maurice Blanchot, and Roland Barthes. By being both present/absent and inside/outside the human experience, the vampire manifests different aspects of neutrality, be it performing gender and sexuality, understanding corporeality, or experiencing temporality. The theoretical aspects of this dissertation are analyzed based on the following contemporary vampire-centric narratives: *Let the Right One in* (2004) by John Ajvide Lindqvist, *The Vampire Chronicles* by Anne Rice, more specifically *The Vampire Lestat* (1987) and *Queen of the Damned* (1989), and *The Passage* (2010) by Justin Cronin. Lindqvist’s novel redefines, among other things, the neutrality of the phallus through the act of castration, making the character of Eli a neutral and genderqueer vampire. Furthermore, vampire fangs will be of importance as they can be perceived as a manifestation of a neutral phallus. Vampiric prepubescence is also shown to espouse the neutral as it personifies a time-stopped body that will forever exist on the cusp of change. Rice’s novels will allow a resignification of the taboo of incest, further manifesting vampiric neutrality. The concept of vampiric neutral spaces will be tackled in both Rice’s and

Cronin's novels through a neutral conceptualization of temporality. In essence, the figure of the literary vampire attempts to deconstruct societal norms pertaining to gender, sexuality, corporeality, and temporality in favor of a free and fluid ontology which leads to the neutral.

Keywords: vampire, gender theory, neutrality, performativity, sexuality, corporeality, abjection, temporality.

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Dedication

À Ernest.

“Obsession led me to write. It’s been that way with every book I’ve ever written. I become completely consumed by a theme, by characters, by a desire to meet a challenge.”
Anne Rice (1941-2021)

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Introduction

The purpose of this dissertation is to suggest that the figure of the vampire is a representation of the concept of neutrality through different perspectives ranging from gender neutrality, corporeal neutrality, and temporal neutrality.¹ From the 13th century onward, the vampire was first perceived as being a “negative” creature which had to be vanquished for the sake of humanity. The vampiric folklore of the 16th and 17th centuries depicts the revenant vampiric creature as something one must fear and kill.² Following in the steps of folklore, fictional narratives such as Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s poem *Christabel* (1816), John William Polidori’s *The Vampyre* (1819), Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu’s novella *Carmilla* (1872), and Bram Stoker’s classic tale *Dracula* (1897) also represent the vampire as a corrupting and murderous being which must be eliminated at all costs.³ In the 19th and 20th centuries, however, the figure of the vampire slowly

¹ Note that the term “vampire” is a figure that is transmitted through narratives; it does not describe an existing being.

² For more information on the folkloric vampire, refer to Paul Barber’s *Vampires, Burial and Death: Folklore and Reality* (1988). Barber (1941-present) is a research associate with the Fowler Museum of Cultural History at the University of California in Los Angeles, mostly known for *Vampires, Burial, and Death* (1988), but he has also published the essay “Staking Claims: The Vampires of Folklore and Fiction” in 1996. For more information on the figure of the vampire internationally, refer to *The Vampire: A Casebook*, edited by Alan Dundes (1998). For more on why “real” vampires were once feared, refer to Brian W. Aldiss’ “Foreword: Vampires – The Ancient Fear.” (1997). For more on “real” accounts of vampirism, refer to Montague Summers’ *Vampire: His Kith and Kin* (1928). For an extensive survey of terms, characters, films, and television series related to the vampire, see J Gordon Melton’s *The Vampire Book: The Encyclopedia of the Undead* (2010).

³ Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834) has been described as one of the most influential poet-critics in the modern English tradition. His poem “Christabel” (1816) has stood the test of time in the vampire canon. For more information on the sexual inclinations present in “Christabel”, refer to Jonas Spatz’s “The Mystery of Eros: Sexual Initiation in Coleridge’s ‘Christabel’” (1975). Spatz argues that the character of Geraldine is a projection of the awakening of one’s sexual impulses in teenage years. The correlation between the prepubescent/teenage body and sexuality will be tackled more in depth in this dissertation through the analysis of John Ajvide Lindqvist’s *Let the Right One in*. Moreover, Geraldine’s purpose in Coleridge’s poem has been surveyed extensively by many authors over the years. For a critical survey of Geraldine’s character, refer to Abe Delson’s “The Function of Geraldine in *Christabel*: A Critical Perspective and Interpretation” (1980). John William Polidori (1795-1821) was an English writer and physician. His most well-know literary work is his short story titled *The Vampyre* (1819). Polidori was part of the Romantic movement and was therefore acquainted with Lord Byron, as well as Mary and Percy Shelley. *The Vampyre* is said to be woven from the torturous relationship Polidori suffered at Lord Byron’s hand, Polidori having been Lord Byron’s personal physician. For more information on Polidori, *The Vampyre*, and Polidori’s relationships with Lord Byron and the Shelleys, refer to Andrew McConnell Stott’s essay “The Poet, the Physician, and the Birth of the Modern Vampire” (2004). Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu (1814-1873) was an Irish author of gothic tales, mystery, and horror, whose most famous work is *Carmilla* (1872). For more information on the ambiguity of lesbian inclinations, as well as the importance of the Gothic in *Carmilla*, refer to Ardel Thomas’ chapter “Queer

transformed into a “positive”, humanized creature, becoming a liberal vehicle through which social and political issues could be addressed.⁴ Anne Rice’s *The Vampire Chronicles* (1976-2021) opened the gateway to more humane vampires by making them the narrative focal point and therefore, transforming them into full-fledged fictional beings.⁵ By this token, the figure of the vampire gained a positive countenance and began to embody and problematize social issues

Victorian Gothic” in *The Victorian Gothic: An Edinburgh Companion* (2012). Thomas argues that “In a near pornographic rendering of queer sex and mutual masturbation [between the characters of Laura and Carmilla], the reader almost forgets that this is supposed to be a frightening moment in the story” (149). The ambiguity of the scene leaves the reader to ponder on the almost systematic erasure of same-sex relationships in favor of heteronormativity. In a similar vein, in her 2016 book *Exhaustion: A History*, Anna Katharina Schaffner suggests that Le Fanu’s *Carmilla* is a “[...] highly representative example of this tendency: allegorically deploying the figure of a female vampire, it is a cautionary tale against the assumed physical and moral dangers of lesbian love” (80). Similarly, Irish writer Bram Stoker (1847-1912) also played with the conventions of same-sex relationships and the many dangers associated to vampirism in his widely known novel *Dracula* (1897). For more information on the depiction of gender and sexuality in *Dracula*, refer to Christopher Craft’s “‘Kiss Me with Those Red Lips’: Gender and Inversion in Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*” (1984). Craft argues that the use of vampiric fangs to drink blood is akin to the act of (heterosexual) penetration during sexual intercourse. The sexual inclinations of vampire fangs in *The Vampire Lestat* and *Queen of the Damned* by Anne Rice will be detailed further in this dissertation. Conversely, Dejan Kuzmanovic’s “Vampiric Seduction and Vicissitudes of Masculinity in Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*” (2009) argues against Craft’s claim, rather suggesting that “[...] homoerotic desire, while initially a manifestation of [Jonathan] Harker’s faltering masculine identification, eventually functions as a defensive mechanism of Harker’s ego helping to prevent a more radical identity crisis” (412). The author believes that “[...] Harker’s reluctant sexual and professional development - hindered by his servile relation to Dracula, occasional feminine identification, and glimpses of homoerotic desire - is symptomatic of a deeper psychic process in which Harker’s ego, in response to external pressures of his impending initiation into business and marriage, allows its own limited, temporary destabilization in order to be re-stabilized in a modified form which can accommodate these external pressures. It is this process that I describe as the process of seduction” (412). Other noteworthy analyses on sexuality and/or gender in *Dracula* include “Repossessing the Body: Transgressive Desire in *Carmilla* and *Dracula*” by Elizabeth Signorotti (1996), “Vampiric Affinities: Mina Harker and the Paradox of Femininity in Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*” by Charles E. Prescott and Grace A. Giorgio (2005), and Barry McCrea’s “Heterosexual Horror: *Dracula*, the Closet, and the Marriage-Plot” (2010). In his text, McCrea ponders on Stoker being potentially secretly gay and how being “in the closet” might have influenced Stoker’s writing of his vampire novel. McCrea writes, “*Dracula*, I want to suggest, is a novel about hetero-sexuality as it is viewed from inside the gay closet - as an exotic foreign world, at once alluring and frightening” (253). For more on gender representations in *Dracula*, see Milly Williamson’s “Gender and the *Dracula*: What’s at Stake?” (2005).

⁴ For more on the figure of the vampire as Other and what this alienation permits (e.g., to question the concepts of identity and of gender, for instance), refer to Margaret L. Carter’s “The Vampire as Alien in Contemporary Fiction.” (1997), Miriam Jones’ “*The Gilda Stories*: Revealing the Monsters at the Margins.” (1997), Trevor Holmes’ “Coming Out of the Coffin: Gay Males and Queer Goths in Contemporary Vampire Fiction.” (1997), and Veronica Hollinger’s “Fantasies of Absence: The Postmodern Vampire.” (1997).

⁵ It is important to note Anne Rice’s passing on December 11, 2021. For more on Rice’s life and legacy, see Alison Flood’s piece (2021) and the interview her son Christopher Rice gave on CBC Radio (2021). On December 13, 2021, *Rolling Stone* republished their 1995 interview with Rice as a way to pay tribute to her and her literary works. See Mikal Gilmore’s piece for more. For more on Anne Rice’s allyship towards the LGBTQ+ community, see Phaylen Fairchild’s piece (2021). The future of *The Vampire Chronicles* is unknown at the moment of this dissertation’s publication. Refer to “Rice, Anne.” in the Works Cited for the exhaustive list of her *Vampire Chronicles* novels, as well as her other vampire narratives: *New Tales of the Vampires* (*Pandora* (1998) and *Vittorio the Vampire* (1999)). Rice also published a memoir in 2008 titled *Called Out of Darkness: A Spiritual Confession*.

such as the inclusiveness of multiple genders and sexual orientations, representations of nuclear vampire families, etc. in vampire-centric narratives.⁶

More contemporary vampire texts also deal with similar matters, albeit to varying degrees.⁷ Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight Saga* (2005-2008) can be described as unconventional for a vampire-centric narrative inasmuch as it promotes sexual abstinence and displays an aseptitized view of vampiric blood consumption.⁸ However, since one of the novel's major characters, Edward

⁶ For more information on queer and/or subversive readings of Rice's *Vampire Chronicles*, refer to Kriti K. Kalia's "The Dynamics of Transgressive Vampirism: A Queer Reading of Anne Rice's *Interview with the Vampire*." (2013), George E. Haggerty's "Anne Rice and the Queering of Culture." (1998), and James Bell's "Decadence, Dandyism and Aestheticism in *The Vampire Chronicles*." (2006). For more on sexual politics in some of Rice's early novels (*Interview with the Vampire*, the *Beauty* series, *The Mayfair Witches* series, etc.), refer to James R. Keller's *Anne Rice and Sexual Politics: The Early Novels* (2000). For a broader survey of the postcolonial gothic, refer to Sarah Ilott's "Postcolonial Gothic." (2019) and Charles L. Crow's "Gothic in a Post-American World." (2009). For a survey of female vampirism and its connection to the Gothic, refer to Gina Wisker's "Female Vampirism." (2016). For more information on the sense of community in Rice's *Vampire Chronicles*, refer to Sara Wasson's "'Coven of the Articulate': Orality and Community in Anne Rice's Vampire Fiction." (2012) and Kathleen Rot's "Who Do You Love? Anne Rice's Vampires and Their Moral Transition." (2003). For more information on nuclear families in Rice's *Interview with the Vampire*, refer to Candace R. Benefiel's "Blood Relations: The Gothic Perversion of the Nuclear Family in Anne Rice's *Interview with the Vampire*." (2004). For more on how 1970s gender discourses of bodily mutability have influenced Rice's understanding of her vampire characters and how the concept of dieting falls into play, refer to Sandra Tomc's "Dieting and Damnation: Anne Rice's *Interview with the Vampire*." (1997). For more on race and slavery in the context of Anne Rice's and Charlaine Harris' vampire novels, see Victoria Amador's "The Gothic Louisiana of Charlaine Harris and Anne Rice." (2013). For more on race and identity in the context of Rice's *The Tale of the Body Thief*, see Trevor Holmes' "Becoming-Other: (Dis)Embodiments of Race in Anne Rice's *Tale of the Body Thief*." (2006). For more on racism and homophobia in *Dracula*, *The Vampire Chronicles*, and *True Blood*, see Alyssa Gammello's *Biting Back: Racism, Homophobia and Vampires in Bram Stoker, Anne Rice and Alan Ball* (2018). For more on the figure of the vampire and the various ways in which it comes to embody human identity in a selection of vampire narratives (e.g., *Dracula*, *Twilight*, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *The Vampire Chronicles*, etc.), see *The Modern Vampire and Human Identity* (2013).

⁷ For a survey of gender representations in various vampire narratives, see *Gender in the Vampire Narrative*, edited by Amanda Hobson and U. Melissa Anyiwo (2016).

⁸ When a vampire bites a human in the *Twilight* universe, venom is injected into the victim's bloodstream, causing him/her to feel extreme pain. Transformative blood exchanges do not occur in Meyer's narrative like they do in other narratives (e.g., *Dracula*, *The Vampire Chronicles*), in which the victim drinks his/her sire's blood after the vampire has quenched its thirst, bringing the victim to the verge of death. Therefore, it can be stated that the vampires in *Twilight* are aseptitized, both because of their blood consumption methods and because the Cullens, the main vampire clan in the novels, only feed on animals. For more information on animal blood consumption and the "anti-feminist" views which are represented in the *Twilight Saga*, refer to Laura Wright's "Post-Vampire: The Politics of Drinking Humans and Animals in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Twilight*, and *True Blood*" (2014). In addition, sexual abstinence is represented in most of the novels in the *Twilight* series as Edward constantly refuses Bella's advances by fear of hurting her. When Edward finally consents to having sex with Bella on their honeymoon in *Breaking Dawn*, Bella automatically becomes pregnant. That unplanned pregnancy then kills Bella as she is giving birth, forcing Edward to transform her into a vampire so that she can stay "alive". Therefore, sex is not represented as something natural and pleasurable in the *Twilight Saga*, but rather as something which is constantly

Cullen, and his family strive to protect human teenager Bella Swan at all costs, the vampires of the *Twilight Saga* do adhere to the humanization process inherent to the “positive” representations of the figure of the blood drinker.⁹ Other contemporary works such as Charlaine Harris’ *The Southern Vampire Mysteries* (2001-2014) rather promote sexual and gender freedom, making her vampires part of the human world and vice versa.¹⁰ In short, the humanized vampire

refused and when it is finally given, leads to an extremely painful death. For more information on the patriarchal agenda and ideologies of abstinence present in the *Twilight Saga*, especially in the context of the young adult literary genre, refer to Anna Silver’s “*Twilight* Is Not Good for Maidens: Gender, Sexuality, and the Family in Stephenie Meyer’s *Twilight* Series.” (2010). For more information on the sexual politics in the *Twilight* series, refer to Carol Siegel’s “The *Twilight* of Sexual Liberation: Undead Abstinence Ideology.” (2011) and Casey Ryan Kelly’s “Melodrama and Postfeminist Abstinence: The *Twilight* Saga (2008–2012)” (2016). Also worthy of note is Meyer’s publication of *Midnight Sun* in 2020. This novel retells the original story of *Twilight* (2005) but, this time, from Edward’s point of view instead of Bella’s. The anguish and angst felt by Edward towards Bella is exacerbated since the readers can clearly envision Edward’s pain and fear of hurting and/or killing Bella. In 2016, Meyer also published *Life and Death: Twilight Reimagined*, which is a gender-swapped retelling of the original *Twilight* story (the main human character is male, and the main vampire character is female). The four original novels were also adapted into five films from 2008 to 2012. See the Works Cited list for more details.

⁹ For more information concerning the representation of the vampire and/or of gender and sex(uality) in the *Twilight Saga*, refer to Ananya Mukherjea’s “My Vampire Boyfriend: Postfeminism, ‘Perfect’ Masculinity, and the Contemporary Appeal of Paranormal Romance” (2011), Catherine Spooner’s “Gothic Charm School; or, How Vampires Learned to Sparkle” (2013), Melissa Ames’ “*Twilight* Follows Tradition: Analyzing ‘Biting’ Critiques of Vampire Narratives for Their Portrayals of Gender and Sexuality” (2010), Kathryn Kane’s “A Very Queer Refusal: The Chilling Effect of the Cullens’ Heteronormative Embrace” (2010), Danielle Dick McGeough’s “*Twilight* and Transformations of Flesh: Reading the Body in Contemporary Youth Culture” (2010), and Carrie Anne Platt’s “Cullen Family Values: Gender and Sexual Politics in the *Twilight* Series” (2010). Ames concludes her essay by suggesting that the *Twilight Saga*’s rise to fame is mainly due to its capitalization on “[...] the long-lived practice of merging the vampire narrative into the young adult romance genre, resulting in predictable patterns and familiar feminist critiques” (51). One such critique is analyzed in Platt’s text, as she claims that “[the] connection between bloodlust and physical attraction enables Meyer to make the socially conservative argument that abstinence is possible in the most tempting of situations and is necessary for living an ethical life” (77). Meyer’s representation of the vampire is greatly departed from the traditional vampiric lust for both blood and sex, as the Cullens do not feed on humans and Edward keeps dodging Bella’s advances for most of the series, deeming her too fragile and thus, Edward is constantly afraid of killing her. Platt also suggests that abstinence is a way to police female sexuality in the young adult book series (79). McGeough’s analysis of the body and sex in Meyer’s book series echoes Platt’s and Ames’ claims by proposing that Bella’s “[...] experience of sexual pleasure is disembodied” (93).

¹⁰ See “Harris, Charlaine.” in the Works Cited section for an exhaustive list of her *Southern Vampire Mysteries* novels and stories. It is noteworthy to mention that Harris’ *Southern Vampire Mysteries* spawned the popular television series *True Blood* which was created by Alan Ball, and which aired on HBO from 2008 to 2014. For more information on *True Blood*’s representation of otherness and abjection, refer to Sabrina Boyer’s “‘Thou Shalt Not Crave Thy Neighbor’: *True Blood*, Abjection, and Otherness.” (2011). For more information on the blurring of race and of sexuality in *True Blood*, refer to Michelle J. Smith’s “The Postmodern Vampire in ‘Post-Race’ America: HBO’s *True Blood*.” (2013).

enables critical thinking processes pertaining to social and political issues, while putting “good” and “protective” vampires at the forefront of several contemporary vampire-centric narratives.¹¹

The main goal of this thesis is to suggest that while both the “negative” and “positive” inclinations of the blood drinker cement it as a viable cultural figure, the contemporary (contemporary, in the context of this dissertation, needs to be understood as vampire-centric narratives starting with Anne Rice’s *The Vampire Chronicles* and onward) narrative vampire is now neither positive nor negative, but rather neutral.¹² As I will demonstrate in this dissertation through different lenses (gender theory, corporeality, temporality, etc.), the undead status of the vampire – i.e. being neither dead nor alive – makes it a potent representation of the concept of

¹¹ Other significant examples of good vampires in contemporary popular culture are the characters of Angel and Spike in the television series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003) and *Angel* (1999-2004), both created by Joss Whedon. Angel is a vampire with a soul who must atone for his past sins (his evil vampiric counterpart is named Angelus). He also falls in love with Buffy Summers, who is a vampire slayer chosen to protect the world from vampires and demons. The character of Spike undergoes a different transformation. When viewers first encounter him, Spike is an evil vampire who dreams of killing the slayer – he has killed two in his lifetime – and will stop at nothing to attain his goal. Spike is eventually captured by a military unit and scientists put a chip in his brain to prevent him from hurting and killing humans (every time he tries, Spike feels intense neurological pain). Unable to feed on human blood, he resorts to animal blood (as does Angel since killing humans causes him too much pain due to his being a soulful vampire) and ends up helping Buffy and her friends battle evil. Spike eventually falls in love with Buffy and after having a toxic and violent relationship with her (Spike tries to sexually assault Buffy towards the end of the series’ sixth season), Spike chooses to get his soul back so that he can become the type of “man” that Buffy deserves. In the last season of *Buffy*, Spike even sacrifices himself and saves the world (he does come back to “life” in the last season of *Angel* and still keeps on “fighting the good fight”). Both Angel and Spike, although differently, are significant representations of the “good” vampire. It is noteworthy to mention that both these characters’ relation to sex is particular. Angel cannot have sex because one moment of true happiness will make him lose his soul. Spike, on the other hand, is a highly sexual being, relying on sexuality to get what he desires, but also to feel “alive”. For more information on gender, sexuality, and vampire (and human) representations in Joss Whedon’s universes, refer to *Sex and the Slayer: A Gender Studies Primer for the Buffy Fan* by Lorna Jowett (2005), Amy Kind’s “The Vampire with a Soul: *Angel* and the Quest for Identity.” (2010), as well as “Every Night I Save You: Buffy, Spike, Sex, and Redemption” and “Love and Loss: It’s Not Over – Time, Love, and Loss in ‘Surprise’/‘Innocence’”, two chapters from Rhoda Wilcox’s *Why Buffy Matters: The Art of Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (2005). Other noteworthy texts include Melissa M. Milavec and Sharon M. Kaye’s “Buffy in the Buff: A Slayer’s Solution to Aristotle’s Love Paradox” and Gregory J. Sakal’s “No Big Win: Themes of Sacrifice, Salvation, and Redemption”, two essays part of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer and Philosophy: Fear and Trembling in Sunnydale* (2003), as well as the two following essays in *Fighting the Forces: What’s at Stake in Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (2002): Diane DeKelb-Rittenhouse’s “Sex and the Single Vampire: The Evolution of the Vampire Lothario and Its Representation in *Buffy*” and Elisabeth Krimmer and Shilpa Raval’s “‘Digging the Undead’: Death and Desire in *Buffy*”. The journal of *Buffy* studies *Slayage* by editors David Lavery and Rhonda V. Wilcox, which was founded in 2001, is also still active to this day and keeps *Buffy* and *Angel* academia alive.

¹² For a more specific timeline as to the changes in perception of the vampire from “negative” to “positive”, please see *Unholy Transubstantiation: Christifying the Vampire and Demonizing the Blood* by Maureen-Claude LaPerrière.

neutrality. By being situated in an in-between (in terms of gender spectrum positioning, corporeality, and temporality), the contemporary blood drinker becomes a vessel through which the neutral can be exemplified. One of the lenses through which the vampire's neutrality will be explored in this dissertation relates to gender theory, especially the theories developed by Judith Butler.¹³

Gender theory has undeniably evolved throughout the years, most often starting with the claim that gender is simply a biological binary, i.e., either male or female, depending on one's genital organs. With the creation of sexual orientation and/or gender identification scales such as the Kinsey Scale (1948) or the Klein Sexual Orientation Grid (KSOG) (1978), gender slowly started to detach itself from its binary inclination in order to move towards a more fluid – hence, non-binary – conceptualization.¹⁴ This fluidity has been addressed by American philosopher/theorist/critic Judith Butler who first defined what she calls “gender performativity” in her ground-breaking 1990 book *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. Butler's stance stipulates that gender is a social, fluid, and performative construct as she explores in *Gender Trouble, Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex”* (1993) and *Undoing*

¹³ For more on the evolution of sexualities through history, refer to *Sexualities in History: A Reader*, edited by Kim M. Phillips and Barry Reay (2001). As to the impact of cultural figures and productions and their impact on society, Sandrine Galand, in her essay *Le féminisme pop*, claims that “[...] la notion de culture—particulièrement à travers le spectre des lettres – devient une façon d’assurer la conservation d’une certaine morale dans les classes sociales émergentes. On l’envisage désormais comme un instrument au potentiel unificateur, un outil de réorganisation sociale, une contre-force aux assauts dissolvants et aliénants de la production et du capitalisme” (60-61). Galand further suggests that in order for a cultural object to enter popular culture “[...] il faut qu’il [l’objet culturel] offre une possibilité de jeu, de modifications, de réappropriation, qui nous permette de le faire nôtre, et c’est précisément cette facette qui ne peut être prévue par ses producteurs” (63). The (cultural) figure of the vampire does allow for a resignification of various cultural and social issues. For more on the iterations of popular culture, see John Fiske's *Understanding Popular Culture* (2nd edition) (2010). For more on contemporary feminism, refer to Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *We Should All Be Feminists* (2014) and to *Les filles en série : Des Barbies aux Pussy Riot* (2013) by Martine Delvaux.

¹⁴ For more information on the Kinsey Scale and the Klein Sexual Orientation Grid, refer to Chapter I of this dissertation.

Gender (2004).¹⁵ Since gender is a fluid performance, multiple positions can thus be taken on the large spectra of gender and sexuality.¹⁶ Gender and sexual fluidity will contribute to this thesis as the figure of the vampire and its inherent undead status are potent representations of non-binary fluidity, further underpinning the neutrality of the blood drinker. Indeed, the contemporary narrative vampire is situated in-between – and can even transcend – social norms and constructs. The undead countenance of the vampire not only makes it a figurative vessel of gender and sexual (non-binary) fluidity, but it also makes it a significant cultural vehicle to comprehend neutrality.

According to Claude Stéphane Perrin in his text *Le neutre et la pensée*, that which is neutral is “[...] ni saisissable , ni déssaisissable des mots qui accompagnent l’expiration de tout sens possible ainsi que de celle du sujet. Le neutre est dans cet abîme.” (11).¹⁷ As I will illustrate in this dissertation, the figure of the vampire, by its undead countenance, represents the *abîme* inherent to Perrin’s conceptualization of neutrality. The author also stipulates that the neutral transcends categorizations and precedes multiple significations (Perrin, *Neutre et la pensée* 31). In that sense, vampiric undeadness also suggests that the contemporary figure of the vampire transcends gender-binary categorizations to rather reflect gender and sexual fluidity, as well as going beyond hegemonic constructs pertaining to corporeality and temporality. By the same token, Perrin also states that when it comes to the neutral, no pre-established or definitive significations are accepted (*Neutre et la pensée* 37). As I will show in this thesis, the vampire fits

¹⁵ For more information on Butler and her works, as well as what other scholars have written about her theories, refer to Chapter I of this dissertation.

¹⁶ The evolution of gender and sexual categories (e.g., cisgender, heterosexual, transgender, transsexual, bisexual, pansexual, non-binary, etc.) further demonstrates the inherent fluidity of gender. For a list of gender related terms, see the “PFLAG National Glossary of Terms.”

¹⁷ Claude Stéphane Perrin, a French retired professor of philosophy specializing in the philosophy of non-violence through the lens of the neutral and its connection to the infinity of Nature, has also written *Le gouffre, l’abîme et l’infini* (2017), *Les démons de la pensée* (2013) et *L’art et le neutre* (2010).

into the category of the unstable and of the ever-changing since its undead in-between status, its ontological *abîme*, makes it a significant figuration of neutrality. Perrin's theorization of the Eternal as neutral will also provide necessary insight into the correlation which can be made between the neutral and the vampire. Indeed, Perrin's conceptualization of the Eternal implies something that is neither inside nor outside, neither present nor absent (*Neutre et la pensée* 39). I will, throughout this dissertation, analyze Perrin's theory of the neutral as that which is both present and absent/inside and outside. For instance, if something is black and white, the existence of both colors is implied. Vampiric neutrality therefore also demands that presence and absence, and inside and outside all be considered when defining neutrality and the neutral in vampire-centric narratives. The undead and the "all-time encompassing" countenance of the vampire will also establish it as a viable vehicle through which one can comprehend the unfixed nature of the neutral. The expression "all-time encompassing" refers to my understanding of vampiric temporality as that which encompasses past, present, and future while lacking a classic sense of linearity. This conceptualization of time that I have called "mega time" is influenced by Frank Kermode's theories as developed in his text *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction* (1966).¹⁸ By understanding temporality as a "third", neutral duration, the space in between things which is occupied by the vampire can take form. In addition, likening vampiric time to angelic time (as defined by St. Thomas) will suggest that vampires, being neutral creatures, are neither eternal, nor of time but somewhere in between, as echoed by Perrin's *abîme*. Vampiric "mega time", i.e., an "all-time encompassing" view of temporality, will also underpin the neutral inclination of vampiric spaces in the midst of (human) society. By suggesting that the vampire is both time-stopped and existing forever, the neutrality of these in-

¹⁸ See Chapter I of this dissertation for more on Kermode's work and how it underpins the neutral temporal status of the vampire.

between vampiric spaces will also allow for an exploration of Jacques Lacan's theory of drive, desire, and the Symbolic.¹⁹ Harking back to Perrin, the fact that the Eternal remains like an infinite mark, always active and repeated (Perrin, *Neutre et la pensée* 39) also intertwines the figure of the vampire with Judith Butler's concept of gender performativity, as it will be discussed at length in the following chapters.²⁰ Furthermore, Maurice Blanchot's conceptualization of the neutral will also be examined in this thesis in order to demonstrate that the vampire is a neutral being, in terms of its gender and sexual fluidity, its corporeality, and its experience of temporality.

In *L'entretien infini*, Blanchot states that that which is neutral belongs to neither the category of the subject nor to the category of the object. More significantly, Blanchot stipulates that the ambiguous in-between inherent to neutrality questions and therefore pushes the limits of the neutral further (*Entretien* 440, 450). In my dissertation, I will expand on this statement by showing how this postulate is illustrated in vampire literature, going as far as to erase said limits in certain contemporary vampire-centric narratives, especially in terms of vampiric identity and corporeality. Blanchot also states that neutrality is a *limit-experience* in the sense that that which is neutral supposes an *unknown rapport* to any requirements pertaining to identity and unity

¹⁹ The Lacanian symbolic will be explored more in depth in Chapter IV when comparing Babcock's and Amy's respective vampiric neutral realms.

²⁰ The claim that the Eternal is neutral – and the concept of neutrality in and of itself – can also be connected to Jacques Derrida's theorization of *la trace de la différence*, as the trace ultimately erases itself and “[...] est innommable comme telle, illisible dans la forme de la présence” (“[Derrida, la trace]”). Since the trace erases itself and thus cannot be fully embodied, the trace becomes unreadable; in other words, it becomes part of the realm of the neutral. In the case of the narrative vampire, the term “trace” can also be defined as a mark. Indeed, one's vampiric transformation in most vampire-centric narratives occurs when a vampire bites a human victim which, in turn, drinks the vampire's blood to complete the transformation. Therefore, the concept of the trace defined by Derrida undeniably correlates with vampiric blood consumption as the vampire – and the victim during the transformation process – leaves a literal mark on the victim's flesh.²⁰ Moreover, since the trace erases itself, it undeniably implies that said trace is part of the neutral. In that sense, the Derridian trace and the figure of the vampire connect as representations of the neutral, not only in terms of gender and sexuality but also as a fictional figuration of the overall concept of neutrality. Derrida's concept of the trace will therefore point to the idea that neutrality is indeed an infinite mark, while cementing the figure of the vampire as a cultural representation of this specific claim.

(*Entretien* 443).²¹ This statement also correlates with Blanchot's claim that "[...] penser ou parler au neutre, c'est penser ou parler à l'écart de tout visible et de tout invisible, c'est-à-dire en termes qui ne relèvent pas de la possibilité" (*Entretien* 444). I will show that vampiric undeadness supposes an intrinsic in-between status, an in-between which does not stem from that which is possible. To that effect, Roland Barthes' conceptualization of neutrality will provide significant insights.²²

In his 1977-1978 seminars at the Collège de France, Roland Barthes strived to comprehend what the neutral ultimately entails. In short, for Barthes, that which is neutral is what evades the paradigm.²³ Indeed, Barthes stipulates the following: "[...] le paradigme, c'est le ressort du sens; là où il y a sens, il y a paradigme, et là où il y a paradigme (opposition), il y a sens. [...] D'où la pensée d'une création structurale qui défait, annule ou contrarie le binarisme implacable du paradigme par le recours à un troisième terme : le *tertium* [...] : terme amorphe, neutre [...], ou degré zéro" (*Le neutre* 31). In terms of vampire-centric narratives, the figure of the blood drinker is representative of this "third term" since it deconstructs binaries when it comes to gender, sex,

²¹ I will be using the term *limit-experience* in the same way as Maurice Blanchot does. This will be dealt with at length in Chapter I.

²² Roland Barthes (1915-1980) was a French literary theorist, essayist, philosopher, critic, and semiotician whose work engaged in the analysis of a variety of sign systems, mainly derived from Western popular culture. Barthes' most well-known works include *Le degré zéro de l'écriture suivi de Nouveaux essais critiques* (1972), *Le plaisir du texte* (1973), *Le bruissement de la langue : Essais critiques IV* (1984). For more on Barthes' discourse on desire and gender, refer to Lawrence D. Krizman's "Roland Barthes: The Discourse of Desire and the Question of Gender." (1988). For more on the methodology used by Barthes in his lectures *Comment vivre ensemble* and *Le neutre*, refer to Lucy O'Meara's "*Comment vivre ensemble, Le neutre* and Their Context." (2012). For more on the Barthesian neutral and the concept of weariness, refer to Rudolphus Teeuwen's "An Epoch of Rest: Roland Barthes's 'Neutral' and the Utopia of Weariness." (2012). For more on Barthes and cultural otherness, refer to Jane Hiddleston's "Displacing Barthes: Self, Other and the Theorist's Uneasy Belonging." (2010). For more on Barthes, theatricality, desire, and corporeality, refer to Timothy Scheie's "Performance and Its Double: The 'Live' and the Structuralist Abstraction." and "Staging Theory: Theatricality and the Displacement of Desire." (2006). For more on Barthesian paradigms and the concept of nuance, refer to "'Neutrality' as Nomos? Paradigm, Nuance, and the Politics of Coterritoriality in Late Barthes." by Christian Moraru (2016). For more on the history of Barthes' *Le degré zéro de l'écriture*, refer to Daniel Just's "Against the Novel: Meaning and History in Roland Barthes's *Le degré zéro de l'écriture*." (2007).

²³ "Ce qui déjoue le paradigme" in the original French.

corporeality, identity, and temporality. In other words, the vampire is a literary figuration of Barthes' definition of the paradigm since the blood drinker does indeed allow for significations of the neutral and also of the human experience to arise. I will also posit that the paradigm evasion which generates the neutral according to Barthes also serves as a system through which norms can be deconstructed. By adhering to Judith Butler's claim that "doing one's gender" implies the deconstruction of norms, it will become clear that gender neutrality (and fluidity) are viable and culturally represented by the figure of the vampire. This understanding of neutrality as that which deconstructs norms also relates to the deconstruction of the corporeal and the temporal by the neutral vampire. To that end, Barthes also states that that which is neutral is "ce qui annule et/ou brouille" (*Le neutre* 171). The undead nature of vampires is once again of interest here. Since they are neither dead nor alive, vampires exist in an "all-time encompassing" temporality I have called "mega time". By experiencing past, present, and future as one single temporality, which therefore lacks a classic sense of the linear, further bolsters the neutral status of the vampire. This "conception" of time as being unstable also suggests that the vampire in and of itself provides a gateway into the neutral realm. In other words, the blood drinker and its ambiguous ontological nature represent that which is neutral insofar as to go above and beyond time.²⁴ Roland Barthes' view of neutrality will also enable the correlation between the undead status of the vampire and the realm of the neutral, while pointing to the "all-time encompassing" temporal quality of the figure of the blood drinker. Furthermore, seeing the neutral as that which annuls and/or blurs confers it its in-between status, which can be represented by the figure of the

²⁴ I will use the pronoun "it" -- unless it is not grammatically suitable -- when referring to vampires in this dissertation as a way to establish the figure of the blood drinker's neutral countenance. In addition, Claude Stéphane Perrin's conceptualization of the Eternal will be interesting here. The transgressive nature of the vampire will also be of particular interest in this case.

vampire itself, but also through vampiric blood consumption. To that effect, Julia Kristeva's work on the abject will prove significant.

In *Pouvoirs de l'horreur: Essai sur l'abjection*, Julia Kristeva suggests the following: "Ce n'est donc pas l'absence de propreté ou de santé qui rend abject, mais ce qui perturbe une identité, un système, un ordre. Ce qui ne respecte pas les limites, les places, les règles. L'entre-deux, l'ambigu, le mixte" (12).²⁵ Kristeva's theory will be necessary insofar as it explicates the notion of the figure of the vampire as representing the abject, especially since it does disrupt identity and does not respect limits and rules.²⁶ In short, by using Julia Kristeva's theory of the abject, I will show that the vampire is a figuration of the in-between, the ambiguous, and the non-binary. Kristeva's conceptualization of the abject will thus further strengthen my claim that the contemporary figure of the vampire is now neither "negative" nor "positive", but rather neutral. Even if the aforementioned scholars accurately define neutrality, I will consider the neutral in terms of vampiric undeadness, providing new ground to not only understand gender fluidity and its possible neutrality in a new light, but more significantly, in order to point to the importance of

²⁵ Julia Kristeva (1941-present), Bulgarian-French philosopher, literary critic, semiotician, psychoanalyst, feminist, and, most recently, novelist, is known for *Étrangers à nous-mêmes* (1988), *La révolution du langage poétique : L'avant-garde à la fin du XIXe* (1974), and *Le féminin et le sacré* (1998), co-written with Catherine Clément. For more on Kristeva's psychoanalytic social theory, refer to "Recent Work on and by Julia Kristeva: Toward a Psychoanalytic Social Theory." by Maria Margaroni (2007). For more on Kristeva's advocacy for working with texts which deal with sex and violence, refer to Judith Still's "Horror in Kristeva and Bataille: Sex and Violence." (1997). For more on Kristeva's contribution to postfeminist ethics, refer to Dawne McCance's "*L'écriture limite: Kristeva's Postmodern Feminist Ethics.*" (1996). For more on Kristeva's and Judith Butler's theories examined through the lens of spatial imaginations to create a politics of transformation, refer to Jenny Robinson's "Feminism and the Spaces of Transformation." (2000). For more on how Kristeva's theory of the abject intertwines with performances of the female body, see "Redefinitions of Abjection in Contemporary Performances of the Female Body." by Christine Ross (1997). For more on Kristeva, religion, death, and gender, see Grace M. Jantzen's "Birth and the Powers of Horror: Julia Kristeva on Gender, Religion, and Death." (2002). For a survey of Kristeva's theory of the abject, refer to Katherine J. Goodnow's "Horror – Basic Concepts: The Abject and Its Varieties." (2014). For more on the abject and desire from literary and cultural perspectives, see Konstanze Kutzbach and Monika Mueller's *The Abject of Desire: The Aestheticization of the Unaesthetic in Contemporary Literature and Culture* (2007).

²⁶ Kristeva's figuration of blood as being semantically favorable to the abject will also point to the vampire since blood becomes the crossroads through which dichotomies such as murder/procreation can arise (Kristeva, *Pouvoirs de l'horreur* 116), a dichotomy which the figure of the blood drinker exemplifies.

the narrative vampire -- and ultimately, other figures present in popular culture -- as a cultural vehicle which leads to an understanding of the human experience as a whole.

Using Maurice Blanchot's theory of the neutral as my conceptual basis, I will strive to establish that the unidentifiable and unidentified nature of neutrality makes the neutral what it truly is, while pointing to its "all-time encompassing" status. Indeed, neutrality is unidentifiable insofar as it always remains the unidentifiable surplus (Blanchot, *Entretien* 450). In terms of vampiric "mega time", the neutral supposes a "[...] temps comme autre, comme absence et neutralité [...], temps arrêté, incapable de permanence [...]" (Blanchot, *Entretien* 63). By virtue of being undead, the narrative vampire is a figuration of the in-between. There is little doubt, therefore, that this liminal status is thus what makes the vampire neutral; liminality can be defined as the position of that which forever remains on the margins. Neutrality is therefore a *limit-experience*, something which adheres neither to the category of the subject, nor to the category of the object. In other words, the undead status of the vampire makes it a potent figuration of the unknown *rapport* which is inherent to Blanchot's conceptualization of neutrality. The liminality which stems from the neutral is also represented by the blood drinker since its "all-time encompassing" temporal nature strengthens its liminal countenance. This will be analyzed further in the upcoming chapters as it demonstrates that the figure of the vampire is a representation of the (neutral) in-between. The liminal quality of the vampire also makes it a potent vehicle through which gender and sexual fluidity can be explored. By being situated in a (neutral) in-between, the narrative vampire goes above and beyond normative gender and sexual spectrum positions. By virtue of its undead liminal status, the figure of the blood drinker can place itself in between multiple genders and sexual orientations, becoming a cultural representation of Butlerian gender

performativity and fluidity, as well as challenging views on identity, corporeality, and temporality.

Through its undead countenance, the vampire always has a provisional identity. The idea that (gender) identities are multiple and unfixed equates to the in-between status of the blood drinker. Also, since vampiric undeadness supposes a timeless quality, the narrative vampire can embody several identities throughout its entire “life”, especially due to its vampiric experience of temporality being “all-time encompassing”. To that effect, the character of Eli(as) in *Let the Right One in* by John Ajvide Lindqvist further distorts the lines of identity by being utterly neutral, both in terms of gender identification and because of their undead status.²⁷ The character of Lestat de Lioncourt in *The Vampire Chronicles* by Anne Rice will also provide an interesting insight, inasmuch as Lestat’s identities vary from novel to novel and that vampires in Rice’s universe experience time and existence through “vampire eyes”. Seeing the world in such a way will allow for an understanding of vampiric neutrality through the importance of vampiric neutral realms. Another significant character is that of Amy in *The Passage* by Justin Cronin. Amy deconstructs identity norms by having indistinct corporeal features, while also using a non-normative method of communication, i.e., telepathy. Amy’s and Babcock’s respective neutral realms will also further underpin the neutral status of the vampire, especially when it comes to understanding identity through the Lacanian perspective of drive, desire, and the symbolic.

²⁷ Eli(as)’s name will be written as such a few times throughout this dissertation to put the emphasis on Eli(as)’s neutral and genderqueer countenances. Genderqueer refers to a category of identities which are outside the gender binary and cisnormativity. Also, the neutral pronouns “they”, “them”, and “their/theirs” will be used when referring to Eli(as) as a way to further strengthen their non-binary countenance.

The figure of the vampire is “multiple” when it comes to its unfixed identities – and the correlation with the concept of neutrality – but also when the vampire consumes blood, either to survive or to transform someone into a vampire. When vampires bite human beings, blood drinkers do not differentiate genders and/or sexual preferences; a human being is simply a human being, regardless of gender. The fact that such distinctions are not made supposes that vampires are genderless not only when it comes to their provisional and ever-changing identities, but also when they select their victims.²⁸ In a way, this vampiric non-differentiation further exemplifies my claim that the narrative vampire is a representation of multiple – and sometimes neutral – gender spectrum positions. Vampiric undeadness allows the figure of the blood drinker to navigate through the large spectra of gender and sexuality. By being a representation of a (neutral) in-between, the vampire is thus non-binary, both in terms of gender identification – or non-identification – and sexual orientations. Since identity is arbitrary and can no longer encompass the simple heteronormative male/female biological binary, the figure of the vampire becomes the cultural vessel through which multiple genders and sexual orientations can be illustrated. The claim that the vampire is a representation of neutrality plays a significant part in terms of deconstructing and redefining the impact of the neutral on (vampiric) identity, corporeality, and temporality. Defining the neutral as that which is in-between, and which implies an “all-time encompassing” temporality provides a basis through which neutrality can be explored. This dissertation will attempt to defend the aforementioned claim by looking at neutrality in contemporary vampire-centric narratives through the following perspectives: gender and sexuality, corporeality, identity, and temporality.

²⁸ The phallic inclinations of vampire fangs will also be of interest here.

The first chapter will delve into the concepts which will be significant in order to posit that the contemporary figure of the vampire is now neither “negative” nor “positive”, but rather neutral. Gender neutrality will be examined as one of the perspectives explored by the vampire. To do so, an overview of gender theory will provide significant insights in order to ascertain that gender is not a fixed biological precept, but rather something that is “multiple” and fluid in nature. To that effect, Judith Butler’s concept of gender performativity and fluidity will strongly reinforce this statement. By explaining Butler’s philosophy, more specifically in *Gender Trouble*, *Bodies That Matter*, and *Undoing Gender*, it will become clear that the vampire is a literary figure that is neutral. The vampire’s provisional ontology, i.e., being time-stopped and existing forever, provides the necessary assets to suggest that the blood drinker is malleable enough as to deconstruct societal norms pertaining to gender, sexuality, identity, corporeality, and temporality. By defining the concept of neutrality according to Claude Stéphane Perrin, Maurice Blanchot and Roland Barthes, it will be made clear that the neutral is of great importance when it comes to demonstrating that the vampire is the one of the most potent cultural figures to exemplify the concept of neutrality. Julia Kristeva’s conceptualization of the abject will also illustrate that the vampire is part of an in-between in the same respect as the abject is, especially in terms of vampiric ontology and temporality.

The second chapter will expand on the undead pre-pubescent aspects of the vampiric body, while also delving into its trans-gender and genderqueer nature, by analyzing John Ajvide Lindqvist’s novel *Let the Right One in*.²⁹ This novel must be part of the main corpus of this dissertation as the main vampire character, Eli, is a prepubescent-looking blood drinker who has been castrated

²⁹ I use “trans-gender” here both in terms of the gender inclination, i.e., a transgender person, and as a reminder that the vampire transcends gender – and sexual – norms.

by a sadistic vampire before being changed into a vampire.³⁰ Eli(as)'s castration before becoming a vampire makes them the most tangibly neutral vampire of the corpus which will be studied in this thesis in terms of gender neutrality. Also, by dressing as a girl to blend in socially, Eli(as) literally performs multiple genders at once, cementing the fact that gender – and vampires – are fluid and performative. Moreover, Eli(as)'s use of the diminutive Eli to introduce themselves also correlates with their non-binary identity as Eli can be defined as a gender-neutral name. In addition, Eli(as)'s intimate relationship with Oskar will also show that sexual orientations and identities are unfixed. These in-depth analyses will posit that the contemporary figure of the vampire is neutral in terms of gender and sexuality, that being one of the lenses through which the theory of vampiric neutrality will be explored in this dissertation.³¹

The third chapter will strive to demonstrate that *The Vampire Chronicles* by Anne Rice, while making the vampire “positive” also paved the way to a more neutral representation of the vampire, in terms of gender and sexual identifications, of corporeality, and of temporality. By focusing my analysis of Rice's works on Lestat de Lioncourt, the main vampire in the series, it will become clear that the arbitrary nature of Lestat's identities will suggest that he is part of the in-between inherent to the undead and timeless status of the vampire, but it will also show that, by virtue of being transgressive, Lestat reinforces my claim that the contemporary vampire is now neutral. Indeed, Lestat not only adheres to multiple non-binary sexual orientations, but his performative inclinations also provide a cultural vehicle that is malleable enough as to slowly encompass social and political issues, especially those relating to gender theory, corporeality,

³⁰ Eli's castration is the change-before-their-(vampiric)-change. This idea will be developed further in Chapter II of this dissertation.

³¹ Eli's gender expressions, their prepubescent looking body, their romantic relationship with Oskar, and the castration Eli(as) had to suffer through are also the main reasons behind choosing *Let the Right One in* as the main novel to be analyzed in the second chapter of this dissertation.

and temporality. Furthermore, Lestat's reversed relationship with his mother will point to the transgressive inclinations of the vampire. Indeed, Lestat's relationship with his mother, Gabrielle, and the original transgression of incest, which is illustrated through Gabrielle's vampiric transformation by Lestat, reverses their filial bonds, and as such, strengthens the place of the vampire in the realm of the in-between, of the neutral. In addition, as in most vampire-centric narratives, the act of drinking blood is extremely significant in Anne Rice's *Chronicles*. The deep sensual bond which arises between the soon-to-be vampire and its sire is another figuration of the in-between which is inherent to the neutral. By having the victim and the vampire share blood, the condition of undeadness required for the victim to become a vampire takes hold of the chosen victim, therefore causing the newborn vampire to become neutral. In other words, Anne Rice's novels will provide contemporary vampiric insights into the performative inclinations – gender and sexual orientations wise – of the figure of the blood drinker, while suggesting that the transgressive nature of the vampire, both in terms of vampiric identity, temporality, and in terms of incest and sex, cement it as a potent vehicle through which the neutral can take shape. Also, by conceptualizing time as encompassing past, present, and future while lacking a classic sense of the linear, the vampires' existence in Rice's novels will suggest that the undead countenance of the vampire comes to even challenge the human conception of time towards a more neutral temporality as echoed by Frank Kermode's work. Finally, the origin story of the creation of vampires in Rice's works will suggest that the figure of the blood drinker is a significant literary representation of neutrality. Indeed, Amel, a powerful evil spirit, takes hold of Enkil and Akasha, King and Queen of Egypt, and transforms them both into blood drinking entities. Amel's jealousy of human corporeality and its need to expand itself

in every vampiric body will demonstrate that Amel is a true representation of the correlation between vampires and the neutral realm in this specific fictional universe.

In the fourth chapter, similar themes will be addressed, more specifically through the character of Amy from *The Passage* by Justin Cronin, as Amy challenges ideals of identity by inhabiting a pre-pubescent, androgynous body. She also deconstructs normative bodily materiality by using a non-normative means of communication: telepathy.³² Amy's status as the Zero of the Twelve towards the end of Cronin's novel makes her an extremely important representation of the neutral in-between inherent to vampirism, as Amy herself becomes the neutral vessel through which all other vampires can regain their "original" identities before they were stripped away by scientifically-induced vampiric transformations.³³ *The Passage*, and more specifically the character of Amy, has been chosen to be part of the main corpus of this dissertation not only because of Amy's prepubescent body which challenges ideals of identity, but more importantly because her connection to the virals and to the character of Babcock allows Amy to manifest neutrality in several ways, i.e. through her use of something which may be referred to as a *non-langage*, to use Roland Barthes' terms, as well as through her androgynous corporeality, and also because Amy ultimately creates her own neutral realm in order to deconstruct Babcock's own neutral (vampiric) realm.³⁴ Both Amy's and Babcock's respective neutral (vampiric) realms will also allow to further manifest vampiric neutrality, especially through Jacques Lacan's

³² I refer to Judith Butler's conception of bodily materiality here.

³³ The first vampires who were scientifically created in Cronin's world are referred to as the Twelve.

³⁴ Vampires in Cronin's world are called "virals".

understanding of drive, desire, and the symbolic. Cronin's dystopian universe will therefore permit a resignification of the neutrality inherent to the vampire.³⁵

The figure of the vampire will be at the forefront in order to provide a tangible vehicle for an intangible concept. I will posit that the vampire is the most potent literary figuration of the concept of neutrality. Since concepts such as gender and sexual orientations, corporeality, and temporality can rarely be fully exemplified by rational definitions, cultural figures often act as manifestations of complex concepts. The locus of agency provided by cultural figures also reinforces the viability of culture, i.e., literature, film, art, etc. in society. The intrinsic goal of this thesis is to demonstrate aspects pertaining to neutrality, but also to cement the importance of cultural figures and symbols as agents of comprehension of the human experience. The figure of the vampire is the perfect embodiment of everything this dissertation will strive to illustrate.

The long-spanning vampiric tradition enables the blood drinking creature to navigate through time, and thus makes it an important vessel to understand human nature. Similarly to the vampire's ability to move through time, human nature and experience morph and evolve as well. Since the human experience cannot be fully consolidated in empirical terms, figures and their intangible features are the best-indicated vehicles to provide definitions of otherwise obscure concepts. Furthermore, the fact that the figure of the vampire challenges heteronormative and

³⁵ Cronin's universe has been chosen specifically because of how Amy and Babcock both challenge vampiric neutrality differently than other vampire narratives that also include prepubescent characters similar to Amy. One such novel is *Fledgling* by Octavia E. Butler. The character of Shori in Butler's novel is a 53-year-old Black amnesiac vampire who has the body of a prepubescent teenager. Issues pertaining to race are also tackled in Butler's story. *The Passage* has been chosen as the main novel of Chapter IV because of all the many aspects of neutrality which Amy manifests, as it has been mentioned above; it is not to forgo the importance of the issues of race, prepubescence, and gender tackled in *Fledgling*. Also, the choice of *The Passage* instead of the other two novels in Justin Cronin's trilogy is deliberate because *The Passage* is the main novel which explores Amy's prepubescence and means of communication more in depth. The character of Babcock, which only appears in *The Passage*, also further manifests vampiric neutrality in a manner which cements my own understanding of vampiric neutrality.

phallogocentric views not only establishes Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity and fluidity as still being relevant today, but it also grounds blood drinking creatures as being malleable enough as to embody contemporary issues pertaining to identity and corporeality. Vampires, as cultural figures, have the ability, because of their liminal countenance, to remain traditional figures through time, but more importantly, to be an illustration of human experience. Human nature in and of itself is a difficult concept to grasp and it therefore needs an external vehicle to facilitate its understanding. The figure of the vampire is the most relevant cultural representation of human experience and its relationship to gender, identity, and corporeality as it will be demonstrated in this dissertation. Finally, this thesis will not only attempt to (re)define various paradigms of neutrality, but it will also strive to contribute to the field of vampire studies by showing that the figure of the vampire is not bound to disappear but to rather stay firmly in place as an embodiment of the human experience.

Chapter I

The Space in Between: Neutrality, Vampiric Undeadness, and Gender Theory

By being neither dead nor alive, the vampire situates itself in an ontological in-between. Contrarily to the definition of the *Oxford English Dictionary* which states that that which is undead is “dead-and-alive” (“Undead, *adj.*”), I would argue that vampiric undeadness rather implies an unclear countenance, a being which is neither dead nor alive.³⁶ This undeadness suggests, on the one hand, that the figure of the vampire can swiftly navigate through time and embody ever-changing social issues, especially those pertaining to gender and sexuality, and on the other hand, those pertaining to the in-between ontology of the vampire solidifies my claim that the figure of the blood drinker is now neutral. For example, the in-between grey area which stems from the vampire’s said undead countenance allows the vampire to be situated in between genders and sexual orientations, a claim which demonstrates that gender is a fluid and performative social construct.³⁷ It stands to reason, therefore, that the in-between status of the vampire, in addition to underpinning the fluidity inherent to gender and sexuality, further bolsters the neutral status of the blood drinker.

The concept of gender has been defined in multiple ways, ranging from gender as strictly biological to gender – and sexual orientations – as utterly fluid. Normative gender theory states that gender is biological and that one’s gender is dictated by one’s genitalia, i.e., being a man implies having a penis whereas being a woman implies having a vagina. This normative view of

³⁶ I use the term “unclear” here in reference to the neutral, more specifically, pertaining to the definition coined by Claude Stéphane Perrin, i.e., that which is neutral is present/absent and inside/outside. Roland Barthes’ conceptualization is also significant here, i.e., the neutral is that which annuls and/or blurs the paradigm.

³⁷ I prioritize Judith Butler’s gender theories in this dissertation; for other views on gender as a social construct and/or how gender may be perceived in various social contexts, see the following texts: Mimi Schippers’ “Recovering the Feminine Other: Masculinity, Femininity, and Gender Hegemony.” (2007), and *Gender reckonings: New Social Theory and Research*, edited by James W. Messerschmidt (2018).

gender also perpetuates the idea that gender(s) and sexualities are utterly binary – masculine or feminine – and heteronormative. As an example of the reach of this 21st-century binarial normativity, social constructs dictate that a newborn boy, for example, should receive blue items as gifts, whereas a newborn girl will most likely get pink items.³⁸ From the start, gender is categorized; gender is typically and normatively gendered. However, if one adheres to the idea that gender is a social construct, one must agree that gender cannot be strictly binary, but rather fluid. In order to empirically measure other sexual orientations than those promoted by the traditional heterosexual norm, Drs. Alfred Kinsey, Wardell Pomeroy, and Clyde Martin developed the Heterosexual-Homosexual Rating Scale, which is more commonly known as the Kinsey Scale. Their findings were first published in *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* in 1948. The main objective of their research was to demonstrate that “people did not fit into exclusive heterosexual or homosexual categories” (“The Kinsey Scale”).³⁹ In other words, the Kinsey Scale scientifically proved the existence of bisexuality and by the same token, not only showed that heteronormativity is a hegemonically constructed norm – a norm which can then be defied – but the findings slowly started to demonstrate that gender is rather a fluid spectrum

³⁸ The history of colors being categorized by gender will be analyzed more in depth in Chapter II of this dissertation. The current division of blue being “for boys” and pink being “for girls” is a contemporary way of looking at restrictive and heteronormative, cisgender norms and dictates and ultimately harm those part of LGBTQ+ communities.

³⁹ Drs. Kinsey, Pomeroy, and Martin published their findings in 1948, which made the Kinsey reports “[...] associated with a change in public perception of sexuality and considered part of the most successful and influential scientific books of the 20th century” (“The Kinsey Scale”). In order to get satisfying results, “the Kinsey team interviewed thousands of people about their sexual histories. Research showed that sexual behavior, thoughts, and feelings towards the same or opposite sex were not always consistent across time” (“The Kinsey Scale”). It is therefore clear that even though I criticize the Kinsey Scale below, it did provide a new way to not only measure sexual attraction and relationships, but also to demonstrate that sexuality does not simply adhere to the hegemonic cis-heterosexual “norm”; sexuality is rather fluid. Note that the term “cis” refers to a person whose gender identity fits with the sex that person was given at birth (e.g., a woman – in this case, someone who was born with a vagina – who was given the “female” gender identity at birth and who identifies as such). For more on the Kinsey Scale and its impact in contemporary contexts, refer to Donna J. Drucker’s “Marking Sexuality from 0-6: The Kinsey Scale in Online Culture.” (2012) and “Notes on the Kinsey Scale.” by James D. Weinrich (2014).

which can encompass an array of positions instead of only promoting heterosexuality as a viable sexual orientation. The Kinsey Scale rating system goes as follows:

- 0 | Exclusively heterosexual
- 1 | Predominantly heterosexual, only incidentally homosexual
- 2 | Predominantly heterosexual, but more than incidentally homosexual
- 3 | Equally heterosexual and homosexual
- 4 | Predominantly homosexual, but more than incidentally heterosexual
- 5 | Predominantly homosexual, only incidentally heterosexual
- 6 | Exclusively homosexual
- X | No socio-sexual contacts or reactions. (“The Kinsey Scale”)

By showing that sexual attraction and relationships can be measured on a scale, the Kinsey reports promote the claim that genders and sexualities are part of a moving continuum; in other words, the large spectrum of gender is undeniably and utterly fluid. Albeit the fact that the work of Drs. Kinsey, Pomeroy, and Martin changed the way in which people understood sexual orientations and relationships, the scale has been criticized over the years for not being inclusive enough. Indeed, even though bisexuality is articulated, the Kinsey Scale does not measure other queer gender and sexual inclinations. Other sexual orientations and gender scales were developed since then as a way of including all the identities which can be found – and performed – on gender and sexuality spectra. One of these more inclusive scales is the Klein Sexual Orientation Grid (KSOG).

The Klein Sexual Orientation Grid (KSOG) was first introduced by Dr. Fritz Klein in his book *The Bisexual Option* in 1978. The main purpose of Klein's text is to demystify bisexuality and the lifestyles attached to it. As such, bisexuality erases heteronormative – and phallogocentric – social (and sexual) inclinations in favor of gender fluidity. The KSOG strives to measure said fluidity by promoting a wide array of sexual orientations (see Figure 1 below). Although the rating system used in the KSOG resembles the one in the Kinsey Scale, the fact that the KSOG includes various variables such as social preference and self-identification strengthens the claim that sexual orientations are not only based on one's sexual attraction and fantasies, but also depends on one's social and individual environments. Thus, gender and sexuality are social constructs in the Butlerian sense (see below). The term “social construct” refers to the idea that one's gender and/or sexual choices may be marginalized if they do not adhere to the social “norm”, but gender as a construct more importantly requires a social dialogue to deconstruct preconceived mindsets and therefore promote openness and inclusion. Norms which marginalize also contribute to the understanding that gender and sexual choices are intrinsically fluid. The Klein Sexual Orientation Grid's innovation mirrors that claim. By providing variables for past, future, and ideal choices, the scale acknowledges that sexual orientations ultimately change and evolve over time, thus stating that gender and sexual fluidity does exist, and that gender is not strictly normative.⁴⁰ To that effect, the work of Judith Butler on gender will provide the main theoretical basis necessary to the understanding of this dissertation's explanation of gender, sexuality, and its connection to (vampiric) neutrality.

⁴⁰ The KSOG states that the past variable stands for “your life up to 12 months ago”, the present variable relates to “the most recent 12 months”, whereas the ideal variable questions what one might eventually like to experience (“The Klein Sexual Orientation Grid”).

Judith Butler is an American philosopher/academic/theorist whose seminal work *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990) consecrated her as one of the most influential gender theorists of her generation.⁴¹ Butler then strived to expand and revise her findings in two subsequent texts: *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex”* (1993) and *Undoing Gender* (2004).⁴² All three works will be significant to my analysis as they encompass the main framework of my understanding of gender theory and how this conceptualization of gender furthers the claim that vampires are neutral beings ontologically and also when it comes to their performance(s) of gender and sexuality. I will address Butler’s works chronologically for a clearer understanding.

Gender Trouble utterly changed the landscape of gender studies when it was published in 1990. Indeed, Butler is one of the first scholars to unapologetically claim that gender is fluid and not fixedly dictated by one’s anatomy. More significantly, she also states that gender is *performative*, a “doing” that is enacted by a human subject: “Hence, within the inherited discourse of the metaphysics of substance, gender proves to be performative – that is constituting the identity it is

⁴¹ Judith Butler (1956-present) has been working on gender theory for more than 30 years. Her other research interests include social and political thought, critical theory, and comparative literature (see “Judith Butler.” in the Works Cited list for more information). Butler’s most well-known works which do not center on and/or which are parallel to gender studies include *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories of Subjection* (1997), *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (1997), and *Senses of the Subject and Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly* (2015). For a survey of Butler’s gender theories analyzed through African contexts, refer to Vasu Reddy’s interview (2004). To mark the 31st anniversary of the publication of *Gender Trouble*, Jules Gleeson interviewed Butler in 2021 to understand how gender and its performativity is still as relevant today as it was in 1990 (see Works Cited list). In October 2021, Butler also published an article entitled “Why Is the Idea of ‘Gender’ Provoking Backlash the World Over?” Butler has also written numerous articles in various journals over the years.

⁴² For more on Butler’s analysis of the sociological and educational implications of gender, see her “Response.” in *The British Journal of Sociology of Education* (2006). For a survey of some of Butler’s theories from an array of perspectives, refer to Warren J. Blumenfeld, et al.’s *International Journal of Sexuality and Gender Studies*’ special issue on Judith Butler (2001). For a survey of Butler’s agency theories, see Kathy Dow Magnus’ “The Unaccountable Subject: Judith Butler and the Social Conditions of Intersubjective Agency.” (2006). For a critical analysis of Butler’s views on language and corporeal matters, see Vicki Kirby’s “When All That Is Solid Melts into Language: Judith Butler and the Question of Matter.” (2002). For a survey of Butler’s gender theories, refer to Moya Lloyd’s *Judith Butler: From Norms to Politics* (2007).

purported to be. In this sense, gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to preexist the deed. [...] There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very ‘expressions’ that are said to be its results” (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 34). By becoming an actor of one’s gender, gender itself cannot be said to be strictly biological. Butler’s theory therefore deconstructs gender and sexual normativity in the name of fluidity. The performative inclination of gender expression is of the utmost importance since

[...] the performativity of gender revolves around this metalepsis, the way in which the anticipation of a gendered essence produces that which it posits as outside itself. Secondly, performativity is not a singular act, but a repetition and a ritual, which achieves its effects through its naturalization in the context of a body, understood, in part as a culturally sustained temporal duration. (Butler, *Gender Trouble* xv)

Metalepsis refers to the use of a (literary) figure of speech in a new context. When extrapolating this process to gender performativity, the roleplay illustrates as that which is imagined by the “actor”, i.e., how one would like to be perceived by both oneself and others in terms of gender and sexuality, and how the actor’s perceptions become real through gender expression(s). Moreover, the idea of performance evolves even further when repeated and ritualized acts take shape through one’s body. The fact that said acts are brought forth through the “context of a body, in part as a culturally sustained temporal duration” will also strengthen the underlying goal of this dissertation which is to demonstrate that the figure of the vampire is a representation of (gender) neutrality.

Of course, Butler strives to change people's perceptions of gender by defending its performative nature, but she also does so by questioning the nature and the cultural apparatus of production of anatomical sexes. She argues that

[...] gender must also designate the very apparatus of production whereby the sexes themselves are established. As a result, gender is not to culture as sex is to nature; gender is also the discursive/cultural means by which 'sexed nature' or 'a natural sex' is produced and established as 'prediscursive', prior to culture, a politically neutral surface *on which* culture acts. [...] This production of sex as the prediscursive ought to be understood as the effect of the apparatus of cultural construction designated by *gender*. (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 10)

The fact that gender performativity becomes "a politically neutral surface on which culture acts" implies that gender performances are influenced by external and/or internal factors such as the subject's environment, values, beliefs, interpersonal relationships, etc.⁴³ However, even if these factors are culturally important when it comes to conceptualizing gender, they can be molded to the subject's desires and can thus take on a neutral form if wanted by the subject. By leading performativity on a neutral path, the performances themselves become an open ground upon which everything and anything can take form. In the same vein, Butler states that the productions of subjects and their gender performances may go as far as to expand boundaries: "The productions swerve from their original purposes and inadvertently mobilize possibilities of 'subjects' that do not merely exceed the bounds of cultural intelligibility, but effectively expand

⁴³ It is important to note that Butler defines gender production as politically neutral to further exemplify the fact that one's gender performance and embodiment is one's personal choice. It is not to be mistaken with gender being apolitical as any and all gender performances – and performativity as a whole – are political in nature. For more information on the correlation between performativity and politics, refer to *Dispossession: The Performative in the Political* by Judith Butler and Athena Athanasiou (2013).

the boundaries of what is, in fact, culturally intelligible” (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 40). In that sense, the figure of the vampire undeniably plays a highly significant part in shaping popular culture, and explaining how the figure of the vampire embraces the neutral.

In addition to creating a new understanding of how culture influences the human experience, Butler’s notion of the subject highlights the restricting effects an unexpanded (binary) cultural apparatus can have on its actors. Indeed, Butler suggests that “[...] the very notion of the subject, intelligible only through its appearance as gendered, admits of possibilities that have been forcibly foreclosed by the various reifications of gender that have constituted its contingent ontologies” (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 46). In other words, by forcing gender and sexual binaries on subjects, societal norms restrict gender to its hegemonic form, and thus also confine people’s ontologies to the extremely normative heterosexual male/female binary. What Judith Butler – and the literary vampire – attempt to accomplish is to deconstruct said normative binary in favor of a free and fluid ontology. By making gender an unbiased epistemological apparatus, gender itself and its elaboration through various ontologies would then become liberated of constraints. Therefore, in striving to erase limits and their associated norms, gender could easily embody its inherent neutrality. One must also not forget that gender and sexualities are cultural, i.e., shaped by culture as well as shaping culture. Hence, if both concepts are indeed culturalized and cultural, the epistemological system of culture could potentially become neutral, therefore allowing an array of content and figurations to be internalized, re-presented, and redistributed. By virtue of reinforcing the correlation between redistribution and gender and sexualities, the “male” phallus – mostly in the Lacanian sense – will provide an important analytical ground.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Jacques Lacan (1901-1981) was a French psychoanalyst sometimes referred to as the “French Freud” as he was deeply interested in Freud’s discovery of the unconscious. His teachings and writings cover an array of various

Judith Butler suggests the following in *Gender Trouble*:

In the place of a ‘male-identified’ sexuality in which ‘male’ serves as the cause and irreducible meaning of that sexuality, we might develop a notion of sexuality constructed in terms of phallic relations of power that replay and redistribute the possibilities of that phallicism precisely through the subversive operation of ‘identification’ that are, within the power field of sexuality, inevitable. (42)

In trying to “erase” the normative male inclinations of phallic power, Butler states that this relationship of power and the possibilities inherent to possessing the phallus should rather be replayed and redistributed in an attempt to broaden the scope of what identity encompasses. This is inevitable, as Butler argues, since the correlation between the concept of identity and sexuality is altogether subversive. Indeed, by virtue of bestowing the phallic power to all and not strictly to the stereotypical male counterpart, we witness a rebellious, norm-countering redefinition and re-inscription of what both the phallus and identity – as male, female, or other – are. More significantly, by reinterpreting the power the phallus holds, a much more fluid identification to it can be made, and vampire fangs will provide a significant example to attest that claim as they emulate the penetrative penis without being attached to any gender and sexual considerations.

Moreover, Butler, influenced by Jacques Lacan’s conceptualization of the taboo of incest, suggests that “[...] incest between son and mother as well as that incestuous fantasy are instated as universal truths of culture” (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 58). This universal cultural truth is well

topics, including the mirror stage, register theory, and the concept of otherness. For more on the concepts listed, refer to Lacan’s *Écrits* (1966). For more on Lacan’s theory of the phallus, also see *Écrits* (1966) and *Le Séminaire XVIII: D’un discours qui ne serait pas du semblant* (1970-1971) (2007). For more on the Butlerian view of the Lacanian phallus and a more contemporary understanding of phallic women, refer to Judith Kegan Gardiner’s “Female Masculinity and Phallic Women – Unruly Concepts.” (2012). For an analysis of Lacan’s theory of the phallus, see Jane Gallop’s “Reading the Phallus: ‘The Signification of the Phallus’” (1985).

illustrated in Anne Rice's *The Vampire Chronicles*, especially when it comes to Lestat's (reversed) relationship with his mother, Gabrielle. By tackling the taboo and fantasy of incest, it will become clear that the contemporary figure of the vampire is all indicated to deconstruct the normative inclinations of binary genders. In his seminal work *Totem and Taboo* (1913), Sigmund Freud notes that exogamy is not an innate quality of human beings. In its primal state, one may have a desire for sexual relationships with family members. However, due to social conditioning, incest has become taboo and exogamy has become the normative form of love/sexuality. However, if the fantasy of incest is innate in human beings (see Freud's Oedipus complex), it makes sense that the figure of the vampire tackles this taboo as the vampire is often an extension of repressed (human) desires. In addition, French social and literary theorist Georges Bataille states the following in his work *L'Érotisme* (1957): "Au centre un noyau assez simple, assez constant, à l'entour une mobilité complexe, arbitraire, caractérisent cet interdit élémentaire [le tabou de l'inceste] : à peu près partout se retrouve le noyau solide, et en même temps la mobilité fluide qui l'entoure. Cette mobilité dissimule le sens du noyau" (51). Here, Bataille states that the taboo of incest is the "elementary prohibition", but he adds an aspect which is significant in the scope of this dissertation. Indeed, Bataille claims that the core of the incest taboo is rather constant (i.e., that must not be done) but that what surrounds this core is quite fluid. Here, the figure of the vampire becomes a vessel of these "fluid surroundings". Since vampirism implies a redefinition of gender and sexual norms, it is clear that the figure of the vampire can also question the prohibition of the taboo of incest.⁴⁵ Indeed, as Judith Butler questions, "Can the prohibition against incest that proscribes and sanctions hierarchical and binary gendered positions be reconceived as a productive power that inadvertently generates several cultural

⁴⁵ As it will be explained later in this thesis, the incestuous relationship between the character of Lestat and his mother, Gabrielle in Anne Rice's *The Vampire Chronicles*, strongly develops once Gabrielle is transformed into a vampire by Lestat.

configurations of gender?” (*Gender Trouble* 98). This dissertation will attempt to positively affirm that Butler’s reformulation of the incest taboo is indeed a viable option as the vampire reconceives the productive power of incest and thus, creates new configurations of gender.⁴⁶

In addition to redefining incest, Butler also describes the Lacanian status of identity as follows: “A thing takes on the characterization of ‘being’ and becomes mobilized by that ontological gesture only within a structure of signification that, as the Symbolic, is itself pre-ontological” (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 59).⁴⁷ In other words, in order for something to become identified and identifiable, said ontological process needs to epistemologically unfold as part of a pre-ontological realm. It is therefore evident that this ontological process enables redefinitions of identities, genders, and sexualities that need to be reevaluated as a function of the neutral. Indeed, by bringing neutrality forward, one’s ontological status becomes free of constraints and norms and thus allows for a true liberated being. Indeed, the norm-free understanding of human metaphysics is a necessity since the unknown, as echoed by Maurice Blanchot in *L’entretien infini*, is “L’inconnu comme neutre suppose un *rapport étranger* à toute exigence d’identité et d’unité [...]” (443). In that sense, the figure of the vampire provides a cultural re-presentation of pre-ontological identities. By virtue of being situated in vampiric “mega time”, i.e., an “all-time encompassing” temporality, the vampire is therefore a vessel through which pre-ontology can step into the realm of the real, and vice versa. The fact that the fictional vampire can swiftly navigate between such realms makes it a truly norm-free being which is able to expand – and even erase – boundaries.

⁴⁶ For more on incest in Gothic literature, refer to Jenny DiPlacidi’s *Gothic Incest: Gender, Sexuality, and Transgression* (2018).

⁴⁷ For more on the Lacanian symbolic, refer to Jacques Lacan’s *Écrits* (1966) and to Jean-Paul Hiltenbrand’s “Symbolique, (- le).” (2005). It is also worthy to note that Lacan expands on his theory of *le Réel, le Symbolique et l’Imaginaire (RSI)* in his *Séminaire XXII: RSI*, but this text has not yet been officially published.

The pre-ontological aspect of both neutrality and (gender) identities is also regulated through the actor's body. Indeed, one's corporeality becomes the canvas upon and through which ontology, in its present and prediscursive forms, becomes intelligible.⁴⁸ In *Gender Trouble*, Butler stipulates that "[...] the body presents itself as a signifying lack" (184). Therefore, the body and its contours is favored to re-present neutrality.⁴⁹ To that end, she further claims that "The redescription of intrapsychic processes in terms of the surface politics of the body implies a corollary redescription of gender as the disciplinary production of the figures of fantasy through the play of presence and absence on the body's surface, the construction of the gendered body through a series of exclusions and denials, signifying absences" (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 184). The gendered body, being a performative canvas, has no other choice than to be a surface on which figurations of fantasy – i.e., how one sees oneself, how one performs said figurations, and how this performance is ultimately perceived by others – can be acted and exemplified. These fantasies are then created through a "series of signifying absences". The fact that absences carry meaning therefore attests that the realm of the neutral is much more semantically charged than simply to exist as a representation of an indescribable void. Indeed, the neutral is an unbiased, limit-free environment where anything can evolve at its own pace, free of constraints and norms. Also, the fact that corporeal gender performances are a series of signifying absences strengthens Butler's claim that gender is always a doing that must be repeated, i.e., re-presented and re-enacted. In terms of the neutral, Claude Stéphane Perrin's theory also reiterates the representational inclinations of the Eternal as neutral as he states that "[...] l'Éternel se serait rendu

⁴⁸ For a modern take on gender and embodiment in the context of cyberfeminism, see Jessie Daniels' "Rethinking Cyberfeminism(s): Race, Gender, and Embodiment." (2009).

⁴⁹ The use of the term "contours" will be significant when analyzing Amy's character in *The Passage* by Justin Cronin, as well as when analyzing Eli(as)'s character in *Let the Right One in* by John Ajvide Lindqvist. Also, the spelling of the word "re-presented" is a way to further solidify the idea that, by virtue of being the (neutral) signifying lack, the body presents one's identity and gender(s) time and time again – thus always presenting again; in other words, re-presenting. This can go as far as to re-present one's (corporeal) being as it always has been or to re-present it through various contingencies depending on one's fluidity.

neutre : ni dedans, ni dehors, ni présent, ni absent... Il resterait pourtant éternel comme un point infini, comme un point suprême, [...] toujours actif, toujours répété [...] (39). The Eternal not only plays a significant part in defining the concept of neutrality, but it also confers to the vampire, by virtue of its immortal undead status, its connection to the realm of the neutral.⁵⁰ Thus, gender and sexual performativity, with the figure of the vampire as its cultural vessel, go hand in hand with neutrality when it comes to repeated signifying absences.

To that end, Butler's concept of gender performativity is emulated through one's body and in that instance, said body becomes a tangible epistemology. In other words, "[...] acts, gestures, and desire produce the effect of an internal core or substance, but produce this *on the surface* of the body, through the play of signifying absences that suggest, but never reveal, the organizing principle of identity as a cause" (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 185). These acts or gestures, which are the concrete products of one's gender expression(s), become the real core of one's gender identity, but because these acts are emulated through one's corporeal form, said body becomes the necessary foundation of these performances. From that standpoint, the fictional vampire allows for the perfect literary representation of a boundary-free corporeality as the blood drinker's countenance is both present and absent, while existing in an "all-time encompassing" temporality. Furthermore, Butler's claim concerning the play of these signifying absences and the fact that they suggest, but never fully reveal, the underlying systems inherent to identity also strongly correlate to the neutral countenance of the vampire. By virtue of being undead and also due to its trans-human look – the vampire being human-looking but not being a full-fledged one, especially due to the fact that the vampire is both time-stopped and existing forever – the blood

⁵⁰ For more on vampiric immortality in *Dracula* in the context of religious beliefs in Victorian Britain, see J. Jeffery Franklin's "The Economics of Immortality: The Demi-Immortal Oriental, Enlightenment Vitalism, and Political Economy in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*." (2018).

drinker indeed suggests the epistemological inclinations of human identities, while it is ill-equipped to fully reveal the systems as a whole since the fictional vampire does not navigate the societal world as mortals do.⁵¹ However, the acts which assert one's identity, regardless of the system that sustains it, are, in a way, manufactured.

In *Gender Trouble*, Butler argues that “Such acts, gestures, enactments, generally construed, are *performative* in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are *fabrications* manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means” (185). Since the aforementioned acts and gestures are interpreted by both the performer and the viewers, it is clear that the performativity of gender productions cannot be denied. To that end, these performances need to be embodied, need to be seen, and one's corporeality is the most viable vehicle through which these performances can come alive. Moreover, Butler also highlights the importance of other discursive means when it comes to performing one's gender(s) and identity. As this dissertation strives to achieve, the most potent discursive means, which is not corporeal in nature remains cultural vehicles – in this case, the contemporary figure of the vampire. By incorporating other discursive means to embody gender and sexual inclinations, Butler also paves the way towards non-normative vessels, and thus strengthens the underlying aim of this thesis.

⁵¹ For more on posthuman vampires in 20th century works, see William Patrick Day's “Post-Human Vampires: ‘We Are Animals’.” (2002). For more on feminist posthumanist theory, refer to Donna J. Haraway's seminal work *A Cyborg Manifesto* (1985).

Butler's essay *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* further defines and questions what one's identity and corporeality encompass.⁵² The main idea that Butler brings forward in her text supposes that sex – and therefore, gender, identity, sex, etc. – is a construction that is constituted in time, and through which norms are reiterated (Butler, *Bodies That Matter* xii). However, by virtue of being an ever-changing bodily apparatus, said societal norms pertaining to gender, identity, and sex(uality), which constantly need to be restated, thus demonstrate the fact that the embodiment of those norms is a process which can never be completely materialized and that can never be fully completed (Butler, *Bodies That Matter* xii). From that standpoint, the figure of the vampire becomes a prime literary illustration of the unfixed nature of human corporeality as the blood drinker inhabits its body without never understanding the human (bodily) experience due to its undead status. This statement is reinforced through Butler's definition of identification – in terms of corporeality and gender – and its correlation with the abject.⁵³

⁵² For more on Butler's own description of her work in both *Gender Trouble* and *Bodies That Matter*, see the interview conducted by Irene Costera Meijer and Baukje Prins (1998). In this interview, Butler elaborates on many topics, such as the epistemological underpinnings of *Bodies That Matter*, the political aspects of her works, how one should define bodies and how abjection comes into play, etc.

⁵³ In Meijer and Prins' interview, Butler is asked how one can conceive of abject bodies as ontologically formed but not valued as fully human. Butler answers the following: "But I would like to ask a different kind of question, namely, how is it that the domain of ontology is itself circumscribed by power? That is, how is it that certain kinds of subjects lay claim to ontology, how is it that they count or qualify as real? In that case, we are talking about the distribution of ontological effects, which is an instrument of power, instrumentalized for purposes of hierarchy and subordination and also for purposes of exclusion and for producing domains of unthinkability. This whole domain of ontology that the good, the conceptually pure, philosopher takes for granted, is profoundly tainted from the start. Now, we cannot look at grammar and say, if I say that there are abject bodies, then I must be able to reason back from the claim 'there are' to a prior ontology. Hardly, hardly. I could say 'there are abject bodies,' and that could be a performative in which I endow ontology. I endow ontology to precisely that which has been systematically deprived of the privilege of ontology. The domain of ontology is a regulated domain: what gets produced inside of it, what gets excluded from it in order for the domain to be constituted is itself an effect of power. And the performative can be one of the ways in which discourse operationalizes power. So, I am performing a performative contradiction, on purpose. And I am doing that precisely to confound the conceptually proper philosopher and to pose a question about the secondary and derivative status of ontology. It is for me not a presupposition" (280). Butler's performance of a "performative contradiction on purpose" in which discourse "operationalizes power" also applies to vampiric ontology as the vampire is a performative contradiction on various levels (e.g., looking transhuman, living among humans but not fully, feeding on humans but also sometimes transforming them to share

Indeed, Butler states the following in the introduction to *Bodies That Matter*:

[...] a linking of this process of ‘assuming’ a sex with the question of *identification*, and the discursive means by which the heterosexual imperative enables certain sexed identifications and forecloses and/or disavows other identifications. This exclusionary matrix by which subjects are formed thus requires the simultaneous production of a domain of abject beings, those who are not yet ‘subjects’, but who form the constitutive outside to the domain of the subject. The abject designates here precisely those ‘unlivable’ and ‘uninhabitable’ zones of social life which are nevertheless densely populated by those who do not enjoy the status of the subject, but whose living under the sign of the ‘unlivable’ is required to circumscribe the domain of the subject. This zone of uninhabitability will constitute the defining limit of the subject’s domain; it will constitute that site of dreaded identification against which – and by virtue of which – the domain of the subject will circumscribe its own claim to autonomy and to life. In this sense, then, the subject is constituted through the force of exclusion and abjection, one which produces a constitutive outside to the subject, an abjected outside, which is, after all, ‘inside’ the subject as its own founding repudiation. (xiii)

The vampire is abject in both Butler’s terms and also due to the fact that it illustrates what is seen as monstrous and life-draining. Indeed, Butler states that in order for a human subject to fully form oneself, one has to be willing to inhabit the “unlivable zones of social life”, to become part of the domain of the abject. The vampire here becomes the perfect embodiment of the constitution of the subject that must be brought forth through both exclusion and abjection.

an undeniable bond, etc.). See above for more the vampiric constitution of the subject through both exclusion and abjection.

Indeed, the literary vampire is abject, but it also becomes excluded from (human) society as it cannot fully function in it as a human being would, especially since the vampire exists in an “all-time encompassing” temporality which human beings cannot experience. More significantly, the realm of the abject, in addition to being necessary for the constitution of one’s identity, also relates to the realm of the neutral. Since neutrality, to use Claude Stéphane Perrin’s theory, is something that is always active and always repeated – just as one’s identity and the norms attached to it are always reiterated – and since neutrality cannot be fully exemplified, it can thus be inferred that the vampire is neutral. In a similar fashion, Butler also states that, in order to access one’s sex and its construction, one has to accept that sex is absorbed by gender, therefore rendering the “site of sex” as some sort of fantasy, “[...] perhaps retroactively installed at a prelinguistic site to which there is no direct access” (Butler, *Bodies That Matter* xv). From that standpoint, the fictional vampire possesses all the necessary assets to access the prelinguistic – and possibly pre-ontological – site which leads to one’s comprehension of the realm of sex. However, it is important to note that in order for gender, sex, identity, and corporeality to fully take form through reiterated norms and performances, one needs to understand how the construction of a human subject – or vampiric subject in this case – operates.

In *Bodies That Matter*, Judith Butler claims that “[...] it is not enough to claim that human subjects are constructed, for the construction of the human is a differential operation that produces the more and the less ‘human’, the inhuman, the humanly unthinkable. These excluded sites come to bond the ‘human’ as its constitutive outside, and to haunt those boundaries as the persistent possibility of their disruption and rearticulation” (xvii). Since the construction of the human subject demands the creation of the humanly unthinkable, it comes as no surprise to claim

that the figure of the vampire is the most potent representation of this part of human construction as the blood drinker is inhuman in nature. More importantly, the vampire is the best creature to illustrate the haunting of the boundaries of the human construction. By virtue of being both undead and neutral, the fictional blood drinker is both time-stopped and existing forever, living in vampiric “mega time” and is thus able to understand temporality as that which contains past, present, and future. Vampiric temporality can then be explained as that which is both inside and outside the empirical (human) conceptualization of time.⁵⁴ Therefore, the vampire is a haunting creature, both literally and figuratively. It does not only haunt humans in search of sustenance, but the vampire also haunts the boundaries of the construction of the (human) subject as what it possesses represents the unthinkable. The undead status of the vampire also plays a significant role in a subject’s – or in a vampire’s – creation as it not only “[...] takes place *in* time, but is itself a temporal process which operates through the reiteration of norms [...]” (Butler, *Bodies That Matter* xix). Since the vampire is a timeless being, it can thus become the vessel through which this construction can become alive beyond hegemonic societal norms. In *Bodies That Matter*, Butler questions bodily materiality and its “limits”, but she also strives to deconstruct the masculine phallus in order to bring forth the idea of a feminine phallus.⁵⁵ While the concept is viable, I will push Butler’s theory further by claiming that the phallus is neither masculine nor feminine but rather neutral in nature. This claim will be exemplified through the importance of vampire fangs.

First, Butler tackles Jacques Lacan’s theory of the phallus by trying to decipher the difference between being and having the phallus. From that standpoint, Butler then states that

⁵⁴ For more on how every age embraces the vampire it needs and how the figure of the vampire persists through centuries, see Nina Auerbach’s seminal book *Our Vampires, Ourselves* (1995).

⁵⁵ More precisely, Butler theorizes the existence of a lesbian phallus.

[...] if this attribution of property [i.e., having the phallus] is itself improperly attributed, if it rests on a denial of that property's transferability (i.e., if this is a transfer into a non-transferable site or a site which occasions other transfers, but which is itself not transferred from anywhere), then the repression of that denial will constitute that system internally and, therefore, pose as the promising spectre of its destabilization. (Butler, *Bodies That Matter* 33)

Relating Butler's statement to vampirism, the figure of the vampire becomes the representation of this non-transferable site. More significantly, since the vampire is a fictional spectre – neither dead nor alive – it allows for a destabilization of the “masculine” phallus, thus reinforcing its neutral inclination.⁵⁶ Furthermore, in terms of blood consumption, vampiric creatures do not differentiate gender performances and sexual orientations when choosing victims to feed on or to transform into vampires.⁵⁷ Indeed, vampires are gender neutral and this is particularly visible through the use of their fangs. In order to drink blood, vampires need to penetrate a human's flesh with their sharp teeth, an imitation of the act of the phallus penetrating someone's body when having sexual intercourse. This claim gains momentum when it is equated to the idea that vampires are genderless, and that their fangs are a figuration of their gender-neutral status. Considering Butler's attempt to describe a lesbian phallus and therefore making it more than simply masculine, I will push the theory further by stating that the phallus is neither masculine nor homosexual, but entirely neutral, as an apparatus able to represent all gender identities and sexual orientations. Vampiric fangs will be the best illustration of my claim as they are phallic in nature while not taking gender and sex into consideration when they are used.

⁵⁶ For a survey of “female” vampire characters in 20th century films, see James Craig Holte's “Not All Fangs Are Phallic: Female Film Vampires.” (1999).

⁵⁷ For more on the sexual liberation embodied by the vampire, see William Patrick Day's “The Vampire Liberation Front.” (2002).

Butler strengthens the neutral phallus theory by stating that “these variable body surfaces or bodily egos may thus become sites of transfer for properties that no longer belong properly to any anatomy” (Butler, *Bodies That Matter* 34). It therefore becomes clear that body surfaces such as the phallus simply become sites of transfer for any anatomy, thus possessing a neutral surface for anyone to perform on. The use of the term “sites of transfer” is especially relevant when equating neutral vampire fangs to the act of vampiric transformation. In most vampire narratives, when a victim is chosen to become a newborn vampire, the sire must drain the victim of his/her blood before making him/her drink the sire’s own blood. Therefore, the vampiric transformation is a literal “site of transfer” as blood and other vampiric attributes are transferred from the sire to the newborn vampire. This also reinforces the claim that vampires – and their fangs – are neutral. Butler explains the lesbian phallus further in the following excerpt of *Bodies That Matter*: “[...] the displaceability of the phallus, its capacity to symbolize in relation to other body parts or other body-like things, opens the way for the lesbian phallus, an otherwise contradictory formulation” (51). I will add that the phallus does not only represent a “contradictory lesbian phallus” as Butler claims, but it also shows that the displaceability of the phallus is such that it can also symbolize a “contradictory” neutral phallus. Butler also states that “[...] the lesbian phallus crosses the orders of *having* and *being* [the phallus] [...]” (Butler, *Bodies That Matter* 51). In that sense, the neutral phallus is the most potent illustration of this crossing, as the neutral implies transcending binaries, in terms of gender, sexuality, or otherwise. Moreover, the neutrality inherent to the phallus is reinforced by Butler’s stance that having the phallus is “[...] redelineated, rendered transferable, substitutable, plastic [...]” (Butler, *Bodies That Matter* 55), which demonstrates that, by virtue of redelineating the boundaries of owning the phallus, the space occupied by said apparatus can go above and beyond these socially

imposed limits. On that note, Butler states that “[...] the phallus (re)produces the spectre of the penis only to enact its vanishing, to reiterate and exploit its perpetual vanishing as the very occasion of the phallus. This opens up anatomy – and sexual difference itself – as a site of proliferative resignifications” (Butler, *Bodies That Matter* 56). Relating this to vampirism, the figure of the blood drinker also produces the spectre of a human being, especially due to its undead countenance. Also, since the vampire and its fangs are neutral, they both allow for perpetual resignifications of boundaries.

Indeed, Butler argues that sex is what marks the human body prior to its embodiment (Butler, *Bodies That Matter* 62). Marking is of the utmost importance when it comes to the vampiric act of drinking blood. The victim is literally marked on his/her flesh by the fangs of the vampire.⁵⁸

⁵⁸ It is worthy to note that the use of fangs as a tool of sexual pleasure is a common trope in vampire fiction and has been used in countless traditional and contemporary vampire narratives. For more on the vampire and consumption, in the sense of consuming blood but also from a capitalist perspective, refer to Robert Latham’s *Consuming Youth: Vampires, Cyborgs, and the Culture of Consumption* (2002). For a sociological/theoretical approach to sexuality at large, refer to Michel Foucault’s *Histoire de la sexualité I: La volonté de savoir* (1976), *Histoire de la sexualité II: L’usage des plaisirs* (1984), and *Histoire de la sexualité III: Le souci de soi* (1984). In the first volume, Foucault argues that “[...] pour affirmer cette répression [de la sexualité], c’est parce qu’elle est historiquement évidente. [...] c’est d’être répressif et de réprimer avec une particulière attention les énergies inutiles, l’intensité des plaisirs et les conduites irrégulières” (17). From a vampiric lens, the blood drinker becomes the cultural/narrative catalyst through which this repression can be released. It is therefore unsurprising that the act of blood drinking, either to feed or to transform a human into a vampire, holds such a sexual undertone. Correlating the vampire as a cultural figure and the repression of sex, Foucault suggests that “[...] c’est la variété, c’est la large dispersion des appareils qu’on a inventés pour en [le sexe] parler, pour en faire parler, pour obtenir qu’il parle de lui-même, pour écouter, enregistrer, transcrire et redistribuer ce qui s’en dit” (Foucault, *Histoire de la sexualité I* 47). The vampire is thus one of the apparatuses which allows sex to be discussed and, ultimately, resignified. On that point, Foucault claims that “cette chasse nouvelle aux sexualités périphériques entraîne une *incorporation des perversions* et une *spécification nouvelle des individus*” (Foucault, *Histoire de la sexualité I* 58-59). The vampire precisely allows this *spécification nouvelle* to take form, especially due to the vampire’s ability to swiftly navigate both the vampiric neutral realm and human society. Foucault also analyzes the importance of blood in body politics, stating that “[...] le pouvoir parle à travers le sang; celui-ci est une *réalité à fonction symbolique*” (*Histoire de la sexualité I* 194). The power which the vampire holds over its human victim is quite obvious, but the power dynamics between vampire and newborn vampire (e.g., Lestat and Louis in Anne Rice’s *Interview with the Vampire*) is indeed formed through blood, especially through the blood exchange in the case of Rice’s works. For a vampiric perspective (more precisely based on Rice’s *Interview with the Vampire* and Poppy Z. Brite’s *Lost Souls* (1992)) of Foucault’s *Histoire de la sexualité*, see Renée Vincent’s “Vampires as a Tool to Destabilize Contemporary Notions of Gender and Sexuality.” (2015). It is worthy to note that Brite’s novel tackles interesting inclinations of vampire gender and sexuality, portraying blood consumption as highly erotic, whatever the victim’s gender may be. The vampire characters in the narrative also

This mark can also become a sign of kinship and even ownership. From that standpoint, Judith Butler's analysis of sex as the ultimate marker of one's body becomes significant. She states that "[...] any recourse to the body before the symbolic can take place only with the symbolic, which seems to imply that there is no body before its marking" (Butler, *Bodies That Matter* 62). In terms of vampirism, there is indeed no vampiric body before its marking by the sire's fangs. In that sense, Butler also circumscribes the marking of one's body by sex as follows: "[...] we can never tell about how it is that a body comes to be marked by the category of sex, for the body before the mark is constituted as signifiable only *through* the mark" (Butler, *Bodies That Matter* 62). Therefore, vampirism – and blood consumption – are the fictional symbolic embodiments of what it means to be *significantly marked*, to be corporeally marked by sex or any other marker one may choose.⁵⁹ Butler then takes the meaning of being sexually and corporeally marked even further by tackling the fear of castration.⁶⁰

Indeed, Butler claims that

Castration could not be feared if the phallus were not already detachable, already elsewhere, already dispossessed; it is not simply the spectre that it will become lost that constitutes the obsessive preoccupation of castration. *It is the spectre of the recognition*

share erotic moments with one another, once again, regardless of gender. This underpins the fluid sexuality inherent to the vampire which will be analyzed further in the second chapter of this dissertation.

⁵⁹ In order to push the concept of the mark even further, I will refer to French thinker Jacques Derrida. Derrida claims that "La trace de la différence s'efface elle-même. Disparue dans l'oubli, elle est innommable comme telle, illisible dans la forme de la présence" ("[Derrida, la trace]"). Since the trace – or the mark – erases itself and thus cannot be fully embodied, the trace becomes unreadable, becomes part of the realm of the neutral. In the case of the narrative vampire, it echoes the same path as the Derridian trace, at the same time reinforcing Butler's understanding of the body marked by sex.

⁶⁰ The importance of castration and its Butlerian meaning will be significant in the chapter on John Ajvide Lindqvist's novel *Let the Right One in*.

*that it was already lost, the vanquishing of the fantasy that it might ever have been possessed – the loss of nostalgia’s referent.*⁶¹ (Butler, *Bodies That Matter* 65)

By virtue of seeing the phallus as that which was never really there, as something which is already dispossessed, it becomes clear that the vampire, as part of the neutral realm, is a potent representation of castration.⁶² More importantly, it can be attested that vampiric fangs play the part of the spectre of dispossession inherent to castration as they dispossess a victim of his/her humanity once the fangs have marked their flesh, bringing them towards the realm of the undead. Furthermore, the feeling of dispossession takes on a new meaning when equating it to the idea that it is “the spectre of the recognition that it was already lost [...] – the loss of nostalgia’s referent” as the vampire will, throughout its timeless life, always feel inside and outside human life, both present and absent in terms of identity and of temporality as the vampire experiences temporality as being “all-time encompassing”. Therefore, the loss of nostalgia and the spectre of recognition of the loss of human characteristics are precisely what allows the vampire to become neutral, but it is also what makes it completely fluid in terms of identity, gender, corporeality, and sexuality.⁶³

The fluidity inherent to the vampire allows it to become a clear figuration of the multiple facets of (human) identity.⁶⁴ To that end, Butler states that the question of identity is no longer “[...] a

⁶¹ Italics used in the original text.

⁶² For a survey of male sexual impotence in traditional vampire narratives, refer to Lloyd Worley’s “Loving Death: The Meaning of Male Sexual Impotence in Vampire Literature.” (1989).

⁶³ It must not be forgotten that the Butlerian conceptualization of gender and sexual performances is achieved through constant repetition. Butler states that these performances are discursive productions (*Bodies That Matter* 70), therefore reinforcing the claim that these performative acts are part of larger spectra.

⁶⁴ From a fan studies perspective, it is interesting to see how fans of vampire literature and characters show their love for the genre through various inclinations (e.g., fan encounters and conventions, etc.). Some even go as far as to dress up and play vampires in fandom contexts, and even sometimes in their daily lives. For more on the sociology of “real” vampires, i.e., people who live as “vampires”, refer to Norine Dresser’s *American Vampires: Fans, Victims, Practitioners* (1990). For more on vampires and fandom, refer to Milly Williamson’s *The Lure of the*

preestablished position or uniform entity; rather, as part of a dynamic map of power in which identities are constituted and/or erased, deployed and/or paralyzed” (Butler, *Bodies That Matter* 79). The figure of the blood drinker, by virtue of being both time-stopped and existing forever, both present and absent, to echo Perrin’s theorization of the neutral, is not only neutral but also redefines the question of identity in a way similar to Butler’s. The vampire does not possess a preestablished and uniform entity since its undead countenance allows it to mold its identity as it sees fit since it is not controlled by the hegemonic pressures of human society. Butler claims that identities can be “constituted and/or erased, deployed and/or paralyzed” and the use of the term “and/or” takes on a significant meaning when it is equated to the figure of the vampire. Since the blood drinker is neither dead nor alive, it cannot be firmly anchored in the paradigms of human existence. Therefore, the use of “and/or” when it comes to symbolizing vampiric identities is important as it demonstrates the fluidly neutral inclinations of all identities. To that end, Butler also states that

this ‘being a man’ and this ‘being a woman’ are internally unstable affairs. They are always beset by ambivalence precisely because there is a cost in every identification, the loss of some other set of identifications, the forcible approximation of a norm one never chooses, a norm that chooses us, but which we occupy, reverse, resignify to the extent that the norm fails to determine us completely. (*Bodies That Matter* 86)

The vampire once again is set to represent this ambivalence of identity as it is itself ambivalent due to its undead status. Moreover, the vampire always reverses norms and gender and sex(ual)

Vampire: Gender, Fiction and Fandom from Bram Stoker to Buffy (2005). For more on fandom in the context of the popularity of Stephenie Meyer’s *Twilight Saga*, see Elizabeth Behm-Morawitz et al.’s “Relating to Twilight: Fans’ Responses to Love and Romance in the Vampire Franchise.” (2010), Inger-Lise Kalviknes Bore and Rebecca Williams’ “Transnational Twilights: A Twilight Fan Community in Norway.” (2010), and Cynthia Willis-Chun’s “Touring the Twilight Zone: Cultural Tourism and Commodification on the Olympic Peninsula.” (2010).

assignments as it cannot adhere to human norms and considerations. In that sense, vampires are never determined by norms as their neutrality allows them to constantly reassign who they are without being imprisoned by the constraints of the human world.⁶⁵ From that standpoint, identity and its perpetual changes are also represented through one's corporeal countenance. Without a body, human existence could not materialize. Therefore, corporeality is much more than a bodily shell; it becomes the outside figuration of one's being. In that sense, a body also becomes an apparatus through which the unthinkable slowly destroys the borders of materiality (Butler, *Bodies That Matter* 140). This obliteration proves that norms are malleable and that the true embodiment of neutral gender and sex(ual) choices can evolve freely on spectra, but that these spectra need an open corporeal slate in order to take form. It is not surprising to claim that the borders or limits of corporeality are haunted by the abject as it comes to represent "[...] the unlivable, the nonnarrativizable, the traumatic" (Butler, *Bodies That Matter* 140).⁶⁶ Therefore, the vampire is the most potent figure to demonstrate the correlation between corporeality and neutrality and by the same token, reinforce the claim that gender and corporeality can be strong enough as to unsettle societal norms.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ For more on vampiric identity and agency in the context of Octavia E. Butler's novel *Fledgling* (2005), refer to Elizabeth Lundberg's "'Let Me Bite You Again': Vampiric Agency in Octavia Butler's *Fledgling*." (2015).

⁶⁶ In *Pouvoirs de l'horreur: essai sur l'abjection*, French philosopher Julia Kristeva states the following concerning the abject: "Ce n'est donc pas l'absence de propreté ou de santé qui rend abject, mais ce qui perturbe une identité, un système, un ordre. Ce qui ne respecte pas les limites, les places, les règles. L'entre-deux, l'ambigu, le mixte" (12). Therefore, the vampire is a figuration of the abject as it unsettles (human) identity, while also being part of an in-between due to the fact that the blood drinker is both undead and thus, neutral. Also, from a literal standpoint, the vampire is unlivable as it does not exist in real life; it is a fictional figure which illustrates the struggles and abjections of human beings. The vampire is also a representation of the traumatic as it coldly drains people of their blood (and forces them to be timelessly undead if the victim is transformed into a vampire). The experience itself is also sometimes dubbed as traumatic by chosen victims (e.g., Elias' vampiric transformation in John Ajvide Lindqvist's *Let the Right One in*).

⁶⁷ For more on vampirism and abjection from a contemporary perspective, see Sabrina Boyer's "'Thou Shalt Not Crave Thy Neighbor': *True Blood*, Abjection, and Otherness." (2011).

The symbolism inherent to abjection and corporeality also reinforces the fact that performances – of gender, identity, corporeality – are powerful vehicles of action. To that end, Butler states that “if the power of discourse to produce that which it names is linked with the question of performativity, then the performative is one domain in which power acts *as* discourse” (Butler, *Bodies That Matter* 171). It is clear that the concept of performativity cannot be stripped away from subjectivity. In terms of vampirism, the power discourse holds when naming that which is performing equates to the vampiric transformative act. By sharing their blood, both the sire and the chosen victim not only become intertwined forever, but the newborn blood drinker also starts a whole new life and therefore needs to re-understand their identity, their corporeality, and their performativity.⁶⁸ In addition, since vampires are neutral beings, the newborn must comprehend the implications of such a realm.⁶⁹ To echo Perrin’s theory, vampirism implies a constant and eternal resignification and repeated performance of the neutral. From a psychoanalytic standpoint, Butler argues that “[...] what is exteriorized or performed can only be understood through reference to what is barred from the signifier and from the domain of corporeal legibility” (Butler, *Bodies That Matter* 179). Thus, the vampire not only exemplifies the “performance through reference” brought forward by Butler, but it also allows for a complete reinterpretation of what it means to be corporeally comprehensible. Since the body of the

⁶⁸ For more on the body and soul in vampire narratives, see Mary Y. Hallab’s “Vampires and Psychology: Body, Soul, and Self.” (2009). The discussions on Michel Foucault’s *Histoire de la sexualité I : La volonté de savoir* earlier in this dissertation also apply here as well.

⁶⁹ In Anne Rice’s *The Vampire Chronicles* for instance, newborn vampires have to adjust and experience the world through “vampire eyes”. In this case, Rice wants to represent the sharp senses that vampires develop, but I also want to suggest that that seeing with vampire eyes means that the vampire understands its undead countenance and accepts its neutral status, i.e., being both time-stopped and existing forever. This claim will be explicated further in Chapter III of this dissertation.

vampire is malleable and neutral in nature, it becomes easy to mold it to any performative need.⁷⁰

To that end, in *Undoing Gender*, Butler claims that

Sex is made understandable through the signs that indicate how it should be read or understood. These bodily indicators are the cultural means by which the sexed body is read. They are themselves bodily, and they operate as signs, so there is no easy way to distinguish between what is ‘materially’ true, and what is ‘culturally’ true about a sexed body. I don’t mean to suggest that purely cultural signs produce a material body, but only that the body does not become sexually readable without those signs, and that those signs are irreducibly cultural and material at once. (87)

The fictional vampire is a cultural sign which brings forth the readability of the body, whatever its inclinations and performances may be. The vampire is a cultural figure, but due to its enduring impact on the human psyche, it also becomes a material apparatus through which the resignification, the undoing of gender, sex, and bodies can materialize.⁷¹ These undoings also radically imply that binaries do not possess the societal power they are purported to have. From the standpoint of “undoing”, the vampire’s neutral status confers it its ability to represent gender, sex, and corporeality as utterly flexible spaces. To that end, Butler suggests that

⁷⁰ The chapters on Justin Cronin’s *The Passage* and John Ajvide Lindqvist’s *Let the Right One in* will provide significant insights into this particular claim.

⁷¹ For more on the vampire’s endurance in the human psyche and how it has come to embody complex (human) issues, refer to Mary Y. Hallab’s “Introduction.” to *Vampire God: The Allure of the Undead in Western Culture* (2009). Hallab suggests that the vampire, being highly adaptable and because of its “unique bipolarity – both human and supernatural, alive and dead – the vampire leads us to a larger consideration of the nature of the individual and his search for significance in a vast and terrifying universe” (1). Hallab’s chapter on “Vampires and Society” also gives insights into how the vampire can convey social messages, sometimes pertaining to deviations from communal norms (Hallab describes this claim from a folkloric vampiric perspective) to the contemporary vampire, being a “living embodiment[t] of history” offering “a sense of continuity with a very ancient past as well as with an expanded, international community” (33).

Even within the field of intelligible sexuality, one finds that the binaries that anchor its operations permit for middle zones and hybrid formations, suggesting that the binary relation does not exhaust the field in question. Indeed, there are middle regions, hybrid regions of legitimacy and illegitimacy that have no clear names, and where nomination itself falls into a crisis produced by the variable, sometimes violent boundaries of legitimating practices that come into uneasy and sometimes conflictual contact with one another. These are not precisely places where one can choose to hang out, subject positions one might opt to occupy. These are nonplaces in which one finds oneself in spite of oneself; indeed, these are nonplaces where recognition, including self-recognition, proves precarious if not elusive, in spite of one's best efforts to be a subject in some recognizable sense. (*Undoing Gender* 108)

The vampire is a literal “hybrid formation” as it is an undead vampiric creature that also possesses human attributes.⁷² More importantly, the “nonplaces in which one finds oneself in spite of oneself” are occupied by the blood drinker. By virtue of being neither dead nor alive, the vampire experiences temporality as being “all-time encompassing” while also occupying the human world. The vampire finds itself in this in-between, understanding what makes it both “human” and “non-human”. However, as Butler states, these nonplaces are “precarious” in terms of recognition and self-recognition. Indeed, the struggle of many vampire characters in contemporary novels relate to their sense of identity and to the struggles they face when it comes to understanding who they are and how they are supposed to blend in with non-vampires. Here,

⁷² Representations of the “virtuous vampire” (e.g., the Cullens in the *Twilight Saga*, Angel and Spike in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Angel*, Bill and Eric in *True Blood*, Stefan and Damon in *The Vampire Diaries*, etc.) render the human attributes which the vampire possesses even more marked. For more on the vampire as an agent of good and of romance, see Susannah Clements' *The Vampire Defanged: How the Embodiment of Evil Became a Romantic Hero* (2011).

vampires' sense of self is indeed precarious as they must timelessly deal with the neutral realm that surrounds them.⁷³ To that end, Claude Stéphane Perrin's correlation between the eternal and the neutral will prove to be insightful.

In his text *Le neutre et la pensée*, French theorist Claude Stéphane Perrin defines the eternal as follows: “[...] l'Éternel se serait rendu neutre : ni dedans, ni dehors, ni présent, ni absent... Il resterait pourtant éternel comme un point infini, comme un point suprême, [...] toujours actif, toujours répété [...] (39). In a literal sense, the vampire exists forever while also being time-stopped and since Perrin equates the eternal with the neutral, it is clear that vampiric timelessness cannot be separated from neutrality. More significantly, by virtue of being undead, the blood drinker is neutral – “neither outside nor inside, neither present nor absent” – as it possesses human-like characteristics while not being able to fully encompass, to fully embody them. In addition, the vampire is neither present nor absent as it navigates throughout the human notion of time without being affected by the passing of time. From that standpoint, the figure of the vampire allows for a neutral temporality I will call “mega time” – a temporality where all times are present, i.e., past, present, and future are not clearly demarcated – to emerge, which not only allows the vampire to be a representation of Perrin's neutral eternal, but it also strongly correlates with both Frank Kermode's view on temporality and Maurice Blanchot's detailed conceptualization of neutrality.⁷⁴

⁷³ For more on how the vampire can come to embody contemporary concerns of alienation and postmodernism, refer to Veronica Hollinger's “Fantasies of Absence: The Postmodern Vampire.” (1997).

⁷⁴ Maurice Blanchot's theories on neutrality and the limit-experience are part of the foundations of my own conceptualization of vampiric neutrality.

In *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction* (1967), Frank Kermode questions the representation of time in fiction, further asking how these representations can influence one's perceptions and understanding of (human) time. Kermode's philosophical claims will allow for a redefinition of temporality as a neutral locus which will, in turn, bolster the vampire's neutral status. To that end, as mentioned above, I will use the following neologism, "mega time", to refer to vampiric neutral temporality as a temporal space where all times are present and which, at the same time, does not adhere to a linear perspective of temporality which can be ascribed to the vampire's neutral status. In other words, vampiric "mega time" is an all-time encompassing temporal space which lacks a classic sense of temporality as the vampire is present/absent, inside/outside to echo Perrin's theory of the neutral. Kermode's understanding of a temporality where all times are present at once echoes Dante's perspective: "[...] their stories are placed at what Dante calls the point where all times are present [...] or within the shadow of it. It gives each moment its fullness" (Kermode 6). Vampires inhabit the locus described by Dante as blood drinkers can experience the linearity of time through the human lives they choose to follow, but they do not have to. Being neutral, vampires experience time in a way which encompasses past, present, and future, while also being "in the shadow" of that time due to their neutrality. Harking back to Perrin's view on the eternal, vampiric "mega time" connects to Perrin's claims as the vampire is present/absent, inside/outside (human) time. Vampiric "mega time" allows for a reinforcement of the vampire's pre-ontological status, especially when considering Perrin's theory. Since the eternal remains "[...] like an infinite mark [...] always active, always repeated [...]" (Perrin, *Neutre et la pensée* 39), the blood drinker is therefore simultaneously time-stopped and existing forever. Kermode establishes a similar claim when he states that "[...] an experimental psychologist adds that 'a sense of time can only exist where there is a submission

to reality” (Kermode 57). The vampire’s experience of time as something that is both all-temporally encompassing and which lacks a real sense of the temporal is further bolstered by the fact that the vampire, by virtue of being neutral, cannot fully submit to reality. Therefore, vampiric “mega time” becomes the space in which the blood drinker can neutrally experience temporality. Kermode further explains the possible inclinations of time as other than linear when he uses the “tick-tock” metaphor: “We say they [tick and tock] differ. What enables them to be different is a special kind of middle” (45). Due to its neutrality, the vampire exists in the “special kind of middle” suggested by Kermode. Vampiric temporality, i.e., “mega time”, thus becomes that neutral timeline which the vampire inhabits, that special middle, because of what that specific vampiric temporality allows, i.e., an all-encompassing time AND a lack of temporality.⁷⁵ In other words, human beings cannot project themselves past the End because of the “middle” temporal position they occupy, but vampires can. Kermode claims that “We project ourselves – a small, humble elect, perhaps – past the End, so as to see the structure whole, a thing we cannot do from our spot of time in the middle (Kermode 8). Blood drinkers, being governed by “mega time”, can and do “project themselves past the End” and really do see the structure whole. One’s understanding of the term “structure” refers to the structure of time, which the vampire deconstructs with its “mega time”. This vampiric projection beyond temporal structures is so engrained – and neutral in nature – that the vampire becomes the “humble elect” which can project itself beyond the end, going as far as to being able to create their own vampiric neutral realms. The temporal shifts that the vampire creates can go beyond the End since vampiric temporality requires neutrality, a neutrality which is derived from the eternal.

⁷⁵ Vampiric “mega time” will be discussed further in subsequent chapters, especially when tackling vampiric neutral realms in Anne Rice’s novels and Justin Cronin’s *The Passage*.

Perrin’s conceptualization of the eternal as that which remains “[...] like an infinite mark [...] always active, always repeated [...]” (*Neutre et la pensée* 39) is indeed seminal to the understanding of the vampire as being both time-stopped and existing forever. By being constantly active and always repeated, the eternal underscores the everlasting existence of the vampire. Furthermore, Perrin’s understanding of the neutral as that which is in an *abîme* illustrates the vampire’s “time-stopped” quality, especially since the neutral erases any possible sense of one as a subject: “[...] ni saisissable, ni déssaisissable des mots qui accompagnent l’expiration de tout sens possible ainsi que de celle du sujet. Le neutre est dans cet abîme” (*Neutre et la pensée* 11). The blood drinker is ni saisissable, ni déssaisissable; in other words, being time-stopped (*ni déssaisissable*) and existing forever (*ni saisissable*). The fact that the neutral lives in this *abîme* further reinforces both the neutrality inherent to the vampire, i.e., being both time-stopped and existing forever, and the neutral aspect which permeates the vampiric conception of time, i.e., “mega time”, a temporality which requires a time where all times are present, while simultaneously lacking temporality or, in other terms, inhabiting Perrin’s *abîme* where the neutral resides. The conceptualization of the neutral and its connection to the eternal suggested by Perrin can be further correlated to the Aristotelian philosophy of the eternal as proposed by Kermode. Indeed, Kermode writes that “[...] what happened in the thirteenth century when Christian philosophers grappled with the view of the Aristotelians that nothing can come of nothing – *ex nihilo nihil fit* – so that the world must be thought to be eternal. In the Bible the world is made out of nothing. For the Aristotelians, however, it is eternal, without beginning or end” (68). Seeing the world as eternal, without beginning or end, upholds vampiric “mega time” as all-time encompassing/lacking temporality since vampiric temporality requires the eternal, here as that which is without beginning or end. Perrin’s view of the eternal as that which

is *ni saisissable, ni déssaisissable*, the *abîme* in which the neutral resides, is also significant here since an *abîme* can be thought as having no beginning or end, especially when the *abîme* is a neutral space. Perrin's conceptualization of the neutral as present/absent, inside/outside is also bolstered by the Aristotelian eternal view of the world that is without beginning or end because both concepts of the eternal require a temporal neutrality. More significantly, the Augustinian worldview and St. Thomas' rationale for angels will further demonstrate the neutral nature of vampires and of vampiric temporality.

St. Augustine's view of the world, although religious in nature, echoes a neutrality which is also found in the vampiric:

St. Augustine [...] came up with a formless matter, intermediate between nothing and something, out of which the world was made. This, of course, was created out of nothing. Formless, it had the potentiality of form, its privation is its capacity to receive form. He identifies this capacity with mutability; creation, for him, is a concept inseparable from that of mutability, of which time is the mode. The 'seminal reasons' are the potentialities to be actualized in time. (Kermode 69)

The vampire, a pre-ontological being, can be considered formless while having the "possibility of form". The blood drinker can, indeed, mold itself to human society and (human) time, while having the possibility of molding their own vampiric neutral spaces to their needs. St. Augustine claims that creation, being mutable with time as its main mode, reiterates the formless mutability of vampiric neutral realm as space in which the vampire can be its full-fledged neutral self.⁷⁶

The Augustinian worldview also bolsters St. Thomas' rationale for the existence of angels.

⁷⁶ Vampiric neutral realms will be further discussed in the chapters about *The Vampire Chronicles* and *The Passage*. The formless mutability of the spirit Amel in Anne Rice's novels will also be of interest later in this dissertation.

Although the creatures are different and are described as distinct opposites in fiction, this rationale for angels further underpins the vampire's neutral status, as well as reinforces the importance of vampiric neutral temporality, or "mega time":

His [St. Thomas'] angels, though immutable as to substance, are capable of change by acts of will and intellect. So they are separated from the corporeal creation, which is characterized by a distinction between matter and form, and also from God. They are therefore neither eternal nor of time. So out of this argument, which is ultimately an argument about origins, there develops a third duration, between that of time and eternity. (Kermode 70)

The vampire, being present/absent and inside/outside, or in other words, "living" in the space in between, is separated from the corporeal creation evoked by St. Thomas. The distinction made between matter and form also echoes the vampire's neutral status since its form resembles that of human beings, but its matter being pre-ontological (and thus neutral) demonstrates the separation between matter and form. Furthermore, the fact that the vampire is part of (human) society without fully inhabiting it makes the disconnection between matter and form undeniable. To that end, vampiric neutral realms will be significant as that which will demonstrate the separation between matter and form as the vampire can create its own neutral space in the midst of (human) society. Vampiric pre-ontology also underpins St. Thomas' understanding of such creatures being "neither eternal nor of time". By virtue of being neutral, in an in-between space, the vampire is neither eternal nor of time. Perrin's conceptualization of the eternal as an *abîme*, the eternal as that which encompasses what is time-stopped and existing forever. More importantly, the third duration brought forth by St. Thomas, a duration between that of time and eternity,

further underpins the importance of vampiric neutral realms as these spaces are literally set in that third duration. These vampiric neutral realms therefore represent a space/time/*abîme*, to echo Perrin's theory, that is between time and eternity. In that sense, vampiric "mega time" as a duration which is "all-time encompassing"/lacks temporality is akin to St. Thomas' third duration and further mirrors the neutral nature of the vampire. St. Thomas' conceptualization of that third duration as a time in between other temporalities also anchors the neutral status of the blood drinker, especially when it comes to the fictional "between-and-betwixt" position that creatures such as angels and vampires can inhabit.

St. Thomas expands his concept of the third duration by explaining the peculiar position that angelic creatures occupy, a position also fitting vampiric neutrality:

The formerly absolute distinction between time and eternity in Christian thought – between *nunc movens* with its beginning and end, and *nunc stans*, the perfect possession of endless life – acquired a third intermediate order based on this peculiar betwixt-and-between position of angels. But like the Principle of Complementarity, this concord-fiction soon proved that it had uses outside its immediate context, angelology. Because it served as a means of talking about certain aspects of human experience, it was humanized. It helped one to think about the sense men sometimes have of participating in some order of duration other than that of *nunc movens* – of being able, as it were, to do all that angels can. Such are those moments which Augustine calls the moments of the soul's attentiveness: less grandly, they are moments of what psychologists call 'temporal integration.' When Augustine recited his psalm he found in it a figure for the integration of past, present, and future which defies successive time. (Kermode 71)

The third intermediate order based on the peculiar between-and-betwixt position of angels applies to the vampire as well; blood drinkers inhabit this peculiar position of being in-between. This between-and-betwixt position is echoed in Julia Kristeva's thought of the abject being part of an *entre-deux*. The vampire, being an ambiguous creature that inhabits the space in between things, further complements Kristeva's abject as that which disrupts the established order. This disruption is also made clear through the creation of vampiric neutral realms. By building their own neutral spaces, vampires unsettle what it means to live – vampires being both time-stopped and existing forever, if one harks back to Perrin's view of the neutral – and they also unsettle the understanding of linear temporality by existing in their vampiric “mega time”. The third intermediate order brought forth by St. Thomas provides a theoretical basis upon which vampiric “mega time” can stand. The between-and-betwixt position is neutral as this thought is echoed in Perrin's understanding of the Eternal – and of the neutral – as an in-between space, an *abîme*. Furthermore, Augustine's psalm as the figure which integrates past, present, and future can be related to vampiric temporality. My claim is that the figure of the vampire allows for this utter integration of past, present, and future since the blood drinker is both time-stopped and existing forever. In other words, the vampire's inherent neutrality allows for the making of this third order of time, this in-between position. As echoed in Maurice Blanchot's view of neutral temporality, the neutral supposes a “[...] temps comme autre, comme absence et neutralité [...], temps arrêté, incapable de permanence [...]” (Blanchot, *Entretien* 63). In other words, that which Augustine defines as “the integration of past, present, and future which defies successive time”, is reflected in Blanchot's neutral temporality as time which is a “temps comme autre... incapable de permanence” since the past, present, and future is one single entity unable to remain static. In

that sense, vampiric “mega time” as that which is all-time encompassing and lacking temporality is neutral in nature, as echoed in Blanchot’s, Perrin’s, and St. Augustine’s conceptualizations of time, or of a third, in-between duration. St. Thomas’, influenced by St. Augustine, allows for the between-and-between position of creatures such as angels and vampires to emerge, and Aquinas’ unusual variety of duration further bolsters the neutral status of the vampire as being both time-stopped and existing forever.

Aquinas theorizes his unusual variety of duration as follows: “The concept of *aevum* provides a way of talking about this unusual variety of duration – neither temporal nor eternal, but, as Aquinas said, participating in both the temporal and the eternal. It does not abolish time or spatialize it; it co-exists with time, and is a mode in which things can be perpetual without being eternal” (Kermode 72). The vampire, due to its neutral status, participates in both the temporal and the eternal as that which does not abolish time or spatializes it, as that which co-exists with time. Harking back to Perrin’s theory of the neutral as that which is present/absent, inside/outside (human) time, one can agree that the vampire indeed co-exists with time. In other words, vampiric “mega time” as “all-time encompassing” while lacking temporality is underpinned by Aquinas’ temporality as which participates in both the temporal and the eternal. Moreover, Aquinas’ temporality as that which does not abolish time or spatialize it can be connected not only to vampiric “mega time” but also to how this vampiric conception of time provides a temporal basis upon which vampiric neutral realms can take form. Moreover, the Platonic way of theorizing “deathlessness and being-for-ever” reveals the importance of the vampire as both being time-stopped and existing forever: “[...] the entire cycle of created life, with its perpetuation of specific forms, had the same kind of eternity within a non-eternal world. The old Platonic distinction between *athanasia* and *aei einai*, deathlessness and being-for-ever, was

given a new fictive shape; men can have the first, but not the second, truly eternal, quality” (Kermode 74). The idea of created life as having eternity within a non-eternal world further underscores the neutral temporality inherent not only to the vampiric creature itself, but also to the neutral temporality that the vampire inhabits due to its position as being between-and-between. The Platonic distinction between deathlessness and being-for-ever further underpins the eternal quality of the vampire, who, by virtue of its neutrality, is a being-for-ever, or is both time-stopped and existing forever.

Moreover, as English poet Edmund Spenser postulates that one’s experience of time is governed by the dissonances of the human experience: “The discords of our experience – delight in change, fear of change; the death of the individual and the survival of the species, the pains and pleasures of love, the knowledge of light and dark, the extinction and perpetuity of empires – these were Spenser’s subject; and they could not be treated without this third thing, a kind of time between time and eternity” (Kermode 80). Kermode’s claim that Spenser’s understanding of the human experience cannot be grasped without a third kind of time, a time that is between time and eternity, cannot be ignored when it comes to theorizing vampiric temporality. Vampiric “mega time” is that temporality between time and eternity, i.e., an “all-time encompassing” temporality which also lacks a real sense of time according to human standards. Spenser’s view of temporality also echoes Perrin’s conceptualization of the neutral as being present/absent and inside/outside since neutrality and the Eternal, from Perrin’s perspective, require an *abîme*, a temporally-free neutral space. In other words, Spenser’s dissonances of the human experience have to be considered through the neutral, or at least, through a neutral sense of time in order to take form. The contradictions of this (human) experience can also be witnessed in the vampiric

world. Anne Rice's *The Vampire Chronicles* is one of the most significant literary worlds which allow the figure of the vampire to feel the human experience. For instance, Spenser's discords are governed in Rice's vampire world as well, especially in terms of the sensuous and sensual.⁷⁷ Rice's vampires also experience the world – human and vampiric – through lavish aesthetics and pleasure, either sexual or not. The idea of experiencing the world is furthered embodied in Rice's works through vampires' ability to see the world through “vampire eyes” once their transformation is complete. This enables blood drinkers to see, hear, and feel everything that surrounds them with the highest degree of precision possible: everything becomes more luscious, more enchanting, and more all-encompassing. Harking back to Spenser's vision of the discordances of the human experience and the need for a third type of time so that these discords can be fully experienced, one observes that seeing the world through vampire eyes allows for this vampiric neutral temporality to take shape. Vampiric “mega time” also permits a redefinition of the vampiric experience, especially if connected to what Kermode calls “angel time”.

Indeed, Kermode claims that “[...] only the angels make their choices in non-successive time, and ‘be’ and ‘end’ are one only in God” (86). Forgoing angelic time and replacing it by vampiric time, one comes to understand the neutrality inherent to vampiric temporality. The vampire, by virtue of being neutral, does make their choices “in non-successive time” as they do not experience it as linearly as human beings. Reiterating Perrin's *abîme* and his present/absent, inside/outside conceptualization of the neutral, the vampire's actions always take place in non-successive time as the blood drinker's experience of time is “all-time encompassing”. In other words, vampiric “mega time” makes the space in between things, the between-and-between position that is the vampire's, echo the vampire's neutral status. Kermode further explains why

⁷⁷ This claim will be dealt with more in depth in subsequent chapters.

the angels must possess their own order of time: “The angels required their own order of time because they were not pure being, yet were (on most interpretations) immaterial, acting in time yet not of it, any more than they participated in God’s eternity. Immutable, not subject to time, they were nevertheless capable of acts of will and intellect, by which change is produced in time” (Kermode 194). Once again, if one changes angelic time for vampiric time, one can extrapolate that the vampire also requires its own temporal space. Vampires do require their own order of time as, like angels, they are not pure beings. Harking back to Julia Kristeva’s conceptualization of the abject, the vampire is, indeed, impure: “Ce n’est donc pas l’absence de propreté ou de santé qui rend abject, mais ce qui perturbe une identité, un système, un ordre. Ce qui ne respecte pas les limites, les places, les règles. L’entre-deux, l’ambigu, le mixte” (Kristeva, *Pouvoirs de l’horreur* 12). The vampire, by being neutral and possessing its own “mega time”, disrupts the (human) temporal order and thus becomes abject. Vampiric temporality also renders blood drinkers immaterial, i.e., acting in time if they so desire, while not-being in time due to their neutrality. This immateriality also renders vampires immutable as they are not subject to time as, in most vampire-centric narratives, blood drinking creatures do not age. More significantly, the vampire’s impervious relation to time stems from its neutral status, from the need to have their own vampiric temporality that is “all-time encompassing” while also lacking a real sense of the temporal. Therefore, with the progression of the fantasy novel, one could perceive the vampire as being likened to the angelic, which further reinforces the vampire’s neutral countenance. Vampiric temporality thus bolsters the vampire’s neutrality and its existence in the space in between. Maurice Blanchot’s conceptualization of the neutral will also strengthen vampiric neutrality as that which permits the redefinition of what it means for the vampire to be a creature that is in-between.

In his landmark work *L'entretien infini*, Maurice Blanchot defines neutrality in a way which embodies the vampiric neutral. Indeed, Blanchot starts by affirming that the neutral is that which cannot be distributed in a specific genre:

Le neutre est ce qui ne se distribue dans aucun genre: le général, le non-générique, comme le non-particulier. Il refuse l'appartenance aussi bien à la catégorie de l'objet qu'à celle du sujet. Et cela ne veut pas seulement dire qu'il est encore indéterminé et hésitant entre les deux, cela veut dire qu'il suppose une relation autre, ne relevant ni des conditions objectives, ni des dispositions subjectives. (*Entretien* 440)

The fact that the neutral refuses to belong to the category of the object as well as the category of the subject paves the way to an understanding of fictional vampirism. The vampire escapes the category of the subject as it is not a full-fledged human actor able to influence the society it lives in since the blood drinker is, from a temporal standpoint, present and absent or always in the midst of vampiric “mega time”, an “all-time encompassing” temporality. The narrative vampire is the fictional embodiment of the “other relationship” inherent to the neutral according to Blanchot. Since the blood drinker experiences time differently than humans due to vampiric “mega time”, the vampire cannot be strictly objective and/or subjective; it cannot be said to possess the same psyche as a human being. Thus, the vampire is the most potent vehicle through which the unclear realm of the neutral can be exemplified. Blanchot also claims that “Le neutre questionne [...] en [neutralisant], par toute puissance interrogative, toujours plus loin la limite où celle-ci s'exercerait encore [...]” (*Entretien* 450). The fact that the neutral questions limits and pushes them further correlates well with the Butlerian theory that gender, sex, identity, and

corporeality are not binary in nature. Butler's deconstruction of societal norms pushes limits, thus intertwining with Blanchot's understanding of neutrality. The vampire, being a figure of neutrality and by virtue of being undead, also questions said limits and goes as far as to transcend them.⁷⁸ Indeed, vampires are both time-stopped and existing forever and therefore do not adhere to temporal considerations; rather, they experience temporality as that which encompasses past, present, and future. Vampiric "mega time" also correlates with Blanchot's conceptualizations of neutrality and of what he calls the limit-experience.⁷⁹

The limit-experience is what breaks the subject from itself. Neutrality is a limit-experience as Blanchot states that "l'inconnu comme neutre suppose un *rapport* étranger à toute exigence d'identité et d'unité, voire de présence" (*Entretien* 443). The unknown rapport brought forth by the neutral once again connects neutrality and unconventional genders, sexualities, identities, and corporeality together as that which is misunderstood is often placed in the category of the unknown. More importantly, Blanchot claims that the unidentified as neutral escapes the need to be identified and unified. The vampire provides significant insights into the understanding of such a theory. Indeed, blood drinkers, by virtue of being undead and by experiencing time as that which is "all-time encompassing" breaks away from identity categories as they cannot be defined by human claims as they cannot be fully engulfed and exemplified by terms and categories which do not fit vampiric beings. The vampire's in-between status confers it its ability to somewhat deconstruct rigid (human) norms and claims. Blanchot's theory of neutrality also tackles what

⁷⁸ From a similar standpoint, Roland Barthes, in his Collège de France lectures on the neutral, states that which is neutral is that which annuls and/or blurs as well as that which evades the paradigm (Barthes, *Le neutre* 171). Here, the vampire is all indicated to represent the Barthian claim as the blood drinker annuls and/or blurs human characteristics while also being able to eternally navigate the human realm. Also, the vampire evades the paradigm as it is always situated in an in-between and is thus able to transcend limits, i.e., to evade the paradigms set by human norms.

⁷⁹ *Expérience-limite* in the original French.

thinking neutrally implies. He claims that “Ce qui signifie que penser ou parler au neutre, c’est penser ou parler à l’écart de tout visible et de tout invisible, c’est-à-dire en termes qui ne relèvent pas de la possibilité” (Blanchot, *Entretien* 444). The figure of the vampire aptly represents Blanchot’s understanding as the vampire is both neither visible nor completely invisible. Indeed, by virtue of being situated in an in-between, the figure of the vampire is neither visible nor invisible, especially when this in-between status is equated to the societal conception of time. Furthermore, Blanchot also claims that neutral thinking implies that the terms used to define such a thinking process do not adhere to the realm of that which is possible. The blood drinker is indicated to represent (neutral) impossibility as the vampire is a narrative figure that does not exist in real life. More importantly, Blanchot also strengthens the unidentified and the unidentifiable nature of neutrality, which are the two components that also make the fictional vampire one of the most potent representations of the realm of the neutral.

The neutral is unidentifiable according to Blanchot as he states that “Le neutre, toujours séparé du neutre par le neutre, loin de se laisser expliquer par l’identique, reste le surplus inidentifiable” (*Entretien* 450). In terms of vampirism, Blanchot’s theory accurately applies as the blood drinker, by virtue of being undead, of always being situated in an in-between, is the unidentifiable surplus. The vampire is never fully present nor absent in human society, and therefore becomes a literal surplus in said society. The vampire being unidentifiable in human terms thus makes the creature a perfect illustration of Blanchot’s neutral surplus. More significantly, the limit-experience – where the subject breaks from itself – also sustains Blanchot’s claim that the neutral is atemporal in nature. To that effect, he suggests that time – the human conceptualization of it – is “[...] comme autre, comme absence et neutralité –, [...] temps

sans évènement, sans projet, sans possibilité, perpétuité instable, et non pas ce pur instant immobile, l'étincelle des mystiques, mais ce temps arrêté, incapable de permanence, ne demeurant pas et n'accordant pas la simplicité d'une demeure" (Blanchot, *Entretien* 63). Blanchot's understanding of time undoubtedly implies neutrality, especially in the sense that time is indeed unstable, always on the verge of shifting. In addition, Blanchot claims that time does not adhere to any permanence but is rather in a constant state of flux. It therefore becomes clear that the figure of the vampire is one of the most potent vehicles of Blanchot's concept of time, or in this particular case, vampiric "mega time", as the blood drinker experiences past, present, and future as one single temporality due to its in-between undead status. Also, the vampire is, as vampiric "mega time", in a continuous state of mutability since the blood drinker must perpetually adapt to its timeless countenance while time unfolds as encompassing past, present, and future. The fact that the vampire unsettles gender, sexual, and corporeal norms also correlates with the idea that, like vampiric "mega time", the gender-neutral blood drinker is in a perpetual state of flux, navigating along the large spectra of gender, sexuality, identity, and corporeality. Moreover, the vampire being a liminal creature always on the fringe of the human experience also reinforces its correlation to the neutral realm.

The blood drinker being neutral supposes an unknown rapport to both unity and presence with respect to identity (Blanchot, *Entretien* 443). This unknown rapport therefore strengthens the "all-time encompassing" nature of the vampire as it is always both inside (strictly when the vampire chooses to follow human lives) and outside (human) societal time, thus reinforcing the claim that the vampire is neutral due to the fact that it is perpetually situated in an in-between. To that effect, Blanchot states that "[...] [le] neutre serait donné dans une position de quasi-absence,

d'effet de non-effet [...]” (*Entretien* 447). Therefore, the vampire’s experience of time as that which is “all-time encompassing” and its in-between undead status puts the blood drinker in a quasi-absent position. This position will be deftly explored by Lindqvist’s child-vampire as the notions of timelessness through destabilization, castration, as well as questioning of gender, will tend toward the neutral.

Chapter II

“But What if I’m Not a Girl?”: Prepubescence, Castration, and Gender Neutrality in John Ajvide Lindqvist’s *Let the Right One in*

Neutral physicality is one of the aspects which confers the vampire its inherent neutrality. Vampiric prepubescence implies that the body of the vampire, being timeless, will forever be a body on the verge of change. John Ajvide Lindqvist’s *Let the Right One in* challenges the concepts of children sexuality and gender performativity by not only making the character of Eli(as) a vampire, but also by making them a corporeal blank slate.⁸⁰ Eli’s neutrality is also manifested through their various gender performances, be it to pass as a real child, to wearing more “feminine” clothes to blend in socially; in other words, Eli will adhere to cisgender and heteronormative gender norms and expressions in order to be socially accepted.⁸¹ The society portrayed in the novel is not shown to overtly repress Eli’s gender and sexual performances, but this normative recognition is rather deployed to challenge and ultimately deconstruct the

⁸⁰ John Ajvide Lindqvist (1968-present) is a Swedish author whose other literary works are horror-based. A Swedish film adaptation of *Let the Right One in* directed by Tomas Alfredson and written by Lindqvist himself was released in 2008, and an American remake titled *Let Me In* was released in 2010. A play based on the novel and on Tomas Alfredson’s film adaptation was produced by the Royal Court Theatre in 2013. My spelling of Elias’ name as “Eli(as)” is significant in terms of Eli’s vampiric neutrality and will be explained at length later in the current chapter. The diminutive “Eli” will be used interchangeably throughout this chapter as it adds another layer to Eli(as)’s vampiric and gender neutralities. Also, defining Eli as “a corporeal blank slate” manifests both their vampiric and gender neutrality. Eli(as)’s neutrality is also literal as he was castrated before being turned into a vampire. In other words, Eli was corporeally changed before the vampiric change occurred; the castration is therefore the change-before-the-change. Due to their lack of genitalia, Eli is thus a full-fledged neutral being, this neutrality being heightened by their vampiric nature. Eli’s prepubescent-looking body also further establishes Eli(as)’s vampiric neutrality. For more on the significance of such a corporeality in terms of (vampiric) neutrality in *The Passage*, see Chapter IV. The neutrality inherent to vampiric prepubescence will also be analyzed more in depth later in the current chapter.

⁸¹ For more on the representation of Eli as a vampire child, see Ashley Quinn’s *Innocent No More: How Child Vampires Challenge the Social Narrative of Childhood* (2020), Maria Holmgren Troy’s “Predator and Prey: The Vampire Child in Novels by S.P. Somtow and John Ajvide Lindqvist.” (2017), Allison Moore’s “‘Not a Child. Not Old. Not a Boy. Not a Girl.’: Representing Childhood in *Let the Right One in*.” (2020). For more on the liminal status of the vampire in Alfredson’s film, refer to Jakub Sebastian Konefal’s “Incoherent Narration, Hauntology and the Liminal Status of Female Vampire in Swedish films *Frostbite* and *Let the Right One in*.” (2018). For queer and liminal perspectives in Lindqvist’s novel, see Benny LeMaster’s “Queer Imag(in)ing Liminality as Resistance in Lindqvist’s *Let the Right One in*.” (2011). For more on different perspectives pertaining to gender and romantic love in Alfredson’s and in Reeves’ film adaptations, see Carol Siegel’s “Let a New Gender In? American Responses to Contemporary Scandinavian Gothicism.” (2014).

hegemonic rigidity inherent to pervasive gender and sexual norms.⁸² Challenging and deconstructing cisgender and heteronormative expressions and performances is also what allows Lindqvist to make Eli neutral due to their vampiric countenance, but also due to them being genderqueer. The term “genderqueer” can be defined as follows:

Genderqueer, identity adopted by individuals who characterize themselves as neither female nor male, as both, or as somewhere in between. The term was coined in the 1990s. Although genderqueer individuals describe and express their identities differently and may or may not consider themselves to be transgender (a general term for people whose gender identity or expression differs from the gender assigned to them at birth), they commonly understand themselves in ways that challenge binary constructions of gender and traditional images of transgender individuals. (Beemyn, “Genderqueer.”)

Elias, whose assigned gender at birth is male (due to his possessing a penis), is socially – and heteronormatively – perceived as a male. However, since they are both a vampire and castrated, Eli challenges gender and sexual societal norms by embodying the fluidity inherent to

⁸² For more on Swedish and vampiric themes and motifs in Tomas Alfredson’s 2008 film adaptation of Lindqvist’s novel, see Rochelle Wright’s “Vampire in the Stockholm Suburbs: *Let the Right One in* and Genre Hybridity.” (2010). For more on Scandinavian landscapes in Lindqvist’s novel and the film adaptations, see Yvonne Leffler’s “The Devious Landscape in Contemporary Scandinavian Horror.” (2013). For more on the depictions of the uncanny and of gender and sexuality in both the American and the Swedish film adaptations of *Let the Right One in*, refer to Maria Holmgren Troy’s “Dealing with the Uncanny?: Cultural Adaptation in Matt Reeves’s Vampire Movie *Let Me In*.” (2016). For more on racism and technology in *Let Me In*, refer to Brian H. Onishi’s “Vampires, Technology, and Racism: The Vampiric Image in *Twilight* and *Let Me In*.” (2013). For more on Jacques Derrida’s notion of hospitality in the context of Alfredson’s film adaptation, see Simon Bacon’s “Hello Stranger!?: The Vampiric Re-Finding of the Projected Self in *Let the Right One in* by Tomas Alfredson (2009).” (2010). For more on the notion of sympathy in Lindqvist’s novel, see Michael Jay Lewis’ “Letting in the Right *Let the Right One in*: Sympathy for the Making of Fictional Sympathy.” (2018). For more on political inclusion and exclusion in Lindqvist’s novel, refer to Divya Dwivedi’s “The Rift Design of Politics: ‘Let the Right One in’?” (2015). For more on *Romeo and Juliet* representations in both Lindqvist’s novel and the *Let Me In* film adaptation, see Greg M. Colón Semenza’s “Echoes of *Romeo and Juliet* in *Let the Right One in* and *Let Me in*.” (2015). For more on trauma in *Let Me In*, see Simon Bacon’s “Trauma and the Vampire: The Violence of the Inescapable Moment in *Let Me In* (2010) by Matt Reeves.” (2013).

identifying as genderqueer. Gender expressions such as wearing more “feminine” clothing and colors are one of the ways Eli uses to perform their genderqueerness, but also to blend in socially due to Eli being a vampire.⁸³ Being genderqueer as well as a blood drinker, Eli challenges the binary constructions of gender and of romantic relationships.⁸⁴ Oskar, Eli’s neighbor, eventually meets Eli when they are both outside in the apartment building courtyard. Being the same age – only corporeally in Eli’s case – they become friends and eventually start to develop a romantic bond. This relationship implies that Eli(as) and Oskar can be both considered sexually and romantically fluid, and their intimacy also manifests the sexual impulses that children experience.⁸⁵ Here, Eli’s – and Oskar’s, to some extent, although he is not a vampire – prepubescence further reinforces the neutrality inherent to the vampire. Being-for-ever, or being both time-stopped and existing forever, Eli’s body will remain prepubescent. Prepubescence demands that one’s body be on the verge of transformation once one enters adolescence. In the case of Eli, being a vampire implies that they will be in a body on the verge of becoming something else forever. Eli’s vampiric and gender neutrality is made clear as any and all gender and sexual expressions can be expressed by their time-stopped prepubescent body, and also underpins Eli’s genderqueer identity. This identity is mainly manifested through Elias’ lack of

⁸³ For more clarifications on gender performances and expressions, see Chapter I. It is worthy to note that in her article “‘Let Me Bite You Again’: Vampiric Agency in Octavia Butler’s *Fledgling*”, Elizabeth Lundberg states the following: “Several scholars who address vampires and queerness together do so in the context of the vampire as a fundamentally liminal, transgressive, or pangendered creature, but also as a way to articulate the unspeakable and as a vehicle for social commentary surrounding normative sexuality [...]” (563). Eli’s genderqueerness indeed manifests all the aspects underpinned by Lundberg.

⁸⁴ For more on sexuality and vampiric blood drinking in Matt Reeves’ *Let Me In*, see Kyle Christensen’s “Drinking and Disappearing: Vampiric Orality and Age as Challenging the Youthful Male Gaze in *Let Me In*.” (2020). For more on seduction and coming of age in *Let the Right One in*, see Amanda Howell’s “The Mirror and the Window: The Seduction of Innocence and Gothic Coming of Age in *Låt Den Rätte Komma In/Let The Right One in*.” (2016).

⁸⁵ See Chapter IV of this dissertation for more on Nancy Chodorow’s analysis of drive, desire and the symbolic during childhood. For more on vampire child/mother relationships in Lindqvist’s novel and in Stephen King’s *Salem’s Lot*, see Lisa Nevarez’s “What to Expect When You Are Expecting (a Vampire): Reading the Vampire Child.” (2015). For more on child sexuality in Alfredson’s adaptation of *Let the Right One in* and in Reeves’ *Let Me in*, refer to Simon Bacon’s “The Right One or the Wrong One?: Configurations of Child Sexuality in the Cinematic Vampire.” (2016).

sexual organs due to the sadistic castration he was subjected to before being turned into a blood drinker by the vampire who castrated him.⁸⁶ In other words, Elias' castration is the change-before-his-(vampiric)-change; Eli becomes neutralized before becoming time-stopped/existing forever. Eli's lack of genitalia literally makes them genderqueer and gender neutral as no sexual markers can be applied to their body. Elias' castration also re-signifies the "masculine" phallus towards a neutral understanding of what it means to possess the phallus.⁸⁷ This phallic re-signification not only strengthens the transferability of the phallus as argued by Judith Butler in *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"*, but Eli's lack of genitalia also illustrates Butler's claim that the fear of castration is always present. In the case of Eli(as)'s castration, this non-phallic site will become a space to manifest their gender and sexual expressions but, more importantly, their vampiric and gender-neutral status. The gender neutrality inherent to Eli can be manifested by playing with the spelling of their name and by tackling the "Eli" diminutive.

Writing Elias' name as "Eli(as)" throughout this chapter solidifies Eli(as)'s genderqueer countenance.⁸⁸ From an etymological standpoint, the term "as" comes from the Old English term "*alswā*", which means "similarly" ("*As, adv. and conj.*"). "As" can also be defined as "expressing identity [and] likeness" ("*Also, adv. and n.*"). In this sense, putting the "as" part of Elias' name between parentheses reinforces their genderqueer countenance. Eli(as) acts,

⁸⁶ Writing "Elias" and using "he/him" instead of "Eli(as)" and "they" in this sentence is a deliberate choice as Eli's castration occurs before he becomes a vampire. Once the vampiric transformation has been completed and therefore becoming a neutral being, Eli begins to identify as genderqueer. Defining Eli as genderqueer is yet another manner from which to reinforce their neutrality because, as a neutral vampiric being, Eli must also be gender neutral.

⁸⁷ This castration adds a layer of understanding to Eli's (vampiric) neutrality as they do not have sexual organs per se, further blurring the lines. The blurring of gender lines can also be equated to Roland Barthes' conceptualization of the neutral as that which annuls and/or blurs, that which evades the paradigm. Eli, due to their lack of genitalia, indeed blurs and evades the paradigm of the social construction of gender and sex as binary, heteronormative, and phallogocentric.

⁸⁸ Sometimes, Eli(as)'s name will be written as either "Eli" or as "Elias". The use of the diminutive "Eli" is not only often used in Lindqvist's novel but using a gender-neutral name also reinforces Eli's genderqueerness. Writing "Elias" with its usual spelling will be used when analyzing Elias' castration and vampiric transformation as he was still a human boy when the trauma occurred.

performs *as* a girl despite them being a boy, biologically speaking. Eli(as) identifying as genderqueer thus demonstrates that gender and sexual orientations are indeed part of fluid and ever-changing spectra. Similarly, Eli(as)'s name is often written as "Eli" in Lindqvist's novel. Being a diminutive of their full name, "Eli" also acts as another gender-neutral way of addressing Eli(as). When Oskar first meets Eli(as), they tell Oskar that their name is Eli.⁸⁹ Correlating Eli's gender expressions – i.e., wearing a pink sweater and having no hint of breasts, to paraphrase Lindqvist – to their use of the "Eli" diminutive further cements Eli's genderqueer identity. Until Eli reveals their complete name to Oskar, the latter does believe Eli to be a girl therefore both strengthening Eli's gender-neutral identity and the genderqueer inclination of using the "Eli" diminutive to identify themselves. Eli's genderqueer identity is also manifested by their being a prepubescent timeless vampire.

Having been castrated and then transformed into a vampire when they were 12 years old, Eli timelessly remains in a vampiric body on the verge of change. Prepubescence implies one's body, corporeality, and identity being on the cusp of changes which will define one's adolescence. Being 12 years old, Eli thus exemplifies the stage of preadolescence. Simultaneously, Oskar, although a human boy, is also 12 years old and sharing a preadolescent identity is one of the first aspects which sparks Eli and Oskar's blossoming friendship, and their eventual romantic bond.⁹⁰ Oskar and Eli can both be defined as preadolescents from a societal standpoint, so it is important to insist on the prepubescent sexuality of Eli and Oskar. In *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler, based on Gayle Rubin's theory, argues that "[...] before the

⁸⁹ Depending on one's pronunciation of "Eli", the diminutive can either sound more "masculine" or more "feminine". Using "Eli" to refer to Eli(as) therefore becomes another manner through which Eli can manifest their genderqueer identity.

⁹⁰ Oskar and Eli(as)'s romance will be of particular interest when further analyzing Eli(as)'s genderqueer identity and sexuality later in the current chapter.

transformation of a biological male or female into a gendered man or woman, ‘each child contains all of the sexual possibilities available to human expression’ [...]” (100). Eli(as)’s embodiment of gender and sexual possibilities is heightened by their vampiric identity. The neutrality inherent to the vampire makes it a potent manifestation of the fluidity of gender, identity, and sexuality. The vampire forgoes cisgender, heteronormative, and phallogocentric norms in favor of fluid and personal gender-aligning expressions of one’s own gender identity.⁹¹ Being a prepubescent vampire, Eli embodies another layer to both their vampiric and gender neutrality, while simultaneously deconstructing and re-signifying societal gender and sexual norms.

Butler defends the following statement in *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex”*:

This ‘being a man’ and this ‘being a woman’ are internally unstable affairs. They are always beset by ambivalence precisely because there is a cost in every identification, the loss of some other set of identifications, the forcible approximation of a norm one never chooses, a norm that chooses us, but which we occupy, reverse, resignify to the extent that the norm fails to determine us completely. (86)

Being a vampire, Eli(as)’s inherent neutrality bestows upon them the power to “occupy, reverse, resignify” gender and sexual norms which indeed “fail to determine [Eli] completely”. Being

⁹¹ Gender identity is defined as “[...] each person’s internal and individual experience of gender. It is a person’s sense of being a woman, a man, both, neither, or anywhere along the gender spectrum. A person’s gender identity may be the same as or different from their birth-assigned sex” (“Gender Identity and Gender Expression”). The claim about the vampire forgoing cisgender, heteronormative, and phallogocentric norms will also be explored in the third chapter of this dissertation, more specifically pertaining to the gender neutrality inherent to vampire fangs. In the case of *Let the Right One in*, Eli(as)’s vampiric identity, their prepubescence, castration, gender expressions, and homosexually-inclined relationship with Oskar are all aspects which manifest Eli’s genderqueer identity and their status as a gender neutral (vampiric) being.

present/absent and inside/outside (human) society, to echo Perrin's theory of the neutral, and therefore experiencing temporality as an "all-time encompassing" space, i.e., vampiric "mega time", Eli possesses the necessary assets to challenge and deconstruct societal norms. Butler's statement pertaining to the unstable nature of "being a man" and "being a woman" is manifested through Eli(as)'s prepubescence, androgyny, and how they emulate their own neutral, gender-blending sexual and gender expressions.

When Oskar first sees and interacts with Eli, Oskar describes Eli as follows: "The girl shrugged. Her voice was not as high as he would have expected. Sounded like someone his own age. There was something strange about her. Shoulder-length black hair. Round face, small nose. [...] Very... pretty. But there was something else. She had no hat, and no jacket. Only a thin pink sweater even though it was cold" (Lindqvist, *Right One in 37*). Oskar first declares Eli's gender to be "feminine" due to their physical attributes and gender expressions, i.e., the sound of Eli's voice, their hair, face, and especially Eli's clothes. From a heteronormative and phallogocentric perspective on gender norms and expressions, pink is often considered, in modern North American societies, a more appropriate color for girls and blue being more appropriate for boys.⁹² Eli wearing a pink sweater therefore serves as a catalyst for them to blend in socially by adhering to the phallogocentric gender norms of girls and women needing to be pretty, sweet, and by wearing the "feminine" pink color, giving traditionally-minded people the illusion that Eli

⁹² It is important to note that the "blue for boys and pink for girls" societal construction has not always been present. Cydney Grannan states that "Pastel colors for baby clothing—including blue and pink—were introduced in the mid-19th century, and they didn't become sex-specific colors until the 20th century" (Grannan, "Has Pink Always Been a 'Girly' Color?"). Grannan continues and writes that "At the beginning of the 20th century, some stores began suggesting 'sex-appropriate' colors. In 1918 the trade publication *Earnshaw's Infants' Department* claimed the 'generally accepted rule is pink for the boys, and blue for the girls. The reason is that pink, being a more decided and stronger color, is more suitable for the boy, while blue, which is more delicate and dainty, is prettier for the girl'" ("Has Pink Always Been a 'Girly' Color?"). The current color and sex assigned at birth combination that is present in North America nowadays was first truly implemented in the 1940s (Grannan, "Has Pink Always Been a 'Girly' Color?").

is a young girl. Eli's corporeal features, i.e., their prettiness, "small nose and round face", further manifest Eli(as)'s literal gender performances as being of the "female" sex. More significantly, Eli's vampiric nature allows them to not only be a neutral creature in and of itself, but it is also what confers upon Eli the latitude to fully exist as a genderqueer/gender-neutral being. In *Le neutre*, Roland Barthes states that *le Neutre est ce qui combine les deux sexes (masculin/féminin)* (238-239). Eli can therefore be the vessel, through which the neutral as that which combines the "masculine" and the "feminine", can take form since Eli often performs their gender as being more aligned with femininity – always to blend in socially – while also emulating the "masculine" by virtue of being a boy based on the sex that was assigned at Elias' birth. However, due to their (vampiric) neutrality, Eli(as) does not adhere to (human) societal norms and expectations by virtue of being present/absent and inside/outside. Being neutral is what allows Eli to be their truest genderqueer self. The etymology of the term "genderqueer" points to Eli's deconstruction of heteronormative and phallogocentric gender and sexual norms. Indeed, the reclaiming of the meaning of the word "queer" ties into the challenging of societal norms, as explained by Beemyn. Since the term "genderqueer challenges gender normativity and the common assumption [...] that everyone is either completely male or completely female", it is clear that Eli(as)'s genderqueer identity – and their vampiric nature – makes them a manifestation of the concept of genderqueerness. It is important to note that, in addition to Eli's neutrality, their holistically neutral gender – and sexual – performances also manifest their genderqueer/gender-neutral identity.

In *Gender Trouble*, Butler argues that

[...] within the inherited discourse of the metaphysics of substance, gender proves to be performative – that is constituting the identity it is purported to be. In this sense, gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to preexist the deed. [...] There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very ‘expressions’ that are said to be its results. (34)

By adhering to gender expressions which are societally perceived as “feminine”, Eli blends into (human) society but, knowing that they are genderqueer, Eli(as)’s gender performances and expressions at this point in the narrative can be considered genderqueer as Eli performs gender as they see fit, free of societal hegemonic constraints.⁹³ To that end, Butler claims that “[...] the performativity of gender revolves around this metalepsis, the way in which the anticipation of a gendered essence produces that which it posits as outside itself. Secondly, performativity is not a singular act, but a repetition and a ritual, which achieves its effects through its naturalization in the context of a body, understood, in part as a culturally sustained temporal duration” (*Gender Trouble* xv). Manifesting their genderqueer identity, Eli always repeats their gender performances so as to express their gender and sexual identities. Since performativity “achieves its effects [...] in the context of a body”, Eli’s corporeality and physical features are also manifestations of their genderqueerness/gender neutrality.

Oskar, still laying his eyes on Eli for the first time, describes Eli(as)’s upper body as follows: “She was almost as tall as he was, but much thinner. The pink sweater fit tight across her chest, which was still completely flat, without a hint of breasts” (Lindqvist, *Right One in* 38). The use of “feminine” pronouns in this excerpt demonstrates that Eli’s gender-passing as a preadolescent

⁹³ Genny Beemyn states that genderqueer individuals “[...] commonly understand themselves in ways that challenge binary constructions of gender [...]”, which further reinforces Eli’s genderqueerness as indeed being a way to detach themselves from hegemonic gender and sexual norms.

girl is performed “appropriately” as Oskar truly believes Eli(as) to be a girl. Harking back to Butler’s concept of performativity, by wearing pink and by possessing prepubescent “feminine” attributes, Eli constantly re-presents their socially accepted gender expressions, in alignment with hegemonic gender and sexual norms. However, Eli(as)’s vampiric and gender neutralities are also expressed through their corporeality. By stating that “the pink sweater fit tight across her chest, which was still completely flat, without a hint of breasts”, Eli’s flat chest not only manifests their genderqueer identity but also the androgyny inherent to gender neutrality. Not only does this apply to Eli(as)’s gender identity, it also further emphasizes their overall neutrality. By showing “no hint of breasts” all the while performing their gender as “feminine” in this particular scene, Eli re-presents both their genderqueer identity and their prepubescence, which reflects Eli’s gender and vampiric neutralities. Eli’s vampiric neutrality is also a component of their gender – and sexual – performances and Eli’s prepubescent body serves as a canvas for this.

In *Gender Trouble*, Butler argues that “The redescription of intrapsychic processes in terms of the surface politics of the body implies a corollary redescription of gender as the disciplinary production of the figures of fantasy through the play of presence and absence on the body’s surface, the construction of the gendered body through a series of exclusions and denials, signifying absences” (184). Eli’s vampiric and gender neutralities imply “the redescription of gender [...] through the play of presence and absence on the body’s surface”. The neutral as that which is present/absent and inside/outside correlates with the “play of presence and absence” which must occur on “the body’s surface” in order for the redefinition of gender to take form. Eli(as) constructs their gendered – in their case, “gendered” refers to genderqueerness/gender

neutrality – body “through a series of [...] signifying absences”. These absences and exclusions are made tangible because of Eli’s vampiric neutrality, i.e., present/absent, and inside/outside or, to echo Frank Kermode’s conceptualization of temporality, as that which is both time-stopped and existing forever.⁹⁴ Similarly, Butler further states that “[...] acts, gestures, and desire produce the effect of an internal core or substance, but produce this *on the surface* of the body, through the play of signifying absences that suggest, but never reveal, the organizing principle of identity as a cause” (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 185). By producing both their genderqueer identity and vampiric neutrality “*on the surface* of the body”, Eli(as)’s androgyny takes form as a vehicle through which gender performances are noticed. “The play of signifying absences that suggest, but never reveal, the organizing principle of identity as a cause” further reinforces the neutrality inherent to Eli, both as a vampire and as a genderqueer being. Since Eli performs their gender neutrality – or more “feminine” expressions in order to blend in (human) society – on the surface of their body, one can refer to Eli as identifying to a gender which is non-binary. However, since “the play of signifying absences [...] never reveals the organizing principle of identity as a cause”, Eli’s core identity as a neutral vampire, i.e., being time-stopped and existing forever, remains Eli’s to share or to conceal.⁹⁵ Having a prepubescent-looking body is also what allows Eli(as) to further embody and perform their genderqueer identity and their vampiric neutrality.

The second time Oskar interacts with Eli, the latter is described as follows: “She talked funny too, like a grown-up. Maybe she was *older* than him, even though she was so puny. Her thin

⁹⁴ The Butlerian concept of “signifying absences” will also be of importance when tackling Eli(as)’s lack of genitalia due to being castrated later in the current chapter.

⁹⁵ Eli’s vampiric identity remains mostly hidden. Oskar, Håkan – Eli’s blood provider – and some victims of Eli’s know or suspect Eli(as) of being a vampire. Therefore, societally speaking, Eli’s core vampiric neutral identity remains secret. It is also for this reason that Eli most often performs their prepubescent “feminine” gender expressions when with human beings as these specific performances are what allow Eli to blend in (human) society.

white throat jutted out of her turtleneck top, merged with a sharp jaw bone. Like a mannequin” (Lindqvist, *Right One in* 57). Eli is older than Oskar but corporeally, they look as though they are the same age.⁹⁶ Comparing Eli’s physicality to that of a mannequin is a way to define their smooth and sleek physicality as a manifestation of both Eli’s androgyny and prepubescence. Oskar is intrigued by Eli as a “person” and also by their physique: “Her skin, its quality – he could only compare it to a wooden butter knife that had been polished with the finest sandpaper until the wood was like silk” (Lindqvist, *Right One in* 69). The use of the “feminine” personal pronoun “her” further reinforces Eli’s gender and sexual performances as being believed and accepted by others as Oskar truly thinks Eli is a girl, but it conversely manifests Eli(as)’s gender neutrality. The quality of Eli’s skin as “polished like silk” indicates Eli’s prepubescence and their neutrality. A preadolescent body indeed implies that said body is not yet fully marked by puberty markers, making one’s prepubescent corporeality a literal blank canvas upon which any and all gender and sexual performances and expressions can be applied.⁹⁷ Correlating this norm-free

⁹⁶ Oskar believes that Eli may be older because of the sound of their voice. Equating this to Judith Butler’s correlation between the act of using one’s voice and how one performs one’s gender and sexuality is an interesting parallel to draw. In *Undoing Gender*, Butler argues that “There is always a dimension of bodily life that cannot be fully represented, even as it works as the condition and activating condition of language. [...] We say something, and mean something by what we say, but we also do something with our speech, and what we do, how we act upon another with our language, is not the same as the meaning we consciously convey. It is in this sense that the significations of the body exceed the intentions of the subject” (198-199). In Eli’s case, the sound of their voice might convey their older age, but the body which Eli inhabits will forever remain physically preadolescent. Therefore, how Eli acts compared to the meaning they consciously – or unconsciously – convey are two different elements. However, by virtue of being a neutral being, i.e., present/absent and inside/outside (human) society and hegemonic norms, Eli rather resignifies Butler’s theory by consciously performing the “intentions of the subject”. This redefinition is due to both Eli’s neutrality and their conscious performance of hegemonic and phallogocentric gender and sexual norms. In other words, Eli(as) consciously performs as a more “feminine” being to blend in socially. Conversely, Eli’s use of language becomes the apparatus through which they can express their real self with whom Eli feels at ease. Here, the speech act rather becomes a more conscious act whereas bodily acts become a way for Eli to conceal their true self.

⁹⁷ The correlation between Eli’s skin and their vampiric – and gender – neutrality is similar to the description of Amy’s skin in *The Passage*, as it will be explained in Chapter IV of this dissertation. The character of Shori in Octavia E. Butler’s *Fledgling* also challenges questions of race in vampire fiction. Ali Brox suggests that “[...] Butler’s vision in *Fledgling* can be read as a Utopian world that is not free of problems but rather one where problems are confronted and dealt with. This utopia embraces ‘difference, disagreement, and diversity’ (Green 168) and never remains static. Through an exploration of race, hybridity, gender, hierarchy, and the restructuring of traditional representations of the vampire figure, Butler’s novel provides a vampiric vision where fixed categories

body to Eli(as)'s inherent (vampiric) neutrality further reinforces the polished quality of their skin. The neutrality inherent to Eli is also due to their forever existing and being time-stopped in a preadolescent body. Håkan, Eli(as)'s guardian and blood provider for the most part of the narrative, describes Eli in a manner which clearly demonstrates the child's (vampiric) neutral status and how this neutrality also ties into Eli's prepubescent appearance.⁹⁸ Håkan describes Eli(as) and the pedophilic "relationship" they share as follows:

And he [Håkan] did not have to feel guilt for his desire; his beloved was older than he. No longer a child. At least he had thought so. But since all this with Oskar had started something had changed. A ... regression. Eli had started to behave more and more like the child her appearance gave her out to be; had started to move her body in a loose-limbed and careless way, used childish expressions, words. Wanted to *play*. (Lindqvist, *Right One* in 108-109)

Håkan's description of Eli as "no longer a child" manifests Eli's neutral temporality, i.e., being time-stopped and existing forever.⁹⁹ Eli's age, in comparison to Håkan's, demonstrates the fact that Eli(as) is part of vampiric "mega time", i.e., an "all-time encompassing" temporality which lacks a classic sense of linearity, which makes Eli a timeless being. Conversely, Eli(as)'s meeting Oskar allows Eli to experience some aspects of preadolescence which Eli might have forgotten

and boundaries are challenged and human (or Ina) [the vampires in Butler's novel are called Inas] agency can instigate change" (392-393).

⁹⁸ It is important to note that the relationship between Eli and Håkan is pedophilic. Håkan has agreed to kill people and to bring back the blood for Eli to drink in exchange for sensual and/or sexual acts. For a psychoanalytic analysis of play and its impact on a child's development, see Sigmund Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920).

⁹⁹ It is also worthy to note that even Håkan uses "feminine" pronouns when referring to Eli, further manifesting Eli's gender passing to blend in (human) society.

or might not have had the chance to fully experience as a human boy due to his castration and transformation into a vampire when he was 12.¹⁰⁰

The fact that Eli regresses back to using “childish expressions” also illustrates Butler’s correlation between language and corporeality. In *Undoing Gender*, Butler claims that

There is always a dimension of bodily life that cannot be fully represented, even as it works as the condition and activating condition of language. [...] We say something, and mean something by what we say, but we also do something with our speech, and what we do, how we act upon another with our language, is not the same as the meaning we consciously convey. It is in this sense that the significations of the body exceed the intentions of the subject. (198-199)

Here, Eli manifests Butler’s statement concerning the dichotomy which may occur between one’s speech acts and one’s bodily movements. By expressing themselves and moving in a childish way while remaining a 200-year-old being at their core, Eli thus reinforces Butler’s concept of “the significations of the body [which] exceed the intentions of the subject”. In this particular excerpt, Eli(as) exceeds their own intentions as their newly manifested inclinations towards their preadolescent self are made clear through various bodily and linguistic acts.

Eli’s – and Oskar’s, to some extent – prepubescence is eventually made clear from a romantic and sensual standpoint. Eli, having been left alone by Håkan, makes it to Oskar’s bedroom window and asks him to grant them the permission to come in. Once inside, Eli(as) joins Oskar in his bed: “[...] Oskar was still keeping his eyes shut as the blanket was pulled off and a cold,

¹⁰⁰ The use of the personal pronouns “he/his” is deliberate here as Elias’ castration occurred before his vampiric change; Eli was therefore considered a boy per the sex assigned at his birth before becoming a gender-neutral vampire.

naked body crept in beside him, pulled the covers back over them both, and curled up into a ball behind his back” (Lindqvist, *Right One in* 168). Describing the two preadolescents’ first foray into romantic and intimate encounters demonstrates Eli’s prepubescence as being corporeally tangible. Since Eli will be a preadolescent forever, i.e., on the cusp of an array of physical and psychological changes, Eli(as)’s prepubescence underpins their neutral status. Eli’s preadolescent corporeality is made even clearer when Eli(as) explains to Oskar how old they really are:

‘I haven’t had a... normal friendship with anyone in two hundred years.’ [...] Oskar widened his eyes. ‘Are you really that old?’ ‘Yes. No. I was born about two hundred and twenty years ago, but half the time I’ve slept.’ [...] ‘But... when I say sleep I mean that there are months at a time when I don’t... get up at all. And then a few months when I... live. But then I rest during the daytime.’ [...] ‘And then when I wake up I’m... little again. And weak. That’s when I need help. That’s maybe why I’ve been able to survive. Because I’m small. And people want to help me. But... for very different reasons.’ (Lindqvist, *Right One in* 349)

When they wake up from a long deep sleep, Eli(as) reverts to their child/prepubescent self. This is significant as Eli’s “weak” self, i.e., their vampire self needing to feed on blood in order to survive, is also when Eli is “little again”. Eli(as)’s prepubescence is connected to their vampiric countenance, especially since Elias’ vampiric transformation occurred when he was 12 years old. Being neutral because they are a blood drinker, Eli reverting to their preadolescent self is the most expedient way for Eli(as) to reexperience their inherent neutrality. The notion of timelessness also plays a part in understanding the correlation between (vampiric) neutrality and Eli’s prepubescence. The vampire’s timelessness, in Perrin’s sense, has indeed become neutral, as something which is always active and always repeated. This is especially relevant to the

vampire's need to feed on several human beings in order to survive. The vampiric bite therefore becomes this "infinite point which is always active, always repeated" according to Perrin.¹⁰¹ In Eli's case, their reverting to their prepubescent self every time they enter (human) society again can also be considered a resignification of Perrin's conceptualization of the eternal. By equating Eli(as)'s prepubescence to Perrin's "infinite point", not only is Eli's need for blood in order to survive always "active and repeated", but their preadolescent physicality, connected to their vampiric countenance, is also reiterated forever. Prepubescence therefore further reinforces Eli's (vampiric) neutrality. Even Eli(as) understands that their preadolescent corporeality is intertwined with their vampiric status. Discussing with another vampire and wondering if other vampires exist – there are actually few other blood drinkers – Eli realizes the following about their own self: "Eli put his hand on his heart, felt the slow beats. Maybe it was because he was a child. Maybe that was why he hadn't put an end to it. The pangs of conscience were weaker than his will to live" (Lindqvist, *Right One in* 385-386). The use of "masculine" pronouns while Eli refers to himself in this excerpt can be considered a way for Eli to align with the sex he was assigned at birth, but one can rather posit that by using "masculine" and "feminine" pronouns interchangeably to refer to themselves, Eli(as) rather manifests their gender fluidity and neutrality.

Eli(as)'s genderqueer identity is elucidated because of Eli's gender performances and expressions but it is accentuated because they are a vampire. The neutrality inherent to the vampire establishes its fluidity on the large spectra of gender and sexuality. Eli's vampiric and genderqueer identities therefore correlate with Judith Butler's conceptualization of identity; indeed, Butler states that the question of identity is no longer "[...] a preestablished position or

¹⁰¹ The idea of the Derridian *trace* is also significant when it comes to understanding the repetition – and relevance – of the vampiric mark, i.e., the vampiric bite, always being repeated. Please refer to the introduction of this dissertation for more information about Jacques Derrida and his concept of *la trace*.

uniform entity; rather, as part of a dynamic map of power in which identities are constituted and/or erased, deployed and/or paralyzed” (*Bodies That Matter* 79). In Eli(as)’s case, the “dynamic map of power” which impacts their identity is quite literally their vampiric status. Being a neutral (vampiric) creature, Eli must constantly adjust being present/absent and inside/outside human society and human norms, especially since Eli(as) is both time-stopped and existing forever in vampiric “mega time”. Depending on whom they interact with and for which reasons – to feed on blood, to perform their gender, or to develop relationships – Eli takes their own positions on the “dynamic map of power” on which one’s identity fluctuates. If Eli must make their vampiric identity secret, they will “erase” or “paralyze” it, to use Butler’s terms. On the other hand, if the conditions permit it, Eli(as) can “deploy” or even reconstruct their identity accordingly. The relationship which Eli and Oskar share allows Eli to fully perform all the facets of their identity, be it their vampiric status, their genderqueer identity, and even share the fact that Elias was castrated. The question of identity as now part of a “dynamic map of power” also further reinforces the importance of gender fluidity and neutrality as viable gender – and sexual – expressions. Harking back to Beemyn’s definition of the term “genderqueer”, it is clear that in order for such characterizations to take form, the hegemonic powers must become fluid spaces, free of heteronormative and phallogocentric norms in the case of gender and sexual expressions and identities. The vampire, being neutral and thus having transcended these (human) norms, embodies Butler’s “dynamic map of power”. By going above and beyond societal norms and by illustrating the fluidity inherent to gender, the vampire also allows for the resignification of the body, the instrument through which gender and sexual performances and expressions can emerge, to occur.

In *Gender Trouble*, Butler claims that “The moment in which one’s staid and usual cultural perceptions fail, when one cannot with surety read the body that one sees, is precisely the moment when one is no longer sure whether the body encountered is that of a man or a woman. The vacillation between the categories itself constitutes the experience of the body in question” (xxiv). Eli(as) exemplifies “the vacillation between the categories [which] constitutes the experience of the body [...]” articulated by Butler. Being neither “masculine” nor “feminine”, i.e., being genderqueer, and a neutral being due to their being a vampire, Eli vacillates on the large spectra of gender and sexuality. Eli(as)’s body and identity also fluctuate between and beyond the “normal” categories which constitutes one’s bodily experiences. Eli’s lack of genitalia not only renders their body sexually neutral, but it also makes said body hardly readable. Being a (neutral) vampire, Eli(as)’s body also does not adhere to the societal (human) gender norms and expressions. These norms and expressions, however, must be understood to be hegemonically implemented and their inherent fluidity is said to be false. Conversely, Judith Butler’s conceptualization of gender performativity and fluidity allows for a redefinition of the hegemonical view of gender and sexuality, and the figure of the vampire is the cultural canvas upon which such a resignification can deploy itself.

Indeed, Butler argues that

Gender is the mechanism by which notions of masculine and feminine are produced and naturalized, but gender might very well be the apparatus by which such terms are deconstructed and denaturalized. Indeed, it may be that the very apparatus the seeks to install the norm also works to undermine that very installation, that the installation is, as it were, definitionally incomplete. [...] Whether one refers to “gender trouble” or “gender

blending”, “transgender” or “cross-gender”, one is already suggesting that gender has a way of moving beyond that naturalized binary. The conflation of gender with masculine/feminine, man/woman, male/female, thus performs the very naturalization that the notion of gender is meant to forestall. (*Undoing Gender* 42-43)

Eli(as), being a neutral vampire and being genderqueer, “undermines the very apparatus [of gender] which seeks to install the norm” since they have no way of anchoring themselves into the hegemony inherent to societal norms. since the “conflation of gender” with the “naturalized binary” of masculine/feminine forestalls the notion of gender as binary, Eli, being a genderqueer vampire, manifests the ways in which gender “moves beyond that naturalized binary”. By being present/absent and inside/outside (human) society and hegemonic norms and expressions (which also echoes vampiric “mega time”), Eli denaturalizes the gender binary while further reinforcing the “definitionally incomplete” aspect of the apparatus which is said to install norms. In other words, Eli(as)’s vampirism denaturalizes human expressions in favor of that which is in between, that which is not binary but rather fluid. To that end, Butler’s definition of the term “transgender” can also be applied to Eli’s genderqueer (vampiric) identity. She indeed argues that “Other approaches insist that ‘transgender’ is not exactly a third gender, but a mode of passage between genders, an interstitial and transitional figure of gender that is not reducible to the normative insistence on one or two” (Butler, *Undoing Gender* 43). One may posit that Butler’s definition of the term “transgender” can also be applied to the term “genderqueer” as this way of identifying oneself which goes above and beyond naturalized binaries. As a genderqueer/gender-neutral vampire, Eli(as) exemplifies “an interstitial and transitional figure of gender that is not reducible to the normative insistence on one or two” in favor of a

conceptualization of gender as fluid and even as neutral. Roland Barthes' theory of the neutral as that which annuls and/or blurs, that which evades the paradigm is significant here since Eli's gender neutrality does annul/blur and evade the paradigm of gender and sexuality as strictly binary or strictly heterosexual.

In *Undoing Gender*, Butler stipulates the following:

This form of reducing gender to sexuality has thus given way to two separate but overlapping concerns within contemporary queer theory. The first move is to separate sexuality from gender, so that to have a gender does not presuppose that one engages sexual practice in any particular way, and to engage in a given sexual practice, anal sex, for instance, does not presuppose that one is a given gender. The second and related move within queer theory is to argue that gender is not reducible to hierarchal heterosexuality, that it takes different forms when contextualized by queer sexualities, indeed, that its binariness cannot be taken for granted outside the heterosexual frame, that gender itself is internally unstable, that transgendered lives are evidence of the breakdown of any lines of causal determinism between sexuality and gender. The dissonance between gender and sexuality is thus affirmed from two different perspectives; the one seeks to show possibilities for sexuality that are not constrained by gender in order to break the causal reductiveness of arguments that bind them; the other seeks to show possibilities for gender that are not predetermined by forms of hegemonic heterosexuality. (54)

Eli's genderqueer identity and fluid sexuality both manifest the two moves which have taken place in queer theory according to Butler. Sexually, one's practices do not presuppose a given gender. In terms of gender, "hierarchical heterosexuality" does not prevent the internal instability of gender from being a viable means of expression. Butler argues that "that transgendered lives are evidence of the breakdown of any lines of causal determinism between sexuality and gender". Genderqueer lives also break down the "determinism between sexuality and gender". Eli's neutrality is not only brought on by their vampiric neutrality, but also by their genderqueerness. The multiple spectra of gender and sexuality on which one can position oneself allows for a resignification of the causality between heteronormative views of gender and sexuality. It is expedient to mention here that these positions are not set and can change often, depending on one's performances and expressions. Eli manifests the possibilities inherent to theorizing gender and sexuality as domains which are fluid, especially due to their vampiric neutrality and because Eli(as) does not possess any genital organs. Butler's understanding of sexual difference reinforces the correlation between gender neutrality and the figure of the vampire. She states that

Perhaps it is precisely that sexual difference registers ontologically in a way that is permanently difficult to determine. Sexual difference is neither fully given nor fully constructed, but partially both. That sense of 'partially' resists any clear sense of 'partition'; sexual difference then operates as a chiasm, but the terms that overlap and blur are perhaps less importantly masculine or feminine than the problematic of construction itself; that what is constructed is of necessity prior to construction, even as there appears no access to this prior moment except through construction. (Butler, *Undoing Gender* 186)

Being genderqueer and having been castrated, Eli manifests the “chiasm” under which sexual difference operates according to Butler. Since sexual difference is ontologically difficult to determine, the vampire becomes the vehicle through which these unclear ontological borders can deploy themselves. Being both time-stopped and existing forever, or present/absent, inside/outside (human) society to echo Perrin’s conceptualization of neutrality, the vampire’s ontology is inherently difficult to determine. Butler’s definition of sexual difference as “neither fully given nor fully constructed, but partially both” demonstrates the neutrality intrinsic to sexual difference. Indeed, Blanchot’s theorization of the neutral is interwoven with Butler’s view of sexual difference:

Le neutre est ce qui ne se distribue dans aucun genre: le général, le non-générique, comme le non-particulier. Il refuse l’appartenance aussi bien à la catégorie de l’objet qu’à celle du sujet. Et cela ne veut pas seulement dire qu’il est encore indéterminé et hésitant entre les deux, cela veut dire qu’il suppose une relation autre, ne relevant ni des conditions objectives, ni des dispositions subjectives. (Blanchot, *Entretien* 440)

Since the neutral, according to Blanchot, is not indeterminate but rather manifests a relationship that is “other”, that is different, and because this relationship “ne [relève] ni des conditions objectives, ni des dispositions subjectives”, Butler’s conceptualization of sexual difference therefore implies an implicit neutrality. By stating that “objective conditions and subjective dispositions” do not determine what is the neutral and that sexual difference “is neither fully given nor fully constructed, but partially both”, the correlation between both concepts allows for a resignification of both neutrality and sexual difference. This redefinition is made clear in *Let the Right One in* through the character of Eli(as). Having been castrated against his will before being turned into a vampire, Elias becomes neutral, but this choice is neither objective nor

subjective; neutrality is rather imposed upon him. Moreover, Blanchot's definition of the neutral as that which "[...] refuse l'appartenance aussi bien à la catégorie de l'objet qu'à celle du sujet" meshes with the vampire as present/absent and inside/outside (human) society, or as being temporally governed by vampiric "mega time", i.e., an "all-time encompassing" temporality. The vampire is thus unable to adhere to either category, further reinforcing its inherent neutrality. This neutrality is also what confers upon the vampire the power to resignify (human) gender norms and practices. Butler states that "That sense of 'partially' [of sexual difference] resists any clear sense of 'partition'; sexual difference then operates as a chiasm [...]" (*Undoing Gender* 186).

As per Butler,

As I understand it, sexual difference is the site where a question concerning the relation of the biological to the cultural is posed and reposed, where it must and can be posed, but where it cannot, strictly speaking, be answered. Understood as a border concept, sexual difference has psychic, somatic, and social dimensions that are never quite collapsible into one another but are for that reason ultimately distinct. Does sexual difference vacillate there, as a vacillating border, demanding a rearticulation of those terms without any sense of finality? Is it, therefore, not a thing, not a fact, not a presupposition, but rather a demand for rearticulation that never quite vanishes – but also never quite appears? (*Undoing Gender* 186)

Defining sexual difference as a “border concept” makes it a manifestation of neutrality as the neutral also implies something being on the fringe, being an *abîme*.¹⁰² More significantly, Butler’s claim that sexual difference “[demands] for a rearticulation” of its “psychic, somatic, and social dimensions” not only reinforces the fluidity of sexuality and gender, but it also cements the vampire as the literary figure which allows for said rearticulation to take form. In Lindqvist’s novel, Eli(as)’s genderqueer identity and fluid sexuality does indeed demand a rearticulation of the dimensions and terms which relate to sexual difference.¹⁰³ Being neutral, Eli(as) also manifests Butler’s interrogation, i.e., “[...] But rather a demand for rearticulation that never quite vanishes – but also never quite appears?”. Eli is present/absent and inside/outside with respect to their neutrality and their impact on (human) society and life. The demand for the rearticulation of sexual difference indeed “never quite vanishes – but also never quite appears” as Eli cannot fully embody said rearticulation nor can they utterly erase it due to Eli being neutral. Eli’s redefinition of sexual difference is rather made clear because of their sexuality and genderqueer identity, both manifested through Eli’s vampiric neutrality.

The rearticulation of sexual difference suggested by Butler, i.e., something that never quite disappears nor completely appears, is made clear when Eli first tries to tell Oskar that they may not be a girl: “Eli stopped in front of him, looking at him earnestly. ‘Oskar, do you like me?’ ‘Yes. A lot.’ ‘If I turned out not to be a girl... would you still like me?’ ‘What do you mean?’ ‘Just that. Would you still like me even if I wasn’t a girl?’ ‘Yes... I guess so.’ ‘Are you sure?’

¹⁰² Please refer to the introduction for Perrin’s discussion of the neutral and the *abîme*.

¹⁰³ Identifying as genderqueer indeed demands for a rearticulation of the psychic, somatic, and social aspects inherent to sexual difference. One’s understanding and acceptance of one’s gender is done psychically and somatically, i.e., accepting one’s gender but also the underlying traumas or simply being willing to share one’s gender and/or sexual expressions. Socially, one’s gender and/or sexuality must be expressed in a social environment in order to be accepted by others and eventually, re-presented by the genderqueer person. It is important to note that all gender and sexual expressions demand for a rearticulation of sexual difference and not only that which pertains to genderqueerness.

‘Yes. Why do you ask?’” (Lindqvist, *Right One in* 125). Eli asking shy questions to Oskar about how the latter would react to the former’s sex assigned at birth is similar to the process of coming out.¹⁰⁴ Not knowing how Oskar would react, Eli(as) threads the subject carefully, but Eli’s carefulness also relates to their being genderqueer. One’s genderqueer identity being non-binary (and thus hard to grasp due to the prevalence of heteronormativity and binaries) can make it difficult for someone to fully understand. As Oskar is a preadolescent, he may be unable to fully form his own thoughts concerning Eli’s gender identity. When Eli cuddles naked with Oskar in the latter’s bed, Oskar asks Eli if they will go out with him: “‘No, I don’t... but Oskar, I can’t. I’m not a girl.’ Oskar snorted. ‘What do you mean? You’re a *guy*?’ ‘No, no.’ ‘Then what are you?’ ‘Nothing.’ ‘What do you mean, “Nothing”?’ ‘I’m nothing. Not a child. Not old. Not a boy. Not a girl. Nothing.’” (Lindqvist, *Right One in* 170-171). This dialogue manifests several social dictates about gender and sexuality, while reinforcing Eli(as)’s gender – and vampiric – neutrality.¹⁰⁵

By telling Oskar that they cannot be romantically involved because they are not a boy, Eli follows the heteronormative and phallogocentric norms inherent to gender binarism and expressions. Here, the neutrality inherent to Eli’s vampiric nature, i.e., being present/absent and inside/outside (human) society, which also echoes vampiric “mega time”, makes it difficult for Eli to understand the underlying norms and practices which influence one’s gender and sexuality. Furthermore, Eli’s vampiric neutrality is made clear by Eli themselves when they state that they are “[...] nothing. Not a child. Not old. Not a boy. Not a girl. Nothing”. Defining themselves as “nothing”, Eli actually brings their neutrality to its simplest terms. Conversely, it can be posited

¹⁰⁵ It is important to note that the descriptions of Eli following this exchange all use “feminine” pronouns, making Eli(as)’s genderqueer/gender neutral identity even clearer.

that this “nothingness” is rather intertwined with Maurice Blanchot’s limit-experience, i.e., that which breaks the subject from itself. In Eli’s case, their neutrality is induced by them being a vampire. Vampirism is a manifestation of the limit-experience as Eli(as) blurs and/or annuls and evades the paradigm, to use Barthes’ terms, of having a clear-cut sense of one’s truest self, which therefore ties into the concept of the limit-experience. In opposition, by claiming that they are “Not a child. Not old. Not a boy. Not a girl”, Eli(as) manifests their own understanding of their vampiric neutrality. In *L’entretien infini*, Blanchot argues that “Le neutre questionne [...] en [neutralisant], par toute puissance interrogative, toujours plus loin la limite où celle-ci s’exercerait encore [...]” (450). Eli’s neutrality and self-definition as “nothing” are ways through which limits are questioned and neutralized even further. Their genderqueer identity and sexuality also deconstruct the limits imposed by phallogocentric and heteronormative binaries. Butler claims that by occupying, reversing, and resignifying norms, said norms fail to utterly determine us (*Undoing Gender* 86), and this is shown through Eli’s neutralization of limits, boundaries, and binaries, but also through how Eli(as) performs their genderqueerness especially through their corporeality.

In *Undoing Gender*, Butler suggests that

Sex is made understandable through the signs that indicate how it should be read or understood. These bodily indicators are the cultural means by which the sexed body is read. They are themselves bodily, and they operate as signs, so there is no easy way to distinguish between what is ‘materially’ true, and what is ‘culturally’ true about a sexed body. I don’t mean to suggest that purely cultural signs produce a material body, but only

that the body does not become sexually readable without those signs, and that those signs are irreducibly cultural and material at once. (87)

The “bodily indicators” proposed by Butler undeniably apply to Eli, especially because of Eli(as)’s prepubescent body and their castration. If a body becomes “sexually readable” without seeing “bodily indicators as signs” which are irreducibly cultural and material at once”, then Eli(as)’s genderqueerness and their lack of genitalia make their corporeality unreadable. By inhabiting a sexually unreadable body – literally due to their castration and figuratively because they are a vampire – Eli’s genderqueer and neutral identities cannot be fully grasped by others who rather understand corporeality as readable. Oskar’s reaction to Eli telling him their full name indeed illustrates Eli’s body as sexually unclear.

After having learned that Eli is a vampire, Oskar asks them the following:

What do I call you, then? This thing that you are?’ ‘Eli.’ ‘Is that really your name?’ ‘Almost.’ ‘What’s your real name?’ A pause. Eli shifted away from him, against the back of the couch, turned around onto her side. ‘Elias.’ ‘But that’s a... boy’s name.’ ‘Yes.’ Oskar closed his eyes. Couldn’t take any more. [...] Far away he felt someone [Eli] stroke his cheek. [...] But somewhere, on a planet far far away, someone gently stroked someone’s cheek. And that was good. Then there were only stars. (Lindqvist, *Right One In* 289)

Eli revealing their real name strengthens their genderqueer identity as Eli(as) adheres to non-binary gender and sexual performances and expressions. The fact that “feminine” pronouns are

used to refer to Eli right before they say their real name not only emphasizes Eli(as)'s genderqueer identity, but it also manifests the performativity inherent to gender and sexuality. Indeed, "feminine" pronouns are used in this excerpt as Eli, up until that point in the narrative, has been expressing and performing their gender through a more "feminine" lens. Gender and sexual performances also impact those who view these performances, and this performativity will also infer one's reaction(s) to said performances. Oskar's surprise after Eli(as)'s confession thus becomes a literary way to further re-present the process of coming out, as well as demonstrating the constant repetition of acts which gender and sexual performativity demands.¹⁰⁶ The effect of gender performances on those who receive them is further shown when Oskar questions his relationship with Eli(as) once Oskar learns that Eli is biologically a boy:

But when he said her name [Eli] aloud he remembered that it was wrong. That was the last thing she had said as they lay together on the couch. That her real name was... Elias. *Elias*. A boy's name. Was Eli a boy? They had... kissed and slept in the same bed and... [...] That he could somehow accept that she was a *vampire*, but the idea that she was somehow a *boy*, that could be... harder. (Lindqvist, *Right One in* 307)

Being able to accept Eli's vampiric nature more easily than them being a boy illustrates the impact of gender and sexual performances. Oskar using "feminine" pronouns throughout the entire passage further reinforces the effect of "feminine" expressions and attributes, i.e., Eli's clothes, hair, etc. Eli's reveal of their biological sex also leads Oskar to question his and Eli's blossoming relationship as their bond is not as heteronormative as Oskar had thought. Gender and sexual performativity implies that the spectators might come to accept or reject the

¹⁰⁶ I would like to emphasize that the use of the term "re-present" is deliberate as gender performativity, having to be constantly performed and expressed, must be re-presented, i.e., being presented repeatedly. The complete quote by Butler about the repetition of acts inherent to gender performativity can be found earlier in the current chapter.

performances presented to them. Eli and Oskar's relationship demands a resignification of both Eli's and Oskar's sexual and gender performances. Oskar must ask himself if he wants to be in a genderqueer relationship whereas Eli must figure out if they are comfortable enough to perform their gender-neutral identity for everyone to see. As the storyline progresses, Oskar slowly comes to terms with Eli's genderqueer identity and sexuality by trying to change the pronouns he uses to refer to Eli(as), while also grasping Eli's vampiric nature: "*It's all true. She is... he is... [a vampire]*" (Lindqvist, *Right One In* 345). Oskar grappling with Eli(as)'s pronouns demonstrates the relevance of the constant repetition of acts when gender and sexuality are performed, while this shift of pronouns also bolsters Eli's genderqueer identity as being viable. To that end, Butler states that

Hence, within the inherited discourse of the metaphysics of substance, gender proves to be performative – that is constituting the identity it is purported to be. In this sense, gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to preexist the deed. [...] There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results. (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 34)

The performativity inherent to identity, which is constituted by "expressions that are said to be the results [of these very expressions and, thus, of identity]", occurs through a constant "doing". Gender identity therefore requires people to notice and accept the expressions and acts which constitute one's gender performances. Gender expressions can range from use of clothes, hair, makeup, and even language to express oneself. In the case of Eli's gender identity, the expressions performed by them align with Eli's genderqueer identity in their intimacy with Oskar. On the other hand, Eli rather uses more "feminine" gender expressions when surrounded

with other people, i.e., people who align with society being cisgender and heteronormative. Eli(as) indeed reverts to “feminine” performances in such cases since their body, being gender neutral due to Eli’s lack of genitalia and other “masculine” gender markers, more easily passes as “feminine” in a heteronormative social construction of gender and sexuality. Eli’s conscious choice of gender expressions to blend in socially is made clear when Eli(as) chooses one of Oskar’s mother’s dresses after having stained their own clothes with blood: “One of his mother’s dresses. Eli stroked his hand over it. ‘Is this alright? I took the one that looked the most worn.’ ‘But it’s...’ [...] The dress was too big, hung like a sack over his thin shoulders [...]” (Lindqvist, *Right One in* 356). The description of Eli’s physicality further reinforces their genderqueer identity, as well as their gender-neutral corporeality. Oskar using “masculine” pronouns to refer to Eli(as) in this excerpt also strengthens Eli’s genderqueerness as a full-fledged way of expressing themselves, while manifesting Oskar’s complete acceptance of Eli’s biological sex and of their identification and expression as a gender neutral being. Eli’s genderqueer/gender neutral identity is made visible through their gender expressions and performances, but the sadistic castration Elias had to suffer before being transformed into a vampire also has a great impact on their gender-neutral status.

Eli(as) shares the vision of their castration with Oskar while Eli gently kisses Oskar:¹⁰⁷

Cold fingers grasp Oskar’s penis, pulling on it. He opens his mouth to scream [...] The man under the table asks something and the wig man nods without shifting his gaze from Oskar. Then the pain. A red hot iron forced into his groin, gliding up through his stomach, his chest corroded by a cylinder of fire that passes right through his body and

¹⁰⁷ Oskar literally experiences Elias’ castration as if it were Oskar himself being castrated. For the vision to occur, Eli tells Oskar “Be me [Eli] a little” (Lindqvist, *Right One in* 351) before kissing Oskar and letting the vision unfold. Also, italics are used in the original text.

he screams, screams so his eyes are filled with tears and his body burns. [...] ... opens his eyes and sees the blond hair unclearly, the blue eyes like distant forest pools. Sees the bowl the man is holding in his hands, the bowl he brings to his mouth and how he drinks. How the man shuts his eyes, finally shuts them and drinks... More time... Endless time. Imprisoned. The man bites. And drinks. Bites. And drinks. (Lindqvist, Right One in 353-354)

In *Bodies That Matter*, Butler suggests that “the site of sex” can be rendered as some sort of fantasy “[...] perhaps retroactively installed at a prelinguistic site to which there is no direct access” (xv). Elias’ castration echoes “the prelinguistic site to which there is no direct access” when it comes to the “site of sex” as Eli literally has no access to his “site of sex” as he does not possess a penis anymore.¹⁰⁸ More significantly, Eli(as) is transformed into a vampire by the sadistic blood drinker who castrated him after Eli’s torture. Once Eli(as) becomes a vampire, they become gender and sex neutral because of their vampiric nature and because of their lack of genitalia, but vampirism also implies that Eli is neutral, i.e., present/absent, and inside/outside (human) society, or as participating in vampiric “mega time” to echo my own neologism. Neutrality can be correlated with Blanchot’s limit-experience, i.e., that which breaks the subject from itself. Being a castrated vampire, Eli manifests the limit-experience since their castration breaks Elias from his “masculinity” in favor of genderqueer/gender neutral identity and expressions. Butler’s theory of the phallus and of its transferability proves significant here. Indeed, Butler suggests that

¹⁰⁸ The use of the name “Elias” and of “masculine” pronouns when referring to pre-vampire Eli is deliberate as he was not a genderqueer being before the castration and the vampiric transformation occurred. This also echoes the idea that Elias’ castration is indeed the change-before-the-(vampiric)-change.

[...] if this attribution of property [i.e., having the phallus] is itself improperly attributed, if it rests on a denial of that property's transferability (i.e., if this is a transfer into a non-transferable site or a site which occasions other transfers, but which is itself not transferred from anywhere), then the repression of that denial will constitute that system internally and, therefore, pose as the promising spectre of its destabilization. (*Bodies That Matter* 33)

Having been castrated and turned into a vampire thereafter, Eli manifests the phallus as a non-transferable site, based on "the promising spectre of its destabilization". Eli's phallus is non-transferable as it is non-existent and therefore, destabilizing in and of itself. Consequently, Butler further reinforces the neutral phallus theory by stating that "[...] these variable body surfaces or bodily egos may thus become sites of transfer for properties that no longer belong properly to any anatomy" (Butler, *Bodies That Matter* 34). Eli's lack of phallic genitalia is, in terms of genderqueerness, "[...] a variable body surface [...] [and] thus become[s] [a site] of transfer for properties that no longer belong properly to any anatomy". Not possessing a phallus allows Eli(as) to change their "body surface" in whichever ways they see fit, which in turn strengthens their genderqueer identity and expressions. In a more literal manner, Eli's lack of genital organs is "[...] a site of transfer for properties that no longer belong properly to any anatomy" as they do not possess a phallus anymore and therefore, the phallus indeed does not belong to "any anatomy" further reinforcing the viability of genderqueerness. Butler explains the lesbian phallus further in the following excerpt of *Bodies That Matter*: "[...] the displaceability of the phallus, its capacity to symbolize in relation to other body parts or other body-like things, opens the way for the lesbian phallus, an otherwise contradictory formulation" (51). In Eli's case, the phallus is literally displaced, removed, which in turn, opens the way for various symbolizations and

formulations to arise. Neutralizing the phallus, both in terms of castration and seeing the phallus as a neutral site, therefore allows for the “displaceability of the phallus”, even going as far as to erase it to allow vampiric and gender neutrality to fully emerge and be expressed. In *Bodies That Matter*, Butler states that “[...] the phallus (re)produces the spectre of the penis only to enact its vanishing, to reiterate and exploit its perpetual vanishing as the very occasion of the phallus. This opens up anatomy – and sexual difference itself – as a site of proliferative resignifications” (56). Since “the perpetual vanishing of the phallus [...] opens up anatomy – and sexual difference itself – as a site of proliferative resignifications”, it becomes clear the phallus can be defined as neutral and/or gender/sex fluid. Eli’s phallic lack further manifests Butler’s claim because Eli(as)’s sexual difference and genderqueer identity both become sites of “proliferative resignifications”. Genderqueerness, and gender and sexual fluidity as a whole, implies resignifications of someone’s gender expressions and performances based on how one feels and wants to express oneself on a daily basis. Being phallus-less and neutral due to their vampiric status, Eli resignifies sexual (and gender) difference and reinforces the viability of the neutral phallus as Eli’s penis literally vanishes, making both anatomy and sexual difference “sites of proliferative resignifications”. Butler’s understanding of the act of castration also has an impact on how the phallus can be viewed while reinforcing phallic neutrality:

Castration could not be feared if the phallus were not already detachable, already elsewhere, already dispossessed; it is not simply the spectre that it will become lost that constitutes the obsessive preoccupation of castration. It is the spectre of the recognition that it was already lost, the vanquishing of the fantasy that it might ever have been possessed – the loss of nostalgia’s referent. (*Bodies That Matter* 65)

Stating that castration is “the spectre of the recognition that it was already lost” further cements the neutrality inherent to the phallus itself and allows gender and sexual fluidity to be performed on the basis of multiple resignifications. Eli’s castration and the following vampiric transformation reinforce the idea that the phallus is “detachable [...] already dispossessed”. Indeed, since Elias gets turned into a vampire after his castration, their vampiric nature brings Eli on the side of the neutral. Barthes’ theory of the neutral as that which annuls and/or blurs, as that which evades the paradigm not only applies to vampirism in and of itself, but it also renders the neutrality of the phallus viable as the “already detachable [...] [and] dispossessed” phallus evades the paradigm of the “masculinity” inherent to possessing the phallus in favor of neutral gender, sexuality, anatomy, and corporeality. Eli’s lack of genitalia and gender/sexual neutrality is highlighted when Eli(as) gets naked in front of Oskar for the first time.

Eli(as)’s naked body is described as follows:

Her upper body was slender, straight, and without much in the way of contours. Only the ribs stood out clearly in the sharp overhead light. Her thin arms and legs appeared unnaturally long the way they grew out of her body; a young sapling covered with human skin. Between the legs she had... nothing. No slit, no penis. Just a smooth surface. [...] ‘But you don’t have a... willie.’ Eli bent her head, looked down at her groin as if this was a completely new discovery. ‘What did you say?’ ‘I said I’ve had one’ [...] ‘Oskar? You understand now that I’m not a girl. That I’m not...’. (Lindqvist, *Right One in* 347-348)

Describing Eli’s body as lacking “in the way of contours” further illustrates their prepubescent corporeality, thus reinforcing the neutrality inherent to Eli(as)’s bodily features. Having inhabited the body of a 12-year-old for hundreds of years, Eli’s vampiric experience of time as

being “all-time encompassing” (while lacking a classic sense of the linear) also underpins their overall neutrality. The description of Eli(as)’s lack of genitalia as “No slit, no penis. Just a smooth surface” further illustrates their sex neutrality. By not possessing their genital organs, Eli is gender and sex neutral. This neutrality is reinforced by the fact that “feminine” pronouns are used to refer to Eli(as) throughout the excerpt.¹⁰⁹ Not only is Eli literally sexless, but they are also genderqueer as Eli is literally neither female nor male, but rather gender neutral. Eli(as)’s castration scar is described as follows: “Eli took off the bathrobe and Oskar got another glimpse of his groin. Now he saw in the midst of that pale skin there was a faint pink spot, a scar” (Lindqvist, *Right One in* 355). The use of “masculine” pronouns in the continuity of this scene is of significant importance in terms of Eli’s genderqueer identity and their gender and sex performativity. The fluidity inherent to gender and sex performances also manifests the possibility of gender – and sex – neutrality, but it also posits that those neutral performances can be accepted by others. Oskar changing the pronouns he uses to refer to Eli(as) from “feminine” to “masculine” can be perceived as a way for Oskar to acknowledge Eli’s genderqueer identity and performances as a viable way for Eli to express who they truly are. Moreover, Eli(as)’s phallic lack reinforces Butler’s claim that “[...] variable body surfaces or bodily egos may thus become sites of transfer for properties that no longer belong properly to any anatomy” (*Bodies That Matter* 34). Eli’s lack of genitalia therefore is a “site of transfer” for properties which not only “no longer belong properly to any anatomy”, but this transfer upholds the existence of fluid gender and sexual identities, expressions, and performances. Similarly, Butler’s suggestion that sexual difference and anatomy are “[...] site[s] of proliferative resignifications” (*Bodies That*

¹⁰⁹ It is important to note that the “feminine” pronouns used to refer to Eli in this excerpt indeed reinforce their gender and sex neutrality, but the pronouns also relate to Oskar’s view of Eli’s gender and sex performances. The description of Eli’s body being told from Oskar’s point of view manifests Eli’s performances as “feminine” as having been integrated and accepted by people around them, i.e., Oskar in this case.

Matter 56) does not only demonstrate that gender, sex, and corporeality can and must constantly be resignified and performed in order to be acknowledged, but these resignifications are needed to render gender and sexual performances and fluidity viable. Conversely, Eli's vampiric neutral status demands a redefinition of binaries as the vampire is present/absent, inside/outside (human) society and hegemonic norms and binaries, especially since their experience of time is "all-time encompassing".

In *Undoing Gender*, Butler argues that

Even within the field of intelligible sexuality, one finds that the binaries that anchor its operations permit for middle zones and hybrid formations, suggesting that the binary relation does not exhaust the field in question. Indeed, there are middle regions, hybrid regions of legitimacy and illegitimacy that have no clear names, and where nomination itself falls into a crisis produced by the variable, sometimes violent boundaries of legitimating practices that come into uneasy and sometimes conflictual contact with one another. These are not precisely places where one can choose to hang out, subject positions one might opt to occupy. These are nonplaces in which one finds oneself in spite of oneself; indeed, these are nonplaces where recognition, including self-recognition, proves precarious if not elusive, in spite of one's best efforts to be a subject in some recognizable sense. (108)

Being genderqueer, Eli allows for the "[...] middle regions, hybrid regions of legitimacy and illegitimacy that have no clear names" to take form as their entire being has no clear boundaries, binaries, and limits to speak of. Barthes' view of the neutral as that which annuls and/or blurs, as that which evades the paradigm, proves relevant here. Eli's genderqueer identity and their going

above and beyond the confines of norms and binaries hence reframes the paradigm of binary genders and heteronormative sexuality. Butler's argument that these unclear places are not there for one to fully occupy despite "one's best efforts to be a subject in some recognizable sense" applies to Eli's vampiric neutrality. Since neutrality implies the subject breaking away from itself, i.e., Blanchot's limit-experience, the neutral "subject" cannot become a full-fledged subject in "some recognizable sense". Moreover, the regions which "have no clear names" suggested by Butler are also reflected by Eli(as)'s genderqueerness as this gender identity allows for the possibility of adhering or not to fixed binaries and/or sexualities. To that end, Blanchot's overall definition of neutrality proves significant.

Being a vampire, Eli does not adhere to objective conditions nor to subjective dispositions as they are not regulated by (human) norms, binaries, and overall hegemony. Similarly, Eli(as)'s gender neutrality addresses Blanchot's view of the neutral as that which cannot be distributed "dans aucun genre". Gender (and sexual) fluidity expands gender and sexual binaries towards non-binaries, i.e., "[...] ce qui ne se distribue dans aucun genre". Eli also reveals Blanchot's *relation autre* as their vampiric identity and corporeality cannot be fully encompassed in (human) societal terms. Therefore, Eli(as) – and the figure of the vampire as a whole – not only manifests gender and sexual neutrality as potent expressions and viable performances, but the vampire also deconstructs binaries and norms in favor of fluidity.

In sum, Eli's prepubescent looking body reveals their vampiric and overall neutrality since their corporeality will always be on the cusp of change without aging due to Eli(as)'s vampiric status. Prepubescence also implies gender neutrality as one's underdeveloped physicality can be

reshaped. In Eli's case, their unclear corporeality allows them to fully perform their genderqueer identity when Eli sees fit, but they can also revert to more binary and heteronormative expressions, i.e., passing as a young girl, to blend in socially due to Eli's being a vampire. Gender and sexuality can be performed by children as they are sexual beings. Eli(as)'s prepubescence therefore becomes a way for them to fully embrace both their gender-neutral status and their vampiric neutrality. This overall neutrality is also demonstrated through the spelling of their name as "Eli(as)" in this chapter to illustrate the fluidity inherent to Eli(as)'s entire being. The usage of both "masculine" and "feminine" pronouns to refer to Eli further reinforces their gender fluidity/neutrality as viable performances. Eli(as)'s genderqueer identity confirms that the vampire can not only embody gender and sexual fluidity, but that it can also cement neutrality as a full-fledged expression and as a way to express oneself. The romantic relationship that Eli(as) shares with Oskar also plays an important part in understanding the ramifications of the deconstruction of heteronormative norms in favor of fluid sexuality. Norm deconstruction allows for a more fluid understanding of gender and sexuality, but it more importantly permits gender-neutral and genderqueer performances and expressions to fully take form. Eli(as)'s neutrality is further manifested through his castration before being turned into a vampire; the castration is the change-before-the- (vampiric)-change. This phallic lack not only renders Eli's body neutral when it comes to their genitalia, but it is also what allows them to fully embrace their genderqueer identity and sexuality. Lacking sexual markers confers upon Eli a corporeal blank slate upon which they can apply any gender and sexuality. Furthermore, Eli(as)'s vampiric status permits a redefinition of norms and rules and therefore pushes the limits of the neutral further, to use Blanchot's terms. Similarly, the neutral according to Barthes, i.e., that which annuls and/or blurs, which evades the paradigm, further strengthens the correlation

between the resignification of gender and sexual norms in favor of openness and fluidity. Since gender is “always a doing”, to use Butler’s terms, such expressions, norms, and performances require a redefinition and restructuring of hegemonic concepts. In the case of *Let the Right One in*, Eli’s vampiric and gender neutrality act as a nexus of understanding of said neutrality, further pushing societal binary limits towards a fluid, open-ended embodiment of one’s true gender identity. The figure of the vampire therefore cements the viability of gender – and sexual – performances and expressions, going as far as to permit a neutralization of gender and binaries. The literary figuration of gender neutrality and of neutrality as a whole thus renders possible any and all expressions of gender to take form, therefore validating all identities and personae. This validation of gender and identity will be explored in the subsequent chapter through the perspective of Anne Rice’s *The Vampire Chronicles*.

Chapter III

Children of the Savage Garden: Corporeal and Temporal Neutrality in Anne Rice's *The Vampire Chronicles*

The gender and sexual inclinations of vampire characters in fictional texts entered contemporary mainstream culture in large part due to prolific author Anne Rice. Indeed, her *Vampire Chronicles* book series (1976-2021) is pivotal in vampire-centric literature. Rice develops her characters precisely but, more importantly, she has created a universe where vampires are full-fledged beings and not simply demons that need to be eliminated.¹¹⁰ Since readers experience the world through vampire characters, Rice's novels allow for a rethinking and restructuring of the figure of the vampire, as well as of the conceptualization of gender, sexuality, and neutrality. Indeed, the vampires in Rice's universe are not only gender – and sexually – fluid but they can also be perceived as neutral, especially through the use of vampiric temporality which also underpins vampiric neutral realms. The overarching world and mythology will prove to be a locus described by Rice in her *Chronicles* where my claim that the vampire is a fictional representation of neutrality is further strengthened. Although the *Chronicles* span almost 45 years and encompass 14 novels, I have narrowed down the works I will examine. *The Vampire Lestat* (1985) and *Queen of the Damned* (1988) are the two stories which most accurately describe the character of Lestat de Lioncourt, the main protagonist of Rice's vampire-centric works, in terms of neutrality and pertinent gender theory found herein. The portrayal of the *Theater of the Vampires* in Rice's fictionalization of Paris will strengthen the importance of the

¹¹⁰ For more on sympathetic vampires analyzed through the lens of melodrama in Anne Rice's *Interview with the Vampire* and in the film adaptation of the novel by director Neil Jordan, see Milly Williamson's "Vampire Transformations: Gothic Melodrama, Sympathy and the Self." (2005). For more on Rice's vampires as monstrous heroes, refer to Crystal L. O'Leary's "Transcending Monstrous Flesh: A Revision of the Hero's Mythic Quest." (2003).

venue as a vampiric neutral space which vampires can inhabit in the midst of (human) life, while bolstering Lestat's neutral vampiric experience of time, i.e., "mega time". Sharing this "mega time" with Lestat, the reader encounters his most pivotal relationship, that of his bond with his mother, Gabrielle, a relationship which is shown to verge on the incestuous. Judith Butler's redefinition of incest and its correlation to gender, sexuality, and corporeality will be of major importance when analyzing how this mother/son relationship shifts once Lestat transforms Gabrielle into a vampire. Moreover, the definition of vampiric "mega time", i.e., "all-time encompassing" temporality which consequently lacks a classic sense of the temporal, will also establish the concept of time as being neutral in Rice's novels.

Finally, the origin story of vampires in Anne Rice's works will be considered as it depicts vampiric neutrality. Indeed, the concept of neutrality will be revisited in the murder and possession of Enkil and Akasha, former King and Queen of Egypt, who will be possessed by the evil spirit Amel after they are violently murdered by a group of nobles. By taking over Enkil's and Akasha's bodies and bloodstreams, Amel finally gains what it has always desired: a human body. By invading the bodies of the King and Queen, Amel instills its taste for blood in them both.¹¹¹ In other words, each time a new vampire is made and/or any time a vampire drinks blood, Amel also feeds on his new "children" and this act permits him to expand his web. Anne Rice uses terms such as "web", "mesh", "weave", and "thread", among others, when referring to Amel's expansion mechanisms as the spirit is the neutral core that links all vampires to one

¹¹¹ The pronoun "it" will be used when referring to Amel's character and also when referring to vampire characters – unless it is not grammatically suitable – in order to further solidify Amel's and various vampires' neutral countenances and identities.

another.¹¹² Therefore, Amel and its connection to the origin story of vampires in Rice's *Chronicles* will be one of the many representations of vampiric neutrality.

Even though Anne Rice's *The Vampire Lestat* and *Queen of the Damned* tackle gender, sexuality, corporeality, and neutrality as ever-changing, Lestat de Lioncourt's young adulthood is first depicted as being more inclined towards the usual masculine stereotypes of physical strength, violence, and power. Indeed, Lestat gains notoriety after killing a pack of wolves that threatened villagers in Auvergne, France. Lestat's reputation undeniably changes when he returns from the forest as he is welcomed as a full-fledged savior. This "transformation" also changes Lestat's understanding of his own self as he realizes that he is and can be much more than what his brothers and father force him to be: "By the time I reached the castle gates, I think I was not Lestat. I was someone else altogether [...]" (Rice, *Vampire Lestat* 28).¹¹³ This simple example demonstrates that Lestat is a character that has always possessed the ability and the will to change his identity to his own liking, regardless of established and hegemonic policies. In addition, after hearing of Lestat's exploits, his siblings are clearly disbelieving and jealous of the recognition Lestat gets.¹¹⁴ In this sense, Lestat once again deconstructs the usual aristocratic values by being popular in the eyes of the population without having access to the proper title of

¹¹² Other terms used are "shimmering circuit", "vine", "current", "a tiny burning center", "veil", "blood cloud", "great invisible thing", "energy", and "invisible tentacles". I believe that it is expedient to list these expressions as they bolster the notion of connectivity amongst the vampires.

¹¹³ Lestat's father is the Marquis de Lioncourt and Lestat, being the youngest of the three surviving sons, does not have any claim to the title nor to the land that the Lioncourts possess. Lestat, therefore, appoints himself as the hunter of the family (Rice, *Vampire Lestat* 23). Although it may seem noble, Lestat's father and siblings see him as being lesser than they are. Lestat himself recognizes this when he states the following: "And I'd been born restless – the dreamer, the angry one, the complainer. I wouldn't sit by the fire and talk of old ways and the days of the Sun King. History had no meaning for me" (Rice, *Vampire Lestat* 23). Clearly, Lestat defies the usual aristocratic standards of nobility, knowledge, and decorum. In this sense, Lestat's character is all indicated to not only deconstruct aristocratic policies, but he is also more inclined to change other clear-cut hegemonic understandings such as the ones pertaining to gender, sexuality, and corporeality.

¹¹⁴ Indeed, Augustin, Lestat's elder brother, says the following to Lestat after the latter has killed the wolf pack: "'You little bastard,' he said coldly. 'You didn't kill eight wolves!' His face had an ugly disgusted look to it" (Rice, *Vampire Lestat* 29).

Marquis.¹¹⁵ By tackling these issues at the beginning of Lestat's younger years, Anne Rice allows for her character to develop and to push gender and sexual boundaries to gain momentum as her novels unfold and therefore also allows for a more fluid perception of gender, sexuality, and corporeality to take form.¹¹⁶

Throughout *The Vampire Chronicles* – but especially in *The Vampire Lestat* – the expressions of both gender and sexuality shift. The character of Gabrielle de Lioncourt, Lestat's mother, most clearly shows how vampirism enables the understanding and expression of fluid spectra of gender and sexuality. After being transformed into a vampire by Lestat, Gabrielle slowly abandons her clear-cut “female” expressions – love for jewelry and luscious dresses and garments, for instance – towards much more “masculine” clothing and expressions.¹¹⁷ This claim takes on more significance when equated with the fact that Gabrielle changes her clothes for the

¹¹⁵ The Marquis de Lioncourt, Lestat's father, is blind. His blindness supports Lestat's deconstruction of aristocracy because the main representation of this system – the blind Marquis, in this case – is seen to be impotent. Therefore, it is not surprising that his son already wants to disentangle himself from the confines of aristocratic life as even the Marquis, the epitome of this social status, is not even able to embody this aristocracy. Furthermore, Lestat's name also represents his need to free himself from his social status. Lestat, meaning “the state” – *l'état* in French – proves that Lestat's persona – or personas, to be more in line with Lestat's overarching fluidity – is the only thing of importance to Lestat. In other words, he yearns for his own views on societal – and parental authority – to be taken into account. By being the ultimate “state”, Lestat wants to be the sole actor of his life. Once again, it can be seen here that Lestat's egocentrism is at the core of his desire to be *seen* and acknowledged.

¹¹⁶ In his seminal work *Totem and Taboo*, Sigmund Freud states the following: “But a person may become permanently or temporarily taboo without having violated any taboos, for the simple reason that he is in a condition which has the property of inciting the forbidden desires of others and of awakening the ambivalent conflict in them. Most of the exceptional positions and conditions have this character and possess this dangerous power. The king or chieftain rouses envy of his prerogatives; everybody would perhaps like to be king. The dead, the newly born, and women when they are incapacitated all act as incitements on account of their peculiar helplessness, while the individual who has just reached sexual maturity tempts through the promise of a new pleasure. Therefore, all these persons and all these conditions are taboo, for one must not yield to the temptations which they offer” (Freud, “Chapter 2: Taboo and the Ambivalence of Emotions”). Lestat, even as a young (human) man, incited forbidden desires and had the power to awaken ambivalent conflicts in others through his own need to dismantle the aristocratic hegemony he was himself forced into. For instance, Lestat's desire to kill the wolf pack can be clearly associated with his process of proving himself through physical strength, violence, and power, as well as install himself as the new leader of a drive-motivated community since Lestat yearns for “this new pleasure” as explicated by Freud. In other words, Lestat's “new pleasure” is intertwined with his deep desire to deconstruct the confines of the aristocracy, confines which he never accepted nor wanted for himself.

¹¹⁷ Gabrielle's vampiric transformation will be dealt with in depth later in this chapter as it tackles Butler's conceptualization of the incest taboo as well as the correlation between vampirism and neutrality.

ones of the man she kills during her first hunt as a vampire: “It came clear in an instant why she’d done it [killed that particular boy]. She tore off the pink velvet girdle and skirts right there and put on the boy’s clothes. She’d chosen him for the fit of the clothes. And to describe it more truly, as she put on his garments, she became the boy” (Rice, *Vampire Lestat* 171). Vampirism in Rice’s universe enables a fluid representation of gender and its expressions.¹¹⁸ The correlation between vampires and gender – and sexual – fluidity becomes even more distinct when Lestat realizes that Gabrielle’s “masculine” expressions – through clothing, in this case – actually render her completely ambiguous: “But she was not really a woman now, was she? Any more than I was a man” (Rice, *Vampire Lestat* 172). Gender and sexual fluidly are expressed in Rice’s *Chronicles*, and this flexibility strengthens the claim that vampires are neutral by nature. By escaping the masculine/feminine binary, the vampire therefore becomes genderless, a completely blank (corporeal) canvas upon which any and all gender and sexual expressions can take form. Neutrality also allows vampires to reverse and resignify their identities after the transformation has been completed. Indeed, as Judith Butler defends in *Bodies That Matter*,

this ‘being a man’ and this ‘being a woman’ are internally unstable affairs. They are always beset by ambivalence precisely because there is a cost in every identification, the loss of some other set of identifications, the forcible approximation of a norm one never chooses, a norm that chooses us, but which we occupy, reverse, resignify to the extent that the norm fails to determine us completely. (Butler, *Bodies That Matter* 86)

Here, Gabrielle – and other vampires in Anne Rice’s works – deconstructs the male/female binarial norm by resignifying and reversing her “female” identity and therefore choosing

¹¹⁸ Gender expressions can refer to the use of clothes, makeup, hair, body language, and voice. Although gender expression is most often seen as being binary – masculine or feminine – it can also express an unclear or androgynous appearance based on what one chooses to publicly express, as expression is how one publicly presents one’s gender.

whichever gender and/or sexual identity she prefers. In other words, vampiric ontology – and its inherent correlation to neutrality – not only demonstrates that gender and sexuality are unstable, to use Butler’s words, but also that the unfixed nature of vampires permits the redefinition of (societal) norms towards a subversive understanding and practice of gender and sexuality.¹¹⁹ It therefore makes sense that the vampires in Rice’s *Chronicles* also do not adhere to typical heteronormative relationships and rather choose someone’s companionship based on who they are as a being and not simply based on their “gender”.¹²⁰ Indeed, some relationships in Anne Rice’s *The Vampire Lestat* and *Queen of the Damned* do follow the cisgender heteronormative format, the most obvious ones being the relationship between Lestat and Gabrielle and the relationship between Lestat and Akasha, but most of the main pairings in both novels can be defined as pansexual.¹²¹

The vampiric transformation is greatly significant in most vampire narratives and especially in Anne Rice’s *The Vampire Chronicles*.¹²² Not only is it an intimate and sexually redolent

¹¹⁹ I use the term “vampiric ontology” here to state that being undead – being neither dead nor alive – is what renders vampires neutral. By virtue of being “unstable”, the vampire’s neutral countenance – in other words, its ontology – is what permits a complete redefinition of societal gender and sexual norms towards a subversive practice and understanding of these “norms”. I use quotation marks here to signify that since vampirism implies a complete subversive understanding of norms, these “norms” are no longer seen as oppressive but rather as something that can be remodeled, and which can therefore be much more liberating than hegemonically imposed gender and sexual norms can. This claim is reinforced by Butler’s statement that norms “[...] fail to determine us completely” (*Bodies That Matter* 86).

¹²⁰ For more on homoerotic desire in Rice’s novels, see George E. Haggerty’s “Anne Rice and the Queering of Culture.” (1998).

¹²¹ The character of Akasha is the Queen of the Damned in Anne Rice’s mythos. Also, the relationship between Lestat and Gabrielle goes above and beyond the basic cisgender heterosexual definition as it will be explained at length later in the current chapter. Moreover, the term “pansexual” refers to people who do not see biological sexes, genders, and gender identities as determining factors when it comes to their romantic and/or sexual attraction to others (“Pansexual, adjective.”). In the case of the figure of the vampire, pansexuality applies, especially since vampires themselves are genderless.

¹²² The vampiric transformation does not hold the same importance in all vampire-centric narratives. In the *Twilight Saga* by Stephenie Meyer, for instance, the transformation process is induced by the vampire shooting its venom into the victim’s bloodstream. There is no exchange of blood as in most vampire stories. For more on the polymorphous sexualities that can be experienced in vampire nuclear families in Rice’s *Interview with the Vampire*

experience – especially when correlating the penetrative fangs to the penetrating phallus – but it is also the event which brings the newborn vampire into the realms of the neutral, and of gender neutrality. Through the transformation process – a vampire biting its victim and then having the victim feed off the vampire’s blood – the new blood drinker will almost instantly experience neutrality. This is depicted when Lestat gets turned into a vampire by the character of Magnus in *The Vampire Lestat*. In spite of the traumatic nature of the event, Lestat is able to quickly grasp that being a vampire implies an utterly different understanding of identity and of temporality.¹²³ By virtue of becoming a blood drinking creature, Lestat quickly comes to realize that he feels and embodies everything differently. This difference undeniably shapes a newborn vampire’s identity and corporeality – in other words, the vampire’s being as a whole – as utterly neutral. Lestat, in the midst of being bitten by Magnus, divulges the following: “I was incorporeal and the pleasure was incorporeal” (Rice, *Vampire Lestat* 88). Since neutrality implies, according to Maurice Blanchot, a limit-experience which breaks the subject from itself, the incorporeal state which Lestat literally experiences in that moment is decidedly connected to his soon-to-be vampiric and neutral countenances. Indeed, as Blanchot states, “l’inconnu comme neutre suppose un rapport étranger à toute exigence d’identité et d’unité, voire de présence” (*Entretien* 443). Here, the transformative blood exchange becomes the first – and most important – transition into the vampiric neutral realm. Since the unknown as neutral supposes an unknown *rapport* to

as well as in the film adaptation of the novel, see Iulia-Mădălina Pintilie’s “Gender Conventions: Homosexual Eroticism and Family Liaisons in Anne Rice and Neil Jordan’s *Interview with the Vampire*.” (2015).

¹²³ I refer to the vampiric transformation as a traumatic experience since it is not only extremely violent but also rarely consensual since it entails violence of many natures (physical assault, loss of dignity, and threat, to name a few). In other words, most vampiric transformations can be equated to rape. However, it is important to note that some transformations in Rice’s novels and other narratives are consensual. One of the most important of those is Gabrielle’s, Lestat’s mother, transformation by Lestat, which will be discussed at length later in the current chapter. For more on consensual and non-consensual views on vampiric blood consumption (especially through the lens of the vampire as a mother/child hybrid being), see Terrie Waddell’s “Consensual and Non-Consensual Sucking: Vampires and Transitional Phenomena.” (2017). Waddell argues that “Traditionally non-consensual blood exchange was *de rigueur* for the horror genre, but contemporary cinema positions the vampire as a romantic addict, heroically struggling with consent and desire” (147).

identity and unity requirements, it is therefore clear that the incorporeality which Lestat experiences during his transformation is deeply rooted in Lestat not only becoming a vampire, but also becoming a neutral being. This neutrality also allows vampires to fully embody their undead – neither dead nor alive – status. This countenance is what makes the blood drinker figuratively incorporeal since being undead does not demand that one adhere to any identity and unity requirements. Therefore, the vampiric transformation process is what brings a once-human being into the realm of the neutral. However, as it was described above, the vampiric transformation is rarely consensual and thus may be described by Judith Butler’s conceptualization of the subject, as well by Julia Kristeva’s theory of the abject.

The Butlerian formation of the subject and the theory of the abject conceptualized by Kristeva are intertwined in the vampire. For Judith Butler, in order for a human subject to fully form itself, one has to be willing to inhabit the “unlivable zones of social life”, to become part of the domain of the abject.¹²⁴ The vampire here becomes the perfect embodiment of the constitution of the subject that must be manifested through both exclusion and abjection; being thrust into the realm of the unknown, of exclusion and abjection is frightening to Lestat, who does not want to be transformed by Magnus.¹²⁵ This claim gains even more magnitude when it is correlated with Julia Kristeva’s vision of the abject. In *Pouvoirs de l’horreur: essai sur l’abjection*, Kristeva states the following: “Ce n’est donc pas l’absence de propreté ou de santé qui rend abject, mais ce qui perturbe une identité, un système, un ordre. Ce qui ne respecte pas les limites, les places, les règles. L’entre-deux, l’ambigu, le mixte” (12). Equating this claim to the non-consensual

¹²⁴ The full quote from *Bodies That Matter* by Judith Butler can be found in Chapter I.

¹²⁵ For a survey of the figure of the vampire as manifesting abject terrors, refer to Tony Magistrale’s “Vampiric Terrors: *Dracula*, *The Hunger*, *Interview with the Vampire*, *Bram Stoker’s Dracula*, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*.” (2005).

nature of Lestat's vampiric transformation is significant in terms of understanding the ambiguity of the neutral; Lestat's refusal to be transformed into a vampire stems from the analogy of rape, but also from the fear of the deconstruction of the systems Lestat has always known, reinforcing the established connection between rape and systems of hegemony. As Kristeva claims, the abject is what disrupts one's identity, systems, and order, as that which materializes the in-between and ambiguity. Therefore, the non-consensual vampiric change is frightening to Lestat since, as a human being who will soon become a vampire, he does not understand the vastness of the neutral realm. Once he becomes a blood drinker, however, Lestat's comprehension of neutrality – both in terms of (vampiric) ontology and gender neutrality – changes, therefore cementing the figure of the vampire as one of the most potent vehicles of (gender) neutrality and of the abject. Gender neutrality is inherent to the vampiric transformative blood exchange, and this process also establishes the vampire's complete embodiment of sexual and gender fluidity.

Indeed, when he tries to convince Lestat of the exaltation of the vampiric transformation, Magnus tells him that blood – and its exchange when it comes to becoming a vampire – is “‘the wine of all wines. [...] This is my Body, this is my Blood.’ And then his arms surrounded me. They drew me to him and I felt a great warmth emanating from him, and he seemed to be filled not with blood but with love for me” (Rice, *Vampire Lestat* 89).¹²⁶ The notions of love and of

¹²⁶ This quotation also harks to Judith Butler's conceptualization of sex as a confession. In *Undoing Gender* (2004), she states that “In confession we show that we are not truly repressed, since we bring the hidden content out into the open. The postulate that ‘sex is repressed’ is actually in the service of a plan that would have you disclose sex” (162). In basic terms, vampirism implies a disclosure of sex since the literary vampire allows for repressed sexuality to emerge. One of the most potent examples of this is Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897). The vampire characters in this novel exposed sex – although implicitly – during the Victorian Era, a time known for its prim and proper values. In addition, the correlation between sex and the act of confession is significant in the exchange between Marius and Lestat, since the phrases used by Magnus directly tie into the Eucharistic understanding of God's body and soul being shared between believers. In *The Vampire Chronicles*, Anne Rice proposes various inclinations of sex – and vampiric blood consumption – as being “confessed” and shared between vampires and vampires and their victims. The most significant storyline which strengthens my claim is that of Amel, the demonic spirit that made the first

sexual desire are intertwined due to the fact that vampirism and the transformative blood exchange imply an understanding of gender and sexuality which is utterly free of binaries.¹²⁷ The erasure of boundaries – or the “haunting of boundaries” to use Judith Butler’s words – inherent to vampirism are first cemented during the transformation process. Once the blood exchange begins, Lestat, drinking from Magnus, understands Magnus’ body – and his own body – far beyond its usual confines. To that end, Lestat claims that the connection he shares with Magnus in that very instance leads Lestat to “[...] [*know* Magnus’] body” (Rice, *Vampire Lestat* 90). In other words, the vampire’s correlation to the realm of the neutral enables the blood drinker to fully embody its neutral status, especially through the vessel of its bodily countenance. Here, Roland Barthes’ conceptualization of the neutral as that which erases and/or blurs the paradigm (*Le neutre* 171) proves significant. The vampire, being genderless, is all indicated to re-present its body – and its complete being – as that which erases and/or blurs the paradigms of societal norms, especially those pertaining to gender and sexuality.¹²⁸ This blurring of paradigms is also of major importance when correlating the vampiric transformation process to the gender-neutral aspect of vampire fangs. Indeed, fangs, when penetrating a human being for sustenance

original vampires and which spreads into each newly made vampire as this ever-evolving web. This web is what connects all vampire to one another. This storyline and theory will be discussed at length later in the current chapter.

¹²⁷ The figure of the vampire, being neutral, has no choice but to fully embody an understanding of gender and sexuality as that which deconstructs heteronormative/cis-gender binaries in favor of fluid expressions on the large spectra of gender, sex, and sexuality. The idea that gender – and sexuality – is not binary in nature is reinforced by Judith Butler in her book *Undoing Gender* (2004) when she states the following: “Gender is the mechanism by which notions of masculine and feminine are produced and naturalized, but gender might very well be the apparatus by which such terms are deconstructed and denaturalized. Indeed, it may be that the very apparatus the seeks to install the norm also works to undermine that very installation, that the installation is, as it were, definitionally incomplete. [...] Whether one refers to ‘gender trouble’ or ‘gender blending,’ ‘transgender’ or ‘cross-gender,’ one is already suggesting that gender has a way of moving beyond that naturalized binary. The conflation of gender with masculine/feminine, man/woman, male/female, thus performs the very naturalization that the notion of gender is meant to forestall” (42-43). Butler’s claim that gender has a way of moving beyond this “naturalized binary” not only strengthens the fact that gender is indeed fluid, but it also suggests that the figure of the vampire, by virtue of being able to navigate gender and sexual spectra mainly due to its undead countenance, is all indicated to be a cultural vessel capable of deconstructing heteronormative and phallogocentric views of gender, as well as other norms pertaining to corporeality and identity.

¹²⁸ The use of the term “re-present” solidifies the performativity and performances inherent to gender and sexual expressions, as that which must be constantly performed, as that which must be re-presented over and over again.

or to transform someone into a vampire, are a representation of Judith Butler's conceptualization of the phallus.¹²⁹ Indeed, the heteronormative justification of the male phallus goes hand in hand with the heteronormative views of sexual relationships. In this case, the phallus is thought to be only compatible with female genitalia, as the primary function of the penis within the confines of heteronormativity is to procreate. As stated in Chapter I, Judith Butler theorizes that the power and the possibilities inherent in possessing the phallus should be replayed and redistributed in an attempt to broaden the scope of what identity encompasses. Furthermore, Butler affirms that the attribution of the phallus must be nuanced to ensure a complete resignification of the transferability of the phallus.¹³⁰ More importantly, Butler claims that the phallus must become a "non-transferable site" in order to "[...] become the promising spectre of [the phallus'] destabilization" (*Bodies That Matter* 33). Therefore, the vampire becomes a non-transferable site of the phallus, especially due to the genderless aspect of vampire fangs. Indeed, vampires, either when biting a victim to sustain themselves or when biting someone to transform him/her into a blood drinker, must penetrate their victim's flesh to drink their blood.¹³¹ The correlation between the non-transferable site of the phallus and vampire fangs is rooted in the fact that blood drinkers do not pay attention to one's gender and sexual preferences when choosing their prey. Therefore, vampire fangs, being a representation of the phallus in vampiric narratives, are not signifiers of gender as the gender and/or sexuality of the victims are inconsequential here. To further underpin the genderless aspect of vampire fangs and its correlation to the neutral phallus, a few examples from *The Vampire Lestat* and *Queen of the Damned* by Rice will be analyzed. The

¹²⁹ Note that Judith Butler advocates for a resignification of the male phallus towards a lesbian phallus. Although Butler's theory is valuable and will provide significant insight into my conceptualization of gender-neutral vampire fangs, I will push Butler's claims further by proposing that the male phallus can not only be defined as a lesbian phallus, but more importantly as an utterly genderless phallus.

¹³⁰ Please see Chapter I for further information on the phallus and the notion of transferability. Note that Butler's theory stems from Jacques Lacan's conceptualization of the notion of the phallus.

¹³¹ In most vampiric narratives, when a victim is bitten to become a newborn vampire, they must also drink the vampire's blood for the transformation to occur.

pairings not only illustrate that most vampire characters can be described as pansexual, but they also uphold their identity as neutral beings as even their fangs are genderless.

In a scene from *The Vampire Lestat*, Lestat gets bitten by Armand and describes the attack as follows: “I was crying out that I wouldn’t drink; I wouldn’t, and then I felt the two hot shafts driven hard through my neck and down to my soul” (Rice, *Vampire Lestat* 276). “Hot shafts” to describe Armand’s fangs piercing Lestat’s skin undeniably demonstrates that vampire fangs are literal representations of the phallus. Since fangs are genderless – as the vampire itself is – it becomes clear that their use also allows for a rethinking of the phallic non-transferable site (theorized by Judith Butler) and illustrated by Lestat and Armand’s homosexual bond which is beyond the shackles of gender and sexual normativity. Another important homosexual vampiric blood exchange is the one between Lestat and Marius. Indeed, at this point in the narrative, Lestat has been buried underground for decades and Marius, the vampire Lestat had been relentlessly searching for, finds Lestat and brings him back to “life” through a highly spiritual and sexual blood exchange.¹³² Indeed, when Marius finds Lestat in the desert and asks him to drink some of his blood to regain strength, Lestat describes the experience as follows:

‘Drink,’ [Marius] said, eyebrows rising slightly, lips shaping the word carefully, slowly, as if it were a kiss. [...] Blood like light itself, liquid fire. Our blood. And my arms gathering incalculable strength, winding round his shoulders, my face pressed to his cool white flesh, the blood shooting down into my loins and every vessel in my body, ignited

¹³² It is expedient to explain that, at this point in the narrative, Lestat, in a gesture of utter despair and despondency which is symbolic of death, chooses to disappear in the earth so as to escape from the physical world which, so far, has not provided answers as to his vampiric *raison d’être*. For more on the vampire as a spiritual figure, see Beth E. McDonald’s *The Vampire as Numinous Experience: Spiritual Journeys with the Undead in British and American Literature* (2015).

with it. [...] I felt his heart [Marius'] swell, his body undulate, and we were sealed against each other. (Rice, *Vampire Lestat* 362-363)

The act of drinking blood is perceived as kissing, as engaging with someone in an intimate manner. Lestat's comparison of the blood as "liquid fire" also further reinforces the sexual aspect of such a consumption. Furthermore, the blood exchange can be equated to the exchange of bodily fluids during sexual intercourse. Since Lestat and Marius' bond can be qualified as homosexual, the blood can be seen as semen. The description of Marius' blood as "shooting down into [Lestat's] loins", renders this act of blood drinking as clearly sexual. The illustration of Lestat's and Marius' bodies undulating and being "sealed against each other" is also an overt example of the correlation between blood consumption and sexual relationships.

Vampiric openness to all genders and sexual orientations is also manifested when the character of Maharet bites the character of Jesse to transform the latter into a vampire in *Queen of the Damned*.¹³³ Indeed, the relationship between Maharet and Jesse is manifold in the scope of this dissertation. It is important to note that the two women share a filial bond as Maharet is Jesse's aunt.¹³⁴ More significantly, Jesse's vampiric transformation by Maharet not only demonstrates that vampires are sexually fluid, but also proves that vampire fangs do act as a genderless

¹³³ Maharet and her sister, Mekare, are twin sisters and powerful witches. They can communicate with spirits, such as Amel. Khayman, one of Akasha and Enkil's guards, is eventually forced to rape the twins at Akasha's request. Maharet then gives birth to her daughter, Miriam. After Amel takes hold of both Akasha's and Enkil's bodies, the King and Queen summon the twins back to their court to better understand what Amel has done to them and where their taste for blood originates. Once Khayman realizes that he had been betrayed by the King and Queen, he decides to turn Mekare into a vampire, and Mekare then turns Maharet. The three of them escape and create more vampires along the way in the hopes of constituting an army of blood drinkers to defeat Akasha and Enkil. These newly created vampires become eventually known as the First Brood. For more information about these storylines, please refer to *Queen of the Damned* by Anne Rice.

¹³⁴ Jesse's mother is Miriam, the daughter of Maharet and Khayman. The significance of the reversal of filial bonds and gender neutrality will be explained more in depth in the current chapter when I analyze Lestat and Gabrielle's relationship after Gabrielle's transformation.

phallus.¹³⁵ The transformation scene indeed unfolds in an extremely sexual manner, as with most vampiric transformation in Anne Rice's novels:

Then the blood came; it poured through every fiber of her body; she was legs and arms again as it electrified her limbs, her skin stinging with the heat; and the hunger making her body writhe as the blood sought to anchor her soul to substance forever. They lay in each other's arms, she and Maharet, and Maharet's hard skin warmed and softened so that they become one wet and tangled thing, hair enmeshed, Jesse's face buried in Maharet's neck as she gnawed at the fount, as one shock of ecstasy passed through her after another. Suddenly Maharet drew away and turned Jesse's face against the pillow. Maharet's hand covered Jesse's eyes, and Jesse felt the tiny razor-sharp teeth pierce her skin; she felt it all being taken back, drawn out. Like the whirling wind, the sensation of being emptied, of being devoured, of being nothing! 'Drink again, my darling.' Slowly, she opened her eyes; she saw the white throat and the white breasts; she reached out and caught the throat in her hands, and this time it was she who broke the flesh, she tore it. And when the first spill of blood hit her tongue, she pulled Maharet down under her. Utterly compliant Maharet was; hers; Maharet's breasts against her breasts; Maharet's lips against her face, as she sucked the blood, sucked it harder and harder. *You are mine, you are utterly and completely mine.* All images, voices, visions, gone now. They slept, or almost slept, folded against one another. It seemed the pleasure left its shimmer; it seemed that to breathe was to feel it again; to shift against the silken sheets or against Maharet's silken skin was to begin again. (Rice, *Queen* 241)

¹³⁵ It also reinforces Judith Butler's conceptualization of the lesbian phallus in *Bodies That Matter*.

The correlation between blood consumption and sex is once again manifested in Jesse's transformation. The terms used by Rice to describe the bond which blossoms between Maharet and Jesse during this scene reinforces the idea that their fangs are phallic. The fact that Jesse "[...] [gnaws] at the fount, as one shock of ecstasy [passes] through her after another" (Rice, *Queen* 241) clearly demonstrates the phallic power of fangs. More importantly, since Maharet and Jesse are both women and yield the power of the phallus, it can be acknowledged that vampire fangs act as a genderless phallus, which will be further exemplified through the relationship between Lestat and Akasha in *Queen of the Damned*.

Although this pairing can be qualified as heterosexual, both Lestat, the "male" counterpart, and Akasha, the "female", use their vampire fangs to please one another and drink each other's blood. Once again, the fangs operate as a neutral phallus, strengthening the claim that vampires are gender neutral as even their most prominent feature is neutral:

I saw it, the shimmering circuit, and more divinely I felt it because nothing else existed but our mouths locked to each other's throats and the relentless pounding path of the blood. There were no dreams, there were no visions, there was just this, *this* – gorgeous and deafening and heated – and nothing mattered, absolutely nothing, except that this never stop. (Rice, *Queen* 486)¹³⁶

Simply put, the fact that both Lestat and Akasha both drink each other's blood with their genderless phallic teeth proves that vampires are all gender neutral, especially in terms of blood consumption. Therefore, through the three pairings that have been analyzed, one can

¹³⁶ The "shimmering circuit" Lestat alludes to in this excerpt is the spirit Amel. Amel's impact on vampires and their neutrality will be discussed at length towards the end of the current chapter.

undoubtedly acknowledge the sexual nature of vampires but more significantly, that these fangs also possess gender-neutral qualities which cements the neutrality inherent to the vampire. In addition to the phallic inclination of vampire fangs, the blood drinker's corporeality also reinforces the vampire's genderless countenance, which is made obvious when Lestat discovers his new body after his vampiric transformation.

Lestat demonstrates this new awareness of his body as a vampire: "In fact, this was not Lestat in the mirror at all but some replica of him made of other substances! ... I stared at my reflection. I became frantic to discover *myself* in it" (Rice, *Vampire Lestat* 102). The fact that Lestat describes himself as a replica which is made of other substances is greatly significant as Lestat's new vampiric countenance allows him to swiftly navigate through the neutral realm and the human world since he is not fully human nor fully inhuman.¹³⁷ Moreover, this new replica of Lestat being made of "other substances" connects with Maurice Blanchot's definition of the neutral: "Et cela ne veut pas seulement dire qu'il [le neutre] est encore indéterminé et hésitant entre les deux, cela veut dire qu'il suppose une relation autre, ne relevant ni des conditions objectives, ni des dispositions subjectives" (*Entretien* 440). Lestat's new vampiric countenance and these new substances that make up his being allow for this *relation autre* to emerge.¹³⁸ Indeed, since corporeality is needed to form one's ontology in both its present and prediscursive forms, the reason behind Lestat's view of his vampiric body as a replica becomes clear. More significantly, the vampire adheres to neither objective conditions nor to subjective dispositions since its undead status makes it present/absent and inside/outside (human) society. Therefore, it

¹³⁷ The timelessness of the vampire plays a significant part in understanding this since the vampire is present/absent and inside/outside (human) society (as echoed by Perrin's theory of the neutral) by virtue of experiencing temporality as that which encompasses past, present, and future, i.e., my concept of vampiric "mega time".

¹³⁸ This idea will be pushed even further in a later section of this chapter when the origins of vampirism in Anne Rice's works will be analyzed.

is undeniably clear that Lestat's new vampiric countenance is what grants him access to the neutral realm. In addition, the vampiric transformation – especially in Anne Rice's *Vampire Chronicles* – and the discovery of the vampiric world by the new blood drinker clearly prove that vampirism is intrinsically correlated to neutrality.

When Lestat first sees with his vampire eyes after his transformation, he comes to understand the magnitude of the vampiric (neutral) realm: “This was the pulsing center of life itself...” (Rice, *Vampire Lestat* 92).¹³⁹ The pulsing center of life described by Lestat can be defined as the neutral realm which vampires inhabit. Furthermore, Maurice Blanchot's conceptualization of neutrality as a limit-experience also ties into this pulsing center of life since this center is a figuration of Blanchot's limit-experience – that which breaks the subject from itself. Indeed, by experiencing (undead) life neutrally, the vampire transcends the confines of human life and thus breaks itself away from any subject or object considerations. Therefore, seeing the world through vampire eyes and experiencing the vastness of the neutral pulsing center of life inherent to vampirism suggests that the figure of the vampire represents Blanchot's limit-experience.¹⁴⁰ Claude Stéphane Perrin's theorization of the neutral as an “abîme ni *saisissable*, ni *désaisissable*” (11) applies to Anne Rice's representation of the vampiric neutral realm, while echoing Blanchot's limit-experience.¹⁴¹ Perrin's neutral abyss is an illustration of the pulsing

¹³⁹ The use of the expression “to see the world with vampire eyes” is taken directly from Anne Rice's works. In these novels, the act of seeing with one's vampiric sight is significant as it is what truly makes a newborn vampire realize its new way of being, of living. In *Interview with the Vampire*, the scene where Louis first notices the amount of detail and beauty which he can now perceive due to his vampiric senses allows the reader to slowly grasp who and what vampires are in this literary universe. From a neutrality standpoint, the discovery of one's environment through vampiric senses also allows the blood drinker to fully comprehend its new countenance and its attachment to the neutral realm. This will be explored later in the current chapter.

¹⁴⁰ The correlation between the vampire and Blanchot's limit-experience and his conceptualization of neutrality will be developed even further in the current chapter when explaining Amel's impact on vampirism as a whole in Anne Rice's works.

¹⁴¹ The italics are from Perrin's original text.

center of life which Lestat describes since one has to be a vampire to gain access to this neutral realm. Perrin's theory of the neutral as an abyss also correlates with the fact that the vampire, being present/absent and inside/outside (human) society and time, is a being which exists in this own vampiric temporality, i.e., "mega time", which adds to the understanding of the figure of the vampire as being neutral.¹⁴²

The vampire, being both time-stopped and existing forever, must "live" in its own temporality which I have come to call "mega time". This redefinition of temporality allows for a vampiric understanding of time, free of human societal constraints. Vampiric "mega time" is a temporality which encompasses all times – past, present, and future – but which also lacks a sense of what is commonly understood as human time. As upheld by Perrin's theorization of the neutral as that which is present/absent, inside/outside, the blood drinker's neutrality demands a redefinition of time.¹⁴³ This notion is exemplified rather quickly after Lestat's transformation into a blood drinker: "Time passed; yet it did not pass [...] And when there came from the softly lighted city beyond a chorus of dim church bells ringing the hour, they did not mark the passage of mortal time. They were only the purest music..." (Rice, *Vampire Lestat* 98). This overt illustration shows that vampires are not affected by the passage of (human) time, but it more significantly bolsters the importance of a vampiric neutral sense of time. Lestat's claim that time passes and yet does not pass demonstrates that vampires are governed by their own vampiric neutral temporality and, more importantly, that their understanding of time is shaped by their vampiric ontology, i.e., being both time-stopped and existing forever. Harking back to Kermode's "tick

¹⁴² For more on the representation of time in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, see Adam Barrows' "At the Limits of Imperial Time; or, Dracula Must Die!" (2011). Barrows describes Dracula as "ontologically timeless" (83), which further underpins both the vampire's timelessness and ontology.

¹⁴³ Please see chapter I for more details on the "all-time encompassing" temporality brought forth by Dante, as analyzed by Frank Kermode.

tock” metaphor which implies a special kind of middle, the vampire’s in-between, neutral status confers it its ability to exist in its own vampiric temporality, which is, by virtue of the vampire being both time-stopped and “alive”, neutral in nature. Vampiric “mega time” also implies a deconstruction of the (human) understanding of temporality towards a neutral, open space in between things, i.e., Perrin’s *abîme* being an example of the space in between. This understanding of neutral (vampiric) temporality is further echoed by the Aristotelian view of a world without beginning or end. When Lestat states that time passed, yet did not pass, one comes to comprehend that the temporality – and the world – which the vampire inhabits is free of linear temporal constraints. In that sense, St. Augustine’s view of temporality and the possible mutations it implies become significant assets to further comprehend vampiric neutral temporality.

As pre-ontological beings who possess their own sense of time, vampires can be seen as formless creatures who have the “possibility of form” (Kermode 69), especially since they can choose to follow human lives in the human timeline, while also being able to inhabit their own neutral vampiric timeline without beginning or end, echoing Aristotelian temporality. This is further exemplified when Lestat and Gabrielle, the latter having recently been turned into a vampire by the former, both realize that being vampires makes them “[...] both visible and invisible, palpable and utterly unaccountable” (Rice, *Vampire Lestat* 170). The dichotomies of visible/invisible and palpable/unaccountable correlate with Claude Stéphane Perrin’s conceptualization of the neutral as present/absent and inside/outside, but these dichotomies further echo the “between-and-between position” which the vampire occupies in the third duration brought forth by St. Thomas. Indeed, the in-between position which the vampire

inhabits confers it its neutral status, a status which disrupts the established order, to use Julia Kristeva's words. This disruption of temporality – and of (human) order – is also echoed in Aquinas' conceptualization of temporality as that which co-exists with time. Lestat and Gabrielle, being visible/invisible and palpable/unaccountable, participate in both the temporal and the eternal as that which does not abolish time or spatializes it, especially because of the vampiric neutral timeline which they can mold to their liking, i.e., existing forever while being time-stopped. Echoing Spenser's dichotomies of life – i.e., delight and fear of change, the pains and pleasures of love, etc. – Kermode's claim that Spenser's understanding of the human experience cannot be grasped without a third kind of time, a time that is between time and eternity, cannot be ignored when it comes to theorizing vampiric temporality. Still ushered by Lestat and Gabrielle's dichotomies of being visible/invisible and palpable/unaccountable, the third kind of time defined by Kermode further demonstrates that the contradictions that are part of the human experience are also witnessed in the vampiric world. For instance, Lestat and Gabrielle's dichotomies are temporally governed, but are also part of the vampiric existence they experience. In Anne Rice's vampiric-centric narratives, the discords of the human experience as understood by Spenser are mostly felt and molded through the sensuous and the sexual. As previously explained, vampires, through the act of biting and drinking a person's blood, will experience sensuality and sexuality. Furthermore, the need to feel pleasures in the human/vampire experience is made clear through the blood drinkers' ability to see the world through "vampire eyes" once their transformation is complete. Louis, after having been bitten by Lestat, describes his new world as follows:

I saw as a vampire, [...] Lestat was standing again at the foot of the stairs, and I saw him as I could not possibly have seen him before. He had seemed white to me before,

starkly white, so that in the night he was almost luminous; and now I saw him filled with his own life and own blood: he was radiant, not luminous. And then I saw that not only Lestat had changed, but all things had changed. It was as if I had just been able to see colors and shapes for the first time. [...] Then, Lestat began to laugh, and I heard his laughter as I had never heard anything before. His heart I still heard like the beating of a drum, and now came this metallic laughter. It was confusing, each sound running into the next sound, like the mingling reverberations of bells, until I learned to separate the sounds, and then they overlapped, each soft but distinct, increasing but discrete [...].
(Rice, *Interview* 21)

By seeing and experiencing his senses and everything else anew, Louis feels pleasure and lavishness from a completely new perspective. In this sense, his vampiric transformation not only shifts his understanding of “life”, but it also renders his comprehension of sounds, colors, shapes, etc., i.e., his understanding of the human/vampiric experience, that much more overwhelming. The confusion which stems from existing as a vampire is intensified by the fact that the temporality of everything, even when it comes to distinguishing sounds, has shifted to vampiric “mega time”, that all-time encompassing understanding of time which also lacks a real sense of temporality. In other words, being able to experience everything simultaneously, vampires exist in that third duration of time which sits between time and eternity, Perrin’s *abîme*, also echoed in Maurice Blanchot’s theory of neutrality which strengthens this claim of the vampire being situated in that third duration of time: “Ce qui signifie que penser ou parler au neutre, c’est penser ou parler à l’écart de tout visible et de tout invisible, c’est-à-dire en termes

qui ne relèvent pas de la possibilité” (*Entretien* 444). The vampire is “impossible” as it is a fictional being.

Marius, conversing with Lestat in *The Vampire Lestat*, echoes the third duration of time when he states the following: “But you can come very close to life, if you will only lock the secret within you. You are fashioned to be close to it, as yourself once told the members of the old Paris coven. You are the imitation of a man” (Rice, *Vampire Lestat* 469), paraphrasing Blanchot’s theory. In addition, the fact that Marius tells Lestat that the younger vampire can “come very close to life” further solidifies the neutrality of the vampire. To use Akasha’s words to Lestat in *Queen of the Damned*, “I am beyond time as I have always been” (396). By existing in a temporality which encompasses past, present, and future, the vampire not only transcends the human conception of time, but it also allows for the third duration brought forth by Kermode to take form. Harking back to angelic temporality, Kermode states that “The angels required their own order of time because they were not pure being, yet were (on most interpretations) immaterial, acting in time yet not of it, any more than they participated in God’s eternity. Immutable, not subject to time, they were nevertheless capable of acts of will and intellect, by which change is produced in time” (194). Akasha’s claim that she exists beyond time suggests that vampires are indeed immutable, not being subjected to (human) time. Therefore, this third order of time, echoing Perrin’s inside/outside, present/absent view of the neutral, bolsters the importance of vampiric “mega time” when it comes to understanding vampiric neutrality from a temporal standpoint. Furthermore, Maurice Blanchot’s conceptualization of the limit-experience provides more insight into the need for a third, neutral duration as per Kermode’s claims. Blanchot writes that “L’inconnu comme neutre suppose un *rapport* étranger à toute exigence

d'identité et d'unité, voire de présence" (*Entretien* 443). Blanchot's claim that the limit-experience supposes an unknown *rappor*t to identity, unity, and even to one's sense of presence correlates with Kermode's temporality for angels – and for vampires as well – as that which is immaterial, "acting in time yet not of it". Indeed, since neutrality, according to Blanchot, does not require one to be fully present – i.e., existing in a temporality which encompasses past, present, and future – the vampire's neutral status is so engrained in their being that it even affects their sense of time, going as far as allowing them to create their own vampiric neutral realms in the midst of (human) society so that blood drinkers can manipulate their own vampiric "mega time" as they see fit. In other words, by virtue of being ontologically and temporally neutral, the vampire redefines what is between-and-betwixt and the significance of what existing in the spaces in between things allows. A redefinition and reappropriation of what is known as incest also supports vampiric neutrality.

The relationship between Lestat and Gabrielle, after Lestat transforms her into a vampire, can qualify as incestuous. This definition and delineation will allow me to explore Judith Butler's reconceptualization of the taboo of incest. Also, Butler's theory of the marking of sexed bodies will be of importance as the vampiric bite mark is what renders the vampire's body signifiable. Finally, Lestat and Gabrielle's reversed filial bond will demonstrate the gender and sexual fluidity, and neutrality, inherent to the vampire. The relationship between Lestat and Gabrielle has never been easily defined, even before Lestat's transformation into a vampire. Indeed, Lestat describes moments of closeness with Gabrielle that even Lestat's siblings do not get to experience: "So these moments had bound me to my mother. These moments had given a love for each other unnoticed and probably unequaled in the lives of those around us" (Rice, *Vampire*

Lestat 36). Therefore, it is clear from the beginning that this bond has a significant impact in Lestat's life, especially since he feels extremely alienated from his father and his brothers. Lestat thus discovers the importance of filial love through this close and cherished relationship with his mother. This union will become even deeper during and after Gabrielle's transformation by Lestat himself. The fact that Lestat is the one to bring Gabrielle into the vampiric (neutral) realm makes two important aspects stand out: their filial relationship will become utterly reversed and will thus allow for a resignification of their gender and sexuality, while also cementing their vampiric neutral countenance.¹⁴⁴

Lestat chooses to transform Gabrielle into a vampire because she has become extremely sick and is on the verge of death. Contrarily to most vampiric transformations, Gabrielle's is consensual as Lestat asks her if she wants to become a creature of the night: "Do you want to come with me now? Do you want to come with me into this now?" (Rice, *Vampire Lestat* 157). By asking Gabrielle if she wants to come "into this" with him, Lestat wants her to confirm that she is ready for the journey. Once Gabrielle gives Lestat her consent, he drinks from her: "And jetting up into the current came the thirst, not obliterating but heating every concept of her, until she was flesh and blood and mother and lover and all the things beneath the cruel pressure of my fingers and my lips, everything I had ever desired" (Rice, *Vampire Lestat* 157). This first bite which starts the vampiric transformation – Gabrielle must then drink Lestat's blood to complete the change – utterly alters Lestat's vision and feelings for his mother. Therefore, vampirism in this case

¹⁴⁴ The reversal of the filial bond between Lestat and Gabrielle occurs after the latter's transformation into a vampire. Since Lestat is already used to being undead, he takes on a fatherly role to help Gabrielle navigate this new realm and countenance. However, since Gabrielle is an independent woman, she will eventually leave Lestat to live the life she wants.

implies a complete deconstruction of filial bonds.¹⁴⁵ Indeed, in the excerpt above, Lestat talks about flesh, blood, love, and desire and all of these sensations are directed towards Gabrielle, his mother. This desire, both in terms of love and sexuality, is explored further once Gabrielle begins to grasp her vampiric countenance. While enjoying time together, Lestat and Gabrielle kiss as two lovers would: “I went to kiss her again and she didn’t stop me. We were lovers kissing. And there was the picture we made together, white-faced lovers [...]” (Rice, *Vampire Lestat* 169). Here, filial bonds are not only reversed – the son playing the role of the parent to guide Gabrielle in this new existence – but utterly erased. Lestat and Gabrielle, now both vampires, do not adhere to any gender and sexual considerations and can thus allow them to live beyond societal norms, i.e., indulge in incestuous behaviors. The vampire’s neutral realm now confers a rupturing of traditional human paradigms. As Roland Barthes claims, “[...] le paradigme, c’est le ressort du sens; là où il y a sens, il y a paradigme, et là où il y a paradigme (opposition), il y a sens. [...] D’où la pensée d’une création structurale qui défait, annule ou contrarie le binarisme implacable du paradigme par le recours à un troisième terme : le *tertium* [...] : terme amorphe, neutre [...], ou degré zéro” (*Le neutre* 31). In the case of Lestat and Gabrielle’s relationship, this *degré zéro* is such that they completely obliterate the taboo of incest and utterly erase their filial bonds.¹⁴⁶ Furthermore, the taboo of incest as it is conceptualized in Anne Rice’s novels cements Judith Butler’s retheorization of Jacques Lacan’s understanding of incest.

In *Gender Trouble*, Butler, influenced by Lacan’s theory of incest, suggests that “[...] incest between son and mother as well as that incestuous fantasy are instated as universal truths of

¹⁴⁵ For more on how Gothic literary conventions and the taboo of incest, among other taboos, are challenged in Anne Rice’s vampire narratives, see Nicole B. Tanner’s *Anne Rice’s Use of Gothic Conventions in "The Vampire Chronicles."* (2009).

¹⁴⁶ The definitions of the taboo of incest by Sigmund Freud and Georges Bataille have been explained in Chapter I.

culture” (58). Indeed, incest is a universal taboo, and it is therefore not surprising that it is repurposed in Rice’s *Vampire Chronicles*. Correspondingly, Judith Butler questions the taboo of incest by interrogating its prohibition: “Can the prohibition against incest that proscribes and sanctions hierarchical and binary gendered positions be reconceived as a productive power that inadvertently generates several cultural configurations of gender?” (*Gender Trouble* 98). The “incestuous” relationship between Lestat and Gabrielle does inadvertently generate reconfigurations of gender, especially due to Lestat’s and Gabrielle’s vampiric countenances.¹⁴⁷ The restructuring of the perspective of the incest taboo contributes to the redefinition of the relationship between Lestat and Gabrielle, destroying binary genders and sexualities in favor of neutrality. In other words, Lestat and Gabrielle, by being neutral, non-incestuous beings, deconstruct the proscription inherent to incest and allow for Butler’s “productive power of several cultural configurations of gender” to take form, resignifying the universality of the incest taboo and to give primacy to the fluidity of genders and sexualities and their productive cultural inclinations. This redefinition of incest, gender, and sexuality is also strongly correlated to the fact that Lestat and Gabrielle are now both vampires. The excerpt which describes Lestat biting Gabrielle not only illustrates the erasure of their filial relationship, but it also further demonstrates the undeniable connection between vampirism and Judith Butler’s understanding of the sexed body as being signifiable only *through* the mark of sex.¹⁴⁸

Indeed, in *Bodies That Matter*, Butler states that “[...] we can never tell about how it is that a body comes to be marked by the category of sex, for the body before the mark is constituted as signifiable only *through* the mark” (62). Butler questions the category of sex and the impact that

¹⁴⁷ The term “incestuous” is in between quotation marks to signify the erasure of the taboo of incest when it comes to the relationship between Lestat and Gabrielle.

¹⁴⁸ The term “through” is in italics in Butler’s original text.

this category can have on one's understanding of one's body, and even though the concept of a sexed body is significant in the scope of this dissertation, the body as becoming signifiable only *through the mark* gains even more importance when correlating the act of marking someone's body – with the category of sex in Butler's case – to the act of blood drinking inherent to the vampiric transformation. Gabrielle's new vampire body, which equates to the sexed body in this case, is indeed signifiable only through Lestat's mark: the vampiric transformative bite. Since the mark is the only thing that can render the body and its sexed component signifiable, it also adds a degree of comprehension to the filial reversal that occurs between Lestat and Gabrielle. Indeed, the transformation process in Anne Rice's narratives requires the vampire to drink its victim's blood until the victim is on the verge of death. Then, the weakened human being must, in turn, drink the vampire's blood in order to complete the change. In *The Vampire Lestat*, Gabrielle drinking Lestat's blood is described as follows: "Her body lengthened, tensed, her left hand rising to grasp my wrist as she swallowed her first spurt. [...] I could see it as if it were molten metal coursing through my vessels, branching through every sinew and limb. Yet it was only her sucking, her taking the blood out of me that I had taken from her" (Rice, *Vampire Lestat* 158-159). Here, the blood consumption inherent to the vampiric change renders both Lestat's and Gabrielle's bodies signifiable. In the case of Gabrielle, Lestat's bite and her drinking his blood undeniably makes her new vampiric body signifiable as the transformation ends. The mark of both Lestat's and Gabrielle's bites is what changes Gabrielle into her new, immortal vampire self. In the case of Lestat, even if he has been a vampire for a short amount of time at this point in the story, the act of biting and sharing his own blood with Gabrielle also renders Lestat's body signifiable in the Butlerian sense. As Lestat claims when Gabrielle drinks from him, he is able to *see* Gabrielle's blood course through his veins, blood which is then drunk again by Gabrielle.

This literal blood exchange also resignifies Lestat's body since he becomes aware of the blood that has been shared, thus rendering the bodily experience – for both Lestat and Gabrielle – complete *through* the vampiric mark/bite. Moreover, once Gabrielle's transformation is complete, her body regains its former youth. This new corporality enables her to be young forever, which can be seen as a subtle inclination towards neutrality. By inhabiting a never-changing body, Gabrielle proves that the vampiric countenance is deeply correlated to the neutral, an aspect which also ties into the resignification of marked bodies as theorized by Judith Butler. In addition, this new vampiric countenance of Gabrielle's utterly erases hers and Lestat's filial relationship. This claim is made undeniably clear once Gabrielle becomes a vampire. Lestat fully decimates their filial bond as he claims that, "Gabrielle, that was the only name I could call her now. 'Gabrielle', I said to her, never having called her that except in some very private thoughts, and I saw her almost smile" (Rice, *Vampire Lestat* 160). The fact that Lestat chooses to call Gabrielle only by her given name and not her filial label undeniably proves the erasure of their filial relationship, illustrating Roland Barthes' theory of the neutral, allowing this *tertium*, this neutral aspect, to emerge. By modifying their relationship, Lestat and Gabrielle redefine the incest taboo in favor of a definition which correlates with Butler's views, and more importantly, which can be defined as a *degré zéro* of their relationship. This resignification is never fully set in stone and is rather always fluid, especially since this is what the neutral demands, e.g., the dichotomies of present/absent, inside/outside coined by Perrin. This never-ending fluidity and redefinition of social norms ties into Maurice Blanchot's conceptualization of neutrality as a limit-experience, as that which breaks the subject from itself.

Blanchot's theory of the limit-experience frees the subject from any subject and/or object considerations: "L'inconnu comme neutre suppose un *rapport étranger* à toute exigence d'identité et d'unité, voire de présence" (*Entretien* 443). The vampire adheres to this concept as it is present/absent, inside/outside. Furthermore, in Anne Rice's *Chronicles*, the overarching vampiric neutral realm is called the Savage Garden. All vampires are children of the Savage Garden, making them all part of a vampiric limit-experience where vampires can *experience* "life" as their true vampiric selves, free of *toute exigence d'identité et d'unité, voire de présence*.¹⁴⁹ The Savage Garden is also important in understanding the (vampiric) bond between Lestat and Gabrielle. Indeed, Lestat tries to fully grasp and explain what the Savage Garden encompasses once Gabrielle has become a vampire: "We were the same terrible and deadly beings, the two of us, we were wandering in the Savage Garden and I tried to make it real for her with images, the meaning of the Savage Garden, but it didn't matter if she didn't understand" (Rice, *Vampire Lestat* 162). By virtue of being too fluid to circumscribe, the Savage Garden can be described as the ultimate vampiric neutral realm in Rice's novels. Echoing Kermode's understanding of Augustinian temporality, the Savage Garden becomes a neutrally temporal space in which vampires can exist in the space in between things, a space which has the possibility of form: "St. Augustine [...] came up with a formless matter, intermediate between nothing and something, out of which the world was made. This, of course, was created out of nothing. Formless, it had the potentiality of form, its privation is its capacity to receive form. He identifies this capacity with mutability; creation, for him, is a concept inseparable from that of mutability, of which time is the mode" (Kermode 69). St. Augustine's formless matter, which is an "intermediate between nothing and something", is what the Savage Garden comes to represent

¹⁴⁹ The term "life" is in between quotation marks to show that the vampire is undead and therefore cannot live as per society dictates.

in Rice's works. Lestat's claim that he has trouble explaining what the Savage Garden is to Gabrielle stems from this formless matter which has the "possibility of form" intertwined with the connection between creation and mutability, of which "time is the mode". In other words, vampiric neutral realms, such as the Theater of the Vampires and the Savage Garden, allow for this intermediate between nothing and something, this special kind of middle if one harks back to Kermode's tick-tock metaphor, to take shape. However, although the Savage Garden represents the temporal neutral nature of the vampire in Rice's works, it gains even more significance by the end of *The Vampire Lestat* and throughout *Queen of the Damned*. Indeed, as the story unfolds, one comes to understand that the Savage Garden is what connects all vampires to one another. More importantly, this Garden, this thread, this connection between all blood drinkers is actually the evil spirit Amel, which is responsible for creating the first vampires, Enkil and Akasha. In Rice's universe, the character of Amel has not only created vampires, but is also, as I shall explain, what renders vampires neutral.¹⁵⁰

As I have mentioned, the evil spirit Amel invades the bodies of Enkil and Akasha, King and Queen of Egypt, after they have been brutally murdered by a group of nobles. Amel enters Akasha's bloodstream as she is dying, merging Amel's countenance with Akasha's in a mist of blood. Through this act, Amel creates the first vampire. As Akasha gives Enkil back the blood he has lost, she also transforms him into a blood drinker. Amel then permeates both Akasha's and Enkil's bodies. By dividing itself into tiny pieces which are then embodied by all vampires, Amel becomes the web, the thread which links all blood drinkers together, but, more importantly, Amel is what ultimately renders vampires neutral. Amel's desire for flesh and blood

¹⁵⁰ The pronoun "it" will be used to refer to Amel, unless it is not grammatically suitable, in order to emphasize its neutral countenance.

is of major significance in the scope of this dissertation as it will not only demonstrate that neutrality is inherent to vampirism, but it will also reinforce Judith Butler's conceptualizations of corporeality, gender performativity, and identity, as well as what vampiric "mega time" encompasses.

Once Enkil and Akasha have become vampires, they both experience cravings that are not only new to them, but they also do not understand their yearning for blood and corporeality. What they ultimately crave is explained towards the end of *The Vampire Lestat*: "They are maddened that they do not have bodies, that they cannot feel as we [human beings] feel. [...] They can work the body parts but not truly inhabit them, and so they are obsessed with the flesh that they cannot invade" (Rice, *Vampire Lestat* 438-439). The neutrality inherent to the vampire is once again illustrated here, especially due to the corporeal aspect of Enkil and Akasha. Indeed, since they can only work the body parts but are not able to *inhabit* them, their vampiric bodies therefore become their neutral prison.¹⁵¹ It thus becomes undeniably clear that the sexualized, and even ritualized, aspects of vampiric blood drinking are closely intertwined with Enkil's and Akasha's – in other words, every vampire's – obsession with flesh. This desire for flesh and blood is reflected in Judith Butler's theory of the haunting of bodily boundaries. In the introduction to *Bodies That Matter*, Butler states that

[...] it is not enough to claim that human subjects are constructed, for the construction of the human is a differential operation that produces the more and the less 'human', the inhuman, the humanly unthinkable. These excluded sites come to bond the 'human' as its

¹⁵¹ The use of the term "prison" is deliberate because Enkil and Akasha, at this point in the storyline, are always immobile. They both look like statues.

constitutive outside, and to haunt those boundaries as the persistent possibility of their disruption and rearticulation. (xvii)

The madness that Enkil and Akasha feel because they do not possess a body that they can truly inhabit echoes Butler's theory of the haunting of boundaries. Indeed, the vampiric shells inside which Enkil and Akasha "live" therefore become "excluded sites" which allow for a possible "disruption and rearticulation" of corporeal boundaries. In other words, Enkil and Akasha both disrupt their bodily countenance by yearning for real corporeality and not simply accepting their shell-like state. This desire to be corporeal is, as we learn later on in the story, actually Amel's longing and jealousy towards human beings and their ability to feel and utterly inhabit their human bodies. Amel's desire for corporeality is what pushes it to invade Akasha's bloodstream, thus transforming her into a vampire. More significantly, Amel taking over Akasha's body – and ultimately Enkil's after Akasha turns him into a vampire – also allows for the corporeal neutrality of the vampire to fully take shape. Indeed, by inhabiting both Enkil and Akasha – and eventually, all vampires – Amel completely changes the underpinnings of vampiric corporeality: "But now he was in the blood, and the blood was not merely the demon, or the blood of the King and Queen, but a combination of the human and the demon which was an altogether different thing" (Rice, *Vampire Lestat* 440). This combination of demon – Amel – and human – Enkil and Akasha – calls for a complete redefinition of (vampiric) corporeality as this "altogether different thing". In other words, Amel's invasion of these two human bodies ultimately creates an utterly neutral countenance, a completely *neutral* vampiric body. Once again, Judith Butler's conceptualization of the "haunting of boundaries" comes into play here as Amel utterly disrupts and, most significantly, rearticulates what being corporeal entails in terms of vampirism. Amel therefore creates an entirely new body which is fully neutral. This corporeal creation of Amel's

is also firmly anchored in its own desires and needs. Indeed, Amel's ultimate yearning for corporeality stems from its desire to feel: "And the demon had what it wanted: a body to live in, a way to be in the world at last, a way to *feel*" (Rice, *Vampire Lestat* 441). Amel's desire here is to be a neutral being firmly anchored in the human world through a bodily vessel. In other words, Amel is the representation of the in-between quality of the vampire, an in-between which allows the blood drinker to experience its own sense of temporality, i.e., vampiric "mega time" which is "all-time encompassing" while lacking a real sense of linearity due to the vampire's between-and-between position. The vampire, being both time-stopped and existing forever, renders Butler's haunting of boundaries quite literal in nature as the vampire, existing neutrally in its own "mega time", renders the limits of the human world mere spaces that the vampire can somewhat inhabit (the vampire can choose to follow human lives) while not being able to utterly be part of human society due to its inherent neutrality. Claude Stéphane Perrin's concept of the neutral as being present/absent and inside/outside applies since Amel's need to feel and be in the (human) world at last keeps Amel in a neutral state. As it is not a *real* human being and rather a vampiric spirit, Amel has no other choice but to "live" neutrally – being present/absent and inside/outside – in the midst of (human) society. Echoing St. Thomas' Augustinian rationale for angels, Amel's countenance and yearning to be part of the world of human beings renders vampiric temporality – and the vampires themselves – neutral by virtue of existing inside this "third duration":

His [St. Thomas'] angels, though immutable as to substance, are capable of change by acts of will and intellect. So they are separated from the corporeal creation, which is characterized by a distinction between matter and form, and also from God. They are therefore neither eternal nor of time. So out of this argument, which is ultimately an

argument about origins, there develops a third duration, between that of time and eternity. (Kermode 70)

Amel, being a spirit, is immutable as to its substance, always remaining a spirit which, so as to gain power and corporeality, must stretch itself into all vampires. More significantly, Amel, being incorporeal, is “characterized by a distinction between matter and form, and also from God”. Amel’s matter – being a spirit which yearns for blood, flesh, and for its own body – is a discrepancy in terms of the form that Amel takes. By stretching itself into all vampires and also doing so through the act of drinking blood, Amel’s (corporeal) form is thus the vampiric bodies which the spirit inhabits.¹⁵² St. Thomas’ rationale for angels also claims that they are “neither eternal nor of time” further bolsters the neutrality inherent to the vampire and to Amel, by the same token. The “third duration” conceptualized by St. Thomas so as to make sense of angelic (and vampiric) temporality, a sense of time between that of “time and eternity”, thus provides a space that is between-and-betwixt where vampiric creatures can exist. Amel, being the original vampiric creature in the form of a spirit, i.e., being “characterized by the distinction between matter and form”, has no choice but to exist in this third duration, or in vampiric “mega time” as I have come to call the neutral “all-time encompassing”/non-linear temporal space which vampires have made theirs. In Amel’s case, its experience of vampiric “mega time” is also bolstered by its neutral corporeality, especially since Amel’s yearns for a body in order to be able to feel as human beings do. Amel’s desire to be corporeal further echoes Judith Butler’s concept of the performativity inherent to gender.

¹⁵² The discrepancy between matter, form, and God brought forward by St. Thomas is also interesting to consider from the perspective of Amel being an evil, malignant spirit. Amel cannot indeed be likened to God as Amel’s wickedness counteracts God’s love and compassion.

Butler's concept of gender performativity is articulated through one's body and in that instance, said body becomes a tangible epistemology. In other words, "[...] acts, gestures, and desire produce the effect of an internal core or substance, but produce this *on the surface* of the body, through the play of signifying absences that suggest, but never reveal, the organizing principle of identity as a cause" (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 185). Amel therefore becomes a representation of the "internal core or substance" of Butlerian gender performativity as Amel itself is *the* core that connects all vampires to one another. Indeed, as vampires drink blood and/or transform victims into blood drinkers, Amel splits its neutral substance and inhabits each vampiric body and takes part in each episode of blood consumption. Quite literally, Amel is the core, the being responsible for the creation of the vampires in Anne Rice's *Chronicles*, the core that connects all vampires, and also the core which makes all vampires neutral beings. Since Amel spreads his vampiric web through all blood drinkers and because Amel is a neutral being, its inherent neutrality is also shared by all vampires. What renders Amel's nucleus of neutrality representative of Butler's theory of gender performativity is also due to the fact that Amel's effects as an internal core or substance, to use Butler's terms, are indeed produced *on the surface* of the (vampiric) bodies which Amel inhabits. Amel, as the neutral core of vampires, is what brings blood drinkers to become neutral beings on the fringes of "life", to be creatures which are present/absent and inside/outside the human realm. Amel not only changes vampires corporeally but its blood also has an impact on vampiric neutrality: "And it [Amel's effect on Enkil's and Akasha's blood] added to their faculties its purely spiritual powers, so that the King and Queen could hear the thoughts of mortals, and sense things and understand things that mortals could not" (Rice, *Vampire Lestat* 440). Simply put, the neutrality inherent to vampires allows them to inhabit vampiric "mega time" (their neutral vampiric temporality) and/or follow human lives in

their world, therefore always being present/absent, inside/outside. This neutral countenance is also what makes vampires able to “understand things that mortals could not”, especially if one harks back to St. Thomas’ “third duration” of time. The between-and-between position occupied by vampires and the “mega temporality” they inhabit allow blood drinkers to understand things that mortals cannot due to the fact that vampires experience life and its passing without the urgency that mortal life brings. However, Amel, yearning to feel as human beings do but existing in an between-and-between position governed by vampiric “mega time”, has found a way to make its experience of life sensuous and sensual, especially through the act of consuming blood. Indeed, simply by the act of consuming blood, the vampire – in thrall to its core by Amel’s craving for blood and to feel as a human being does – becomes a manifestation of the Butlerian concept of gender performativity, as well as a demonstration of the inherent fluidity of gender and sexuality. Blood consumption and the phallic vampire fangs are the elements through which the vampire becomes a vessel of the performativity and fluidity of gender and sexuality because the act of drinking blood is often sensual and even ritualized in Anne Rice’s works. The use of vampire fangs to consume blood can be equated to a neutral phallus as all vampires, regardless of their gender and sexual identities, use their fangs to penetrate flesh. Furthermore, the act of drinking blood – and sharing blood when it comes to the vampiric transformation – is highly reminiscent of sexual intercourse because of the extreme pleasure it provides the vampire. More significantly, this indulgence is actually caused by Amel’s yearning for blood and the sensations it elicits for the spirit: “[...] that to keep their [Enkil and Akasha] corpses animate, the blood must be fed. [...] Give it [Amel] more blood to enter, give it more blood to push through the limbs of the body in which it enjoyed such glorious sensations, of blood it could not get enough. And oh, the grandest of all sensations was the drinking in which it renewed itself, fed itself,

enlarged itself” (Rice, *Vampire Lestat* 441). Here, not only is the sensation of blood drinking described, but Amel’s need to feed and enlarge itself is clearly shown. This proves that Amel’s neutrality ought to be passed on to each vampire since its ultimate goal is to feel (human) emotions through corporeality, whatever the corporeal vessel may be. Since the spirit is obsessed with blood, it created the original blood drinkers, Enkil and Akasha, but the obsession is so grand that Amel always wants more blood, always wants to feel more and more, and it must therefore spread its neutral web in as many vampires as possible. The ever-stretching web of Amel’s also correlates with both Maurice Blanchot’s theory of the limit-experience and Claude Stéphane Perrin’s conceptualization of neutrality.

Marius, the character in Rice’s *Chronicles* who possesses the most knowledge about vampiric history and evolution, tells Lestat about his understanding of the impact of Amel on all blood drinkers. This passage not only demonstrates the neutrality inherent to the spirit, but it also reinforces the connection between vampiric neutrality, temporality, and corporeality. Indeed, Marius maintains:

It made sense that something was in my blood impending me to drink more blood. It made sense that it heightened all sensations, that it kept my body – a mere imitation now of a human body – functioning when it should have come to a stop. And it made sense that this thing had no mind of its own but was nevertheless a power, an organization of force with a desire to live all on its own. And then it made even more sense that we could all be connected to the Mother and the Father because this thing was spiritual, and had no bodily limits except the limits of the individual bodies in which it had gained control. It was the vine, this thing, and we were the flowers, scattered over great distances, but

connected by the twining tendrils that could reach all over the world. (Rice, *Vampire Lestat* 445)

Amel is the ultimate vampiric neutral being which infuses all vampires. Blanchot's concept of the limit-experience is illustrated by Amel's need for corporeality, making the correlation between bodies and the neutral even more significant. Indeed, the limit-experience is what breaks the subject from itself. Amel's corporeality, or lack thereof, makes it a potent illustration of the subject breaking from itself. In other words, since Amel has "no bodily limits", it reinforces the spirit's representation of the limit-experience because Amel has no real subjectivity and corporeality but that of the vampiric bodies which the spirit inhabits. From a more literal point of view, Amel, being a spirit, has no other choice but to be neutral. Its connection to all vampires stems from the fact that Amel yearns for a body. In turn, by transferring itself into vampire bodies, Amel's intrinsic neutrality attaches to the core of the vampires, rendering them all neutral beings. Moreover, Amel's spirit countenance further proves its neutrality. As Claude Stéphane Perrin states in his text *Le neutre et la pensée*, "[...] [le neutre] dépasse chaque catégorie et précède de multiples significations" (31). Since it qualifies as a spirit, Amel does indeed go beyond categories and precedes multiple significations. In other words, Amel is utterly neutral because it is the ultimate vessel of vampirism. It is the original, pre-ontological being – due to the fact that Amel is a spirit – that has created all vampires. Furthermore, Amel and the vampires it creates, being both time-stopped and existing forever, are in an in-between temporal position (vampiric "mega time") and that space in between things which they occupy "dépasse chaque catégorie et précède de multiples significations" (Perrin, *Neutre et pensée* 31). Vampiric "mega time", encompassing all times while lacking a real sense

of temporality, goes beyond categories and precedes several significations as that which is (neutrally) vampiric essentially co-exists with (human) time. To that end, Aquinas' "unusual" conception of temporality proves significant. The vampire, being in an in-between position (participating in the (humanly) temporal when it chooses to do so, while participating in the eternal by being an immortal creature), is able to "co-exist with time" (Kermode 72) while also moving beyond and preceding multiple meanings to use Perrin's terms, which is also what renders vampires neutral. It therefore cannot be denied that vampirism, in and of itself, implies a deep connection to the realm of the neutral. This connection is made even clearer when Lestat, sharing his blood with Akasha and drinking hers as well, glimpses the shimmering circuit that is Amel:

[...] and the blood was penetrating every pulsing particle of me with the threads of its burning web. [...] I saw it, the shimmering circuit, and more divinely I felt it because nothing else existed but our mouths locked to each other's throats and the relentless pounding path of the blood. There were no dreams, there were no visions, there was just this, *this* – gorgeous and deafening and heated – and nothing mattered, absolutely nothing, except that this never stop. The world of all things that had weight and filled space and interrupted the flow of light was gone. (Rice, *Vampire Lestat* 486)

The threads of the "burning web" described by Lestat are actually the literal expansion of Amel which is produced when vampires consume blood and/or when a new vampire is made. Amel will then enlarge itself in order to feel as a corporeal being would, and to feed on and enjoy the sensations that blood provides. Indeed, when Lestat claims that "the world of all things is gone", it becomes clear that vampirism implies a neutral realm, a world of all things gone. Echoing Claude Stéphane Perrin's vision of the neutral as an *abîme*, vampires do exist in a world of their

own, while being able to follow human lives if they want to and therefore can dim the “filled space” of humankind to their liking. When Lestat states that “the world of all things that had weight and filled space and interrupted the flow of light was gone”, vampiric temporality (“all-time encompassing”/lacking linearity) comes into play as that which disrupts the human experience and the human understanding of time towards a neutral way of perceiving timeless life. Harking back to the Aristotelian worldview that is without beginning or end, the vampiric sense of time further underscores not only the fact that vampires experience time differently than human beings, but it also bolsters their neutral, in-between status. The fact that this depiction of vampiric neutrality occurs during a crucial blood drinking scene between Lestat and Akasha also further proves the potency of the figure of the vampire as a representation of the concept of neutrality. More significantly, the neutral status of the vampire allows it to embody multiple facets of (human) gender identity since any and all gender and/or sexual spectra can be performed through the fictional vessel of the vampire. To that end, Judith Butler states that the question of identity is no longer “[...] a preestablished position or uniform entity; rather, as part of a dynamic map of power in which identities are constituted and/or erased, deployed and/or paralyzed” (Butler, *Bodies That Matter* 79). Amel and its ever-expanding neutral web acts as a dynamic map of power as it is what renders vampires able to constitute/deploy their truest identity when with other blood drinkers and/or when they experience time as vampiric “mega time”, and what makes vampires erase/paralyze their identity when surrounded by mortal beings and/or when vampires choose to follow human lives and thus, adhere to the human conceptualization of time for a short while. The impact of Amel and its expanding neutral realm on vampire bodies correlates vampirism with Claude Stéphane Perrin’s conceptualization of neutrality, i.e., the present/absent and inside/outside dichotomies.

When Akasha explains to Lestat what happened to her when Amel entered her bloodstream, she tells him the following:

And all about me this thing – visible yet invisible – whirled as if it were wind, lifting me, casting me down, turning me about. The blood gushed from my wounds. And it ran into the weave of this veil, just as it might into the mesh of any fabric. And that which had been transparent was now drenched in blood. And a monstrous thing I saw, shapeless, and enormous with my blood broadcast through it. And yet this thing had another property to it, a center, it seemed, a tiny burning center which was in me. Through my limbs it ran, thumping and beating. [...] And it seemed the great invisible part of this thing – the blood mist that surrounded me and enveloped me – was controlled by this tiny center [...]. (Rice, *Queen* 401-402)

The fact that Akasha describes Amel as a thing which is visible yet invisible is echoed by Perrin's definition of the neutral as that which is present/absent and inside/outside. Being visible yet invisible, Amel is a representation of Perrin's dichotomies inherent to the neutral. Perrin also states that the neutral is that which is an "abîme ni saisissable, ni désaisissable" (*Le neutre et la pensée* 11). Since Amel is the spirit which expands into all vampires, the shapeless being which is needed to animate vampiric bodies, it is undeniably clear that Amel is this neither grasped nor ungrasped abyss. "The great invisible part" of Amel is a representation of Perrin's abyss since it cannot be grasped – it is an invisible part – nor can it be ungrasped – Amel's countenance and lust for blood and corporeality are what makes vampires what they are. The visible/invisible dichotomy also echoes St. Augustine's understanding of the world as a formless matter: "St. Augustine [...] came up with a formless matter, intermediate between nothing and something,

out of which the world was made. This, of course, was created out of nothing. Formless, it had the potentiality of form, its privation is its capacity to receive form” (Kermode 69). Being a spirit, Amel is made of formless matter and, being the one that animates all vampires and their thirst for blood, Amel becomes “an intermediate between nothing and something”. The potentiality of form also renders Amel’s ever-stretching web all the more significant since the spirit’s yearning for human flesh, its desire to feel, is made potent through Amel being part of all vampires. In essence, Amel, being a mutable spirit, not only has the “potentiality of form” but also can receive form. This capacity is underscored by the fact that all vampires, being connected to Amel, alter said form(s) through their own worldviews and identities. Also, Amel’s core, its “tiny burning center”, is what connects Amel to all vampires which, in turn, connects all vampires to one another. From that particular standpoint, Amel is, once again, the neutral abyss coined by Perrin. Amel’s core is the most potent representation of neutrality, in and of itself, in Anne Rice’s *Chronicles*. Therefore, it is undoubtedly clear that Amel – both as a spirit and as the creator of vampires – is proof of the neutrality inherent to vampirism. Amel’s core plays a significant part in defining its neutrality, but so does Amel’s more vaporous countenance: its blood cloud.

Mekare, Maharet’s twin sister who is also a vampire at that point in the story, explains to Lestat and other vampires what Amel’s blood cloud ultimately is: “And so the fusion of blood and timeless tissue was a million times magnified and accelerated; and the blood flowed through all his body [Enkil’s body], both material and nonmaterial, and this was the blood cloud that you saw” (Rice, *Queen* 403). Overtly, the terms “timeless” and “both material and nonmaterial” are literal definitions of the vampiric neutral realm. The timeless aspect ties into vampiric “mega

time” (all-time encompassing temporality which lacks a classic sense of linearity), that which also correlates with neutrality. Harking back to Aquinas’ view of duration as something that participates “in both the temporal and the eternal” and as that which “co-exists with time” (Kermode 72), vampiric/Amel’s timelessness, which takes form as being both material and nonmaterial, connects vampiric ontology and sense of time to the between-and-between position of vampires, as well as to the space in between things which blood drinkers occupy. Also, the fact that Amel’s blood cloud is both material and nonmaterial once again connects to Perrin’s dichotomies of present/absent and inside/outside. Therefore, it is clear that the blood cloud – and Amel itself – are neutral in nature. Amel’s expansion into every new blood drinker can be correlated to its need to feel corporeal, to feel as human beings feel. The connection between corporeality and Amel’s ever-expanding web is made clear when Maharet explains to Lestat and other vampires what being a spirit ultimately entails:

There was also abundant evidence that what we called bad spirits envied us that we were fleshly and also spiritual – that we had the pleasures and powers of the physical while possessing spiritual minds. Very likely, this mixture of flesh and spirit in human beings makes all spirits curious; it is the source of our attraction for them; but it rankles the bad spirits; the bad spirits would know sensuous pleasure, it seems; yet they cannot. (Rice, *Queen* 308)

Amel’s envy of the sensuous pleasure provided by human corporeality reinforces its jealousy of the human state; it therefore becomes imperative for it to have a body, or in its case, several bodies, to inhabit. Furthermore, Maharet goes on to say that

Whatever their [spirits] material makeup is, they have no apparent biological needs, these entities. They do not age; they do not change. And the key to understanding their childish and whimsical behavior lies in this. They have no *need* to do anything; they drift about unaware of time, for there is no physical reason to care about it, and they do whatever strikes the fancy. (Rice, *Queen* 308)

All the vampires in Anne Rice's universe are inhabited by Amel and its shimmering circuit. It thus becomes clear that since Amel – and other “bad spirits” – yearns for the mixture of flesh and spirit but cannot utterly attain it, Amel therefore partially attains vampiric corporeality, but also has to force its own spirit countenance unto the vampires which Amel inhabits. Vampiric neutrality stems from Amel's incorporeality since Amel becomes a neutral being in multiple (vampiric) bodily vessels. In addition, the fact that Amel and other spirits “drift about unaware of time” further strengthens the claim that (vampiric) neutrality and “mega time” go hand in hand. Maurice Blanchot's concept of the limit-experience – when the subject breaks from itself – is represented through Amel's countenance and vampiric neutral temporality. Spirits, having no need to do anything, are quite literally “subjects” broken from themselves. They simply drift about unaware of time because of the between-and-between position they occupy. Aquinas' conceptualization of time (*aevum*) proves interesting once again here.¹⁵³ The vampiric unawareness of time, perpetuated by Amel's spiritual countenance, is underscored by the “third duration”, i.e., “mega time”, which vampires inhabit. By participating in both the temporal and the eternal without foregoing the existence of time but rather co-existing with it, blood drinkers can drift about time in whichever way they want. The vampiric “mega timeline” that they occupy also bolsters Aquinas' “unusual variety of duration” as “mega time”, encompassing past, present,

¹⁵³ See Kermode page 72 for the complete quotation.

and future while not maintaining a classic sense of the chronological, becomes the space in between things which allows vampires – and Amel – to fully experience their neutrality. Maharet’s further explanations of what spirits are also reinforce the neutrality inherent to them, especially when it comes to Amel and its (vampiric) expansion.

Maharet states that “[t]he spirits read our minds; and they are enormous and powerful. Their true size is difficult for us to imagine; and they can move with the swiftness of thought” (Rice, *Queen* 339). Overtly, the unimaginable size of spirits has a key part to play in understanding the vastness of the vampiric neutral realm that has been created by Amel. More significantly, Maurice Blanchot’s conceptualization of the ever-expanding limits of the neutral applies to Amel’s ever-expanding vampiric web. Blanchot stipulates that the ambiguous in-between inherent to neutrality questions and therefore pushes the limits of the neutral further (*Entretien*, 440, 450).¹⁵⁴ Here, Amel indeed pushes and questions the limits of the neutral further and further as it forever expands into all vampires. Amel’s questioning and pushing of the limits of the neutral also is what pushes the spirit to yearn for corporeality. In that sense, Judith Butler’s theories pertaining to gender performativity and corporeality provide significant insights. As the character of Maharet states when talking about Amel, “I thought as many a man or woman has thought before and since that maybe it was a curse to have the concept of immortality without the body to go with it” (Rice, *Queen* 341). Quite simply, Amel’s overwhelming desire to have a body, to *feel* corporeal, further strengthens Butler’s concept of gender performativity as being connected to one’s corporeality. More significantly, once Amel is able to expand from vampire to vampire and possess bodily vessels, the following occurs: “Amel has now what he has always

¹⁵⁴ Please refer to the introduction for more information about this theory.

wanted; *Amel has the flesh. But Amel is no more*” (Rice, *Queen* 347).¹⁵⁵ Here, Amel is made corporeal but is cemented in the vampiric neutral realm even more than before. This is the reason why new vampires need to be made in order for Amel to stretch himself and the vampiric neutral realm. However, Amel is not able to fully live a corporeal life because it does not have the human qualities inherent to possessing a (human) body. This inability to be fully corporeal is why vampires are always stuck in an in-between, i.e., present/absent, inside/outside (human) society. This lack of corporeality is also underscored by the fact that vampires experience time through vampiric “mega time”. Being both time-stopped and existing forever, the vampire must “live” in a space that is between-and-between which, ultimately, allows blood drinkers to co-exist with time, echoing Aquinas’ vision of temporality, and thus being able to experience both “deathlessness and being-for-ever” as per the Platonic dictate brought forth by Frank Kermode. This Platonic dichotomy further underpins the reason why Amel, and the vampires it inhabits, cannot be fully corporeal as both deathlessness and being-for-ever are part of vampiric (neutral) corporeality. More significantly, Amel’s neutrality is the key factor to understand how vampiric corporeality functions.

Indeed, Maharet stipulates the following: “Think on the nature of this great invisible thing which animates each one of us, and every blood drinker who has ever walked. [...] Our bodies are no more than shells for this energy. We are – as Marius so long ago described it – blossoms on a single vine” (Rice, *Queen* 422). In other words, all vampires are connected and neutral because of Amel’s inherent neutrality. All vampires are therefore part of the same visible/invisible realm, and their vampiric bodies act as vessels to ensure the existence of the vampiric neutral realm and of the vampiric “mega time” which governs the neutral realm created by Amel. Once vampires

¹⁵⁵ Italics in the original text.

become aware and understand what their neutral countenance entails, they can grasp how vampiric “mega time” shapes their existence. Akasha tells Lestat as much: “History does not matter. [...] Art does not matter; these things imply continuities which in fact do not exist. They cater to our need for pattern, our hunger for meaning. But they cheat us in the end. We must make the meaning” (Rice, *Queen* 368). The fact that Akasha claims that “history does not matter” and that these “things imply continuities that do not exist” further underscores the neutrality of vampires as creatures, as well as the importance which vampiric “mega time” holds when it comes to understanding the temporality inside which vampires “live”. By stating that continuities do not exist for them and that they must rather create their own meaning, vampires’ “all-time encompassing” temporal space does forgo all classic comprehensions of history as chronological since blood drinkers exist in a timeframe which participates in both the temporal and the eternal. Vampiric “mega time”, equated to Perrin’s *abîme*, therefore further bolsters the vampire’s inherent neutral status. Vampires must then find ways to comprehend how to inhabit their vampiric neutral countenance, especially by understanding the significance of their neutral corporeality. Indeed, the vampiric body is not only what renders vampires inherently neutral, due to Amel’s neutral web expanding through vampiric bodily vessels, but also what enables the figure of the vampire to be one of the most potent literary embodiments of the performativity and corporeality inherent to the multiple spectra of gender and sexuality. The next chapter of this dissertation which explores the novel *The Passage* by Justin Cronin, will provide significant insight into the importance of vampiric corporeality and its connection to the neutral.

Chapter IV

The Girl from Nowhere and the Zero: Neutrality, Drive, Desire, and the Symbolic in Justin Cronin's *The Passage*

As seen in the previous chapter, Anne Rice's *The Vampire Chronicles* allowed for a resignification of the narrative figure of the vampire, especially in terms of its neutral status. This dismantling also confers neutrality to the vampire since its undead status is what makes the blood drinker neutral, i.e., present/absent and inside/outside. This openness and resignification of vampiric characters paved the way for even more contemporary vampire-centric narratives, even going as far as ushering the blood drinker into dystopian universes. *The Passage*, the first volume in the trilogy of the same name by American author Justin Cronin, immerses the reader in a universe where vampires are created scientifically; human beings are injected with a virus that transforms them into blood drinkers, and which sparks a worldwide pandemic.¹⁵⁶ This

¹⁵⁶ Justin Cronin (1962-present) is an American author who has published *The Passage* trilogy (2010-2016): *The Passage* (2010), *The Twelve* (2012), and *The City of Mirrors* (2016). Although the first installment of *The Passage* is a solid figuration of the concept of neutrality, the Christian allegory featured in the other two other novels is predominant and does not uphold neutrality the way *The Passage* does. Although they are interesting on their own, *The Twelve* and *The City of Mirrors* are not well suited for the purpose of this dissertation. *The Passage* was also adapted as a television series in 2019 (only 10 episodes were aired before the show was cancelled). The television series changed some of the characters' main features, most notably making the character of Babcock a woman named Shauna Babcock and making Amy an African-American girl. The casting of Amy as African-American is interesting, if only to include more diversity in vampire narratives, which are quite often populated by white characters. It is worthy to note that some vampire novels feature Black vampires, most notably *The Gilda Stories* (1991) by Jewelle Gomez and *Fledgling* (2005) by Octavia E. Butler. *The Gilda Stories* follows the story of an unnamed runaway African-American lesbian slave in Louisiana in 1850. She encounters Gilda, a vampire who runs a brothel. The unnamed woman eventually becomes a vampire herself and adopts Gilda's name. Gomez's novel then follows Gilda's life through a series of vignettes. Gomez explains the thought process behind the creation of her "lesbian-feminist" (Gomez, "Foreword." xii) vampire narrative in the foreword of the 25th anniversary edition of *The Gilda Stories*, as well as in Jewelle Gomez's "Speculative Fiction and Black Lesbians." (1993). Octavia E. Butler (1947-2006), mostly known for her subversive Black postapocalyptic novels, published her last novel, *Fledgling*, in 2005. The novel follows Shori, a Black amnesiac 53-year-old vampire who has the body of a preadolescent girl. Shori identifies as bisexual, challenging both heteronormativity and hegemonic understandings of sexuality in the context of prepubescent corporeality (these concepts have been analyzed in this dissertation through Lindqvist's novel *Let the Right One in*). For more on race, agency, posthumanism, gender, and/or sexuality in Butler's *Fledgling*, see Elizabeth Lundberg's "'Let Me Bite You Again': Vampiric Agency in Octavia Butler's *Fledgling*." (2015), Chuck Robinson's "Minority and Becoming-Minor in Octavia Butler's *Fledgling*." (2015), Ali Brox's "'Every Age Has the Vampire It Needs': Octavia Butler's Vampiric Vision in *Fledgling*." (2008), Pramod K. Nayar's "A New Biological Citizenship: Posthumanism in Octavia E. Butler's *Fledgling*." (2012), Kelly McDevitt's "Childhood Sexuality as Posthuman Subjectivity in Octavia E. Butler's *Fledgling*." (2020), Gregory Hampton's "Lost Memories: Memory as a Process of Identity in the Fiction of Octavia Butler." (2012), and Esther L. Jones' "Untangling Pathology: Sex, Social Responsibility, and the Black Female Youth in Octavia Butler's *Fledgling*." (2015).

scientific study is called Project Noah.¹⁵⁷ The remaining people who have not been infected by the virus or bitten by a viral must help one another in order to survive.¹⁵⁸ The people chosen to become the original vampires – through viral infection – were all selected because they were criminals who would not be missed.¹⁵⁹ There are twelve original virals overall and they are therefore called the Twelve. All the other vampires are made because another vampire has bitten them; these virals are called the Many.¹⁶⁰ The Twelve and the Many are controlled by the first scientifically made vampire named Babcock – his full (human) name is Giles J. Babcock. He is also referred to as the Zero because he commands all the other virals.¹⁶¹ Babcock’s domination over all virals slowly occurs through a recurring dream that all vampires and all humans on the verge of transformation share and act in.¹⁶² This dream is actually a real-life event. It recounts the day on which Babcock violently murdered his abusive mother.¹⁶³ In order for the vampiric transformation to be complete once a human being has been bitten, said human being has to kill Babcock’s mother in the shared dream. Once the “murder” has been committed, the human being

¹⁵⁷ The project is named as such in reference to the Christian biblical story of Noah and his ark. This will be relevant when tackling Amy’s neutrality and her part in bringing the virals, those who have been infected by the virus, to their passage.

¹⁵⁸ The vampires in Cronin’s universe are called “virals” Other terms used to define them throughout the novel are “jumps”, “flyers”, “smokes”, and “drinks”. They are never called “vampires” because it would make the blood drinkers seem unreal. Here, Cronin plays on the idea that vampires are fictional characters and would not be taken at face value in the particular dystopian setting he has created.

¹⁵⁹ Their crimes range from murder and armed robbery to sexual assault.

¹⁶⁰ The humans who are transformed into vampires because they get bitten by a viral do not have to drink the vampire’s blood for the transformation to occur as in most vampire-centric narratives. The simple act of being bitten infects the human being, who, in turn, develops symptoms and then becomes a vampire. Symptoms include brain fog, intense recurring dreams – the dream is significant and will be analyzed later in the current chapter – eye color change, and an uncontrollable thirst for blood.

¹⁶¹ Babcock is not the first subject to be infected with the virus. The first subject is Tim Fanning, AKA Subject Zero. Fanning was a professor and one of the scientists on the original expedition to research the virus in Bolivia and the first to turn into a viral. Fanning was also responsible for the first viral outbreak in a military compound. Following the outbreak, Fanning is never seen but his presence is felt. He eventually comes back in the last volume of the trilogy, *The City of Mirrors* (2016). It is important to note that Fanning is not part of the Twelve. Babcock is the first subject to be part of the Twelve. Even if he is named as Subject 1 in military files, Babcock calls himself the Zero (Cronin 568). This appellation is of great significance when analyzing Babcock’s vampiric neutrality and will be dealt with at length later in the current chapter.

¹⁶² For more on the virals in *The Passage* as “Zampires” (zombie-vampires), see Victoria Nelson’s “Postapocalyptic Gothick.” (2012).

¹⁶³ The dream will be of the utmost importance when analyzing the neutrality of vampires in the novel in correlation with the concepts of drive, desire, and of the symbolic later in the current chapter.

becomes a viral of the Many, a vampire under Babcock's rule.¹⁶⁴ Once Babcock has gained control over the virals, the blood drinkers function in a hivemind fashion. To that end, Freud's understanding of the group mind, influenced by Gustave Le Bon's theory, will be of the utmost importance.¹⁶⁵

Simultaneously, Amy Harper Belafonte also influences the virals of the Twelve and of the Many. Amy is described as follows in the very first lines of *The Passage*: "Before she became the Girl from Nowhere – the One Who Walked In, the First and Last and Only, who lived a thousand years – she was just a little girl in Iowa, named Amy. Amy Harper Bellafonte" (Cronin, *The Passage* 3). Amy has also been infected with the virus – she is named "Subject 13" of the Twelve – but with a different strain. Amy is chosen as a test subject to figure out if the viral symptoms and characteristics – strength, speed, etc. – could be passed down without turning the human being into a viral. Amy is selected as the vessel of this new virus strain because she is six years old at the time she is brought to a military compound and scientists believe that due to her youthfulness, the virus may affect her differently.¹⁶⁶ It is indeed the case as Amy does not develop a thirst for blood and can walk in the daylight contrary to the other virals who can only act in darkness. More significantly, Amy can communicate telepathically and can even feel the virals of the Twelve and the Many within herself. As such, she can call the virals to her. As the

¹⁶⁴ The Many's thirst for blood is actually Babcock's own craving for it. Babcock's power and control over the virals is so intense that every time a vampire feeds on blood, it not only consumes blood, but it also feeds Babcock himself. The concept of the hivemind where the virals of the Many operate under Babcock's rule will be of the utmost importance when tackling the neutrality inherent to the blood drinker later in the current chapter.

¹⁶⁵ Charles-Marie Gustave Le Bon (1841-1931) was a leading French theorist whose areas of interest included anthropology, psychology, sociology, medicine, invention, and physics. He is best known for his 1895 work *Psychologie des foules*, which is considered one of the seminal works of crowd psychology.

¹⁶⁶ Contrary to traditional vampire lore, Amy ages until early adolescence. This is an important aspect to consider in terms of vampiric neutrality because even if Amy inhabits a prepubescent female body, she is actually 100 years old. This lack of aging will be analyzed further later in the current chapter, especially when tackling vampiric neutral realms and temporality.

storyline of *The Passage* unfolds, it becomes clear that Amy, because of her unusual abilities and her closeness with the virals – all except for Babcock who is the purest, revenant-type viral on an ever-ending quest to kill and consume blood – is the one who will bring the virals to their passage.¹⁶⁷

Amy also helps a group of human beings fight off virals. This group, named the First Colony, lives in a bunker-type compound to ward off vampires and live as securely as they can. One day, Amy manifests out of thin air when the character of Peter Jaxon and his crewmates are attacked by virals at a deserted mall.¹⁶⁸ Amy silently and telepathically brings Peter to a hiding spot before gesturing him to escape through the roof of the building. Before Peter can make it to the roof, he notices that Amy has disappeared. Peter and Amy meet later when Amy, who is first thought to be a viral by most Colony members, makes her way to the Colony's compound. She is called a "walker" by the Colony crew because new people rarely arrive at the compound. Her unknown origins and the fact that Amy does not tell the Colony her name takes them aback, but the members decide to take Amy under their wing as she is an approximately 14-year-old girl lost in the middle of a viral-filled environment. Eventually, Michael, the Colony's engineer, and Peter discover a transmitter in Amy's neck which contains information pertaining to Amy's vital signs and physicality. Michael and Peter then come across pieces of information stored in the transmitter which state that Amy is a hundred years old. Amy's blurry physical attributes and her mostly telepathic communication will underpin her neutrality, especially when echoed by Roland

¹⁶⁷ The virals of the Twelve and the Many, except Babcock, all at some point want to go back to their human personas. Throughout the novel, the virals keep asking themselves – and Amy due to her connection with them and her ability to communicate telepathically with them – who they are.

¹⁶⁸ Peter is one of the main characters in the novel. The reader is told the story mainly through Peter's point of view. He and Amy also share a particular bond as the narrative of *The Passage* unfolds. They share a mutual trust towards one another, especially because Amy saves Peter's life when he is trapped in the deserted mall.

Barthes' concept of the neutral as a *non-couleur* and as a *non-langage* (*Le neutre* 84). Amy's neutral status will be made clear when equating her to the realms of desire and of Lacanian symbolism.

According to Lacanian scholarship, Drive is defined as follows: "While the aim of a drive can be and inevitably is inhibited, its (true) goal always is reached—and this because its goal is nothing other than enjoying the ceaseless movement of repetitively rotating around whatever blockages land on its path" (Johnston, "Jacques Lacan."). Desire is different than Drive since "[...] an essential characteristic of desire is its restlessness, its ongoing agitated searching and futile striving" (Johnston, "Jacques Lacan.").¹⁶⁹ Babcock, as Drive, is the counterpart of Amy's connection to Desire and the symbolic.¹⁷⁰ By virtue of being timeless and possessing vampiric attributes but, at the same time, not being a full-fledged viral, Amy manifests Desire, eventually entering the symbolic where she fulfills her purpose. Amy's manifestation of Desire is clearly more evolved than the Driven Babcock.¹⁷¹ The dichotomy between Babcock (drive) and Amy

¹⁶⁹ As Johnston further explains, "Whereas desire is stuck with its dissatisfied drifting from object to object and ever onward [...], drive derives a perverse enjoyment from this desire-fuelled libidinal circling around the vanishing point of the impossible-*qua*-unattainable. There where desire is frustrated, drive is gratified. Drive gains its satisfaction through vampirically feeding off of the dissatisfaction of desire" ("Jacques Lacan"). Lacanian drive and desire are intertwined with the concept of *jouissance*: "The post-1920 Freud muses that all drives might be said to be death drives, meaning that each and every drive perhaps works, at least in certain respects at certain times, contrary to the pursuit of the pleasurable as balance, gratification, homeostasis, satisfaction, and so on. Along these same lines, the Lacanian drive extracts "enjoyment" from the thwartings and failures of desire; whereas the latter is oriented by the tantalizingly elusive *telos* of pleasure *qua* satisfaction, the former generates its *jouissance*-beyond-pleasure precisely through the inhibiting of desire itself. The many possible sadistic and masochistic implications of this side of the libidinal economy are not difficult to imagine" (Johnston, "Jacques Lacan"). The possible sadistic and masochistic inclinations of *jouissance* can be echoed by the vampiric act of drinking blood. Several vampire narratives depict the vampiric transformation as akin to rape. See Chapter III of this dissertation for more on the rape-like inclinations of vampiric transformations.

¹⁷⁰ Babcock's abusive relationship with his mother will provide significant insight into the concept of drive, as it will be explicated at length later in the current chapter.

¹⁷¹ Amy entering the realms of desire and of the symbolic indicates that she does not need to feed her body from the blood. Amy possesses viral abilities, but she does not need to feed on blood to survive as the other virals do. This independence from blood bolsters her figuration in the realm of desire as opposed to drive, and especially why she is the desire/symbolic counterpart of the drive which consumes Babcock.

(desire and the symbolic) will be greatly important in cementing Babcock's and Amy's vampiric neutralities, as well as their distinct vampiric neutral realms. Consequently, the characters of Amy and of Babcock will demonstrate the correlation between the figure of the vampire and the neutral.

Vampiric neutrality in Cronin's novel is first manifested through the blood drinkers' relation to time. Like most other contemporary vampire characters, the virals in *The Passage* are described as experiencing time neutrally, i.e., through vampiric "mega time", the "all-time encompassing" timeline which vampires inhabit without having a classic view of a chronological temporality. Vampiric "mega time" echoes Perrin's conceptualization of the neutral being present/absent and inside/outside, as well as Aquinas' view of time as that which participates in "[...] both the temporal and the eternal. It does not abolish time or spatialize it; it co-exists with time [...]" (Kermode 72). One of the first overt explanations of the effect of time on virals – or human beings on the verge of becoming blood drinkers – occurs when Grey, one of the guards in the military compound where the virals of the Twelve are kept, starts developing viral symptoms. He contemplates the passing of time and states the following: "[...] Funny strange, the whole idea of *time*. [...] It wasn't a line but a circle, but even more; it was a circle made of circles made of circles, each lying on top of the other, so that every moment was next to every other moment, all at once. And once you knew this you couldn't unknow it" (Cronin, *The Passage* 191). The description of time as concentric circles and of moments as occurring simultaneously is relevant to vampiric temporality as being "all-time encompassing", and its connection to neutrality. The vampire, being present/absent and inside/outside as well as inhabiting vampiric "mega time", implies a conception of time that is never-ending and which encompasses past, present, and

future; in other words, the vampire cannot conceptualize time as being linear since it lives both outside and inside (human) societal time.¹⁷² Grey's circular notion of time connects to Kermode's conceptualization of angel time – the angelic, here, is likened to the vampiric – as follows: “But only the angels make their choices in non-successive time, and ‘be’ and ‘end’ are one only in God” (Kermode 86). The vampire, being a creature who does not experience time in a chronological manner due to its neutral countenance, makes its choices “in non-successive time”. The circle image of time outlined by Grey clearly demonstrates the potency of vampiric “mega time” as a temporal understanding of the neutrality inherent to the vampire. In addition, Grey's claim that time is a “a circle made of circles made of circles, each lying on top of the other, so that every moment was next to every other moment, all at once” (Cronin, *The Passage* 191) echoes St. Augustine's perception of time as “[...] the integration of past, present, and future which defies successive time” (Kermode 71). By experiencing time in an “all-time encompassing” manner, the vampire's neutrality is further reinforced and echoed by Maurice Blanchot's theorization of the neutral which supposes a “[...] temps comme autre, comme absence et neutralité [...], temps arrêté, incapable de permanence [...].” (Blanchot, *Entretien* 63). Intertwining Blanchot's and St. Augustine's views on the temporal aspects of the neutral allows for a resignification of “all-time encompassing” temporality since time is “[...] autre [...], incapable de permanence” and therefore cannot remain linear nor static. The vampire, being neutral and inhabiting the space in between things, exists forever while also being time-stopped, further underscores the fluid, “all-time encompassing “mega time” (which also lacks a full-fledged sense of the temporal) which the blood drinker participates in. This view of time as not linear and as circular also applies to Amy since she possesses most viral attributes. When the

¹⁷² This also echoes the idea that vampires can, if they choose to, follow human lives within human time while also existing inside their own vampiric temporal space, i.e., “mega time”.

character of Brad Wolgast, an FBI agent mandated to bring Amy to the Project Noah military compound decides to flee with Amy, he realizes that she has been infected with the virus and would never die: “She was a child. [...] No, she wouldn’t die. That was the worst of it, the terrible thing they’d done. Time parted around her, like waves around a pier. It moved past her while Amy stayed the same. *And all the days of Noah were nine hundred and fifty years.* However they had done it, Amy would not, could not die” (Cronin, *The Passage* 244).¹⁷³ The description of time as moving past Amy while she remains the same further solidifies Amy’s – and the virals’ – existence within vampiric “mega time” or, to use Perrin’s terms, in the *abîme* which the neutral requires. Aquinas’ “unusual variety of duration” bolsters the in-between temporal position which vampires and Amy occupy. Amy’s character is interesting to consider in light of how Aquinas perceives one’s co-existence with time. Amy, not being a full-fledged viral and therefore experiencing time differently than other vampires (she is 100 years old but she physically ages very slowly), exemplifies Aquinas’ “[...] mode in which things can be perpetual without being eternal” (Kermode 72). Vampiric neutral temporality takes on its most significant meaning when it is equated to the virals of the Many and Babcock’s rule over them.

When Sanjay Patal, a member of the Colony, starts developing viral symptoms, he begins to comprehend his long-lasting relationship with Babcock.¹⁷⁴ The tense relationship between Sanjay and Babcock is due to Babcock’s stronghold over the virals of the Many and over the humans on the verge of vampiric change. Sanjay describes Babcock’s influence on him as

¹⁷³ The use of the name Noah is deliberate and applies to the character of Amy, whose role as the “ship” that will bring the virals to their passage correlates with Noah as the prophet in the Judaic tradition. This will be analyzed later in the current chapter.

¹⁷⁴ Babcock has been talking to Sanjay ever since he was a child. Being too young to understand, Sanjay considered Babcock his imaginary friend. After telling other children about Babcock, Sanjay is made fun of, and he therefore stops mentioning Babcock. However, once Sanjay starts developing viral symptoms, Babcock’s presence gets stronger and even infiltrates Sanjay’s dreams as it is the last step to fully complete the vampiric transformation.

follows: “A kind of slow nibbling, of being eaten away; that’s what life did, that was how it felt. So many years gone by – the passage of time itself a kind of marvel – and Babcock a part of it all. Like a voice inside him, quietly urging, being a friend to him when others could not, though not always speaking in words. Babcock was a feeling he had about the world” (Cronin, *The Passage* 409). Describing Babcock’s presence as being part of the marvel of the passage of time reinforces the vastness of the vampiric neutral realm(s) in Cronin’s narrative, in addition to manifesting the neutral experience of time inherent to the vampire.¹⁷⁵ The fact that Babcock expresses himself without always using words is relevant to his timeless and neutral vampiric status as it demonstrates that the vampire, by virtue of being neutral, does not use the same means of communications as human beings. The language used by virals in Cronin’s novel is often described as a series of clicking sounds. The use of such a language provides insight into the neutral status of the vampire. Indeed, Roland Barthes, in *Le neutre*, claims that the neutral can also manifest itself through a *non-langage* (84). The clicks used by the virals may be considered a *non-langage* to communicate amongst themselves, which further reinforces the neutrality inherent to vampirism.¹⁷⁶ In *Undoing Gender*, Judith Butler claims that “Of course, there are ways of using speech that occlude the body as a condition, which act as if the meanings that are conveyed emanate from a disembodied mind and are addressed toward another

¹⁷⁵ The vampiric neutral realms described in *The Passage* – one is Amy’s, and the other is Babcock’s – will be of the utmost importance when analyzing the character of Amy as well as her deep connection with Babcock later in the current chapter. Also, Babcock literally owns his own vampiric neutral realm from which he controls the virals of the Many. Babcock has named his own realm “The City of Babcock” and understanding the ramifications of this neutral space will be significant, as it will be dealt with at length later in the current chapter.

¹⁷⁶ The hivemind relationship shared by all virals – Babcock being the leader of them all – also has an impact on the language used by the virals. The hivemind construction and its connection to vampiric neutrality and corporeality will be analyzed in depth later in the current chapter. Moreover, the character of Amy communicates telepathically throughout most of the novel. Telepathy can also be considered a *non-langage*, further integrating Barthes’ conceptualization of the neutral as a *non-langage* into vampire-centric narratives. Amy’s use of a neutral language and its impact on Amy’s neutral corporeality will be significant when tackling Amy as a character later in the current chapter. For more on how language forms power discourses in other vampire narratives, i.e., *Dracula* and the *Twilight Saga*, see Jutta Schulze’s “A ‘Truth Like This’: Language and the Construction of Power and Knowledge in Vampire Fiction.” (2011).

disembodied mind. But that is, as it were, still a way of doing the body, a way of doing the body as disembodied” (172). Disembodiment manifests itself through the figure of the vampire, being present/absent and inside/outside as well as being time-stopped and existing forever, always on the cusp of the in-between. Since Babcock was a murderer when he was human, he was already ostracized, from a societal perspective.¹⁷⁷ After his vampiric transformation, Babcock’s disembodiment becomes even more prominent as he uses speech patterns – as do all the virals – that are a *non-language* to use Roland Barthes’ terms, a voiceless way of communicating. All the virals use speech patterns that resemble clicking sounds to express themselves and not only does it illustrate the communion between Babcock and the virals of the Many, but this bond is also made clear through the hivemind organizational system prioritized by the vampires in Cronin’s novel.

The virals of the Twelve and of the Many function as one single unit that is led by Babcock himself. Michael, the Colony’s engineer, describes the hivemind organization of the virals as follows:

These Twelve original subjects, [...] they’re like the queens, each with a different variant of the virus. Carriers of that variant are part of a collective mind, linked to the original host. [...] The way they move, for starters. [...] Everything they do looks coordinated because it *is* [...] The fact that they always travel in pods – bees do the same thing, traveling in swarms. I’ll bet they send out scouts the same way, to establish new hives, like the one in the mine. And it explains why they take up one person out of ten. Think of

¹⁷⁷ All the original virals of the Twelve were criminals as humans and were therefore all disembodied beings prior to their vampiric transformation. The vampiric countenance simply exacerbates this already present disembodiment.

it as a kind of reproduction, a way of continuing a particular viral strain. (Cronin, *The Passage* 741)

The collective aspect brought on by the hivemind reinforces the neutral status of the Twelve and the Many since they all work towards the same specific objective: to be linked to the original host and to be part of this collective mind. This collectivity is also strengthened by the neutrality inherent to the vampire. Babcock, being the ultimate representation of the revenant, neutral vampire, wants to consume blood and to control as many vampires as possible. In order to attain this goal and to be recognized as the leader of the virals, Babcock forms a hivemind collectivity. This bond not only makes Babcock the leader of the virals but, more importantly, it also manifests the vampire's neutral status. Being part of a single collective unit erases each viral's individuality for the benefit of Babcock's and the virals' need for blood. In the case of the virals of the Twelve, this erasure of individuality is made clear even before the vampiric transformation. Anthony Carter, also known as Subject 12, is described as follows when he gets to the military compound where the scientifically induced vampiric transformations occur: "They were calling him Number Twelve. [...] A person who had died, leaving only this sick, writhing form in his place" (Cronin, *The Passage* 181). Changing Carter's name to a number allows for his identity to be slowly neutralized, literally and figuratively. The fact that all the members of the Twelve are now referred to as their numerical counterparts also adds to their dispossession of human identity. This erasure of the Twelve's – and the Many's – human characteristics is also made clear because Carter is now described as a "sick, withering form". Not only is Carter depicted as a form and not as a full-fledged human being, but the fact that the form is slowly fading away further demonstrates the lack of identity markers once the vampire transformation is

underway. Identity deconstruction also allows Babcock to control all the vampires under his rule as this erasure of human characteristics is what makes the virals susceptible to the power and control of Babcock's hivemind formation. Babcock's control is achieved through the recurring dream of Babcock killing his mother, which ultimately leads to the complete transformation of a human being into a viral, but that control is also gained through blood consumption. Carter's almost-vampiric blood is described as follows: "The blood in his body was alive but he didn't think it was only his anymore; it belonged to someone, something, else" (Cronin, *The Passage* 181). Carter's blood is now controlled by Babcock himself since the bloodlust of the virals is in fact Babcock's own yearning and craving for human blood. In other words, the control wielded by Babcock over all virals seeps into all spheres of the virals' existence; they exist only because Babcock needs them to survive and to execute his plan of living in a world free of human beings. Babcock's insatiable hunger can therefore be felt by all virals and by soon-to-be virals: "And inside him [Carter], far down, a great, devouring hunger uncoiled itself. To eat the very world. To take it all inside him and be filled by it, made whole. To make the world eternal, as he was" (Cronin, *The Passage* 182). In terms of the neutrality inherent to the vampire, Perrin's conceptualization of the Eternal as an infinite mark that is always active and always repeated (*Le neutre et la pensée* 39) provides an understanding of Babcock's – and ultimately, of all virals – constant desire and hunger. Babcock and the virals under his control want to recreate his vampiric neutral realm, The City of Babcock, in the human world; in other words, to make the world eternal as vampires are. Harking back to vampiric "mega time", i.e., a temporality that is "all-time encompassing" while also lacking a real sense of the temporal, the connection between eternity and Babcock's vampiric neutral realm further reinforces the neutral temporal space that the vampire inhabits. Vampiric neutral realms such as The City of Babcock are neutral spaces (or

an *abîme*, to echo Claude Stéphane Perrin's term) that co-exist with time to use Aquinas' words. Being both time-stopped and existing forever, the vampire does indeed participate in "both the temporal and the eternal" (Kermode 72). Aquinas' "unusual variety of duration" not abolishing nor spatializing time further exemplifies the neutral temporality of vampiric realms, as these realms are in-between spaces, sometimes set in the midst of (human) society, which vampires inhabit and since these spaces possess their own notion of time, become fictional representations of Aquinas' "variety of duration". In order to attain his goal of ending the world and expanding The City of Babcock, Babcock must gain control and power over the virals, thus the hivemind organizational system put in place by Babcock has such a great impact not only on how the virals behave as a single unit, but how the hivemind also manifests the virals' inherent neutrality.

In "Group Psychology and Analysis of the Ego", Sigmund Freud, based on the works of Gustave Le Bon, defines the group mind as follows:¹⁷⁸

Whoever be the individuals that compose it, however like or unlike be their mode of life, their occupations, their character, or their intelligence, the fact that they have been transformed into a group puts them in possession of a sort of collective mind which makes them feel, think, and act in a manner quite different from that in which each individual of them would feel, think, and act were he in a state of isolation. There are certain ideas and feelings which do not come into being, or do not transform themselves into acts except in the case of individuals forming a group. The psychological group is a provisional being formed of heterogeneous elements, which for a moment are combined,

¹⁷⁸ Other works by Sigmund Freud that could be relevant when it comes to the figure of the vampire and (gender) neutrality include *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) and *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905). For a review of Freud's group psychology theories, see Hugh Veness' "The Psychology of Crowd Behavior: A Review of Freud's Theories in Light of Contemporary Historical Research." (1971).

exactly as the cells which constitute a living body form by their reunion a new being which displays characteristics very different from those possessed by each of the cells singly.' We shall take the liberty of interrupting Le Bon's exposition with glosses of our own [...] If the individuals in the group are combined into a unity, there must surely be something to unite them, and this bond might be precisely the thing that is characteristic of a group. (3-4)

Using Freud's text as a reflection of Cronin's fiction, we can suggest that all the virals controlled by Babcock, be it the Twelve or the Many, are literal manifestations of the heterogeneous elements which are transformed into homogeneous elements in order to form the unity of the group mind. All the virals of the Twelve were chosen because of their criminal past, but the identity of each viral of the Twelve – and the Many – is substituted and takes on the unitary function of Babcock's bloodlust. The impact of the group mind is so strong that all the virals that are part of Babcock's unit are literally stripped of their human identities once they become vampires. The erasure of the virals' individuality is clearly noticeable since the virals keep asking Amy who they are, as they are still searching for the truth about themselves. The homogeneity, created through the dominance of the group mind, of Babcock's vampiric unit is significant. Freud states that

Le Bon thinks that the particular acquirements of individuals become obliterated in a group, and that in this way their distinctiveness vanishes. [...] What is heterogeneous is submerged in what is homogeneous. As we should say, the mental superstructure, the development of which in individuals shows such dissimilarities, is removed, and the

unconscious foundations, which are similar in everyone, stand exposed to view. (Freud, “Group Psychology” 4)

Babcock’s power over his vampiric unit is a manifestation of the submersion of the heterogenous by the homogenous in the group mind. This immersion is demonstrated in a few different ways. The virals all share the same physical attributes after their transformation: sudden physical prowess, abrupt behavioral changes, an overwhelming hunger for blood, and eye color turning orange. Blood consumption being the most relevant aspect of vampirism does have an impact on the establishment of the vampiric group mind. Freud stipulates the following when equating the repression of drives and desires to the homogeneity which stems from the group mind:

For us it would be enough to say that in a group the individual is brought under conditions which allow him to throw off the repressions of his unconscious instinctual impulses. The apparently new characteristics which he then displays are in fact the manifestations of this unconscious, in which all that is evil in the human mind is contained as a predisposition. We can find no difficulty in understanding the disappearance of conscience or of a sense of responsibility in these circumstances. (Freud, “Group Psychology” 4)

The virals, driven by their thirst for blood, literally throw off the repressions of their “unconscious instinctual impulses” as these repressions are indeed the manifestations of unconscious predispositions towards evil deeds. Therefore, the hunger for blood instilled in the vampires of the Twelve is both a manifestation of their conscious and unconscious desires, but this yearning for blood is also caused by Babcock’s own craving for it, additionally showing the homogeneity of the group mind structure created by Babcock. The most considerable impact of the homogeneity spawned by the group mind resides in the dream that all soon-to-be virals share.

Indeed, when human beings have been infected by the virus and the vampiric transformation begins, they all share the same dream: an abusive woman talks to the person who is dreaming, telling them they are worth nothing. Then, the dreamer finds himself or herself with a knife in his or her hand. The assassination of the “fat woman” – she is described as such in Cronin’s novel – is the final step towards someone’s vampiric transformation but, more importantly, it is the final step towards becoming a viral of the Many, i.e., becoming a vampire under Babcock’s rule. The setting of the dream is of the utmost importance since it is a literal recreation, in dream form, of Babcock’s real-life killing of his own mother.¹⁷⁹ This shared dream brought on by Babcock’s own needs also has an impact on the vampiric group mind Babcock has created, as well as on the neutrality inherent to the vampire. At some point in the story, all the members of the Colony, infected or not by the virus, share Babcock’s dream of the fat woman at the exact same time. The effect of the dream is described as follows: “Sometimes they were aware of this dream and sometimes they were not; the dream was like an underground river, constantly flowing, that might from time to time rise to the surface, briefly washing their daylight hours with its presence, as if they were walking in two worlds at the same time” (Cronin, *The Passage* 451). The dream is the neutral circuit which joins all the virals to one another. The fact that the dream is described as a constantly flowing river cause the dreamers to believe they are walking in two worlds at once, and also illustrates the vampiric neutral realm built by Babcock. By feeling like they are in two different environments at once – and this obviously impacts the virals much more than the human beings who may share this dream only once – the vampires under Babcock’s control are neutral. Neutrality as that which is present/absent and inside/outside, and as that which is an *abîme* according to Claude Stéphane Perrin, applies to the shared dream. The feeling of walking

¹⁷⁹ Babcock’s abusive relationship with his mother will be highly significant when tackling Babcock as a representation of Drive, in comparison to Amy’s representation of Desire and of the symbolic later in the current chapter.

in two worlds at once emphasizes the virals' neutrality as walking in two worlds at once is what they do: navigating between their own vampiric neutral realm – in the case of *The Passage*, the vampiric neutral realms have Babcock and Amy at their respective helms – and (human) society. The correlation between Babcock's dream and his vampiric neutral realm is made clear in the following excerpt: "Where did they [the dreams] come from? What were they made of? Were they dreams or were they something more – imitations of a hidden reality, an invisible plane of existence that revealed itself only at night? Why did they feel like memories, and not just memories – someone *else's* memories?" (Cronin, *The Passage* 451). Describing the dreams as "imitations of a hidden reality, an invisible plane of existence that revealed itself only at night" points to the existence of Babcock's vampiric neutral plane. This realm is a hidden and invisible reality to those who are not virals, or who are not connected to the vampires as Amy is. Perrin's theorization of the neutral as an *abîme* that is present/absent, inside/outside ties into Babcock's neutral space, thus reinforcing not only the neutral aspect of said realm but also the inherent neutrality of the virals. Babcock's vampiric neutral realm (and all other vampiric neutral realms mentioned in this dissertation) are also neutral spaces due to vampiric "mega time", i.e., temporality which is "all-time encompassing" that also lacks a classic sense of linearity. Aquinas' "variety of duration" here further reinforces the importance of a neutral (vampiric) sense of time. Babcock's vampiric neutral realm "participates in both the temporal and the eternal", especially when it comes to such a realm's "co-existence with time" (Kermode 72). Vampiric neutral realms are spaces in which the vampire's neutral countenance can fully deploy itself, free of (human) societal and/or temporal constraints. Since these neutral spaces which vampires inhabit can be molded to the blood drinkers' desires, these areas must therefore possess their own temporality, their vampiric "mega time". The vampire, being both time-stopped and

timeless, “lives” in the space in between things, which is echoed in Aquinas’ view of time. In other words, vampiric existence and temporality both “co-exist with time”, further underscoring the neutral countenance of the vampire as correlated to a neutral understanding of time. Babcock’s dream, in addition to being a projection of his vampiric neutral realm, also manifests the neutral countenance of both the virals and of Amy, as she eventually steps into Babcock’s dream.

Sanjay Patal, who is trying to stay awake in order to not get enthralled by Babcock, describes Amy’s arrival in the recurring dream as follows:

It was the Girl from Nowhere. She’d gotten into him somehow, into his mind. The girl was there with Babcock and the Many – what Many? he wondered; why was he thinking about the Many? – and it was as if he was somebody else now, somebody new and strange to himself. He’d wanted...what? A little peace. A little order. To stop the feeling that everything wasn’t what it seemed to be, that the world was not the world. [...] They were inside him, those eyes [Amy’s], as if he were viewing from two angles at once, within and without, Sanjay and not Sanjay [...]. (Cronin, *The Passage* 480)

By thinking that he is someone else now, someone who is strange and new even to himself, Patal unconsciously becomes aware of his ongoing vampiric transformation – he has been infected with the virus at this point – and by slowly becoming a neutral being, struggles with this new and unknown countenance. This confusion is exacerbated by the fact that Patal does not now feel peaceful and orderly. To that end, Julia Kristeva’s theorization of the abject proves significant: “Ce n'est donc pas l'absence de propreté ou de santé qui rend abject, mais ce qui perturbe une identité, un système, un ordre. Ce qui ne respecte pas les limites, les places, les règles. L'entre-

deux, l'ambigu, le mixte" (*Pouvoirs* 12). Now on the verge of becoming a neutral being, Patal's whole world, identity, and corporeality are disrupted as the in-between and the ambiguous are now integral parts of who he is. Being a vampire and being a part of a neutral realm that is both present/absent and inside/outside are manifestations of Kristeva's abject. In addition to manifesting Kristeva's abject, Patal's desire to stop the feeling that "everything wasn't what it seemed to be, that the world was not the world" relates to his first foray into Babcock's vampiric neutral realm and his overall misunderstanding of what and who he is becoming is palpable. This confusion also correlates with the idea that Patal can now feel the pull of vampiric neutrality, i.e., being present/absent, inside/outside, to echo Perrin's *abîme*. Patal's bewilderment is also due to his feeling the pull of the vampiric neutral temporality, i.e., "mega time", that he is now becoming a part of. Kermode's "tick-tock" metaphor also underscores the neutral temporality in which vampires exist.¹⁸⁰ The "special kind of middle" therefore allows for the creation of (vampiric) neutral realms in the space in between things, for these areas to exist within vampiric "mega time", while co-existing with (human) time. The fact that vampiric neutral realms can take form also echoes St. Augustine's view of temporality as which is formless, "intermediate between nothing and something" (Kermode 69). Formless, in this case, refers to both vampiric temporality and to the erasure of one's human identity once a victim is under Babcock's rule. Temporally speaking, the vampire (or the soon-to-be vampire) becomes a part of vampiric "mega time", a temporality which is "all-time encompassing" while lacking a classic sense of the linear, which can be described as the "intermediate between nothing and something". When it comes to the erasure of (human) identity when someone becomes governed by Babcock, St. Augustine's formless matter is significant. By having "the possibility of form" by virtue of being stripped of their identity and thus echoing a lack of form, the vampires of *The Twelve* and *The Many* are

¹⁸⁰ See Kermode page 45 for the complete quotation.

highly capable of receiving form, of being molded to Babcock's needs and bloodlust, as is also illustrated by Babcock's vampiric hivemind. In other words, all the vampires in Cronin's dystopian universe are neutral, both from a temporal standpoint and from an identity perspective, becoming blank slates there to satisfy Babcock's bloodlust. The erasure of (human) identity is also echoed by Blanchot's limit-experience. Indeed, describing himself as "within and without, Sanjay but not Sanjay" not only reinforces Patal's eventual neutrality, but it also manifests Maurice Blanchot's limit-experience. The limit-experience being that which breaks the subject from itself, it becomes clear that being within and without, Sanjay but not Sanjay, Patal is quite literally breaking from himself, therefore slowly becoming a neutral blood drinker. To that end, Patal states that "Because the world was not the world, that was the thing, the terrible truth he had discovered. It was a dream world, a veil of light and sound and matter that the real world hid behind. Walkers in a dream of death, that's what they were [...]" (Cronin, *The Passage* 482). The vampiric neutral realm in Cronin's narrative is further strengthened through the neutral countenance of the vampire, as well as through vampiric "mega time". Describing Babcock's vampiric neutral realm as "a veil of light and sound and matter that the real world hid behind" further reinforces the importance of vampiric temporality as "all-time encompassing/lacking temporality". By hiding "the real world behind", i.e., the real world being the human world, the "special kind of middle" that vampires inhabit must therefore possess its own temporality. Echoing St. Augustine's formless matter, "intermediate between something and nothing", "the veil of light and sound and matter" from which Babcock's neutral realm is made indeed makes the realm to be intermediate, the temporally ambiguous space in between which vampires exist in. It is also important to note that this specific vampiric neutral realm is governed by Babcock, therefore centering all of the virals in his grasp, laboring to fulfill his selfish needs.

Le Bon, as quoted by Freud, claims that “Such also is approximately the state of the individual forming part of a psychological group. He is no longer conscious of his acts. In his case, as in the case of the hypnotized subject, at the same time that certain faculties are destroyed, others may be brought to a high degree of exaltation” (Freud, “Group Psychology” 5). Babcock dictates the actions, thoughts, language, and dreams of all the virals. Also, all the faculties of the virals are indeed destroyed, even their entire identities, and all that remains is the “high degree of exaltation” brought on by their need to kill and to drink blood. This exaltation is of course brought on by Babcock’s own needs. The vampires in Cronin’s narrative are neutral not only because they are vampires, but also because their will and humanity are stripped away, only leaving Babcock’s needs and power in their stead. Babcock’s hivemind is a way to control all virals, but it also makes them neutral, simply vessels of Babcock’s imperatives. Sanjay Patal often hears Babcock’s voice in his head and describes one such encounter: “A soul with a name and a voice that sang inside him [Sanjay], *Be my one. I am yours and you are mine and together we are greater than the sum, the sum of our parts*” (Cronin, *The Passage* 408). By describing his bond with Patal as being “greater than the sum of their parts”, Babcock further reinforces his hold on Patal – and all the other virals, for that matter – but it more importantly illustrates how Babcock’s hivemind structure manifests the vampires’ inherent neutrality. In this case, the vampiric neutrality stems from the virals’ overall neutral status, status that is exacerbated by Babcock’s need to make virals, and soon-to-be blood drinkers, the sum of his parts. The virals have no other choice but to comply with Babcock’s drives and completely erase their own individuality in the process, further illustrating Maurice Blanchot’s theorization of the limit-experience, i.e., that which breaks the subject from itself. In the case of *The Passage*, Babcock can be defined as the manifestation of Blanchot’s limit-experience since Babcock literally is

what breaks the subject – the virals under Babcock’s rule – from itself. In addition to forcing this violent dream into people’s minds, Babcock imposes his yearning for blood consumption and killing as the only viable option for virals; they can only feed because that is what Babcock enables them to do. Freud, still quoting Le Bon, states the following about the compliance inherent to the group mind: “In a group every sentiment and act is contagious, and contagious to such a degree that an individual readily sacrifices his personal interest to the collective interest. This is an aptitude very contrary to his nature, and of which a man is scarcely capable, except when he makes part of a group” (Freud, “Group Psychology” 5). Overtly, the idea of contagion in the context of a collective is interesting in the setting of Cronin’s *The Passage*. Vampires were first created by injecting human beings with a virus strain, transforming them into blood drinkers, so the concept of contagion applies. More importantly, Le Bon’s claim that sacrificing one’s personal interests for the sake of the collective interest as “an aptitude very contrary to nature” is interesting to consider when it comes to vampirism, especially since Babcock is a revenant-type vampire, the revenant being the type of vampire that is driven by its impulses. In *Vampire God: The Allure of the Undead in Western Culture*, Mary Y. Hallab states that “Folklore vampires often convey important social messages in that their undead condition is regarded as a penalty for mental, physical, or behavioral deviations from communal norms, willful or otherwise, during their lifetime” (“Vampires and Society.” 33). Babcock – and all the vampires of the Twelve since they are all criminals to varying degrees – does represent mental and behavioral deviations from societal norms since he has committed murder. Babcock can thus be considered a representation of the revenant blood drinker, solely driven by his most primal desires, i.e., to feed on humans and to kill. Harking back to Freud and Le Bon, Babcock, by virtue of being a revenant-type vampire, does behave in ways very contrary to social norms since

he pushes the virals under his control to forgo societal norms and rather give in to their most primal instincts. The hivemind organization of the virals of the Twelve and of the Many therefore reinforces the neutrality inherent to vampirism and it is manifested through Babcock's overall control over the virals. This control exerted on the virals, as well as Babcock's vampiric neutral realm, is eventually shaken to the core when Amy, described as the Girl from Nowhere, enters the vampiric neutral realm to go against Babcock.

Amy's neutrality can be overtly described as follows: "Amy, time-stilled and nameless, wandering the forgotten, lightless world forever, alone and voiceless [...]" (Cronin, *The Passage* 105). Amy, just as all virals, is both time-stilled and existing forever. It is important to state that Amy is a 100-year-old woman who ages extremely slowly in the course of Cronin's trilogy, which is quite different from classic vampiric immortality.¹⁸¹ Harking back to St. Thomas' Augustinian rationale for angels, Amy's time-stilled/existing forever countenance is made clear.¹⁸² Qualifying Amy as being "time-stilled, [...] wandering the forgotten, lightless world forever [...]" further underpins the neutrality inherent to the virals, as well as the neutral realms they inhabit. Being able to wander these realms – her own and Babcock's as it will be explained later – further echoes Amy's viral neutral countenance. It is important to note that Amy was also injected with the virus but with a different strain. The goal of this infection was to figure out if a human subject could gain vampiric attributes without the violent side effects, i.e., killing, maiming, and drinking blood. Her neutrality is so embedded that she eventually becomes a vessel for the pain and suffering of the virals who want to regain their human identities. In other words, Amy is the ultimate neutral being in Cronin's universe because she is the only one able to

¹⁸¹ In *The City of Mirrors*, the last installment of the trilogy, Amy shares her story to descendants of virals who find her. Virals are said to live at least a thousand years before dying on their own.

¹⁸² See Kermode page 70 for the complete quotation from St. Thomas.

resist Babcock's thrall. This resistance is what enables Amy to not drink blood; she is not driven by Babcock's need to kill and feed. Moreover, the fact that Amy is described as nameless – the members of the Colony will learn her name quite late – adds to her neutral status. The act of naming someone or something is what confers it its existence; therefore, being nameless is also what makes Amy neutral.¹⁸³ This neutrality is also manifested by Amy's wandering of the forgotten world, i.e., the vampiric neutral realm(s), as well as through her use of telepathy to communicate throughout most of the novel.¹⁸⁴ Amy's primary means of communication is telepathy and she is selective of whom can hear her. Using a language that is not voiced strengthens Amy's neutral status that can be reflected in Roland Barthes' conceptualization of the neutral as a *non-langage* (and a *non-couleur*) will prove.¹⁸⁵ Amy's physical features and her corporeality manifest both *la non-couleur* and *le non-langage*.

At the beginning of the story, Amy is six years old. When she arrives at the Colony, she is said to be either fourteen or sixteen. Although she ages, Amy still can be defined as a neutral being as she is “neither eternal nor of time”, to use St. Thomas' words. In reality, Michael and Peter, while looking at the information stored in the transmitter that had been placed in Amy's neck, understand that Amy is actually a hundred years old. Therefore, even though she ages, albeit slowly, she is a being that exist in an *abîme*, to use Perrin's term, who possesses vampiric features. Amy's physicality not only proves that she experiences the “all-time encompassing” temporality of the virals, but her corporeality also manifests her neutrality. Eventually, Sanjay

¹⁸³ For more on naming and the identity and kinship implications of this act, see Janet Finch's “Naming Names: Kinship, Individuality and Personal Names.” (2008).

¹⁸⁴ The use of the plural form of “realm” is there to reinforce both the vampiric neutral realm as a whole, as well as Babcock's and Amy's respective neutral realms. The correlation and the differences between the two spaces will be analyzed further in the current chapter.

¹⁸⁵ See *Le neutre* page 84 for the complete quotation about *le non-langage et la non-couleur*. Barthes' theory on the neutral as a *non-couleur* and a *non-langage* will be used again later in the current chapter when further developing Amy's language use, as well as when tackling her physically and corporeality.

Patal makes his way into the infirmary where Amy is sleeping and he describes her as follows: “Her body wasn’t a woman’s body, her hips and chest were as compact as a boy’s, her legs, where they appeared below the frayed hem of her gown, possessing a coltish sleekness and an adolescent’s knobby knees” (Cronin, *The Passage* 412). Amy’s physical features are described as both boyish and as androgynous. The prepubescent aspect of her body also ties into her neutral temporal status as she finds herself on the verge of physical changes during adolescence. Amy’s body qualifies as prepubescent despite her old age. As someone who experiences time in the same way as virals do, i.e., existing in vampiric “mega time”, Amy will then embody her prepubescent corporeality for a very long time, and this is especially significant because her body is on the verge of change without necessarily changing. Amy’s body is therefore-neutral not only because she is a being with viral attributes, but also because of her prepubescent corporeality. Amy’s androgynous physical features confer upon her a more gender-neutral appearance.¹⁸⁶ Barthes’ conceptualization of the neutral as that which erases and/or blurs the paradigms figures prominently as Amy, despite being assigned female gender markers, displays physical attributes which can be defined as androgynous. Amy’s overall corporeality manifests Barthes’ theory of the neutral as blurry and is manifested through descriptions of her skin. Patal, still observing Amy, describes her skin as “Not white, not pale; neither word seemed to capture its quality of muted radiance. As if the lightness of its tone were not an absence of color but something in its own right” (Cronin, *The Passage* 412). Amy’s muted skin literally is on “the edge of color”, neither absent nor transparent to use Barthes’ terms, but rather “something in its own right” which cannot be adequately defined. The fact that the tone of Amy’s skin is described in such terms reinforces the idea of Amy’s body as neutral. This neutrality can be extrapolated to

¹⁸⁶ Both prepubescence and androgyny have also been explored in Chapter II through the lens of *Let the Right One in*.

Amy's non-usage of the spoken word; Amy does not speak at that point in the story but rather communicates telepathically.

Before making her way to the Colony, Amy spends a long period of time alone and eventually realizes that she does not remember words anymore: "She thought the word for what it was, but when she tried to say it, she realized she had forgotten how. [...] She thought of all the other words she knew and it was just the same. All the words, all locked away inside" (Cronin, *The Passage* 353). Judith Butler's theorization of language and corporeality is significant in order to understand Amy's embodiment of her neutrality. In *Undoing Gender*, Butler states that

Every time I try to write about the body, the writing ends up being about language. This is not because I think the body is reducible to language; it is not. Language emerges from the body, constituting an emission of sorts. The body is that upon which language falters, and the body carries its own signs, its own signifiers, in ways that remain largely unconscious. [...] In my view, performativity is not just about speech acts. It is also about bodily acts. The relation between the two is complicated [...] There is always a dimension of bodily life that cannot be fully represented, even as it works as the condition and activating condition of language. [...] We say something, and mean something by what we say, but we also do something with our speech, and what we do, how we act upon another with our language, is not the same as the meaning we consciously convey. It is in this sense that the significations of the body exceed the intentions of the subject. (198-199)

Amy, having forgotten how to use words and rather using telepathy to communicate, manifests Butler's understanding of the correlation between language and the body. Amy's use of telepathy to express herself becomes this dimension of bodily life that cannot be fully represented since she literally does not use spoken language for most of the novel. Neutrality also has an impact on Amy's means of communication. Peter reflects on Amy's telepathy and comes to the following conclusion: "How strange it was, speaking this way – strange because it *wasn't* so strange. He had never heard the sound of the girl's voice, and yet he did not feel this as a lack. There was something calming about it, as if she had put aside the noise of words" (Cronin, *The Passage* 431). Peter claims that even though he has never heard Amy's voice, he does not feel it as a lack. In that sense, Amy's use of telepathy becomes a neutral manner of communicating. As Butler suggests in *Undoing Gender*, Amy's language patterns align with "[...] a way of doing the body as disembodied" (172) since everything about her bodily signifiers – blurred physical markers, language use, her ambiguous age, etc. – confer a more neutral status upon her. Here, Roland Barthes' conceptualization of neutrality as that which annuls and/or blurs the paradigm is particularly significant in terms of Amy's language use. Communicating telepathically is yet another way for Amy to affirm her neutral status since, simply by using an unusual means of communication, she does blur the paradigm of language use. Amy's telepathy is therefore an illustration of Barthes' theorization of the neutral as a *pensée-limite*, *au bord du langage*, that which creates the *non-langage* (*Le neutre* 24). By virtue of using a neutral way of expressing herself, Amy manifests the inherent *pensée-limite* of the neutral, making her telepathic means of communication a space of linguistic neutrality. Therefore, when Peter says that Amy's language use does not feel like a lack, it is because the neutral – present/absent, inside/outside, in this case – allows for a complete resignification of paradigms, enabling Barthes' *pensée-limite* of the

neutral to emerge. Although Amy uses telepathy to communicate throughout most of the novel, she eventually does use conventional language to express herself, but even her language use becomes a manifestation of the “[...] dimension of bodily life that cannot be fully represented, even as it works as the condition and activating condition of language” theorized by Butler.

After Amy speaks in front of the members of the Colony for the first time, Peter describes her as follows: “Amy’s face seemed different to him, now that he had heard her voice. It was as if she were suddenly present, fully among them. [...] Her voice was neither a woman’s nor a child’s but something in between. She spoke flatly, without intonation, as if she were reading the words from a book” (Cronin, *The Passage* 610). Amy’s more substantial presence among them shows that, in this specific passage, Amy is more present than absent in (human) society, while still retaining her neutrality as the neutral implies being both present and absent, being inside and outside. The description of Amy’s voice as “something in between” once again suggests the liminality inherent to the neutral, a liminality which is also manifested through the vampire. This *pensée-limite* of language, to use Barthes’ terms, can also be seen through the actual description of Amy’s voice as neither a woman’s nor a child’s but something in between. Being constantly on the verge of change but always remaining in a liminal space confers a neutral status to prepuberty, therefore making it clear that even Amy’s voice, her “activating conditions of language” to use Butler’s terms, is neutral. Although Amy uses her voice with the Colony members towards the end of the narrative, she still uses her telepathy while conversing with the virals and Babcock. This telepathy is not only significant in terms of Amy’s linguistic neutrality,

but it also is a manifestation of drive.¹⁸⁷ Jacques Lacan then states that the father eventually becomes the obstacle preventing the child from having access to his mother.¹⁸⁸ The father's power to say "no" is an integral part of Lacan's theory about *le non/nom du père*:

[...] La conception de Lacan introduit une différence radicale qui consiste à disjoindre le lien du sujet au père du lien que le sujet peut avoir avec la personne du père. En ce sens, la primauté du symbolique, axe que Lacan privilégie au moment où il introduit le Nom-du-Père, est ce qui permet de concevoir le lien au père en termes de fonction et la métaphore paternelle comme ce qui permet l'introduction d'un signifiant qui aura la place d'un nom. C'est par l'accès au signifiant père que le sujet peut nommer ce qui ne relève ni de l'expérience, ni de la connaissance, à savoir ce qu'est un père. En effet, la conjonction du nom au terme de père indique l'écart irréductible entre la personne du père et la paternité. (Izcovich 24)¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁷ The concept of drive will be of the utmost importance when analyzing the differences between Babcock and Amy later in the current chapter. Simply put, the former manifests drive whereas the later manifests desire and the Lacanian symbolic.

¹⁸⁸ The masculine pronouns will be used in this section on drive and desire as Freud makes it clear in his works that he is referring to a male child.

¹⁸⁹ The use of the terms non and nom is there to reflect the legislative and prohibitive functions of the father. For more on *le non/nom du père*, refer to Lacan's *Des Noms-du-Père* (1953) and *Séminaire III : Les psychoses* (1973). Izcovich further explains Lacan's *non/nom du père*: "Il existe encore chez Lacan un autre changement décisif par rapport à Freud. Si, pour ce dernier, l'opération du père – dont la fonction est la transmission de la loi – vise l'enfant et limite sa jouissance, il est évident que pour Lacan la fonction paternelle a ceci de décisif qu'elle pose la barre de la négativation de la jouissance sur la mère, ce qui aura des conséquences sur l'enfant mais elles sont relatives de la soustraction à l'endroit de la mère. L'opération de transmission par le père suivant cette perspective passe dès lors par une extraction de la jouissance maternelle. Bien que l'opposition entre Lacan et Freud ne soit pas radicale sur ce point puisque le résultat pour l'enfant est de lui donner une issue qui soit de l'ordre du désir, la différence est fondamentale et les conséquences essentielles pour la direction de la cure. Selon Freud, le père dans son essence est un interdicteur de jouissance pour l'enfant, ce qui, entre parenthèses mais ce n'est pas secondaire, laisse l'impasse sur la cause de la psychose dans les cas où celle-ci relève aussi du père interdicteur. S'agit-il d'une question d'intensité dans l'interdiction ? Certains l'ont cru. La proposition de Lacan résout l'impasse freudienne et pose que la fonction du père est celle de conjindre le désir à loi, conséquence de l'opération du père sur la jouissance maternelle. Ceci implique un saut par rapport à Freud. Si, pour celui-ci, il s'agit d'une question de droit à la jouissance, Lacan, sans exclure ce droit, introduit la dimension du mérite. Car il ne suffit pas que le père jouisse d'une femme pour qu'il mérite son nom. Si ni la personne du père, ni la relation de l'enfant à celui-ci, ni la possession d'une femme suffisent à assurer qu'un père est un père, une double question se pose, celle de savoir ce qui permet d'affirmer "l'être père", et celle de l'accès à ce signifiant" (24-25).

As the child grows up, he comes to realize that power is wielded by his father. Once a child develops his agency, he enters the realm of the symbolic and manifests desire, i.e., the desire to gain power. Agency is manifested when a child begins to speak, which indicates entry into the symbolic, i.e., the realm of power. In *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender*, Nancy Chodorow argues that the early period of “total dependance” (62) of the infant to the mother is highly significant when it comes to understanding how the infant evolves, i.e., experiencing drive, then desire, and finally entering the symbolic. If the period of dependance to the mother is not properly achieved, the infant’s development might be problematic. Extreme narcissism may arise in these cases and the character of Babcock, not having experienced a loving, infant-need based relationship with his (abusive) mother, therefore becomes the catalyst of such narcissistic behaviors. Chodorow suggests that “All extreme narcissism can be explained as a withdrawal from object relations; [...] infants need holding and contact from a person who is emotionally there, not simply food and cleaning [...]” (64). Babcock’s mother, being abusive “and not emotionally there”, to use Chodorow’s words, deprived him of a healthy object relation. Therefore, Babcock will never evolve from drive to desire to the symbolic as he was deprived of an object relation which would have led to Babcock becoming his own full-fledged self. To that end, Chodorow, based on Winnicott’s theory, suggests that “[...] a good relationship between infant and caretaker allows the infant to develop a sense of separate self – a self whose existence does not depend on the presence of another – at the same time as it develops a sense of basic relatedness” (68). Babcock and his mother’s abusive relationship (Babcock does murder his mother) did not allow Babcock to gain a “sense of separate self”, making him unable to develop further. Babcock’s inability to exist without depending on someone else is manifested in Babcock’s hivemind formation with the virals;

Babcock is so deeply dependent that he must vicariously feed on blood through the catalyst of the virals under his control. In *The Passage*, Babcock represents drive whereas Amy manifests desire and the Lacanian symbolic.

Babcock can be denoted as pure drive as he strives for blood and power; he is therefore a representation of the revenant blood drinker. Babcock's insatiable desire for human blood coerces the virals of the Twelve and the Many to rob them of their blood so as to nourish Babcock.¹⁹⁰ Babcock's abusive relationship with his mother becomes the source of the conflict which will show up in his manifestation of drive. Since Babcock's mother was extremely abusive, verbally, physically, and psychologically, towards her son during his childhood, Babcock has never experienced the usual loving and warm relationship between a mother and her child. This bond is important as it leads a child to eventually pass on to desire and finally, to the realm of the symbolic. Babcock, never having had the opportunity to share a loving bond with his mother, is therefore never able to access the realms of desire and of the symbolic. Babcock therefore always remains anchored in the drive phase. Correspondingly, the fact that Babcock killing his mother becomes the basis of the recurring dream which leads to the final step of the vampiric transformation demonstrates his drive-induced impulses. The vampiric transformative dream culminates in the soon-to-be viral having to murder Babcock's mother in the dream. This final step is what cements the vampiric change, and which echoes the basic concept of that which occurs in the child's desire to cast aside the domineering parent, making clear that vampires, both Babcock himself as well as the virals of the Twelve and of the Many,

¹⁹⁰ Every time the virals drink human blood, they also feed Babcock by extension, showing that the virals are all connected to Babcock.

are manifestations of drive.¹⁹¹ Conversely, Amy, by possessing viral attributes but not being driven by the constant desire to consume blood, manifests both desire and the symbolic.

Amy does not need to feed on blood to survive and does not need to feed her physical body. She transcends the terrestrial, therefore manifesting the neutral, possessing the agency and power to enter the symbolic.¹⁹² Entering the realm of the symbolic requires agency, thereby conferring upon acts of speech the role of nexus of bestowed power and agency. Amy's telepathy is her way of manifesting desire, i.e., the desire to gain power but not possessing the agency necessary to enter the realm of the symbolic.¹⁹³ When a child begins to speak, he is now his own agent, having enough power at his disposal to be his own full-fledged self. In other words, speech allows the child to enter the symbolic, enjoying this newly bestowed power and agency. When Amy eventually communicates with the members of the Colony using her voice and not her telepathic powers, she establishes her presence in the realm of the symbolic. The agency bestowed upon Amy is also what allows her to manifest her neutrality. Amy's participation in the symbolic permits a resignification of the patriarchal underpinnings of the symbolic in favor of a more neutral structure.

Traditionally, the Lacanian symbolic has been defined as strictly patriarchal, through the power wielded by the figure of the father, i.e., *le nom/nom du père*. In *Gender Trouble*, Butler exposes

¹⁹¹ As Babcock's father was absent, and his mother did not fulfill her duty to bond with her child, she becomes the parent against whom the child retaliates.

¹⁹² The correlation between Amy and the neutral will be analyzed later in the current chapter, especially when Babcock's and Amy's respective vampiric neutral realms will be defined.

¹⁹³ At this point in the narrative, Amy can be considered the bridge that brings the virals from the realm of drive to the realm of desire, especially due to the bond Amy and the virals share. The use of the word "bridge" is also deliberate here since Amy, towards the end of *The Passage*, serves as the "bridge" that will bring the virals to their passage, i.e., not being under Babcock's control after his own demise. This will be dealt with more in depth later in the current chapter.

Monique Wittig's theory on the symbolic in order to question not only the strictly patriarchal epistemology inherent to it, but also to define the symbolic order in a different way: "She [Wittig] does not criticize 'the subject' as invariably masculine according to the rules of an inevitably patriarchal Symbolic, but proposes in its place the equivalent of a lesbian subject as language-user. [...] Hence, Wittig calls for the destruction of 'sex' so that women can assume the status of a universal subject" (27). The deconstruction of "sex" proposed by Wittig, which would lead to a subject assuming its universal status, is of interest in the scope of this dissertation. I would suggest that while the use of the lesbian subject does allow for a resignification of the symbolic, a resignification of its inherent patriarchy could be achieved by redefining the realm of the symbolic as neutral. The Lacanian symbolic is theorized as a "[...] non-natural universe [...] an elaborate set of inter-subjective and trans-subjective contexts into which individual human beings are thrown at birth [...] a pre-existing order preparing places for them in advance and influencing the vicissitudes of their ensuing lives" (Johnston, "Jacques Lacan."). Defining the symbolic as a "non-natural universe" regulated by "inter-subjective and trans-subjective contexts" begs for the neutral (as present/absent and inside/outside) to materialize. This resignification of the symbolic could then transform the symbolic into an epistemological neutral realm. This redefinition would make manifest the status of a universal subject suggested by Wittig, pushing it further into the realm of the neutral. Since vampiric neutral realms can be defined as non-natural universes, such spaces can be correlated to the symbolic.

Amy's neutrality is different than the one embodied by Babcock, the Twelve, and the Many. Manifesting desire and having entered the symbolic confers upon Amy a neutral status which

goes beyond the confines of drive, which Babcock and the virals he leads represent. This difference is made manifest when Amy thinks about the fact that she is alone in this world: “Alone with no one but the voices she heard, everywhere and all around. [...] She was different, they said. She was not like them, not of them. She was apart and alone and there were no others like her in all the world” (Cronin, *The Passage* 350). The voices that Amy hears are the virals of the Many and of the Twelve who wish to go back to their former selves, those who wish to go back to their passage.¹⁹⁴ Having manifested desire and having entered the realm of the symbolic, i.e., possessing her own power and agency, Amy has the ability to bestow the same power upon the virals who wish to reclaim their own agency, free from Babcock’s control. In *L’entretien infini*, Maurice Blanchot states that “Le neutre, toujours séparé du neutre par le neutre, loin de se laisser expliquer par l’identique, reste le surplus inidentifiable” (450). Amy, being apart from and the only one of her kind, manifests this unidentifiable surplus.¹⁹⁵ The virals of the Twelve and of the Many are also neutral beings, but their neutrality rather illustrates Claude Stéphane Perrin’s conceptualization of the neutral as present/absent and inside/outside. This is significant as the virals, controlled by drive, cannot attain the unidentifiable surplus of the neutral. Rather, they must travel between Babcock’s neutral realm, The City of Babcock, and (human) society in an attempt to regain their former selves.¹⁹⁶

Due to her connection with the virals, Amy can hear their voices and understand the neutral realm in which they navigate:

¹⁹⁴ Here, “the passage” also implies the passage to being free of Babcock’s rule.

¹⁹⁵ Amy’s status as the Zero towards the end of the novel – she is conferred that status once Babcock dies – also ties into her manifesting Blanchot’s unidentifiable surplus. Amy as the Zero will be analyzed further in the current chapter.

¹⁹⁶ The importance of The City of Babcock and neutrality will be analyzed at length later in the current chapter.

But over time's passage his [Wolgast's] voice became all mixed in her mind with the voices of the others, the dreaming ones, both there and not there, as the dark was a thing but not a thing, a presence and an absence joined. The world was a world of dreaming souls who could not die. She thought: there is the ground below my feet [...] and rain and stars and everywhere the voices, the voices and the question. *Who am I? Who am I? Who am I?* (Cronin, *The Passage* 350-351)¹⁹⁷

Comparing the dark, i.e., Babcock's vampiric neutral realm, to "a thing but not a thing, a presence and an absence joined" manifests Perrin's theory of the neutral as present/absent and inside/outside. The neutrality of the virals of the Twelve and the Many also relates to Blanchot's limit-experience, i.e., that which breaks the subject from itself. Living in Babcock's vampiric neutral realm and attempting to be both present/absent and inside/outside, the virals also lose their identities, therefore becoming neutral to the core. Since the vampiric transformation is induced by a virus infection, the virals have not only become neutral beings, but have also lost their identity, the core of who they used to be. Not only does this identity change manifest Perrin's conceptualization of the neutral, but it also demonstrates the neutrality inherent to Blanchot's theorization of the limit-experience. Moreover, Amy's bond with the virals of the Twelve further shows the neutrality inherent to the vampire and to the neutral realm which the virals inhabit.

Amy describes her connection to the Twelve as follows:

¹⁹⁷ Wolgast is one of the FBI agents who was asked to retrieve Amy and bring her to the military compound where the viral transformations took place. He eventually runs away with her, and they live together for some time before Wolgast dies. Their relationship is akin to a father and daughter bond.

There were others she did hear, in the dark. And she knew who these were, too. *I am Babcock. I am Morrison. I am Chávez. I am Baffes-Turrell-Winston-Sosa-Echols-Lambright-Martínez-Reinhardt-Carter.* She thought of them as the Twelve, and the Twelve were everywhere, inside the world and behind the world and threaded into the darkness itself. The Twelve were the blood running below the skin of all things in the world at that time.¹⁹⁸ (Cronin, *The Passage* 352)

Listing the human surnames of the Twelve illustrates the former human personas of the Twelve (where the *nom du père* becomes explicit). Blanchot's concept of the limit-experience as that which breaks the subject from itself applies here since the virals of the Twelve – all except Babcock – were stripped away from themselves once the vampiric transformation occurred, rendering all the virals neutral. This neutral status also manifests Freud's and Le Bon's theory of the group mind as all the last names of the Twelve eventually becomes one single unit. Not only does this prove that Babcock's influence on the virals is immense, but it more importantly signifies that the neutrality inherent to the vampire goes as far as making the virals perceive themselves as one unique subject. By describing the Twelve as being everywhere, inside and behind the world, and as the "blood running below the skin of all things in the world", it is clear that the virals manifest Perrin's understanding of the neutral as that which is present/absent and inside/outside.

The vampiric neutral realm, of which the virals are a part, also echoes St. Thomas' Augustinian rationale for angels.¹⁹⁹ The virals of the Twelve being "[...] everywhere, inside the world and

¹⁹⁸ Italics in the original text.

¹⁹⁹ See Kermode page 70 for the full quotation from St. Thomas.

behind the world and threaded into the darkness itself” underscores the “all-time encompassing” temporality that vampiric creatures inhabit (a temporality which also lacks a classic sense of linearity). Being able to experience past, present, and future at the same time, virals indeed exist within St. Thomas’ “third duration”, that which is between time and eternity. The virals’ connection to the human world is achieved through the bond they share with Amy, especially because Amy remains the “ship” which will bring the virals to their passage, i.e., freeing their souls and giving them their human personas back. This desire to regain their human identities is established through the Twelve asking Amy who they are, and by constantly repeating their last names. This repetition is there to highlight the importance most virals give to their human identities, but it more significantly ties into Judith Butler’s view on the impact of the act of repetition not only when it comes to gender performativity, but also when it comes to corporeal and identity performativity.

In *Gender Trouble*, Butler argues that

[...] the performativity of gender revolves around this metalepsis, the way in which the anticipation of a gendered essence produces that which it posits as outside itself. Secondly, performativity is not a singular act, but a repetition and a ritual, which achieves its effects through its naturalization in the context of a body, understood, in part as a culturally sustained temporal duration. (Butler, *Gender Trouble* xv)

In the case of the virals and their constant search for their identities, bodies, and souls, performativity is a repetition; they persist in asking Amy to provide them with their identity. These performances become ritualized because Amy, being the “ship” capable of bringing the

virals to their passage, will ritualize this passing for the virals who wish to embark upon it. Performativity also implies the context of a body taking form. The ritual by which Babcock controls the virals' bodies develop demands a constant repetition, especially since the virals must be kept in a subordinate position where they lose control of their own corporeality and identity. The metalepsis of gender which "produces that which it posits as outside itself" occurs here, i.e., the outside force which is Babcock. Amy, however, also constitutes an influence since she tries to bring the virals back to their original forms. Amy's connection to the virals of the Twelve and the Many implies the understanding of the virals' need: to get their souls back.

Butler claims the following in *Gender Trouble*:

The effect of a structuring inner space is produced through the signification of a body as a vital and sacred enclosure. The soul is precisely what the body lacks; hence, the body presents itself as a signifying lack. The lack which *is* the body signifies the soul as that which cannot show. In this sense, then, the soul is a surface signification that contests and displaces the inner/outer distinction itself, a figure of interior psychic space inscribed *on* the body as a social signification that perpetually renounces itself as such. (184)

Stating that the soul is what "contests and displaces the inner/outer distinction" upholds the neutrality inherent to the vampires in *The Passage*. Referring to Perrin's theory of the neutral as present/absent and inside/outside, we can posit that the virals' search for their souls correlates with their search for their identities. Butler's statement of the soul as that which "cannot show" also ties into the virals' connection with Amy as the "ship". Since they cannot remember who they really are, the virals must rely on Amy to regain their souls. Having been controlled by

Babcock and therefore not having been in touch with their own selves for some time, the virals of the Twelve and of the Many cannot showcase their souls, their full-fledged selves. In other words, the virals' bodies, by virtue of being dominated by Babcock's drive-induced impulses, suggest the signifying lack introduced by Butler since the virals themselves are not attached to their identities anymore due to Babcock's control. The virals are thus neutral not only due to their inherent vampiric neutral status, but also because of the effect of performativity on one's identity and corporeality. To that end, Amy's own neutrality and status as the "ship" that will bring the virals to their passage are significant.

Amy's neutrality is made evident in several ways – her prepubescent age, her existing within vampiric "mega time", her blurry physicality, her connection to Babcock and the virals, her use of telepathy to communicate, etc. – but one significant aspect resides in the fact that Amy is described as the "ship" that will bring the virals to their passage, i.e., free their souls.²⁰⁰ Project Noah is the name of the secret research that led to the discovery of the virus which causes the vampiric transformations. The use of the name "Noah" is not insignificant when it comes to understanding Amy's role as the "ship", but it is also important in order to grasp her neutral status. Noah, in the Jewish tradition, is the prophet. Amy manifests pure religious neutrality as she is neither Christian, nor Judaic, nor Muslim; she just is. Amy has therefore manifested desire and has entered the symbolic, but is now also spiritual, going beyond the terrestrial to be neutral.

This transcendent aspect of Amy's self also ties into her status as the Girl from Nowhere, and

²⁰⁰ Throughout the novel, the virals of the Twelve and the Many (all except Babcock who wants to remain his drive-induced self) communicate with Amy. The virals constantly ask her who they are because they are trying to go back to their original selves, to whom they were before the vampiric transformation. Sister Lacey, who had taken care of Amy when she was an orphaned child, eventually meets Amy again and tells her that she is indeed the "ship", the one to free the virals' souls from Babcock's control. Amy says that "She knew them [the virals] all, each to a one; she knew them all at last. She was the ship, just as Lacey had said; she carried their souls inside her. [...] She would return what was rightfully theirs – the stories of who they were. The day when they would make their passage" (Cronin, *The Passage* 721).

eventually the Zero, as these appellations not only make her neutral but also a manifestation of the indivisible.

In *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, Raymond Williams states that

Individual originally meant indivisible. [...] ‘Individual’ stresses a distinction from others; ‘indivisible’ a necessary connection. [...] *Individuus* was used to translate *atomos*, [...] - not cuttable, not divisible. Boethius [...] defined the [meaning] of *individuus* [as] [...] something [that] is called individual, the specific designation of which is not applicable to anything of the same kind [...]. (161-162)

Overtly, Amy, being the only one of her kind in Cronin’s universe, can be defined as the meaning of *individuus*. Sara and Peter come to discuss Amy’s viral status and Sara claims the following: “All I know is what she isn’t. She’s not a viral, that’s obvious. But she’s not an ordinary human being, either” (Cronin, *The Passage* 478). Amy’s physicality and viral-based attributes manifest William’s interpretation of indivisibility. Amy as the indivisible also implies her connection with the virals of the Twelve and the Many. Since the concept of the indivisible stresses a “necessary connection”, the bond shared between Amy and the virals is necessary for the vampires to regain their sense of self. This necessary attachment is also illustrated by the neutral space which the virals – and Amy – inhabit. After calling the virals to her so that they can express their pain and confusion, Amy lets them go and her experience is described as follows: “[...] She departed that place as she had departed all the others before it and stepped into the moonlit night of which she was a part, one and indivisible” (Cronin, *The Passage* 355). Amy’s indivisibility is not only manifested through her unusual viral status, but also because she is neutral. “The night of which she was a part, one and indivisible” illustrates Williams’s

“necessary connection” inherent to the indivisible since Amy – and the virals – are definite parts of the vampiric neutral realms brought forward in *The Passage*. Being the “ship”, which will bring the virals to their passage also confers Amy the connection which she has to maintain in order to remain the virals’ anchor. Amy’s manifestation of the indivisible gains even more importance when she is defined as the Zero (of the Twelve) near the end of the novel.

Indeed, Sister Lacey, who had taken care of Amy before she was taken away by two FBI agents, eventually finds Amy again and tells her that she is the “ship” that will save the virals from oblivion. In order to help Amy, Lacey sacrifices herself by killing Babcock with a bomb blast. Once Babcock has been killed, Amy is described as follows: “She was Amy, and she was forever. She was one of Twelve and also the other, the one above and behind, the Zero. She was the Girl from Nowhere, the One Who Walked In, who lived a thousand years; Amy of Multitudes, the Girl with the Souls Inside Her. She was Amy” (Cronin, *The Passage* 720). Being defined as “the one above and behind” confers upon Amy her neutral status since the neutral is that which is present/absent and inside/outside. Amy’s existence as “the one above and behind” also echoes St. Thomas’ “third duration”.²⁰¹ Amy’s viral countenance emulates the “between-and-betwixt position” as she exists in the space in between things, as do all virals due to their inherent neutrality. Now that Babcock is dead, Amy is the one who is the Zero. She therefore becomes the ultimate vampiric neutral vessel, “the Zero” which also manifests her indivisibility. Overtly, the term “zero” means that which is naught, null. Intertwining this definition to Blanchot’s conception of the neutral as “le surplus inidentifiable” (*Entretien* 450) allows for a resignification of Amy’s neutral countenance. Amy, now the Zero of the Twelve, manifests the unidentifiable surplus of the neutral. This unidentifiable surplus confers another layer of

²⁰¹ See Kermode page 71 for the complete quotation.

neutrality upon Amy since she is now not only neutral, but also indivisible. The correlation between the neutral and the indivisible is evoked by Blanchot's definition of what it means to think or to speak neutrally.

Indeed, Blanchot states that, "Ce qui signifie que penser ou parler au neutre, c'est penser ou parler à l'écart de tout visible et de tout invisible, c'est-à-dire en termes qui ne relèvent pas de la possibilité" (*Entretien* 444). Amy, by virtue of being the Girl from Nowhere and, eventually, the Zero, manifests the impossibility inherent to the neutral. This is made clear in Sanjay Patal's explanation of how the other Colony members describe Amy:

Not about the girl: he'd never dreamed about her, of that he was certain. Or mostly certain. This Girl from Nowhere – that's what everyone was calling her [...]; the phrase had, in the space of just a morning, become her name – had arrived in their midst full blown, like an apparition borne from the darkness as a being of flesh and blood. Her sheer impossibility refuted by the fact of her existence. (Cronin, *The Passage* 407)

Amy's "sheer impossibility" reveals Blanchot's theory of the neutral as that which is not possible. Amy's existence refuting her impossibility also implies her neutrality as present/absent and inside/outside. Echoing vampiric "mega time", i.e., "all-time encompassing"/lacking a classic sense of the linear, the "sheer impossibility" which is refuted by Amy's mere existence further underscores the neutral temporality which virals inhabit. St. Augustine's "formless matter, intermediate between nothing and something" (Kermode 69) further reinforces Amy's neutrality, both because of her countenance and because she gets to experience vampiric "mega time". Amy, being the only one who was injected with the virus but not having developed the virals' thirst for blood, has the capacity for mutability brought forth by St. Augustine. The

“intermediate between nothing and something” underscores Amy’s experience of the world (and of temporality) as she is neutral. The fact that she is always referred to as the “Girl from Nowhere” who “had arrived in their midst full blown, like an apparition borne from the darkness as a being of flesh and blood” allows for Amy’s different viral countenance to add another layer to her neutrality. In *Gender Trouble*, Butler states that “A thing takes on the characterization of ‘being’ and becomes mobilized by that ontological gesture only within a structure of signification that, as the Symbolic, is itself pre-ontological” (59). The pre-ontological aspect of the symbolic, or within any similar structure of signification, applies to Amy since she does manifest the symbolic, but also because she is a pre-ontological being. Once Amy becomes the Zero of the Twelve, she is described as “[...] the Girl from Nowhere, the One Who Walked In, who lived a thousand years; Amy of Multitudes [...] She was Amy” (Cronin, *The Passage* 720). As the Girl from Nowhere, having lived a thousand years and possessing multitudes, Amy becomes, in the dystopian world of *The Passage*, a pre-ontological being. Having lived before the virus outbreak, aptly called the Time Before in the novel, Amy’s pre-ontology is dictated by her having experienced a time before Babcock. Not only is Amy neutral, but she also embodies the pre-ontological aspect inherent to “a thing [that] takes on the characterization of ‘being’”, to use Butler’s terms. Amy’s bond with the virals confers upon her a neutral status, adding a layer of understanding to her unusual neutrality. Being the “ship” that will bring the virals to their passage, Amy has the ability to create her own vampiric neutral realm. Conversely, Babcock, being pushed only by his drive-induced impulses, also controls his own vampiric neutral space named The City of Babcock. The confrontation between the two neutral realms not only proves the existence of vampiric neutral spaces in Cronin’s universe, but more importantly, it reiterates the neutrality inherent to the vampire. Although Amy is not considered a full-fledged viral, she

still possesses some vampiric attributes. Also, being a more fully-fleshed-out yet multi-layered individual – conversely to Babcock’s representation as a figure of drive – Amy’s neutrality also makes her the ultimate neutral vessel for the virals who are trying to regain their sense of self. More significantly, Amy eventually confronts Babcock in “the ring”, i.e., a ritual on a specific night where virals fight while Babcock drinks on animal and human blood. Amy goes into the ring and confronts Babcock; they talk telepathically to each other, but they do not physically fight. Although Amy possesses the skills necessary to defeat Babcock, it is rather Sister Lacey who kills him with a bomb blast. Amy, not being the one to kill Babcock, insists on her status as neutral as she avoids eliminating Babcock.

Babcock’s origin story and how he came to control the virals of the Twelve and of the Many is significant when it comes to understanding how his vampiric neutral realm is articulated, and how this neutral space influences Babcock’s apparent neutrality as a vampire. Babcock and his vampiric neutral realm are first described as follows:

He was Babcock and he was forever. He was one of Twelve and also the Other, the one above and behind, the Zero. He was the night of nights and he had been Babcock before he became what he was. Before the great hunger that was like time itself inside him, a current in the blood, endless and needful, infinite and without border, a dark wing spreading over the world. (Cronin, *The Passage* 568)

Babcock’s status as the Zero throughout most of Cronin’s novel, “the one above and behind” suggests his inherent vampiric neutrality. In *L’entretien infini*, Blanchot states that “L’inconnu comme neutre suppose un rapport étranger à toute exigence d’identité et d’unité [...]” (443). Babcock’s description as the Other is significant here since otherness implies something which is

unknown.²⁰² As the neutral does not require identity and unity, Babcock's drive impulses also reflect his neutrality. Not having experienced the realms of desire and of the symbolic, Babcock cannot develop his own identity which usually detaches itself from one's parental figures once one enters desire and the symbolic. Babcock's neutrality and single foray into the realm of drive is due to his vampiric countenance, but it is also dictated by his relationship with his mother. Babcock's mother's relationship with her son is abusive (we do not know anything about Babcock's father throughout *The Passage*) makes Babcock's thwarted drive more explicable. Since his mother was abusive towards him, Babcock has never been able to experience the positive and loving aspects of the bond between a mother and her baby. Furthermore, Babcock's father is not mentioned in his origin story; the father's absence has clearly had an undeniable impact on Babcock's inability to access the realms of desire and of the symbolic. Not having experienced the Lacanian stage of *le nom/non du père*, Babcock cannot attain the stages of desire and the symbolic and is ultimately destined to remain in the realm of drive forever. Babcock himself even acknowledges his drive-induced impulses when he affirms that "He was the night of nights and he had been Babcock before he became what he was" (Cronin, *The Passage* 568). This manifestation of drive also correlates with Babcock's overwhelming yearning for blood.²⁰³ By manifesting drive in its most primal and need-based manner, Babcock even goes as far as to influence the other virals into feeding on blood for Babcock's own benefit. Indeed, every time a viral feeds on blood, it feeds Babcock by the same token.²⁰⁴ Blood consumption and its relation

²⁰² It is also important to note that the folkloric vampire and vampire characters in narratives such as *Dracula*, *Carmilla*, and "Christabel", among others, were defined as being scary and evil because they were defined as the Other who must be killed because of this otherworldliness.

²⁰³ Babcock's desire for blood obviously relates to his vampiric countenance but also to his human life. Having brutally murdered his mother, Babcock's humanity is also tainted by this affirmation of the need for power and control. Babcock's power-hungry personality was therefore also deeply rooted in his identity even before the vampiric transformation took place.

²⁰⁴ Babcock's influence on the other virals' blood consumption is also due to the hivemind structure that has been established between Babcock and the virals of the Twelve and of the Many, as it has been explained earlier in the

to drive is made clear when Babcock states the following: “[...] Before the great hunger that was like time itself inside him, a current in the blood, endless and needful, infinite and without border, a dark wing spreading over the world” (Cronin, *The Passage* 568). Defining his yearning for blood as “endless and needful”, Babcock further solidifies his overall drive-induced impulses and the power which these drives bestow upon him. By also qualifying the “current in the blood [...] [as] infinite and without border”, Babcock claims that the vampiric yearning for blood is intense in nature, but the use of these terms also correlates the act of drinking blood to the neutrality inherent to the vampire. Since all the aspects of vampirism demand that which is neutral to take form, blood consumption also requires a complete surrender into the realm of the neutral; in other words, drive-powered blood drinking is the only thing that should matter, so much so that one should be submerged by this drive. Harking back to St. Thomas’ rationale for angels, the importance of blood consumption can also be connected to vampiric experiences of time. Babcock’s claim that “Before the great hunger that was like time itself inside him, a current in the blood, endless and needful, infinite and without border [...]” underpins the fact that, in Cronin’s novel, bloodlust and vampiric “mega time” sometimes intertwine. Qualifying his hunger for blood as “time itself” is an example of that connection. The “current in the blood”, i.e., Babcock feeling his victims’ blood in his own bloodstream, being described as “endless, infinite, [...] and without border” echoes St. Thomas’ “third duration”. Vampiric neutrality also influences vampires’ experience of time (and it is why they exist in a different temporality than human beings, i.e., “mega time”) and being “neither eternal nor of time” further shows the correlation that can be made between bloodlust and vampiric temporality. Blood consumption being seen as that which is “endless, infinite, [...] and without border” also connects St. Thomas’

current chapter. In addition to the influence of the hivemind, the virals’ blood consumption being linked to Babcock is made clear towards the end of the novel when a ritual sacrifice of both animals and humans is hosted for Babcock to feed.

view of (angelic) temporality as The City of Babcock – and all other vampiric neutral realms – does require a “[...] third duration between that of time and eternity.” Babcock’s description of the bloodlust he feels as that which is “endless, infinite, and without border” takes shape in his vampiric neutral realm which is situated in this third duration. St. Thomas goes on to state that angels – here likened to vampires – are in a “between-and-betwixt” position. This “third intermediate order” based on this in-between status not only bolsters vampires’ need for their own temporal space, but also further correlates Babcock’s bloodlust to his vampiric neutral realm. His need for blood as “endless, infinite, and without border” can be described as such since vampiric “mega time” (“all-time encompassing” temporal space which lacks a classic understanding of the linear) is indeed “endless, infinite, and without border. Thus, Babcock’s yearning for blood can be likened to the neutral temporal space he – and all virals – occupy. The realm of drive not only influences Babcock’s – and the virals’ – relationship with blood, but it more importantly defines Babcock’s vision of, and need for, vampirism, as well as further cements the power-induced relationship he shares with the virals of the Twelve and of the Many.

Babcock describes his bond with the virals, which he aptly refers to as The We of Babcock, as follows:

He [Babcock] was made of Many. A thousand-thousand-thousand scattered over the night sky, like the stars. He was one of Twelve and also the Other, the Zero, but his children were within him also, the ones that carried the seed of his blood, one seed of Twelve; they moved as he moved, they thought as he thought, in their minds was an empty space of forgetting in which he lay, each to a one, saying, *You will not die. You are a part of me, as I am a part of you. You will drink the blood of the world and fill me up.*

They were his to command. When they ate, he ate. When they slept, he slept. They were the We, the Babcock, and they were forever as he was forever, all part of the Twelve and the Other, the Zero. They dreamed his dark dream with him. [...] His children. His great and fearful company. The Many. The We of Babcock. (Cronin, *The Passage* 568-569)

Babcock's power and control over the Twelve and the Many functions as Freud and Le Bon's group mind since the We of Babcock all work towards the same goal which is dictated by Babcock himself. The homogeneity of the group mind is manifested through Babcock's command. Accepting Babcock's command, the virals and Babcock become one, The We of Babcock thus all become a neutral entity. The hivemind controlled by Babcock is not only there to make it easier for Babcock to expand his vampiric neutral realm, but also to make the virals of the Twelve and of the Many neutral, detached from themselves solely to serve Babcock's will. Being part of "the Twelve and the Other, the Zero" confers neutrality upon all the virals due to Babcock's own neutrality seeping into them all.²⁰⁵ Babcock's drive-induced impulses also have a significant impact on his and the virals' neutral status, and Babcock's vampiric neutral realm, The City of Babcock, is the space where this vampiric neutrality takes form.

Babcock's rule over the human world began before the story told in *The Passage*. Babcock describes his return to his vampiric neutral realm after satisfying his hunger for blood as follows:

And This Place. He [Babcock] had come to it with a feeling of return, of a thing restored.

He had drunk his fill of the world and here he rested, dreaming his dreams in the dark,

²⁰⁵ If we cast our mind back to the character of Amel in Rice's *Vampire Chronicles*, we can draw a parallel between Babcock and Amel, especially in terms of how they represent drive and how they both render vampires neutral. Both Amel and Babcock's bloodlust (and yearning for corporeality in Amel's case) is what pushes vampires to feed. The neutral status of Babcock and Amel is also what makes the vampires they control become neutral beings in turn.

until he awoke and he was hungry again [...] And Babcock knew that the time had come to bring those that remained to him, that they should know him, know Babcock and the Zero also, assume their place within him. He had stretched out of his mind and said to the Many, his children, *Carry the last of humankind to me; do not kill them; bring them and their words that they should dream the dream and become one of us, the We, the Babcock.* [...] They dreamed the dream with him [Babcock] and he told them, when the dreaming was done, Now you are mine also, like the Many. You are mine in This Place and when I am hungry you will feed me, feed my restless soul with your blood. You will bring others to me from beyond This Place that they should do the same, and I will let you live in this way and no other. [...] And so the city was built. The City of Babcock, first in all the world.²⁰⁶ (Cronin, *The Passage* 569-570)

Dreaming the dream, which is the last step to complete one's vampiric transformation, is not only significant in order to understand Babcock's existence within the realm of drive, but the dream – and the act of murdering Babcock's mother as a proxy in the dream – in and of itself is also what brings the virals into The City of Babcock; in other words, the dream and Babcock's power and hunger are what ultimately make the virals neutral. The existence of The City of Babcock suggests that vampires do inhabit a vampiric neutral realm that is governed by vampiric “mega time”, i.e., an “all-time encompassing” temporality. Perrin's theorization of the neutral as present/absent and inside/outside is echoed here, manifesting both the neutrality inherent to the vampire and the neutral temporal space which Babcock and his virals must occupy. Conversely, Amy as the “ship” that will bring the virals to their passage, freeing them and returning them back to their former selves, also possesses her own vampiric neutral realm. Amy's neutrality is

²⁰⁶ Italics in the original text.

different from Babcock's because Amy has entered both the realm of desire and the realm of the symbolic, whereas Babcock has only ever experienced the realm of drive.

Babcock eventually feels Amy's power looming over The City of Babcock, and he describes Amy and the effect she has over his vampiric neutral realm as follows:

But now there is Another. Not the Zero or the Twelve but Another. The same and not the same. A shadow behind a shadow, pecking at him like a bird that darted from sight whenever he tried to fix the gaze of his mind upon her. And the Many, his children, his great and fearful company, heard her also; he sensed her pull upon them. A force of great power, drawing them away. [...] *Who am I?* they asked her. *Who am I?* She made them want to remember. She made them want to die. She was close now, very close. Babcock could feel it. She was a ripple in the mind of the Many, a tear in the fabric of night. He knew that through her, all that they had done could be undone, all that they had made could be unmade.²⁰⁷ (Cronin, *The Passage* 570)

Having the power to draw the virals away from Babcock, Amy can be the vessel to bring the virals of the Twelve and the Many to the realm of desire and ultimately, to the realm of the symbolic. The virals asking Amy to confirm who they are is the first step towards their selfhood and evolution. She is also defined through her description as “[...] Another. Not the Zero or the Twelve but Another. The same and not the same. A shadow behind a shadow [...]”. Being “the same and not the same” relates to Amy's possessing viral attributes but not being a full-fledged vampire, but it also correlates to her being more evolved than Babcock's sole drive-wielded impulses. Amy's sense of self being more developed also implies her having the ability to create

²⁰⁷ Italics in the original text.

her own vampiric neutral realm to annihilate Babcock's. Being "[...] a ripple in the mind of the Many, a tear in the fabric of night", Amy's neutrality and her overall identity allow her to create her own neutral realm in order to free the virals from Babcock's control. Amy's understanding of desire and the symbolic manifests a type of neutrality which is different from Babcock's drive-induced neutrality. Harking back to Amy's description as the Zero once Babcock has been defeated, Amy is defined as "[...] Amy of Multitudes, the Girl with the Souls Inside Her. She was Amy" (Cronin, *The Passage* 720). Being simply described as Amy and as the Girl with the Souls inside her, it is clear that Amy's neutrality makes her what she is: a neutral being who simply is.

The Passage by Justin Cronin establishes the vampire's neutrality in various ways. Babcock's neutral status is dictated by drive, whereas Amy's is rather bestowed by her entry into the realms of desire and of the symbolic. Babcock's yearning for blood also connects him to the virals of the Twelve and the Many, further reinforcing the control he exerts upon them. This extreme desire for power is also manifested through Babcock's hivemind formation, forcing the virals to follow his own yearning for blood and domination. The hivemind is also present in the dream which Babcock shares with all the virals, or the human beings on the verge of their vampiric transformations. The recurring dream being about Babcock killing his mother, and by demanding that each individual take part in the murder in dream state in order to complete their vampiric change, further demonstrates Babcock's identity and neutrality as solely induced by drive. Conversely, Amy's neutrality allows the virals to free themselves from Babcock's drive. By possessing vampiric attributes but not being a full-fledged viral, Amy's neutrality can also be defined as being that which is neither one thing nor the other. Amy's corporeality and her use of

telepathy to communicate throughout the most part of the novel also manifest her neutral status. Amy further demonstrates her entrance into the realm of desire and the symbolic once she finally uses her voice to communicate Corporeally, Amy's pre-pubescent physicality also confers upon her a neutral status since pre-pubescence implies a body on the verge of change. Since the accepted tenets of vampirism are rooted in timelessness, a vampirized pre-pubescent body will remain on the verge of change forever. Therefore, temporality, corporeality, and the Lacanian trifecta of drive, desire, and the symbolic all allow for an exploration of the figure of the vampire as a locus of neutrality.

Conclusion

As I have argued previously, although the figure of the vampire has evolved from a “negative” creature to a “positive” one, the contemporary vampire is now neither negative nor positive but rather neutral. The undead status of the blood drinker, i.e., that of being neither dead nor alive, is what confers upon the vampire its in-between status, that which impacts vampiric ontology, corporeality, temporality, as well as gender and sexual fluidity. The inherent fluidity of the vampire ultimately allows for gender and sexual binaries to be challenged and deconstructed, in addition to other social norms pertaining to identity and corporeality. The evolution of gender theory also tremendously influences the challenging of norms and binaries. While gender was once perceived as falling into two strict categories, the arrival of gender and sexual orientation grids has allowed theoreticians of gender to go above and beyond said categorizations in favor of embracing a panorama of utter fluidity. The vampire’s undead countenance not only makes the blood drinker a literary vehicle that challenges binaries, but this in-between status makes it so that the vampire can even transcend these binaries in favor of non-binary genders and sexualities. This deconstruction of norms, which is forged by the vampire’s undead countenance, also allows for a redefinition and resignification of the neutral as that which can change perceptions of identity, corporeality, and temporality. Hence, the act of deconstructing and transcending hegemonic binaries is also conferred upon the vampire due to its neutrality.

My theory is influenced by that of Claude Stéphane Perrin’s concept of the neutral as that which is neither present nor absent, inside nor outside so as to incorporate the neutral as that which is both present and absent, inside and outside. The neutral indeed requires all these combined elements to elucidate the context of vampire-centric narratives. Perrin’s claim about the Eternal

as that which must always be active, always be repeated correlates with the act of blood drinking. Since the vampire must feed on blood, either for sustenance or to transform someone into a newborn vampire, the acts of biting and drinking must always be repeated. Repeating vampiric acts further reinforces the neutrality inherent to the vampire. Since the blood drinker is neutral, neither the category of the subject nor the category of the object, to use Maurice Blanchot's terms, applies to the vampire. Being present/absent and inside/outside (human) society (and by experiencing temporality as "mega time"), the vampire cannot fully adhere to (human) considerations and norms, therefore making the blood drinker a potent cultural representation of the fluidity and transcendental implications of going above and beyond hegemonic norms. Adhering neither to the category of the subject nor to the category of the object also correlates the vampire to Maurice Blanchot's limit-experience, that which breaks the subject from itself. Since the vampiric subject splits from both itself and any other (human) considerations, it becomes clear that vampirism implies neutrality. To that end, Julia Kristeva's concept of the abject as that which does not respect limits and rules and which disrupts identity further reinforces both vampiric neutrality and how this neutral status can ultimately manifest a fluid, norm-free environment. The deconstruction of norms and hegemony performed by the vampire also manifests Roland Barthes' theory of the neutral as that which annuls and/or blurs and, consequently, evades the paradigm. Echoing Frank Kermode's conceptualization of temporality, the vampire's experience of time as vampiric "mega time", i.e., an "all-time encompassing" temporality which lacks a classic sense of linearity, further underpins Barthes' view of the neutral as that which evades the paradigm. Being both time-stopped and existing forever, the blood drinker is peerless in blurring hegemonically-sanctioned paradigms, even going as far as deconstructing them.²⁰⁸ The paradigm evasion which generates the neutral also serves as a

²⁰⁸ Lestat and Gabrielle's erasure of filial bonds and the inherent redefinition of the taboo of incest in Anne Rice's

system through which norms can be deconstructed. Judith Butler's theory of gender as performative (performativity generates gender as a constant doing) correlates with norm erasure but also with the fluidity inherent to gender and sexuality, among other conceptualizations of corporeality and temporality which also permit a deconstruction of hegemonic norms which leads to neutrality.

Gender theory has undeniably evolved throughout the years, going from something that is strictly binary – male and female – to finally understanding the social construct which phallogocentric and heteronormative gender and sexual norms imply. Judith Butler's theory of gender as performative broadened gender expressions and performances towards an individual understanding of gender as a viable endeavor. Obviously, gender is not simply an individualistically repeated performance as these expressions of gender must also be seen by others to fully take form. Reiterating my claim in Chapter I, which advocates as to what an unbiased, neutral redefinition of gender would provide, I aim to make it clear that this redefinition would not only make gender even more fluid, therefore allowing one to live more freely, but it would also render culture neutral. Understanding the epistemological system of culture as something which could potentially become neutral would allow for an array of content and figurations to be internalized, re-presented, and redistributed. The contemporary figure of the vampire represents myriad social and cultural issues, ranging from the fear of the other to vicarious literary experiences of sex. If the epistemological system of culture became neutral, the vampire would then not only embody its usual social and cultural issues but would, more significantly, attempt to deconstruct normative binaries of gender and sexuality in favor of a

novels are examples of the deconstruction of paradigms which can be carried out by the vampire. Barthes' view of the neutral as a "third term", as a *degré zéro*, also further strengthens the vampire's ability to deconstruct and go above and beyond hegemonically-induced binaries and norms.

fluid, non-binary ontology. This vampiric fluid and neutral ontology is also manifested through the vampire's corporeality (as a blank prepubescent canvas in *Let the Right One in* and in *The Passage*, for instance) and through the vampire's experience of time. Referring to Frank Kermode's *The Sense of an Ending* and his explanation of St. Thomas' Augustinian rationale for angels (I have likened the vampiric to the angelic in this dissertation), the vampire is neither eternal nor of time, thus requiring a "third duration" that is between time and eternity. This special duration which I have come to name vampiric "mega time" occupies the space in between things, that "duration between time and eternity". The "all-time encompassing" temporality experienced by the blood drinker bolsters the neutral status of the vampire as even temporality is part of an *abîme*, to echo Claude Stéphane Perrin's theory of neutrality. This vampiric "all-time encompassing" temporality is another lens through which the vampire's neutrality has been explored in this dissertation. In terms of gender and sexual fluidity, the vampire already possesses the necessary attributes to challenge binaries and redefine said fluidity, one of the most significant attributes being the neutrality of vampire fangs.

Butler, influenced by Jacques Lacan, advocates for a reconceptualization of the "male" phallus towards a "lesbian" phallus. My claim is that the phallus, by virtue of being transferable, is neither "masculine" nor "homosexual" but rather neutral. The use of fangs to drink blood, i.e., the act of penetrating flesh, is neutral in and of itself as both "male" and "female" vampires use their fangs to feed. As it has been explained in Chapter III, the choice of the victim and/or which vampire to feed on when it comes to vampiric sexual acts also reinforces the neutrality of the vampire and of its fangs as the victims/vampiric partners are often chosen regardless of their performed gender. As I have argued in Chapter I, gender performativity implies acts or gestures,

which are the concrete products of one's gender expression(s) and become the real core of one's gender identity, but because these acts are emulated through one's corporeal form, said body becomes the necessary foundation of these performances. Vampiric corporeality, being unfixed due to the neutral status of the vampire, becomes a vessel through which neutrality can be (culturally) embodied. The pre-ontological underpinnings of the vampire also manifest the timelessness of the blood drinker, but it also allows for a resignification of corporeality as the body is a tangible epistemology of gender (and sexuality) and of neutrality. Since gender expressions take form through corporeal means (and other means such as language, make up, clothing, etc.), one's body becomes a manifestation of one's being, of one's gender and one's sexuality. This dissertation has been striving to establish that, in addition to corporeal means, cultural figures are potent discursive means through which neutrality can be expressed, be it from the perspective of gender and sexuality, of identity, of corporeality and of temporality. The figure of the vampire is the best indicated literary/cultural apparatus through which one can further understand neutrality since the vampire is undead (and time-stopped while existing forever) and is both present/absent and inside/outside (human) society and thus hegemonic norms do not affect the vampire. The neutral status of the vampire also allows for a resignification of Judith Butler's theorization of the abject as that which constitutes the subject through both abjection and exclusion. By haunting boundaries, to use Butler's terms, the vampire therefore underpins the Butlerian abject by indeed "living" on the fringe of human life (being time-stopped and existing forever) and haunting the boundaries of the construction of the (human) subject, as what the vampire possesses represents the unthinkable. The vampiric haunting of boundaries is manifested in several ways in the corpus I have studied throughout this dissertation. Lestat in Anne Rice's *Vampire Chronicles* haunts the human experience by

experiencing vampiric “mega time” as that which is “between time and eternity”, especially when it comes to the vampiric neutral realms that are the Theater of the Vampires and the Savage Garden. Referring to Kermode’s view of temporality, these neutral realms in Rice’s novels allow for this “intermediate between nothing and something”, this “special kind of middle” to take shape. It can thus be suggested that vampiric neutrality and vampiric neutral realms haunt (human) boundaries as the vampire and its “mega time” cannot completely connect to human norms, time, and considerations as the vampire exists in an *abîme* as understood by Perrin, a space between time and eternity (to echo St. Thomas). In *The Passage* by Justin Cronin, Amy, being the “ship” that will bring the virals to their passage, also haunts boundaries since she has to navigate between the human realm and her own vampiric neutral realm. She also shares a contrasting bond with Babcock who also possesses his own vampiric neutral realm. Amy therefore “haunts” these various spaces, forgoing hegemonic (normative) constructions in favor of boundary-free environments which the vampire can inhabit due to its neutral status, and due to the vampire’s “all-time encompassing” experience of time. Amy’s haunting of (human) boundaries is also made manifest through her use of telepathy to communicate, a means of communication which can be defined as a *non-langage* to use Roland Barthes’ term. This further bolsters Amy’s neutrality and how she redefines boundaries as even her use of language can be considered neutral.

Harking back to vampiric corporeality, the significance of vampire fangs and the redefinition of the Butlerian (and Lacanian) phallus once more demands vampiric neutrality to be constant. Since the blood drinker forgoes gender and sexual parameters when it comes to biting, vampire fangs can thus be said to be gender neutral in nature. These fangs, in many vampiric literary

contexts (e.g., *Dracula*, *Carmilla*, *The Vampire Chronicles*, etc.), substitute the phallus as a way of representing sexual penetration and pleasure. The vampire's (gender) neutrality also confers upon the vampire the ability to resignify and ultimately deconstruct constrictive binaries and norms in favor of fluid gender (and sexual) spaces and expressions, while also resignifying what neutral corporeality and temporality entail. This deconstruction is also made possible because the vampire embodies Maurice Blanchot's concept of the limit-experience, i.e., that which separates the subject from itself.

Since the timeless vampire is both time-stopped and existing, the figure of the blood drinker cannot strictly be objective nor subjective. This vampiric limit-experience applies to Blanchot's view of the neutral as being the unidentifiable surplus. The vampire, by virtue of being undead and being situated in a constant in-between, is the unidentifiable surplus. This is made clear through the vampire's status as being both present/absent and inside/outside (human) society; the vampire is therefore a literal surplus in the human world. By experiencing time as that which is "all-time encompassing", while existing and being time-stopped in a space between "time and eternity", the vampire has to be Blanchot's unidentifiable surplus as it does not fully exist within human temporality. Blanchot's limit-experience and vampiric "mega time" also underpin the vampiric neutral realms which vampires inhabit in certain narratives, such as those seen in *The Vampire Lestat*, *Queen of the Damned* (called the Savage Garden in Rice's novels) and in *The Passage* (Amy's and Babcock's respective neutral spaces in Cronin's universe).²⁰⁹ These vampiric neutral realms further demonstrate the neutrality inherent to the vampire by suggesting that these neutral realms are temporally neutral spaces, *abîmes* which are "situated" between time and eternity. The constant unsettling of norms by the figure of the vampire, be it in terms of

²⁰⁹ The *Theater of the Vampires* can also be considered a vampiric neutral space in Anne Rice's novels.

gender and sexuality and/or corporeality, also stems from the vampire's experience of time as that which is "all-time encompassing" while lacking a classic sense of the linear. Being timeless, the vampire has a different view of the (human) conception of time, especially because of the vampire's time-stopped-while-existing-forever status. The vampire's experience of temporality as that which is between "time and eternity" thus allows for an erasure of (human) norms and rather suggests that since vampires are not subjected to human time and considerations, blood drinkers are able to deconstruct and redefine (human) norms and practices. An example of vampiric neutrality and of its resignification of norms is made manifest when the erasure of the filial bonds between Lestat and his mother Gabrielle occurs in Anne Rice's *The Vampire Lestat*. By completely turning the concept of incest on its head, Anne Rice shows gender and sexuality to be neutral, going as far as to redefine the incest taboo.

Gabrielle not only resignifies her filial bond with Lestat, but she also chooses to perform her gender in a more "masculine" way after having fed on her first victim following her vampiric transformation. As the story unfolds, Gabrielle also adopts a more solitary way of being, therefore further deconstructing hegemonic, phallogocentric, and heteronormative views of "masculine" and "feminine" binaries and norms. Lestat's own gender neutrality is made clear especially through the relationships that he entertains with other vampires, regardless of their gender identities and sexualities. That is significant since vampiric fangs, being equated to a neutral figuration of the phallus (as inspired by Butler's Lacanian lesbian phallus) forego phallogocentric and heteronormative inclinations towards gender fluidity. Vampiric neutrality has also been explored through the vampire's experience of time in Anne Rice's novels. Being a timeless creature which lives in a temporality that encompasses past, present, and future, i.e.,

what I have come to call vampiric “mega time”, the blood drinker experiences time as neutral. This temporal neutrality also echoes Claude Stéphane Perrin’s theorization of the neutral as an *abîme*. Perceiving time as neutral can also be connected to St. Thomas’ “third duration” of time as that which inhabits creatures that are “neither eternal nor of time”. The vampire, likened to St. Thomas’ angels, are beings that occupy this in-between space. This “peculiar betwixt-and-between position” is also what allows the vampire to experience time neutrally. In Anne Rice’s novels, the Savage Garden, which is governed by the evil spirit Amel, the being who renders vampires neutral in Rice’s universe, is a representation of this “between-and-betwixt” position. The Savage Garden is a vampiric neutral realm due to Amel, the spirit from which vampires have originated, as it is the neutral core which inhabits each and every vampire in Rice’s vampire narratives. Amel’s yearning to have a body, to feel what humans feel and its overwhelming desire to consume blood are what constitute the neutral core of all vampires. Vampires in Rice’s universe are therefore neutral due to Amel’s own neutral status.

In *The Passage*, Amy’s and Babcock’s respective vampiric neutral realms also redefine both vampiric ontology and neutrality. Babcock’s realm being most closely represented by the concept of drive, and Amy’s neutral space having evolved in the realm of desire and eventually, into the symbolic, vampiric neutrality thus demands a resignification of (vampiric) ontology. Vampiric neutral realms also reinforce the neutral nature of the vampire’s experience of time, as echoed by Aquinas’ concept of *aevum*. This “unusual variety of duration” as that which participates in “both the temporal and the eternal” and which “co-exists with time” make vampiric spaces neutral. In the case of *The Passage*, both The City of Babcock and Amy’s own neutral realm act of temporal spaces that are situated in between, in an *abîme* or a “third

duration”, to echo Perrin and Aquinas, respectively. Therefore, the vampire is neutral not only due to its experiencing “mega time” and being situated in a space that co-exists with time, but also because its neutral status. Vampiric ontology is also what permits a complete redefinition of societal norms towards a subversive practice and understanding of these “norms”, especially since Judith Butler’s theories imply that norms always fail to determine us completely.

The vampire subverts and deconstructs these hegemonic norms towards a boundary-free redefinition. All the vampire characters that have been analyzed in this dissertation uphold this redefinition as they all embody vampiric neutrality. In terms of a gender and sexual-norm-free understanding, the character of Eli(as) in John Ajvide Lindqvist’s *Let the Right One in* manifests this gender and sexual norm resignification through Eli(as)’s gender performances and his castration, this castration being Eli’s change-before-the-(vampiric)-change. Eli’s castration has not only rendered him literally gender-neutral (Eli has no genital organs), but the castration also manifests Eli the vampire’s gender neutrality. Eli can therefore perform any and all genders and sexualities that they desire since their (vampiric) corporeality is a blank canvas. Eli’s prepubescent body also allows for a resignification of the neutral as prepubescence implies having a body that is on the cusp of change. A similar interpretation can be made of Amy’s body, especially when we first meet her. Although Amy somewhat ages throughout the course of *The Passage* (and she does age, albeit very slowly in the subsequent novels of the trilogy), she can still be considered a vampiric timeless being on the cusp of change throughout the first novel. Prepuberty therefore further reinforces the (gender and sexual) neutral implications of the vampire.

Concretely, I have strived to demonstrate that the figure of the vampire, at first being seen as “negative” and eventually evolving towards a more “positive” representation, is rather neutral. What the literary vampire attempts to accomplish is to deconstruct normative binaries of gender, identity, corporeality, and temporality in favor of a free and fluid ontology which leads to the neutral. By making gender, corporeality, and temporality unbiased epistemological apparatus, various ontologies are then liberated of constraints. In striving to erase limits and their associated norms, the vampire re-presents inherent neutrality. More significantly, since gender, sexualities, and the corporeal are cultural, i.e., shaped by culture as well as shaping culture, as I have been striving to demonstrate, the vampire is one of the best cultural figures to manifest the scope of gender, sexuality, corporeality, and temporality as being concepts which can be neutrally defined and understood. Culture, especially popular culture, allows for an array of content and figurations to be questioned, internalized, re-presented, and redistributed. The vampire has been an important part of popular culture for centuries in its myriad incarnations, and, as I have shown, the vampire’s inherent neutrality will allow it to remain a manifestation of not only (human) desires but, most importantly, of human beings’ ability to change and evolve towards a more open and inclusive human experience.

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